

INSPECTION REPORT

UPTON HALL SCHOOL FCJ

Upton

LEA area: Wirral

Unique reference number: 105115

Headteacher: Mrs P Young

Reporting inspector: Mr R Palmer
31198

Dates of inspection: 12th – 15th February 2001

Inspection number: 215524

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Grammar (selective)

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Girls

School address: Upton
Wirral
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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr J Morgan

Date of previous inspection: N/A

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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31198	Mr R Palmer	Registered inspector		The characteristics and effectiveness of the school
				The school's results and pupils' achievements
				Teaching and learning
				Leadership and management
				Key Issues for action
13786	Mrs S Walsh	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
				Pupils' welfare, health and safety
				Partnership with parents and carers
30690	Mr G Allison	Team inspector	Geography	
			Information and communication technology	
3534	Mrs A Braithwaite	Team inspector	Science	Quality and range of opportunities for learning
7926	Mr J Bowden	Team inspector	Physical education	
			Provision for pupils with special educational needs	
4773	Mr P Gilliat	Team inspector	History	
31986	Mr B Medhurst	Team inspector	Mathematics	
17868	Dr E Metcalfe	Team inspector	Art and design Equality of opportunity	

12276	Mr T Payne	Team inspector	Music	
19214	Mr G Price	Team inspector	English	
22491	Mrs L Small	Team inspector	Design and technology	
4829	Mr I Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
31838	Mr M Williams	Team inspector	Spanish	
22691	Mr R Woodhouse	Team inspector	Science	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Upton Hall School Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ) is a voluntary aided, Roman Catholic selective grammar school for girls aged 11 to 18, mainly from Wirral. It is smaller than other secondary schools nationally and is oversubscribed. In January 2001, there were 704 girls on roll, including 152 in the sixth form, compared with 646 the previous year. The attainment of pupils in the current Years 7 to 11 was well above average when they entered the school at age 11. Prior to 1996, when it was independent, the school's intake each year contained about 70 per cent of pupils selected on the basis of very high attainment and 30 per cent who were of average and below average attainment. Students entering the sixth form are of well above average attainment overall and include a few who transfer from other schools. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (seven per cent) is below the national average. No pupils speak English as an additional language. A low number (one per cent) come from ethnic minority backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs (two per cent) is well below average. No pupils have statements of special educational needs.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Upton Hall School FCJ is a good school and has some outstanding features. It maintains a very good quality of pastoral care while improving pupils' overall standards of attainment. The very good leadership of the headteacher and the very good management and support provided by the governing body and senior staff contribute positively to the school's improvement. Results in external examinations are well above average and are improving. Pupils make very good progress throughout Years 7 to 9 and good progress in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. A-level results are well above average but achievement in A-level subjects ranges from very good to satisfactory. Pupils respond very well to the very high expectations set for them, work hard and enjoy their learning. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and is very good overall. The school has considerably more strengths than weaknesses, manages its resources well and provides good value for money. The sixth form is cost effective.

What the school does well

- Attainment is well above average in nearly all subjects. Achievement is often outstanding in English, art and design and music.
- Leadership and management are very good. The excellent ethos contributes significantly to pupils' personal development.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall.
- Pupils' excellent attitudes and behaviour enhance their learning. Relationships among pupils and between teachers and pupils are excellent.
- Pupils extend their learning and their personal development through active participation in an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in sport and music.

What could be improved

- GCSE results, although well above the national average, have been below expectations based on prior attainment.
- A-level results in mathematics, geography, French and German were not high enough in 2000.
- Pupils insufficiently enhance their learning through the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in most subjects.
- Attendance of a few students in the sixth form is not high enough to ensure that all students achieve their full potential.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has not previously been inspected.

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	A	A	A	E
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	A	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Results in GCSE examinations are well above the national average. The school's average GCSE points score per pupil has risen faster than the national trend. In 2000, GCSE results were understandably well below the average for selective grammar schools, mainly because the school has not had a fully selective intake until the current Year 11 started school. However, pupils' overall GCSE results in 2000 compared with their prior attainment in the national tests taken at the age of 14 were below expectations. Results in all subjects were well above national averages except for the separate sciences in which they were average.

Results in the national tests for 14 year olds are very high compared with those of all other schools; they have improved faster than the national trend over the last three years. Results for 2000 compared with those of other selective grammar schools nationally were well above average in English, average in mathematics and below average in science.

Results in A-level examinations are consistently well above average and are steadily improving. The best results in 2000 were in English language and literature, English literature, chemistry, art and design, history and music; the weakest results were in general studies and business studies.

Pupils' overall achievements are very good at the end of Key Stage 3 and good by the end of Key Stage 4 and at the end of the sixth form. Achievement at A-level is good rather than very good because the erratic attendance of a few students adversely affects their standards. Standards as observed during the inspection are well above average by the end of Key Stage 4 in English, mathematics, science, art and design, design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages and music; they are above average in ICT and physical education. In the sixth form, standards are well above average in English, art and design, design and technology and geography; above average in mathematics, science, modern foreign languages and music; and average in history and ICT.

The school sets suitably challenging targets for improving pupils' results in public examinations.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils work very hard and enjoy their lessons.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. The school is a very calm and orderly environment in which pupils want to learn.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Teachers very effectively help pupils to become mature and responsible. Pupils show tolerance and respect towards others.
Attendance	Attendance is very high overall. The erratic attendance of a few students in the sixth form adversely affects their learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Very 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.

The quality of both teaching and learning is very good overall; it is at least good in all subjects. The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in all of the lessons seen. It was good or better in 92 per cent of lessons, very good in 48 per cent and excellent in 11 per cent. A large amount of teaching was very good in all subjects. Teaching and learning were very good in Key Stages 3 and 4 in English and science; in mathematics they were very good in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4. Teachers plan their lessons very effectively to ensure a fast pace of learning and have very high expectations of pupils. They manage their classes very well and outstandingly so in Key Stage 3 lessons, in which pupils respond with considerable enthusiasm to the opportunities to think for themselves. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is good, though it lacks consistency. Pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs and those who are gifted or talented, receive the same high quality of teaching and learn at an appropriate pace. The good quality of homework enhances pupils' achievement. Pupils acquire very good skills, knowledge and understanding in most subjects and know whether they are doing well enough. They usually concentrate well and are willing to learn. The productivity and pace of learning are good overall and very good in Key Stage 3, where pupils are frequently involved in investigative activities.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. A rich and varied curriculum meets the needs of all pupils and satisfies statutory requirements. Large numbers of pupils greatly enhance their learning through an outstanding programme of extra-curricular activities, particularly in music and sport.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good overall. Pupils with special educational needs are generally well taught but in a few subjects teachers make insufficient use of the individual education plans.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Very good. Provision is suitably based on the school's distinctive and Catholic ethos, which is characterised by shared beliefs and excellent relationships.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The high quality of care provides a very supportive environment in which pupils mature emotionally and strive for very good academic achievement.

Parents are very supportive of the school. The partnership between parents and the school is very good and close.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very good leadership and is very well supported by other senior staff. Together, they plan very thoroughly and successfully manage improvements, particularly in improving the quality of teaching and learning and in raising pupils' levels of achievement.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are very effective and supportive, carry out their duties responsibly, have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, monitor progress carefully and provide a clear direction for the school's further improvement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Procedures for monitoring and evaluation have improved and are effective in raising achievement and improving the quality of teaching and learning.
The strategic use of resources	Very good use is made of the generally good staffing, accommodation and learning resources. The principles of best value are applied to spending decisions, which are made in line with the school's educational priorities.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils are expected to work very hard. • Leadership and management are very 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few say that homework is inconsistent and some say there is too much.

<p>good.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching is good; pupils' progress is good. • The range of extra-curricular activities is very good. • Behaviour is very good; pupils like school. • Pupils become mature and responsible. • Parents can easily approach the school with a problem. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports on pupils' progress are insufficiently informative.
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Parents are justifiably very pleased with nearly all aspects of the school's performance. Inspectors' findings strongly support parents' positive views. In respect of parents' views about possible improvements, inspectors find that the amount and quality of homework set are appropriate and contribute significantly to high standards. They agree with parents that reports on pupils' progress, though satisfactory, could be more consistent and more informative

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils' overall attainment on entry to the school is well above average and reflects the expected levels of attainment of pupils in selective grammar schools. All pupils in the current Years 7 to 11 were selected for the school on the basis of their well above average attainment. Formerly, around 70 per cent of pupils were selected on grounds of well above average attainment and 30 per cent as a result of other criteria. This meant that previous intakes contained a sizable minority of pupils of average and below average attainment. This accounts in large measure for the school's overall performance in GCSE in 2000, which, though very high and well above the national average, was well below average in comparison with that of other selective schools.
2. Results obtained in national tests at the age of 14, GCSE results at the age of 16 and A-level results at the age of 18, are well above the national averages. Standards of work seen in classes and in scrutiny of work were well above average in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and above average in the sixth form. Pupils' overall achievement is well above expectations by the end of Key Stage 3 and above expectations at the end of Key Stage 4 and at the end of the sixth form. Achievement is highest in Key Stage 3 because most of the exciting and active learning and a greater range of teaching methods occur in classes in Years 7 to 9.

National Curriculum assessments at end of Key Stage 3 at age 14

3. By the end of Key Stage 3, when pupils reach the age of 14, their results in the National Curriculum tests are significantly above the national average for all pupils and for girls. For the last three years, results in these tests overall and in English, mathematics and science have been similar to those achieved by the top five per cent of all secondary maintained schools. Results for 2000 compared with those of other selective grammar schools nationally were average overall; they were well above average in English, average in mathematics and below average in science.
4. The proportion of pupils reaching Level 6 and above in the Key Stage 3 tests is very high when compared with all maintained secondary schools. In comparison with those of other selective schools, the proportions of pupils attaining Level 7 were above average in English and average in mathematics and science.
5. Although attainment in the tests in science was lower in 2000 than that in English and mathematics, pupils had made faster progress in science because their level of attainment in science on entry was below that in the other two subjects and the gap narrowed by the end of the key stage.
6. The trend in the school's total average points score for pupils in the Key Stage 3 national tests over the last five years is in line with the national trend. Over the last three years the trend has been above the national trend and reflects the increased levels of attainment of the wholly selective intakes recently. These trends are the more praiseworthy because the school started from a position already well above the national average.
7. In 2000, teachers' assessments showed that pupils' attainment was well above the nationally expected level for pupils aged 14 in art and design, design and technology,

French, geography and history; it was above average in ICT, music and in German and Spanish, both of which languages pupils only began studying from Year 8 onwards.

GCSE results at end of Key Stage 4

8. Results in GCSE examinations are consistently well above the national average. In 2000, the average total GCSE points score per pupil was very high compared with that obtained in all other maintained secondary schools but well below that obtained in other selective grammar schools. The comparison with other selective schools is harsh, however, because the year group concerned was not fully selective and contained around 30 per cent of pupils of average and below average attainment. The GCSE results were adversely affected in that year because three high attaining girls did not sit the examinations because of medical reasons.
9. Comparison of pupils' overall GCSE results in 2000 with their prior attainment in the Key Stage 3 national tests taken at the age of 14 shows that their results were below expectations. These are partly explained by the absence from the GCSE examination of the three girls whose predicted achievements, based on their prior attainment, were for one to gain ten A* or A grades and for the other two to gain ten B grades. However, even when due allowance is made for these absences, pupils' overall attainment in GCSE examinations was below expectations. This supports the contention of the headteacher who, since her arrival three years ago, needed to persuade teachers that GCSE results were not high enough. She has sought, and is succeeding, to encourage teachers to make greater demands of the pupils to raise their standards further.
10. The best results in GCSE examinations in 2000 were obtained in religious studies. More than 50 per cent of candidates gained GCSE grades A* or A in English, English literature, art and design, French and German. Results in all subjects were well above national averages except for the separate sciences, in which they were average and few achieved the highest grades. The lowest results in 2000 were in science, geography and history.
11. The school's average GCSE points score per pupil has risen faster than the national trend, even though the school started from a position well above the national average. The score has risen from nearly 11 points above the national average in 1996 to 19 points above the national average in 2000. This represents good progress towards the school's aim of bringing GCSE results at least in line with those attained in other selective schools. The school has successfully concentrated its efforts on improving GCSE results for pupils whose predicted achievements are on the grade C/D borderline. It is now, appropriately, devising strategies to increase the number of GCSE grades achieved at A* and A.

A-level results

12. Overall results in A-level and AS-level examinations are consistently well above average. No vocational courses have been taken to examination level in the sixth form. The highest attainment in A-level results in 2000 was in English language, English literature, chemistry, art and design, history and music; in all of these subjects at least 50 per cent of candidates achieved grades A or B. The lowest results were in general studies and business studies.
13. A-level results in 2000 were well above expectations, based on students' prior attainment and their relative performances in other subjects, in English language, English literature, art and design, music and physics; they were well below

expectations in mathematics, French, German and geography and in line with expectations in other subjects.

14. A-level results are steadily improving. The average points scored by students who enter two or more A-levels or the equivalent have risen from 2.9 points above the national average in 1996 to 4.1 points above the national average in 2000. Achievement at A-level is good rather than very good because the erratic attendance of some students adversely affects their standards.

