

INSPECTION REPORT

NICHOLAS BREAKSPEAR RC SCHOOL

St Albans

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117584

Headteacher: Mr J C White

Reporting inspector: Martin Beale
19385

Date of inspection: 30th October - 3rd November 2000

Inspection number: 223725

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Colney Heath Lane St Albans Hertfordshire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr P Bell
Date of previous inspection:	17 th January 1996

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Clive Parsons 4126	Team inspector	Science; equal opportunities	Curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils
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The Office for Standards in Education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Nicholas Breakspeare is an average-sized mixed voluntary-aided Roman Catholic Comprehensive School for pupils from 11 to 18 years of age. There are 957 pupils on roll with 150 in the Sixth Form. There are considerably more boys than girls, particularly at Key Stage 3. 28 pupils have English as an additional language of whom 6 are supported through funding for minority ethnic pupils. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, including those with statements, is above average, and the attainment of pupils on entry to the school is below average. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is lower than the national average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Nicholas Breakspeare is a good school, which provides a good education. The strong leadership provided by the headteacher and senior staff has successfully focused on the drive to raise standards. Teaching is good overall, being a strength at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form, and has resulted in good progress and improved examination performance. Examination results were above average at Key Stage 3 and well above average at GCSE in 2000, but below average at A Level. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school enables the pupils to achieve above average results in Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) at Key Stage 3.
- Standards at GCSE have improved significantly in the last year.
- Very good examination results are achieved in English, science and modern foreign languages because of the high quality of the teaching.
- Management has successfully focused on improving teaching and learning as a key to raising standards.
- There is much good and very good teaching at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form.
- The school has developed strong links with parents to the benefit of the pupils.
- There is very good provision for the pupils' moral and social development.
- Procedures for monitoring and supporting the pupils' academic progress and their personal development are good.

What could be improved

- National Curriculum requirements are not being met in design and technology and standards are low.
- Weaknesses in leadership in music need to be remedied.
- Although the curriculum provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good, the teaching at Key Stage 3 is variable with a considerable proportion that is unsatisfactory.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Good progress has been made in raising standards and dealing with the key issues from the last inspection in 1996. SAT, GCSE and A Level results have all improved since the last inspection. Teaching has improved, with much less now that is unsatisfactory and slightly more that is good or better. Expectations of pupils are higher and standards have improved in most subjects. The school undertakes regular reviews of the curriculum and has joined consortium arrangements for post-16 provision. National Curriculum requirements are being met in art. There has been a considerable extension in the use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum. Leadership of music is weaker now than it was. The organisation of and provision for careers education have improved. The professional development of teaching and support staff is now thoroughly organised. The minor health and safety issues from the last report have all been dealt with and regular checks and risk assessments are undertaken.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	B	B	A	B
A Levels/AS Levels	D	E	n/a	

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

The overall SAT results at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000 were above the national average. Results in science were well above average and they were above average in English and mathematics. Results in all three subjects were close to the average of similar schools. GCSE results reached a peak in 1997, declined from there until 1999 but increased considerably in 2000 to be the best overall results achieved by the school. The results in 2000 were well above the national average and above the average of results in similar schools. This represented good progress by the pupils from their earlier results at Key Stage 3. Results in modern languages have been consistently high, and English and science results were well above average, while those in design and technology (particularly in resistant materials) were below average. The school did not meet its 1999 targets but exceeded those for 2000. A Level results have fluctuated. In 1999 results were well below average. Results improved in 2000 with overall satisfactory progress made from GCSE.

Pupils are making good progress overall and in most lessons they are achieving at least what is expected of them. High standards are being achieved in science and modern foreign languages throughout the school, and attainment is above average in English and mathematics. Language skills are satisfactory and often good. Most pupils' number skills are adequate for the stage at which they are working, although it is only the minority of pupils who have secure mental arithmetic skills, many relying too heavily on the calculator. The standards achieved by many pupils with special educational needs are rising as a result of some skilled teaching by individuals who are specialists and by some class teachers; however, some progress is unsatisfactory when teaching does not give clear guidance to the pupils on how they might improve. Pupils with English as an additional language make good progress when work is focused, but teachers are not always aware of these pupils' needs and do not adapt their work sufficiently.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils are keen to come to school. They show an enthusiasm for learning and participate fully in the life of the school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Most pupils behave well and show respect for property and each other; however, on occasions some pupils can lapse into silly and immature behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils accept responsibility well and establish constructive relationships with their teachers and with each other.
Attendance	Attendance is close to the national average. Pupils are punctual to school and to their lessons.

