

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **COCKERMOUTH SCHOOL**

Cockermouth

LEA area: Cumbria

Unique reference number: 112381

Head Teacher: Michael Wilde

Reporting inspector: John Dixon  
OFSTED number: 13155

Dates of inspection: 9 to 13 October 2000

Inspection number: 223723

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

© Crown copyright 2000

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Castlegate Drive  
Cockermouth  
Cumbria

Postcode: CA13 9HF

Telephone number: 01900 325940

Fax number: 01900 325944

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Len Cockcroft

Date of previous inspection: 1 May 1995

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
John Dixon 13155	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? What should the school do to improve further? The school's results and pupils' achievements How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
David Wood 13802	Lay inspector		How well does the school work in partnership with parents? Community links
Jenny Coleman 12941	Team inspector	Physical education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Elizabeth Collins 7948	Team inspector	Religious education  Equal opportunities	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils?
Lynne Heath 1997	Team inspector	History	
John Hunt 12885	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Mike Lormor 4605	Team inspector	Music	
Howard Meredith 16495	Team inspector	Science	
Allan Nicholl 2473	Team inspector	ICT	
Daphne Nicholl 23569	Team inspector	Modern languages	
Nick Padfield 13058	Team inspector	English and drama	The work of the sixth form unit
Isabel Seddon 10910	Team inspector	Special educational needs	The work of the special needs unit
Brian Shaw 13156	Team inspector	Art Design & technology	
Peter Starling 4847	Team inspector	Geography	

The inspection contractor was: Bolton Metro  
Education Offices  
PO Box 53, Paderborn House  
Civic Centre  
Bolton BL1 1JW

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Registrar  
Inspection Quality Division  
The Office for Standards in Education  
Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6 - 11</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?</b>	<b>12 - 15</b>
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
<b>HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?</b>	<b>15 - 16</b>
<b>HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?</b>	<b>16 - 18</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?</b>	<b>18 - 19</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?</b>	<b>19 - 21</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES</b>	<b>21 - 23</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>24 - 27</b>
<b>PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>28 - 44</b>

## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Cockermouth School is a comprehensive school serving a small market town and its surrounding rural area. There are 1,237 boys and girls aged 11 to 18 on roll, of whom 240 are in the sixth form. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school at age 11 is well above average. The proportion of pupils who are eligible for free school meals is well below average for similar schools. There are 151 pupils with special educational needs, which is also below average. The school has a specialist unit for up to 15 autistic pupils. Fewer than 1% of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and eight pupils have English as an additional language.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Cockermouth School is a very effective school which achieves high standards and works hard to sustain them. It is characterised by good teaching and good relationships at all levels, and by the extremely positive attitudes of the majority of its pupils. The school is well led and well managed, and gives good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Teaching is good throughout the school: teachers have good subject knowledge and have high expectations of pupils.
- Pupils at all levels make good progress: standards are high in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, and in most other subjects.
- There is clear leadership and a shared commitment from staff and pupils to high levels of achievement.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good
- Relationships at all levels are very good and play an effective role in promoting high standards.
- Arrangements for the pastoral care and well-being of all pupils and students in the school are very good

#### **What could be improved**

- The standards which pupils attain are not high enough in French or in ICT
- The curriculum does not ensure that the requirements of the National Curriculum are satisfactorily met in information and communication technology and in religious education
- The curriculum does not make sufficient timetabled provision for some important areas in the main school, and the sixth form curriculum could be broader.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school was last inspected in May 1995. Since that time it has sustained and slightly improved its high standards of achievement. Levels of attainment in the national tests taken by pupils at age 14, in GCSE examinations and at advanced level have risen, and the school is well placed to maintain the high standards which it sets itself.

Not all the issues raised at the time of the last inspection have been satisfactorily addressed. The school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all its pupils. The governors of the school made a resolution not to address this issue as they considered that the school lacks appropriate accommodation in order to comply with statutory requirements. Their decision is reviewed annually. Information and communication technology (ICT) is still not as firmly embedded in the curriculum planning for all subjects as it might be, and the extent to which all pupils acquire suitable levels of ICT skills remains an issue to be addressed. However, the school has substantially improved its arrangements for assessment, which are now good.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds based on their performance in National Curriculum tests, GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
Key Stage 3 tests	A	A	A	A
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	A	

Key	
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

The proportion of pupils who achieve the national expectation of level 5 in the tests which they take at age 14 in English, mathematics and science is well above average and well above the average for similar schools. In mathematics and science their attainment is very high compared with comprehensive schools in England and Wales, and in all three subjects there is a high proportion of pupils who attain level six or above.

GCSE results in 2000 were the highest for many years and there is a rising three-year trend in pupils' achievement in the GCSE examinations. The gap in performance between boys and girls, which was an issue at the time of the last inspection, has been narrowed and is now less significant than the national pattern. A-level results, which have shown a slight upward trend over the last four years, were also markedly higher in the current year. The school sets itself ambitious targets for its examination performance.

Work seen during the inspection shows that pupils attain high standards in English, mathematics and science, and in the majority of other subjects. Pupils throughout the main school and in the sixth form, including those with special educational needs, make good progress, although some higher attaining pupils in the upper school could be making better progress. Progress and the standards attained by some pupils in French are unsatisfactory, and the attainment and progress of most pupils in ICT in the upper school are also unsatisfactory.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes to the school are very positive, and make a major contribution to the standards which they achieve.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in lessons and about the school is very good. There were very few lessons where behaviour was unsatisfactory.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between pupils and with teachers and other staff are extremely positive and contribute well to the quality of pupils' learning.
Attendance	Attendance is good, well above the average nationally for this type of school.

Pupils' attitudes to their work are a credit to themselves and to their teachers. They clearly enjoy coming to school, and tackle the often demanding work with great enthusiasm. Pupils treat the school building with respect. They co-operate well, show consideration for others and sympathise with those less fortunate than themselves.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	96	68	52

*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 is good throughout the main school and in the sixth form. All but a very small proportion of the lessons seen during the inspection were satisfactory or better. Three-quarters were judged to be at least good, and one lesson in three was very good or outstanding. The teaching of English, mathematics and science is very effective, and good teaching was seen in all subjects of the curriculum. The teaching of literacy as part of the school's literacy initiative is particularly strong. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and pupils have high expectations of themselves. Lessons are well planned and well matched to pupils' levels of attainment. Pupils are involved in their learning and lessons are conducted in a good atmosphere. In the small number of unsatisfactory lessons the pace was too slow and made too little demand on the pupils. There was a higher proportion of unsatisfactory teaching in French than in other subjects, and some pupils' skills in the language were not well developed as a result.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school offers a suitably broad curriculum for the majority of its pupils, but does not satisfy legal requirements in its provision for religious education in the upper school and the sixth form, and in the provision it makes for pupils' education in ICT. There are some gaps in the curriculum provided in Years 7 to 11, and the sixth form curriculum could be broader. The school offers a wide range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities for study outside the school day.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good provision is made for pupils with special educational needs. The support which they receive is well matched to their specific need, and the pupils are well integrated into the life of the school. There is good communication with parents and with outside agencies. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school provides well for all aspects of pupils' personal development. Provision for moral and social development is particularly strong in the emphasis which the school places on relationships and regard for others. Cultural opportunities are provided through visits, exchanges and contacts with young people abroad.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The pastoral system makes a very strong contribution to the well-being of pupils in the school and to the standards which they achieve. The progress made by individual pupils both academically and socially is carefully tracked and action to support pupils and improve their progress is promptly taken where necessary. Appropriate attention is given to ensuring pupils' safety and protection.

The school curriculum, whilst being broad and balanced for the majority of pupils, lacks vocational options and formal opportunities for drama and there is inadequate provision for music in the lower school. The curriculum does not allocate sufficient time in religious education for the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus to be covered in Years 10 and 11 or in the sixth form. In ICT, the curriculum arrangements do not ensure that all strands of the subject required by law are adequately covered. Statutory provision for a daily act of collective worship is not met. The sixth form curriculum is restricted to the most popular and traditional courses and could be broader. The school works well in partnership with parents to ensure that pupils gain the maximum possible value from their education. Parents are kept informed and involved in their children's progress. The school has a very good system for tracking pupils' academic and personal development which involves a half-termly review of their progress and welfare, taking appropriate action where necessary. Form tutors have a suitably important role to play in the supervision of pupils' development.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff	The school is well led. It has a strong management structure: senior staff are well deployed and committed to the welfare of pupils and to raising standards. Middle management is strong: subject departments are effectively managed and the school has an effective pastoral structure.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is aware of its statutory responsibilities and along with the head teacher plays a key role in the strategic management of the school. The school's spending is closely monitored. All governors are attached to subject departments and to year groups and spend time seeing at first hand how the school works.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There is good evidence to show that the school takes care to monitor its performance closely and through its analysis to raise standards, although no formal procedures are in place to monitor the quality of teaching. Heads of department make a thoroughgoing annual review of their department's performance and how it can be improved. The school has taken effective measures in recent years to improve the performance of boys.
The strategic use of resources	The school plans carefully for the future and allocates resources with the welfare of pupils and the raising of standards in mind. Governors have been successful in obtaining capital funds from other sources in order to undertake planned improvements to the school's accommodation.

The school is well led. The head teacher gives the school a clear sense of direction. This is transmitted through the senior management team, which is involved in all aspects of the school's academic and pastoral operation. Heads of department and heads of year are empowered to fulfil a strong middle-management role which contributes greatly to the quality of pastoral care and to the standards achieved by pupils. However, there is insufficient formal monitoring at middle management level of the quality of teaching. Financial matters are well managed on a day-to-day and strategic basis by the school's professional finance officer, and the principles of best value are rigidly applied to all school spending. The governors' finance committee has appropriate procedures for strategic financial planning.

