

INSPECTION REPORT

HILBRE HIGH SCHOOL

West Kirby

The Metropolitan Borough of the Wirral

Unique reference number: 105102

Headteacher: Jan Levenson

Reporting inspector: Richard Hancock
2715

Dates of inspection: 4th – 7th December 2000

Inspection number: 192976

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	All ability
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Frankby Road West Kirby Wirral
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Jan Casey
Date of previous inspection:	29 April 1996

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11672	Peter Harle	Team inspector	Art and design	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Hilbre High School is a co-educational school for pupils in the 11-18 age range, situated on the Deeside of the Wirral peninsula. A selective system operates locally and applicants to the schools are normally those who have been unsuccessful in reaching the standards required for entry to the grammar schools in the area. Whilst the area is relatively affluent, there are pockets of disadvantage; the percentage of pupils eligible for a free school meal is above the national average. There are 1002 pupils on the current roll, the school has considerably more boys than girls. Pupils come from a wide diversity of social background. There are few pupils from ethnic minority families and very few pupils for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of pupils on the school's register of special educational need is lower than average at 18 percent but the proportion of pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need is higher than the national average at 3 percent. The attainment of pupils on entry is broadly average although it is higher than this in Year 7 because of significant changes to the local authority's admissions procedure.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

In many respects Hilbre High School provides a good education for its pupils. They have positive attitudes to learning and behave well. The majority of lessons are well taught, and pupils make especially good progress in music, art, physical education and design and technology. When they enter the school their attainment is largely average but by the time they reach the age of 16, they reach standards which are above average in English, music, and design and technology and well above average in physical education. Pupils' attainment in mathematics and science is below average by the time they reach the age of 16. Pupils with an individual education plan are not always getting the attention they need. The headteacher is providing good leadership and is well supported by a well organised governing body. Many aspects of management are good but in order to help ensure quality in all aspects of the school's work, monitoring needs to be more thorough, systematic and rigorous. The school's systems for handling finance are good and the school is giving satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Provides a particularly good education in art, design and technology, music and physical education
- Helps pupils to develop positive attitudes to learning and to behave well
- Develops good relationships with pupils and shows good levels of care
- Teaches pupils well in the majority of lessons and very well on Post-16 courses
- Organises its finances efficiently

What could be improved

- The attainment of pupils in mathematics and science at Key Stage 4
- The use of assessment in teaching and the monitoring of pupils' progress
- The monitoring of teaching
- The schemes of work for information and communication technology and its wider use in the curriculum
- The quality and use of individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs

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 almost four years ago in the spring of 1996. It has made satisfactory progress since that time. The overall quality of teaching is now good although the independent learning skills of pupils still need further development. The school has not succeeded in raising the proportion of students leaving with a minimum of two passes at GCSE 'A' level but it has made Post-16 provision more cost effective. The time allocated to teaching at all key stages is now in line with national recommendations. Some monitoring has taken place but is not yet comprehensive although it is being further developed. ICT, despite improvements, needs further development. The school development plan is now a more effective instrument for carrying out the school's priorities.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	D	D	D	
A-levels/AS-levels	D	E	E	

Key

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

* the school's grade in this category is B, however, this is presently not validated by DfEE.

In 2000, pupils' end of Year 9, results in English declined significantly and were below the national average for pupils reaching Level 5 or above. In 1999, results were above the national average. The trend in attainment had been upward but the line of trend has now dropped. In the same year, results in mathematics were below the national average for pupils reaching Level 5 or above. In 1999, they were close to the national average. Over time, results have been below average but the trend has been upward. In 2000 results in science were below the national average for pupils reaching Level 5 or above. In 1999, results were also below the national average. Over time, results have been below the national average and the attainment trend has been downward. By the end of Year 9, attainment is average or above in other subjects and most pupils are making satisfactory progress. They make especially good progress in design and technology, music, and physical education and very good progress in art.

By the end of Year 11, pupils' attainment is above average in English but is below average in mathematics and science. The trend of attainment, taking the core subjects as a whole, is roughly in line with the national trend. In 2000, 39% of pupils reached 5 passes at grades A*-C, not quite making the school's ambitious target of 43%. This was much better than results in previous years and is, whilst not as yet validated by DfEE comparative data, well above average for similar schools. The figure of 90.9% of pupils reaching 5 passes at A*-G is above the national average for all schools. When use is made of national benchmarks to identify pupils' progress since their Key Stage 3 tests, results are below average but are above average on the free school meals criteria. Pupils did especially well in physical education, religious education, English literature, and design and technology. Pupils make good progress in art, design and technology and physical education.

Attainment Post-16 varies from course to course but the percentage of candidates obtaining two or more passes at 'A' level is no higher than it was at the time of the last inspection when it was a key issue for action. The average points score per candidate entered for two or more A or A/S equivalent remains well below the national average. Nonetheless, in relation to their prior attainment, many pupils make good progress, especially in English, design and technology, physical education and art.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. The majority of pupils have positive attitudes to school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The majority of pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Pupils take on responsibility well. They establish good relationships with one another and with teachers and other adults.
Attendance	Satisfactory. The school is working hard to improve further.

The attitudes of most pupils to learning is positive. Pupils behave well and only a very small minority are inattentive in classes. Relationships are based on mutual respect and pupils grow in confidence. The school is working hard to improve attendance rates further.

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.

At both key stages, the quality of teaching in English varies from lesson to lesson but is good overall. It is satisfactory in mathematics. It is satisfactory in science at Key Stage 3 but there are weaknesses in teaching at Key Stage 4. In all three subjects teaching is good on Post-16 courses.

The main strengths of the teaching are to be found in the high expectations that most teachers have of pupils, the skilful way they manage work in the classroom, the high quality of planning, the variety of strategies they employ and the good relationship they enjoy with the pupils. The main weaknesses in teaching are to be found in the limited use made of assessment, the inadequate focus on the learning of pupils with special educational needs, weak learning objectives and some ineffective classroom management.

The quality of teaching is especially good in design and technology, music, art and physical education. The skills of numeracy and literacy are being satisfactorily taught but both are now in need of further development. For the most part, the school meets the needs of all learners although pupils with individual education plans do not receive sufficient attention. Higher attainers could be extended further if teaching focused on their specific needs.

The quality of teaching is generally good. It was excellent in 5 percent of lessons, very good in 23 percent, good in 36 percent, satisfactory in 31 percent and unsatisfactory in 5 percent. Pupils learn well and develop a wide range of skills and show growth in understanding but their research and investigative skills could be further developed.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. A well balanced curriculum with a good range of courses at all levels but progression in vocational courses is limited and schemes of work in ICT do not build systematically on the skills of pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Although some pupils have their needs well met, provision is unsatisfactory overall because pupils with individual education plans require more help.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. Pupils' progress does not differ essentially from that made by other pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory. The personal, social and health education programme is well planned but is inconsistently delivered. Scope for spiritual development is limited but provision for social and moral development is good. Good provision for cultural development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Satisfactory. Good levels of pastoral care. Monitoring of pupils' progress, both academically and in terms of personal development is not complete.

The school works well with parents. It keeps them well informed and consults them on key issues. Parents find the school approachable.

The main strengths of the curriculum are to be found in the breadth and balance at both key stages, the opportunities pupils have to study two modern languages, to undertake a well-planned PSHE programme, to study drama and to take part in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The main weaknesses in the curriculum are to be found in the limited application of ICT in some subjects, schemes of work in ICT which do not build on pupils' skills, limited progression in vocational courses and the unsatisfactory distribution of lessons in the fortnightly cycle. There is no provision for RE in Post-16 education. The school does not comply with the legal requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship. The school is safe and levels of pastoral support for pupils are good but the monitoring of their progress is incomplete.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good leadership and satisfactory management. The school has a clear sense of direction and a vision of its future. Levels of planning are good but monitoring procedures are still being developed.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Virtually all legal requirements are well discharged. Governors now need more detailed knowledge of the specific strengths and weaknesses of the school to help in the process of self-evaluation.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. The school is making some good use of data to improve pupils' attainment but the key information to be derived from effective monitoring is limited.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The school plans ahead and matches resources to key initiatives.

Staffing levels are adequate but some problems of continuity in the teaching have arisen as a result of extended staff absence. Administrative staff are skilled, very motivated and well-trained. The school has made appropriate use of supply teachers. Much of the accommodation is in a poor state, but the school is making the best use of it; there are detailed plans for replacement and refurbishment. There are no major shortages of resources. The school has a clear sense of direction as a result of the vision of the headteacher and the support of the governing body. Planning levels are good but systematic monitoring of all areas of the school's performance has still to take place. The school's finances are well conducted and every effort is made to ensure that value for money is obtained when making purchases. The school makes use of data to compare its performance against relevant criteria and sets itself good levels of challenge. It gives satisfactory value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High expectations of pupils • The progress made by pupils • The approachability of the school • The promotion of good attitudes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent, nature and timing of homework • Information on pupils' progress • The links between parents and school • Support for pupils with special educational needs

The inspection team found evidence to support all the qualities of the school that please parents. The team also found that, although homework is making a contribution to pupils' learning, its use is not being stringently monitored and this could lead to uneven allocations over time. Reports provide parents with adequate, but not extensive, information about pupils' progress. Links between home and school are satisfactory. The school needs to pay more attention to the provision and use of individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. By the time they reach the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment is average in science and mathematics and above average in English.
2. In the year 2000, pupils' results in the National Curriculum tests in English dropped and were below the national average for pupils reaching Level 5 or above. In the previous year, results were above the national average. Whereas results for the previous three years based on the pupils' average points score had been close to the national average, they are now below the national average for all schools. From 1996-1999, the trend in attainment had been strongly upward but because of the most recent results the line of trend has fallen.
3. In the year 2000, pupils' results in the National Curriculum test in mathematics were below the national average for pupils reaching Level 5 or above. In the previous year, results were close to the national average. Over time, results have been below average but the trend has been upward.
4. In the year 2000, pupils' results in the National Curriculum test in science were below the national average for pupils reaching Level 5 or above. In the previous year, results were also below the national average. Over time, results have been below the national average, and the attainment trend has been downward.
5. In mathematics and science, it is clear that boys are not doing as well as they could but girls are faring even less well. In all of the core subjects attainment at the higher levels is limited and the school could achieve more in this respect if levels of challenge in lessons were always present and the higher attainers were stretched. Attainment is average in all subjects by the end of Key Stage 3, apart from geography, music and physical education where it is above average. Pupils with special educational needs reach appropriate standards for the most part, except where their individual educational plans are not well used and then their progress is restricted.
6. By the end of Year 9, the majority of pupils are making satisfactory progress in most subjects and are making good progress in design and technology, music, and physical education. They are making very good progress in art. Pupils with special educational needs could achieve more if their needs were more frequently met in lessons.
7. By the time they reach the end of Year 11, pupils' attainment is above average in English and below average in mathematics and science. The trend of attainment taking the core subjects as a whole is roughly in line with the national trend.
8. The analysis of GCSE and GNVQ examination results for the year 2000 shows that 39% of pupils reached 5 passes at grades A*-C, not quite achieving the school's ambitious target of 43%. These results are below the national average for all maintained secondary schools. The school's figure of 91% of pupils reaching 5 passes at A* - G is above the national average. When the average points score is looked at the results for both boys and girls are below average. When use is made of national benchmarks to identify pupils' progress since their Key Stage 3 tests, results are below average; however, they are above average on the free school meals criteria which is a good outcome. Pupils did especially well in physical education and religious education where results were well

above the national average and in English literature and design and technology where they were above the national average.