The school's clear code of conduct is successfully promoted and understood by all. Staff quickly deal with any incidents of poor behaviour.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is good overall. It is satisfactory or better in 95% of lessons and very good or better in over 20%. Teaching is best overall in the Sixth Form and better at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. There is no unsatisfactory teaching in the Sixth Form and very little at Key Stage 4. English teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and satisfactory in the Sixth Form, while mathematics teaching is satisfactory throughout the school. The teaching of science is good overall and is very good at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. The literacy policy is resulting in a satisfactory contribution from subjects to the development of language skills. The needs of the lowest-attaining Key Stage 3 pupils are being met through withdrawal from modern languages and more intensive literacy work. There are limited opportunities for the development of numeracy in subjects other than mathematics, and this aspect is under-developed. Teaching of PSHE is variable but unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3. Most class teachers are giving satisfactory support to pupils with special educational needs, and teaching by specialists is mostly satisfactory or good but with some unsatisfactory teaching. Most teachers have established a purposeful working atmosphere in their classrooms. Their good subject knowledge is shown by the clear explanations that they give and their lively and challenging teaching. These enable the pupils to concentrate, to consolidate their learning and to put considerable effort into their work. Where teaching was unsatisfactory it was either from teachers who taught otherwise satisfactory or better lessons, or from temporary teachers and non-specialists. This usually resulted in the unproductive use of time, a limited challenge for the more able pupils, some inattentiveness and a slower pace to learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good breadth and balance is provided in the curriculum at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form, but there are shortcomings at Key Stage 4.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory provision is made with an appropriate variety of arrangements at both Key Stages 3 and 4; however, some individual education plans are too general and do not give sufficient guidance to class teachers on how to help the pupils.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Work is sharply focused when the pupils are directly supported in the classroom, but subject teachers are often unaware of the pupils' needs and do not always adapt materials sufficiently.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The pupils' personal development is successfully promoted by the strong contribution from the religious life of the school and the very good provision for the pupils' moral and social development. The provision for cultural development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides well for the everyday health, safety and welfare of its pupils. Concerted action has been taken to encourage good attendance and the school is effective in promoting, monitoring and

	supporting good behaviour.
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Statutory requirements are not met for the teaching of design and technology at Key Stage 4. The school has a strong and effective pastoral system, which closely monitors, supports and guides the pupils. Strong links have been established with parents, and a wide range of methods is used to communicate with them.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The strong leadership provided by the headteacher, ably supported by the deputy head and senior managers, has been successful in raising standards in the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The Governing Body closely scrutinises the work of the school but needs to be more involved in framing its future direction.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very effective monitoring and evaluation of the work of departments have supported the school's aims of improving teaching and raising standards.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are used efficiently. Strategic planning is satisfactory and the management of finance is carefully linked to the school's priorities.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources are satisfactory overall, although there are shortcomings in some areas. There are insufficient specialist staff for design and technology, and the long-term absence of the head of music is adversely affecting standards. Although the principles of best value have not been formally adopted, they are understood and used when purchasing goods and services.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents identify that the school expects their children to work hard and achieve their potential. The overwhelming majority of parents are happy with the progress that their children make and the standards that they achieve. Parents are pleased with the good teaching and the teachers' high expectations of their children. Parents report that their children like school. They feel the school is well led and managed and very approachable. Most parents feel that behaviour is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20% of the parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire are not happy with the amount of homework set.

The inspection team supports the parents' positive views of the school, although there are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching, and some unsatisfactory behaviour was seen in a small number of lessons. Evidence indicates that, with the exception of music, all departments use homework satisfactorily.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Overall results in Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000 were above average. Mathematics and science results were above, while those in English were close to the national average. These results were all close to the average of results in similar schools. The difference between the subjects was largely because higher-attaining pupils did better in science than in English and mathematics. Results have fluctuated since the last inspection, more so in English than in mathematics and science, but are higher in all three subjects. 1997 was a low point overall, because boys' results were considerably lower than in preceding and subsequent years. Girls have generally achieved better results than boys in English, although apart from in 1997 this has been to a smaller extent than nationally. Boys have achieved better results than girls in mathematics and science apart from in 1997, and this has usually been to a greater extent than nationally. The trend in the school's results since 1996 has been close to the national trend. Results in all three subjects showed an improvement at the higher levels in 2000, while remaining largely unchanged in the proportion of pupils achieving the expected Level 5.
2. There are considerably more boys than there are girls in the school. This is reflected in the entries at GCSE in recent years but not at A Level where roughly equal proportions of girls and boys have been entered. The significance of this for the school's overall results is that nationally boys achieve considerably lower results at GCSE than girls. Although girls have generally achieved better results than boys at GCSE, the gap between their results has been much smaller than nationally.
3. GCSE results reached a peak in 1997, declined in 1998 and 1999 but increased considerably in 2000 to be the best overall results achieved by the school, following a concerted drive to arrest this decline. The proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C grades and the average points score were both well above the national average in 2000 and above the average of results in similar schools. The decline in results from 1997 to 1999 was largely because of a considerable decline in boys' results from being well above to below average. Girls have consistently achieved above average results but only in 1999 was their advantage over boys greater than nationally. Compared with national figures the progress made at Key Stage 4 by the group of pupils who sat GCSE in 2000 was well above average.
4. Modern language results have been consistently well above average, with boys achieving particularly good results. Results in English, science and French in 2000 were all well above average while those in art, design and technology (resistant materials and systems and control), drama, and geography were below average. There was a considerable improvement in overall GCSE results in 2000, largely brought about by a significant increase in the proportion of boys achieving A*-C grades. Most subjects showed an improvement, and English language and science amongst the core subjects, particularly so.
5. The relationship between A Level results and the GCSE results from the corresponding group of pupils two years earlier has been inconsistent. A Level results were well below average in 1999, having fallen considerably from 1998. The 1999 results followed one of the best sets of GCSE results achieved by the same pupils two years earlier. Results were below average in all subjects in 1999 with the exception of economics, where they were above average and in biology and physical education where they were in line with the national average. The pupils who achieved lower GCSE results in 1998 than in 1997 went on to achieve higher results two years later, both in terms of the average points score achieved by candidates and in the proportion of A and B grades. Overall, the pupils in the 2000 cohort made satisfactory progress from GCSE to A Level. Very good progress (A Level results being better than might have been expected from GCSE results) was made by pupils in English, biology, chemistry, physics and theatre studies but unsatisfactory progress was made in art, French, German and psychology.