The school is well staffed and teachers are well qualified. In a few instances the deployment of non-specialist staff means that pupils do not make the progress they should. Teachers are well supported by their ancillary and technical colleagues. Resources are plentiful, and the school has ambitious plans to provide a range of support materials which will help pupils to study better at home. Because the school is over-subscribed, the school building is cramped in places, but the governors are continuing their efforts to provide further teaching spaces.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More than 90% of parents agree that their children like school, that they are expected to work hard and to achieve their best.</li> <li>• More than 80% of parents agree that:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ their child is making good progress;</li> <li>○ teaching in school is good, and so is behaviour;</li> <li>○ they would feel comfortable approaching the school with suggestions or problems;</li> <li>○ the school is well managed, is helping their child to become mature and responsible, and provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

The views of parents about the school were very positive, and were borne out by the findings of the inspection team. Pupils enjoy going to school, most make good progress and are encouraged by good teaching to achieve high standards. A small minority of parents expressed concerns about pupils' work not being regularly marked by the teachers, and inspectors found that this was the case in a minority of instances.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and achievements**

1. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is well above the national average. In all three subjects, the attainment of the pupils currently in Year 7 was around 15% higher than the national average for pupils of their age when they left primary school.
2. In the national tests which pupils take at age 14, the attainment of pupils at Cockermouth School remains well above the national average. In English, after a gradual decline in performance over the three years to 1999, the proportion of pupils reaching level 5 or above in the current year was well above the national average and above the average for similar schools. The proportion reaching level 6 or above was well above the national average and well above the average for similar schools. Both boys and girls attained standards well above the national average.
3. In mathematics, both boys and girls consistently achieve high standards at age 14. In 2000, almost nine out of ten pupils reached the required standard of level 5 and almost two-thirds surpassed it. Almost one pupil in three achieved level 7 or above. These are high standards, very high compared with the national average and very high compared with similar schools.
4. The performance of boys and girls in science at age 14 is similar to that in mathematics. In the current year, four out of five pupils reached the national average at level 5 and well over half attained at least level 6. Almost a quarter of the pupils reached level 7 or above. These standards are well above the national average and well above the average for similar schools.
5. The school's GCSE results went down slightly over the years since the last inspection, although remaining well above the national average. In 2000, though, the school redressed the balance and achieved its highest results ever. The trend of GCSE results since the last inspection is now rising at roughly the same rate as the national trend, but with the school's results almost 20% above the average.
6. 72% of the pupils achieved five or more A\* to C grades in the current year, well above the national average and well above the average for similar schools. After a period where the gap between girls' performance and that of boys was widening, the 2000 results showed that the attainment of boys has caught up well and is now approaching that of girls. There was a substantial improvement, too, in the proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes at grade A\* to G in 2000. All pupils – 99% of the year group – who were entered for five or more GCSE examinations obtained a grade. This is well above the national average and the average for similar schools. 99.5% of the year group achieved at least one GCSE grade A\* to G.
7. Pupils achieved an average GCSE points score in 2000 almost two full points higher than in the previous year. The average total points score for the school was 45.7, well above the national average and well above the average for similar schools. Boys' attainment showed a marked improvement with an average points score of 44.4, but girls' performance was not as high as in the previous year, falling to 46.8.
8. In 2000, GCSE results in English were higher than in previous years and were well above the national average. Both boys' and girls' attainment was high, and boys' performance was closer to that of girls than is the case nationally. In mathematics

GCSE results are consistently above average, and rose in 2000 to around 20% above the national average. After a slight downward trend to 1999, GCSE results in science were well above the national average in 2000. A very high proportion of both boys and girls achieved the highest grades: a third of the girls and over a third of the boys achieved A\* and A grades in science.

9. In nearly all subjects, the 2000 GCSE results showed a marked rise over those of the previous year in terms of pupils' achieving A\* to C grades. In design and technology, geography, history, business studies, German and religious education they were above the national average, in most cases well above. The attainment of pupils who took design and technology was overall three-quarters of a grade higher than the grade they achieved in other subjects, and all the girls who took the examination in resistant materials achieved A\* to C grades compared with 60% of the boys. A very high proportion of girls – almost nine out of ten - achieved A\* to C grades in religious education.
10. Results in art showed a marked improvement over those of the previous year, and were in line with the national average, but in French, after good results in 1999 when the proportion of A\* to C grades was well above the national average, pupils performed less well than in their other subjects and well below the national average. Well over half of the boys and nearly a third of the girls achieved grades D to F in French.
11. Attainment of students in the sixth form is consistently well above the national average. A-level results reflect well the students' prior attainment at GCSE, and in 2000 were at their highest point for many years. Boys achieved an average points score per student of 24.5 compared with 21.0 for girls. Over half of boys' A-level grades were at A or B, compared with just over a third of the grades attained by girls.
12. The performance of sixth form students in vocationally related examinations is not as high as in A-level. The average points score per candidate is below the national average, and there are problems with students who fail to finish their assignments in GNVQ business studies. All students completing the GNVQ courses in health and social care and in leisure and tourism, however, achieved distinction or merit grades in 2000.
13. In English and mathematics, the performance of students in the A-level examination is roughly in line with the country as a whole, and somewhat above overall in science, although there is significant variation between the results in the three sciences. In biology, students attain the higher grades at a rate roughly in line with the national average, and results have improved significantly over the past three years. In chemistry, the achievement of higher grades is consistently well above the national average, but in physics a lower proportion of students achieved grades A and B compared with the previous year. This coincided with significantly larger numbers of students taking the A-level course.
14. Achievement of students at A-level is high in art, design and technology, geography, history, German and religious studies. In French it is below the national average and below the average for the school.
15. Most pupils in Year 9 are achieving high standards and making good progress in English, mathematics and science. In English pupils develop good reading, writing and speaking skills over their first seven terms in the school, although they have insufficient opportunity to develop more extended speaking skills. There are good opportunities across the whole curriculum for pupils to sustain their well-developed literacy skills. In mathematics, pupils in the higher and middle sets are achieving standards well above the national average. In science, pupils are achieving standards above the national

average, and their work shows that they have made good progress since they have been in the school.

16. In the majority of other subjects pupils in their third year at the school are achieving above average standards, indicating a rate of progress which is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Standards in French, however, are in many cases well below the national average and in ICT pupils do not reach the expected standard because there are important elements of the work which are not systematically taught.
17. In Year 11, the majority of 15-year-olds are reaching standards above the national average in English, mathematics and science, although the highest attainers in science are not making as rapid progress as they should. In most other subjects 15-year-olds are making good progress, but the progress of many pupils is unsatisfactory in French and in ICT, where the lack of formal teaching of the subject means that pupils fall behind what they might be expected to achieve. The progress of pupils in physical education is not as good in those classes where there is a lack of specialist teaching.
18. Pupils of all ages with special educational needs and those with statements of special educational need make good progress, and many are achieving as well as their peers in subjects where their special needs do not affect their learning.
19. In the sixth form, most students are making at least satisfactory progress after GCSE, and in the majority of subjects their standards of attainment are well in line with the requirements of the courses which they are following. Poor attendance at lessons impairs the progress which is made by some students in the Year 13 GNVQ business course.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

20. Pupils' and students' attitudes to their work and to the opportunities offered in school are a credit to themselves and their teachers. Parents said that most of their children enjoyed school and were keen to take part in school activities. This is borne out by pupils' enthusiasm to tackle new work, engage in personal research or simply to apply themselves diligently in lessons, even in those which lack pace and challenge. A large number of pupils stay enthusiastically after school to become involved in extra-curricular activities: even to the extent of committing themselves to a weekend under canvas in the middle of October!
21. The few incidents of poor behaviour observed in lessons were always related to unsatisfactory teaching, but in the vast majority of cases behaviour was very good. Even in the trying circumstances of a rushed and crowded dining area pupils and students remain well behaved and display respect and consideration to those around them. This characteristic is also demonstrated in the respect with which they treat the school building.
22. Relationships at all levels are very good and play a significant role in allowing good learning to take place. Older students support younger ones in the practicalities of learning to read and help them to develop their confidence to establish relationships beyond their immediate peer group. Most pupils recognise and appreciate the needs of pupils with particular disabilities. This mature approach enriches the experience of all and allows for good integration of all pupils and students. Pupils in all year groups have the confidence and skills to work well in pairs and groups and to address the rest of a class in discussion and debate, expressing their own ideas fluently. When the opportunity is offered, pupils and students are able to reflect and share personal responses to circumstances and human dilemmas, and to recognise the validity of different opinions and responses.

## HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

23. Pupils are well taught throughout the main school and in the sixth form. The teaching seen in all but a very small proportion of lessons was satisfactory or better. In three-quarters of the lessons the teaching was at least good, and in almost a third it was very good or outstanding. The quality of teaching is good for pupils of all levels of prior attainment. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is mainly good, and sometimes very good.
24. Teaching in the school is characterised by the teachers' sound knowledge of their subject and by their clear planning of lessons which helps pupils to know what they will learn and to focus their efforts. Most lessons have interest, pace and challenge. Expectations are high in most subjects and of most pupils, however gifted or otherwise they are. In all but a very small minority of lessons classroom management is good. There are smiling, positive relationships between the teacher and the pupils, and the work proceeds in a good atmosphere. Activities are varied and well chosen. Pupils of all ages respond well to discussions and whole-class work, and to working in groups and as individuals. Teachers make good use of a range of up-to-date resources.
25. There is high quality teaching in English, mathematics and science. In English, it is characterised by the wide range of teaching and learning strategies which are effectively employed by teachers. The teaching of literacy as part of the school's literacy initiative is particularly effective. In mathematics, teachers question pupils well to test their understanding, and work is well matched to pupils' level of attainment. Science teachers have a good understanding and knowledge of their subject and plan their lessons well, using a range of effective teaching methods. In design and technology, the praise and positive feedback which pupils receive about their work contributes very positively to the progress they make. Classroom discussion is well managed and used to good effect in history, geography and religious education, and some modern languages lessons are presented in a lively and exciting fashion. The teachers' enthusiasm for music and their good subject knowledge enable pupils to develop their musical skills and knowledge to a high standard.
26. In those areas where teaching is less effective, teachers' expectations of the pupils are not high enough either because of the slow and undemanding pace of the lesson or the level at which it is pitched. This was true in a minority of lessons observed in mathematics, science, history and design and technology. In some French lessons, the methods and resources chosen by the teacher were unsatisfactory, and did not lead to good learning: there was often an over-emphasis on writing at the expense of speaking, and pupils' language skills were not well developed.
27. Homework is regularly set in most subjects to support and reinforce pupils' learning, but in some cases the quality and consistency of the marking of pupils' work is unsatisfactory. Marking is not consistent across the school and sometimes within individual subjects. In some subjects there is not enough marking of pupils' work by the teacher, pupils doing much of the marking themselves. In these cases pupils do not receive sufficient individual advice and guidance as to how their work can be improved. Although some heads of department monitor the quality of teachers' marking in exercise books, it is not done consistently across all subjects. Marking is therefore not as effective as it might be in raising pupils' standards of attainment.
28. At the time of its last inspection, the school did not make sufficient use of ICT to support learning across the curriculum. The school has made a considerable investment in computers since then and there has been a marked increase since 1995 in the use of ICT to support learning. However, teachers still do not incorporate new technology

sufficiently into their lesson planning. There is insufficient use of computers in subjects where ICT could be expected to play a very significant role in learning such as mathematics, science and design and technology.

