

INSPECTION REPORT

HASLAND HALL COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Chesterfield

LEA area: Derbyshire

Unique reference number: 112959

Headteacher: Mr G R O'Hagan

Reporting inspector: Mrs C Gillies
20597

Dates of inspection: 18th – 22nd September 2000

Inspection number: 223709

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 16 years
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Broomfield Avenue Hasland Chesterfield Derbyshire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Seddon
Date of previous inspection:	May 1995

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M Roberts 8672	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school, which opened nine years ago, is an average size 11 to 16 community comprehensive school with 897 students. There are more girls than boys, particularly in Years 8 to 10. The school is oversubscribed and has grown since the last inspection. Attainment on entry is slightly below average. Over 16 per cent of students are eligible for free school meals (close to the national average). Eighty per cent of students come from five primary schools, including the areas of Hady, Spital and Calow, the latter containing many disadvantaged families. Fewer than half the students live in Hasland. Less than one per cent of students is from ethnic minority groups or speak English as an additional language. The percentage of students with special educational needs (Stages 2 to 5) is average but the percentage of those with statements (over five per cent) is twice the national average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Hasland Hall is a very effective school which tries out new ideas so that students have an interesting and worthwhile time at school. It describes itself as a 'self-improving school' and it is. Students attain standards at least in line with national averages, they are taught well and make good progress. Every effort is made to include all students in every aspect of school life by putting the school aims of freedom, fairness and friendship into practice. The school is very well led by an imaginative headteacher and provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- In at least nine subjects GCSE results are above the national average and the students' average GCSE points score has gone up every year since the last inspection. Results of tests taken at the end of Year 9 went up considerably in 2000 and were above average.
- Teaching is very good in over a quarter of lessons. Teachers are dedicated and committed and work hard to raise standards.
- Leadership and management at all levels are very good. The headteacher and senior management team, supported by an effective governing body, continue to implement interesting, successful and unusual ideas; for example, bilingual teaching in Year 7 and Years 9 and 10 students choosing which English set they want to work in. Initiatives are monitored and evaluated carefully and appropriate changes are made.
- The foundation course and bilingual programme in Year 7, the humanities in Years 8 and 9, and personal and social education and careers advice are all most effective.
- Monitoring of how students are doing in their work is most impressive and they receive very good personal support and guidance. Students with special educational needs are well provided for and make good progress.
- Behaviour is good. The majority of students work well together and are thoughtful and considerate.

What could be improved

- Standards are below average in music, and religious education is not studied in depth because too little time is spent studying these subjects. Too few specialist music and religious education teachers. The amount of time for music and physical education varies between groups in Years 7 to 9.
- Provision for the development of students' spiritual awareness is unsatisfactory.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION (MAY 1995)

Overall improvement has been good. Standards of attainment, at least in line with the national average in 2000, have gone up since the last inspection (when they were slightly below average). Three subjects were mentioned in a key issue about standards in the last report and in two, modern foreign languages and geography, GCSE results have improved steadily and consistently. In design and technology, GCSE results are better overall, because designing skills are better. What is taught in Years 8 and 9 has been altered and it now leads on well from the foundation course in Year 7. Several changes, such as specific work for higher and lower attaining students, mean that work is better matched to students' capabilities. Teaching and learning have also improved. The school has responded effectively to the key issues raised in the last report but it has not addressed several minor points mentioned, for example the need to review how spiritual awareness is developed or the tone of morning tutor sessions.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16-year-olds based on average point scores in GCSE examinations (points are calculated by eight for A*, seven for A, etc.).

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	C	C	C	C

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

National data is not yet available but it is likely that the GCSE 2000 results will be above average compared to similar schools (those with roughly the same percentage of pupils taking free school meals).

End of Year 9 – 2000: the percentage of students attaining levels above the expected (Level 5) in English and science was just above the 1999 average. Mathematics results are above average at all levels in 1999 and higher in 2000. Girls do better than boys in English. Gap has narrowed over the last few years; no greater than that seen nationally. Standards observed: above average in mathematics, information and communication technology, the humanities and the foundation course overall. Below average in design and technology, music and religious education (but not in Year 7). Average in the rest.

GCSEs – 1999: 46 per cent of students attained five grades A*-C (national 48 per cent). Better in 2000 – just over 48 per cent and the average total points score went up, especially for boys. English, mathematics and science results very close to averages (but above average overall in mathematics as about 30 students take GCSE a year early). Higher percentage of girls achieve five GCSE grades A*-C but the gap has narrowed – boys have done better. Since 1996 results in art and design, geography, information and communication technology, child development, physical education, statistics and drama consistently above average and better practically every year. Results in French and Spanish are much better than they were five years ago. Relatively low results in resistant materials, electronic products and graphic products. Standards observed: above average in mathematics, art and design, history, geography and physical education, well above average in information and communication technology, average in the rest, but below in music and religious education.

Progress: statistics from schools with a similar percentage of students taking free school meals, or schools which had similar results at the end of Year 9, confirmed during the inspection, show that in all years students at Hasland Hall achieve well and make at least good progress in the majority of subjects. Progress is unsatisfactory in music in Years 7 to 9 and in religious education in Years 8 to 11.

GCSE targets: 1999 and 2000 achieved for both grades A*-C and points. Targets for 2001: 50 per cent attaining 5 or more A*-C grades and average total points score of 39.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Students are well motivated in lessons and involve themselves in most aspects of school life. They respect each other and are thoughtful and considerate. They possibly take for granted the school's many good qualities and that they are looked after well by caring staff and teachers.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	At least satisfactory in 90 per cent of the lessons seen during the inspection. However, a minority of students in Year 9 sometimes find it difficult to behave sensibly. Behaviour is sometimes boisterous in the lunch hour but students do have to queue for quite a long time to get lunch and there is a limited amount of outdoor space for them to use.
Personal development and relationships	Friendship is one of the three school aims and the great majority of students work well together and support each other. When given responsibility they respond well and generally show respect for school property.
Attendance	Overall better than the national average. Unauthorised absence similar to average. The school sets targets and has improved attendance since the last inspection. Permanent and fixed term exclusions are below average and the school gets students back into school as soon as possible.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching was satisfactory in 94 per cent of lessons seen during the inspection. It was at least good in 63 per cent of lessons, including 27 per cent where it was very good or excellent (four lessons). It was most effective in Year 7, especially in the foundation course, and in Years 10 and 11. Most of the lessons (nine in all) when teaching was unsatisfactory were in Years 8 and 9. The main feature of these lessons was that students did not do enough, the result of poor planning and/or a lack of concentration and sensible behaviour. Students' learning was at least satisfactory in over 90 per cent of lessons.

The percentage of good teaching was relatively low in music and religious education. Literacy and numeracy skills are taught soundly overall. Teaching was good in over half the lessons seen in English, mathematics, art and design, modern foreign languages and science and very good in at least one third of lessons seen in humanities and information and communication technology (Years 10 and 11) and physical education (all years). It has improved considerably since the previous inspection – then it was unsatisfactory in ten per cent of lessons and at least good in only 36 per cent of lessons.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good overall but with particularly strong features such as the foundation course and bilingual programme in Year 7, the humanities in Years 8 and 9, personal and social education, careers advice and the good range of courses in Years 10 and 11. Uneven, and/or too little time for music, physical education and religious education. Nevertheless, students have every opportunity to follow suitable and interesting courses.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. As required, students receive helpful support in class and in small groups and all teachers are fully aware of, and take responsibility for, their individual needs and progress. Students with learning difficulties are well integrated into the life of the school.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	One student joined the school this term and has already made good progress learning English. The student successfully joins in practical lessons, such as physical education, without any problems.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Sound overall with particular strengths in how the school develops students' understanding of acceptable moral and social standards. European cultures are discussed in depth but students are less aware of other cultures. Provision for spiritual development is not satisfactory, especially as students only have one assembly a week which rarely includes reflection or worship. This picture is similar to that presented in the last inspection report.
How well the school cares for its students	Monitoring of how students are doing in their work is most impressive and they receive very good personal support and guidance. Too little care is taken over the state of repair and maintenance of lavatories.

The school works well in partnership with parents. They receive very good information about what is happening, what is being taught and find the reports helpful. Students transfer from primary schools very smoothly because the school puts much effort into this.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good at all levels. The headteacher continues to implement interesting, successful and unusual ideas and to assess whether they have the required effect. He has a clear vision about what the school needs to do to keep moving forward. Since the school opened nine years ago the headteacher and senior management team have generated a will to succeed and have achieved a great deal in terms of innovations which have contributed to improved standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school and provide supportive and helpful guidance. Governors are astute, confident and perceptive and carry out their responsibilities most effectively. They have not agreed a health and safety policy for the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good because the headteacher has made critical analysis and evaluation of all aspects of the school's work a high priority. For example, successful changes have been made to the foundation course as it has matured over the years.
The strategic use of resources	Funds for the development of computers and other specific initiatives are allocated properly and used effectively.

Too few specialist music and religious education teachers, otherwise staffing arrangements are fine. Facilities for physical education are particularly good but the library is rather small for the present number of students. New classroom block being set up during inspection. Number and quality of computers improved in September. The governing body has decided not to provide a daily act of collective worship (a legal requirement). The school applies the principle of best value very well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very good arrangements for transfer from primary schools. • The good standard of teaching, that teachers know students well and write helpful reports. • They find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems. • Innovations, such as the bilingual teaching, and how the school assesses new ideas carefully. • The detailed information they receive about what is taught. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour, particularly in Year 9. • A few parents do not feel they are kept well informed about students' progress. • The range of activities outside lessons. • A few parents have concerns that work in Years 7 to 9 does not move fast enough or build on what students have done in primary school, particularly for average attainers.

The inspection confirmed all parents' positive comments. Pockets of unsatisfactory behaviour in Year 9 have partly been defused by the introduction of smaller classes and some regrouping but behaviour continues to be least good in this year. The team found that the range of extra-curricular activities, particularly for expressive arts, is good – possibly some students need parental encouragement to join in. The school is aware of developments in primary schools and is incorporating these into its regular review of what is taught in Years 7 to 9. No evidence was found to suggest that average attainers make any less progress than others.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

Attainment refers to the standards students achieve compared to national averages. Achievement refers to the progress students make in terms of where they started when they entered the school or when they started their GCSE courses. Thus good achievement does not necessarily mean that standards are above average, but that students have made at least as much progress as might be expected.

1. Students enter the school with slightly lower than average standards, particularly in speaking. By the end of Years 9 and 11 overall attainment is average but in a considerable number of subjects, particularly in Year 11, it is above this. Students' speaking, listening, reading and writing skills are average by the end of Years 9 and 11, although a significant number have poor handwriting and presentation. By the end of Years 9 and 11 attainment in mathematics is above average and in line with expected standards in science.

End of Year 9: *students are expected to reach at least National Curriculum Level 5 in English, mathematics and science national tests taken at the end of Year 9. Level 6 and above are referred to as the higher levels. In 2000 the national percentage of students reaching Level 5 and above (with Level 6 and above shown in brackets) was 63 per cent (28 per cent) in English, 65 per cent (41 per cent) in mathematics and 59 per cent (29 per cent) in science. Average points scores are also calculated. A student achieving Level 5 in all three subjects would have an average points score of 33. The national average points score was 32.5 in 1999.*

2. In 1999 the percentage of students reaching the expected level was close to the average in English and science though the percentage reaching the higher levels was below. However, in 2000 the percentage of students reaching the expected level was above average and that for the higher levels almost doubled the 1999 results. Mathematics results were above the average at both levels in 1999 and they improved further in 2000. Girls perform better than boys in English and slightly lower than boys in mathematics and science, but the relative gaps have narrowed over the last four years and they are no greater than those seen nationally.
3. In 2000 the points score for both boys and girls in English, mathematics and science, improved (by almost two points on average) bringing the results above the national average for 1999. These improved results also mean that the four year trend is above that seen nationally. Results in 2000 were also much better in comparison with schools with a similar percentage of students taking free school meals.
4. Present standards (seen during the inspection) are average in English, science, art and design, modern foreign languages and physical education and above average in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), and the foundation and humanities courses overall. They are low in design and technology and music and students in Years 8 and 9 have lower than expected levels of knowledge and understanding in religious education. Overall students' learning and progress are good and they achieve well by the end of Year 9. Learning and progress in the present Year 9 are not quite as good as in the other years because a significant minority of students do not concentrate well. In religious education and music students do not achieve enough by the end of Year 9.

GCSE results: *In 1999 nationally, 47 per cent of students attained five or more grades A*-C, 91 per cent attained five or more grades A*-G and 96 per cent attained one or more grades A*-G.*

The average total points score was 38.0 in 1999 (calculated by 8 points for A, 7 for A, etc). National figures for 2000 were not available at the time of the inspection.*

5. In 1999 46 per cent of students attained five grades A*-C, very close to the national average. The percentage attaining five grades A*-G was just above average. The points score was just below the national one. GCSE results were better in 2000 with just over 48 per cent of students attaining five grades A*-C and the points score for boys went up by 1.8 points (girls by 0.2 points). Although a higher percentage of girls achieved five GCSE grades A*-C, the gap has narrowed as boys have done better. The school sets realistic targets which were achieved in 1999 and 2000; targets for 2001 are for 50 per cent of students to attain t or more grades A*-C and an average total points score of 39.
6. In English, mathematics and science, results were very close to the national averages in 1999. Having improved until 1999 there was a very slight drop in the percentage of students achieving grades A*-C in mathematics in 2000, whilst the percentages in English and science improved. Between 25 and 30 students take GCSE mathematics at the end of Year 10 (a year early) and attain at least a grade C but few attained grade A in 2000 and no grade A*s. These students follow a GCSE statistics course in Year 11 and attain impressive results.
7. Girls performed better than boys in many subjects in 1999 but in 2000 only significantly in three: English language and literature and French (boys performed better than girls in history, German and ICT). These differences are fairly similar to those seen nationally and teachers continue to seek ways to reduce them. During the inspection no significant differences were seen in the performance of different groups of students, and those with special educational needs make good progress in all years.
8. Improvement in overall GCSE results has been evident every year since 1996. In the same period results in art and design, geography, Spanish, design and technology, child development, drama, statistics and physical education have been consistently above the national averages and better practically every year. Since 1996, French and Spanish results have gradually and steadily improved with the 2000 results being the highest so far. Numbers taking GCSE music are low and results fluctuate. In eight subjects in 2000 new school records were set. Results in design and technology are relatively low in resistant materials, electronic products and graphic products.
9. Statistics from schools with a similar percentage of students taking free school meals, or schools which had similar results at the end of Year 9, show that students at Hasland Hall achieve well in GCSE and make good progress in these years. When national data is available for 2000, Hasland Hall's relative position against these measures should show a considerable improvement on the previous year. Present standards (seen during the inspection) are average in English, science, design and technology and modern foreign languages, above average in mathematics, art and design, history, geography and physical education, and well above average in ICT. They are below average in music and fall short of expectations set out in the locally agreed religious education syllabus.
10. **English:** Achievement is good. Most students speak clearly and reasonably fluently though not often expansively and a minority are quite softly spoken. Individual high standards of speaking were observed in the debating society and several classes. Students read challenging texts and both boys and girls show insight into poetry and into characters in literature. When working in pairs boys often rely on their partner, a girl, to do the writing. Many students choose personal reading appropriate for their age and enjoy writing imaginative and often ingenious stories, diaries, reviews, letters and news reports, some with an assured journalistic style. In all years a significant number of lower and middle attainers have poorly formed handwriting and poor presentation.