9. By the end of Year 11, pupils make good progress in art, design and technology and physical education. Higher attaining pupils are reaching satisfactory standards but could achieve more if challenging work were provided for them. Pupils with special educational needs could achieve more if their needs were more nearly met in lessons.
10. Attainment Post-16 varies from course to course but overall the percentage of candidates obtaining two or more passes at GCSE A/AS level or Advanced GNVQ is no higher than it was at the time of the last inspection when it was a key issue for action. The number of candidates taking these examination courses has greatly increased but the average points score per candidate entered for two or more A or A/S equivalent remains well below the national average. Nonetheless in relation to their prior attainment many pupils make good progress especially in English, design and technology and physical education. They make especially good progress in art.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

11. The pupils continue to have the same positive attitudes towards their school as those described in the last inspection report. Their attitudes to learning are generally good in all subjects. Most pupils are interested in their work and concentrate well. Their attitudes are especially good in art, music, design and technology, ICT and physical education. They thrive on the practical work they do in these lessons. In the very best lessons, teachers model activities for pupils to emulate. Pupils particularly enjoy this approach and responded well to the sound of jazz on a double bass, the application of paint in the style of Van Gogh and the video recording of a child gymnast to exemplify the use and importance of strength.
12. The majority of pupils behave very well in lessons and when they are moving about the school. They are courteous, polite and co-operative in class and work conscientiously. They behave in an orderly way when travelling from lesson to lesson and do not loiter. Pupils' work is displayed in exposed places but is not interfered with. However, in about one in five lessons a minority of pupils can quickly lose interest in what they are doing, especially if the work is more abstract, routine or repetitive. They will then sometimes call out to teachers or start to talk amongst themselves. This interferes with learning and impedes progress. This happens in some lessons in English, mathematics, science, geography and modern languages. The behaviour of some pupils is also unsatisfactory on occasions in some of the more congested parts of the school, mostly in doorways leading to and from the main teaching blocks. Pupils sometimes barge their way through groups of other pupils and have little regard for their welfare.
13. Pupils in the sixth form are very mature. They are reflective and articulate, show that they can sustain an open discussion with adults on an equal basis, are straightforward and honest and show no pretence. The majority of them study hard. They are respected by the younger pupils and provide good role models for them to emulate.
14. Relationships are good between pupils and between pupils and teachers and other adults. This is the foundation for much of the good work that goes on in lessons and after school. There are some pupils who find it difficult to control their own behaviour but they are being helped by the newly established pupil support centre where they showed calm and restraint. Levels of attendance are satisfactory and in line with national average. There are fewer unauthorised absences than in most secondary schools. A number of pupils are regularly late, mainly due to the unreliability of the school transport system. The number of exclusions is mainly caused by a small number of pupils.

15. The personal development of pupils is being well catered for. They are often given particular responsibilities in class through taking on leadership roles, for instance, by organizing 'warm-up' sessions in gymnastics, making presentations to the class in English and undertaking research in information and communications technology. The majority take homework seriously and conscientiously record it in their planners. Pupils take an active part in form discussions and speak out with confidence. They show respect for each other's feelings, belief and values. Pupils become more confident through their willingness to take on responsibility, and the success they have in doing so is recognised fully by a school event, much appreciated by parents, when the wide range of pupils' achievements is celebrated.
16. The recent establishment of the student council is an important step in helping to ensure that pupils have a voice in shaping the future direction of the school. This is an excellent opportunity for pupils to develop their powers of decision-making. Minutes of meetings show that the council is making an important contribution to this process.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

17. The quality of teaching is good in the school as a whole. It was excellent in 5 percent of lessons, very good in 23 percent, good in 36 percent, satisfactory in 31 percent and unsatisfactory in 5 percent.
18. There were no major disparities in the quality of teaching either in years or in key stages although the quality of teaching was especially good in the sixth form. The overall quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection although the emphasis on the development of pupils' research and investigative skills still needs strengthening. ICT is being well used to further learning in some subjects, such as music and design and technology, but its use needs to be embraced by more subjects. Homework is being well used to reinforce learning but is used less commonly to research and investigate.
19. Excellent teaching was observed in some lessons in most subjects. In these lessons, teachers had the highest expectations of pupils, set a driving pace, often by questioning pupils closely and intensively, demonstrated key learning points expertly and used time very productively. A typical example occurred in a French lesson in Year 9 where the teacher expected the highest standards from pupils although they were not considered to be the most able linguists in their year. Conducted entirely in French, the lesson focused on the use of the past tense when discussing the weather. Clear objectives were given for the lesson, good use was made of earlier work when the pupils were asked to remember expressions they had used as early as Year 7, and precise questioning elicited good responses from all pupils. The teacher showed great enthusiasm for the subject, insisting on the highest standards of pronunciation, and the pupils responded positively and could see by the time the lesson ended that they had achieved something worthwhile.
20. At sixth form level, teachers show expert knowledge of the key aspects of their subject, and have effective ways of helping students to learn with particularly good use being made of skilful questioning to help students focus on significant detail. Clear targets are often set for students which help to motivate learning, they are helped to learn through collaborating with one another, and all work is underpinned by the good relationships which exist between teachers and pupils.
21. In the school as a whole, the main strengths of the teaching are to be found in the high expectations that most teachers have of pupils, the skilful management of classroom practice, often through effective use of timed tasks and feedback, the high quality of planning, the variety of strategies used and the good relationship with the pupils. A

characteristic lesson occurred in a Year 7 English class where the learning focused on the ways in which advertising uses language to persuade and influence. Good classroom management enabled the teacher to involve all pupils in the learning. After leading a review of prior learning on advertising generally, the teacher introduced a question and answer session which quickly established that the purpose of an advertisement was to persuade. The pupils themselves went on to describe and analyse a situation in which they had been required to think how they could best persuade someone towards a particular point of view. This then developed further into a consideration of how a product might be launched on the Christmas market and the ways in which language could be used to promote it. Throughout the lesson, pupils and teacher made good use of standard English to explain things clearly. By the end of the lesson, the pupils had clearly learned more about how language is used to influence and persuade.

22. The quality of teaching is especially good in art, music, physical education, ICT and design and technology. In these subjects there is a strong emphasis on practical work and teachers are especially skilled at demonstrating skills and techniques. This competence has a direct bearing on the pupils' learning as they seek to emulate what they have observed. A good example occurred in a Year 8 lesson in design and technology where pupils were working in metal to create a letter rack. The teacher used demonstration very well, making use of hand shears to cut mild steel and using an extension bar to show how extra pressure could be gained in the cutting process. Pupils were able to see an effective technique well demonstrated, and at the same time, learn more about the properties of materials. They went on to show that they could use tools responsibly and with good regard to safety. The teacher intervened helpfully to assist individual pupils when cutting sheet metal. The whole lesson had a strong sense of purpose, and pupils were deploying and extending their skills and developing further understanding about the nature of materials and processes.
23. The main weaknesses in the teaching are to be found in the limited use made of assessment, the inadequate focus on the learning of pupils with special educational needs, weak learning objectives and ineffective classroom management. In the very weakest lessons, which were unsatisfactory, the learning objectives for the lessons had not been made clear, and pupils were not well disciplined, were allowed to call out to teachers, and were not checked when they spoke amongst themselves. Such lessons occurred in some instances in English, mathematics, science and PSHE.
24. The teaching and learning of pupils with special educational needs is inconsistent. In some lessons, it is good, particularly in design and technology where learning tasks are carefully structured and all pupils are aware of the steps that need to be taken if processes are to be completed. In a number of other subjects, however, such as modern foreign languages, no specific provision is made and pupils are not seen to be making progress. The individual education plans, even when available, are not helpful to teachers, and there was very little evidence of teachers in any subject effectively addressing the learning needs of pupils, as identified in their plans.
25. The teaching of tutorial support time is also inconsistent. At its best, it is excellent as was observed in a Year 7 lesson where the teacher focused on the learning needs of individual pupils who were then being helped to organise their learning more effectively and shown how to study with more purpose. This was a very good example of how the school intends that form time should be used and directly underpins its priority to raise the overall attainment of pupils in the school. The quality of teaching in tutor support time was not usually so successful and some lessons consisted of a miscellany of activities which did not make for a coherent experience for the pupils.

26. The school is on the threshold of new developments in terms of working with gifted and talented pupils. No discernible strategies are yet in place. It was not possible to see extensive evidence of how the school is developing the teaching of literacy because there were few literacy lessons on the timetable in the week of inspection, but the policy has clear potential and there was some effective attention given to key terms and concepts in a number of different subjects.
27. A comprehensive numeracy policy is in place and is delivered to the pupils at Key Stage 3 in a distinct lesson. In these lessons, the pupils are made to focus on basic skills in number, and during lessons pupils were observed tackling how to figure out answers mentally; using calculators sensibly; suggesting sensible estimates of measurements; and using simple statistics. Pupils were observed in other subject areas such as science, geography, languages, music, craft, design and technology, art and physical education using mathematics competently for such topics as graphs, averages, two and three dimensional drawings and chord sequences. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory.

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

28. The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. All subjects of the National Curriculum are adequately represented. Pupils also have opportunities to study drama and to benefit from a programme of PSHE. The curriculum for modern languages which offers French and Spanish in alternate years works well. Although in practice, the use of tutor support time was not always efficient, a striking example of its effective use was observed when the tutor used the time very productively by working alongside pupils to track their academic progress. There is also a good programme of extra-curricular activities.
29. There are strengths in the curriculum in English, mathematics, art, design and technology, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. In each of these subjects the curriculum is interpreted broadly, and all pupils are given good scope to develop their skills and understanding. Although there is some good practice in individual subjects, the development of literacy is still at an early stage. Effective work on the development of numeracy is well established in mathematics but its wider application in the curriculum at large is piecemeal.
30. There is a carefully planned programme for PSHE for pupils at all levels which is delivered by specialist staff. The programme is very wide ranging and includes appropriate work on sex and drugs education, addresses bullying, and promotes the effective use of study skills. Careers education forms part of the programme in Years 9, 10, and 11. This is carefully planned and delivered in collaboration with the LEA careers service. Work experience forms part of this provision. The quality of the teaching and learning in PSHE lessons is very uneven but there is no systematic monitoring of provision to promote more consistent practice.
31. Particularly good use is being made of ICT in music and design and technology. However, in subjects as a whole, it is underdeveloped which means that pupils are not experiencing its full potential for learning.