Achievements in classes and work observed during the inspection

15. Overall standards of work seen in classes and through scrutiny of work during the inspection were well above average by the end of both key stages and above average by the end of the sixth form.
16. Standards of work seen in Years 7 to 9 were well above average in all subjects except ICT, in which they were above average. Standards of the work seen in Year 9 were of a similarly high level to those achieved in the national tests in recent years and represent good achievement in view of pupils' levels of attainment in the various subjects when they enter the school.
17. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' overall achievement in relation to their previous attainment is good. Standards of work observed were well above national expectations for pupils' ages in all subjects except physical education and ICT, in both of which they were above national expectations. In Years 10 and 11, pupils' are making excellent progress in English, very good progress in art and design, geography, modern foreign languages and music, and good progress in most other subjects.
18. In the sixth form, achievement overall is good. Standards of work were well above average in English, science, art and design, design and technology and geography; they were above average in all other subjects except history and ICT, in which they were average. Students' achievement relative to their previous attainment is outstanding in English, very good in art and design and music, good in design and technology, geography and the science subjects and satisfactory in other subjects. One of the principal reasons that achievement in the sixth form is not as high as it might be is the reluctance of sixth form students in a few subjects to become actively engaged in their own learning; they prefer to be told things by the teacher.
19. The few pupils with special educational needs make good progress throughout the school. Overall, all other pupils, including those identified as gifted and talented, make very good progress throughout Key Stage 3 and good progress throughout Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The work that all pupils are expected to do is usually very well matched to their needs.
20. The progress of a few pupils and students is hindered because they have irregular patterns of attendance, particularly in Years 12 and 13.

Literacy

21. Standards of literacy are high throughout the school. Pupils speak confidently and appropriately. All pupils read well and read aloud fluently and accurately, using expression very well to convey meaning. Writing is always carefully planned and very well presented. Pupils write accurately with good awareness of grammatical rules. Listening skills are very good; pupils listen attentively and their oral and written

responses indicate good and often very good understanding of the work being discussed.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

22. Pupils' skills in ICT are good. Although they use these skills well to enhance their work in many subjects, the limited access to ICT facilities sometimes hinders pupils' effective use of ICT to promote their learning. Pupils of all capabilities can, by the end of Key Stage 3, select and use appropriate software for a particular task. They access the Internet with confidence, copy information from Internet sites and insert them into their documents. They can find, open, move and save their work with ease. They manipulate text in word-processed documents very well.

Numeracy

23. Standards of numeracy are good. Pupils use their mathematical skills to assist their work in many subjects such as science, geography and design and technology. In geography, pupils collect and analyse data well. In design and technology, they use mathematics confidently and accurately when measuring, weighing, handling data, drawing and interpreting graphs and with work on rotary, linear and oscillating motions.

Targets

24. The school sets demanding but achievable targets for pupils and subject departments. Targets for examination performance are based on pupils' prior attainments and comparisons with appropriate national data. The school came close to meeting its appropriately challenging targets for GCSE and A-level in 2000.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

25. Pupils have excellent attitudes towards their schoolwork and are enthusiastic about coming to school. They arrive happy, smiling, and eager to spend the day with their friends. Pupils up to the age of 16 have excellent attitudes to their schoolwork. They are very hard working and really enjoy rigorous, challenging lessons. These extremely positive attitudes are reflected in the pupils' work, which is well presented, well organised, accurate and complete. Younger pupils concentrate very well; they are keen and readily answer questions. As they mature, they develop the confidence to ask perceptive questions of the teacher. When pupils find lessons difficult they continue to try hard, they do not give up. Although students in the sixth form have very good attitudes to their learning, they are slightly less outgoing than the younger pupils. Students' responses to questioning are less vigorous, but they are still thinking and learning well.
26. A very large number of pupils take part in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities provided by the school. Year 7 pupils are so enthusiastic about the many exciting activities on offer that they find it difficult to fit them all in. In Year 10, over 80 pupils are participating in the Duke of Edinburgh's bronze award scheme; in Year 11 over 50 pupils participate in the silver award scheme. Very many pupils take part in musical pursuits and sporting activities. Pupils join in these activities in Year 7 and continue to have a high level of involvement right up to Year 11. Sixth form students also play a full and active part in school life and spend a generous amount of time helping younger pupils.

27. Standards of behaviour are very high indeed. Behaviour in lessons is excellent and ensures that all pupils in the class can learn properly. Behaviour around school is calm and controlled. Pupils are very polite and make visitors very welcome. Bullying is very rare. Occasionally pupils fall out but teachers quickly identify petty squabbles and take steps to resolve the situation. There were no temporary or permanent exclusions of pupils during the previous school year.
28. Relationships are excellent. Pupils work extremely well together. For example, in a Year 7 drama lesson pupils were able to organise themselves into relatively large groups. They quickly undertook complex organisational tasks that required them to identify the different sounds that are heard at the seaside. They further divided themselves into small groups, some to produce noise of high volume such as the sound of waves and others to work as individuals to produce sparser sounds such as those of a shrieking seagull. They managed to create a soundscape of very high quality, through exceptional management and organisational skills that are rarely seen in pupils who are only eleven and twelve years old.
29. Personal development is very good. Teachers encourage the younger pupils to develop initiative and responsibility. Pupils acquire high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. Students in the sixth form can and do apply for posts of responsibility including those of senior prefects, cabinet prefects representing different interests in the school such as musical opportunities, and for the ultimate appointment, head girl. Their well-written applications reflect very good personal development. Throughout the school pupils pursue a wide range of interests and often undertake to help those who are less fortunate than themselves. Pupils in the lower school have more limited formal opportunities to influence decision making in the school.
30. Attendance rates are very high compared with all other secondary schools. Unauthorised absence rates are well below national rates. Very few pupils have significant absences but the school is aware that some pupils take odd days off for relatively minor ailments. Some students in the sixth form occasionally miss sessions or fail to register. This adversely affects attainment, as when students are absent they cannot take advantage of the good teaching.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

31. The overall quality of both teaching and learning is very good. It is best in Key Stage 3. Teaching and learning are very good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. Pupils made at least good and often very good progress in the great majority of lessons observed.
32. The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in all of the lessons seen. It was good or better in 92 per cent of lessons, very good in 48 per cent and excellent in 11 per cent.
33. Teaching was very good throughout the school in English, art and design, design and technology, geography, modern foreign languages and music. Teaching was also very good in Key Stage 3 in mathematics and in Key Stages 3 and 4 in science. It was good in other subjects in all years.
34. A large amount of teaching was very good in all subjects. A very high proportion of the teaching observed in English, art and design and in music was very good and sometimes outstanding. Excellent teaching was also seen in geography, modern foreign languages and science. The best teaching in the sixth form was in English, art

and design and music. The proportion of very good teaching was highest in Key Stage 3 and lowest in the sixth form. Teachers use more exciting approaches and engage pupils more actively in their own learning in classes in Years 7 to 9 than in classes in many subjects in Years 12 and 13.

35. The teaching has many strengths. Teachers plan their lessons very effectively to ensure a fast pace of learning. They have generally very high expectations of pupils, particularly since teachers have recently acquired a suitable understanding of how to use the school's very good assessment data to predict suitably challenging outcomes for individual pupils. All teachers use their knowledge of their specialist subject well to help the pupils to learn quickly and often succeed in passing on their own enthusiasm for the subject to the pupils. Teachers manage their classes very well and outstandingly so in many classes at Key Stage 3, in which pupils respond with considerable enthusiasm to the opportunities to think for themselves and to become actively involved in their own learning, often making and testing hypotheses. The excellent relationships between teachers and pupils help to create a very purposeful learning environment.
36. Teachers use a good variety of teaching methods that help pupils to maintain their concentration and interest. Lessons, particularly in Key Stage 3 often begin with a short, very brisk mental exercise that successfully stimulates the pupils' interest; this is quickly followed by a very clear introduction to the work to be done, which gives pupils a good understanding of the aims of the work. Most teachers provide a good range of interesting, challenging and carefully timed activities to maintain pupils' interest throughout the lesson. Towards the end of many lessons, pupils consolidate their understanding of the work through snappy and effective question and answer sessions that review what has been learned. The large majority of teachers match the work to the needs of all pupils. Teachers help pupils to reinforce their learning by setting homework of suitable challenge, relevance and variety, including work to develop pupils' creative thinking and investigative skills.
37. There were no major shortcomings in the teaching observed, though a small amount of teaching was uninspiring and in some lessons, particularly in the sixth form, the teacher tended to dominate the lesson. The school is moving away from its former more didactic and 'chalk and talk' methods by using a greater variety of teaching methods and styles. The very good quality of learning in both Key Stages 3 and 4 and improved attainment in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE examinations indicate that this bolder approach to teaching is effective in raising standards.
38. A typical example of a very good lesson was observed in a Year 7 English class in which pupils were carrying out work on Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Many features of the teaching approaches of the National Literacy Strategy were evident in this lesson. Pupils eagerly undertook the initial spelling test, which was conducted in a friendly and supportive manner by the teacher. The test was appropriately related to key words and characters in the play. Pupils' answers displayed very good standards in spelling and a very good knowledge of characters in the play. This activity was followed by a very useful warm-up period in which pupils became very enthusiastic and reinforced their knowledge through a lively question and answer session. The ensuing pace of the lesson was brisk. The pupils recorded the word 'soliloquy' in their work books and the teacher ensured that all pupils understood its meaning. The teacher was at pains to sketch in the Shakespearian background whenever possible during the lesson. Pupils practised their reading skills and most displayed very good fluency in reading parts aloud. The teacher constantly reinforced

pupils' knowledge of poetic terms such as rhyming couplets. Pupils deepened their understanding of the play through considering why Shakespeare sometimes used blank verse and sometimes used rhyming couplets. They moved rapidly from one activity to another in this very well managed lesson. They enjoyed the written task of writing a letter to the agony aunt of a teenage magazine. This was very good learning.

39. The few pupils with special educational needs in Key Stages 3 and 4 receive the same very good quality of teaching as pupils of all levels of attainment receive. In a few subjects however, teachers make insufficient use of pupils' individual education plans so that the work is not always suitably matched to their individual needs. However, these pupils make good progress because they have positive attitudes to their work.
40. Talented and gifted pupils receive good teaching and support and make at least good progress in all subjects. In music and physical education they receive very good additional teaching through participation in extra-curricular activities of high quality. They make very good progress in Key Stage 3.
41. The quality of learning is very good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. The quality of learning matches the quality of teaching in all subjects except for ICT in Key Stage 3 in which learning is very good and teaching is good; pupils often extend their learning in ICT through the use of computers at home and through independent activity.
42. Pupils' learning is very good overall because they behave very well, have extremely positive attitudes, and maintain very good concentration and interest throughout lessons. The vast majority of pupils work hard, complete their homework very conscientiously and develop very good creative and thinking skills. Pupils acquire a very good overall knowledge and understanding of the work in most subjects. Particularly in the lower school, they enjoy working independently and co-operate well with each other in paired and group work. They have a very good knowledge of their own learning and what they need to do to improve. The productivity and pace of learning are good overall and very good in Key Stage 3 because pupils are more often involved in finding out for themselves.
43. The teaching of literacy and oracy skills across all the subjects of the curriculum is generally good but is haphazard. The whole-school policy is inconsistently followed, although teachers' awareness of the importance of teaching literacy in all subjects has been raised through an in-service training session led by the headteacher. The teaching of basic skills such as spelling is well established in English lessons; language errors are corrected in other subjects, such as geography. Pupils encounter a good range of reading opportunities and materials appropriate to their levels of attainment in nearly all subjects. Pupils are taught to improve their writing skills in many subjects.
44. The teaching of skills in numeracy is good in mathematics lessons for pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs. The mathematics department has sought, through staff training, to encourage other departments to be consistent in the use of mathematics and to use agreed language and methods so as to avoid pupils becoming confused when moving from subject to subject. This is good practice. Additionally, as part of the department's plan to improve the cross-curricular provision, many mathematical aspects of physics and geography are taught in mathematics lessons.

45. In many subject areas teachers encourage pupils to use ICT to enhance their work. The limited access to computing facilities during lesson times restricts pupils' use of ICT to extend their learning. Appropriate training for teachers in ICT occurs in most subjects.
46. The librarian provides valuable and very effective support to teachers and pupils. Many pupils and particularly sixth form students make good use of the learning resource centre to develop their skills in reading and research in many subjects.

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

47. In almost all aspects of the curriculum, the quality and range of learning opportunities the school offers to pupils are very good. The curriculum has been steadily adjusted and developed over the last two years to rectify omissions in ICT and design and technology in Key Stages 3 and 4. As the main school and sixth form increase in size, the curriculum is kept under continuous review. Throughout the school many activities and opportunities, both planned and informal, promote pupils' personal development and a wider knowledge and understanding of the world. The interesting programme offered during the two concentrated 'activities weeks' enriches the curriculum further. Equality of opportunity is good: all pupils have access to the full range of learning opportunities. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and fully supports the aims and values of the school.
48. In Key Stage 3 the school provides all the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. The time allocations for subjects are satisfactory. The curriculum provides very good learning opportunities for pupils.
49. In Key Stage 4 the curriculum is good overall. In Year 10, pupils have a satisfactory range of subjects from which to select the two GCSE courses they study in addition to the broad core of compulsory subjects. The arrangements ensure that all pupils study a good balance of subjects.
50. The school offers a rich and varied curriculum in the sixth form with a good range of A-level and AS-level courses. Students follow A-level and AS-level courses. This is appropriate for the level of attainment of the students entering the sixth form. In addition, all students take the A-level general studies course. This course has well chosen units of work that add considerably to students' knowledge and understanding of current issues. All students follow a course in religious education. This year the key skills of communication, numeracy and ICT have been introduced through a carefully planned series of lessons in Year 12. The courses meet the Curriculum 2000 requirements.
51. Pupils and students identified as having special educational needs have full and equal access to the curriculum on offer. The school has made a good start in providing for gifted and talented pupils through the Excellence in Cities programme. Pupils have been identified in Years 7 to 10 and each subject has outlined the activities and additional work provided for these pupils.
52. Good practice in the teaching of literacy occurs in several departments. Basic skills such as spelling are well taught in English lessons and, in most subjects, teachers correct language errors made by pupils. Pupils experience a good range of reading opportunities in science, geography and art and design. In many subjects teachers encourage pupils to produce pieces of extended writing.