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

29. There are very good curriculum links with primary schools in the area, where shared bridging projects in English and in science ensure that pupils make a good start in their new school. The school curriculum provides a broad and balanced education matched to the needs of pupils and students, although there are areas where it is restricted and where it does not fully meet the requirements of law.
30. The school has made a very good start to its teaching of literacy in Year 7, which is of high quality and builds well on what pupils have been doing in their primary schools. However, the withdrawal of pupils from a range of lessons for additional literacy support can cause problems for the most vulnerable pupils. All pupils are given the opportunity to learn two foreign languages from Year 7, and there is a good range of optional subjects for pupils to choose in Year 10, although the availability of vocationally oriented courses of study for older pupils is very restricted, and there are no opportunities for pupils to take the GCSE examination in PE. The sixth form curriculum offers a range of traditional AS and A-level courses and a limited number of GNVQ courses of study at both intermediate and advanced level. However, popular courses such as media studies, politics and sociology are notably absent.
31. Statutory requirements for religious education are still not being met in Years 10 and 11 or in the sixth form. The Year 10 modular course, whilst providing a range of interesting curricular experiences for pupils, does not make adequate provision for religious education and physical education. Since the last inspection a taught course in ICT has been introduced in Year 7, but the overall ICT provision does not fully meet the national requirements, and the standards which pupils reach are not high enough, especially in Years 10 and 11.
32. Since September 2000 the school has introduced the opportunity for further option choices provided by recent changes to the law. In the current Year 10, 59 pupils were disapplied from taking a modern foreign language, either to concentrate on a preferred GCSE subject or to participate in a specially designed programme for disaffected pupils. The school will need to judge whether this arrangement effectively provides a curriculum which has sufficient breadth, balance and relevance for such a large proportion of the school population.
33. The school is committed to equal opportunities for all pupils. However, the physical education programme in Year 10 does not allow for equality of access to all activities. The time available for music in the lower school means that practical aspects such as the development of instrumental technique and pupils' understanding of traditional notation are not sufficiently developed. Good provision is made in most subjects for pupils with special educational needs. The specialised autistic unit provides very good support for its pupils, who are fully integrated into the normal school curriculum wherever possible.
34. Arrangements for personal, social and health education are good. Provision for careers education is overall satisfactory but lacks a coherent and detailed scheme of work for Years 10 and 11. Pupils have good opportunities to take part in work experience, community service and work-based curricular projects. There are very good links with other post-16 education establishments, with higher education and with local industry and commerce.

35. Most subjects provide well-balanced courses of study which are in line with National Curriculum requirements and well matched to the needs of the pupils at each level of attainment. Schemes of work are well planned and provide clear guidance to teachers on syllabus content and teaching methods. The curriculum available to all pupils with learning difficulties is broad and balanced; it includes the subjects of the National Curriculum supplemented by a range of opportunities specifically designed to meet their individual and specific needs. The structure for integrating all pupils into the mainstream curriculum is well established and maintained to good effect.
36. The aims and objectives of the school are clearly stated and form a sound basis for pupils' personal development. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good. Many curriculum areas contribute well to pupils' spiritual and cultural development, but not always in a clearly planned and systematic manner. The provision for a daily act of collective worship, as raised in the previous report, has not been addressed by the governing body because of the school's lack of a suitable space in which it could take place. The governors' decision is reviewed annually. Those assemblies which take place make good provision for pupils' moral and social development and support the school's general ethos, but do not always give enough opportunity for quiet contemplation or personal reflection.
37. The essence of moral decision making and recognising right and wrong behaviour is established in the pupil code of conduct and the emphasis which the school places on relationships and regard for others. These opportunities are enhanced in many subjects where issues of ethical significance are tackled, offering pupils opportunities to discuss and consider moral dilemmas such as abortion, the concept of civilisation versus barbarism in the study of the Roman Empire and the impact on the environment of particular types of energy.
38. The extra-curricular experiences offered to pupils in the school are very good. A wide range of sporting, musical and other activities involves large numbers of pupils before and after school. Throughout the year there are residential visits, exchanges with schools in France and Germany and a range of other types of excursion which make a significant contribution to the pupils' personal development. Pupils in the school join on a regular basis with their peers in schools in France, Germany and the Czech Republic to produce a multi-lingual magazine. There are good opportunities for pupils to study outside school hours: the school library and ICT centre are open to all pupils at break times and after school, and a homework club has recently been introduced.
39. The school provides a wide range of opportunities for all pupils and students to develop socially. All curriculum areas make good use of a range of paired and group activities in their teaching strategies and sixth form students help younger pupils with their reading. There are good facilities inside and outside the building for pupils and students to relax and meet socially when not in lessons. All staff are keen to establish and maintain good relationships and to encourage pupils to develop personal skills and interests.
40. Despite the construction work which is at present taking place, the school building and its outlook offer a pleasant cultural environment for learning. Pupils have many opportunities to follow their own cultural interests, and to use the area to its best advantage, for example through the orienteering module undertaken by all pupils in Year 10. There are good examples of the curriculum being used to enrich and widen pupils' cultural experiences and in a very monocultural region to give opportunity for pupils and students to undertake activities well outside their normal experience, such as the visit to a Buddhist monastery and listening to a group of South American musicians.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

41. The pastoral system and the underlying support it offers to enable pupils of all levels of attainment to achieve their potential is highly regarded by parents and seen by the school as a crucial part of every teacher's role. Form tutors are currently involved in all major aspects of pupil care and welfare and play a pivotal role as teachers of personal and social education (PSE). Plans are in place to develop their role further to include responsibility for tracking the academic progress of pupils. Year tutors set great store by forming sound relationships but the morning tutorial period needs to be used in a more structured way, especially as the PSE programme becomes more demanding.
42. Health and safety procedures are grounded in good practice and the process for dealing with child protection issues is made clear in the staff handbook. Staff are well deployed at different times of the day to supervise pupil movement in a building which was not built for so many pupils, but at certain times the narrow stairs and corridors can be potentially hazardous for smaller and more vulnerable members of the school.
43. The school behaviour policy and the home-school agreement make clear the expectations for attendance and behaviour from all members of the school. These are recognised and understood by all and implemented in a firm and fair way by staff. The desire not to overburden staff with paperwork, however, means that no official record is kept of the use of the in-school exclusion room and incidents of bullying and racist behaviour are not centrally monitored.
44. The school makes good provision for the assessment and recording of pupils' academic progress and personal development, which are reviewed on a half-termly basis. Appropriate action is taken as a result of the review to give support to pupils who need it and to reward those who have made good progress. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is well monitored, and they are given very good support in their academic and personal welfare.
45. Senior staff are becoming increasingly skilled in using attainment data to set targets for pupils to achieve and to provide support and guidance where necessary. All subject departments have an assessment policy and there are good examples of departments' using the results of assessment to plan and revise their teaching. Most departments set challenging targets for the pupils to achieve. Departments are required annually to produce for the head teacher a detailed analysis of pupils' performance, targets set and achieved, and what steps are being taken to raise standards.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

46. The relationship between school and parents is close and effective. There is a clear sense of partnership which provides a secure basis for both teaching and learning. Parents are closely involved during the transition process from primary school and after their children have had time to get used to their new school. Pupils settle in well: three Year 7 pupils interviewed during the inspection volunteered the opinion that school is 'cool'. The learning support department maintains good communication with the parents of pupils with special educational needs, and this has a positive effect on the progress which they make.
47. Participation in the home-school agreement is almost 100% in Years 7 and 8. Most parents consider they are kept well informed about how their children are progressing and are comfortable when approaching the school with problems or suggestions. Parents are also involved in finding suitable work experience placements for their children. The annual report which parents receive clearly recognises children as individuals and provides a helpful analysis of their progress. A school newspaper and the school's website keep them up-to-date with the wider school picture.

48. At parents' evenings and options evenings, the school ensures that the careers service and, where relevant, university admissions officers are present. Cockermouth School Association is a pro-active organisation that runs a varied social programme for parents and pupils. It also provides valuable additional funds for learning resources.

#### **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

49. Cockermouth School is well led. The whole school is clearly committed to sustaining and raising standards. A clear sense of direction is given by the head teacher and his senior staff, who operate as a cohesive and well-focused team and are effectively deployed to provide both academic and pastoral leadership across the whole school. The attachment of each member of the senior team to a year group and to subject departments ensures that the school's aims and values are seen in its work at all levels.
50. The governing body is aware of its statutory responsibilities and along with the head teacher plays a key role in the strategic management of the school. It has been successful over recent years in its bids for national funding to improve the provision which the school can make for its pupils, and there are clear plans in train for the future development of the school. Finances are carefully controlled and monitored, and the newly appointed professional finance officer has sound plans to ensure the effectiveness and value for money of school spending. Members of the governing body are attached to year groups and to subject departments and some governors have been able to spend time in classrooms in order to experience the work of the school at first hand.
51. Targets are set for the school's performance and are agreed by the governors. Over the past three years the school has set itself challenging targets which it has worked hard to achieve. The recent improvement in the academic performance of boys relative to girls has been as a result of whole-school initiatives taken in response to its clear analysis of trends in examination results.
52. Heads of department and heads of year are committed to high standards, provide strong leadership and contribute well to the school's strong ethos and shared sense of purpose. Most subject departments have effective schemes of work which ensure good lesson planning, although schemes of work in ICT and in physical education do not ensure that the requirements of the National Curriculum in those subjects are met. The work of the learning support department is well planned and well co-ordinated.
53. Whilst all departments evaluate their performance annually and identify areas for development and improvement in discussion with senior staff, teaching is not formally monitored in most areas of the curriculum. In modern languages, for example, the teaching of French is unsatisfactory in some cases and good in others, and German is overall well taught. There is a need for the department to identify its strengths and weaknesses and to institute clear directives and procedures to improve its performance overall.
54. In ICT, the evaluation of the subject's effectiveness across the school is a weakness. In both lower and upper schools, but most particularly in Years 10 and 11, pupils are not achieving standards which should be expected for their age. ICT is taught as a separate subject only in Year 7 and as a five-week module in Year 10. It is, therefore, important to monitor standards across departments in order to ensure that the work is planned to meet National Curriculum requirements. This monitoring is not at present being satisfactorily carried out.