11. The school has been developing a strategy for all subjects to develop **speaking, listening, reading and writing skills**. Several subjects do develop language deliberately, for example subject-specific vocabulary, but altogether some useful opportunities are lost. Students discuss, debate, take on a role and give formal presentations in class, especially in the foundation course and in humanities, but occasionally speaking in lessons is limited to answering teachers' questions. In music, the foundation course and modern foreign languages students are taught to listen acutely. The humanities are the most active in promoting speaking, reading and writing for different purposes. The librarian is knowledgeable and encourages students to read books and to access text on the Internet. In religious education particularly, students do not read enough.
12. **Mathematics:** Achievement is consistently good. Higher attaining students in Year 9 deal confidently with linear equations using algebraic fractions, have a very secure grasp of inverse operations and high standards in trigonometry. Lower attaining students in Year 8 have an impressive knowledge of essential basic skills and mental mathematics. High attaining students in Year 11 deal efficiently with cumulative frequency curves and trigonometry to an exceptional level. In a Year 10 lesson, playing against the teacher at a dice game, students mastered some of the issues involved in probability. The profile of investigation work is not high enough in the department.
13. Whilst much good work is happening, departments (other than mathematics) do not always contribute enough to the development of **numeracy** skills so that students develop them methodically and in the school style. For example, some graphs are not labelled properly and evidence suggests that not all teachers encourage students to interpret and analyse them. Examples of good practice include interpreting census data in history, discussing ratios and proportions in art and design, analysing data from surveys in design and technology and using formulae and measurements accurately in science.
14. **Science:** Achievement in science is good. Year 9 high attaining students accurately represent what happens in experiments as chemical equations and low attainers describe them as word equations. High attaining students in Year 11 use formulae well. The standard of graph work and students' understanding and use of technical vocabulary are varied. Year 9 students competently carry out experiments, understand the need to vary factors when conducting tests, and in Year 11 higher attaining students identify sources of error and write detailed conclusions; others find it difficult to apply their knowledge of science. The majority of students in all years do not analyse their results in enough depth. Through the Cognitive Acceleration in Science Project (CASE), students in Years 7 and 8 deepen their understanding of scientific method.
15. Achievement in **art and design** is good in all years. The highest standards are attained in two-dimensional work such as drawing, painting and collage as the two art rooms do not provide enough scope for a breadth of three-dimensional work. Most students' drawings show confidence and boldness and in Year 7 teachers encourage them to use art vocabulary. Improvements in the curriculum since the last inspection mean standards in students' knowledge of art and artists are rising but students in Years 10 and 11 still have knowledge below that expected for their age.
16. **Design and technology:** Most students in Year 9 produce good quality textiles and food products and some evaluate design ideas and products well. However, some notes do not include enough step-by-step descriptions or diagrams and they contain mistakes or are incomplete. Students cannot always explain why or for what purpose they are making particular items. Achievement is sound in Years 7 to 9 and better in Years 10 and 11. In Year 10 students confidently draw free-hand sketches of design ideas and have good skills

in food. They are beginning to use models to make sure that their designs can actually be made but do not regularly produce detailed working schedules with realistic deadlines.

17. In **drama** in Years 7 to 9 students devise scenes in small groups and use techniques such as freeze-frame, mime and thought tracking to express their ideas effectively. Responding to such topics as bullying they readily think up situations and create clear, spontaneous dialogue. By Year 11 students use their imagination, have a good range of drama conventions, communicate effectively with body language and facial expression and acquire a good sense of timing with some telling use of pauses. Some speak expressively but not all enunciate clearly or project their voices.
18. Standards are at least average in the subjects delivered through the **foundation course** in Year 7 (over half the classes being taught in French). The bilingual elements most effectively develop literacy and improve students' awareness of Europe; evidence suggests they improve general thinking skills. Students' understanding of social and moral issues develops well, as do their computer skills. The course helps students to recognise links between subjects and that skills learned in one area can often be used in another. Standards are above average in French for those students taught in this language.
19. In **humanities** (in Years 8 and 9) most students make good progress acquiring historical and geographic skills and using them well. Students describe clearly the human and physical features of locations from maps and photographs and use technical terms such as 'patent' and 'copyright' appropriately. In **GCSE geography** students use sophisticated technical vocabulary well and produce good quality coursework, but they do not analyse data or interpret graphs enough. In **GCSE history** students examine a wide variety of source material and appreciate the value and relevance of history; they ask quite perceptive questions and use historical language well.
20. Students in Year 7 are becoming familiar with the technical language of **ICT** (through the foundation course) and they can readily access the Internet and CD-Rom. Present students in Years 9 and 10 lack consistent experience when they were younger and many type with only one finger. However, Year 11 students who take GCSE demonstrate high standards and overall achievement is very good. Pockets of very good work are seen in Years 7 to 9, especially in the foundation course, humanities, science and art and design.
21. By the end of Year 9 most students have sound and often good listening and comprehension skills in **modern foreign languages** (especially those taught in French in Year 7). Many students speak foreign languages well but those in lower sets lack confidence and say as little as possible. Pronunciation and intonation are generally sound but students do not read out loud enough. The accuracy of written work shows improvement since the previous inspection and achievement in all years is sound. In Years 10 and 11 students do well in listening tests but few ask questions in the foreign language as a matter of course. High attaining students show a good grasp of basic grammar.
22. Students sing in **music** lessons only occasionally and irregularly and they do not give enough attention to tuning, expression or breathing. Most have poor composing and performing skills and few understand music notation. They listen respectfully to each other and to recordings. When they appraise music they use limited vocabulary and have too little general musical knowledge. In the present Year 11 class standards, particularly in instrumental playing, are below average and only a few higher attaining students show understanding of musical language. Many GCSE students do not join in extra-curricular work. Standards in instrumental lessons are broadly average. There is a folk band and a small choir and school concerts are held regularly.

23. By the end of Year 9 boys and girls have a good knowledge of fitness and can warm up and stretch independently and effectively in **physical education** lessons. They develop good basic skills in badminton and basketball although gymnastics remains an area of underachievement. The standard of work seen in GCSE netball and football is high; Year 11 students have consistently good ball skills and a good knowledge of the rules and tactics of the games. Over half the boys playing football have speed, stamina and a high level of skill. The attainment of some individual students and teams is very high. They play football, netball, hockey, cricket, cross country, and athletics for district and county teams. Achievement is very good in all years.
24. By the end of Year 7 students have a sound foundation in **religious knowledge**. They have a broad understanding of the major beliefs and practices of Christianity and three other religions and are sensitive to the fact that different faith communities have different ways of living. However, as much of the work done in all other years focuses on personal development, overall standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 fall short of those set out in the locally agreed syllabus. Students have a fragmented and shallow understanding of the major beliefs and practices of all the religions that are found in our society, including Christianity, although they have a sensitive appreciation of the role that religion plays in providing people with a framework of values.
25. Students following the new General National Vocational Qualification (**GNVQ**) **leisure and tourism** and **health and social care** courses did research out of school in the first couple of weeks of the course and were introduced to the independent work ethos of GNVQ study. The attainment of students in these groups varies considerably. The majority of students studying leisure and tourism are enthusiastic and have good ICT skills. Over half of the health and social care group have low level listening and literacy skills and this hinders their learning.
26. Including those at Stage 1, over 40 per cent of students in the school are listed on the register of special needs. The number of students who have come into the school with extensive special needs is twice as high as might be expected. This demonstrates the confidence of parents in this school, many of whom seek places from outside the local area because they believe that the support will be effective. Students with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well.
27. Through careful planning, specific targets and a high level of encouraging support from teachers and classroom assistants, students with special educational needs meet challenging tasks in English and learn well how to write appropriately for different purposes, including being persuasive. The one student with English as an additional language, who was in her first full week at the school and a beginner in English, had constant, kindly support and was making good progress.
28. The quality and comprehensive nature of the work in the mathematics folders of students with statements of special educational needs is good, the levels and range studied cover a wide spectrum, not just number work. In all other subjects students with special educational needs make good progress because teachers and support staff help them to feel they can achieve, they gain confidence and usually do as well as the rest of the class.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

29. Practically all students are well motivated and enjoy their school life. They find the work interesting and feel that teachers treat them fairly. They think that the school has good facilities generally, with the exception of the lavatories. They can readily name the subjects they enjoy and feel that they are challenged in most of them. Their overall attitude is more matter-of-fact than strongly enthusiastic.

30. Many students enjoy taking part in the wide range of activities available during the lunch hour and after school. In sports activities they practise with considerable verve. Attendance has improved steadily since the last inspection. In 1999 to 2000 it was above average but unauthorised absence was a little higher. Lateness in general is not significant and overall attendance is better than the national average.
31. The standard of behaviour overall is good. In nine out of ten lessons observed during the inspection behaviour was satisfactory, and in half the lessons seen it was good or better. In these, students listen well and respond willingly. They show interest and sustain concentration throughout most lessons, which last for an hour and a quarter. Learning and behaviour are not quite as good in Year 9 as in the other years because a significant minority of students have to be persuaded to get down to work and they distract others. Odd pockets of poor behaviour in class occasionally occur in other year groups, particularly when the teaching is unimaginative or too slow.
32. Outside lessons the great majority of students move around the school sensibly. Occasionally a few of them run rather noisily along the corridors or display inappropriate, boisterous behaviour. Attitudes are normally sensible and self-controlled, even when students have to queue for quite a long time, waiting for lunch for example. The way students cope in the dining hall is particularly good; students are friendly, enjoy each other's company and, with the headteacher and several members of staff joining them, a pleasant social atmosphere is generated. Students respect the school property, especially where it is in good order.
33. Some students report having been subject to occasional bullying and not all students feel 100 per cent confident that any problems will be addressed seriously by all teachers. This is surprising because the senior management team has an open door policy and the headteacher makes it clear to students that he does, and will, do everything possible to make sure there is zero tolerance of bullying. None was observed during the inspection. Relationships throughout the school are generally open and friendly. Teachers and members of staff have good relationships with students, with a good level of mutual respect. Much work is put into supporting and encouraging good social attitudes for the small number of students who find self-control difficult. The success of this is indicated by the marked fall in exclusions over the last few years. Exclusions are lower than normal for similar schools.
34. Students' personal development is good. They are successfully encouraged to think independently, and to challenge constructively if they consider something is wrong. Whilst working independently they will stop to help each other. With many opportunities to work in groups, students develop good co-operative attitudes and gain confidence when exchanging opinions. Several expressions of sympathetic friendship were seen, involving individuals or small groups. For instance, a student was worried before going home that she could not understand her mathematics and a group of friends, showing real concern, rallied round saying they would help her. Relationships and respect throughout the school are of a high quality.
35. Students with special educational needs work well in class. They understand their own personal targets and try hard to achieve them, maintaining their concentration throughout lessons. They are confident, so they often take the lead in answering questions or suggesting solutions to problems. The support is important here, providing the reassurance that enables them to risk being wrong. A significant number of students who have difficulty learning, also struggle to manage their behaviour and their relationships with others. In the great majority of lessons teachers handle these problems very well and help students to focus their energy on learning.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

36. Teaching was satisfactory in 94 per cent of lessons seen during the inspection. It was at least good in 63 per cent of lessons, including 27 per cent where it was very good or excellent. It was most effective in Year 7, especially in the foundation course, and in Years 10 and 11. Most of the lessons (nine in all) when teaching was unsatisfactory were in Years 8 and 9; the main feature of these lessons was that students did not do enough – the result of poor planning and/or a lack of concentration and sensible behaviour. The percentage of good teaching was relatively low in music and religious education.
37. Teaching was excellent in four lessons during the inspection. It was good in over half the lessons seen in English, mathematics, art and design, modern foreign languages and science. It was very good in at least one third of lessons seen in the foundation course, the humanities and physical education, and in ICT in Years 10 and 11. It has improved considerably since the previous inspection, then it was unsatisfactory in ten per cent of lessons and at least good in only 36 per cent of lessons.
38. When teaching is particularly strong, it is obvious that teachers use their **good knowledge of their subjects** effectively, for example by sharing the lesson's objectives with students so that they clearly understand what is expected of them and get going swiftly. Teachers delivering the humanities course in Years 8 and 9, outside their area of specialisation, nonetheless have good subject knowledge as they are supported by excellent teamwork and training. In contrast non-specialist religious education teachers are given no training so their lessons are not so effective. Excellent understanding of the latest computer technology is immediately used well in discrete ICT lessons. Many, though not all, non-specialist teachers have subscribed to the school's Computer Loan Scheme and undertaken training in their own time and are therefore more competent to instruct students to high levels of competence.
39. English teachers constantly pool their ideas in order to amass imaginative tasks that will motivate students, for example using horror stories to identify successful features for written work. All drama teachers have good skills which the students enjoy, as in a lesson where they questioned the teacher who acted as the owner of a haunted house. In a few lessons where teachers explain design tasks, incorporating their understanding of science and commercial procedures, learning is often creative. Excellent fluency means that foreign languages are used extensively in lessons, which accounts for good listening and comprehension skills.
40. Humanities teachers ask very challenging questions, seeking the historical significance of comments made by students or developing content which reflects current information, as in Year 10 lessons on less developed countries. Thus students are intellectually challenged. The music teacher has good accompanying and arranging skills which serve school productions very well. Taught by such competent players, students in Years 7 and 8 contribute much physical effort and quickly acquire the skills needed for badminton and basketball.
41. A dominant characteristic of the high quality teaching seen in many lessons, is when teachers make it clear they have **high expectations** by displaying their **enthusiasm and enjoyment**. In the foundation course, and in some science lessons, excellent use of humour encourages learning. In several mathematics lessons teaching is vibrant and spontaneous; supportive replies to students such as 'I like your approach', or 'Fantastic response', encourage all to feel that they can understand the work. In a Year 10 mathematics lesson learning was powerful when students were, unusually, challenged to

play against the teacher at a dice game as they mastered some of the issues involved in probability.