53. There is good provision for the teaching of numeracy in many subjects. The mathematics department has encouraged other departments to be consistent in the use of mathematics and to use agreed language and methods. Many mathematical aspects of physics and geography are taught in mathematics lessons.
54. Excellent provision is made for pupils' personal, social and health education. The combination of personal and social education lessons, excellent extra-curricular activities and very good careers education prepares pupils well for adult life. The strong emphasis placed upon the school as a community clearly helps to promote pupils' personal development. In the main pupils benefit from a very good and well-taught scheme of work for personal and social education, which cover the aspects of sex education and drugs awareness as required. The programme is carefully reviewed each year to ensure that quality and relevance are maintained. In the sixth form, personal and careers education is provided through an effective well-planned tutorial programme. Students speak highly of the support and guidance they receive. The effectiveness of this programme is shown in the mature and rigorous manner in which students approach current issues, for example, when asking questions of a visiting speaker about the way in which governments and parliament work.
55. A large proportion of pupils extend further their personal development by taking part in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities. There are outstanding opportunities for music making; pupils' achievement in the senior choir for Years 10 to 13 is exceptional. Pupils and sixth form students participate in large numbers in the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme. A wide range of sporting clubs and teams adds to the breadth of activities on offer at lunchtime and after school. Almost 75 per cent of all pupils take part in extra-curricular sporting activities. A varied programme of activities is offered in other subjects such as the environment club in science.
56. A very good programme of careers education and guidance helps pupils to develop an awareness of the world of work. Careers guidance begins in Year 7 with an introduction to the careers library, continues with mini-enterprise activities in Year 8 and develops through the rest of the school to help pupils to select appropriate courses and career paths. The careers programme in the sixth form is successful in meeting the individual needs of students. Pupils and students have a planned work experience in Year 10 and in Year 12.
57. The contribution of the wider community to pupils' learning is very good. Many visitors from the local community contribute to 'activities weeks'. Significant numbers of pupils and sixth formers take part in community work and voluntary work. The school has good links with other institutions, for the benefit of the pupils. There are very good links with local universities and colleges. Links with local primary schools are satisfactory and are improving, as part of the school's bid to achieve status as a specialist technology school.
58. The policy for promoting equal opportunities for all is effective. The school meets the requirements of the Sex Discrimination Act and the Race Relations Act. Displays around the school indicate an awareness of an ethnically diverse society and all groups are represented in non-stereotypical ways. The school maintains close links with its sister schools abroad through an educational project in Asia. Pupils are made aware of their own privileged position and are sensitive to the needs of others. The curriculum recognises cultural diversity and prepares pupils for life in a multi-cultural society.

59. The provision for pupils' personal development is very good. The school's strong Christian ethos, characterised by shared values and excellent relationships, provides a very supportive context for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The commitment and attitudes of staff set a very positive example for pupils. They take every opportunity to promote pupils' personal development, both in the classroom and in the day-to-day life of the school, although planning for this is not fully reflected in departmental schemes of work. The daily act of collective worship and the religious education programme, the subject of a separate report under Section 23 of the 1996 Education Act, clearly contribute very significantly to pupils' spiritual and moral development.
60. Overall provision for pupils' spiritual development is very good. All subjects provide opportunities for pupils to develop spiritual insight. In music, art and design and dance, for example, pupils are able to reflect and respond to topics in a personal way. The 'Discovering God' project, which currently includes music, mathematics and art and design, is helping to extend pupils' spiritual knowledge and understanding. Very good use is made of the school grounds to develop pupils' sense of reverence and respect for the environment.
61. Moral education is very good. The daily life and routines of the school successfully promote very positive values, and provide a clear framework for supporting pupils' moral development. Valuable discussion on ethical issues and moral dilemmas takes place in a number of subjects, including the school's programme of personal and social education. This encourages pupils to discuss their beliefs and ideas, and think through some of the choices they will need to make in life, within the context of Christian and Catholic values. The school's observance of the Holocaust Memorial Day, based on collaboration between a number of subject departments, provided pupils with a good opportunity to reflect on a wide range of moral issues.
62. Social education is also very good. Pupils develop social and collaborative skills in many of their lessons, for example when working in groups for composing and performing in music. They are encouraged to take initiatives and exercise responsibility within the school. Sixth formers help the younger pupils with sports activities and take responsibility for language clubs. Pupils' social and political awareness is promoted very effectively through the school's participation in activities such as the local and regional youth parliaments. During the week of the inspection a visit from a government minister and a local member of parliament provided sixth formers with an excellent opportunity to learn about decision-making processes in parliament.
63. Overall provision for pupils' cultural development is very good. Good opportunities to develop an understanding of different cultures are well planned in subjects such as English, modern foreign languages, music, art and design, history and geography. Cultural interests and horizons are extended through the school's excellent extra-curricular programme of sport, music and other activities. Pupils are also given a wide range of opportunities to go on educational visits and take part in trips abroad. As a 'Faithful Companions of Jesus' (FCJ) school, Upton Hall is part of a world-wide network of schools and religious communities which provide pupils with rich opportunities to learn about and appreciate other peoples' culture; for example, the school's 'Millennium Project' not only raised money for an FCJ project in the Philippines but also enabled pupils to find out a great deal about the culture of the country.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

64. The school has high standards of care and provides a very supportive environment in which girls can mature emotionally and achieve academically. The pastoral system is very strong and identifies and supports those pupils with personal problems. This results in pupils staying in school and ultimately being successful in examinations. Support to promote academic attainment is very good. Subject departments provide pupils with effective support such as revision classes or extra sessions in which they can get advice about how to tackle course work. Pupils feel safe and secure. They appreciate the family atmosphere and the fact that they are well known to teachers. The school has recently appointed a learning mentor, who is providing strong support for a small number of pupils who are finding it difficult to cope with their schoolwork. The school plans to extend this support to help more pupils who may struggle at some point in their education.
65. The monitoring of personal development is good. It is generally informal but this works well because this is a small school in which teachers know the pupils very well. The personal and social education programme, careers education and the 'activities weeks' all provide pupils with very good guidance and assist them in making sensible decisions about their futures and how to live their lives. For example, in personal and social education pupils were able to take home a programmed crying doll. They shared their experience with the whole class and this really brought home to them the problems that young single mothers face and the responsibilities that babies bring.
66. Arrangements for child protection are good. The school follows locally agreed procedures and is very concerned to protect children from harm. There is a named person who has appropriate training. The school has worked hard to put in place the necessary policies and procedures to ensure that pupils are safe and secure. Risk assessments have been established for all departments and safe practice is emphasised in science, design and technology and physical education.
67. The school has very good arrangements for promoting good behaviour. The vast majority of girls come from homes where high standards of behaviour are expected. Therefore it is not necessary for the school to have a rigid system of rewards and sanctions. However the school does have an appropriate behaviour policy clearly based on Christian principles. This is enhanced by the teachers, senior members of staff and older pupils who provide very good role models. Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent and this promotes mutual respect.
68. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance are good. The school has recently introduced more formal systems to monitor the attendance of the whole school and year groups. Heads of year monitor the attendance of individual pupils regularly. The very few pupils with attendance problems are well known to the school and substantial efforts are made to encourage these pupils to attend. The learning mentor has contact with most of these pupils and works hard to persuade them to come to school more regularly. Consistent hard work has resulted in raising attendance rates over the last few years. However there is a tendency for some pupils to take single days off for relatively minor complaints. A small minority of form tutors do not follow up absences with sufficient rigour. The casual approach to attendance of a few sixth form students results in these students missing important parts of the learning programme.
69. The school's detailed assessment policy provides a very good framework for an effective assessment, recording and reporting system. All departments have produced their own policies satisfying the school's requirements, whilst reflecting the varying assessment criteria and practices within the different disciplines. Consequently, current practice is, for the most part, good. The procedures for assessing pupils'

attainment, and those for assessing and monitoring their progress are good overall. The use made of assessment to revise the curriculum or to reconsider teaching and learning strategies is good in many departments, but not all are making sufficient use of information for this vital purpose. The current statutory assessment requirements of the National Curriculum and those of the special educational needs Code of Practice are satisfied.

70. The school makes very good use of data from a range of sources to analyse progress, the value added, strengths and weaknesses, and relative performance of subjects. Particularly noteworthy is the good system for monitoring the progress of pupils in Years 9 and 10 and of students in Year 12, which is to be extended to all pupils in the near future. Through this system, which sets individual attainment targets, underachievement is quickly identified and tackled. A very effective individual action plan is devised for any underachieving pupils or students to assist them to reach their full potential. This system is valued by pupils, teachers and parents and is symptomatic of the high level of care afforded to pupils to help them in their personal and academic development. Good achievement is recognised and celebrated. All departments are provided with appropriate data about pupils' attainment and potential, along with advice on interpretation of such information, to help them to review progress and to set targets. The whole system is well managed and monitored centrally and ICT is used beneficially where appropriate.
71. Assessments of pupils' performance and attainment are generally accurate and reliable. An appropriate range of methods is employed to reflect the distinctive requirements of subjects. With varying degrees of success among subjects, feedback on performance is provided for pupils; targets are set for pupils' future learning, based on achievable goals, which are reviewed with subject teachers and form tutors.
72. The school uses a range of tests on pupils when they enter the school to identify pupils with special educational needs. These results are used to place pupils on the appropriate stage of the special educational needs Code of Practice. The improving provision for pupils with special educational needs means that teachers now identify pupils with causes for concern before they are placed on stage 2 of the school's register of special needs. Individual education plans have recently been produced for those pupils who are on stage 2 of the school's register of special needs. The first review of progress being made towards achieving the targets set out in these plans has yet to take place.
73. Good and often very good attention is given to pupils' day-to-day work. In most subjects, suitable evidence of pupils' attainment is maintained in pupils' books, folders of work, artefacts and in records based upon teachers' observations. In the majority of departments, marking of pupils' day-to-day work to assess progress, to provide feedback and to promote higher standards is satisfactory overall. In those subjects where marking and feedback are good pupils receive regular information about strengths and weaknesses that aids progress. In others, insufficient written detail is provided, while oral feedback is generally good. Within the same departments there is some inconsistency in marking practices that cause problems when pupils move from class to class. Records are kept which provide adequate information about curricular coverage and pupils' effort and attainment at set points throughout the year. In many departments, pupils are encouraged to become involved in self-assessment to which they respond well. Good practice occurs when clear assessment criteria are communicated to pupils, who then critically evaluate their work.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

74. The school's partnership with parents is close and very good. Parents are very supportive of the school. They find it easy to contact the school should problems occur and appreciate the warm friendly environment. They feel that pupils like the school and make good progress. Parents rightly consider that standards of behaviour are high and that the school is well led and managed. The home/school agreement is of good quality. The views of parents were extensively sought while the agreement was being developed. Many parents offered well thought out and ultimately very useful views. There is a thriving parents' and teachers' association (PTA) that raises very substantial sums of money, often through well-supported social events. The PTA is currently involved in the purchase of a new school minibus to replace an outdated vehicle. Parents also provide the school with practical support for extra-curricular activities showing an admirable willingness to transport their children to and from sporting and musical events.
75. Parents receive a very good range of information from the school. There are regular newsletters of high quality, supplemented annually by a very good publication 'The Uptonian'. The school effectively uses evenings for parents at the beginning of each academic year to explain the special features of each year. At additional evenings, parents learn about optional courses for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
76. Parents receive two reports a year about their children's work in school. A minority of parents have expressed concerns about the quality of these reports on pupils' academic progress. The reports conform to statutory requirements, provide a satisfactory range of information about pupils' progress, but are insufficiently detailed about pupils' strengths and weaknesses in different subjects. The school uses arbitrary grades to report on attainment. These grades, however, vary greatly among departments; for example, a pupil can score well above average in the end of year science examination and well below average in the end of year French examination but get the same overall attainment grade in both subjects. Teachers in the same department also differ in how they apply attainment grades to pupils' examination scores. This causes confusion and makes it difficult for parents to judge how well their daughters are doing at school. Reports do not contain a statement about what topics have been taught. This information is available at the information evening at the beginning of the school year, but some parents find it difficult to attend. However, parents do get the opportunity to discuss the reports at a formal parents' evening or they can contact the school if they require further clarification.
77. Not all parents or carers of pupils who have special educational needs have yet been informed that their daughters have individual education plans; hence they are not able to help support the pupils to achieve the targets set.
78. Homework diaries are well used, especially by the younger pupils. A small number of parents feel that their daughters have too much homework. However, inspectors found that the quality and amount of homework were appropriate. Homework is often challenging and is an important factor in ensuring that pupils continue to reach high standards of attainment.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

79. The very good leadership and management of the headteacher, who is well supported by a very effective leadership team and the governors, are important factors in the school's improvement. Since the arrival of the current headteacher in 1997, the school has maintained its very caring ethos and has introduced several effective initiatives to

raise pupils' standards of attainment further. The headteacher leads by example and has very high expectations of staff and pupils. She is a visible presence around the school and has a good knowledge of the pupils. Staff morale is high. The vast majority of pupils like coming to school. There is a very positive and purposeful atmosphere within which much very good learning takes place. The school's work provides equal opportunities for all pupils and clearly reflects its aim of providing 'educational experiences which will enable individuals to achieve their full potential in every aspect of their development.'