55. Most subjects are well staffed with well-qualified teachers whose subject knowledge is good and who are confident to teach their subject to the highest level. There is a very small amount of non-specialist teaching which does affect pupils' learning. For example, a significant number of non-specialist staff are called upon to teach some physical education when specialist staff in the department are available but teaching other subjects, and half of the history lessons taught in the first two years are taught by non-specialist staff. Whilst the teachers of ICT are well qualified in their subject, there is less expertise in other subject areas which have the responsibility for teaching part of the ICT curriculum. Some teaching groups in the sixth form are too large to enable students to receive the level of individual attention which they require. The school plans the professional development of all its staff in a supportive and organised manner which is linked directly to the school's priorities and targets.
56. Learning resources are never less than satisfactory in the school, and most subjects have good, up-to-date resources which are effectively used. There is an adequate supply of books in most subjects, and library stock to support learning is good in many subjects and satisfactory in most of the others. The school has set itself the target to provide books for all pupils to use as support materials at home, and is currently evaluating the first phase of this project.
57. The school is over-subscribed, and is constantly attempting to bring its accommodation into line with the demands of its population and its curriculum. The accommodation for the majority of subjects is adequate, although insufficient specialist accommodation in some subjects places constraints on the quality of teaching. Pending the completion of the science laboratories which are at present under construction a significant number of science lessons are taught in non-specialist accommodation. Music education is adversely affected when the specialist accommodation is given over to examinations at certain times of the year, and through the inadequacy of dedicated practice rooms.

#### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

58. In order to improve further the school's standards of academic performance and the quality of its provision, the governors and head teacher should:
- (a) Ensure that the requirements of the National Curriculum and religious education are fully met by:
- (i) Providing an appropriate structure for the teaching of ICT which ensures that all strands of the subject are satisfactorily covered and that all pupils can make the progress which they should make;
  - (ii) Providing sufficient time to ensure that the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education can be implemented in the upper school and in the sixth form.
- (b) Take steps to raise standards in French and ICT by:
- (i) Bringing all teaching in French into line with the best teaching in that subject, and ensuring that teaching is carefully monitored and expertise shared across the modern languages department;
  - (ii) Undertaking more consistent and rigorous monitoring of what subject departments are providing in ICT education in order to ensure that all pupils receive well-planned and coherent learning experiences;

- (iii) Ensuring that staff from all departments make effective use of the training which they receive in order to promote pupils' progress in ICT in their subject area.
- (c) Improve the breadth of the school's curricular provision by:
- (i) Increasing the opportunities for vocational education and for drama;
  - (ii) Ensuring adequate timetabled provision for music in the lower school;
  - (iii) Extending the range of subjects available in the sixth form.

## **OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES**

### **The strategic facility for autism**

59. The school caters very well for its autistic pupils who are well accepted by the school community and achieve a high level of social and educational integration. All spend the majority of their time following the mainstream curriculum, with a level of support that is well matched to their needs and abilities. For some this is exclusively in-class support whilst others are withdrawn for additional literacy or numeracy along with other pupils who are operating at a similar level. Specific curriculum initiatives which help some autistic pupils to develop communication, cognitive thinking and life skills, also include pupils without autism who would benefit. In the upper school and the sixth form individual pupils are helped with course work in a distraction free environment whilst others have elements of their studies designed or modified to utilise their particular strengths. One Year 11 boy is following a programme combining ICT with elements of business administration that link with a Year 10 project.
60. All learning support staff have undergone training in autistic spectrum disorders and this expertise is being passed on to subject teachers through example, advice and in the collaboration required for the delivery of effective in-class support. Pupils are empowered by their teachers' ability to recognise difficulties and develop strategies that will enable them to channel their obsessive interests, reduce their anxieties and overcome their fears.
61. An excellent level of support is provided outside the school timetable. Before school and at break times support assistants are available in the year areas and pupils can use the learning support base as a quiet retreat when needed. Innovative learning aids and raised awareness of lunch-time staff help pupils cope with the stress that can be caused by crowds, choices and complex physical management of materials.
62. Whilst pupils with autism always have priority use of the small, soundproofed, multi-use classroom with an adjoining computer facility, it is used flexibly by the learning support department to provide a wide range of individual and small group teaching for all pupils who have special educational needs.

### **The work of the sixth form**

63. Standards of attainment shown by sixth form students at A-level are satisfactory in relation to prior attainment and to the requirements of the courses being followed. The school had its best A-level results for many years in 2000. Recent examination results in most subjects have been above or in line with national averages with the exception of French where the number of students gaining higher grades has been low over the last two years and where overall results are worse than those for other subjects. Good

standards are seen in the work of students on GNVQ health and social care and leisure and tourism courses.

64. Sixth form students have very good attitudes to their learning. They show commitment and independence in their approach to their studies when given the opportunity, and are confident and articulate in discussion.
65. The sixth form curriculum offers a good range of traditional, two-year A-level courses in two, three or four subjects and general studies. AS-level examinations are taken at the end of Year 12. In addition the school offers a one-year sixth form course involving the study of ICT to intermediate GNVQ level, work experience and the opportunity to improve GCSE grades in mathematics and English. A working party is currently reviewing the range of A-level subjects on offer, and plans to broaden the spectrum through the inclusion of additional subjects are being considered.
66. The head and assistant head of sixth form provide good leadership and guidance. The sixth form brochure and leaflets about individual subjects are informative and clear. The role of sixth form tutors in monitoring academic performance has recently been given increased emphasis. There is a sixth form council and students are offered a range of opportunities for voluntary activities and community involvement.

### **Community links**

67. While Cockermouth School has a pleasant Lakeland location, it is somewhat isolated in terms of the wider commercial and industrial communities. Despite this, the school works hard to overcome this potential difficulty and secures some 200 work experience placements for Year 10 pupils every year, although only a minority involve industry as opposed to commerce and, particularly, tourism. Happily, the school sees its relative isolation as a challenge and has countered it very successfully. Academic links for pupils in Years 9 and 10 and the sixth form have been forged with two schools in Marvejols, France. Pupils from Year 7 upwards take part in visits and exchanges involving schools in France and Germany and there is an interesting curriculum project which involves pupils from a school in the Czech Republic.
68. The school takes care to include in its curriculum a range of opportunities which involve its pupils and students in the wider community. The Year 10 curriculum includes a five-week community service module. Visits to the theatre play a key role in the English curriculum and the school regularly welcomes visitors from the local and wider communities. The school's music centre coaches 250 children from the school and the wider community every Saturday morning and produces an annual primary school music festival for parents. The youth wing is used by the youth service and Cockermouth youth club. There are effective links with Cumbria Careers, Enterprise Cumbria, the Young Enterprise Scheme and West Cumbria College. Good links are maintained with a number of UK universities, and university visits are arranged for pupils in Years 9 and 12.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

216

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

63

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	27	46	20	5	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

#### Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	997	240
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	66	3

#### Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational need	29	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	155	4

#### English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	8

#### Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	18
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	21

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.0
National comparative data	7.9

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
2000	112	87	199

National Curriculum test/task results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 or above	Boys	71	90	85
	Girls	78	79	73
	Total	149	169	158
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	75.5 (63)	86.6 (79)	80.1 (72)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	44 (33)	64 (52)	55 (41)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 or above	Boys	71	92	75
	Girls	73	79	74
	Total	144	162	149
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	73 (72)	87 (86)	77 (79)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	47 (49)	64 (53)	41 (49)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	107	98	205

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	56	102	104
	Girls	71	96	98
	Total	127	198	202
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	62 (63)	97 (97)	99 (97)
	National	46.6 (44.6)	90.9 (89.8)	95.8 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	44 (43)
	National	38 (37)

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

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	49	52	101

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	21.5	23.2	22.4	1.3	0	0.8
National	17.7	18.1	17.9	2.7	2.8	2.8

### Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	3
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	1193
Any other minority ethnic group	9

### Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	42	2
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

### Teachers and classes

#### Qualified teachers and classes

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	75.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.4

FTE means full-time equivalent

#### Education support staff

Total number of education support staff	5
Total aggregate hours worked per week	132

#### Deployment of teachers

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.7
---	------

#### Average teaching group size

### Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	2936020
Total expenditure	2935845
Expenditure per pupil	2423
Balance brought forward from previous year	114658
Balance carried forward to next year	114833

Key Stage 3	22.4
Key Stage 4	21.2

### **Results of the survey of parents and carers**

#### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1237
Number of questionnaires returned	248

#### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school	43.1	48.8	4.4	2.0	0
My child is making good progress in school	36.7	48.0	6.5	0.4	4.0
Behaviour in the school is good	37.5	50.4	4.0	1.2	4.8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home	25.8	50.4	14.9	2.4	2.4
The teaching is good	31.0	54.0	3.2	1.2	5.2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on	31.0	41.9	14.5	3.2	4.4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem	52.0	37.5	5.6	2.0	1.2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best	58.5	35.1	2.4	0.8	1.6
The school works closely with parents	28.2	49.2	11.7	4.0	3.2
The school is well led and managed	43.5	45.6	4.4	1.6	2.0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible	41.1	45.2	4.4	1.2	4.8
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons	43.1	42.3	3.6	1.6	6.9