32. The timetabling of lessons over a two week period creates difficulties for learning. Lessons are bunched together in some subjects, such as modern foreign languages in Year 9, which means that pupils are unable to benefit from the frequent and regular reinforcement of skills and concepts which a more even distribution of lessons allows for.
33. There is a vocational aspect to the curriculum in the form of business studies and GNVQ courses at Key Stage 4. At present, the GNVQ course attracts only the less able pupils and so its vocational influence is restricted in range. Although there is a GNVQ intermediate course at post-16, there is no Advanced course. This limits both continuity and progression.
34. There is a wide range of subject courses on offer Post-16 at A/S and A level. The curriculum is flexible and enterprising and is currently offering a range of options in the field of modern foreign languages. Work on core key skills is also timetabled. However, the provision for religious education at this level is limited. The school is currently considering the nature and direction of its future sixth form and has published a helpful working paper which is part of a healthy and wide consultation process. It has not yet succeeded in significantly raising the proportion of students achieving two A level passes, a key issue from the last inspection.
35. The use of homework is making a contribution to pupils' learning by reinforcing what pupils have been taught in lessons but its use to extend learning through research and investigation is much more limited.
36. Pupils with special educational needs have good access to the curriculum but would be able to make even better use of the wide range of learning opportunities if their individual educational plans were more effective. Gifted and talented pupils rise to the high levels of challenge provided by the curriculum in subjects such as music and art but as yet their progress is not being accelerated in other subjects.
37. The provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. It is especially good in religious education where pupils are given many opportunities for reflection. For example, in one Year 11 GCSE lesson pupils took part in a calming, quiet exercise for ten minutes to release all tension in their minds and bodies by relaxation and the strength of mind to exclude any noise around them. The pupils maintain that these exercises help their concentration skills in other lessons as well as these. Pupils are given some opportunities to reflect in music, geography, art, design and technology, literature and drama. Because the school does not have a regular daily act of collective worship, pupils are denied an important regular occasion for reflection although some provision was made for this in form groups when they focused on 'the thought for the day'.
38. The school's contribution to the moral development of pupils is good. Staff provide pupils with good role models, and many take time to discuss with pupils the effects of their actions on others. In religious education, pupils are encouraged to discuss moral issues such as racism, prejudice, abortion and euthanasia. In art, pupils learn to value their own work and that of others. In the study of literature in English, pupils are given good opportunities to discuss the behaviour of characters and to draw conclusions about moral choices and what constitutes appropriate behaviour.
39. The social development of pupils is well promoted. Pastoral care is good and pupils of all ages know where to go when they need help. Pupils are expected to behave well in class

and around the site and are given good opportunities to show that they can take responsibility for their conduct. The school council provides a good context for pupils to make decisions which affect the wider school community. In many subjects, pupils are expected to work in groups, to share equipment, and to take a positive interest in one another's work. They are given very good scope to work wholeheartedly in support of charities and to raise considerable sums of money for good causes.

40. The provision for pupils' cultural development is good. Pupils study a wide range of cultures in art where excellent use is made of aboriginal forms and expression as a focus for their work. In design and technology, their work gains inspiration from Indian culture. Pupils listen to music from around the world. In geography, some pupils are working with a Japanese exchange student to learn about Japanese culture at first hand.
41. There is good extra-curricular provision in many areas of the curriculum. Activities are well supported by pupils, both at lunchtime and after school. There are opportunities for residential visits, and pupils also undertake field trips.
42. The school gained the Schools' Curriculum Award in 1992. There are still very strong links with local industry. Links are particularly good in design and technology, and the school is involved in a range of regional and national initiatives, sponsored by local and national companies. The governing body has been especially helpful in facilitating strong links with local industry and commerce.
43. Relationships with other institutions are good, including those with the very large number of feeder primary schools, enabling most pupils entering Year 7 to take full advantage of the curriculum immediately. However, information relating to pupils with special educational needs is tardy and inadequate and does not allow them to make best use of the curriculum the school offers. There are good links with other secondary schools and some good links with further and higher education, including initial teacher training institutions.
44. The issues from the last inspection relating to the curriculum have been fully resolved, except for some Post-16 provision, where appropriate vocational subject courses to provide continuity following the intermediate GNVQ course, are not available.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

45. The high priority given to the pupil's welfare and guidance in the last inspection report has been maintained. The school's procedures for child protection and for promoting well being, health and safety of all pupils are good.
46. Child protection procedures are in place and meet statutory requirements. There is a designated person who has received training and staff are aware of procedures. There are five trained first-aiders and pupils know who to go to if they are sick or injured. Clear procedures are in place for identifying and controlling risks to health and safety in all faculties. There are regular fire drills with additional ones at the start of the academic year for Year 7 pupils; and fire notices are displayed around the school.

47. The pupils' attendance is carefully monitored. The school has very thorough procedures for following up absences and lateness through the 'First Day Absence' policy. The educational support officer contacts those families where the attendance of a pupil is causing concern.
48. The school has a positive approach to discipline, and standards of behaviour are good, in the classrooms, dining hall and in other parts of the school. Any bullying is dealt with quickly and appropriately. Tutor periods and assemblies are used to reinforce the school's anti-bullying policy. All members of staff monitor the behaviour of individual pupils and present a united approach in dealing with discipline problems when they arise.
49. The standard of care provided by teaching and non-teaching staff is good. Relationships are strong between the pupils, pupils and teachers and other adults in the school. The school has been closely monitoring the academic progress of pupils in Year 11 with a view to ensuring that all pupils achieve GCSE grades which are commensurate with their abilities. This is a good initiative because it is helping to ensure that pupils do themselves full justice in their last year of full-time compulsory education. The monitoring has also embraced pupils in Year 10. At present, the close monitoring of the all-round progress of all pupils at Key Stage 3 is not taking place but is being planned.
50. Target setting is playing an important part in art lessons in helping teachers to know that all pupils are making progress but it is not systematically used in all subjects to help the pupils' all round progress and to raise attainment. The marking of work is often very generalized and makes only limited use of guidance to show pupils how they might improve their work.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

51. The school works satisfactorily with the parents. The results of the questionnaires show that the majority of parents are happy with what the school is doing, feel that it is an improving school and that it is 'on the move'. At the parents' meeting, a number of them spoke warmly of the successful careers followed by their sons and daughters as a result of the firm foundations laid by the school. They believed that the school encouraged co-operation, care and concern and promoted warm relationships.
52. A significant number of parents were concerned about the extent, nature and purpose of homework, and the lack of consistent support for pupils with special educational needs, especially where they had individual education plans which were not being followed up in school. There was also dissatisfaction with pupils' standards in mathematics and disappointment at the lack of feedback to pupils. There was also concern over the extensive use of supply teachers leading to a lack of continuity in learning.
53. Parents are kept well informed of school events through the school newspaper, 'The Hilbre Endeavour' and other correspondence. The school's prospectus and governor's annual report are informative publications. The school issues interim reports as well as annual reports for pupils at Key Stage 3 and these give parents clear indications of pupils' achievements and effort. Pupils' annual reports do not contain sufficient information about attainment to enable targets to be set for pupils. The reports for sixth form students are better because they contain more specific information and targets. Parents welcome the opportunities given to them to discuss their children's progress at the annual interviews between staff and parents.

54. There is a very active parent association, which supports the school well by promoting social occasions and fund-raising events. Parents support their children's learning through supervising homework, and the school planner provides an effective link between home and school. There is a Home School Agreement which helpfully sets out the responsibilities of the different but complementary partners. Parents find the school approachable.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

55. The school is well led by the headteacher. It has a clear sense of direction, a comprehensive set of policies, and sound plans for further improvement. The governing body is providing strong support for the school. The leaders of the key stages and most heads of faculty are working effectively to support the school's current priorities. The vast majority of teachers are very positive in the way they relate to pupils, expect them to give of their best and have high expectations of what they can do.
56. The school is well managed. The prospectus contains much useful information and is presented in a style which prospective parents would find helpful. The school development plan is clear in its identification of appropriate priorities. It has enough detail to allow progress to be monitored. It is supported by a strategic vision which carefully and prudently costs all the resources needed to support key developments in the next five years. It is not accompanied by any statement of principle governing the sort of school it would like to become; this is a weakness as it would help all members of the community to see what they were striving for, if they had such a picture of the future. The staff handbook is a very helpful guide, especially for teachers who are new to the school.
57. The governing body is well run. It meets regularly, takes important decisions, is well briefed by the headteacher on major developments, and is consulted on the formulation of the school development plan. Some visits by individual members have been made to the school which have resulted in the governors concerned becoming more informed about the curriculum and the newly established pupil support centre.
58. The governing body is currently working on allocating more governors to represent the different curriculum areas which is a good development. Although the governing body has a good knowledge of the main strengths of the school, and its overall achievements, it does not show that it has such a firm grip on the school's weaknesses and as such is not in the best position to evaluate its overall performance. School improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory but there are still some outstanding issues to be fully resolved.
59. At the time of the last inspection, the monitoring procedures in the school were found to be in need of further refinement. The school now has a number of effective initiatives. The senior management team has embarked on a rolling programme of monitoring the work of each faculty to set criteria. This has already produced useful information and has enabled action to be taken to address areas of weakness. For instance, it was found that some lessons in science lacked challenge and it was possible for teachers to be put in touch with a well established programme of work in science which seeks to develop pupils' powers of reasoning through their involvement in demanding tasks.
60. There are some limitations to the monitoring being undertaken by the senior management team. Firstly, follow up is a weakness as there are no further monitoring visits to see how things have worked out if an agreed course of action is set in motion. Secondly, the notes of the monitoring visits record little by way of response from the faculty members which suggests that the process has not yet resulted in the dialogue between equals which is

what is normally looked for. Thirdly, the visits are not effectively reinforced as the faculties themselves are not undertaking systematic observations of classroom practice. Although there is some monitoring of pupils' work, this does not of itself provide a sufficient strong base to make judgements about a faculty's strengths and weaknesses. This is one of the reasons why the governing body does not have the detailed analysis of performance which would enable it to speak authoritatively about the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

61. The school has no established means for bringing together its data to track pupils' academic progress from the time they enter the school. It has been focusing its attention on monitoring the attainment of pupils at Key Stage 4 to help ensure that they do themselves justice on GCSE examination courses. This process is now being extended to pupils in Year 9. The school is making use of two main criteria in this process as it embraces pupils in Year 9: commitment to learning and organization. It is expected that the faculties will be monitoring pupils' attainment. It is important that the school finds an effective way of ensuring that all criteria are brought together to arrive at a comprehensive picture of all pupils' progress throughout the school, both in terms of their personal development and their academic progress.
62. The school is working towards implementing the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment for Pupils with Special Educational Needs and all the basic practices are in place. Good intentions are clear, for instance, it is proposed that each individual education plan should have a subject focus. The governing body is fulfilling its statutory requirements by designating a governor to have oversight of this area of the school's work. This role is being discharged well as the governor takes a close interest in this subject and supports helpful developments, keeps in close touch with what is happening in the school and ensures that the interests of pupils with special educational needs are represented at governing body meetings.
63. A number of factors have been hindering the provision for special educational needs. These include the extended absence of the special educational needs coordinator, the delay the school has experienced in obtaining outside help to assist with the statementing process and the delay in receiving detailed information from other schools on the specific learning needs of Year 7 pupils. Whilst the school has acted responsibly in putting in place a temporary management arrangement, the outcome is nonetheless unsatisfactory and needs to be rectified. By the end of their first term in the school, Year 7 pupils have still not had their individual education plans prepared. Existing individual education plans for other pupils in the school are very generalised and are of little help to teachers. No individual education plans have subject interpretations in line with school policy. They rarely refer to targets. Some teachers do not have individual education plans to hand in the classroom. There is no systematic monitoring taking place to see if the plans are being effectively used.
64. Expenditure on supply staff is higher than average for schools of this type but the school manages the use of supply teaching competently. Inevitably, staff absence has some impact on the continuity of learning, especially given a timetable with a two week cycle, and the school is not monitoring this closely to discern its full effect on the continuity of pupils' learning. Newly qualified teachers are well supported. The monitoring of teachers which has taken place so far is helpful in preparing for performance management. Homework is making a positive contribution to pupils' learning but its use is not being monitored over time so it is not possible for the school to know whether 'the famine or feast' referred to by a number of parents is a reality. Resources are mostly adequate although there is a shortage of atlases. The stock of the learning resources centre is not of broad appeal to the average learner and is not being used to support literacy

developments. Much of the accommodation is dilapidated and run down but an extensive programme of renewal is imminent.