42. Students are enthused about physical education because teachers are vibrant, enthusiastic and very well organised. Hence students learn well and work energetically. In history, teachers willingly share relevant anecdotes about their own lives. In the foundation course teachers read with great expression, use their voices dramatically and pause at just the right moments in order to keep their students fascinated.
43. **Planning and content** are well considered in many lessons. The art department's programme is particularly successful in Years 7 and 8 when students master fundamental principles methodically. Just occasionally the teacher's presentation (about artists and art movements) was too wide-ranging for students to follow. In mathematics different strategies (and games at the end) are used expertly to break up the lessons. Similarly, the momentum is sustained in modern foreign languages by switching tasks systematically so that each activity builds on the preceding one; teachers sustain momentum by timing classroom tasks exactly so that there is virtually no scope for coasting or wasting time.
44. Learning was quick in a Year 7 science lesson because the teacher chose several different activities and used new apparatus which really interested students. In all subjects, practically all teachers are aware that students learn in different ways and they modify their methods so that all students can make progress. In some design and technology classes students quickly extract information from text and respond confidently to questions because they are given helpful definitions and guidance.
45. Teachers generate many very useful visual **resources** to illustrate key principles in art and design. High quality materials are prepared for the foundation course – the documents in French on racism are particularly imaginative and thought provoking. In the humanities, teachers guide students to use a range of resources, including textbooks, worksheets, photographs and video recordings, most effectively – this has a positive effect on learning. In mathematics particularly careful organisation of resources and a well-written guidance manual about using graphical calculators, all contribute to good learning. The mathematics department makes sure that students' own notes are comprehensive and useful for revision.
46. A GNVQ presentation on a leisure park topic was well supported by transparencies shown on an overhead projector. In religious education repetitive written exercises, often using uninspiring worksheets, did not generate motivation and enthusiasm; if artefacts and colourful pictures are not displayed and used to elaborate points made in lessons, teaching lacks sparkle and progress is slow. Visual aids are not used enough in music.
47. Art and design students are given a wealth of exemplars about what is required for different GCSE grades so they assess the quality of their own work very well. In 1999 to 2000, Year 9 students, not teachers, chose which English sets they wished to be in; clearly successful, with students gaining confidence and being challenged at their chosen level, this system has been extended into Year 10. A significant strength of the teaching in English, is the thorough and consistent assessment of students' work, which praises what they have done well and gives very specific targets for improvement. This encourages students to assess themselves accurately and take responsibility for their own learning.
48. Teachers set valuable **homework** in art and design and give each student praise or criticism when deserved. Marking of homework in science, which is occasionally imaginative, is done regularly but only the best states clearly how well students are progressing and thoroughly checks that comments are acted upon. In contrast,

assessment data in design and technology is not used to generate motivation and improvement. Class work in students' physical education GCSE files is not checked enough but their tests and homework are well marked with informative and constructive comments.

49. Teachers have developed **positive relationships with students** and manage them well which contributes significantly to most students enjoying many subjects and being keen to succeed. Many teachers defuse potentially unco-operative behaviour tactfully and with humour so that learning proceeds in a good atmosphere. In a Year 10 mathematics class, several boys attempted to provoke disorder but this was dealt with by gently deflecting the issue rather than direct confrontation, so the situation markedly improved. In the best science lessons students are complimented about their efforts, within a jovial working atmosphere, so learning is good.
50. In the foundation course, humanities and GNVQ courses, students have many opportunities to carry out independent research and make presentations. They search outside class time, from sources such as the Internet, for their enquiry work. When students show initiative, for instance in organising some of the debating and presentations (particularly in English, the foundation course and humanities) or designing a website, teachers encourage and support them very well.
51. Some students with special educational needs are withdrawn from ordinary lessons for additional, concentrated help. This is mainly in Year 7 to improve reading and to address other specific learning problems. In these groups the teaching is caring and carefully organised. Students enjoy the sessions and learn well. Extra help (whether in ordinary lessons or separate classes) is most effective when the pace of work is brisk, the tasks are challenging, too much written work is avoided and success brings rewards.
52. A particular strength of the school is the way that all teachers take responsibility for supporting special educational needs. This means that a current of care, respect and support runs right through the school. Within this overall atmosphere there are some outstanding examples of skill and technique – both recording what students can do, choosing when to support and when to stand back, and devising tasks which focus on the essential learning. Such particularly good practice and expertise could be shared beneficially with other teachers.
53. The teachers with particular expertise in special educational needs work closely with their colleagues and modify work, such as science experiments, so that all pupils can join in. Support staff also contribute very effectively, showing good understanding of the students' needs and careful judgement about when and how to intervene in the work. Individual support in ICT is very thorough for students with special educational needs, for whom work is now carefully structured at the right pace, which it was not at the time of the previous inspection.
54. In the relatively few lessons where teaching was only just satisfactory or unsatisfactory, one or more of the following features were noted: lax management of time, a relatively slow pace, weak planning, students not sure what they were doing, unimaginative and dull worksheets, a failure to match tasks to the needs of individual students, the teacher echoing every answer from students, tasks which were too open-ended, plans which were too focused on the organisation of the activity rather than what students should learn and students repeating work. However, apart from the unsatisfactory aspects of music teaching which are linked to timetable and staffing issues, pupils very rarely experience anything other than satisfactory teaching and often it is better than this. Almost nine out of ten parents feel the teaching is good.

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

The foundation course, which takes up half the week in Year 7, offers an integrated approach to the teaching of personal and social education (which includes religious education), geography, history, ICT and English. An integrated humanities course (history and geography) follows on from the Year 7 foundation course.

55. The foundation course, including the bilingual elements, careers and recently introduced vocational courses are particular strengths of the curriculum on offer at Hasland Hall. The school has responded effectively to various issues since the last inspection, for example improving rigour in Year 7 and by designing better progression from the foundation course to work in later years. However, since religious education is not taught as a discrete subject, but through personal and social education, not enough time is given to this subject so it is not studied in enough depth. In addition, arrangements for expressive arts mean that some students have more music lessons than others and that they are occasionally taught music in single sex groups. The total time for music in Years 7 to 9 is lower than average and makes it difficult to cover the National Curriculum properly.
56. The school's provision for extra-curricular activities is good. In addition to the very wide range of sporting activities, students take part in drama productions, welcome touring theatres and musicians to the school and visit a variety of drama festivals both at home and abroad. The school has been selected twice for the National Theatre scheme. The music department has strong links with the local music centre and festival. Several subjects organise valuable fieldtrips and Year 7 take part in a residential experience in Lea Green which helps them to get to know each other and their tutors. The library, which is generally full at lunchtime, is open for homework and private study at the end of the school day. The debating society is well supported and several subjects, mathematics for example, run clubs at lunchtime and after school. There are year councils, representatives of which are elected to the school student council which considers relevant issues on a regular basis.
57. The careers programme is very good. Students discuss careers as part of personal and social education in Year 8, prepare for option choices in Year 9, and benefit from a visit by the 'Impact Theatre' in Year 11 when they consider further education, training and the world of work. The careers elements of the personal and social education programme includes helpful advice on the completion of application forms, interview techniques and visits from colleges and training providers. Students are fully prepared for two weeks work experience in early July and the school places great emphasis on their evaluation of these experiences when they return to school.
58. The personal and social education programme is a strength of the curriculum. In Year 7, as part of the foundation course, it specifically develops students' confidence as they settle into the school and focuses well on issues such as bullying (complemented by work in drama) and anti-racism. In later years sex education and drugs (supported by work in the science department) are dealt with sensitively and sensibly. Students are given many opportunities to discuss a wide range of issues and they enjoy debating moral and social ones.
59. In September 2000 GNVQ courses in leisure and tourism and health and social care were introduced. These have extended the vocational course alternatives to GCSE well. GCSE child development and business studies are now firmly established and students may opt also for the Derbyshire Peak Award. This is particularly valuable for those who do not wish to have too many academic subjects and all who take it enjoy the course enormously.

60. Students with special educational needs are well integrated into normal lessons and the support they receive is most effective and helps them to work independently. Effective collaboration between teachers and support staff in child development results in imaginative ways of keeping routine notes up to date, helping students to overcome considerable difficulties and complete all the tasks. Students who need additional help to deal with specific problems are identified quickly; they follow a carefully planned programme of expert help so that they remain confident, and continue to make good progress in all of their subjects.
61. The contribution of the community to school life is good. Outside agencies visit the school regularly as part of the personal and social education programme. There are three teacher representatives on the community forum and the school contributes annually to the community arts show. A youth centre on the school site is used during the day and in the evening. Sports coaches visit the school to promote badminton, cricket and athletics and local groups, including Chesterfield Football Club's School of Excellence, use the school facilities out of school hours.
62. Students studying GNVQ business education and child development take advantage of links with the community (especially the next door primary school) which certainly make their courses interesting. For the Derbyshire Peak Award students work in the community for fifteen hours over three months; they also plan a 15 kilometre walk in Year 10 and a two-day expedition in Year 11. The humanities department invites local historians into school to discuss their work and students themselves take a real interest in the community. Two Year 9 students wrote to a local politician, for example, and the outcome was that the council renovated the war memorial in Eastwood Park.
63. Relationships with partner institutions are a very strong feature. The school maintains very good links with several feeder primary schools and runs joint training sessions on the curriculum, teaching methods, literacy and numeracy. Links with Chesterfield College and sixth-form institutions are also strong and effective. Several teachers are members of national and international educational organisations and have given presentations of the school's work to a variety of audiences at universities and also at the annual education show in Birmingham. The school trains final-year student teachers and has strong links with four universities. It has also been awarded recommending body status from the Teacher Training Agency and a licence to train teachers and to recommend them for Qualified Teacher Status. All these links indirectly contribute to rising standards as the school is receptive to research findings and prepared to try out interesting ideas in the classroom.
64. Consideration of students' spiritual, moral, social and culture development (overall provision being satisfactory) is reflected in the aims of the school which seek to provide an environment in which fairness, friendship and freedom prevail. The provision for moral development is good. Relationships between teachers and students are positive, with staff providing good role models. Many subjects include opportunities for students to explore moral situations. In the personal and social education course students frequently consider contemporary moral issues; a Year 11 group thoughtfully discussed the issues surrounding drug taking.
65. In English, students considered the way in which the media often misrepresent issues and reflected on the moral issues involved. The moral dilemmas presented by genetic engineering are fully considered in science. These examples are reinforced in a practical manner through subjects such as physical education where students are encouraged to develop the principles of fair play and sportsmanship. School assemblies frequently focus on moral topics. During the inspection one assembly used the Olympic games as a stimulus to consider racism.

66. The overall provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory. The key issues raised in the last inspection have not been addressed. There is still no daily act of collective worship and opportunities for spiritual development are not consistently delivered across the curriculum. Students attend one assembly a week and spend the other days with their tutors. There is no planned approach to either assemblies or tutor time. During the inspection only one of the three assemblies attended contained any element of spiritual development or reflection. Tutor time is rarely spent on anything other than administration and few sessions seen during the inspection provided students with a cheerful and positive start to the day.
67. Some subjects such as personal and social education, particularly the religious education elements, do provide good opportunities for spiritual development. In the foundation course, students are constantly encouraged to reflect upon a wide variety of issues. In dance both boys and girls develop their awareness of the spiritual nature of life. In other subjects much that happens does so by default rather than design with the result that opportunities are missed.
68. Students' social development is encouraged both in lessons and through practical opportunities within the daily life of the school. This is a strong feature of the physical education programme where students are actively encouraged to co-operate. This is reinforced through the foundation course and subjects such as ICT, science and the humanities where students regularly work in pairs or groups. Social issues frequently arise in the personal and social education programme and are discussed sensitively.
69. Students do raise issues of concern in the school council but a significant number feel that it is not as successful as it might be. Opportunities for students to play an active part in the day-to-day running of the school are limited. Students do help out in the library and help run several clubs. Year 8 students support primary school pupils who spend a day in school in the term before they transfer to Hasland. This is now developing into a 'buddy' scheme and students will receive training to develop their counselling skills. Many of the community links (described above) also contribute to students' social awareness and many local organisations speak highly of how well the students behave. Provision for social development is satisfactory.
70. Several extra-curricular activities contribute to students' social and cultural awareness. Trips to European countries are organised regularly and a visit to the Edinburgh Festival last year (described in drama) was a great success. The Peak Award Scheme challenges students to extend their horizons and take responsibility for their own development. Students are encouraged to join the school choir and regular musical events take place each year. A strong debating society enjoys good support from students. A recently formed staff and student fitness session group is proving to be popular.
71. Several subjects, particularly art and design and drama, include material that focuses students' attention on both United Kingdom cultures and those of the wider world. A very good example is the foundation course as it extends students' appreciation of other cultures through an integrated approach. Students' understanding of the French words for various religious customs is excellent. There is no contact with the local faith communities other than the Christian churches. The festivals of other religions do occasionally arise in assembly but there is no planned coverage of such events. With the exception of the foundation course there is a dearth of colourful material to demonstrate the joy and vitality that characterise such festivals. Overall provision for students' cultural development is satisfactory.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

72. In practically all respects the school cares for its students well. It successfully encourages good attendance and promotes fairness when dealing with behaviour. The large majority of students responds well to this. Everything possible is done to keep students in school and if they are excluded temporarily, it is never for more than a few days. Students' personal difficulties are addressed very sensitively. Academic needs are evaluated very carefully and individual progress is monitored and supported very well. It is only the state of repair and maintenance of lavatories (particularly for girls) that mars the school's otherwise evident care for students.
73. With the exception of Year 7, students have the same tutor and head of year throughout their school life. This certainly helps tutors to know their students really well and spot any problems quickly. The tutorial and achievement programme reviews provide more than just an opportunity for students to discuss their work, as any others concern can be raised. Heads of year and members of the senior management team effectively support class tutors and contribute well to the pastoral care for students.
74. The tutorial and achievement programme (just started at the time of the last inspection) is now well embedded and a real strength. It comprises several initiatives designed to recognise, support and celebrate the successes of all students. Subjects identify students of marked aptitude (SOMA) and lesser aptitude (SOLA) at the beginning of each year and provide them with appropriately different homework. The quality of these tasks varies between subjects and good practice is not shared enough. Students who are SOMA or SOLA in more than five subjects are given a teacher mentor with whom they have regular meetings. All students take part in two extended meetings with their tutors, to gauge progress and set short- and long-term targets. Students and parents speak highly of these meetings and also of the impressive student planners.
75. The school has developed a written policy for special educational needs and has organised most effective regular reviews of students' needs with parents and students involved. The handbook for special educational needs is now out of date so it does not highlight the most successful ways of supporting students with special educational needs, many of which were seen during the inspection.
76. The good structure provided by teachers is supplemented by other care staff. The school's reception staff deal cheerfully and sensitively with the gamut of students' daily practical needs. The school care officer makes visits to homes and hospitals as well as attending very well to students' emotional problems. Her work has recently been supplemented effectively by additional classroom assistants for students with particular social difficulties; this interesting approach fully supports the concept of keeping students in school. The school has many trained first aiders and medical matters are effectively and promptly addressed. Members of the senior management team pay much attention to students' welfare, both strategically and on an individual, practical basis.
77. The promotion of good behaviour is helped by a range of rewards and sanctions, but rests upon the responsible examples set by staff and teachers, the provision of interesting and challenging work, and the overall atmosphere of freedom, fairness and friendship. This is effective for the large majority. A few students find it difficult to adjust to, or abide by, the adult standards implied. The school's thoughtful anti-bullying policy treats bullying seriously. Each reported instance is investigated thoroughly with tutors, year heads, and usually parents being involved. No instances of bullying were observed during the inspection but a few students from different year groups did express concerns that cases were not always resolved completely. This may imply inconsistency of treatment, as parents believe, or alternatively, as the school maintains, that the response has been more effective for being subtle and low profile.