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

### **ENGLISH**

69. The attainment of 13-year-olds and 15-year-olds is well above the national average, reflecting pupils' attainment in the national tests at age 14 and in GCSE examinations. In 1999 the results of the national tests were disappointing and dipped to around the national average, but in 2000 there was a significant improvement with over three-quarters of pupils achieving the national standard or above. Results at GCSE in both English and English literature for which all pupils are entered have been consistently well above the national average. There is a rising trend in both subjects. In 2000 English literature with 73% of pupils achieving A\* to C grades came closer to English where 76% of pupils achieved that standard. These are the best results the school has achieved in recent years. Overall girls do a little better than boys, but the difference is far less than nationally. In the sixth form students' attainment is satisfactory in the context of the A and AS-level courses they are following in English literature and in English language and literature. Again this is reflected in recent examination results.
70. Pupils' standards of literacy are generally high when they come to the school and they make good progress in refining and developing their higher order reading skills and language awareness. Attainment in literacy is high in other subjects: in geography, history and religious education extended writing is a strength and oral skills are well developed. In music most pupils are beginning to use a correct musical vocabulary while in PE pupils use technical language competently. In science standards of scientific literacy are high and there are some examples of drama-based approaches being effectively used as part of the teaching and learning in the subject.
71. In the writing that pupils do there is much that is fluent and accurate with a clear sense of audience and purpose. The best is written with deliberate craft and a real relish for language. Pupils' writing develops well because it is well taught and clearly valued, often through a highly detailed written response from the teacher, in some cases incorporating the use of clear and well-chosen individual targets.
72. In speaking and listening, pupils are generally confident and articulate in class discussions in response to the teachers' skilled questioning, and in pair work and group work. Though some drama techniques such as 'hot-seating' are a feature of the work in some lessons, there is only limited evidence of pupils' attainment in more extended oral activities such as formal presentations and debate. Provision for drama - and the development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding of drama - is a weakness.
73. Pupils are attentive, enthusiastic and keen to respond. They make good progress in developing their language abilities in reading, writing and speaking and listening. Pupils with special educational needs make significant progress in improving their communication skills. In the sixth form students make satisfactory progress in relation to course requirements and build on their attainment at GCSE level. There are many examples of mature collaboration and pupils and students showing real interest in the work being undertaken. Behaviour is almost invariably very good.
74. The quality of teaching in English is a major strength. In Years 7 to 9 most of the teaching is good or very good. In the upper school and the sixth form there are examples of very good and excellent teaching, although there is a small element which is unsatisfactory. Teachers' specialist expertise is put to good use in lessons which have explicit, well-focused objectives, clearly related to aspects of language. A good

range of teaching and learning strategies is effectively employed. Well-structured, well-paced lessons are a feature of the teaching in the Year 7 literacy initiative. Teachers make good use of skilled questioning to maintain momentum and challenge thinking. When pupils are working individually or in pairs or small groups teachers monitor progress carefully and make timely and telling interventions. Particularly notable in the consistent and conscientious marking of pupils' writing is the quality and detail of teacher comment. Good, systematic use is made of homework. In the small element of unsatisfactory teaching there were some weaknesses in the presentation of material, the range of strategies being used and in the management of the pupils.

75. The curriculum in English is appropriately broad and balanced but is limited by the lack of formal provision for drama. Curriculum links between the department and primary schools are a developing strength. As well as the introduction of a bridging project to support continuity between Years 6 and 7, teachers' knowledge about the National Literacy Strategy in primary schools enables them to pick up effectively on what pupils already know and can do. The literacy initiative both within the department and across the school has been well planned, organised and managed. It is clearly having an impact with word walls, writing frames and a growing awareness of the demands on pupils' understanding made by textbooks. The English department has a well-designed programme of study for ICT in Key Stage 3 and the range of available sixth form courses is being expanded.
76. The department makes generally good provision for pupils' personal development. As well as a programme of theatre visits there are many opportunities for pupils' cultural development in the range of texts being studied, including texts reflecting diverse cultural backgrounds. Moral issues are frequently under active discussion as part of learning in English and pupils' social development is supported through the many opportunities provided for pupils to collaborate in pair and group work, to speak and listen to each other and to learn to value each other's contributions. In some lessons there is an element of reflection, and pupils' interaction with the themes and issues presented in the texts they are studying offers opportunities to extend their insights into matters of value and belief.
77. The English department is made up of a team of well-qualified, enthusiastic staff. It is well led by a head of department who appreciates the qualities of individual members and has developed a strong team ethos. The scheme of work contains individual elements which are of good quality and the department is well placed to make good use of the new national framework for English teaching in order to achieve greater overall coherence. There is an appropriately focused departmental development plan which includes a review of performance in 1999 – 2000 and sets out clear and appropriate targets for the coming year. The department is committed to reviewing its performance and to develop in response to changing needs.

## **MATHEMATICS**

78. The attainment of pupils currently in Year 9 and Year 11 in mathematics is well above the national average. In the national tests taken by 14-year-olds in 2000 86% of the pupils reached level 5 or above. This is very high compared with the national average. The proportion of pupils who reached level 6 or above was also very high and well above the achievements of similar schools. Over the last three years around two-thirds of the pupils entered for the GCSE have achieved grades A\* to C. This is well above the national average. Pupils achieved better results in GCSE mathematics than they did in most other subjects. Although boys achieved better GCSE results than the girls in 2000 this is not always the case. GCE A-level results have been more variable. Over the last three years the performance of students has been more or less in line with the average nationally.

79. Standards of work in mathematics lessons are variable but most pupils are working well above expected levels. For example, an upper set in Year 9 had a good understanding of a problem involving the collection and analysis of real data associated with prime numbers. Pupils were able to calculate the mean, mode and median of data that had been collected. At the other end of the scale, a lower set in Year 11 found difficulty in recognising lines of symmetry of different three-dimensional figures. Other aspects of the same lesson showed that many of the group had limited numeracy skills. Pupils in the upper and middle sets are making at least satisfactory progress and working at appropriate levels for their age, and some pupils are making good progress and achieving very high standards. Lower attaining pupils and those with special needs are generally making satisfactory progress. Most students in sixth form mathematics classes are achieving the required standard for the course.
80. Teaching is good and sometimes very good. All teachers are well qualified and have good subject knowledge. Lessons are well planned and involve pupils in an appropriate variety of activities. Pupils have a very positive attitude to their mathematics work. Behaviour in all classes is of a very high standard and relationships are good. Lessons proceed at a good pace and teachers set challenging activities for the pupils to undertake. For example, in a very good Year 7 class pupils investigated different types of triangles using supporting materials. By investigation the pupils gained an understanding of congruency. More demanding work was set for the more able pupils. The class contained an appropriate variety of individual and group work. The teacher gave good explanations of the work where required and encouraged pupils to high standards of achievement by asking well-chosen questions. In a few classes, however, pupils are allowed to work for too long on one type of activity. For example, a lower ability Year 9 class undertook examples involving the division of numbers and lost interest in the work because the activity went on too long.
81. Homework is regularly set by all teachers but when it is not done by pupils, reasons are not always requested and followed up. Although work is regularly set and marked only a relatively small amount is formally marked and graded by the teachers. This is particularly the case in the sixth form where students mark much of their work using the answers that have been given.
82. The mathematics curriculum is appropriate throughout. AS-level and further mathematics are available in the sixth form in addition to A-level mathematics. Appropriate schemes of work have been developed and agreed and these meet the needs of the full range of pupils' attainment including those with special educational needs. Pupils are regularly assessed and good records of progress are kept.
83. Some use is now being made of ICT to support and enhance teaching and learning in mathematics. In particular, use of graph plotting software and spreadsheets is made to support aspects of the work. However, the overall level of ICT activity is restricted and opportunities to support further aspects of mathematics work are being missed. The development and support of pupils' numeracy skills is an effective part of the mathematics curriculum, particularly in the lower school. However, the school does not formally build on the National Numeracy Strategy in Year 7 in the same way as it is developing its literacy teaching.
84. The mathematics department is effectively led and managed. Teachers share in the work of the department, meet on a regular basis and work well as a team. A detailed review of the department's work is carried out on an annual basis. The outcome is a written report containing an analysis of test and examination results including value-added analyses. Future plans are made and targets are set as a result of the review. However, insufficient emphasis is given to the monitoring of the quality of

teaching and learning in the review process. Although teaching observations have been carried out with the two newly qualified teachers in the department there is currently no systematic programme of observations for other teachers in the department. Opportunities for the sharing of good practice and of raising the standards of teaching to the highest level are therefore being missed. Resources provided to support the work of the department are good. Accommodation for mathematics is good and there is good mathematical display to provide a focus for the subject.

## SCIENCE

85. In the national tests taken by 14 year-olds in 2000, the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 or above was very high compared with the national average and very high compared with similar schools. The proportion at level 6 or above was also very high compared with the average nationally. Almost a quarter of pupils attained levels 7 or 8. Pupils make good progress over their first three years in the school and are on average three terms ahead of the standards which they might be expected to achieve.
86. In the GCSE examinations in science in 2000 nearly three-quarters of the pupils obtained A\* to C passes and just over one third obtained A\* or A grades. Over the last three years both boys and girls have shown levels of attainment well above the national average and above the average for similar schools. A-level results in 2000 were well above average in biology and chemistry and slightly below the national average in physics. Students' performance in biology was significantly better than in the previous year, remained the same in chemistry and was lower in physics. The drop in overall attainment in physics has coincided with a large increase in the numbers of students opting to take the subject to A-level.
87. The good progress which most pupils make in the lower school is continued in Years 10 and 11. From pupils' work seen during the inspection, the pupils who are in the middle range of attainment are making the best progress. Lower attainers and pupils with statements of special educational need are making satisfactory to good progress. The progress of the pupils with the highest attainment is not on the whole as great as it could be, although their rate of progress varies between the three sciences and according to the group in which they are taught. Most students in the sixth form are making good progress and some students' progress – male and female - is very good. The progress of the highest attaining students is again not as great as it could be because the level of challenge is too variable.
88. The work of the higher attaining pupils is consistent with strong, independent learning and analytical thought, which is supported by their ability to write fluently using the terminology and principles of the subject. They apply very good laboratory skills to undertake systematically planned experimental investigations, drawing the evidence from a range of sources and coming to well-reasoned conclusions which are soundly based on precise data and on scientific laws. The middle range of pupils achieve these qualities in more modest measure and with less independence of learning, but nevertheless at a standard which is above the national expectations. The lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs can, with assistance, organise experiments, make measurements appropriately and present their data in tables and graphs. They can recall and apply scientific knowledge to a limited extent to explain the effects which they observe. Where opportunities are given to write with feeling on scientific issues which are contentious, for example in the end of module reviews, pupils' work shows remarkable maturity.
89. In the majority of science lessons the teaching challenges pupils' curiosity about scientific matters and has high expectations of the pupils. Teachers insist on the use of correct scientific terminology and the correct use of language, and on the application of

scientific principles. Lessons are well planned to provide continuity and to relate where appropriate to learning in other subjects. In a minority of lessons, questioning is less demanding, and the pace and challenge of the lesson is not as great as in the majority of well-taught lessons. In most science lessons pupils concentrate well and display a good level of scientific enquiry and curiosity. Co-operation is good when pupils share equipment or work on tasks together.