80. When she took up her post, the headteacher correctly identified that results in public examinations, though high in comparison with those of most schools, were not high enough in relation to pupils' potential levels of attainment or in comparison with results obtained in broadly similar schools. Because the school was in the independent sector until five years ago it had not previously been inspected through OFSTED's arrangements for maintained schools; its overall performance had not been formally measured against that of other schools. Until 1997, the school did not use the assessment data provided by national and local education authorities to measure pupils' attainment to predict suitable outcomes, to influence the teaching or to review the school's curriculum. This has changed considerably. The school now has very good information about each pupil, which it analyses very thoroughly to set demanding but achievable targets for pupils and departments. The information is also used effectively to determine what should be taught and how. In order to help pupils and staff to make these improvements the headteacher has played a prominent role in persuading teachers to improve further the quality of teaching and learning, particularly through the adoption of a more active approach to teaching in which pupils are made to think more for themselves.
81. The school fulfils all its statutory requirements. The governors are very supportive of the school and carry out their duties responsibly and effectively. They set a clear direction for the school's educational aspirations. Governors and staff want to raise the level of academic achievement to the same very high level as that of pastoral care in the school. Suitable programmes for school improvement are in place. These include raising standards, further improvement in the quality of teaching and learning, and improving pupils' skills in literacy, in ICT and in numeracy. Governors have approved a suitable and detailed development plan, which indicates clearly the school's priorities for the immediate future. It is clear who is responsible for implementing each of the priorities, though there is a lack of detail about the potential cost of each initiative. Departmental plans are closely linked to the school plan. Particular priority has recently been given to improving the learning environment, resulting in significant improvements to the accommodation during the last two years.
82. Through the weekly meetings of the chairman and the headteacher and through the close and regular contact of other governors with the school, the governing body carefully monitors and evaluates the school's performance and takes effective action to make improvements. Accordingly, governors and senior staff have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and those areas for development that will further enhance pupils' standards of attainment. Governors and senior staff have managed change very effectively over the last few years, particularly in respect of keeping the school running smoothly despite the considerable disruptions caused by major building works which were on site for a sustained period at a time when some restructuring of the school's staffing was taking place. The nominated governor for special educational needs liaises well with the school and keeps the rest of the governors suitably informed about this aspect of the school's work.

83. The quality of leadership and management in subject areas is very good in all subjects except for music, in which it is outstanding, and geography, ICT and physical education in which it is good. The monitoring and evaluation of the teachers' work in the classroom are good overall and are generally effective in sharing good practice of teaching and learning.
84. The school sets suitably challenging targets for pupils' achievements by the end of each key stage. Pupils and students are generally aware of the levels at which they are currently working and what their realistic capabilities are.
85. Development planning at both whole-school and departmental level is good. The plans agreed by the governing body contain appropriate targets, tasks and timescales for completion, though there is a lack of detail about the potential costs of some initiatives. The plans clearly state who carries the responsibility for leading each initiative and for its effectiveness.
86. Financial management and administration are good. The accounts held on the school's computer system are used to provide regular budget statements for members of the finance committee. This allows governors to monitor actual expenditure against the planned budget. The system is efficiently directed by the school's administration manager. There is effective control of expenditure through effective application of the school's finance policy. The reserve funds once held by the school have mostly been used to support the cost of equipment and refurbishment during the recent building programme. The school now holds a very small reserve fund in case of emergencies, leaving little flexibility for governors when setting the budget, though they have wisely allowed a little room for movement within some budget headings. The last audit of the school budget confirmed the accuracy of the figures presented, but it is now nearly two years since this was done. The school's private funds are audited annually.
87. The governing body is fully involved in planning, setting and monitoring the school's budget. It relates spending decisions to the school's educational priorities. Financial administration is detailed and thorough. Specific grants received for the development of national priorities such as literacy, ICT and staff development are all spent as intended. They are effectively used to improve educational provision. The allocation of funds to individual departments is based largely on timetable share and is generally fair. A small proportion of the funding is retained for bids based on departments' development plans.
88. The school applies the principles of best value to its spending decisions. The governors' finance committee very carefully considers how to obtain the best possible value from contracts, such as those for curricular support and for catering. The quality of the service provided is taken into account, as well as the total cost, and these services are subject to regular evaluation in order to maintain standards. Wherever it is prudent to do so, estimates or tenders are invited from contractors.
89. The school uses its good resources of staffing, accommodation and learning resources well.
90. There is a good match between the experience and expertise of the staff and the requirements of the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 as well as in the sixth form. The expertise of the staff is reflected in the overall very good quality of teaching in the school. Arrangements for the induction of new staff are very good.
91. The school buildings, though somewhat compact, provide good accommodation for the requirements of the curriculum overall. Particular strengths are in the quality of the new

accommodation for science, technology, English and religious education. Much of the accommodation is further enhanced by effective, informative and celebratory displays that are used well to promote pupils' learning in many subjects.

92. The provision of learning resources such as books, materials and equipment is good overall and they are well used to support pupils' learning. At times, there is restricted access to computing facilities in many subjects that prevents pupils making fully effective use of their computing skills to enhance their work in those subjects.
93. The full-time chartered librarian provides a very effective and efficient service to help pupils to improve their reading and research skills. She provides a range of interesting resources and activities and keeps very good records of pupils' use of the facilities. Although many pupils, especially sixth formers, use the library frequently during the day and at lunchtimes, the library's position as a through route to the dining room reduces its effectiveness. The stock of 4,500 books, of which over 75 per cent are fiction, is modest.
94. The overall quality of provision in the school, in particular of teaching, is very good and pupils' attainments are well above national averages. Pupils' attitudes to work and relationships in the school are excellent. The leadership and management of the headteacher, senior staff, and heads of department are also very good. As a result, the school is gradually improving its already high standards, and its overall effectiveness is good. The socio-economic background of the pupils at the school is relatively high, and the total funding allocated to the school per pupil is also high. The pupil to teacher ratio is lower than the national average and there are a number of relatively small classes. Based on the quality of education compared with the cost of provision, the school provides good value for money. The school has the capacity and the commitment to improve further.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

95. In order to improve the good quality of education further, the school should;
- a. improve results in GCSE examinations, particularly at grades A* and A, so that they are at least in line with those achieved in selective grammar schools nationally; (paragraphs 8, 9,156)
 - b. increase the proportion of sixth form students achieving grades A and B in A-level examinations, particularly in mathematics, geography, French and German; (paragraphs 10,13,106,181)
 - c. enable pupils and students to use their good skills in ICT more effectively to enhance their learning in all subjects; (paragraphs 22,45,92,139,146,169,171, 174,175)
 - d. improve the attendance of the few sixth form students whose attendance is irregular to ensure that their learning is not adversely affected (paragraphs 14,20,30,68,106,110).

The school's development plan already includes provision for dealing with the four points for action listed above.

In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- monitor the use of individual education plans to ensure that the few pupils with special educational needs receive work of appropriate difficulty in all their subjects; (paragraphs 39,72,81,100)
- improve the reporting of pupils' progress to parents so that in all subjects it provides suitable information about how well pupils are achieving, their strengths and weaknesses and what they should do to improve (paragraph 18).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	159
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	62

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
11	48	33	8	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	552	152
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	50	0

Special educational needs

	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	12	1

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	4
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	11

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.7
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
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	0	101

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	-	-	-
	Girls	100	101	101
	Total	100	101	101
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (99)	100 (99)	100(96)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	93 (91)	98 (96)	86 (83)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	-	-	-
	Girls	101	101	101
	Total	101	101	101
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (97)	100 (99)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	83 (84)	92 (89)	83 (74)
	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	-	96	96

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	-	-	-
	Girls	88	93	93
	Total	88	93	93
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	92 (89)	97 (97)	97 (97)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	57.3 (54.2)
	National	38.4 (38.0)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	-	127	127

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	-	22.3	22.3 (22.3)	--	1.5	1.5 (3.5)
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.8)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	0
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	4
White	697

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	0	0
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)	42.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	0

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	1 669 960
Total expenditure	1 709 203
Expenditure per pupil	2646
Balance brought forward from previous year	41147
Balance carried forward to next year	1904

Key Stage 3	26.2
Key Stage 4	21.6

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	704
Number of questionnaires returned	385

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	51	45	4	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	50	48	1	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	55	42	1	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	42	48	7	2	1
The teaching is good.	48	48	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	51	8	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	64	33	2	1	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	81	17	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	41	49	7	1	2
The school is well led and managed.	62	35	1	1	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	61	35	2	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	55	38	5	1	1

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

ENGLISH

96. Attainment is well above average at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and the sixth form. Results for English in external tests and examinations are very high compared with national figures and are amongst the highest for all subjects in the school. This is achieved through very good teaching and the very positive attitudes of pupils, which together give rise to very good learning.
97. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, make very good progress in Years 7 to 9 and achievement at the end of Key Stage 3 is very good. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests for pupils at the age of 14 results were very high in comparison with national averages and well above the average levels achieved in selective grammar schools. Although results were higher than in mathematics and science, pupils did not make quite the same improvement in English on their original levels of attainment when they entered the school. At the age of 14 pupils are generally competent speakers and show good command of language, as seen when they reported back to the class after working in groups. They are usually avid readers and tackle demanding texts, including those from previous centuries, with enthusiasm. They can analyse persuasive writing, such as the transcript of a speech by Tony Blair on education, and identify some of the linguistic devices employed. They have a very good knowledge of poetic and other technical terms. In their written work they adopt an appropriate tone and style for different tasks, using a good range of vocabulary and expression. They write methodically, using drafting and re-drafting techniques effectively to improve their writing, and always present their work well.
98. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' achievement is excellent. In GCSE examinations for 2000 in English and English literature pupils achieved results which were very high compared with national averages. There has been an upward trend in GCSE results since 1997. The number of pupils gaining either A or A* grades was double that of the previous year at well over 50 per cent of all candidates who entered each subject. In comparison with other subjects in the school, pupils performed better than in national comparisons between subjects. GCSE results at grades A*-C were similar to those in mathematics and above those in science. Standards are well above average by the end of the key stage. At the age of 16, pupils are generally confident when contributing to class or group discussions, although they do not have sufficient opportunities to develop what they say in more depth. When listening to others speak, pupils are attentive and prepared to modify their own views, as seen when Year 11 pupils discussed the language and meaning of a poem, 'An Old Woman' by Arun Kolatkar, from the GCSE literature anthology. Their reading skills are well refined; they are able to understand and appreciate demanding literary and other texts, including media presentations such as the series of television advertisements for 'Levi' jeans. Written work is of a consistently high standard and shows clear evidence of careful planning and preparation. Essays by Year 11 pupils, such as those which compared love poems by different poets, show sensitivity to poetic language and a good grasp of techniques. Imaginative writing is well constructed and engaging.
99. Students' achievement in the sixth form is excellent. The 2000 A-level GCE grades in English were well above the national average. Of the students entered for English literature, 50 per cent gained grades A or B and 75 per cent of those entered for combined English language and literature gained similar grades. In work seen during the inspection, levels of attainment were well above average. At the age of 18 students

have excellent knowledge of the set texts and they talk and write about them confidently. When presenting findings and theories to fellow students in class they are composed, often speaking at length in appropriate language. When students have the opportunity to develop their arguments the level of debate in class is often very high. They present literary criticism in essays which are well crafted and carefully researched.

100. Teaching is very good throughout the department and, together with the very positive attitudes shown by all pupils and students towards their work in English, leads to very good learning. All the teaching observed in the department was never less than good and 80 per cent was either very good or excellent. In 20 per cent of all lessons seen, the teaching was excellent. Teachers always have high expectations of their pupils and the intellectual rigour and brisk pace of lessons are challenging. Pupils respond very well to this teaching and appear to revel in the hard work. The best teaching builds effectively on excellent relationships with pupils. In these lessons, in particular, the knowledge and enthusiasm of the class teacher for his or her subject are strongly conveyed to pupils, who respond with added zest. Where learning is of particularly high quality teachers focus clearly on the important objectives in each lesson so that every pupil understands why he or she is doing each activity and can proceed with confidence. In the best lessons, teaching and learning are conducted in a friendly and lively atmosphere. Teachers encourage pupils and students to take part in aspects of decision making, as when groups of Year 7 pupils organised themselves to investigate different aspects of Robert Burns' poem 'Tam O'Shanter', and reported their findings to the rest of the class. Where teaching and learning are less good the teacher sometimes imposes too rigid a structure for pupils to develop full individual responses; for example, rapid question and answer sessions which were useful for revising key facts did not encourage more reflective and developed oral contributions. In some lessons teachers do not always check that all the pupils, including those with special educational needs, are secure in their acquisition of each stage of learning.
101. The department is very well led by a recently appointed head of department, who has set about making important changes both to schemes of work and to the way in which the work of the department is monitored and evaluated. However, there is no other post holder within the department to permit the customary delegation of key areas of responsibility. New schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 are well rooted in the programmes of study of the National Curriculum and take full account of the recommendations of the National Literacy Strategy. Approaches to teaching the GCSE syllabuses in Years 10 and 11 have also been revised to give a more balanced and progressive programme. Together these changes have improved the effectiveness of teaching in the department, which has already led to higher standards of attainment. Plans for further sharing of good teaching practice and for strengthening links with feeder primary schools have also been laid. Procedures for monitoring and recording progress are very good. Pupils and students are very clear about their progress and levels of attainment, which is in part due to regular self-evaluation, which is an essential part of the assessment process. The curriculum is generally balanced, although there is a reduced allocation of teaching time in Year 8. Drama is offered to Year 7 pupils only. There is much evidence of the widespread use of ICT by pupils but this has not yet been formalised in schemes of work. The new English rooms, which are grouped together and which are enhanced by some very good displays of pupils' work, have helped teachers to raise the profile and popularity of English.
102. Standards of literacy among pupils of all levels of attainment are high throughout the school. Pupils speak confidently and appropriately. They read well and are able to access information from a variety of sources. They read aloud fluently and accurately,

using expression very well to convey meaning. Writing is always carefully planned and very well presented. Pupils appreciate the need to modify their written work according to task, situation and audience. They write accurately with good awareness of grammatical rules. Good range of expression and a wide vocabulary are also notable features of pupils' writing.