78. Procedures for promoting and monitoring attendance are good. The school sets annual targets for improvement. Effectiveness is demonstrated by the improvement over the last four years. Students and teachers use electronic 'swipe cards' for every lesson. This generates sophisticated computerised information for checking and statistical purposes. Absences and consistent lateness are followed up promptly, either by telephone or letter, or if necessary through the assistance of the educational social worker.
79. The school's arrangements for child protection are good and specialist agencies, such as social services, are consulted as appropriate. School lunches provide a healthy eating option. Minor health and safety matters, however, require attention. Safety, for example in science, design and technology and physical education is a top priority and considered carefully. However, the school does not have a health and safety policy and supervision, for example of hazardous substances, has been lacking. While electrical safety has been checked annually by a qualified electrician, comprehensive risk assessment and inspection of general facilities has not taken place. In particular the state of repair and maintenance of students' lavatories requires urgent attention. During the inspection a third had toilet seats missing and some were without doors, locks, paper or soap. Drying equipment was not always in place or functioning.
80. The school's procedures for assessing students' attainment are very effective and are based on a concise, practical and readable policy. In addition to detailed work in Years 7 to 9, GCSE results are analysed by group, gender and teacher. The school has a comprehensive database which is updated regularly. Parents and students praise the school marking policy. Although it is not always applied consistently, it motivates students to higher levels of attainment because it grades their work according to the standard each individual is expected to reach. In this way, students can assess how well they are doing.
81. The school uses its analysis of assessment results very well to consider whether any changes should be made to what is taught. An active group of teachers liaise well with the governors' curriculum committee. Governors make sure they are fully informed about local and national initiatives and how they relate to the school. The introduction of business education, GNVQ courses, the Derbyshire Peak Award and also the bilingual elements of the foundation course are good examples of a 'thinking school', a school where teaching methods and course content are always under review.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

82. Parents are generally pleased with the school. It has a steadily growing reputation and popularity, so it is regularly oversubscribed. Parents recognise that the school expects its students to work hard and achieve their best. They value the school's approachability and friendliness and appreciate the very good arrangements made for newcomers to the school. They particularly like the quality of the annual progress reports. They like the high levels of innovation and improvement set by management. All these positive points made were endorsed during the inspection.
83. Parents have some reservations regarding behaviour, particularly in the present Year 9. The school is aware of this and has divided the year into more classes and regrouped students in them; the inspection team consider that the school addresses behaviour problems well. A few parents feel they are not told early enough if problems arise about their child's progress. A larger percentage than that found in most schools approves of the arrangements for homework, while noticing some inconsistency in the regularity and helpfulness of marking.
84. Parents receive very good information. The prospectus and award-winning (Times Educational newspaper) governors' annual report are both well written and unusually

comprehensive. Most parents consider themselves well informed about school events through frequent newsletters. They are impressed by the information supplied in yellow folders on what is to be taught. Occasional meetings are held regarding the curriculum or other aspects of the school's activities. Parents can gauge the progress of their child from the planners and homework provided.

85. The school has consistently aimed for a triangular partnership between parents, students and itself, so it issues a comprehensive questionnaire to all parents every three years. The results are carefully considered, compared with the responses last time, areas for attention singled out, and the conclusions reported to parents. At an individual level parents are contacted whenever particular concerns arise, for instance in relation to attendance or behavioural features. The school's approach is very much geared to keeping all students in school, which depends crucially on the support of parents and family. Parents of students on the school's register of special educational need receive regular and good consultation regarding progress and targets for their children's individual education plans.
86. Most parents support their children's learning. The majority come to parents' evenings and the school takes care to follow up and communicate if they have not attended a meeting. School events and outside visits, for instance to sporting fixtures, are well supported by parents. The parent-teacher association is active. The overall effectiveness of the school's relationship with parents is good.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

87. As the school approaches the end of its first decade, governors, headteacher and all members of the school can be proud of what they have achieved. At the time of the last inspection only 35 per cent of students attained five grades A*-C but six years later 48 per cent did so and the gap between boys' and girls' performance has narrowed. It is possible to highlight some of the reasons for the improving standards, such as the tutorial and achievement programme and the interesting setting arrangements introduced into Year 9 last year, and suggest that the benefits of others, such as the bilingual programme and development of thinking skills through science, will raise standards further when they work their way through the system.
88. The headteacher was described as 'visionary' in the previous report and this is still the case. His continued concern, to question the status quo and then consider whether better alternatives exist, is based on a passionate desire to improve education for all students. The quality of the 'self improving school' reviews (completed for several departments), which the headteacher and members of the senior management team lead, is very high and still improving. The detailed advice given to departments and individual teachers is valuable and constructive. Combined with meticulous analysis of results and different groups, for example standards attained by bilingual compared with non-bilingual students, it is evident that the high quality of monitoring and self-review has contributed to the improving results.
89. The governing body works extremely well and supports the school with an effective blend of questioning and encouragement. It is astute, confident and perceptive and has become particularly effective since the last inspection. New governors are given an excellent pack of information to help them to get to grips with their roles. The chair and vice chair of the governing body regularly discuss issues and present helpful guidance to others. Governors bring a wide range of relevant expertise to their deliberations, for example accountancy skills to the finance committee.

90. Governors appreciate that the headteacher analyses the impact of initiatives carefully and know that this is essential if the school is to keep developing. They are quite clear about the direction that the school should take and believe it is the right time for initiatives, such as the bilingual project, to settle down and possibly expand. They are proud of what the headteacher has achieved and totally support his style of leadership. When members of the governing body spend a morning in school to visit lessons in one particular department, they are welcomed by teachers who appreciate their interest in gaining first-hand experience of what is going on. Governors do not meet their legal responsibility to provide a daily act of collective worship. Minor health and safety issues outstanding from a January 2000 report have not been rectified nor has a health and safety policy been agreed.
91. There are enough qualified teachers to teach effectively in all subjects except in religious education and music. In the foundation course, humanities and art and design non-specialists teach as well as their specialist colleagues. This is not true in religious education where a number of non-specialists are reluctant contributors. As well as the senior management team, all heads of department have observed lessons and some new staff have been encouraged to watch more experienced staff. A considerable amount of staff development goes on. These activities have played a major role in improving teaching standards. The school has already made good progress towards implementing performance management procedures. Administrative staff carry out their diverse tasks efficiently and there is good technical support in most areas. Special educational needs staff receive strong support from a sizeable team of assistants. The previous report recommended including non-teaching staff on various committees; whilst the school is happy for this to happen it has proved impractical.
92. The school is a complex assortment of old and more recent buildings; most parts are accessible to students with physical disabilities. With no playgrounds students use the all-weather pitches at lunch times. Attractive, open courtyards, surrounded by teaching rooms, were not used during the inspection; if they had been, some of the congestion outside the buildings could have been relieved. There are still too few seats outdoors – mentioned in the last report. The library is small for the number of students in the school.
93. The very good sports hall and further facilities have a positive effect on learning and standards in physical education. In contrast a lack of small rooms makes it difficult for students to practise music in groups. With no signs in the local area, it is difficult to find the school and once on-site it is not clear which door to enter. This lack of attention to detail is reflected in the state of many of the lavatories. Students notice whether the school goes out of its way to make the very best of the environment and evidence suggests that greater care could be employed and more pride taken.
94. Resources in general are good, especially for physical education. In mathematics graphic calculators are very well resourced and well used. Several departments have too few computers but the two main ICT rooms are now well equipped. The art and design rooms are too small for the development of ceramics and sculpture. Although space is limited, the library is very well organised by an experienced full-time librarian, with computers, reading and work areas. The librarian sells small equipment, for example pens and notebooks before school and at the end of the lunchhour. This helps many students to be well equipped for their lessons. The room set aside for students with special educational needs is well equipped with new computers and well used. So far the school has not identified programmes which will run on the new machines to help overcome specific learning problems and provide more varied approaches to learning. Individual students with special educational needs are provided with laptop computers if necessary.

95. The governing body have managed both income and expenditure very effectively over the past four years to provide the very best value for all students. The finance committee responds positively to audits and inspections and is in a strong position to improve the school further. The amount spent on each student has gone up and the benefit to students is clearly shown in the upward trend in examination performance, the quality of learning in most subjects and in the wider range of extra-curricular activities. After the last inspection a director of administration and finance was appointed. All of the recommendations in the last audit report have been speedily implemented.
96. Evaluation of how spending affects standards is carried out by audits of performance by departments and year groups. Aware of behaviour affecting performance in Year 9, the governors and senior management team introduced extra staffing so that classes could be smaller. The principle of best value is applied consistently. Amongst many successful initiatives for which specific funds have been provided are two that illustrate the school's determination to invest in people. The number of classrooms has increased and there has been significant investment in training (particularly the Computer Loan Scheme for teachers) so that the students can gain even greater benefit from computer growth in the future. Current provision for ICT is not as good as it should be, but the forward planning is good enough to almost guarantee that learning will improve, particularly in Years 8 and 9.
97. Major priorities are clearly shown in the plans for the future with good projections about income levels over the next three years. Allocation of funds and estimates for future spending are not transparently clear in either the school development plan or departmental ones. The school compares its spending with other schools and invites tenders to ensure best value in its financial management. The school therefore provides very good value for money.
98. In an important book on education myths published last year, which was edited by the headteacher, he described the evidence for fairness in a school as coming from 'every pore'. Support for students with special educational needs gives them maximum access to everything that happens; all gifted, talented and lower ability students are identified and given individual help, and additional staff have been taken on to work with students who are at risk of exclusion. A basic belief in the importance of fairness, equal opportunities and proper care is at the heart of the work of the school and it generates a good atmosphere. Students perhaps take for granted the many strong features of the school and do not appreciate that freedom, fairness and friendship would not permeate the atmosphere of the school so well if the headteacher, teachers and staff had not determined to make them living school aims.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

1 Raise standards in music and religious education by:

- increasing the number of specialist teachers (paragraph 91)
- changing the balance of the timetable allocation so that all students spend the same amount of time on music [and physical education] (paragraph 55)
- increasing the overall amount of time for music (paragraph 55)
- making sure that religious education is given greater emphasis within personal and social education (paragraph 55)
- rectifying the detailed points raised in the music and religious education sections of this report (paragraphs 201-209 & 219-223).

2 Develop provision for students' spiritual awareness by:

- improving religious education as described in the last line above
- planning assemblies more carefully and including more spiritual elements (paragraph 66)
- making all departments consider how their subjects can contribute to this (paragraph 67)

In addition to the two issues raised above, the following improvement points should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- Literacy and numeracy: persevere with implementing the emerging policy for literacy and speaking skills, and write one for numeracy. Share good practice so that they both have a high profile in all department plans and all teachers are aware of their importance (paragraphs 112,113, 123, 124).
- Deal with the state of repair and maintenance of the students' lavatories (paragraphs 79, 93).
- Record what students can do in information and communication technology and check that they all receive enough time using computers in Years 7 to 9. Check whether students who do not study GCSE information and communication technology or GNVQ courses use computers enough (paragraphs 185, 186).
- Introduce a health and safety policy, to be agreed by the governing body. Rectify the minor health and safety issues outstanding from the January 2000 review (paragraphs 79, 90).
- Respond to the fact that although incidents of bullying are taken very seriously by all the teachers, some students' perception is that they are not always dealt with effectively (paragraphs 33, 77).
- Make tutor time in the morning more interesting and worthwhile (paragraph 66).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	158
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	50

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2.5	25	35	32	5	0.5	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll

	Y7 to Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	897	N/A
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	149	N/A

Special educational needs

	Y7 to Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	47	N/A
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	398	N/A

English as an additional language

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

Student mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	18
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	11

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.0
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	76	99	175

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	40 (40)	62 (66)	55 (51)
	Girls	78 (65)	73 (59)	62 (44)
	Total	118 (105)	135 (125)	117 (95)
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	67 (60)	77 (72)	67 (54)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	31 (16)	53 (40)	30 (16)
	National	28 (28)	41 (38)	29 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	52 (48)	57 (57)	53 (59)
	Girls	75 (67)	76 (57)	64 (62)
	Total	127 (115)	133 (114)	117 (121)
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	73 (66)	76 (66)	67 (70)
	National	– (64)	– (64)	– (60)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	40 (33)	47 (37)	37 (35)
	National	– (31)	– (37)	– (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	80	74	154

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Number of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	33 (28)	74 (70)	74 (73)
	Girls	41 (39)	67 (66)	73 (67)
	Total	74 (67)	141 (136)	147 (140)
Percentage of students achieving	School	48.1 (45.8)	91.6 (93.2)	95 (96)

the standard specified	National	– (46.6)	– (90.9)	– (95.8)
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Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	38.5 (37.3)
	National	– (38.0)

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

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	1
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	893
Any other minority ethnic group	1

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	17	3
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 to Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	50
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 to Y11

Total number of education support staff	24
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Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	2,051,691
Total expenditure	1,960,589

Total aggregate hours worked per week	559
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Deployment of teachers: Y7 to Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 to Y11

Key Stage 3	23.2
Key Stage 4	21.8

Expenditure per student	2,353
Balance brought forward from previous year	8,317
Balance carried forward to next year	99,479

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	897
Number of questionnaires returned	278

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	31	57	7	3	2
My child is making good progress in school.	34	52	5	2	7
Behaviour in the school is good.	19	56	12	4	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	61	15	2	5
The teaching is good.	23	66	4	1	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	26	50	14	3	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	36	53	5	3	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	48	46	4	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	24	52	16	3	5
The school is well led and managed.	24	57	8	3	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	28	53	9	1	9
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	23	51	9	2	15

Many parents in Year 7 felt they could not answer several questions as the questionnaire was completed so near the beginning of term.

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

ENGLISH

99. Students enter the school with lower than average standards in all aspects of this subject. Up to 1999 results in the Year 9 national tests were close to the average at the expected level but below average at the higher levels and for points gained. These results were below those for schools with a similar uptake of free school meals. However, in 2000 results at both the expected level and in the overall points improved significantly; the percentage of students attaining the higher levels was almost double that of the previous year. In 1999 to 2000, Year 9 students, rather than teachers, chose which sets they wished to be in; clearly successful, this system has been extended into Year 10. Girls do much better than boys in the Year 9 tests, as they do nationally. English results are lower than those in mathematics, where boys' results are similar to girls'.
100. GCSE grades A*-C were below the average from 1997 to 1999 but in line with the results of similar schools. In 2000 however they improved, and 57 per cent of students attained grades A*-C. Nearly all students in English language, and all those entered for English literature (the great majority) attained grades A*-G. In both these subjects, although boys' results improved in 2000, girls still do much better than boys.
101. The work seen during the inspection shows that students learn well and make good progress and reach average standards at the end of Years 9 and 11. Most students speak clearly and reasonably fluently though not often expansively. A minority are quite softly spoken because they lack the confidence to speak out. Several lower attaining students have difficulty remembering to use standard English in formal speech. They are taught to read challenging texts and both boys and girls show insight into poetry and into characters in literature. When faced with unfamiliar text they try hard to work out the meaning from the context. This was evident in a Year 8 class where both boys and girls learnt to enjoy 'The Horses' by Ted Hughes; one student compared the poet's journey at dawn with his emerging respect for animals. Several boys explained puzzling phrases to the class but, when asked to write answers to questions, they often relied on their girl partner to do the writing.
102. Many students choose personal reading appropriate for their age though in a few classes several students did not have a current reading book. The teachers have improved their methods of teaching writing and many students now enjoy writing imaginative and often ingenious stories, diaries, reviews, letters and news reports. Some have an assured journalistic style, for example when interviewing witnesses to the fight in 'Romeo and Juliet'. Above average attainers in Year 8, though otherwise challenged, would be capable of some more demanding writing tasks. Some middle attainers in Year 9 have difficulty in including interesting detail in their writing.