90. Good basic teaching skills were observed in the majority of lessons. The use of skilful questioning and clear presentation of the work to be completed is a feature of most teaching. In some lessons, the teachers' knowledge, enthusiasm and practical participation encourage the lively involvement of pupils. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, boys and girls were thinking hard and calling on many skills as they devised a short drama-style presentation to show the complex movements of the solar system. Very good levels of teacher knowledge are a feature of most sixth form science lessons. In a biology lesson, for example, the teacher's enthusiasm for recent research into cell structures gave rise to a stimulating discussion which advanced students' thinking in their new AS-level course. In practical work there is an emphasis in Years 10 and 11 on the development of independent and co-operative work, whereas in the lower school there is a more teacher-directed approach to the development of skills. Throughout the school lessons are typified by the way in which all pupils are included irrespective of their skills or attainment, and by the teachers' encouragement of pupils and attention to detail. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to use computers to support practical and theoretical learning.
91. Some weaknesses were observed in the consistency and quality of marking pupils' written work. The quality of the marking is too variable. At its best it shows ways in which pupils might improve their work or it gives encouragement about how their work is progressing. At the other end of the scale the marking comprises unhelpful ticks and crosses and sometimes fails to pick up on obvious and sometimes serious errors.
92. Many aspects of departmental management are good, and some are very good: for example, the use of computer methods to diagnose the progress of pupils. There has been some monitoring of teaching quality. The department is staffed with a satisfactory balance of expertise and experience and there is good quality technician support from dedicated staff who are highly valued. Staff development needs to be better planned, particularly in the use of computers for data logging.
93. The science curriculum is well planned and supported by detailed schemes of work which aid successful lesson planning. The department has a good range of textbooks, and all pupils are able to keep a textbook at home for reference. Generally, practical equipment is satisfactory but more up-to-date apparatus is needed for data-logging experiments. Preparation and storage facilities are barely satisfactory and rely on the good co-operation of all staff. Health and safety aspects of the department are generally well managed.

## **ART**

94. Pupils' and students' attainment in art is broadly in line with national averages. GCSE results for art for the last three years have been below the national average but reached it in 2000 when 61% of pupils gained A\* to C grades. This inconsistency can be attributed to a range of factors, including differing interpretations of examination board expectations, variations in teaching quality and tensions between creativity and technical excellence. In the creative textiles examinations pupils achieve high standards. In art and creative textiles in 2000 almost one pupil in five gained A\* and A grades. A-level results are consistently high: all students entered have achieved pass grades in the past three years. The standard of pupils' work seen throughout the school during the

inspection ranged from being at least in line with national expectations to being significantly above average, particularly in the sixth form.

95. Teaching in art is always at least satisfactory and some is good. The range of teaching styles adopted by teachers in the department varies from energetic and enthusiastic to thoughtful and reflective. All staff contribute effectively to the teaching of art, but whereas some teachers favour a tight and prescriptive approach to teaching and learning with closely predicted outcomes, others prefer a freer, more open-ended model with responsibility largely in the hands of pupils. This encouraging of ownership is very successful in bringing about effective learning by all pupils. All lessons are well planned, follow the published scheme of work and form a structured sequence of activities which ensures that all pupils move forward.
96. The attitude of pupils to art is almost always positive although a small number of reluctant older pupils was observed: they were less motivated and had much less self-confidence. A-level students of art, particularly in Year 13, are mature and self-critical in their approach to the work, and set themselves challenging targets.
97. The art curriculum has breadth and balance and covers work in two and three dimensions, and in textiles. However, there is little evidence of any ICT-based work and the department has very limited resources for using computers to support learning. Pupils of all ages gain most from art when they are encouraged to think for themselves. They are encouraged to develop personally and reflect this independence in their work and in A-level classes the students have excellent opportunities to develop as individuals. However, this practice is not consistent throughout the department and some pupils experience a less stimulating programme of work where a more structured framework of expectations is evident and less responsibility is taken by pupils.
98. Great care is taken to meet the needs of individual pupils. However, the concern to match work to the personal and emotional needs of individual pupils sometimes compromises the need to raise standards. Pupils are expected to respect the feelings of others and evaluate the work of others sensitively. The contribution made by art to the social development of the A-level students is significant. Pupils co-operate effectively and the atmosphere in the department is friendly and relaxed providing pupils with opportunities to share their learning experiences. The subject makes a significant contribution to the cultural development of pupils throughout. The work of a broad range of artists is considered, with different staff following their own preferences within the framework of the published scheme of work. However, the department does not take the opportunity to share its artistic enthusiasms more broadly around the school.
99. The department is led with passion and commitment, but the philosophy to encourage independent thinking in a free structure is clearly not shared by all staff and the contribution of other teachers of the subject is not always fully recognised. Staff do not work harmoniously together as a team and there is no shared sense of purpose. The department is not a sufficiently cohesive unit. It does not evaluate its own performance satisfactorily and there is little sharing of good practice in order to raise standards. The accommodation for art is cramped but could be improved by removing some clutter and improving storage.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

100. The standards attained in GCSE examinations are high in most material areas, design graphics being the most successful with 93% of pupils gaining A\* to C grades in 2000. There is variation between the performance of boys and girls in the different material areas but not all is stereotypical: in 2000 girls obtained better results in resistant materials - the opposite of the national trend. Overall the school's performance in

design and technology is above average, with many pupils gaining their best grades in the subject. The GCSE results for food technology for the last three years have been above average and in 2000 a large proportion of pupils gained the highest grades. Twelve candidates took the A-level design examination in 2000 and five gained an A grade. The A-level design work seen during the inspection was mature, with some sophisticated and challenging projects being undertaken. Students following the advanced GNVQ health and social care course are reaching high standards.

101. Standards of work seen during the inspection generally reflect examination attainment, although some pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not fully illustrate their design thinking, indicating some gaps in the designing process. The standards which pupils achieve are generally assured through a very structured approach and the encouraging feedback which pupils receive about their work, and through the clear guidance which teachers provide about the completion of examination coursework. Pupil progress and attainment are carefully monitored in all classes. Regular evaluation of pupil performance is used to inform and modify course planning and pupils are provided with effective feedback on their progress. Excellent group evaluation and assessment activities can be seen at the end of food technology lessons in the lower school.
102. The quality of teaching is satisfactory or good in all material areas, although the teaching of design is not as consistently good as it might be. There is some variability in the pace of lessons: some are taught at a brisk pace with very little time being lost, while others are conducted in a rather leisurely manner and lack any real urgency. Teachers are experienced and have good subject knowledge and generally have high expectations. There are good, positive relationships in the department and teachers are well supported by technical and other non-teaching staff. Lessons are well planned and carefully structured with clear learning objectives.
103. Most pupils have very positive attitudes towards their work in design and technology. In a minority of lessons pupils are submissive and almost disinterested but the generally good behaviour disguises and masks their lack of commitment and involvement. Generally pupils are keen to learn, enthusiastic and interested in the activities and opportunities provided by their teachers. They behave well, are polite and willing to discuss their work. Pupils co-operate effectively, sharing resources and accommodation well. There is a friendly but business-like and productive atmosphere in most lessons.
104. The learning opportunities provided by the curriculum are comprehensive, broad and balanced and a good range of courses is available. From Year 7 onwards there are opportunities for pupils to develop as individuals and to take responsibility for their own work, organise their own materials and research the work set. Pupils in food technology organise their working areas efficiently and work in a mature fashion with due regard for health and safety. Teachers work hard to help pupils understand commercial practices and make comparisons with other types of production. There is only relatively limited use of ICT to support learning in design and technology, although many pupils use ICT to enhance their folders and design work.
105. The design and technology areas are well led and effectively managed. Work is well planned in the long, medium and short term. However, design and technology and food technology are currently treated in philosophy and planning terms as different disciplines, which is contrary to the way in which they are considered in the National Curriculum, where they share common aims and principles.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

106. Teacher assessment for 14-year-olds shows that most pupils are performing above the national average. Classes are taught in mixed ability groups and the overall standard of work seen is good. There is little or no evidence of under-achievement. The highest attaining pupils are being encouraged to complete extension work and to cover topics in greater depth. The proportion of pupils obtaining A\* to C grades in GCSE geography in 2000 was well above average. A-level results were also very good: nearly three-quarters of the students obtained the highest grades in 2000. All pupils are making good progress and pupils with special educational needs make better than average progress.
107. Pupils have very positive attitudes to their work. They are well behaved, show an active interest and concentrate well throughout the lesson. The quality of pupils' learning reflects the good teaching which they receive: all lessons seen were good or very good. Lesson planning is clear and well matched to the needs of the pupils. Lessons have pace and variety. The quality of relationships is a strength of the department. Students enjoy their geography and its associated activities, including field studies.
108. Teachers employ a variety of teaching strategies and use a wide range of resource materials. Homework and further investigative tasks are set regularly to reinforce work in the classroom. Assessment is used effectively.
109. Pupils are encouraged to use ICT to support many aspects of their work in geography. In the upper school and in the sixth form pupils call on a variety of computer skills, including word processing, using spreadsheets and producing graphs and other information in diagrammatic form to produce work of high quality.
110. The newly appointed head of department has vision and the capacity to take the geography department forward. The teachers of geography work in close partnership and support each other. There is a shared commitment to raise standards and to improve the quality of education which the department can provide. Resources are good and well managed. Geography teaching rooms although small are well presented and make a positive contribution to the quality of pupils' learning.

## **HISTORY**

111. By the end of their third year in the school pupils attain standards which are well above the national average. All pupils are able to demonstrate good levels of historical knowledge and understanding and they are able to draw on these in providing informed explanations of historical events. A key strength of all pupils is their use of specialist vocabulary and technical language in written and oral responses. In Year 9 particularly, the higher attaining pupils are able to compare different attitudes towards war and offer insights into the political and moral factors that shaped opinions at the time. In Year 8 pupils are able to give an accurate and informed analysis of the factors leading to the dissolution of the monasteries. The written work of these pupils is structured and articulate, and uses accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation. There are many good examples of extended writing where pupils show high levels of skill in organising and presenting complex arguments.
112. GCSE results in history in 2000 were above the national average. Pupils in Year 11 are confident and independent learners who make effective use of a range of historical sources and produce detailed, analytical written assignments that show good levels of knowledge and understanding. The use of historical sources related to Ireland is particularly good, and elsewhere students are able to give a clear and articulate summary of the various issues relating to the culture of the Native Americans. Lower attainers show good knowledge of the events studied, although their written work tends to be more descriptive and less specific.