103. Good practice in the teaching of literacy occurs in several departments. Awareness has already been raised by a staff in-service training session, led by the headteacher, which addressed some of the key issues. The teaching of basic skills such as spelling is well established in English lessons and there is evidence of language errors being corrected in other subjects, such as geography. Pupils encounter a good range of reading opportunities in science, geography and art and design, where the cross-curricular 'Ocean World' project gives pupils a chance to bring their own choice of poems to read in art and design lessons. Reading materials are appropriate to pupils' levels of attainment in all subjects, although in mathematics there are no examples of more difficult texts to challenge the highest attaining pupils. Only in history were source materials occasionally too difficult for pupils to manage. Teachers emphasise the importance of learning and correctly using technical words in mathematics, physical education, geography, art and design and business studies. Opportunities for writing are limited in mathematics, apart from some interesting investigative work, and in physical education. However, in geography personal writing is a strong feature. Pupils in art and design write at length about design and the influence on the work of different artists. In science pupils adopt individual styles and approaches in their written work.

MATHEMATICS

104. Attainment in mathematics, as indicated by the 2000 national test results taken at the end of Key Stage 3 when pupils are 14 years old, is very high when compared with the national average. All pupils attained Level 5 or above and 98 per cent gained Level 6 or higher. These results are similar to those obtained in other selective schools. The schools' results at Level 6 or higher are above the average figure for grammar schools, whilst those at Level 7 or above match the average. Pupils' overall results in mathematics were below those achieved in English but better than those achieved in science. These results, when compared with those obtained previously at the age of 11, indicate that pupils have made better than expected progress, gains made in knowledge, skills and understanding exceeding the average for pupils with similar prior attainment. There has been a steady rise in the level of attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 over the last four years, the rate of increase having been steeper than the national trend and those achieved by English and science in the school.
105. In GCSE examinations, results are again very high in comparison with national expectations for grades A*-C, almost every pupil attaining within these grades. This is twice the national figure. Particularly noteworthy is the relatively high percentage of pupils achieving the highest grades A* and A. The school's figure is three times the national average. Analysis of these results indicates the relatively strong performance of mathematics in comparison with other subjects in the school. When the 2000 GCSE figures for the 97 per cent of pupils who took the examination are compared with the 1998 Key Stage 3 national test results, progress was in line with expectations. GCSE results at grades A*-C were similar to those in English and above those in science. From lesson observations, scrutiny of work and conversations with teachers and pupils it is apparent that the department has the capacity and the will to continue to aim for even higher standards.

106. Over recent years the department has enjoyed considerable success at A-level; in 1999, for example, 70 per cent of candidates attained grades A or B, which is indicative of achievements in these examinations over time. The 2000 figures, however, do not reflect the general trend, only 45 per cent achieving the high grades. The results have been carefully analysed by the department and reasons for the difference in overall achievement clearly highlighted. Whilst around 50 per cent of students achieved better grades in mathematics than in the other subjects they studied, many students who had attained the highest GCSE grades chose not to study mathematics. Irregular attendance hindered progress for a significant minority of students on the A-level mathematics course last year. During the inspection, similar unsatisfactory attendance patterns were noted in both Years 12 and 13. The department is rightly concerned about the possible detrimental effects of such attitudes to A-level studies.
107. By the time they are 14, at the end of Key Stage 3, most pupils of all capabilities, including those with special educational needs and those who are talented or gifted, are attaining at levels that indicate that their potential for success is being fully realised. This is very good achievement, accomplished through predominantly very good teaching with well-motivated and responsible pupils. All pupils are confident when working with numbers, such as with the four rules, and with a wide range of work with fractions, decimals and percentages. Mental mathematical skills are well developed to cover wider aspects of the programmes of study, such as algebra, data handling and geometry, through well-planned, regular practice at the beginning of lessons.
108. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 use correct terminology when describing aspects of mathematics and they often give extended, reasoned answers to teachers' well-planned and challenging questions, indicating a good depth of understanding. Such was the case in a Year 9 class of the school's lower attaining pupils, who were discussing angle properties associated with triangles and parallel lines. Pupils gave competent geometrical reasons for their answers to questions in clear unambiguous terms. Algebra and trigonometry are well developed, higher attaining pupils in Year 9, in particular, handling quite complex algebraic concepts. For example, when they undertook investigations to determine an expression for the sum of the squares or cubes of whole numbers, the quality of outcomes was outstanding. The pupils worked in a systematic and methodical way, justifying and representing their findings maturely and succinctly, far in excess of expectations of pupils of this age. Pupils use calculators effectively and proficiently; there is very little inappropriate use for calculations that should be performed mentally.
109. Achievement is good at the end of Key Stage 4 for pupils of all levels of attainment. Throughout Years 10 and 11, predominantly good teaching challenges pupils to work at a high level to achieve targets that are based upon high, but realistic, expectations of success. Pupils commented that they appreciate challenges set before them and the support and guidance provided, which enable them to cope with the regular and demanding classwork and homework. The quality and quantity of their written work bear testimony to this. Work undertaken by the highest attaining pupils shows that they not only have the skills and knowledge to answer demanding GCSE questions, but they also understand what they are doing and use a correct range of mathematical tools in appropriate contexts. Examples of this were seen in work on irrational numbers, negative and fractional indices and the interpretation of graphical functions following combinations of transformations. When opportunities arise in lessons from pupils asking questions to extend understanding of the immediate topic, teachers willingly extend their pupils by debating with them aspects beyond the demands of the GCSE course. An example of this was seen in a Year 10 lesson where algebraic limits and the concept of infinity were discussed. Such good teaching and learning do much

to provide pupils with an agenda for success. On the contrary, however, in the lower sets a minority of pupils' work on past examination papers indicates that they have learned processes without the attendant understanding required to reach the highest levels.

110. Achievement is satisfactory at the end of the sixth form. Students tend, after much encouragement, to show a more responsible attitude towards work; this not only enhances their learning for A-level but also prepares them well for higher education. This was illustrated in two of the lessons observed. In one, students were required to work in small groups to solve problems in mechanics and to prepare presentations of their results for fellow students. In the other, they were directed to perform a series of geometric, arithmetic and algebraic proofs at a fast pace, again working in small groups. In both cases, with sensitive intervention by the teacher, very good progress was made in the lessons. The students worked well collaboratively, using a suitable range of mathematical arguments to present their cases to their colleagues. Such practice is doing much to challenge and motivate students. A minority of students attend too irregularly to benefit from these good teaching and learning situations.
111. Very good behaviour, good attitudes towards work and appreciation for the high quality of teaching received, are strong features of most lessons. Nearly all work is well organised, well presented, accurate and complete. Such commitment does much to maintain and improve standards throughout the school. During lessons pupils are keen to be involved, eager to answer questions and keen to ask questions to confirm or extend their understanding. Hence most pupils make useful progress in lessons and at home when completing the generally good homework which is set to enhance their learning.
112. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Predominantly good teaching, within a well-led team of appropriately qualified and committed teachers, is the major contributory factor to the successful outcomes achieved. All teachers have high expectations that they express through the demanding yet achievable tasks they present to pupils and students. These, allied to very good questioning techniques that require pupils to explain how they obtain solutions and to respond using full sentences, ensure that pupils think about what they are doing rather than merely repeating processes. This is good learning and assists pupils' development of their literacy skills. Most lessons are designed to maintain the pupils' interest and involvement throughout the 50-minute sessions; the mental mathematical lesson starters do much to engage pupils' attention quickly at the beginning of the lesson whilst helping them to revise previously learned topics. Whenever possible ICT is used to enhance pupils' learning in mathematics. Good examples were seen, varying from pupils in Year 7 presenting algebraic problems to their classmates, to pupils in Key Stage 4 using facilities to aid calculation and to improve the presentation of quite complex investigations into quadratics. Insufficient access to ICT facilities at present restricts further development of their work in this area.
113. Whilst no unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection, one or two otherwise good lessons were marred either by presenting tasks beyond the capabilities of the pupils or through tasks that were insufficiently difficult. In both cases, pupils lost interest and made insufficient progress.
114. Pupils' basic skills in numeracy are good and often very good. Aspects of mathematics are used to good effect in many other areas of the curriculum. Best examples occur in geography and design and technology. In geography, pupils collect and analyse data well, represent outcomes with pictograms, pie charts and advanced geographical

graphs and they test hypotheses. In design and technology, provision for teaching numeracy is very good; pupils use mathematics confidently and accurately when measuring, weighing, handling data, drawing and interpreting graphs and with work on rotary, linear and oscillating motions. The mathematics department has sought, through staff training, to encourage other departments to be consistent in the use of mathematics, using agreed language and methods so as to avoid pupils becoming confused when moving from subject to subject. This is good practice. Additionally, as part of the department's plan to improve the cross-curricular provision, many mathematical aspects of physics and geography are taught in mathematics lessons.

SCIENCE

115. In the National Curriculum tests at the age of 14, the average points score obtained by the whole year group has improved in each of the last four years. In 2000, it was very high compared with the national average, but was still below the figure for selective schools. The proportion of pupils obtaining Level 6 or better improved compared with 1999, but was below that for English and mathematics. However, the overall improvement since the year group entered the school is well above average; it is in line with the progress made in mathematics, and above that in English.
116. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils obtaining grades in the range A*-C was above the national average in biology, chemistry, and double science, but below in physics. Pupils did less well in biology, double science and physics than in their other subjects, mainly because there is a lower number of A* and A grades. In chemistry, results are broadly in line with those in other subjects. The overall improvement shown by the year group since the national tests at the age of 14 is just below the average. Results in the last three years have been consistent in biology, chemistry, and physics; in double science, in spite of the higher number of A* and A grades, the overall proportion of A*-C grades fell in 2000. GCSE results at grades A*-C were below those in English and mathematics.
117. In the sixth form, the majority of students at A-level obtained results in biology, chemistry and physics higher than expected when compared with their target grades based on their results in their GCSE examinations. In both biology and chemistry, the proportion of entries gaining A or B grades, and the average points score, were well above the national averages. In physics, both these figures were below national averages. However, physics results have improved in each of the last four years. Results have been consistently high in chemistry, but in biology, while still well above national figures, there has been a downward trend in the average points score.
118. Achievement is very good at the end of Key Stage 3 and good at the end of Key Stage 4 and at the end of the sixth form for pupils and students of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs and those who are gifted or talented. In Key Stage 3, pupils with special educational needs make very good progress.
119. In the classes observed and in the work scrutinised, pupils' standards of attainment throughout Key Stages 3 and 4 were well above those expected for pupils of the same age nationally. These standards reflect attainment in recent test and examination results in Key Stage 3, but they are better than examination results indicate in Key Stage 4. In the sixth form, work seen in books and folders reflects recent performance in A-level in biology and chemistry, being above expectation. In physics, work is in line with the standard expected.

120. In Key Stage 3, pupils show a high degree of independence in organising practical work; they take precise results, and are able to draw conclusions from these, including the analysis of graphs. In a lesson in Year 8 on light and the colours of the spectrum, pupils demonstrated the ability to predict accurately the appearance of a coloured dress in different coloured lights, showing a clear understanding of whether the light would be absorbed or reflected.
121. By Key Stage 4, pupils are using formulae with confidence, for example, to calculate the kinetic energy of a moving body. They also write chemical equations with confidence, for example, in Year 11, to summarise the chemical changes taking place when they heat limestone and then add water to the residue.
122. In A-level classes, students show good technique when answering examination questions and show confidence in their teachers. They achieve particularly well in practical lessons, as in the dissection of lambs' hearts, and when determining the order of a reaction rate.
123. Throughout the school, pupils of all capabilities display good literacy skills and express themselves clearly when answering questions, both orally and in writing. Pupils' numeracy skills are good and well applied to aid their work in science. Their investigative skills are high; their planning is very good, and they use their initiative effectively to predict outcomes before taking measurements.
124. The quality of both teaching and learning is consistently very good in Key Stages 3 and 4. It is good overall in the sixth form, with a number of very good lessons. Teachers are well qualified; their planning is very thorough and gives impetus to each lesson. The objectives for each lesson are clear, so that pupils know what is expected. These objectives are normally reviewed at the end of the lesson in order to consolidate what has been learnt. Teachers are aware of those pupils with special educational needs, and where appropriate they provide additional support such as lists of key words, so that these pupils make similar progress to the rest of the class. Teachers use a variety of strategies in order to make learning interesting. A high proportion of lessons contain practical activities for pupils; these are well organised so that maximum use is made of the limited time available. Short discussion sessions, video material, computers and CD-ROMs, teacher-led demonstrations, textbooks, and the Internet for research are all used, as appropriate, to add interest to the subject.
125. Pupils benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities; additional revision classes and help sessions are provided, which are clearly appreciated by the pupils. A number of lessons in the Key Stage 3 curriculum specifically aim to develop pupils' thinking skills. Pupils' active involvement in lessons is given a high priority; pupils readily volunteer to answer questions and take part. For example, in Year 9, the teacher demonstrated the electrolysis of acidified water. Full use was made of the pupils' interest by allowing them to collect and test the gases released at the electrodes, so that they could prove to the rest of the class that the gases were hydrogen and oxygen. In a Year 8 lesson on fossil fuels, with no practical work for pupils to undertake, interest was maintained by circulating samples of fossil fuels; the resulting discussions led pupils to wonder at how the energy in the sample of coal came from the sun, 300 million years ago.
126. The pace of learning is often very high. In Year 10, pupils investigated the rate of reaction of magnesium with acid, quickly assembled the equipment and took a series of readings; this allowed them time to analyse their results. By contrast, though the teaching was thorough, the pace in a Year 12 physics lesson was less challenging, and

there was insufficient time for the students to practise using the formulae developed. There are some excellent examples of the constructive marking of pupils' work, with suggestions of how pupils can improve. Across the department, however, marking is inconsistent, and there is little reference to National Curriculum levels in Key Stage 3. All teachers set homework regularly, but it sometimes lacks sufficient challenge for the higher attaining pupils.