103. A significant number of lower and middle attainers have poorly formed handwriting and poor presentation. Students with special educational needs make good progress. Through careful planning of lessons, specific targets for English and a high level of encouraging support from teachers and classroom assistants, they meet challenging tasks and learn to write appropriately for different purposes, including being persuasive. The one student with English as an additional language, who was in her first full week at the school and a beginner in English, had constant, kindly support and was making good progress.
104. Students in Years 10 and 11 continue to make good progress, particularly developing their speaking and listening skills, which are above average for their age. Very high standards were observed in the debating club, both in prepared and impromptu speeches, some contributed by Year 9 students. Teachers provide many opportunities for discussion in small groups so that students gain confidence in explaining their ideas. They discuss in a mature way with students skillfully chairing the groups.
105. Reading and writing at the end of Years 7 and 9 are in line with standards expected nationally. Boys and girls show insight into characters and ideas though they sometimes lack the technical knowledge to explain this. Many, including lower attainers, remember a reasonable amount of what they have read and they make useful notes. There are a number of examples of engaging writing, ranging from responses to the Year 10 half-day computer-simulated emergency, 'Hijack', to reflection on personal experiences and to imaginative writing arising from their study of literature.
106. There is still some poorly formed handwriting in Years 10 and 11. Students with special educational needs continue to make good progress because they try hard and gain confidence in the well structured lessons with firm, friendly support. They are prepared to tackle difficult material, enjoy reading aloud and have original ideas, for instance when questioning potential witnesses of the scenario at the end of 'Macbeth'.
107. Because the teachers usually establish good relationships most students behave well, do what they are asked and work sensibly in groups. Students are sometimes rather slow to settle at the start of a lesson if the lesson does not begin promptly and crisply. Some students in Year 9 and a few in Year 11 have some difficulty persevering. A number find writing a chore if they deem it unnecessary. Behaviour was a problem in Year 8 during the last inspection and during the last academic year, according to some parents. Overall, however, the recent initiative to allow Years 9 and 10 to choose which teaching set they would like to be in is working very well. Students gain confidence and learn well because they are challenged at their chosen level. When students show initiative, for instance in organizing some of the debating or designing a website on 'The Ancient Mariner', they are encouraged and supported by the department.
108. Teaching is good overall. All teaching was at least satisfactory; it was at least good in over one third of lessons and very good in a quarter. Teachers constantly pool their ideas in order to amass imaginative tasks that will motivate the students. For example in Years 9 and 10 classes looked at examples of horror stories, of autobiography and of persuasive writing to identify successful features that they could incorporate into their own work.
109. Teachers are also versatile as more than half the department teach drama too. They arrange speaking and reading events, and encourage students to enter local and national celebrations of writing where there have been some notable successes. A significant strength of the teaching, in addition to the deliberate focus on vocabulary, is the thorough and consistent assessment of students' work, which praises what they have done well and gives them very specific targets for improvement. This encourages students to assess themselves accurately and take responsibility for their own learning.

110. Teachers are competent users of most aspects of ICT needed for English. Until September 2000, however, computers have been used less than is desirable, especially in Years 10 and 11. Other minor weaknesses, seen in only a few lessons, are when the pace falters at the start or within the lesson, when the teacher echoes too many answers from students or when the process of generating ideas is more laborious than it need be and students lose interest. Writing full answers to comprehension questions is not replaced often enough by accumulating ideas orally in groups (with a strict time limit) and then making brief notes as preparation for the final product. On rare occasions teachers do not always remember that the meaning of a piece of literature is usually more important than the stylistic devices by which it is expressed. Although opportunities for developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are manifold in English, and often developed well, the department does not develop every chance as it has not consciously planned how to make the most of them.
111. The department is very well managed. The team are mutually supportive and have embraced initiatives, such as students opting for teaching sets or the foundation course and bilingual programmes in Year 7. The department has thoroughly assessed the impact of these as well as the results in the Year 9 national tests and in GCSE and has modified its teaching accordingly. Attention to increasing the challenge of work for Year 8, to teaching students to write so as to interest their readers and to improving boys' attainment, is helping to raise standards.

The contributions made by other subjects of the curriculum to students' competence in speaking, listening, reading and writing.

112. By the end of Year 9, students' skills in speaking, listening and literacy are average for their age. The school has implemented a strategy for all subjects to develop these skills (and a policy will be presented to the governors soon). At present several subjects do develop aspects of language deliberately but in others some useful opportunities are lost, with the result that students are not given the chance to improve their command of language as much as they might within each subject. Some subjects promote vocabulary that is specific to their topics. There are a few chances for students to discuss, debate, take on a role and give formal presentations in class, especially in the foundation course and in humanities, but often speaking is limited to answering teachers' questions.
113. In music, the foundation course and modern foreign languages students are taught to listen acutely. Geography and history are the most active in promoting speaking, reading and writing for different purposes, including longer pieces of writing. The librarian is knowledgeable and encourages students to read books and to access text on the Internet. In religious education particularly, students do not read enough. Untidy handwriting and presentation was particularly noted in science and modern foreign languages but there are a number of students in the school of all levels of attainment who have poorly formed handwriting and disorganised exercise books.

MATHEMATICS

114. Students' attainment on entry is slightly below the average. However standards reached in the Year 9 national tests at both levels are above the average points score and improving, and well above average compared to schools with a similar uptake of free school meals. An impressive 53 per cent of students reached the higher levels in 2000 (mathematics results were better than in English or science).
115. GCSE results have also improved since the last inspection. In 1997 the results were well below average for both A*-C and A*-G grades. However in 1999, A*-C and A*-G grades

were in line with the average and well above compared to similar schools; they were a little lower in 2000. Boys did slightly better than girls in 2000. The mathematics department enters about 30 students for GCSE mathematics at the end of Year 10 (a year early). In 2000, all these students attained grades A*-C. This group will continue their studies and sit GCSE statistics next year. In 1999, 28 students took this examination and 83 per cent attained grades A*-C; results were even better in 2000.

116. Present standards at the end of Years 7 and 9 are above average and sometimes very high. Higher attaining students in Year 9 deal confidently with linear equations using algebraic fractions and their grasp of inverse operations is very secure. Work from previous years shows evidence of high standards in trigonometry. Lower attaining students in Year 8 have an impressive knowledge of certain basic skills and they respond well to questions such as 'what is 237 to the nearest hundred, what is 9×6 or what is 125 minus 27'? They answer all these questions in the pressurised whole-class aural mathematics sessions using 'game-loop' cards, where accurate answers and reaction time are both important for success.
117. All students make good progress and achieve well. High attaining students in Year 11 deal efficiently with cumulative frequency curves and the notion of using the curve to interpret data. Of particular merit is the teachers' insistence on comprehensive note-taking so that students' books are useful for revision in the future. These books contain previous work of a high standard, including inequalities, quadratic equations using a variety of solution methods, and trigonometry to an exceptional level. The quality and comprehensive nature of the work in the folders of students with statements of special educational needs is good, the levels and range of mathematics studied covers a wide spectrum and is not restricted to number work.
118. The quality of the teaching overall is good so that learning was at least good in well over one third of lessons observed. Teaching was good in half the lessons seen. Where teaching was only satisfactory (and in the one unsatisfactory lesson) it was characterised by an over-mechanistic or rather monotonous approach. However at its best the style displayed, particularly in Years 7 to 9, was vibrant and spontaneous. In a Year 9 lesson the teacher sensitively challenged students' knowledge, initiated reaction and encouraged them all to participate. The teacher gave supportive replies to students' explanations such as 'I like your approach', 'That's good, even excellent', or 'Fantastic response'. Preliminary work was referred to which encouraged independent thought and it provided the link with the concepts under consideration. Expectations were high and students were made to feel that they could all understand the work. The mathematics flowed from these strategies.
119. In another lesson where teaching and learning was very good, different strategies, defined by specific units of time within the 75 minute lesson, were used expertly. The lesson began with an interestingly delivered oral test followed by the main aspect which was substitution in algebra and concluded with a game organised in groups relating to algebra. All this was helped by an easy but controlled classroom style with a measured degree of open and collaborative discussion.
120. In a Year 10 lesson learning was powerful as students were, unusually, challenged to play the teacher at a game of probability dice. The game was not entirely unbiased, the teacher invariably winning, but it clearly emphasised in a refreshing manner some of the issues involved in probability. Pace and interest is a vital essence of learning for this class who will take the GCSE at the end of Year 10. When learning was unsatisfactory in a small minority of lessons, teachers used a more orthodox and less imaginative approach.
121. The majority of students are purposeful, interested and put much effort into lessons. A few require skilful handling with their tendency for inattentiveness, idle chat, lethargy and inappropriate comments. In a Year 10 class, several boys attempted to provoke disorder

but this was dealt with by gently deflecting the issue rather than direct confrontation, so progress continued.

122. Leadership of the department is very good; enthusiasm for students' education is very evident and attention to administrative details excellent. The assessment and record-keeping is exceptionally rigorous and has contributed to the rising standards. Resources are carefully organised for all different levels of attainment; they are particularly good for investigation work (though the profile of this could be raised) and those with special educational needs. Of particular merit is the increasing use of graphical calculators; a well-written guidance manual supports this initiative. However, with only five computers, the department cannot provide all the ICT it wants to and as required by the National Curriculum. Lessons without exception, contain a separate element of aural work. This provides a fine starting point for further development, particularly complying with the future National Numeracy Strategy. Overall, the department has made very significant progress in raising standards since the last inspection and it is now very well poised to continue this commendable trend.

The contributions made by other subjects of the curriculum to students' competence in numeracy.

123. In history, by analysing census data students appreciate the value and danger of interpreting statistics and in Years 10 and 11 they draw, but do not interpret, graphs. In physical education students use counting measuring and recording; however these skills are not emphasised as a departmental policy. In GCSE physical education, students use graphs, bar charts and percentages well when recording results. Spreadsheets are used effectively in ICT lessons, especially for GCSE coursework. In art and design, discussions about ratio and proportion are valuable. In child development very simple bar charts are rarely interpreted; doing this would improve the quality of students' coursework.
124. In design and technology, Year 10 and 11 students work from drawings using physical quantities and units at a reasonable level. In addition, they analyse data from surveys related to customer preferences for products such as table lamps and cosmetics. In science, where mathematical skills are taught as particular problems become evident, high attaining Year 11 students used formulae to calculate and measurements for frequencies. Lower attaining Year 11 students manipulate formulae with assistance and Year 9 students calculate speed using correct units. Where graphs were in evidence, axes were not fully labelled. In Year 7 they have many opportunities to develop key skills in measuring and understanding mass and weight. Whilst much good work is happening, all teachers need to be aware of how much they can contribute to the development of numeracy skills, so that they develop them methodically and in the style promoted by the mathematics department.

SCIENCE

125. Since the last inspection the percentage of students reaching the expected level in Year 9 national tests has been close to the average. Boys' and girls' results were similar and standards were broadly in line with those of schools with a similar uptake of free school meals. Results for 2000 show considerable improvement at both the expected and higher levels. Teacher assessments in both 1999 and 2000 were overly generous and did not match actual test scores, particularly at the higher levels. 1999 results were higher in science than in English and below those achieved in mathematics but in 2000 performance in science was closer to that in mathematics.
126. In GCSE, the percentage of students attaining A*-C grades in the double science award was below average in 1999; a decline in standards since the previous year. Girls' results

had improved to be in line with the average for girls and higher than the boys' results, which had declined to below the average for boys. In 2000 boys made a notable improvement by achieving 51 per cent A*-C grades; girls' results were similar to the previous year. A higher percentage of students achieved A*-C grades and A* grades.

127. Inspection evidence is that current attainment in all years is average. How well students increase their knowledge and understanding is linked directly to the quality of teaching but overall they make good progress and achieve well. For instance, progress in learning about density was quick in a Year 7 lesson because the teacher had chosen several different activities to explain the idea. Using new apparatus which really interested them, students constantly talked about their task to each other and this also encouraged their learning. Where teaching explicitly encourages high standards, high attaining students in Year 9 accurately represent what is happening as green plants make sugar in daylight as a chemical equation. Low attainers learn how to describe this process as a word equation because they are well supported by their teacher to understand what happens.
128. In Year 10, higher attaining students deepen their knowledge about chemical reactions because of the several opportunities they are given to calculate and draw electronic structures of various elements. In a lower set in Year 10, they are given a chance to discover ideas about pressures in liquids for themselves. They are especially interested in watching whether or not a 'volunteer' can successfully prevent water flowing from a cylinder with several spouts! This sharpens their observations about how and why water spurts out of each spout differently.
129. Students in Year 11 have good knowledge about electrical circuits, current and resistance because they are left in no doubt that their teacher expects them to understand the flow of electrical charge. At the same time, they are complimented about their efforts within a jovial working atmosphere, consequently progress in learning is good. Students with special educational needs make good progress because teachers know them well and provide effective support. For example, they quickly grasped basic ideas in a lesson about digestion because their teacher adjusted tasks to reduce writing.
130. Students develop their number skills as an integral part of learning science but the rate of development notably depends upon whether teachers plan that students will practise calculations and use formulae. After completing several examples, higher attainers in Year 11 correctly calculate the velocity of successive waves in a 'wavetrain'. They use chemical symbols (for example the formation of limestone) while lower attaining students correctly write the equation in words because they understand the chemical reaction. Examination of students' work shows inconsistencies in the standard of graph work; where teachers have high expectations graphs are neatly presented and correctly labelled.
131. Several good examples of students using scientific vocabulary were seen; teachers encouraged the development of technical language and referred to displays of key words. On the other hand, some written work shows limited use of technical words in answers and explanations, particularly in brief conclusions, or that students may recognise a technical word but not understand its meaning. Standards of handwriting and presentation are variable and do not always match expected standards, particularly for higher attainers, although much work is covered in all years. As ICT is only currently being integrated into schemes, computers are not used as often as they could be. They are used effectively for graph plotting and using sensors, when measuring the rate of chemical reactions and exploring insulating properties of materials for instance.
132. All students continue to have good opportunities to do practical work, mentioned in the previous report. They learn to use an increasing range of apparatus and materials, and by the end of Year 9 they competently carry out experiments with understanding of fair tests.

Through the Cognitive Acceleration in Science Project (CASE), Year 8 students deepen their understanding of scientific method as, for example, they deal with a matrix of variables during an investigation about rusting.