113. Attainment is high in the sixth-form. A-level results have improved steadily over the last three years, most significantly in the number of higher grades achieved. Sixth-form students develop high levels of historical skill and are able to make accurate and perceptive judgements based on a range of evidence.
114. Most pupils make good progress in history. They demonstrate a good understanding of historical knowledge and of causes and consequences. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are able to recall key events and demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of historical concepts such as change and continuity.
115. In the lower school the teaching of history is almost always satisfactory, and often good or very good. Where lessons in Years 7 and 8 are less effective, pupils are not challenged to link events and circumstances across time and place in order to discern trends and identify patterns. The deployment of specialist staffing in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form reduces the availability of specialist teachers in the lower school. The large size of teaching groups in the sixth form places limitations on the development of different styles of learning.
116. Teachers' subject knowledge is good or very good and very effective classroom management ensures good pace in most lessons. Older pupils are becoming skilful independent learners. Their thinking is effectively extended and challenged by astute prompting from teachers. Higher attainers in particular are encouraged to pose searching and insightful questions in order to develop their own views and opinions. The needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, are met through the provision of high quality learning resources and activities. Relationships between staff and pupils are particularly good, and are characterised by mutual respect and good humour.
117. Effective use of ICT is evident in the department, with an innovative departmental website that reduces the time spent by students searching for reference sites on the Internet. The department is well resourced with textbooks and this enables purposeful homework to be regularly given. However, library stock in the lower school is limited and out of date and does not match the quality of provision for older pupils.
118. Pupils' work is regularly and consistently marked and there is evidence of increased pupil involvement in their own assessment. Feedback to pupils is constructive and supportive, although the very detailed comments observed in some pupils' books do not always influence their subsequent work. Teachers make good use of information about pupils' progress to plan their lessons and to set challenging targets.
119. The head of department provides thoughtful and reflective leadership. Action planning identifies clear targets for improvement. Schemes of work are very detailed for all year groups and reflect the changing requirements of Curriculum 2000. The department has taken a lead role in the implementation of whole school approaches to literacy and citizenship and to the provision for the most able pupils and this is beginning to influence attainment.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

120. The attainment of most 14 year-olds in many aspects of information and communication technology (ICT) is in line with national expectations. All pupils can word process. The highest attainers are able to produce high quality pieces of work and use a layout, fonts and illustrations that bring them to life. Lower attainers can produce work that is well set out and illustrated but they use the skills involved at a more basic level. They can all use e-mail and the Internet with confidence. All pupils can use

spreadsheets and the higher attainers can vary the numbers and use this technique to solve simple problems. Lower attainers can use them to add columns of figures. However, pupils are not systematically taught how to use databases or the techniques of using computers to control devices. Overall, therefore, their attainment by the age of 14 is below what they are expected to achieve.

121. At age 16 pupils' attainment remains below average. There is very little formal teaching of ICT in Years 10 and 11. At the end of Year 11 pupils' attainment has improved little on what they could do two years earlier, other than their ability to use databases. The highest attainers are able to enter data and order and re-order it. Lower attainers can use a simpler application at a more basic level.
122. Some students in Year 12 are following a course leading to an intermediate GNVQ. At the time of the inspection students had only been working on this programme for a few weeks. The work that they have produced so far is in line with the course expectations. All of the students can use a word processor effectively to produce papers such as letter headings and invoices that would be required by business. They can use spreadsheets, databases and the Internet with confidence.
123. Teaching in ICT is well planned and almost always of a high standard. Teachers have good classroom control and relate to their pupils very well. They monitor pupils' work effectively and provide good support and encouragement. Resources and time are used well and lessons proceed briskly. Pupils of all ages concentrate well and show good levels of interest. In some lessons in Year 7 it was possible to see fascination on pupils' faces as they discovered new things they could use computers to do. In lessons pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. Behaviour is always good and pupils have good attitudes to the subject.
124. Curriculum arrangements for ICT are unsatisfactory for pupils in Years 8 to 11 and do not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. ICT is taught as a separate subject in Year 7, where the new teaching scheme is having a positive impact on standards. In Years 8 and 9 ICT is taught and assessed within other subjects. These arrangements do not ensure that all of the aspects of the National Curriculum are developed. In addition, the teaching is not monitored sufficiently to ensure that all pupils have similar and effective experiences or that the highest attaining pupils are challenged. In the upper school the only planned ICT teaching for all pupils is a short five-week course. The teaching scheme for this course ensures that the work done in Years 7 to 9 is revised. However, pupils' ICT skills are only extended slightly and the teaching plan used produces little challenge for higher attainers. Pupils of all ages are not sufficiently encouraged to use computers independently as required by the National Curriculum.
125. The assessment of pupils' attainment in ICT is mainly carried out in subject departments. There are no clear arrangements to ensure that each pupil's progress is monitored and that their skills are systematically developed. Assessment is not used well to plan for future teaching. No samples of work at each National Curriculum level are kept and used to ensure that there is conformity between teachers' assessments.
126. The management of ICT is satisfactory overall but there are some weaknesses. The requirements of the National Curriculum are not being met across all age groups. There is no clearly stated whole-school curriculum. While the work of subject departments is co-ordinated there is no effective monitoring to ensure coherent and equal experiences for all pupils. When ICT is taught as a separate subject there are sufficient teachers with training to ensure that it is taught well. However, there is an insufficient number of ICT-skilled teachers of other subjects to ensure that ICT is used effectively across the whole school.

127. The school has worked hard since the last inspection to improve the provision which it makes for learning in ICT. Computers are now used in a number of subject areas to support learning, but their use remains inconsistent. There are good examples of ICT work in departments, but opportunities are missed in mathematics, science and design and technology.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

128. In Years 7 and 8, all pupils study both French and German. In Year 9, higher attaining pupils continue with two languages while average and lower attaining pupils choose either French or German. In Years 10 and 11, most pupils study either French or German to GCSE while small numbers continue with two languages. Both languages are available at A-level.
129. Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment at age 14 in both 1999 and 2000 were for French only, since it was the language studied by all from Year 7. These show that attainment was well below that expected nationally. Work seen in pupils' books and in lessons indicates that, in French, attainment remains well below average. By the end of Year 9 the highest attaining pupils can write short paragraphs describing people, but cannot use a variety of tenses to write about events in the past or future. The majority of pupils can copy sentences in French but many have difficulty writing without support. Speaking is the weakest skill for all pupils. Many speak with poor French accents and cannot give extended replies to questions or join in extended conversations effectively. Many pupils, including those with special educational needs, do not make satisfactory progress.
130. For those pupils who study German in Year 9, attainment is above average. In lessons, higher attaining pupils can speak and write in sentences using correct word order and the past tense accurately. Average and lower attainers can, with support, construct some sentences in the past tense both orally and in writing. Standards are good in German for all pupils, including those with special educational needs, given the time they have spent learning the language.
131. After a good set of results in French in 1999, results fell sharply this year. Pupils performed badly in French compared with other subjects. In lessons, higher attainers have difficulty preparing extended presentations on topics of their own choosing and have problems using dictionaries to support their speaking and writing. Most pupils are working at a very basic level in the four skill areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Speaking and writing are the weakest skills since pupils can understand much more than they can produce for themselves. Boys' attainment is below that of girls by more than is found nationally.
132. Up to the present time only higher attaining pupils have studied German to GCSE level. Even taking this into account, the results in German are high. All pupils gained A\* to C grades in the examination in 1999, and a very high proportion gained these grades in 2000. The numbers of pupils entered for the examination have increased each year. In lessons, pupils' attainment is high in all skill areas. They can write and speak accurately using complex sentences with correct word order. They can understand German spoken at normal speed and can read and understand demanding texts in German.
133. In the A-level examination in French in both 1999 and 2000, numbers of students gaining higher grades was low in comparison with national averages, and the results overall were significantly worse than those for other subjects in the school. In lessons, pupils in Year 13 are passive and reluctant to make extended contributions to discussion or in

answer to questions from the teacher. Their results in the school examinations at the end of Year 12 show that generally their performance is not as good as it should be for the course, nor does it reflect students' grades in GCSE. Listening is particularly weak and for most students speaking is stronger than writing.

134. There were no candidates for A-level in German in 1999. In 2000, of the small group entered, half gained A or B grades which is well above both national and school averages. In the present Year 13 the vast majority of candidates are well able to cope with the demands of the course. They are building up a wide vocabulary which enables them to speak and write about issues of topical interest such as the environment. They are able to write essays of a discursive nature in German, paying good attention to accuracy. They read widely, both articles and some literary texts. Listening is the weakest skill for most students. The department has recognised this and is providing students with useful extra practice in this area.
135. The teaching seen in modern languages was at least satisfactory in two-thirds of the lessons, good or very good in over half and on occasion was excellent. However, teaching was unsatisfactory in a third of the lessons. It is better in German, where all lessons were satisfactory and almost all were good or very good. In French there was some very good teaching for pupils of all ages, but teaching was unsatisfactory in half of the French lessons seen across the age ranges.
136. Teachers have an appropriate command of the language they teach. They generally use French or German well to communicate with pupils in lessons as required by the National Curriculum, and this gives pupils valuable practice in listening to the language they are learning. Classroom control is good in almost all lessons. In all German and some French lessons, time is well used and activities proceed at a brisk pace. In good lessons, teachers use teaching methods which build carefully on what pupils already know and challenge them to attain at a high level. In the best lessons, the presentation by the teacher is lively and motivates pupils very well to learn new language. Some teachers use resources such as flashcards and the overhead projector very well to engage pupils' interest and to help them to learn without constantly referring to English.
137. In some lessons which were otherwise satisfactory, there was an over-concentration on writing at the expense of activities using other skills. In some unsatisfactory lessons in French, the teaching methods used did not result in good learning for some or all of the pupils. At times expectations were too low. Sometimes inappropriate resources were used. In some lessons speaking activities were not well enough prepared. As a result, pupils did not have a secure enough grasp of the language they needed to use. In some lessons pupils were not given good opportunities to practise skills. For example, when pupils listened to a tape of French children speaking, the teacher repeated what was said rather than encouraging pupils to persevere by listening carefully themselves. Occasionally classroom control was unsatisfactory.
138. The curriculum in modern languages for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is good. Pupils are given the opportunity to gain a basic grounding in two languages before choosing which to continue with to GCSE level. In Year 10, a significant number of pupils have been given the opportunity to concentrate on another subject instead of a language. Whilst this is allowed by the latest regulations, it does limit the breadth and balance of the curriculum for these pupils and deprives them of an important skill. In Year 11, the lowest attaining pupils have one lesson fewer of French than other pupils. This limits their opportunities for learning and the GCSE grade which they can obtain.
139. The newly promoted head of department was originally appointed to improve standards in German in the school. He has very successfully accomplished this task. There are now very good results at GCSE and significant numbers of students are now choosing

to study German at GCSE and A-level. As head of modern languages he has begun to unite the department. There has been some monitoring of teaching and marking but, as yet, this has not been sufficiently rigorous. The department has begun to share good practice in teaching and the departmental handbook contains some useful sections on teaching and learning. The department needs to move to a clearer shared understanding of good teaching methods to improve standards in French.