127. The positive attitudes that pupils show towards their work make a major contribution to the high rate of learning. Their behaviour is excellent in all lessons. Throughout the school, they show a particularly keen approach to practical activities; discussions during practical work are constructive. It is rare for any conversations to be off task. Pupils take particular care with the presentation of work in books and folders. Standards of written work and of diagrams are very high indeed. The high quality of relationships between pupils and their teachers contributes significantly to pupils' achievements.
128. The leadership and management by the head of the science faculty are very good. The other heads of subject are also beginning to make a good contribution to the overall development and monitoring of the work of the subject. The sense of dedication, of teamwork, and of seeking continuous improvement is very strong. For instance, examination papers are scrutinised to identify any areas of weakness and to plan revised teaching strategies to bring about improvement. Development plans are detailed and establish clear and appropriate priorities for the future. There is good delegation of responsibility for initiatives, but the likely costs of developments are rather vague. Departmental documentation is of a very high order; detailed curricular schemes help teachers to plan their work, and this leads directly to very good teaching. Curricular plans also include guidance for the technicians, whose efficient and cheerful support helps teachers to become even more effective. The results of the regular assessments of pupils' work are compared with past performance, so that individual pupils' progress is regularly checked. A sound start has been made with performance management, including lesson observations. Consistency of practice across the science faculty is encouraged by a number of agreed policies, for instance for the marking and grading of pupils' work. However, the overall time spent on the monitoring of practice is insufficient; the result is that these policies are not always routinely applied.
129. In the last three years, provision in science has become far more closely integrated, with the formation of a single faculty rather than three separate departments. This is partly the result of the new purpose-built suite of laboratories, but it is also due to the realisation that there is much to be gained from a consistency of approach. For instance, there has been a significant improvement in the use of ICT in science lessons throughout the school. Teachers are now far more confident in the use of computers, and this enhances the quality of lessons by adding interest and providing better opportunities for learning. The overall result of the integration is an increase in teamwork, and standards of teaching are rising across the science faculty. This is having a positive effect on pupils' attainments in public examinations. There is an excellent basis for continued improvement.

ART AND DESIGN

130. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards in art and design are well above the national average when compared to the national expectation. A significant feature of these standards is that all pupils work with confidence and composure.

131. In Year 7, pupils can make accurate observational drawings and delicate watercolour paintings of flowers for an Oriental type fan. These are inspired by Chinese and Japanese art. In Year 8, pupils respond well to ideas generated by the 'Artists in Residence' in creating printing blocks based on the theme of The Ocean. In Year 9, pupils experiment well with glue and wax-resistant methods in abstract designs based on studies of Picasso and Braque. Three-dimensional work is very good, particularly masks and puppets. The puppets have especially good expressions and there is very good use of textiles for finish.
132. Results in GCSE art and design have been well above the national average over the past three years. All of the entrants gained the higher grades A* to C and over 50 per cent gained A* and A grades in these years. Pupils' GCSE results in art and design in 2000 were slightly below their average grades in other subjects. Standards in the present Year 10 are very high; pupils research their topics in good depth, using the Internet in almost all cases. Their three-dimensional developments of fashion shoes show skill and imagination. In Year 11, there is some work of exceptionally high quality and pupils are on course to achieve very good GCSE results this year. Pupils experiment with a wide range of techniques for the development of work inspired by the artist Gustav Klimt. They make a good range of delicate prints on tissue to add decoration to their large-scale designs for mirror frames.
133. Standards in A-level have been well above average over the past three years. In 2000, all candidates gained A-level grades in the range A-E; over 60 per cent gained A and B grades. The present Years 12 and 13 are achieving similarly high standards. Students can examine works of art critically and understand the social and political ideals that underpin some 20th century art. They understand and interpret the use of symbols and use symbols appropriately in their own work. They understand the assessment procedures for A-level and which elements of their own work will be marked. This helps them to show developments in their work to advantage and so gain the appropriate marks.
134. Achievement is very good at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and at the end of the sixth form. Pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, make very good progress throughout all years. Pupils' standards and achievements are directly related to imaginative and inspiring teaching. They acquire very good skills and techniques in drawing and painting from Year 7 onwards. They gain an awareness of the power of line and the use of tone and texture in drawing and painting. They build systematically on these skills. A good range of printing processes is taught and this is a particularly strong feature of the artwork from Year 7 through to GCSE and A-level. Pupils have a good vision of what they want to achieve in printing. They understand the printing process well and this leads to the very high achievement. All pupils get individual attention and support in class. Work is planned so that there is good provision for the gifted and talented pupils to develop their work in greater depth.
135. Pupils have very good attitudes to this subject in all year groups. They are lively and responsive in Years 7, 8 and 9 and they enjoy the work. In Years 10 and 11 they are mature and purposeful and keen to do well. They show independence and work at a good pace. In Years 12 and 13 students show increasing sophistication in their attitudes and responses. They voice opinions with confidence, paying close attention to detail. They are energetic and keen to work at the highest standard.
136. Teaching and learning are very good overall; some instances of excellent teaching were observed. There are excellent features in almost all lessons. Teachers have very good knowledge and expertise in the subject and very good organisational skills.

They create a serious working atmosphere and maintain discipline with apparent ease. They are creative and imaginative in their approach and inspiring in their ideas. They have very high expectations of their pupils and aim for the highest grades. They help their pupils to understand clearly the demands of the GCSE and A-Level examinations, including the marking systems. All these enable pupils to achieve the high grades reached in GCSE and the well above average standards in A-level.

137. Assessment is thorough and well recorded. All pupils are engaged in self-assessment and are asked to comment on their own standards and achievements. This ensures that they know their own strengths and weaknesses and are better placed to improve. Teachers' comments let pupils know what they have to do to improve.
138. The head of department has been in post for approximately one and a half years. Through a lively and energetic approach, she makes the subject attractive to pupils. There has been a significant increase in the number of pupils taking art and design in the past year. Art and design has a high profile within the school with impressive displays of pupils' work in all the main areas of the building. This motivates pupils.
139. In all year groups pupils and students use ICT well to research the work of artists and art movements. They make effective use of an art folder that lists details of museums and art galleries and useful web sites. However, there is insufficient use of ICT, particularly in the development of pupils' creative work.
140. There is no provision for pottery although there is a kiln. This represents a weakness in provision.
141. Literacy is well promoted within the department. The success of the subject at examination level can be attributed in part to pupils' very good written notes explaining their ideas for research and development. The subject is well supported by the librarian, who is always available to help pupils in their search for information, especially using the Internet. Pupils use their numeracy skills effectively in proportional and scale drawing.
142. The department benefits from its close links with the local education authority's provision for art and design and with the local art galleries and museums. Very good exercises are planned for visits to the art galleries, which ensure that pupils make maximum use of this learning resource. The work of major artists is studied in good depth as appropriate within the topics in all years. The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

143. Pupils' attainment in design and technology at the age of 14, as shown by teachers' assessments, has been well above the national average in recent years; this matches the level of work seen during the inspection.
144. In 2000, the proportion of pupils achieving GCSE grades A* to C was well above the national average and in line with that of selective schools. Results show considerable improvement since 1998. However, entries to date have been for food and textiles examinations only. Pupils who enter design and technology examinations achieve better results than in many of their other subjects. The school does, however, enter fewer pupils for design and technology examinations than other schools nationally.

145. The school did not enter students for A-level design and technology in 2000. However, there is now an A-level course being followed by students in Year 13 and an AS-level course in Year 12.
146. In the work seen, pupils in Years 7 to 9 attain levels well above the national average. For pupils at the end of Year 9, this represents good achievement. All pupils in Years 7 to 9 gain a very good range of skills in designing and making products in food, textiles, graphics and resistant materials. They combine mathematical, scientific and designing skills well. Pupils used scientific knowledge effectively in a Year 9 food lesson in which they were designing foods high in Vitamin C to encourage young children to eat foods rich in these vitamins. As part of their developmental work, pupils experimented with adding vinegar, salt and bicarbonate of soda to the water when boiling vegetables. They identified differences in colour and flavour and researched the chemical effects of these additives on Vitamin C. They used this knowledge well to design recipes which contained a high amount of the vitamin. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and are well supported to achieve very good standards. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to use ICT to improve their work in Years 7 to 9. Teachers have recognised this shortcoming and are now planning to extend these opportunities.
147. Throughout the school, lower attaining pupils receive good guidance and support from teachers through well-structured lessons. Pupils of all capabilities show good numerical skills and handle data effectively in the form of charts, graphs and food calculations. In graphics, pupils work at a particularly high level throughout Years 7 to 9. They are taught a suitable range of two- and three-dimensional drawing skills and apply these skills well to their own designs. Higher attaining pupils annotate their drawings well to explain stages and special features of their designs in depth and detail. Lower attaining pupils were able to apply all the basic skills to improve the overall presentation and quality of their work.
148. In the work seen, attainment at the end of Year 11 is well above the level expected of pupils at this stage nationally. This represents a good level of achievement. Pupils use a broad range of investigative and research skills. They have well-developed evaluative skills and are able to assess their strengths and weaknesses effectively as they progress with their design ideas. They make products of high quality and take account of large-scale manufacturing processes. They draw on their own mathematical skills to achieve accuracy in some very challenging designs. For example, in a Year 11 resistant materials class, one pupil was designing a room screen which was based on circles and triangles of varying sizes. She managed to design the triangles and circles to achieve a good aesthetic arrangement, incorporating triangulation to add strength to the structure of the design. Higher attaining pupils made products of good quality that required advanced making skills and the use of more than one material such as acrylic and wood with work in copper. Coursework was well supported with accurate, well-developed plans, the testing of processes, materials and finishes. All the work reflects a high degree of research. Higher attaining pupils are able to apply accuracy and depth to the development of their designs in all materials they use. Lower attaining pupils receive good individual help from their teachers to produce work well suited to the requirements of the examination coursework.
149. In Years 10 and 11, pupils use ICT well to present their GCSE coursework; they show a variety of skills using digital pictures and scanned images, combined with desktop publishing. They process and present the data effectively when designing products. Pupils in Year 10 use computer-aided design and manufacturing processes well to produce a range of packaging designs.

150. The work of students currently in Year 12 and 13 on the A-level and AS-level courses is well above the standard expected nationally and their achievement is good overall. In general, practical skills are very good but some students who have not completed a GCSE in design and technology before starting the course are finding the development and depth of study more difficult. The quality and standard of project work are generally very good; students include a very good level of analysis, accuracy and depth in the development of their ideas.
151. The quality of teaching and learning overall is very good. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and use practical methods, enabling pupils to understand difficult concepts. This was seen in a Year 8 resistant materials lesson, where pupils were carrying out work on mechanisms and designing an automaton. The teacher encouraged pupils to use card models to test the effectiveness of the motion before producing the automaton in their chosen material. As a result pupils improved their knowledge of linear, reciprocating and rotary motion; they showed a high level of understanding and learning was good. This lesson was particularly effective, giving pupils the opportunity to evaluate a product's development and to understand the need for accuracy.
152. Teachers usually plan their lessons well and have very high expectations of their pupils. They help pupils to acquire a very wide range of skills and encourage them to test and experiment to refine their own skills. An example of this was seen in a Year 10 textiles lesson in which pupils were learning to apply colour to textiles. The teacher introduced a variety of techniques such as tie-dyeing, batik, painting and dip-dyeing. Pupils were able to use a range of methods before selecting the methods for their own work. Pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, make good progress because they receive good individual attention. All teachers place a very good emphasis on the development of pupils' technical vocabulary; this is having a very positive effect on the development of literacy skills. Pupils behave well and form good relationships with their teachers. Teachers are well organised and include a very good range of skills and this has a very positive effect on the pace of learning.
153. Management of the subject is very good and benefits from a strong team approach. There are appropriate systems in place to record attainment and achievement but assessments do not make enough reference to the levels of the National Curriculum. There is insufficient monitoring of teaching and sharing of strategies for planning learning resources to cater for the needs of pupils of all capabilities. The curriculum meets statutory requirements as all pupils now do a GCSE design and technology course in Year 10. There is no technician to support the work of the department, which restricts slightly the range of learning opportunities for pupils.

GEOGRAPHY

154. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is well above national expectations. Teachers' assessments in geography in 2000 showed that 87 per cent of pupils reached at least Level 6 and nine per cent attained Level 8, 'exceptional performance'. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher levels has increased since 1999. The achievement of pupils of all levels of attainment as seen in lessons and through scrutiny of work is very good. They have a very competent understanding of geographical concepts.
155. Pupils in Year 7 can accurately describe and explain the processes of coastal erosion and the physical features that result. By the end of the key stage, they can analyse information from a variety of forms, such as graphs, and draw detailed and accurate

conclusions. Pupils have a very good understanding of geographical terminology, which they use with confidence and accuracy. The work of gifted and talented pupils is of a very high standard. They ask searching questions which illustrate a high level of understanding and breadth of knowledge.