133. At the end of Year 11, the highest attaining students identify sources of error and extend their conclusions from closer evaluation of results. Others do this with support and coursework investigations illustrate that they find it difficult to apply their knowledge of science ideas and research in their evaluations. Analysis of work shows that highest attainers record investigations to a good standard and make predictions firmly based on scientific knowledge learnt in lessons. A Year 11 student, for example, explained clearly and in detail the relationship between kinetic theory of particle movement and changes in the rate of a chemical reaction.
134. Written work also shows that the majority of students in all years could increase the sophistication of observations, make deeper analysis of results in searching for patterns and raise the standard of evaluations in classwork. Opportunities are also missed for them to plan class experiments; too often a method recalls what has already been done and is written as a recipe. Students enjoy practical work, they listen carefully to each other as they explore different resistance in electrical circuits, cheerfully manage a leaky potometer in learning about transpiration in plants and so increase their knowledge and understanding.
135. In almost two thirds of lessons teaching was at least good. It was satisfactory in the rest, apart from one, and very good in three lessons. It was particularly effective in Years 10 and 11. Learning and progress mirror the quality of teaching. With good quality technician support, practical activities are safely planned so students develop their skills well. Year 7 students very carefully managed to use a Bunsen burner for the first time and older students sorted out their investigations about insulation sensibly.
136. In the majority of lessons teachers are confident in their subject knowledge, they share the lesson's objectives with students so that they clearly understand what is expected of them, and swiftly involve students in work that interests them. They teach with confidence and humour and encourage learning with happy banter, for example when students are selected to explain results to their classmates. When students like what they are doing they keep up a brisk pace throughout the lesson. With the exception of the highest attainers, who are not always given enough rigorously challenging work – a weakness mentioned in the previous report – teachers have high expectations of effort, behaviour and attainment.
137. When teaching was unsatisfactory (or just satisfactory) plans were too focused on the organisation of the activity rather than centring upon what students must learn. Here opportunities for them to explore their own ideas were constrained by narrow teaching styles. Progress slowed down when activities did not become progressively challenging in lengthy lessons, lessons did not begin in ways that captured students' imaginations or not enough time was left at the end for thinking about what had been learnt. Marking of homework, which is occasionally imaginative, is done regularly but only the best states clearly how well students are progressing and thoroughly checks that comments are acted upon by students.
138. Recently the science department was reviewed as part of the 'self improving school' programme. Improvement since the last inspection has been good and leadership of the department is sound. Different systems have been successfully developed and rewarded by notable results. Efficient work and excellent support is provided by two highly valued technicians whose work greatly contributes to the quality of science education. In seeking improvement, further work on widening teaching methods, monitoring teaching and

learning, scrutinising books regularly and sharing good practice, needs to be implemented swiftly.

ART AND DESIGN

139. Most students enter the school with limited skills in art and design. After three years the majority reach, and a small minority exceed, the standard of work expected. This represents good progress and achievement is good in Years 7 to 9.
140. In 1999, results in GCSE grades A*-C were well above average for all students and the percentage who gained A* and A grades was much higher than the national figure. Students do much better in art and design than in most of their other GCSE examinations. Because of the small number of entries for GCSE, comparisons between boys and girls and the national picture is not possible. Since the last inspection standards have improved consistently and since 1998 results have moved well ahead of the national average for A*-C grades. The 2000 GCSE results maintained this upward trend.
141. The highest standards are attained in two-dimensional work such as drawing, painting and collage. Most students handle pencil and chalk skilfully so their drawings are confident and bold. They manipulate line, tone, pattern and texture imaginatively to produce lively compositions and have a good knowledge of colour. At the end of Year 9, using only basic techniques with clay, fewer students reach as high a standard in three-dimensional work such as ceramics and sculpture. Teachers have the expertise to raise standards here but the two art and design rooms, only just adequate for two-dimensional activities, do not provide enough scope for a breadth of three-dimensional work.
142. Teaching, learning and progress are good in three-quarters of lessons seen and very good in a quarter. Teachers have good expertise and have developed a detailed, carefully planned and sensibly co-ordinated programme of work for all students to follow. It is particularly successful in Years 7 and 8 as students master the fundamental principles for drawing and using colour and learn well about art and artists. The projects through which they do this are challenging and stimulating; for example, a study of Aboriginal imagery develops a better understanding of pattern, colour and using paints.
143. In Year 7 students are encouraged to use art vocabulary. They have the chance to write imaginatively about strange creatures for example, which helps them to clarify their visual ideas. However, they write less in Year 9 so opportunities for improving literacy and numeracy are not as good as they ought to be. Recent improvements in the curriculum mean standards in students' knowledge of art and artists are beginning to rise; by Year 8, students confidently recognise Da Vinci's work and higher attaining students correctly attribute a print as the work of Warhol.
144. By the time they take GCSE, students have progressed well and attain above average standards in their practical work through the skilful and creative ways in which they use materials. They have extended their mastery of line and tone so their drawings are good, for example their studies of Chinese masks. They generate many good ideas through imaginative experimentation with colour, texture and pattern.
145. Students seldom draw references from books, or research on their own the diversity of art forms to support their ideas and work. This form of enquiry is not promoted as an essential dimension of refining and modifying ideas. Students' sketchbooks, a rich repository of their wide experimentation with ideas, contain limited study of art and artists so their knowledge lacks depth. Teachers have addressed this and now discuss art and artists effectively. Students do not use computers enough for research or for creating imagery, although as

access to computers is getting better and because teachers' skills are good, standards in this respect should improve.

146. In one Year 9 lesson observed, the teacher's presentation about artists and art movements was too wide-ranging and disparate to match the essence of the lesson. Students lost interest and their pace of learning slowed down. In other lessons the teacher expanded knowledge in an interesting and clear manner that led students to genuine reflection. The way ideas on the origins and meanings of ethnic masks were shared with Year 11 students is a particularly good example. Teachers generate many very useful visual resources to illustrate key principles. A good example is the professionally produced sequence of portrait images with increasing tonal contrasts. Year 8 students for example, quickly saw how tonal values are so effective in making good drawings and then began experimenting to achieve that effect in their work. In the same respect, Year 10 and 11 students are given a wealth of exemplars that help them know what is required for GCSE and the standards of work for different grades; students are very competent to assess the quality of their own work.
147. Teachers set valuable homework and evaluate work accurately; their written comments are considered, giving each student praise or criticism when deserved. Teachers have developed positive relationships with students and manage them well, which contributes significantly to most students enjoying art and design and being keen to succeed. The issues for development in the previous inspection have been addressed well and this has led to significant improvements, especially in the higher standard of students' practical work and better quality of teaching. The subject is led well and the strong team spirit generated between the art and design teachers has contributed to improvements in the subject.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

148. Evidence seen during the inspection shows that overall standards are below average, particularly in Years 7 to 9. In some areas of design and technology, for example food, textiles and electronic products, GCSE results, although fluctuating, have improved since the last inspection. Results tend to be lower than other subjects in the school, apart from those for child development, which are consistently above the national average. During the inspection standards were highest in textiles. Present Year 10 standards are average as, following a school review, the department is addressing weaknesses in teaching and planning. However, too few students achieve high standards, although lower attaining students do well.
149. By the end of Year 9, students studying textiles combine knowledge from art and design about mixing colours with good stitching and accurately transfer their design shapes onto fabric. Most students produce good quality fabric decoration and some consider different design ideas well, work from their own drawings and describe how to evaluate products such as aprons or beanbags by considering factors such as shape, colour and size. However, when making items students do not refer to their own annotated diagrams enough, although much good practice was seen in textiles. In electronics they draw satisfactory diagrams of simple circuits involving switches and sensors.
150. When preparing to make storage boxes, many students cannot clearly explain why they are making them nor what they will be used for. Year 9 students make print blocks accurately and are able to explain what they are doing but some make too many mistakes in their written work. Students make very good cakes and they have clear ideas about the importance of taste and appearance but they do not modify recipes themselves often enough. In all areas of design they lack confidence when asked to explain orally or in writing why one design is preferable to another.

151. Learning is good (in almost half the lessons seen) when teachers make sure that students have acquired the skills and knowledge they need before they start to plan or make anything, and guide them to effectively relate the product to the customer's needs. In Year 10 for example, students confidently drew free-hand sketches of design ideas about leisure wear and annotated them to help them make decisions about choice of materials and manufacturing methods. Students in Year 10 also have good skills in handling food and detect unhygienic procedures in case studies about food poisoning using specialist terms such as bacterium and incubation period. In a few lessons where teachers explain design tasks incorporating their understanding of science and commercial procedures, learning is often creative. For example, evaluating products such as lipsticks and deodorants and considering customer preferences, helped students to distinguish between essential and luxury products.
152. Year 10 students are now using models to make sure that their designs can actually be made, but many do not fully appreciate that a compromise is often necessary when a product is being designed. Occasionally, students do not produce detailed working schedules with realistic deadlines, so they work more slowly and less thoughtfully than they should to get the best results. Year 11 folders show satisfactory use of word processing to produce questionnaires to identify customers' requirements and of the Internet to find out about products. Some use spreadsheets to display and analyse the results of their investigations. Computer-aided design is soundly used to improve product quality, for example of fast food advertisements and packaging. In child development, students effectively apply their knowledge of how children learn to design play products, such as colouring books. Learning is good as the teacher discusses potentially embarrassing topics with considerable expertise and sensitivity so that all students contribute to discussions.
153. Teaching and learning were satisfactory in all but two lessons seen and good in almost one half. Learning and achievement are better in Years 10 and 11 but all students work safely; a high priority in all the rooms. The most effective teaching helped students to make progress independently and with confidence. For example by checking definitions, so that students could quickly extract information from text and respond confidently to questions, or by giving good demonstrations so that students mastered the skills well and were surprised by their own achievements. Good teaching also focused well on the essential links between design and making and what the customer wants. Students following the child development course benefit considerably from several well-organised outings, for example to local shops to evaluate choice and cost or to a local nursery.
154. In the few less successful lessons, the teacher talked at the class rather than with the class and did it for too long. Sometimes the task set was not really new, so that students repeated work, or it was not well explained so they sat waiting for instructions with no idea what to do next. On a few occasions the pace was too slow so there was an unsatisfactory gap between what was planned and what was achieved.
155. In about half of the lessons seen students responded well and achievement was good. Teaching in these lessons had the following characteristics: firmness coupled with a good sense of humour; work which students could see was relevant; regular feedback which left them in no doubt about how well they were doing and opportunities for them to use previously acquired skills. Less successful teaching was characterised by weak planning, so the sequence of things to be done was changed several times during the lesson or was unclear to students and an absence of things to do for those who finished quickly and accurately.

156. There is much expertise in this department, which is soundly led and recent changes have addressed underachievement by students and how the department should develop, although plans lack costing and completion dates. Improvements in teaching, resulting from a 'self improving school' review, are having a good effect but they have not been in place long enough to raise overall standards. Since the last inspection the department has made reasonable progress in designing but much remains to be done. It is already good at 'making', although too few good quality products are used as exemplars in lessons or displayed around the school. Whilst the targets set in the new plans are challenging, they are not yet used as a basis for good lesson planning in which clear objectives are matched with best methods and appropriate assessment techniques.
157. Teachers assess students' work but do not use this knowledge to set new and higher targets. Too often work is not completed; students were seen to get away with leaving work unfinished in some lessons. The storage of timber and project work is currently unsatisfactory and some equipment, for example soldering irons, computers and peripherals need to be updated. These issues, plus linking up more with industry and commerce, need to be addressed with some urgency.

DRAMA

158. In Years 7 to 9 students make good progress and reach a standard appropriate for their age when devising scenes in small groups and using drama techniques such as freeze-frame, mime and thought-tracking to express their ideas. Inspired by their teachers to respond to such topics as bullying and homelessness, they readily think up situations and create clear, spontaneous dialogue. Students currently in Year 9 enjoyed learning to operate some sound and lighting in Year 8. In Years 7 to 9 students do not continue to concentrate well on the roles they are developing if teachers allow them longer than they need for this work.
159. The GCSE results in drama over the past two years have improved to being well above average for grades A*-C, with 20 per cent gaining A* and A grades. In 1999 students did better in drama than in almost all their other subjects. About 25 students take the GCSE each year and all attain grades A*-G. The group who were so successful in 2000 had benefited, not only from stimulating teaching, but also from excellent opportunities to perform at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and at a drama festival in Lithuania. Their film version of 'About Face', the story of a girl coping with a schizophrenic mother, is very sensitively acted.
160. Sensitive responses were also evident in Year 10 where groups were enacting stanzas of Roger McGough's poem 'The Identification' about a boy killed in an explosion. Students in Years 10 and 11 make very good progress, particularly using their imagination and a good range of drama conventions. They attain high standards. They communicate effectively with body language and facial expression and acquire a good sense of timing, with some telling use of pauses. Some speak expressively but not all enunciate clearly or project their voices.
161. Having been taught from the start of Year 10 to keep useful notes, which have been regularly marked, students write clearly and honestly and at some length on how they create their drama. They understand a range of technical terms and show some understanding of contrast, tension and effective sets. Higher attainers tend to tell the story of what they have done rather than reflecting critically on their own performances (to gain the highest grades in their writing as well as performance). In all years, students with special educational needs make good progress: because teachers and support staff help them to feel they can achieve; they gain confidence and usually do as well as the rest of the class.

162. All the drama classes have new teachers this year. Half the teaching seen was very good, a quarter was good and a quarter satisfactory. In the best lessons teachers stimulated students to think deeply in their groups, for instance about the individuals within a stereotyped group of aggressors; they were thus also developing students' spiritual, moral and social awareness. Teachers themselves have good drama skills which the students enjoy, as in a lesson where they questioned the teacher who acted as the owner of a house with a mystery. Teachers usually began and ended the lessons in a calm manner and established clear routines.
163. Minor weaknesses in the teaching were when tasks were too open-ended and the class had longer than needed for preparing so that students became restless and silly. Not all teachers encourage students in Years 7 to 9 to evaluate their own and other people's work as much as would be useful. At the time of the inspection half of the English department shared the teaching with a deputy headteacher who was most effectively advising the rest of the team. Nevertheless, the school recognises that the current staffing should not be a long-term solution and intends to appoint a new full-time head of drama as soon as possible.

FOUNDATION COURSE (HALF THE YEAR TAUGHT BILINGUAL IN FRENCH)

The foundation course, which takes up half the week in Year 7, offers an integrated approach to the teaching of personal and social education (which includes religious education), geography, history, ICT and English.

164. Launched in 1991, the foundation course is a vital element of the curriculum in Year 7. It was designed to ease the transition from primary to secondary school. Teachers involved in the planning and teaching of the course (who are also tutors to the classes they teach) spend much time discussing the content with primary school colleagues and they attempt, very successfully, to ensure that students new to the school see the links between the foundation course and the primary schools they have just left. Moreover teachers, well supported by the headteacher, evaluate the effects of the course on how students learn and make progress and, when needed, they modify elements in order to provide more rigour and also to prepare students more effectively for Year 8 and beyond.
165. Two years ago the school extended the foundation course by deciding to teach it in French to some groups. This initiative, which has been fully evaluated, is very popular among parents and students and is now a permanent feature. Spanish is to be introduced next year. The bilingual elements of the foundation course, delivered now to four of the Year 7 classes, are most effective in improving awareness of Europe in general, they contribute to the development of literacy and because of the emphasis on listening and speaking, serve to improve students' concentration on the tasks in hand. Standards are at least average in all the subjects delivered through this course (and above average in French for those taught in this language) and evidence suggests it also leads to an improvement in general thinking skills.
166. Because of the high quality of teaching in the foundation course, Year 7 students benefit from a wide variety of opportunities and make good progress overall. Teaching is always at least good and in over half of lessons it is very good or excellent. Teachers insist on high standards of industry and maintain a lively pace to the lessons. Students are generally fascinated by the subject matter and are motivated to succeed because teachers have high expectations. Teachers use humour very effectively and they also make sure that their questioning techniques challenge their students realistically. As one female student said, 'I sometimes find the lessons hard, but I really enjoy them and the teacher is very kind. I am looking forward to Year 8 because I now really think I will do well if I work hard'.