65. The financial management of the school is good. Excellent use is being made of up-to-date technology. Staff takes good advantage of training courses to ensure that their skills and expertise are fully developed. The system itself has great flexibility and allows for projections and forecasting as seen in the strategic vision document. Staff and governors are provided with regular updates on a wide range of expenditure. All developments are carefully costed. Recommendations of audit reports are acted upon. Efforts are made to ensure that the school obtains value for money from its providers. Specific grants are being well used for their intended purpose, the school makes good use of outside agencies and responds well to external initiatives which can help it to improve further.
66. On entry to the school, the attainment of pupils is average. On the whole, they make good progress and by the time they reach the statutory leaving age their attainment in terms of reaching five grade A* - C is well above average in relation to similar schools. Pupils need to reach higher levels in mathematics and science. They are well taught. The school is well managed but there are weaknesses in monitoring. The income the school receives is average for its type and its expenditure per pupil is also average. The sixth form remains expensive although it is not the drain on the school that was identified at the time of the last inspection. The school has not succeeded in improving the pass rate for the number of pupils reaching 2 A levels. By balancing each of these factors and taking them all into account, the school is seen to be giving satisfactory value for money, as it was at the time of the last inspection.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to help the school improve further, the headteacher, staff and governing body now need to:

1. Improve the attainment of pupils in mathematics and science at Key Stage 4;
(Paragraphs 84,85,93,94,101)
2. Ensure that teaching makes full use of the assessment process so that pupils can be made aware of their levels of attainment and that the progress of all pupils can be closely monitored throughout the school;
(Paragraphs 23,50,88,101,116,134,143)
3. Introduce thorough monitoring procedures to ensure that:
 - In line with school policy, individual education plans are provided for all pupils who need them and that they contain appropriate targets for pupils to work to;
(Paragraphs 5,24,36,49,61,63,81,90,104,126,129)
 - All faculties undertake regular classroom observations of teaching in order to define good practice and to share it;
(Paragraphs 60,79,91,102,117,154)
 - ICT provision takes full account of the need for all pupils to build on skills, to acquire further knowledge and to develop its application to their learning in all subjects;
(Paragraphs 18, 31, 79, 93, 118, 128, 136, 140, 146, 171)

In addition, the following, less significant issues, should be considered:

- Raising the proportion of students achieving 2 A levels or equivalent (an outstanding issue from the last inspection report) (paragraph.10)
- Introducing Post-16 courses to improve opportunities for progression in vocational education; (paragraphs.33,117)
- Ensuring that marking provides guidance to pupils on how they might best improve their work; (paragraphs.50,170)
- Improving timetabling so that there is a more even distribution of teaching time for subjects such as modern languages; (paragraph 155)
- Ensuring that tutor support time is more efficiently used and that the PSHE programme is delivered to consistently good standards. (paragraphs 23,25,28,30)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	161
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	55

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	23	36	31	5	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	994	108
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	236	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	24	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	144	6

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	7

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	23
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	27

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	91.4
National comparative data	93.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	0.4

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	95	79	174

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	39	70	51
	Girls	49	47	30
	Total	88	117	81
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	50 (70)	67 (58)	46 (42)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	10 (32)	25 (27)	11 (9)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	53	69	58
	Girls	56	47	39
	Total	109	116	97
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	62 (66)	66 (58)	55 (48)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	23 (27)	18 (18)	10 (10)
	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	89	75	164

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	29	78	81
	Girls	35	71	73
	Total	64	149	154
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	39 (39)	91 (95)	[94] (98)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	34 (34)
	National	38.4 (38)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	N/a
	National		N/a

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	20	14	34

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	9.2 (11.6)	13.3 (11.8)	10.9 (11.7)	N/a (5.0)	N/a (N/a)	N/a (5.0)
National	17.7(17.7)	18.6(18.1)	18.2 (17.9)	2.6(2.7)	2.9(2.8)	2.7 (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	0	N/a
	National	N/a	N/a

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	0	N/a
	National	N/a	76.5 (82.5)

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	2
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	4
White	965
Any other minority ethnic group	2

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	60	1
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)	56
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	303

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.2%
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Average teaching group size: Y7– Y13

Key Stage 3	24.5
Key Stage 4	21.5

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	2310212
Total expenditure	2265364
Expenditure per pupil	2326
Balance brought forward from previous year	12303
Balance carried forward to next year	57151

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1002
Number of questionnaires returned	323

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	53	9	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	39	51	6	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	28	54	10	2	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	53	15	5	2
The teaching is good.	32	57	5	2	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	26	50	17	4	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	44	6	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	52	43	3	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	22	50	16	5	6
The school is well led and managed.	33	53	5	2	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	34	55	5	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	26	49	13	3	9

Other issues raised by parents

Several parents expressed concern that pupils did not have access to lockers, that there was congestion in the dining hall at lunchtime, and that it was difficult for them to see all the teachers they needed to see at consultation evenings.

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

ENGLISH

67. Pupils' current attainment in English is above the national average. The results in the National Curriculum English tests at the end of Year 9 were also above the national average in 1999. Over the period 1996 to 1999, pupils' performance has been close to the national average. However, the proportion of pupils gaining Level 5 or above in the National Curriculum tests in 2000 declined significantly but there is no obvious reason for this. The attainment of girls is significantly higher than that of boys.
68. The 1999 GCSE results in English and English literature were above average in comparison with national figures. Over the last three years, the performance of pupils has been above average in comparison with all schools nationally. In 2000, the number of pupils gaining A* and A grades at English declined. The results of girls have been significantly higher than those of boys.
69. In 1999, the number of students sitting the A level English literature examination was too small for helpful national comparisons to be made but in 2000, there was a significant increase in the number of candidates gaining A-E grades.
70. By the end of Year 9, pupils are capable speakers and listeners. Their responses to the texts they read are good. They write in a range of styles in a convincing and appealing manner. For example, a Year 9 class produced their leaflets after analysing charity pamphlets which effectively caught the eye. Handwriting is generally satisfactory. Most pupils are able to spell monosyllabic and common polysyllabic words accurately. In lessons there is a strong emphasis on the need to improve punctuation and spelling. All pupils, including those with special needs, make satisfactory progress during Key Stage 3.
71. By the end of Year 11, pupils achieve standards, which are above the national average. Girls achieve higher standards than boys. The ability of pupils to work independently and take leading roles of their own accord is satisfactory. Standards in speaking and listening are good. A majority of boys and girls listen attentively. Pupils are keen to answer questions.
72. Where pupils are well prepared for discussions they make sophisticated contributions and maintain discussion at a high level. In a well-planned lesson in Year 11, for example, pupils were encouraged to explore the construction of poems. Whilst exploring two poems, pupils used their knowledge of technical language, metre and rhyme to describe points of similarity and identify the poems as sonnets. One group's understanding was clearly demonstrated by the comment "His kidney's going on strike... he's going to die."
73. Reading standards are good at Key Stage 4. A majority of pupils are able to read aloud with confidence, fluency and expression. Lower attaining pupils are encouraged to improve the quality of their reading aloud. A shared reading and discussion of Carol Anne Duffy's poetry by Year 11 pupils showed that pupils could understand significant ideas and events. Pupils were able to refer to the text when explaining their views. For example, after reading *Before You Were Mine* a girl explained, "The wrong kind of walk home... that can get you into trouble... you've got to be careful."
74. Standards in writing are satisfactory at Key Stage 4. The writing of girls is generally of a higher standard than that of boys. Pupils write for a suitable range of purposes. They produce an interesting range of extended writing. Many pupils are able to improve the fluency and accuracy of their writing with re-drafting on paper. Insufficient use is made of

ICT when drafting. Handwriting is generally good. Most pupils are able to spell and punctuate accurately. In lessons there is a strong emphasis on the need to improve punctuation and spelling.

75. In the sixth form, the students studying A-level English literature show good understanding of the themes of classic novels, poetry and Shakespeare's plays. They build well on the critical skills acquired at Key Stage 4.
76. Throughout the school, well-targeted work, combined with high expectations of learning and behaviour, result in a majority of pupils making good progress. At Key Stages 3 and 4, the progress made by pupils with special educational needs and with low prior attainment is satisfactory. Pupils with English as an additional language progress at the same rate as other pupils. The attitudes to learning of the majority of boys and girls are mostly very good at each key stage. Many pupils are very well motivated. Good management of behaviour encourages pupils to co-operate. The behaviour of most pupils is very good.
77. Overall, the quality of English teaching is good but does vary in quality from lesson to lesson. It is sometimes very good or excellent. Individual teachers are making a significant contribution to the education of all pupils in the school. Their well-structured lessons and activities ensure that all pupils learn at a crisp pace. All of the teachers have a good knowledge of both language and literature. The majority of lessons are very well managed at each key stage but in some lessons work lacks focus and pupils do not make the progress they should. The overall effectiveness of teachers' planning is thorough and effective. Planning for individual lessons and sequences of lessons is also good. Teachers consistently identify the learning objectives for lessons and make them clear to the pupils. Skilful questioning stimulated pupils. For example, in a Year 13 practical criticism lesson an evocative reading of Vernon Scannell's *Nettles*, together with a blend of open and leading questions, enabled students to identify words and phrases that demonstrated parental love.
78. The use of homework is good at all key stages. Good schemes of work have been developed. They provide a stimulating range of experiences for pupils. The quality and use of ongoing assessment are satisfactory. The English faculty is satisfactorily led and managed. All members share a commitment to the school's aims. Schemes of work are well balanced. They adequately cover the National Curriculum and examination syllabuses.
79. The arrangements for monitoring teaching are unsatisfactory because they are unsystematic and have not identified or acted upon the inconsistencies in the quality of the teaching and learning. Documentation is extensive but unfocused. Resources for teaching, books in particular, are plentiful and well cared for. The lack of faculty based ICT equipment and limited access to other facilities is a weakness. This has a detrimental effect on the work of the faculty. Displays are well organised and of good quality.