156. At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is well above the national average as shown in the GCSE results over the last few years. In 2000, 78 per cent of pupils achieved A*-C grades. However, these results compare unfavourably with the 96 per cent of pupils who achieved grades A*-C in English and mathematics, in which subjects all pupils are entered for the GCSE examination. Results in geography in 2000 were below those obtained by the same pupils in most of their other subjects.
157. However, pupils' achievement in the lessons seen and in the scrutiny of work is currently good and sometimes very good. Pupils of all capabilities make at least good progress in lessons. Their ability to recall information is very high. For example, Year 11 pupils showed very good knowledge of the environmental factors influencing the exploitation of oil in Alaska learned in previous lessons. Their GCSE coursework is often of a very high standard. They can investigate hypotheses, collect evidence, present their findings in a wide variety of ways, often using ICT appropriately, and analyse their results in a mature and accurately written manner. Their ability to interpret data and to write succinct, relevant and detailed answers to examination questions is very good.
158. All students who entered, passed A-level in 2000. However, the proportion of A and B grades was below the national average. This contrasts with the previous year when the proportion of these higher grades was well above the national average. Lesson observations and inspection of students' work show above average levels of achievement. Essays written by students in Year 13 are detailed and relevant and contain valid examples that would gain high marks in examinations. Discussion in class on acid rain illustrated their wider reading and familiarity with the whole range of issues associated with this topic. They were able to quote evidence from other areas of the syllabus to support their arguments.
159. Teaching and learning are very good in all key stages. The methods used by the teachers are varied and appropriate to the needs of the pupils. As a result the pupils are fully involved in the lessons. Most lessons are segmented into different activities and move on at a good pace. One lesson in Year 7 involved a demonstration of the properties of flint, two video clips of coastal erosion, the use of an ordnance survey map, discussion in pairs, and pupils taking their own notes. Great emphasis is placed on discussion and pupils' presentations so that concepts are clarified and understanding increased. The standard of these presentations is very high. Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subject. As a result, they are able to offer full answers to pupils' questions and to amplify points in discussion. There is constant emphasis on improving attainment by analytical marking that gives pupils areas for improvement. Pupils often follow up the advice given by adding extra information to their notes. Very good emphasis is given to the meaning of instructions in examination papers so that pupils understand the importance of relevance in their answers.
160. The provision for fieldwork is excellent. Pupils study a variety of areas as they move through the school. This enables them to become familiar with techniques that are an essential part of their examination work. Pupils are encouraged to think for themselves, to research and to produce reports of their investigations. The use of ICT is encouraged and many pupils' work shows very good research skills using the Internet.

Teachers prepare their lessons very thoroughly. They explain the aims of the lesson very clearly at the start and consolidate pupils' learning through a summary at the end using appropriate questions. Teachers support pupils very well in lessons to clarify any misunderstandings. Revision classes are held after school and teachers make themselves available throughout the day to assist the pupils.

161. The attitude of pupils towards geography is very good. Concentration is maintained throughout the lessons; pupils apply themselves to their work diligently and with thought. Appropriate questioning of the teacher is a regular feature because pupils want to learn. They take great care with written work. They use their mathematical skills, especially in data handling and graphs, to enhance their work in geography. Response to questioning is enthusiastic; discussion is orderly and focused on the topic. Pupils show interest in the subject. They support each other very well and co-operate fully when working in groups. Their behaviour is always very good.
162. The good management of the department is a major factor in the very good progress currently made by pupils in geography. There is a clear emphasis on stretching all pupils to do the best they can. This is well illustrated by the clear planning of the courses, which are meticulously followed by the teachers. The improvement in resources in recent years, and especially the location of the department in one area of the school, have also had a positive influence on the standards achieved by the pupils.

HISTORY

163. Attainment in work seen during the inspection is well above the nationally expected level for 14 year olds, and this is reflected in teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 for the last two years. Pupils of all levels of attainment have a very good understanding of the major events and changes in the periods they are studying. Year 9 pupils, for example, know about the long and short-term causes of the First World War and can argue a point of view as to who was responsible for the war. Pupils work successfully with historical sources, and are able to explain why events and situations can be interpreted in different ways. They research and organise information effectively and produce well-argued, persuasive historical writing, for example on how the Industrial Revolution changed people's lives. Over the key stage pupils achieve well and make good progress. Their attitude to work in class is very positive, and standards of behaviour are excellent.
164. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results for the last three years at grades A* to C have been well above national averages for all schools. Results have been improving and in 2000 they were close to the national average for selective grammar schools. Attainment in work seen during the inspection is well above the national average for 16 year olds. Pupils are mastering the content of the course successfully and have a good understanding of the underlying themes in the 20th century history they are studying. They use historical sources confidently and intelligently. For example, when making oral presentations in class, Year 11 pupils handled very persuasively conflicting evidence about who was to blame for the Reichstag Fire in 1933. They produce well-structured, analytical writing, for example, when explaining how the Weimar Republic survived the crisis of 1923. Over the period of the GCSE course pupils make good progress and achieve well. They have very positive attitudes to the subject and participate very fully in lessons.
165. In the sixth form, A-level results at grades A to B have improved during the last three years; in 2000, they were well above the national average for selective grammar schools. Numbers taking the course have been small, and the prior attainment of students in the current Year 13 group is not as high as that of students in the previous

two years. Overall attainment in the work seen towards the end of Year 13 is broadly in line with national averages for all schools. Students have a sound and often good grasp of the 16th century topics they are studying, and can analyse relevant questions and issues, for example when discussing the reasons for the Northern Rebellion in Elizabethan England. The written work of the higher attaining students is clear, effective and well substantiated, but others have difficulty in bringing sufficient detail and depth to their essays in history. Overall, students achieve satisfactorily during the A-level course, although the progress of some students is hampered by absence.

166. The quality of teaching and learning in history is consistently good, and in some lessons it is very good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the topics they are teaching, which is used well to extend pupils' understanding. Effective strategies are in place to develop pupils' literacy skills; in one Year 8 class, good preliminary activities and carefully structured help with writing prepared pupils very well for writing about the events of the English Civil War. Planning of lessons is thorough and is usually well matched to the learning needs of the pupils, so that they make good progress. Pupils who find the work difficult are well supported and the teachers take the differing attainment of pupils into account when arranging group work. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve, which encourages pupils to work at a good pace. Teaching methods are varied and well judged; skilful questioning is a particular strength and group work is used to good effect. In one Year 10 lesson, groups within the class researched different aspects of the Bombing of Dresden in 1945 and their findings were then shared, clarified and extended in a very effectively managed whole-class discussion. Very good classroom management means that pupils participate fully and work well. Pupils' books are usually well marked, often with helpful comments, although practice at Key Stage 3 is not always consistent because some comments do not provide sufficient guidance on how pupils can improve their work. Homework is set regularly and is well integrated with ongoing class work.
167. Considerable improvements have taken place in the department during the last four years, which have included the writing of a very thorough scheme of work, the building up of resources and the use of a wider range of teaching methods. Very good leadership and management have been responsible for these developments. During the current academic year the department has supported the successful induction of two newly qualified teachers very effectively. The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal development, especially through the opportunities provided by the department for moral and political education. Good progress has been made in developing assessment procedures but the information obtained is not yet fully used for monitoring pupils' progress. Although ICT is being used in history, its application is still at an early stage of development. Numbers taking history at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are low, but the department is working hard to identify and develop strategies to address this issue.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

168. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, as measured by teachers' assessments, is above national expectations with 96 per cent of pupils reaching at least Level 6. There has been a significant improvement in the proportion of pupils reaching Level 7 in recent years. However, no pupils attained the highest levels that are reached in many other subjects.
169. Observations of lessons show good levels of achievement in Key Stage 3. Pupils of all capabilities can, by the end of the key stage, select and use appropriate software for a particular task. They access the Internet with confidence, can copy information from

Internet sites and insert it into their documents. Throughout the key stage they are confident users of the 'Windows' environment and can find, open, move and save their work with ease. They can manipulate text in word-processed documents very well. For example they produce attractive, well-designed leaflets to promote particular businesses. These show the use of imported graphics and pictures, different fonts, the setting up of the page in the correct format and a good understanding of how to use colour in an appropriate manner. Pupils in Key Stage 3 are becoming independent and confident users of ICT. They are willing to experiment and can transfer their knowledge of one software package to another. For example, pupils were able to use a desktop publishing program, which they had not seen before, very quickly and with understanding. Progress made by pupils in years in Years 7 and 8 is very good but the restricted amount of time allocated to ICT in Year 9 inhibits their progress at the end of the key stage.

170. No pupils have taken GCSE examinations in ICT at the end of Key Stage 4. However, those following the business studies and ICT course in Year 11 show well above average attainment. They are able to use a variety of business software with skill and understanding. They can merge mail from a database and use spreadsheets to model possible outcomes. They are competent users of word-processing software and can manipulate text to produce well-designed and clear presentations. Their assignment work illustrates good knowledge of how to import graphics, modify text and use tables.
171. In 2000, the sixth form took no examinations in ICT. However, students in Year 12 are following the key skills ICT course. These students show average standards of attainment because of the restricted ICT opportunities that were available to them when they were in the lower school. Most are working towards Key Skills Level 2, though there is a wide range of attainment within the groups. Some students, especially those who use ICT at home, have much better skills and are able to use a variety of software appropriately. Others can only use word-processing software at a basic level. Most students make good progress in their ICT lessons. In preparing an article for a magazine they were able to use Internet searches appropriately, use their choice of software to present their text, and import graphics from a variety of sources.
172. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. The aims of the ICT lessons are clearly set and the main learning points are discussed at the end to reinforce the pupils' learning. The teacher has good knowledge of the software; this enables her to support pupils actively when they are in difficulties. The good use of a projector to demonstrate new software gave clear direction to its initial use. From this base pupils rapidly became aware of how best to utilise the program. Good questioning of the pupils clarifies issues and reinforces techniques such as the best way to use 'Word Art' in a Year 8 lesson. Pupils are encouraged to work in groups on presentations; this encourages experimentation and exploration of the software. Individual support to pupils is a particular strength; the teacher continually moves around the room helping and encouraging. The lessons move on at a good pace and pupils are expected to complete tasks within a time limit. The periodic whole-class review during lessons also helps to focus on the tasks and offers further good explanation of issues that have arisen during the lesson. The teacher has a good awareness of the individual needs of the pupils, especially those who find the work difficult, and makes a point of giving extra support to them. Pupils often enhance their skills of literacy and numeracy through their work in ICT classes.
173. Pupils' attitudes towards ICT are very good in all key stages. Pupils work together well and help each other willingly. Behaviour is very good. In discussion they listen attentively both to the teacher and to other pupils. Contributions to discussion are

enthusiastic. Pupils are interested in the subject and question the teacher confidently if they are unsure. They use the computers with respect and common sense.

174. There has been considerable improvement in recent years in the ICT facilities and the learning opportunities they provide. This, in turn, has improved the attainment of most of the pupils, especially in Key Stage 3. Specific strengths include: the careful planning of the network, which reaches most parts of the school; the appointment of an effective ICT technician; the establishment of an ICT study area open to all pupils; and, the increased use of ICT in subject areas. Science, mathematics, geography, modern foreign languages, art and design, music and design technology are particularly effective in their use of ICT. However it is difficult for subject areas to book the ICT room for teaching as timetabled ICT classes occupy it for most of the time. Appropriate training for teachers in ICT is in progress.
175. The time allocated to ICT in Year 9 is insufficient. This hinders pupils' progress in matching their very good progress in Years 7 and 8. This is a factor in explaining the lack of higher levels achieved by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3. Not all pupils have sufficient opportunities in Key Stage 4 to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding still further. The courses followed do not allow all pupils to have access to a wide range of ICT applications. There is no clear curricular plan for the development of ICT in Key Stage 4 beyond 2001.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French, German and Spanish

176. Teachers' assessments for 2000 for pupils in French showed attainment to be well above the national average. In work seen in classes and through scrutiny of work, overall attainment for pupils by the age of 14 is well above average. Pupils' understanding of the foreign language is very good, because teachers make consistent use of it in the classroom. Pupils' speaking is good as also is their pronunciation. In their written work pupils show a very good knowledge of the relevant vocabulary and they write very accurately. By Year 9, higher attainers write in paragraphs referring to present, past and future actions and events, and they apply grammar in new contexts. Average and lower attainers have a sound knowledge of the perfect and immediate future tenses, but they lack the same high standard of accuracy, particularly with accents.
177. On entry to Year 8, pupils have the opportunity to study a second modern foreign language, either German or Spanish. By the age of 14 their overall attainment in these languages is above average. Pupils' understanding of each foreign language is again very good. In their oral work in German, pupils have developed good pronunciation; in Spanish, pupils' accents and intonation have become very good. Written work in Spanish showed a wide range of continuous writing at levels that can reasonably be expected at this time of year in pupils' first foreign language taken for a year longer. Written work in German showed pupils at much the same levels. They have a good knowledge of relevant vocabulary, prepositions, cases and verbs, but in a Year 9 lesson many pupils had problems with placing words in the correct order.
178. Pupils' GCSE results in modern foreign languages in 2000 were higher than their average grades in all other subjects except for religious education. The proportion of pupils attaining grades A*-C in the full-course GCSE examination in French in 2000 was well above the national average for all pupils in maintained secondary schools and in line with the national average for all pupils in selective schools. The proportion of

pupils gaining grades at A* was above, and at grade A just below, the national average for selective schools. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' overall attainment in French by the age of 16 is well above average. Understanding is very good. In a Year 11 lesson every pupil answered a range of questions confidently and competently. Written work is well used to support oral work. Most pupils are able to write formal and informal letters successfully. Higher attainers' work shows a good knowledge of different tenses and a high standard of accurate writing.