## MUSIC

140. Most pupils aged 14 attain standards that meet the levels set by the National Curriculum. Pupils' understanding of how musical elements such as pitch, duration and timbre can be used expressively and their ability to improvise and compose rhythmic and melodic ideas compositions are good. However, in singing, whilst most Year 9 pupils can sustain an independent part, boys in particular, do not always sing with clear articulation, intonation and enthusiasm. In Years 7 and 8 pupils are making good progress in singing and in composing using graphic scores to record their ideas. By Year 9, pupils are beginning to make some use of ICT to plan and record their compositions. Higher attaining pupils who have access to additional instrumental lessons provided by the school or at the Saturday morning Music Centre, which is based at the school, make good progress. However, in some lessons, higher attaining pupils are insufficiently challenged and do not always make the progress they should in composing. Although pupils with special educational needs reach appropriate standards in the practical aspects of music, when they are presented with worksheets that are too complex, or, asked to write or articulate personal responses to music, they do not make the progress they should. Standards in GCSE examinations are good: in the most recent examination, most pupils achieved their expected targets, and several exceeded them. Standards in the sixth form are good and some of the composition work done in recent years has been exceptional.
141. Pupils of all ages have very positive responses to music. Their behaviour is good and they listen attentively. They work co-operatively in group practical sessions and treat each other, resources and musical instruments with respect. Relationships are very good and pupils and teachers work in an atmosphere in which mutual respect is evident.
142. Teaching is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they use praise and humour effectively to engage and motivate pupils. In the lower school the quality of teaching is sometimes very good. The vast majority of lessons are well planned as part of a sequence and typified by clear introductions and high expectations of behaviour. Teachers use a range of questions and teaching styles to enable pupils to consolidate their understanding of how the music creates its emotional effect. In practical sessions, teachers provide good support for individuals, carefully assessing their progress. In Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form teachers' commitment to high standards and infectious enthusiasm for music enable pupils and students to make good progress in developing their understanding and knowledge.
143. The department provides a caring and stimulating environment in which high expectations enable pupils to succeed. There are good systems for monitoring pupils' attainment and progress and clear targets are set for performance. Parental links are good and the department has developed strong links with local primary schools. Its work is highly valued by parents and the local community.
144. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and provides a good balance of performing, composing and appraising activities. However, the time allocated to music on the timetable in Years 7 to 9 is insufficient for the full requirements of the revised National Curriculum to be taught in sufficient depth. Consequently, although lessons

have a good balance of activities, many pupils do not develop their instrumental skills or their understanding of music notation in sufficient depth and this limits their achievements in performing. The development of instrument specific skills and pupils' understanding of music notation are further inhibited when the department moves out of its specialist accommodation during examination periods. The curriculum is extended by the provision of instrumental lessons, provided by part-time and visiting teachers, which 95 pupils attend. The teaching of instrumental lessons provided by the school is good. The school has two choirs and a clarinet ensemble but the majority of extra-curricular ensembles are provided through the Saturday morning Music Centre, which is attended by approximately 130 pupils from the school.

145. The department is well led and staffed by a team of well-qualified, enthusiastic and able teachers and musicians who work hard to provide a stimulating musical life for the school. There is a clear, shared educational direction for music and a development plan sets out clear targets for improvement. There are sufficient well-qualified staff but the deployment of teachers in Year 9, where two teachers are allocated to each teaching group, is not an efficient use of time. Learning resources are well managed and the current accommodation is adequate for class lessons.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

146. The attainment of pupils by the age of 14 and 16 and in the sixth form meets the national expectation. In Years 10 and 11 progress is not on a par with that made in other subjects because of the Year 10 curriculum arrangements and the amount of teaching by non-specialist staff in the upper school.
147. In the lower school pupils can plan sequences of movements, adapt and refine skills and apply these into basic games such as rugby, hockey and basketball. In Years 10 and 11 pupils undertake different roles as performer, coach and official. Some show that they can use skills with precision, recognise the importance of rules and apply them appropriately.
148. All pupils demonstrate a commitment to work, the ability to sustain effort and a willingness to practise their own skills and techniques. Pupils listen well and quickly translate instructions into appropriate physical responses with sustained concentration, even during adverse weather conditions. They are courteous, show respect for equipment, the environment and work within the parameters of safety at all times. Pupils throughout the school exhibit good sporting behaviour and fair play.
149. Teaching in physical education is generally good. Specialist staff have good subject knowledge, set appropriate tasks, use effective questioning techniques and give clear instructions. The department provides a range of opportunities and experiences for pupils through a variety of teaching styles and techniques which are suited to the needs of most pupils but which need to provide a closer match to the needs of pupils with special educational needs. The balance between different teaching methods is based upon the idea of fitness for purpose and how the teacher can make the best use of teaching time in order to maximise learning. Teaching by specialists aims to develop positive attitudes and to enable all pupils to achieve high standards.
150. The curriculum for PE meets statutory requirements. However, significant changes will need to be made to meet the requirements of National Curriculum 2000, especially in Years 10 and 11. The lack of opportunity for pupils to study physical education as a GCSE subject is a weakness. The curriculum is enriched by very good extra-curricular opportunities. Systems for assessing pupils' attainment are not sufficiently well developed, and assessment information is not consistently used to plan teaching or to set targets for individual improvement.

151. The departmental aims, values and policies influence the work of all staff and form the basis of a shared sense of purpose. Leadership is concentrated on the most important issues of teaching and learning and the development of a professional culture. The new head of department is aware of the changes required to move the department on and to ensure that the pupils receive the best opportunities in physical education. However, some of the issues which need to be addressed are based within the wider school framework. They concern the appropriate deployment of specialist staff and more appropriate timetable provision in the upper school.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

152. This is a dynamic and well-qualified department with considerable potential for even greater success. The standards of attainment of all but a small number of pupils in Years 10 and 11 are good, in line with the expectations laid down in the local agreed syllabus and those related to the demands of both GCSE and A-level examinations. External examination grades are above the national average at GCSE and A-level and the number of candidates being entered has risen year on year since the last inspection. There is no marked difference between the attainment of boys and girls in class work and the difference is not as great in examination results as is seen nationally. Only in the general lessons followed by non-examination pupils in Years 10 and 11 does attainment not reflect the high level seen in the rest of the school. All pupils irrespective of their prior attainment make good progress, except in a small number of lessons when resources are not well used or the pace of the lesson becomes too relaxed.
153. Pupils are well taught in lessons which are by and large carefully planned and well orchestrated with pace and demands appropriate to the needs of the pupils. Staff use their experience and expertise to help pupils and students enjoy their learning through a variety of tasks. They set clear expectations for the development of precise and demanding thinking and give time and space for personal development. Older pupils of low prior attainment were seen to be carefully directed through a discussion on abortion, producing - through their own efforts - a well-balanced table of arguments for and against. Younger pupils enjoyed a guided fantasy before contemplating what they considered to be the main elements of the religious life. Effective strategies are in place for teaching literacy skills and pupils make considerable gains in using language with precision through the thinking skills approach to RE. Non-specialists who teach some general lessons occasionally need greater support in curriculum planning, however, to maintain these high expectations and standards of attainment.
154. Pupils respond in an exceptionally positive manner in lessons. They willingly discuss their ideas and ask questions, and are eager to join in paired or group activities showing a co-operative level of planning and organisation which would be the envy of many corporate bodies. Many are able to express their own responses to difficult philosophical and moral questions, sharing their ideas and showing respect for the views of others. Issues of diversity and difference are dealt with openly and maturely. Sixth form students shared their views and responses to experiences in a Buddhist monastery with an open honesty and sensitivity.
155. The issues raised by the previous inspection concerning the statutory provision for RE have only been partially addressed by the school. Teaching time in the lower school barely allows time for the locally agreed syllabus to be implemented. For pupils who do not follow a GCSE course in Key Stage 4 the RE curriculum time allowed still does not offer them their statutory entitlement and equality of opportunity as the timetabling and frequency of lessons has a negative effect on their attainment and progress in the subject.

156. The newly formed RE team has been set an ambitious list of objectives by the head of department and needs to prioritise its actions while updating the department handbook and bringing it into line with current practice and expectations. In order to maintain standards and set departmental targets the team should concentrate on the implementation of an assessment process which is clearly related to the demands of the locally agreed syllabus and which will help track the progress of pupils through their first three years in the school.

## **OTHER SUBJECTS**

### **Business education**

157. Some pupils choose to follow a course in business education in Years 10 and 11. At the age of 16 pupils' attainment is above average. After GCSE results in 1999 which were slightly below the national average there was a substantial improvement in 2000 when the proportion of pupils attaining A\* to C rose by a quarter. By the age of 16 pupils know about business opportunities, types of production and types of company. They know how to set up a small company, how to conduct research to identify suitable opportunities, premises and their location. They know about analysing sales, and the principles of marketing, and accounting. The higher attainers are able to provide detailed accounts of how they would use this knowledge to set up their own small business. Lower attaining pupils write about some of the issues that they would need to take account of in setting up a business.
158. In the sixth form, students are following a course leading to the award of advanced GNVQ. In the final assessments of summer 2000, although a third of students gained merit awards, none gained distinctions and half of the candidates did not complete the course. The school attributes these unsatisfactory results to the provision of insufficient lessons and high levels of absence by some students. At the age of 18, students' work is in line with the course expectations, although some of the problems with absenteeism remain.
159. Teaching is always satisfactory and mainly good. It is well planned to match the scheme of work. At times the requirements of the examination are emphasised rather than the general principles of business. Teachers generally have good classroom control and a relaxed and friendly style, and lessons proceed at a good pace. Pupils of all ages concentrate well in lessons, although on occasions, they are allowed to talk at the same time as the teacher. They show interest in the topics they are studying, apply themselves well and make good progress. Teachers have a good understanding of the content of the individual education plans of pupils with special educational needs. These pupils also make good progress. Resources are based on real business situations that pupils can recognise and are used well to support the objectives of the lesson. For example, pupils are given a case study about Tesco and asked to use it to discover why they became market leaders and to analyse the results of their entry into a number of different European countries.
160. Pupils' work is well monitored and assessed and the results are used to help to raise standards. Each piece of completed work is assessed against the coursework requirements and this is used to provide advice and support for pupils.
161. Management of the subject is sound and the curriculum provided is appropriate. It is based on good, practical, local business situations which help make it relevant to pupils' lives. The numbers of pupils choosing to study the subject for GCSE and GNVQ are rising. There is good use of ICT in both the GCSE and GNVQ courses and pupils are

encouraged to develop and extend their skills in situations modelled on business practices. The high demands which the subject places on computer resources and the impact this has on the teaching of ICT across the school will need to be carefully managed into the future.