80. Since the previous inspection, there have been some improvements. The overall standards attained by pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 have risen. The ability of pupils to speak clearly and with confidence in more formal situations has improved greatly. Listening skills are now good. The quality of teaching is usually good but there is still some unevenness in quality. The English faculty is continuing to develop initiatives to raise the achievement of boys.
81. Literacy development is seen as a whole school issue. A school literacy initiative has been introduced. Faculties have audited their current literacy provision to provide a baseline for planning this strategy. The rationale for the literacy initiative emphasises that pupils must have the ability to recognize, understand, use and manipulate the conventions of language. This strategy is at an early developmental stage. The literacy initiative lacks an overview explaining the vision and how it will work in the classroom. Current arrangements for monitoring the literacy initiative are limited.
82. The literacy initiative has been based on a set of principles recognizing that, in all subjects, pupils should be taught to use correct and appropriate expression and to read accurately and with understanding. This scheme has been designed to encourage all curriculum areas to contribute to pupils' literacy standards. In general, there is a focus on ensuring that pupils know and understand key vocabulary in subjects. For example, in a Year 11 history lesson on Nazi Germany pupils were given a comprehensive glossary of technical terms. This approach has still to be fully developed in practice.
83. Pupils' confidence in speaking and listening is good in most subjects. Oral work in several subjects has helped to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills. For example, in a Year 7 lesson in physical education good use of questioning encouraged girls to evaluate their performance. Pupils are encouraged to read from a range of texts, to use reference texts and to read aloud. For example, in art pupils are provided with opportunities to read from a range of reference texts and CD-ROMs. In many subjects pupils are provided with opportunities for different kinds of writing. For example, in a Year 9, history lesson pupils were provided with opportunities for writing from a sympathetic viewpoint during a lesson on the Plains Indians and the Buffalo.

MATHEMATICS

84. By the end of Year 9, the overall performance of pupils in the National Curriculum tests at Key Stage 3 is below average in comparison with all schools. By the end of Year 11, pupils' attainment in the GCSE examination is significantly below the national average for grades A*-C, but is broadly in line with the national average for grades A*-G. At Post-16, there are few pupils taking this subject and the examination results show that no pupils attain the higher grades. In the majority of lessons seen the attainment of the pupils is in line with national expectations and progress is satisfactory.
85. The progress of pupils, whilst being basically satisfactory, is uneven and closely reflects the quality of teaching and the response of the pupils. The poor behaviour of a minority of pupils in a number of lessons slows the pace of the lesson, and has an adverse effect on their own and other pupils' progress. There is evidence to show that pupils progress in their learning at Key Stage 3. They are able to read complicated time-tables to complete journeys by more than one mode of transport, can use instruments to construct mathematical figures accurately from given information and can calculate percentages in everyday situations. They use scale factors to enlarge drawings. At Key Stage 4, pupils can use Pythagoras' Theorem and Trigonometry; solve quadratic equation and tackle examination questions of the type that they are likely to meet in the GCSE. On post-16 courses, the pupils can use Newton's Laws of Motion, and the Trapezium Rule.

86. In half the lessons the teaching was good or very good, just over a third of lessons were satisfactory and teaching was unsatisfactory in just over 1 in 10 lessons. The teaching showed extremes of quality. On Post-16 courses the teaching is very good, and pupils work very hard at their studies. At Key Stages 3 and 4, the best lessons demonstrated the basic procedures in managing classes effectively by establishing the full attention of the whole class, giving a clear statement at the beginning of a lesson as to what the pupils will be doing, and what they should achieve by the end of it.
87. Examples of effective teaching included a Year 8 lesson, in which the teacher built on the pupils' prior knowledge, with skilful questions and used the same technique to reinforce the learning at the end of the lesson. Similarly effective was a Year 9 lesson where the pupils' attention was sustained by encouragement and praise, combined with the fact that the teacher expected them to behave, and the pupils were aware of that fact. In a minority of the lessons basic classroom management is unsatisfactory.
88. Homework is regularly set to consolidate class work but rarely to extend the pupils' knowledge and understanding. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainments are unsatisfactory at both key stages. They are not related to National Curriculum levels, and do not help pupils to understand how to raise the standards of their work. Assessment on post-16 courses is good because the modular course has built into it procedures for informing the pupils of their attainment against national norms.
89. The management of the department is satisfactory. The curriculum is good, and all the pupils have access to it. The class text which supports work at Key Stage 3 is good. At the present time, the texts at Key Stage 4 are being examined with a view to changing them and this should be completed with some urgency.
90. Pupils with special educational needs are provided for in the curriculum but the specific support for individual pupils is not consistent, resulting in teachers relying too much on the setting situation in this subject to cater for the level of work that they provide for the pupils.
91. The monitoring of teaching is too informal. It needs to be regularised so that the perception of what is going on in the classrooms can be based on accurate information, which in turn could provide better information on which to base in-service training needs.
92. A comprehensive numeracy policy is in place and is delivered to the pupils at Key Stage 3 in a distinct lesson. In these lessons, the pupils are made to focus on basic skills in number, and during lessons pupils were observed tackling how to figure out answers mentally; using calculators sensibly; suggesting sensible estimates of measurements; and using simple statistics. Pupils were observed in other subject areas such as science, geography, languages, music, craft, design and technology, art and physical education using mathematics competently for such topics as graphs, averages, two and three dimensional drawings and chord sequences. Overall, provision for numeracy is satisfactory.
93. The department has good resources and ensures that all pupils have the necessary equipment to participate in lessons. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection in aspects such as the development of the numeracy policy, and in improving attainment in the GCSE examination where, despite the below average attainment, the trend in the results is upward. There is still limited use of ICT in the department which has few computers of its own and cannot easily gain access to a computer room. There is no doubting the commitment of this department to the pupils in its care but the characteristics of the best practice in teaching and learning need to become the consistent experience of all the pupils, especially those at Key Stage 4.

SCIENCE

94. The attainment of pupils in science is below the national average. In 1999, pupils' overall attainment in the National Curriculum tests for 14 year-olds was below the national average. This has been the position for the last three years. In 2000, the proportion of pupils attaining the Level 5 norm was an improvement on those of previous years but the results show that almost half of the pupils made no improvement on their science results since the age of 11. At Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils attaining the higher grades of A*-C in GCSE examinations in the period 1997-2000 was below the national average. The trend is worsening. In comparison with other secondary modern schools, the results are less good. However, in 1999, taking the results of all pupils into account, the results were slightly better than the national ones. This reflects the success that the department has had in the education of lower attaining pupils at GCSE. Few students took Advanced Level examinations in 2000, and then only in biology. Students' results were below national averages.
95. On entry the pupils' attainment is average. They make good progress in Years 7 and 8, although there is some unnecessary repetition in Year 8 of work covered in Year 7. Unsatisfactory progress is made in Year 9. In Year 7, pupils are able to carry out investigations involving chromatography accurately and with care. They understand the application of chromatography in forensic science. By Year 8 pupils' practical skills have developed further. In identifying the gas produced by a reaction between an acid and various carbonates, pupils showed that they could handle equipment with dexterity, and some made a good range of scientific observations.
96. Pupils' knowledge of the work done in Years 7 and 8 is at least satisfactory. In Year 9, pupils' knowledge and use of scientific terms are markedly less well developed. In one class pupils could not recall the name of a variable resistor, though they had encountered it the previous lesson. In a lesson to investigate the energy content of crisps, pupils carried out the practical work well, but few were able to comment on the accuracy of the methods used. In Years 10 and 11, insufficient progress is made. Pupils' knowledge and understanding are well below national norms. In Years 12 and 13, the progress made is satisfactory overall with some students, although not all, coping well with complex work.
97. At Key Stage 3, girls make more progress than boys. The position is reversed at GCSE. The department makes a satisfactory contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills, but more needs to be done to improve pupils' knowledge and use of specialist terms. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.
98. Although the quality of teaching in the science department is satisfactory overall, there is some unsatisfactory teaching. It is good at Post-16. At Key Stage 3, the quality varies from very good to satisfactory. Good and very good lessons are characterised by the teacher setting clear and challenging objectives, being aware of any difficulties pupils are having with the work and responding to these. In a successful Year 8 lesson, designed to develop pupils' thinking skills, the work was challenging, and there were high expectations of the amount of work pupils would do. The teacher worked with groups asking questions to stimulate their thinking and to ensure that they were working quickly enough. The lesson ended with a useful discussion about what had been found out during the lesson. In a Year 7 lesson on chromatography, the pupils' interest was stimulated by the imaginative context the teacher used. Pupils had to use the technique to solve a crime. This resulted in a lesson in which pupils were highly motivated; they carried out the work quickly and well.

99. There are some weaknesses in teaching at Key Stage 4. The work is often unchallenging. For example, in a Year 10 lesson pupils were to plan an investigation on how to keep water in a container hot. The lesson lacked challenge, and the teacher did most of the thinking for the pupils. As a result interest waned and pupils' approach to the lesson became unenthusiastic. In a Year 11 lesson in which the periodic table was being revised, the teaching concentrated on facts to the exclusion of promoting the necessary understanding. As a result, pupils' knowledge lacked a firm foundation and was insecure so their motivation declined, as did their work rate.
100. At both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, questions are often asked solely of those pupils who are volunteering to answer. This results in some pupils being unchallenged and losing attentiveness. In the sixth form, the teaching is well judged, relating well to the needs of the students who as a result are making progress. The marking of pupils' work is generally helpful, with errors corrected. There is however much unfinished work in pupils' books, particularly in chemistry in Key Stage 4. The completion of work by pupils, including homework, is best in biology.
101. The school has provided the science department with the information needed to set appropriate work for individuals and to guide expectations of how well pupils should be able to do. Insufficient use is made of this data. There is very little evidence of work being adapted to reflect the range of abilities in classes. This contributes to the lack of challenge for some, whilst others are not able to adequately understand the work. This is a feature of both mixed ability classes and those organised by ability. Use of the data to identify individual pupils who are underachieving is well used in a very small number of instances. The use of the information to guide expectations of the quality of work produced by individuals on a day to day basis has yet to become part of the department's general approach. As a result the under-performance of pupils is not being rigorously dealt with. The analysis of pupils' answers in the national tests has been undertaken however, and to good effect. Aspects of science which pupils have found difficult have been identified and schemes of work amended to improve the teaching of these areas.
102. The regular monitoring of teaching and the scrutiny of pupils' work is not undertaken. As a result the good practice which exists in the department is not being identified and discussed. This weakens the basis for improving standards.
103. Health and safety standards are good in lessons. Pupils' carry out practical work safely. Their attention is drawn to any hazards associated with the materials they are using and they respond well to this. However, the storage of resources is unsatisfactory. There is insufficient storage space for chemicals and equipment. It is further limited by being used to store books as well. Some items, which must be kept securely in a locked cupboard, are not being locked away.
104. Since the last inspection, good progress has been made on the production and use of guidance notes for the teaching of investigations, although more still needs to be done. There has been an increase in the range of resources, particularly in the provision of data-logging equipment. There is still a need for rigorous monitoring and evaluation of practices in the department to improve standards and an increased concentration on developing pupils' understanding.