167. The teachers' excellent understanding of the demands of this course is evident in the high quality materials they prepare; students of differing attainment levels are offered a variety of worksheets which effectively match their learning needs. Furthermore, the course considers social and moral issues as part of the personal and social education element – the documents in French on racism are particularly imaginative and thought-provoking.
168. The foundation course is a major strength of the school and is one of the reasons why new students are able to settle down quickly and benefit almost immediately from the rigour and challenge of secondary education. It not only helps students to make links with the topics covered and skills introduced in their primary schools, but goes further by encouraging them to recognise that there are links between all subjects and that skills learned in one area can often be used in another. The team of teachers responsible for the planning and delivery of the foundation course are to be commended for their industry, for their teaching skill and also for the commitment they display to the well-being, both academic and social, of the students in their care.

HUMANITIES YEARS 8 AND 9

An integrated humanities course follows on from the Year 7 foundation course. During the inspection the content of Year 9 lessons was entirely historical, while in Year 8 both history and geography were being studied.

169. By Year 9 standards are average for the majority of students, with a small minority below and a larger minority above. Most students make good progress acquiring historical and geographic skills and using them well. Year 8 students make thoughtful points on urban and rural settlements in France and can describe clearly the human and physical features of locations from maps and photographs. Year 9 students understand production, growth and investment factors when studying the life of Richard Arkwright and used technical terms such as 'patent' and 'copyright' appropriately. Written work is of a good standard, although about one fifth of students have difficulty with any task that requires lengthy passages of writing. Encouraged by their teachers' careful attention to the development of reading and writing skills, the written work of many students considerably improves during Years 8 and 9.
170. Teaching in the humanities course is always satisfactory; it was good in half the lessons observed. All teachers have good subject knowledge and those teaching outside their area of specialisation are supported by the excellent teamwork and training provided within the humanities department. Skilful questioning elicits good responses from all students. Time management and classroom control are good with appropriate allocation of time to different activities providing the stimulus arising from a range of activities and a calm atmosphere for learning. These qualities were apparent in a Year 8 lesson in which students worked collaboratively in small groups, preparing presentations on changes in French village life. The way in which teachers encourage this type of independent learning is a feature of many lessons and is much appreciated by the students, who respond positively.
171. Teachers guide students to use a range of resources, including textbooks, worksheets, photographs and video recordings, most effectively – this has a positive effect on learning. There was particularly effective use of the video recorder during a lesson on the importance of Richard Arkwright. In the few lessons where the quality of teaching is satisfactory rather than good, there is lax time management, a relatively slow pace and a failure to match tasks to the needs of individual students. In most cases though, teachers know exactly what sort of work to provide for higher and lower attaining students. Students' behaviour is frequently good or very good as they respond well to challenges and show

genuine support for each other, as when listening attentively to their classmates' presentations. Many students show their enthusiasm for humanities by the way they search, outside classes, for sources such as the Internet, for their enquiry work.

172. Organisation and leadership of the humanities course is good and effective. The course is well planned to meet the requirements of National Curriculum history and geography and it builds on, and develops well, the work covered in Year 7. The structure of the topics covered in Years 8 and 9 has been reviewed and strengthened since the last inspection, so that continuity from Year 7 is now strong and students are well-prepared to start GCSE courses in geography or history.

GCSE GEOGRAPHY

173. In the 1999 GCSE examinations almost 80 per cent of students, and in 2000 over 80 per cent, attained grades A* to C. This is well above the national average. Results have improved significantly since the previous inspection, largely due to teachers matching tasks to the individual needs of students much more closely and to greater attention being given to examination requirements than was the case before. Girls outperform boys in most years, although generally by a narrower margin than that seen nationally.
174. Standards and achievement seen in Years 10 and 11 are above average. Most students produce good quality coursework which includes good descriptive writing and testing of hypotheses. Presentation is helped by the use of computers for word processing and drawing graphs. However, students do not use correlation techniques to analyse the data they collect and they do not interpret the graphs they draw.
175. Most students make accurate notes and have a good appreciation of human issues, such as the difficulties experienced by women in less developed countries. In a Year 10 lesson on this topic and in a Year 11 lesson on weather, students gave carefully researched presentations, often using sophisticated technical vocabulary. Students extract relevant information from a variety of sources to produce clear notes and read aloud fluently and with understanding from detailed texts. Numeracy skills, normally well developed among geography students, are relatively undeveloped at this school. Students with special educational needs make good progress and enjoy this subject.
176. Teaching and learning are very good in two-thirds of lessons and good in the rest. Teachers defuse potentially unco-operative behaviour tactfully and with humour so that learning proceeds in a good atmosphere. Teachers provide an interesting variety of tasks in lessons and allocate the right amount of time to each one. They provide content that is accurate and which reflects current information, as in Year 10 lessons on less developed countries and Year 11 lessons on recent weather patterns in the United Kingdom. The frequent opportunities for students to carry out independent research and make presentations contributes to their enthusiasm for this subject. Most students can recall previous work because teachers regularly review the content of recent lessons. Students with weak writing skills make good progress because they receive effective guidance to use writing frames and other aids.
177. The subject, which is part of the humanities department, is managed effectively. The key issues raised by the previous inspection have been met fully, resulting in a marked improvement in standards. There are few opportunities for students to use computers and a lack of teaching of more sophisticated statistical methods for data analysis.

GCSE HISTORY

178. GCSE results have been above average for four years and in 2000 69 per cent of students gained grades A*-C, boys doing slightly better than girls. Work seen during the inspection was of a similar standard. Teachers introduce their students to a wide variety of source material and students are thus very well aware of the value and relevance of history. The positive and industrious atmosphere generated by teachers in the classroom is such that students are confident to seek help when they are unsure and they also ask quite perceptive questions. They use the language of history, 'gothic' and 'symbolism' for example, accurately and in context; teachers encourage the use of the correct historical words. They also guide students to think of themselves as historians and students are now becoming better at making links between the past and the present. Some contributions which students made in Year 11 lessons would not have been out of place in a sixth-form class.
179. The quality of teaching is a major strength of the department and is characterised by pace and rigour yet great sensitivity. Teaching was very good in two lessons and excellent in one. Teachers' use of very challenging questions, asking for the historical significance of comments made by students for example, leads to students being able to refine their ideas and in some cases change them completely when they become aware of new evidence. Because teachers display respect for students and use humour very effectively to interest and to motivate, those who study history enjoy the cut and thrust of historical debate and are becoming more confident in expressing their own views. The breathtaking pace of some lessons also instils confidence; students are proud when they are able to make progress so quickly. It is not surprising that students learn very well and achieve commendable standards.
180. Students play a large part in the lessons and learn very much from the contributions of their peers. For example, students who visit church regularly are able to give accurate information on the furnishings inside the local church and make comments on the major elements of church services. They are encouraged to do this because teachers willingly share relevant anecdotes about their own lives. Teachers are aware that students learn in different ways and they modify their methods to meet the needs of all. For example, students in both Years 10 and 11 were fully engaged in a lesson on the medieval church by the use of pictorial evidence and also a video which considered views on heaven and hell in the Middle Ages. Moreover, teachers read with real expression, use their voices dramatically and pause at just the right moments in order to whet the appetites of their already fascinated students, who respond by being very keen to answer questions.
181. The emphasis on literacy and also on the acquisition of historical skills is good. The GCSE course is both of great value to the students' future lives and is also a good preparation for advanced study. The department has increased its emphasis on ICT and there is very good provision for those with special educational needs at both ends of the attainment spectrum. Assessment of students' progress in class is impressive and the department also makes a profound contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students. Teachers, for example, are very good role models and they insist on mutual regard, high levels of industry, mature behaviour and courtesy to all. Another significant contribution to high standards is that teachers organise a variety of fieldtrips and are always looking for links with other areas of the curriculum. The department was complimented in the last report and since then standards have gone up.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

182. Students' ICT skills are mostly very weak on entry to Year 7. Early indications are that standards of attainment being reached in the Year 7 foundation course are above average. Students are becoming familiar with the technical language of ICT and they can readily access the Internet and CD-Rom resources to support enquiry work, which will materially

help their work in all subjects through to Year 11 and beyond. At the end of the GCSE course, students are very skilled using computers and have a strong supportive theoretical knowledge. Results in recent years, although fluctuating, have been consistently above the national average at A*-C and A*-G grades and on a rising trend. In 2000 they were roughly 25 per cent higher than the year before. Girls' results are better than boys' and the gap is widening.

183. Students at the beginning of Year 10 build on their previous word processing experience to gain a more technical understanding of the software they use but the lack of consistent experience before shows up in their restricted keyboard skills; many students type with only one finger. By Year 11 students demonstrate competently their knowledge and skills and learn quickly how to access the Internet in preparation for the next stage of their coursework assignments. Four former students edited and published a programme for Chesterfield Football Club Second XI games at school and one of them now publishes this commercially as part of his own business interests.
184. Students following the new GNVQ courses use a wide variety of ICT resources and skills in commercially realistic assignments, such as publishing a visitors' guide to the Rother Valley Leisure Park. In a Year 11 design and technology assignment students used word processing skills to design questionnaires. Many of the assignments and exercises test and develop students' literacy and numeracy skills.
185. The school's policy, for students in Years 7 to 9 to be taught ICT through their work in other subjects, is sound but has not yet come to fruition because what they are actually taught is not organised as a comprehensive programme. Statements in department plans about how and to what end computers will be used, either do not appear or sometimes are not set out in detail. Students' competence is not assessed to National Curriculum levels but the work observed suggests that standards in Year 9 are average, but they are above average in Years 7 to 9 overall and there are patches of excellent experience.
186. Although coverage of all the strands of the subject is not yet guaranteed, undoubtedly good things are happening in many lessons. For example, students in Year 8 humanities use the Internet to help compare and contrast village life in England and France and during the inspection a Year 9 student set up a website on 'The Ancient Mariner'. Students use data-logging for a science assignment on loft insulation and in art and design use Clipart in some units of study. There is no certificated coursework for higher attainers in Year 9 nor for those in Years 10 and 11 who do not choose the GCSE or GNVQ courses.
187. There are mitigating factors for the relatively slow progress since the last inspection. The school's old fashioned computers have only recently been upgraded or replaced (some just before the inspection) in sufficient numbers to make the proposed teaching possible. All students, particularly in Year 7, are already benefiting from the new resources and at this early stage they regard ICT as an integral part of their work in all subjects.
188. After a considerable amount of training, only a few subject teachers are not secure about teaching ICT to the higher levels of the National Curriculum. Training is continuing and the school is participating in the most recent government-funded programme. Many non-specialist teachers have participated in the school's Computer Loan Scheme and training at home, so they are confident and competent to instruct students. The policy to teach ICT across the curriculum promises much, but confirmation of future progress in its delivery will depend on senior management's support in insisting that agreed Programmes of Study, and related assessment procedures, are uniformly implemented.
189. The quality of students' learning and progress in ICT lessons is often very good. They acquire basic computer skills in Year 7 well and early on use them to support their

foundation European thematic work to research a range of topics, such as cheese, Beethoven and the Russian Revolution. In Years 10 and 11 they are confident and competent using Windows and begin to incorporate theoretical knowledge and keyboard skills to tackle assignments that realistically reflect the tasks that might be done in an office. Students use a variety of Internet search engines to find things out and are able to get into local authority and government websites quickly; some look up data on their own school's results.

190. In Years 10 and 11 teaching is predominantly very good and occasionally excellent. Relationships with students are very good and teachers have an excellent grasp of the subject material. These two factors, combined with extremely well-structured lessons, inspire confidence and respect in the students and are the basis of many successful lessons. One lesson made particularly good use of newly acquired technology to take students step by step through the process of identifying certain websites as 'Favourites', for quick access.
191. Lessons integrate the development of literacy and numeracy with practical keyboard skills. Challenging assignments have a clear purpose, often linked to other subjects. Individual support and assessment is very thorough, particularly for students with special educational needs for whom work is now carefully structured at the right pace, which it was not at the time of the previous inspection. The librarian makes a most positive and instructive contribution to teaching as does the technician, who organises the equipment most efficiently. This extremely well-managed department is forward looking and has a clear vision of what needs to be done to improve on the very high levels of achievement to date.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

192. Standards at the end of Year 9 match national expectations for age with sizeable minorities both above and below. GCSE French results at grades A*-C have improved gradually but steadily since the previous inspection and now exceed the national average. The 2000 results were the highest achieved so far in French and Spanish. Results in German have fluctuated around the average; they were above in 1999 but dropped in 2000. Girls outperform boys in French but the reverse applies to German. In Spanish there is no significant difference. Results in French in particular compare favourably with most other subjects in the school.
193. By the end of Year 9 most students have satisfactory and often good listening and comprehension skills, partly as a result of the emphasis on oral methods used on the bilingual foundation course. Many students respond positively to their teachers' encouragement to speak the foreign language but those in lower sets lack confidence without written prompts and say as little as possible. Pronunciation and intonation are generally sound but students do not read aloud enough in class to build oral confidence and to refine pronunciation. However, Year 7 beginners in German (who study French bilingually) had great fun demonstrating their oral skills by singing along to a video clip based on the topic they had just covered. The accuracy of written work shows improvement since the previous inspection but the presentation is often poor and too many exercise books look shoddy and unloved.
194. Attainment at the end of Year 11 is in line with that expected nationally. Students in a Spanish and in a German class coped confidently with a barrage of questions, answering for the most part without delay and in a minority of cases at some length. Students also did well in listening tests in the classroom thus demonstrating their ability to retain recent learning. Few, however, ask questions in the foreign language as a matter of course. The range and variety of written work is naturally wider than in earlier years and most are getting a feel for the structures of the foreign language. High attaining students show a

good grasp of basic grammar and make few errors. Their standard of presentation is usually well above average. In one German class, students demonstrated good skills in using the computer to help solve a demanding grammar and comprehension exercise.