179. The proportion of pupils attaining grades A*-C in the full-course GCSE examination in Spanish in 2000 was well above the national average for all pupils in maintained secondary schools and above the national average for all pupils in selective schools. The proportion of pupils gaining grades at A* was above, and grades A just below, the national average for selective schools. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' overall attainment in Spanish by the age of 16 was well above average. Understanding is very good. In oral work, conversation flows very naturally, with a good range of expressions and accurate use of tenses. Written work is often lengthy, with signs of originality as opinions are given and justified.
180. The proportion of pupils attaining grades A*-C in the full-course GCSE examination in German in 2000, for a smaller group of pupils than for Spanish, was well above the national average for all pupils in maintained secondary schools and above the national average for all pupils in selective schools. The proportion of pupils gaining grades at A* and A was well above the national average for selective schools. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' overall attainment in German by the age of 16 is well above average. Understanding is very good. Higher and middle attainers' written work shows a good knowledge of tenses and of inversion, but word order still presents problems for some of the pupils.
181. All the students in the A-level examinations in French, German and Spanish in 2000 attained a pass in the range A to E. However, the overall average score for each language and the percentage of students gaining the higher grades A and B were below the national average for all selective schools. These students entered the school before it became fully selective. Overall attainment for this year's students by the end of the key stage in French is average, and in Spanish it is above average. There are no candidates for German this year. In all classes the foreign language is used almost exclusively; pupils encounter little difficulty in understanding. Much of the work is from authentic texts, and students have acquired, or are in the process of acquiring, the necessary vocabulary and grammatical structures to talk and write about a range of topics, for instance, pollution in Spanish, and hatred and violence in the suburbs of cities in French.
182. The quality of teaching and learning in French and German is good and is often very good in all three key stages; teaching and learning in Spanish are consistently very good. The quality of teaching and learning overall is very good: two of the lessons observed were excellent. Teachers have a very good command of their subject, and they use the foreign languages very well and very consistently in the classroom to challenge pupils, thereby helping them to develop their understanding. In an excellent Spanish lesson in Year 8, pupils responded willingly to a difficult listening exercise. In an outstanding French lesson in Year 10, the teacher and the foreign language assistant talked at length in French about their respective towns and regions, whilst the pupils compiled copious notes, which they later produced as short reports.
183. Lessons are well planned with clear learning objectives, which are sometimes shared with the pupils at the outset. Many lessons involve different activities and different

skills. Work in pairs helps pupils to develop oral skills and to promote good relationships. High expectations are revealed in teachers' desires to ensure that pupils understand the way each language works and to help pupils to consolidate and extend what has been learnt. Teachers make good use of resources, particularly of well-produced worksheets, the overhead projector, flash cards and the cassette recorder. Homework is set regularly and work marked; marking is better at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 3. German books are particularly well marked, with helpful comments and examples to help pupils to improve. Many pupils redraft their work to improve accuracy. The presentation of some written work could be better. Relationships in the classroom are very good.

184. Achievement and progress in all three foreign languages are very good at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and satisfactory at the end of the sixth form. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are gifted or talented make good progress in all years. In most lessons, teachers help pupils to consolidate what they have learnt, sometimes with an oral or visual element, and to extend the topic with gains in knowledge, for instance with new constructions and vocabulary. In the best lessons, pupils are challenged to think hard and to commit words and phrases to memory. They learn how to improve their reading and listening skills and know what is needed to produce a piece of very good writing. Very good assessment of all their skills enables pupils to identify their own weaknesses and to set their own targets to improve.
185. Pupils' attitudes to the subjects are very good; behaviour is excellent. Pupils concentrate very well, apply themselves well to tasks, listen very well, both to the teacher and to fellow pupils, and they work very well together in pairs or independently. Pupils are very well motivated and enjoy their lessons. Relationships in lessons are very good.
186. The three language departments have been amalgamated under a head of faculty, whilst retaining a head of Spanish and a head of French, who was absent during the inspection. Leadership and management are very good; the requirements of the new orders for modern foreign languages have been effectively implemented. ICT has been introduced into the curriculum. The allocation of time for the second modern foreign language in Key Stage 3 is good and helps pupils to make very good progress. The department makes a very good contribution to pupils' social and cultural development through clubs and visits to France, Germany and Spain. Good displays enhance the classrooms. Sixth form students have completed work experience abroad; they help with the language clubs in school.

MUSIC

187. Pupils enter the school with a wide range of attainment depending on whether they have received specialist and/or instrumental teaching in their previous schools. Most pupils enter the school with above average musical experience and teachers' own assessments confirm this.
188. By the end of Year 9, standards are above average. Standards observed in Years 7 and 8 are well above average because these classes have received more music teaching in recent years.
189. In Years 7 to 9, pupils of all capabilities sing well and tunefully in parts, with plenty of volume, clear diction and good posture. They sing expressively, with a sense of enjoyment and communication. Pupils have good instrumental skills; a large number of pupils enhance their musical skills through instrumental tuition of high quality. An

unusual feature, and a major strength in raising achievement, is that all Year 7 pupils receive free instrumental tuition in groups as one of their two lessons each week. When pupils compose, they show clear understanding of the ways in which pieces can be developed because they are taught how composers achieve musical effects. Pupils who play instruments can name notes and recognise common signs, especially in Year 7, but in Years 8 and 9 only about 50 per cent of the pupils show a confident understanding of notation. Pupils listen respectfully and sympathetically to each other's performances. When they appraise music, they use appropriate vocabulary because it is developed from their music-making experience. General musical knowledge, for example of artists, instruments, forms, styles, composers and well-known pieces, is very good.

190. All pupils achieve very well because music is taught as a practical subject. Those who play instruments and read music make the best progress, building on their previous knowledge, wider experiences and their personal interests. Gifted and talented pupils are appropriately challenged and stretched. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress; they are well integrated.
191. In recent years, GCSE examination results have been well above the national average and broadly in line with those for selective schools. In 2000, pupils gained higher grades in music than in most of their other subjects. High numbers opt for music. Standards in the current Year 10 and 11 groups are well above average and improving. Performing skills are well above the expected levels. All pupils on the GCSE course in music sing in the school's choirs as well as in lessons; they sing confidently in parts. The average performing grade in Year 11 is grade VI, well above the average. Pupils compose competently, showing imagination and technical understanding; they make good use of computers to develop and notate their work. Pupils have very good general musical knowledge, especially of styles, forms, instruments and contemporary artists; they appraise well, showing good technical vocabulary.
192. In recent years, examination results at A-level have been in line with national results but few students opted for the subject until two years ago. However, numbers are now very good and are improving. Standards achieved by the end of the sixth form are above average. Practical skills in the Year 13 group are improving and students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment levels; the work of a few students has been affected by illness. Students' performing skills are around grade V; compositions sometimes have gaps in understanding of harmony and compositional devices; work in musical history shows good coverage of the syllabus but there are a few gaps in students' general musical knowledge, especially of well-known repertoire, because students do not always follow up on work independently. Standards in the Year 12 group are well above average.
193. Almost all the teaching observed was very good, including all teaching at GCSE level and in the sixth form. Teaching in instrumental work is of high quality; the teaching of extra-curricular groups is uniformly excellent. Teachers show excellent knowledge and prepare their lessons very well. They are fine musicians who accompany, arrange, direct and conduct most competently. The teachers are excellent communicators; they give clear instructions and present information confidently so that pupils know what they have to do. Lessons always have a brisk start to make full use of the time. Planning ensures that pupils are engaged in musical activity that develops their skills. The teaching is energetic, encouraging, humorous and often charismatic; expectations are high so that pupils are interested, challenged and stimulated. Class management, based on mutual trust, is excellent; pupils like and respect their teachers and relationships are excellent. Pupils rate music highly and their enthusiastic attitudes and

mature behaviour support their learning. They use equipment very sensibly and enjoy being actively involved in their learning, for example when composing pieces in groups. School resources are used well and many pupils bring their own instruments to lessons; this strengthens the quality of music making in lessons and supports instrumental tuition. Teachers make good reference to musical terms, often using their own skills as instrumentalists, but visual aids are rarely used to explain or illustrate. Assessment is constructive and questioning skilfully draws out responses from shy pupils. A strength of the department is the technical help given to show pupils how to improve, for example when singing, playing or composing, so that high standards result. Homework is used well and set regularly at examination levels but not always with the younger pupils; this is a lost opportunity to extend and develop practical work.

194. The management of music is excellent and promotes very high standards. Teachers are most enthusiastic, very hardworking and highly committed. Documentation is impressive; good assessment schemes and schemes of work are in place and are being further improved. There are good links with other schools and the community. The spacious rooms and adequate areas for group work help to promote high standards but the very fast pace of learning is occasionally slightly hindered through some shortages in classroom instruments, especially bass tuned percussion, and the absence of technical support. Music makes a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils reflect and experience the joy of music, relate well to moral messages in songs, eagerly participate in group work; share the feel-good factor of making music in school and publicly; and appreciate their own cultural traditions and those of other lands.
195. Nine visiting teachers provide a wide range of instrumental and vocal lessons involving 200 girls, an exceptionally high proportion. Standards are well above average. The teaching is of good quality; very good teaching was observed in flute, cello and brass tuition and excellent teaching in violin. A wide range of extra-curricular musical activities supports these lessons. These include senior orchestra, Wednesday orchestra, senior choir, junior choir, chamber choir and many other ensembles, including those for strings, wind, brass and guitar. These groups involve well over 33 per cent of all pupils, including large numbers in the upper part of the school, including the sixth form. Exemplary attitudes support the very high standards. Regular visits to concerts include those to the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and to London to see musicals. Visits to the school include workshops which enhance learning, such as the ones given by instrumental ensembles and by the Wirral's composer-in-residence scheme, which sixth form students found invaluable. Annual events include the Christmas and summer concerts, which regularly involve several hundred pupils. The school is rightly proud of its musical tradition and reputation. These first-rate activities reflect the dedication of staff, support of parents and the school and the enthusiasm of the competent and many talented musicians whose performances and successes bring great credit to the school and this outstanding department.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

196. Teachers' assessments in 2000 show that standards at Key Stage 3 are good in relation to national, age-related expectations. In lessons, the majority of 14 year olds are in line to achieve appropriate levels at the end of the key stage.
197. There is no teacher assessment data for Key Stage 4 in 2000. In the course that all pupils take at Key Stage 4, only one Year 11 lesson, a problem-solving session, was observed. There is, therefore, insufficient evidence to comment on standards in Year

11. In lessons in Year 10, standards are good and the majority of pupils are making good progress towards achieving appropriate levels at the end of the key stage.
198. At the end of Key Stage 3, the achievement of pupils is good. All pupils have, for example, a secure knowledge and understanding of the principles and procedures for warm-up. In volleyball, although pupils clearly understand the principles of play and tactics, the quality of their actual play is not so strong. Ongoing teachers' assessments show that in their other activities practical skills are well developed. In Year 10, achievement continues to be good in the course that all pupils take. In squash, for example, pupils are developing a good range of shots, though some find it difficult to use backhand when receiving serve in the left hand service box. The department introduced GCSE physical education last September. In both their theory and practical lessons, pupils are making good progress.
199. Although no pupils identified as having special educational needs were observed with additional help, they are well supported and integrated and make good progress. The level of challenge offered in most lessons also enables the more physically capable to make good progress. Pupils and students who are gifted or talented in the subject make good progress and achieve well in all years.
200. The quality of teaching and learning is good at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Good teaching is having a positive impact on standards, achievement and the quality of pupils' learning in lessons. Prompt and efficient starts to lessons, the high expectations of teachers and the challenge they offer to pupils, together with the very positive attitudes and relationships amongst pupils, all help to create a very positive learning atmosphere. All pupils are thus enabled to learn well and make good progress. In a Year 7 gymnastics lesson, for example, all pupils were fully involved in aspects of planning, performing and evaluating the quality of their performance. This deepened their knowledge and understanding of the quality of their movements and led to further improvements by the end of the lesson. Pupils are well aware of their capabilities because teachers circulate well and offer constructive praise and criticism throughout. The effectiveness of this was evident in a Year 7 netball lesson in which pupils were working to improve their footwork and movement.
201. Clear introductions to lessons ensure that pupils are made fully aware of what is expected of them. Very effective demonstrations, where appropriate, also ensure that pupils know what they have to do to make progress and to develop their skills and techniques. The planning of lessons, which includes a structured variety of activities, is indicative of teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of the games and activities being taught. They help pupils to learn through effective use of questions and in structured group discussions both during and at the end of lessons. In this way teachers not only establish what pupils know and understand but also help pupils to develop their speaking and listening skills. GCSE theory work is consistently marked and graded; teachers' comments provide effective guidance for pupils on what is needed to improve the quality of their work.
202. There are occasionally a few minor shortcomings in the quality of teaching and learning. Pupils have insufficient opportunities to take responsibility for leading aspects of their own warm-up or to discuss the effectiveness of warm-up through different activities. Such activities, when undertaken by pupils at Key Stage 3, for example, serve as good preparation for those pupils who opt for the GCSE course at Key Stage 4. At times, in gymnastics and dance, teachers take for granted that pupils understand specific terminology such as canon, unison and body tension; hence they are not always used by teachers or discussed and used sufficiently by pupils. In some games

lessons, there are too few opportunities for pupils to observe and evaluate one another or to learn what they have to do to improve their performance.

203. Assessment procedures are well established and ICT is effectively used for recording purposes. The new requirements for assessment levels are in place at Key Stage 3. However, these are recorded using the whole-school grading system. It is unclear if pupils and parents fully understand how this system informs them of the levels achieved in the subject.
204. This is a strong and well-led department. The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the requirements of the new National Curriculum for physical education. It has now been extended at Key Stage 4 by a GCSE course and the introduction, in Year 10, of the junior sports leaders award course. Insufficient time allocation for the subject, particularly in the course that all follow in Year 11, means that it is difficult to raise standards further. Although there is no formal timetabled provision of physical education in the sixth form to broaden students' learning experiences, some take the community sports leaders award course. A very good range of extra-curricular activities throughout the year further extends opportunities. These include matches against other schools as well as inter-form matches and recreational activities. As a result of the continuing enthusiasm and dedication of the physical education teachers, a number of individual pupils have recently gained representative honours at district and county levels in athletics, badminton, cross-country running, hockey and netball. In gymnastics, one Year 9 pupil has been selected to be a member of the national training squad and one Year 7 pupil achieved regional representative honours. One Under 19 student was selected for the national talent squad in netball and the Under 19 netball squad are county champions. The redundant balcony area in the sports hall, to which there is no access, detracts from the overall quality of accommodation.