ART AND DESIGN

105. In 1999, GCSE results in art were in line with the national average for grades A*-C and average points score compared to other secondary modern schools. Results in 2000 were at a similar level. For the last four, years the average point's scores have been close to the national average for all schools. Results at A level, although small in number, were at

the national average for all schools in 1999. Attainment in work seen at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is at the national average, but there is a significant proportion of work, which is above this level. Post-16 attainment is well above the national average.

106. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and have full access to the curriculum. The pupils produce striking work in two and 3 dimensional form based on art nouveau and the work of Kandinsky. The work they produce from the starting point of decorative lettering is exciting. The department regards directly observed drawing as a basic tool for learning, and this principle continues into Post-16 work where a visit to the Stanlow refinery is resulting in some exciting large scale work. Sketchbooks are well used as tools for research and development. Visits to galleries only take place at Post- 16 level. Display is very well used to celebrate pupils' attainment and to inspire others.
107. Teaching and learning are very good at both key stages and on the Post-16 course. Teachers use a variety of styles but their approach is always based on excellent relationships and the communication of passion and an enthusiasm for art. Organisation and management are good, and planning, preparation and clear target setting are always evident. They combine to produce an excellent work ethos. There is clear skill development through the school, and work is put into geographical, historical and cultural context. Pupils learn from each other, and through feedback from teachers, which helps pupils to refine and improve their work and to make progress. Neither teachers nor pupils are frightened of the emotional implications in art lessons, and the high expectations of teacher's lead to a similar attitude from pupils. One Year 7 lesson, involving multi-coloured printing from polystyrene tiles, was extremely exciting. The pace of learning was intense, with enjoyment and hard work being clearly linked in a lesson in which pupils produced numerous high quality prints. The pupils' responses are very good at Key Stage 3, and excellent at Key Stage 4 and on the Post-16 course. Attitudes are open and positive, and pupils are keen and enthusiastic. When working they concentrate deeply, and there is often a real sense of fun. Pupils organise themselves very well, act responsibly, and are mutually supportive and work with a sense of common intent. There is a very good working atmosphere in lessons.
108. The curriculum fully satisfies National Curriculum requirements, and full account is taken of the changes required by Curriculum 2000. Art from a wide range of historical and world contexts is built into the curriculum. Exciting work is taking place in the Aboriginal art and Indian textiles projects. Information and communication technology is part of the curriculum, and is well used as a research and art-making tool. Some excellence in image modification was seen on the Post-16 course. Assessment happens most importantly through verbal feedback, where class targets become individual ones. More formal assessment takes place at the end of topics, and includes pupils' self-assessment. The faculty system works well for art and many principles and practices are shared. The monitoring of teaching and learning takes place within the faculty setting on a regular basis to agreed criteria. The occasional split classes in the current timetable are very well managed. This subject is very well led, and its collaborative style effectively harnesses individual strengths. Staff shares a common vision and a concern for growth and development.

109. The level of pupils' attainment at Key Stage 3 was an issue at the last inspection. This has now improved significantly. All other issues in art from the last inspection have been fully addressed, but the elderly kiln continues to break down. A new one is in the development plan for the new buildings.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

110. By the end of Year 9, the attainment of pupils is average, and there are no significant differences between the performance of boys and girls. Levels of achievement are often above average and sometimes are well above average. Design folders showing a range of presentational skills to illustrate information and practical work are usually of a good standard. Pupils' work improves throughout the key stage, and good work is seen in all areas of the department's work. Where the work is sometimes weaker, it is often because of the lack of depth in research, which limits the pupils' range of graphical techniques.
111. The 1999 GCSE results were above the national average for both boys and girls. Attainment differed in the different specialisms within the subject with attainment in work on courses in resistant materials and textiles being above the national average, and girls reaching standards, which are above average in food technology. But attainment in graphic products was below the national average when compared to all maintained secondary schools. Attainment is considerably higher than that of other secondary modern schools. Results continued to improve in 2000 with pupils performing well in all specialisms, except for the attainment of boys in food technology. Low entries at A level make comparisons difficult but results were favourable with a range of grades achieved in fashion and fabrics and design technology, and the work of most pupils showing evidence of good progress.
112. Pupils' attainment in Year 11 is above the national average and reflects the improved results achieved in 2000. Design folders show a good range of presentational and graphical skills, including freehand sketching, shading, use of colour, commercial material and the application of information and communications technology to illustrate information. Where the work is sometimes weaker it is mainly due to a lack of initial ideas, limitations in the range of graphical techniques used or incomplete evaluations.
113. Current attainment on the Post-16 course is in line with expectations in all areas of study. Pupils produce good work in design folders and offer interesting solutions to practical problems, including such items as the investigation of a keyboard for partially sighted children and a children's play system. In fashion and fabrics students can discuss with some understanding the influence of dress style on society, and Year 12 students are producing good work in their solutions to design problems, including a motorised micro scooter, a dust extraction system for the home and an automatic water sensor device. Levels of achievement are mostly good.
114. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall with a small proportion of satisfactory and very good teaching. The better lessons have good pace, use appropriate teaching strategies, keep pupils focused on their tasks and use subject knowledge to expand or develop ideas. This was seen in a Year 9 lesson where pupils were making savory dishes, a Year 10 lesson where pupils were researching and making wooden toys, a Year 7 lesson making decorative Christmas stockings, a Year 13 lesson where pupils were engaged in a blend of revision skills and practical work and a Year 11 lesson where pupils were looking at childbirth. Satisfactory lessons have many good features, but shortcomings include the inefficient use of time or situations where teachers tend to dominate a lesson. A strong feature of all lessons is the level of interest and motivation

shown by the pupils, created by the teaching which leads to increased learning and good progress by all pupils, including those with special educational needs.

115. Pupils' attitudes are generally good and very good in the sixth form. They work well in pairs or groups and share workplaces willingly. Literacy skills are well developed with key words on display in each area to support technical language. There are only rare instances of inattention and distraction where pupils are off task. Relationships are good in all areas.
116. Assessment procedures are in place but need to include National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3 and target-setting needs to be developed for individual pupils. Pupils are encouraged to assess and evaluate their own work but need to understand the levels at which they are working. Marking is consistent and homework set regularly.
117. The curriculum meets statutory requirements, and pupils experience a range of materials and processes at Key Stage 3 and all pupils take a technology subject at Key Stage 4. A level courses are offered in design technology and fashion and fabrics. The curriculum is not enhanced by GNVQ courses at Key Stage 4 and Post-16. Curriculum enrichment is evident with strong links being forged with local industry. The management of the department is good, and documentation is well prepared and thorough. Much work is done in analysing pupils' performance linked to improving examination results, but the monitoring of teaching and learning should be more formal and regular and requires a sharper focus.
118. Accommodation is in two separate blocks, which makes operating a collegiate team more difficult. Some accommodation is rather cramped and other areas are in need of upgrading, especially food technology. There are good displays of work in all areas. Resources are satisfactory but there is a need to update some graphics equipment and CAD-CAM facilities need improving. It is difficult to use information communication technology equipment in the food technology rooms at present.
119. Improvements since the last inspection include revised project work at Key Stage 3 providing more challenging work, improved examination results at GCSE and A level, the use of data books to motivate pupils to complete theory work, and more consistency in constructive marking. Strong links with local industry and colleges are a feature of the work in the department with the electric vehicle challenge and the Wirral Millennium Project involving imaginative and creative thinking for successful outcomes to be achieved.

GEOGRAPHY

120. The attainment of pupils by the end of Year 9 is above average. Levels of attainment have improved year on year since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils attaining Level 5 and above is now well above those for secondary modern schools. The proportion of pupils reaching Level 6 and above has also been increasing. Over the last two years, the boys have done better than girls at the higher levels.
121. The attainment of pupils by the end of Year 11 is average. GCSE results have shown improvement over the last three years although they remain below the national average for the proportion of pupils gaining grades A* - C. In 1999, the results improved to a level just above the average proportion of grades A* - C for secondary modern schools. In 2000, they slipped to below the national average once again, although the trend over the three years remains one of improvement. Girls perform proportionally as well as the boys at this level.

122. There has been a decline in the number of pupils choosing to study geography at GCSE level by almost a third. On Post-16 courses, pupils' levels of attainment vary from year to year but the average point scores are below national averages. There has been an increase in the number of students choosing to study geography at post-16 level this year.
123. Levels of attainment at Key Stage 3 are average. By the age of 14, most pupils have developed a satisfactory knowledge of the subject. They can use information to draw conclusions within a geographic context. Where higher attaining pupils are challenged, they make good progress. Likewise, where the needs of pupils with learning difficulties are targeted they make similar progress to other pupils. Although pupils generally make satisfactory progress, higher expectations, especially of written work, could result in higher levels of achievement. Written work seen does not reflect some of the good geographical content and skills observed in lessons. More effort needs to be made in the emphasis of keywords to raise literacy levels. By the age of 16, levels of attainment were seen to be good with pupils developing improved understanding of geographic skills and undertaking a number of effective geographic enquiries. Attainment was satisfactory in Year 12 and good in Year 13 with students benefiting from the use and application of ICT.
124. Overall, progress is satisfactory at Key Stage 3. However, in one class, as a result of weaknesses in teaching, especially ineffective class management, pupils made less progress than in other classes. Inadequate lesson planning and a failure to communicate the purpose of the lesson to pupils resulted in their making unsatisfactory progress in understanding the importance of climate on the location of holiday resorts in Europe. Unsatisfactory progress also occurred because of lack of pace and off task behaviour. At Key Stage 4, progress is good. Pupils gain increased knowledge and learn to apply this to new situations. They have the opportunity to experience different learning styles. In Year 10, good teaching and organisation ensured that pupils made good progress in their understanding of the effects of floods and the influence of environmental factors upon human geography in the Amazon rain forest.
125. Pupils' attitudes to learning are generally satisfactory at both key stages and behaviour is good in lessons at Key Stage 4 where pupils show more commitment and are able to work independently. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally good and consistently so at Key Stage 4 and Post-16.
126. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. In half the lessons it was good or better. At Key Stage 4 teaching was good or very good in all lessons. The quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory and often very good on Post-16 courses. In an unsatisfactory lesson at Key Stage 3, class management was weak, pupils were inattentive and lacked understanding of the tasks. Time targets were not used to maintain lesson pace within an already poorly structured lesson that relied on textbook exercises. There was no evidence of differentiated tasks for pupils of varying ability either those with learning difficulties or for the higher attaining pupils in the group. Little evidence was seen of the use of individual education plans throughout the department.
127. Where teaching was good classes were well managed and lessons were well planned with a variety of appropriately timed tasks that maintained lesson pace. Lesson objectives were shared with the pupils, previous learning was recalled and pupils understood the purpose of the activities. Differentiated materials were available for pupils with learning needs. Frequently marked work with guidance for improvement also assisted pupils' progress. Homework was chosen to extend pupils' understanding of the knowledge gained in the lesson and to give them an opportunity to reflect on that learning, for instance to try to decide where the Indians are the best guardians of the rainforest. At Key Stage 4, excellent use of a video extract about the Amazon Indians and a well chosen

reading describing conditions in the rain forest assisted the learning of the pupils by engaging their imagination.