195. Progress and achievement are satisfactory for students of all attainment levels. Including the bilingual work in Year 7, achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good overall. Teachers vary the pace and the amount and difficulty of the learning materials used so that all students benefit. Students with special educational needs make appropriate progress as teachers are aware of their needs. In several lessons classroom assistants provided individual support and thus helped to ensure good progress.
196. The quality of teaching has improved and it is always satisfactory. In lessons seen it was at least good in over a half. The foreign language is now used extensively in the classroom which accounts for good listening and comprehension skills. English is used as sparingly as possible even when subjects such as history and geography are being taught in the foundation bilingual classes. The sharing of aims and objectives with students sets the scene for lessons. Rapid fire question and answer sessions help to get the proceedings off to a flying start and help to practise recent learning.
197. The momentum is sustained by switching tasks systematically so that each activity builds on the preceding one. Thus students have ample opportunity to practise and gain confidence in the main language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Lively and active teaching stimulates their interest and teachers most effectively encourage and prompt students working in pairs or groups. This is particularly important in the lessons which at seventy-five minutes are longer than usual for modern languages. Teachers also sustain momentum by timing classroom tasks exactly so that there is virtually no scope for coasting or wasting time.
198. The mainly good behaviour stems from good teaching and effective class management. Students' concentration levels are usually good and their attitudes to language learning are positive. In one or two classes there was at times some rather immature and silly behaviour which was not always handled with sufficient rigour.
199. The department has benefited from an internal school review. Recently appointed teachers, who work both in the department and deliver the foundation bilingual course which is administered and organised separately, have brought a new dimension to the department's work. Schemes of work are thorough and make very good reference and working documents. Formal and informal assessment procedures are precise, highly informative and meticulously recorded so that students' progress is monitored very well. Leadership of the department is good.
200. Teachers are aware that wall displays in the foundation suite rooms are based on French and are taking steps to give German and Spanish a higher profile. The basis for further progress is firmly established. The foundation bilingual course has generated a new impetus and 'buzz' in modern languages. To sustain and consolidate this the department needs to develop its use of computers and video, to appoint foreign language assistants where appropriate, to continue its efforts to find partner schools on mainland Europe for such activities as e-mail and student exchanges and to extend student visits beyond France to Spain and Germany.

MUSIC

201. Students enter the school with below average experience of music overall but also with a wide range of standards. This reflects whether they received specialist and/or instrumental teaching in their primary schools and how much parents encourage and support an

interest in musical education at home. Regular musical productions are of a good standard and individual students do well, for example if they take GCSE, compete in the local festival or sing in the school choir, but standards are not high enough for the large majority of students in Year 9. The complex timetable arrangements result in students not having music for considerable spells of time and the amount of time for music varies widely between classes, compounding the difficulties.

202. GCSE is studied by an average of ten students per year, mainly girls. In 1999 all attained grade B or higher (three grade A*s), well above average. Fewer high grades were attained in 2000, but half the group did better in music than in their other subjects. In the present Year 11 group standards, particularly in instrumental playing, are below average. This merely reflects the musical capabilities of the students which fluctuate considerably from year to year.
203. Class singing does not develop enough after Year 7 as students sing only occasionally and irregularly, partly explained by the timetable situation. When they do their performance lacks gusto, without enough attention being given to tuning, expression, posture, breathing or diction. Most students play keyboards in instrumental work but their performing and music reading skills are poor, as seen when students tried to play their own compositions, with little success. A few students who play instruments can name notes or recognise common signs, but most show little understanding of notation. Students listen respectfully to each other and recordings. When they appraise music they use limited vocabulary and have limited general musical knowledge, for example of composers, instruments and well known pieces.
204. In Years 7 to 9, students who play instruments and read music make the best progress, building on their previous knowledge and experiences and their personal interests. However, with too little time in total, music lessons for only part of the year, and teaching which is unsatisfactory overall (though good on occasions), most students do not make enough progress so they underachieve. Work does not develop their instrumental, vocal and music reading skills enough, so they do not realise their potential in performing, composing and listening. Students with special educational needs make similar progress but are well integrated.
205. The teacher gives clear instructions so students know what they have to do and generally they enjoy practical work. However, if this goes on for too long or the musical objectives for a session are not clear, students waste time and lose interest. They do not achieve much if lessons are too academic or involve too much writing. Sometimes there are not enough resources and although many students have their own instruments, too few use them in class. Musical terms are not referred to enough and visual aids are rarely used to explain or illustrate. On occasions not enough technical help is given to show the students how to improve. When it is given, results and attitudes improve dramatically as seen in some singing lessons. Homework, which could extend and develop work, is not set regularly in Years 7 to 9. The main weakness is that lessons do not engage students in enough enjoyable music-making which also develops their skills, knowledge and understanding.
206. When writing compositions, the few higher attaining GCSE students show good understanding of musical language; a talented student has composed extended pieces including a *Thunder Symphony* and a setting of Psalm 150 using a home computer, but most students do not know how to develop tunes adequately. Computers are not used enough for developing and notating compositions. Students show limited technical vocabulary in discussion and their general music knowledge is patchy. Students' attitudes in class are satisfactory but several GCSE students (all of whom bar three have instrumental tuition) disadvantage themselves by not joining in extra-curricular work.

207. The teacher has good subject knowledge and displays competent musicianship, for example when accompanying or arranging music for groups. Last year traditional folk music for dance workshops included singing and playing instruments such as tin whistles and squeeze boxes. The band, choir, soloists and dancers also joined together for a complete performance of some local eighteenth-century manuscripts. These valuable experiences are most worthwhile.
208. The management and support of music is unsatisfactory and much remains to be done to raise standards in Years 7 to 9 especially and to encourage more students to join in extra-curricular activities. There is a shortage of practice rooms for group work, computers, classroom instruments – especially tuned percussion, and no overhead projector. Technical support is absent, imposing pressures on the already overburdened teacher; indeed there are not enough music teachers. This partly explains why students do not study music regularly nor for long enough and so cannot cover the National Curriculum fully. This is unacceptable, affects standards and it was highlighted in the last report. Other teachers in the school support music well. With no regular music in assembly, opportunities to promote students' cultural development are missed.
209. Five visiting teachers provide a range of instrumental and vocal lessons involving over 50 students (mainly girls) at present. The governors subsidise these lessons so that as many students as possible can have them. Some very good teaching was observed in woodwind tuition. However, students do not have practice books and instrumental tuition is not monitored. Very rarely do students use their instruments in class music lessons which is a significant weakness. The music teacher and visiting staff support limited extra-curricular activities which regularly include a folk band and a choir and further groups before productions. School concerts are popular, often comprising cantatas written by the music teacher and another member of staff, such as *Brenda 9 and the Happy Planet* or *The Highwayman*. Such events reflect the dedication of staff and the enthusiasm of the musicians whose performances and successes bring credit to the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

210. On entry to the school, attainment in physical education is below average. Students have low level movement skills in gymnastics and dance and limited experience of games activities. By the end of Year 9, the majority of students attain at least average standards with approximately one third exceeding this. GCSE physical education A*-C grades are above average and improving. Results at the time of the previous inspection were below average. The improvement is due to the well structured units of work (which balance carefully all strands of the National Curriculum and address the need for planned progress) and to the extremely good teaching students receive (in fine specialist accommodation).
211. By the end of Year 9 boys and girls have a good knowledge of fitness and can warm up and stretch independently and effectively. They develop good basic skills and an understanding of defensive and attacking strategies in badminton and basketball. Gymnastics remains an area of underachievement for one third of students. Boys and girls lack body tension and control in their movements.
212. The standard of work seen in GCSE classes is above average. In netball and football, Year 11 students have consistently good ball skills and a good knowledge of the rules and tactics of the game. Their written work is well organised and the girls' files are very well presented. Year 11 students are confident when debating the use of drugs by sportsmen and women. The very good teaching observed challenged the moral principles involved and gave students a real insight into the topic. In non-examination lessons, students also attain high standards. Over half the boys in football have speed, stamina and a high level of skill. In badminton girls and boys play deep overhead clears and understand how to use

net shots effectively. These standards are an improvement on those reported in the previous inspection. The attainment of some individual students and teams is very high. They play football, netball, hockey, cricket, cross-country and athletics for district and county teams. One girl swims for her country and three boys play basketball in national leagues; one recently captained the England team for his age group.

213. Teaching is always good; it was very good in two-thirds of lessons observed. It was excellent in one lesson. The quality and consistency has improved considerably since the previous inspection. Teaching now addresses well the planning and evaluative strands of the National Curriculum and students are given many opportunities to learn independently. Because of the very good subject expertise of their teachers, students in Years 7 and 8 quickly acquire the skills needed for badminton and basketball and increase their understanding of these games. Students make progress in planning activities and gain confidence and knowledge through observing the performance of others. The equal progress of students, regardless of their different physical abilities, is well supported by the use of appropriate equipment, good support staff and by teaching boys and girls separately.
214. Teachers do not always divide classes up to make smaller ability groups when the range of attainment in a group demands greater flexibility and guidance than whole-group teaching can deliver. However, they circulate well to set individual tasks and all students achieve well in relation to their earlier attainment. All teachers go over previous work and share the session's objectives with students at the beginning lessons. This is a particularly successful strategy with the lower attaining groups who often need to refine and revisit existing skills before progress can be made. Class work in students' GCSE files is not checked enough but their tests and homework are well marked with helpful and constructive comments. In all years the department focuses on literacy skills by displaying key words and discussing subject specific vocabulary with the students. This could be extended further to encompass spelling and reading skills which would be helpful for the theoretical aspects of the GCSE examination.
215. Students are enthused because teachers are vibrant, enthusiastic and very well organised. Hence students learn well and work energetically. Only students with medical reasons do not participate regularly and strategies to involve them are applied consistently. A quarter of the year group, more boys than girls, opt to study GCSE physical education. Large numbers of boys and girls attend extra-curricular activities. This shows the interest and enthusiasm students have for the subject.
216. Games, gymnastics, athletics and dance are taught in Years 7 to 9 but there is not equality of opportunity. Some groups experience more time on physical education than others because of the timetable links to drama and music. Some groups spend more time on one activity, for example gymnastics, than other groups and a few boys and girls are taught together whilst the majority are taught separately. The department has many strong links to the community sports development teams.
217. Outside coaches have visited the school to promote badminton, cricket and athletics. Many local sports teams and clubs use the school's high quality facilities. The department makes a very good contribution to the social and moral development of students. They are taught co-operation, fair play and sportsmanship through the frequent pair and group work in lessons and the many team and club practices after school and at lunchtimes. The indoor and outdoor facilities are very good but a dedicated room to teach the theoretical aspect of GCSE would allow teachers to use audio visual equipment and ICT more often. The leadership of the department is excellent and all the issues raised in the previous report have been addressed most successfully.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious education is taught as part of the foundation course in Year 7 and as part of the personal and social education course from Years 8 to 11.

218. By the end of Year 7 students have a sound foundation in religious knowledge. They have a broad understanding of the major beliefs and practices of Christianity and three other religions. For example, they know about the major festivals of Christianity and Judaism. Students have written some very good work on the Jewish Passover. They begin to understand how religious belief and practices affect a person's life style and are sensitive to the fact that different faith communities have different ways of living. A group of students demonstrated a good understanding of the importance of the five K's for a Sikh. Students of all attainment levels make satisfactory progress.
219. From Years 8 to 11 a considerable amount of work that is done focuses on personal development. The allocation of time for religious education topics is barely enough to cover the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus although several units of work dealing directly with religious education are embedded in the personal and social education course. All students have a sensitive appreciation of the role that religion plays in providing people with a framework of values. A group of Year 9 students recognised the important part that worship plays in the life of a Hindu boy. However as students' knowledge is not developed systematically the good foundations laid in Year 7 are not built upon. Consequently students have a fragmented and shallow understanding of the major beliefs and practices of all the religions that are found in our society, including Christianity. Students in Year 10, for example, were unable to recall any significant Christian beliefs when dealing with a unit on the meaning of love.
220. By the end of Year 11 students explore some of the 'ultimate' questions that people face and understand that a religious faith can provide motivation and meaning to life. They can discuss contemporary moral issues confidently. A Year 11 group sensitively discussed drug-related issues. The lack of a strong religious knowledge base means that their response to religious questions lacks depth of understanding and perception. Whilst all students make good progress in their personal and social development, their progress in understanding religious concepts and language is unsatisfactory.
221. The quality of teaching was satisfactory in all lessons and good in one, but the atmosphere of lessons varies considerably. In the majority of lessons, taught by the specialist teacher, students' interest is sustained, especially when the teacher uses his musical talent to add a unique flavour to lessons. Students are interested and responsive but repetitive written exercises, often using uninspiring worksheets, do not generate motivation and enthusiasm. Non-specialist teachers, relying heavily on material produced by the head of department, deliver lessons which are just satisfactory, but they lack knowledge of both the subject and related teaching methods to explore fully religious education issues. One teacher confessed to feeling as if he is 'sitting on an egg shell' when attempting to teach religious education.
222. Frequent use of videos does engage students' attention, but these are not backed up by colourful and interesting learning materials. In one lesson the worksheet which was used contained a reference to a song that was popular over 20 years ago. Such lessons lack pace and vitality and students lose interest. Literacy levels are below that found in other subjects. Although broadly following the school policy on assessment there are no carefully planned procedures, with individual teachers applying a variety of methods, styles and levels. Infrequent marking of books and limited record-keeping means that the progress of students is not carefully monitored.

223. Although this picture remains much the same as that seen during the last inspection the overall level of religious knowledge has fallen. Standards of attainment fall short of those set out in the locally agreed syllabus. A number of significant factors affect this situation. The content of what is taught in Years 7 to 9 is currently being reviewed but it still has too few units that encourage students to focus clearly on religious issues. This is compounded by the fact that the school has no fully trained religious education specialist. By finding teachers who have gaps in their timetables the senior management team decide who, in addition to the head of department, will teach religious education. These non-specialist teachers are given no training and they do not have access to modern colourful resources to bring the subject alive. There is no shortage of material that encourages personal development but resources that could encourage academic rigour and the development of higher order skills, such as analysis and evaluation, are missing.

GNVQ COURSES

(Year 10 only, Health and Social Care and Leisure and Tourism)

224. Year 10 students are the first to be given the opportunity to participate in GNVQ courses. The take-up for both subjects offered has been very good and there are almost 30 students in each group. The department aims to guide students to select either the foundation or intermediate level after the initial investigation activity has been completed; timetable and teaching arrangements will allow this. This full group introduction has generated a very positive atmosphere for the students studying leisure and tourism but the two groups of health and social care students had their first few lessons together in a small room, so they did not get off to such a good start. However, new accommodation opened during the inspection has partly addressed this problem.

225. Both subjects have engaged students in research out of school and made every effort to familiarise students with the independent work ethos of GNVQ study. The attainment of students in these groups varies considerably. The majority of students in leisure and tourism have good ICT skills. Several of the health and social care group have low level literacy skills and this hinders their learning. Students in the leisure and tourism group have the confidence and enthusiasm to work independently but a few students in the health and social care group lack listening and co-operative skills.

226. The first units of work are well planned and teachers have in place clear assessment strategies and record sheets for evaluating students' progress. In lessons seen, the leisure and tourism group had a detailed presentation on the leisure park topic; this was well supported by overhead transparencies and a handout which helped students to focus on specific tasks. An ambitious lesson for the health and social care group was unsuccessful because it was not broken down into short, timed, sections so students felt confused and hence they were inattentive and made little progress.

227. Both subjects are in the early stages and will develop over the next few months. All teachers must continue to develop the best structure for the long lessons and for the right balance between guidance and independent learning. In both courses, tasks set have been realistic and linked to the community and students have already been given many opportunities for independent learning.