128. There is good use evidence of good use of fieldwork to enhance the geography curriculum in all key stages. The department organises extra sessions for the improvement of GCSE coursework and revision. Resources within the department are limited. At Key Stage 3 there are insufficient atlases for all pupils. The department has only one computer that is not linked to the Internet and that had been acquired very recently. Difficulty in gaining access to ICT rooms means that opportunities for ICT in the curriculum are limited.
129. Little formal monitoring of teaching takes place within the department or faculty. The location of the three geography rooms on separate floors does not facilitate the sharing of good practice by the teachers. It also creates difficulties for monitoring pupil learning and behaviour, especially during periods of long-term staff absence. Likewise, there is little formal monitoring of the quality of work produced by pupils and its assessment.

HISTORY

130. The standards of attainment overall in the school are in line with the national average. Standards by the end of Year 9 are in line with the national average as indicated by the pupils' work and the proportion of pupils reaching level 5 and above in teacher assessments in 1999. The proportion achieving level 6 and higher was below the national average. In teacher assessments for 2000, there was a slight improvement in both levels of attainment. There has been a consistent upward trend of improvement over the last three years and standards are now higher than at the time of the last inspection. Boys attain as equally well as girls, although their rate of improvement has been significantly faster in the last three years.
131. The standards of attainment by the end of Year 11 are also in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils attaining A*-C grades at GCSE in 1999 was well below the national average. Pupils did less well at these higher grades than in many of their other subjects. However, there was a 30% improvement in these grades in 2000 and the level of pupils' work seen during the inspection is in line with the national average. The proportion attaining Grades A*-G was also in line with the national average in 1999 and 2000. There has been a marked improvement in A*-C grades since the last inspection. Boys in particular have improved and are now performing as well as the girls and better than boys nationally both at A*-C and A* or A grades.
132. Pupils are making satisfactory progress overall and at both key stages. They enter the school with average attainment level and by the age of 14, the majority of pupils attain levels expected of them nationally, including those with special educational needs. This represents satisfactory progress in their achievement. By age 16, pupils have maintained satisfactory progress to reach average levels of attainment compared their prior attainment at the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils with special educational needs also make satisfactory progress in their level of achievement. Boys progress at a faster rate than girls at both key stages, as indicated by the higher grades in GCSE results and teacher assessments at level 5 and above at Key Stage 3, which are both above the national average.

133. The quality of teaching is always at least satisfactory and is good in over a third of the lessons. It is best at Key Stage 4 where it is always good. This is an improvement since the last inspection, when there was some unsatisfactory teaching. This is due to better planning, a stronger emphasis on developing skills, good classroom management and a wider range of activities. For instance, an exciting and well-chosen video extract from "Dances with Wolves" was used to stimulate interest in American Indians hunting buffalo to prompt some effective writing of a diary by a white man observer.
134. Teachers have a good subject knowledge and set appropriate learning objectives, which are clearly explained. There is a good pace to most lessons and clear setting of deadlines for individual tasks, although time is rarely given at the end of the lesson to summarise or check understanding. Tasks are suitably challenging, as when Year 8 pupils had to match descriptions on cards to the book evidence to identify the characteristics of Cavaliers and Roundheads. However, more demanding enquiry skills of recognising bias and interpreting events are not being practised sufficiently, especially at Key Stage 3. Marking, although being done regularly, and in a way to encourage the pupils, often lacks an intellectual rigour that challenges pupils to think carefully about statements they make. It also needs to set pupils more specific targets for improving pupils' history skills.
135. Pupils' progress is satisfactory and is often good. It is best at Key Stage 4, where it is good. It is linked to the more even quality of the teaching and to the good attitude and behaviour of the pupils. There is a satisfactory acquisition of historical knowledge and understanding of chronology, change and continuity at both key stages. Pupils at Key Stage 3 are learning at least satisfactory organisational skills, although a lengthy period of research and enquiry is not provided, which would further develop their research skills. Middle and higher attaining pupils select and record evidence well. However, their ability to evaluate a variety of sources and causes, to interpret events and to write critically at length is less well developed. Such skills are better developed at Key Stage 4, as shown by detailed and well-researched coursework on Speke Hall. Lower attaining pupils still need more help to fully develop their skills of extended writing. Pupils generally concentrate well and are nearly all learning to work effectively by themselves. Their good behaviour and respectful relationship with the teacher and with each other are also helping to improve their learning.
136. A number of improvements have taken place since the last inspection, which has contributed, to the raising of standards. Guided by well-prepared schemes of work and helped by improved textbook resources, lessons are now better planned to meet the needs of all abilities. Teaching is of a more consistent quality. The use of a wider range of teaching strategies has been encouraged by an increased time allocation to history at both key stages. The department is beginning to use ICT as an information source and as a way of organising pupils' enquiry work, although this requires further development.
137. However, some issues raised in the last report have not been fully addressed. The department development plan still lacks details of costing, timing, accountability and success criteria to make it valuable for strategic planning. Assessment procedures are also not yet fully developed. Although there are now end-of-unit tests and moderation of results at Key Stage 3, results are not centrally recorded or analysed to inform curriculum planning and teaching. Nor are they used to make pupils sufficiently aware of their progress in the key elements and skills. Individual target setting is also lacking at Key Stage 4 to sharpen the pupils' awareness of their progress. Monitoring and evaluation of both teaching and learning are not happening systematically so that the good practices are shared.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

138. Standards of attainment overall are average despite some variation between key stages. At Post-16, recent examination performance has been poor. Now that the school is delivering its own A level course there is evidence of improved standards in the present Years 12 and 13. At Key Stage 4, there is no recent examination performance, but the standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average. At Key Stage 3, standards in aspects of communicating and handling information in relation to exchanging and sharing information are better than average but performance in the other strand is less good.
139. The progress that pupils make in the different strands of the ICT course at Key Stage 3 shows variations. Opportunities for pupils to review, modify and evaluate are limited and too much emphasis is placed on the 'polished' final work. There is insufficient time for pupils to think about how best to improve work and to make it more effective. Pupils do, however, make good progress in reorganising and presenting information in a variety of forms. They create good quality presentations, particularly in the use of *Power Point* that reflect an awareness of the target audience as well the use of appropriate information.
140. At Key Stage 4, pupils make good progress in their work in most strands and some very sophisticated work is achieved in relation to the use of *macros*, formulae and calculations in spreadsheets. Again, however, the opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their ability to review, modify and evaluate are less evident. At both key stages there is a need to monitor programmes of study more closely and continue to ensure all aspects are being delivered with equal stringency.
141. At both key stages pupils' attitudes are good. They demonstrate a willingness to learn, are enthusiastic and motivated and can work both independently and co-operatively as the work demands. They show a respect for both the resources and the staff, and this helps to create a very positive ethos. However, in some classes at Key Stage 4, which are not studying for a GCSE qualification, pupils have less positive attitudes to learning, and their behaviour is sometimes poor. The overall enthusiasm and knowledge the pupils show is a strength to be built upon.
142. The quality of teaching in the department is always satisfactory and is often good. In some lessons the teaching is very good and is occasionally excellent. Both specialists and non-specialists demonstrate a confident knowledge and competence in ICT, which is reflected in good standards of pupil management and good levels of interaction between teachers and pupils. In all lessons objectives were communicated clearly at the start, instructions and explanations were specific and, in almost all cases, learning built upon previous lessons. The use of correct terminology e.g. *multitasking*, *validation* and *verification* was used with a developing understanding by the pupils.
143. An area for development and improvement within the teaching relates to the assessment of ICT capability. Systems have already been put in place but they lack rigour, being based on the recording of pupils' use of ICT applications rather than judgements about attainment linked to National Curriculum level descriptors or GCSE performance. There is a clear need to develop the existing systems so that teachers evaluate the quality of pupil work and not just provide tick lists of activities undertaken.
144. In managing the department the subject leader leads by example providing a good role model in terms of teaching, developing good relationships between staff, offering support when needed and making effective use of the technician's time. The strategic leadership of the department is less well developed as there is a need to provide more detailed and thorough planning so that the development of ICT capability for all pupils is realised.

145. Accommodation is good and, although access by other subjects is limited, there is clear evidence of some challenging and interesting work taking place in design and technology with two and three dimensional modelling and the use of sensors, in music, through sequencing, composing and modelling, in Spanish, through internet use, including e-mail, and art through image manipulation on the Post-16 course. Other subjects show less sophisticated use of ICT and concentrate primarily on its presentation aspects.
146. There has been good progress since the last inspection on the cross-curricular aspects of ICT and the employment of a technician. However, schemes of work are still in need of development and the assessment of ICT capability is still an issue. The school will soon benefit from an extensive building programme in which ICT will figure prominently. At this significant time in the school's future, there is need to consider how to introduce more rigorous strategies for monitoring and assessing ICT capability across the whole curriculum. This would help to ensure that all departments can access ICT curriculum opportunities and provide a vision for the use of *Management Information Systems (MIS)* with all staff.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French and Spanish

147. Currently, French and Spanish are being studied by the whole cohort of pupils in alternate years. All courses lead to accreditation.
148. Attainment of pupils on entry is average. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with national averages. This is teacher assessed and from work seen the assessments are rigorous. Girls perform better than the boys. Results at GCSE level fluctuate, but are improving. In Spanish the percentage of A* - C grades rose from 18 percent in 1999, to 39 percent in the 2000 results. In 1999, the French results exceeded the national figures, but showed a decrease in 2000.
149. Pupils at both key stages use the foreign language effectively in question and answer activities and are encouraged to answer the register, using an item of vocabulary from the current topic. They are still reluctant to use French or Spanish when asking for equipment, or permission to do something and generally lack confidence. In the higher ability groups pupils are able to give fuller answers. Pair work is established, which builds up pupils' confidence. Post-16 students in Year 12 are able to give oral presentations and discuss topics very competently. Listening forms an integral part of lessons, and pupils are guided as to answering techniques, e.g. which key words or phrases are required to gain important marks.
150. Evidence from a scrutiny of work, together with lesson observations, shows that much of the written work involves reinforcement of grammar and consolidation exercises. There are more opportunities for extended work in Year 9 upwards, and displays on walls included some detailed, extended writing produce using ICT. There is no evidence of support for pupils with special educational needs in lessons. Individual educational plans for these pupils are not subject specific. In some lessons, pupils would have benefited from additional help, or differentiated tasks. Setting alleviates the problem in some years. Pupils at both key stages and Post-16 are well motivated, particularly in lessons, which provide challenge. A minority of pupils in lower ability groups are apathetic.
151. Progress at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good, and pupils are not afraid to ask for help. Good progress was seen in a Year 8 Spanish lesson. Pupils enjoyed the challenge of making the longest sentence

using cards, and there was a keen sense of competition. In a similar Spanish class, pupils were carried along by the teacher's enthusiasm and were able to give full descriptions of people, as a direct result of the sequence of the tasks, brisk pace, high teacher expectations and excellent classroom management.

152. Progress at Key Stage 4 continues to be satisfactory. A Year 11 French revision lesson came alive, as the teacher provided challenging opportunities. Oral repetition to improve accent and fluency was taken seriously; not a minute was wasted as one activity followed another. Response was rapid, the enjoyment visible, success evident. This was an exemplary lesson, showing careful planning, variety of activity, flexibility and skill by the teacher.
153. Post-16 students are well motivated and have made swift all round progress since GCSE. These students are committed.
154. The quality of teaching is generally good. At Key Stage 3, it was good or better in half the lessons, whilst at Key Stage 4, nearly two-thirds were good or better. Teaching was good in the lesson observed on the Post-16. The language staff are well qualified and committed and their work is enhanced by foreign language assistance. Lessons are well planned. The more successful lessons are challenging, with high teacher expectations and clear explanations. Teachers have little opportunities to observe colleagues at work in the classroom so that good practice can be shared. Some lessons were conducted throughout in French or Spanish, with good pupil response and understanding. Teachers give freely of their time and organise clubs at lunchtime and revision clubs after school. Pupils have the opportunity to visit France and Spain and there are pen friend links. Relevant homework is set and marking is consistent. Assessments are used to monitor progress. Reports inform parents of progress, strengths and weaknesses. The department is well managed. Documentation is detailed and clear, with schemes of work explicit. These are revised to suit the pupils' best interests. Finances are used efficiently. Arrangements for the subject meet the requirements of the National Curriculum.
155. Rooms are used to advantage with attractive wall displays and authentic posters. Photographs help relive some of the cultural visits and trips abroad. A selection of readers and magazines encourage independent reading. Textbooks are carefully chosen to suit the needs of pupils; teachers complement these by home produced worksheets. Time-tabling inhibits continuity, for instance, in one class in Year 9 all four lessons occur in one week.
156. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Examination standards are improving, pupils are more confident in spoken activities and the use of ICT impact on extended written work. The opportunity for all teachers to observe colleagues would further enhance progress, particularly in sustained use of the foreign language by the teachers.

MUSIC

157. The attainment of pupils is above average by the end of Year 9. GCSE results have improved since the previous inspection and pupils' A*-C results in 2000 were well above the national average. There are no courses at A level. Girls achieve higher than boys at Key Stages 3 and 4.
158. At both key stages, the pupils who generally achieve the higher standards also receive additional instrumental tuition. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated and the department makes good use of pupils' individual educational plans. It is working towards completing individual subject related targets. For example, one pupil with specific

learning difficulties finds the writing of traditional notation difficult but has made very good progress in music and is able to perform, play and improvise on an instrument to a good standard.

159. The quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 is good and is sometimes excellent. This leads to pupils making good progress. In one Year 7 lesson, pupils were given the opportunity to learn in different ways. They were able to touch and play all the instruments of the string family, and the overhead projector was linked to the computer to illustrate the parts and range of the instruments. A pupil was involved in operating the equipment. Pupils practised the subject-related vocabulary, such as *pizzicato*. Very good relationships throughout this well paced lesson led to pupils showing sheer enjoyment whilst demonstrating good gains in knowledge.
160. Schemes of work meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Opportunities for pupils are broad. For example, in Year 8, boys and girls have been taught to produce a good tone on the recorder. They are using their skills and producing compositions based on a pentatonic scale. Assessment of pupils' attainment and progress has proved more difficult than it should be due to the shortage of music staff. However, the department is introducing the new National Curriculum levels for music. A weakness at this key stage present is that the pupils are not aware of the levels at which they are working or their individual targets for improvement.
161. Very good teaching at Key stage 4 leads to pupils making very good progress. Pupils on the GCSE course are encouraged to research in order to find inspiration for their pieces. For example, in Year 11, one pupil working at a high level has composed a piece of Big Band music in jazz style. The inspiration came from an arranged visit to listen to the sound of a Big Band. Another pupil has researched life in Victorian times. The composition, set in London, successfully depicts the contrasts between a life of poverty and society. Year 11 pupils on the GCSE course are achieving beyond expectations. Year 10 pupils are using a wide range of instruments for playing and composing. Attainment overall in Year 10 is average with two pupils working towards higher standards. Assessment, including marking, is thorough in Years 10 and 11. Pupils are given good guidance on how to achieve their individual targets. Analysis of pupils' work in Year 10 shows that they have a clear understanding of examination requirements.
162. The department is very well managed within the expressive arts faculty. Staff work hard to provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils are given many performing opportunities in school and in the community. There are, however, weaknesses in the staffing of the department. Although almost a half of music lessons at Key Stage 3 are taught by non-specialist teachers, standards and the quality of pupils' learning are being maintained and monitored because the head of department is involved in all these lessons through team teaching, and planning and evaluating. Good support is given by visiting instrumental teachers from the Wirral Music Service. Parents are supportive and contribute towards the cost of lessons. However, the provision for this school is insufficient to meet the needs of the large number of pupils wishing to study the subject. A small minority of pupils studying for GCSE are using voice for their performance but are not receiving specialist tuition.
163. The quality of accommodation is acoustically unsatisfactory affecting pupils' pitch especially when preparing aural as part of assessment. For example, in one trumpet lesson one able pupil found it difficult to pitch the individual notes of a triad when composing because teaching and other individual instrumental lessons were taking place in adjacent rooms.

164. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. Skills in ICT are taught at both key stages. Pupils are using computers to research, compose, sequence and process work. GCSE results have improved. There are new keyboards with full sized keys. However, the school has not addressed the issues in staffing and soundproofing rooms.

DRAMA

165. Pupils' attainment in drama has been well below the national average. In 1999, GCSE results were well below the national average and well below the average for secondary modern schools.

166. The quality of teaching is now very good. Planning is especially effective. Lessons are well structured and flow at a good pace. There is a very good working atmosphere in lessons. Attitudes are keen and enthusiastic. The teachers' very good knowledge is used to develop a wide range of performance skills. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into all activities. They work well together and show a high level of commitment. Their improvisation work is impressive. Individual, pair and small group presentations are constructed carefully. For example, Year 7 pupils made good use of space, time and non-verbal techniques to explore dramatic situations.

167. In the work seen at Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment is now close to the national average. Pupils are learning effectively through scripted work. For example, Year 10 pupils are coping well with the complexities of a Lorca script as a basis for characterisation. They are developing appropriate theatre and drama skills. Links with English and other subjects are undeveloped.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

168. In 2000, 74 percent. of pupils gained A*- C grades in GCSE. This is significantly above the national average for all secondary schools. A*- C grades have been in line with the national average since 1996. Very few girls take the subject at GCSE. Of the first five pupils taking A level none gained A-B passes.

169. By the end of Year 9, attainment is nearly always satisfactory or better. Often it is good and occasionally very good or even excellent. Where attainment is excellent, teaching is sufficiently flexible to achieve many objectives and to encourage pupils to plan, perform and evaluate their work. It is also extremely well organized and planned. This was exemplified in a Year 8 gymnastics lesson where girls produced imaginative, original and high quality pair work. Learning and progress in this lesson were good. In basketball, dribbling and shooting skills were clearly improved by Year 9 boys. Where teaching is satisfactory, pupils do not get as many chances to show individuality and the pace and progress of lessons are not as good. Pupils with special educational needs progress well.

170. By the end of Year 11, learning and attainment are good as a direct result of good teaching. Lessons, carefully structured with game-related practices, small sided games and good use of competition, ensure that more advanced skills are enhanced. Although girls are far fewer in number, they compete well and progress equally with boys. Year 11 girls show very positive attitudes to health-related exercise. However, at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, their knowledge of cardio-vascular functioning is superficial. In practical work GCSE pupils attain well. A class of boys reacted very well to a lesson on strategies of attacking and defending in basketball. Because the lesson was thoroughly prepared and because teaching styles allowed co-operation and collaboration, they produced good plans and incorporated them into games, reflecting on the degree of

success, which they achieved. Written work in GCSE varies in quality. Marking fails to give pupils the information essential to help them improve. Revision procedures for the recent GCSE were greatly improved.

171. Post-16 students, show positive attitudes. They are keen to improve. They are prepared to express opinions forcefully, clearly and with conviction. ICT does not appear in students' written work or in the delivery of the course. Students are not retrieving information electronically. Marking is not sufficiently informative. There is no physical education for students not studying the examination course.
172. Attitudes and behaviour are nearly always good or very good and, occasionally, excellent. Students enjoy physical education and remain engaged and interested throughout lessons. Pupils arrive promptly and dress appropriately. When required to co-operate and collaborate they respond particularly well and this enhances progress and attainment. Questions are answered eagerly and enthusiastically. Many pupils attend extra-curricular activities which the department provides.
173. Management and administration are good. The curriculum is both well balanced and well organized. There is a good extra-curricular programme. Staff are involved in departmental policy decisions. Meetings are held monthly and minuted. Stocks of books, both for borrowing and for examination courses, are good. Since the last inspection, examination results have been in line with the national average and in 2000, the results were easily the best so far attained. Opportunities exist in some lessons, for pupils to plan and evaluate work. Assessment procedures have improved.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

174. By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment is average. GCSE results in 2000 were very good and have improved considerably since the previous report. Eighty-eight percent of pupils gained A* – C grades compared to the national average figure of 58 percent. Girls achieve higher grades than boys in religious education GCSE examinations. Although there were only three students on the A-level course, all were successful.
175. The standards of pupils' work seen in lessons are average with some examples of work, which is better than this. In Years 10 and 11, standards on GCSE courses are average but there is also some work which is better. Standards of work of the Year 11 pupils on the non-GCSE courses are uneven. In one lesson standards were below average because the curriculum failed to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. On the A-level course, pupils are working at average levels.
176. The quality of teaching is mostly good at Key Stages 3 and 4. The quality of teaching on A level courses is very good. Pupils are given the opportunity to gain knowledge in a variety of ways. For example, in one Year 8 lesson pupils were learning about Christmas through group discussion, giving quick response to questions, showing curiosity, and sorting information. Pupils worked collaboratively and spoke with confidence when reporting their findings. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated in these lessons.
177. In a few lessons teaching is no more than satisfactory; the pace is then too slow as non-specialist staff do not always have enough knowledge of the level at which pupils are working. They are not aware of the learning requirements of pupils with special educational needs. Teaching Post-16 demonstrates very good knowledge of the subject and of examination requirements. Each pupil has a clear plan for revision. Pupils know how much time to allow for each question and how marks are allocated. Their subject knowledge is average but there are examples of very good written work. One student

produced a lengthy essay on the role of women in church and how the role had changed. The student had extensively researched the essay and demonstrated a mature and understanding approach. Students in this group are sometimes reluctant to make an oral contribution in lessons and this is an area for teachers and pupils to develop.

178. There is no teacher assessment of Year 9 pupils, or attainment on entry statistics for the Year 2000. The department has not improved at a satisfactory rate since the last inspection because of late resignations and the difficulties which have resulted. The school does not meet statutory requirements because it fails to provide religious education for all Post-16 students. At present, the lack of subject leadership is resulting in a department that has inconsistencies, especially in teaching and the assessment of pupils' work. There are some good features which provide a base on which to build, such as the provision of GCSE full and short courses, the A level examination course, and the quality of much of the teaching.