6. The school enters a small number of pupils for Advanced, Intermediate and Foundation GNVQ qualifications. The pass rate at all three levels increased substantially from below the national average in 1999 to above it in 2000.
7. Standards of literacy are satisfactory and for many pupils they are good. Most pupils speak confidently, with boys more so than girls; however, the opportunities provided for extended speaking are limited. The pupils are attentive listeners. They read with appropriate expression and generally good comprehension. Writing is of a satisfactory standard, although there is little of great length at Key Stage 3. The literacy policy is resulting in a satisfactory contribution from subjects to the development of language skills. The needs of the lowest-attaining Year 7, 8 and 9 pupils are being met through withdrawal from modern languages and more intensive literacy work. There have been some improvements in numeracy standards. While most pupils have reasonable number skills overall, mental arithmetic skills are more varied and are not being consistently developed. There are limited opportunities for the development of number skills in subjects other than mathematics. Improvements are taking place in the pupils' skills in ICT and in their use of ICT to support learning. The school has invested heavily in computers and they are being used effectively as a learning resource throughout the school.
8. The pupils are making good progress overall. In most lessons they are achieving at least what is expected of them. Overall, attainment reflects the standards in the most recent SATs and GCSE examinations, but further improvements are being seen in the Sixth Form. Standards in English and mathematics are above average at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, whereas standards are above average in science at Key Stage 3, and well above average at Key Stage 4. High standards are also being achieved in modern foreign languages throughout the school and in physical education at Key Stage 4. Standards in the resistant materials aspect of design and technology remain low.
9. The standards of many pupils with special educational needs are rising as a result of some skilled teaching by individuals who are specialists and by some class teachers. There is, however, some unsatisfactory progress when teaching is poorly focused, does not develop a good learning atmosphere and does not give clear guidance to the pupils on how they might improve. Pupils with English as an additional language make good progress when work is sharply focused on their identified needs; however, progress is unsatisfactory when teachers are unaware of their needs and do not adapt their teaching or the materials used.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10. The school has a clear code of conduct, which is fully understood by all. Pupils are generally keen to come to school and largely behave well once there. They show interest in school life, for example valuing the retreats, which all pupils go on once a year, and attending extra-curricular activities. Attendance is close to the national average and pupils are generally punctual to school and to their lessons.
11. The pupils generally behave well in lessons and show an enthusiasm for learning. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson looking at *Beowulf* they were attentive, clearly interested and they concentrated on the story. Another group in design and technology dealing with graphic products showed interest and a pride in their work. Often, constructive relationships are manifested, as in a Year 9 mathematics lesson on number patterns, where all pupils participated fully. Year 12 pupils in a drama lesson also participated and co-operated well. Some pupils lack drive and enthusiasm on occasion, such as when Year 13 pupils studying *The Alchemist* in an English lesson took notes assiduously but asked no questions and showed little spontaneous interest in the subject.
12. On a few occasions some pupils, often but not always boys, manifest silly and immature behaviour, for example, in a Year 10 citizenship lesson where they were unable to concentrate sensibly or sustain the discipline of a class discussion, and poor attitudes interfered with learning. Such actions are usually, but not exclusively, a response to poor classroom management or unchallenging lesson material. Pupils report that minor bullying (mostly name-calling and insults)

does happen but is quickly dealt with by staff. There is no evidence of any overtly racist or sexist behaviour, although the imbalance of occasionally overbearing boys means that quieter well-behaved girls are sometimes dominated in lessons. The pupils show respect for property around the school and for the privilege of open classrooms at break time and lunchtime. Pupils with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language are fully integrated into the life of the school.

13. Pupils are encouraged through the religious nature of the school and the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme to reflect and to consider the impact of their actions on others. They do this with varying degrees of success depending on their personal maturity. They are more successful, for example in physical education lessons, listening to others respectfully and giving them support and encouragement to improve their performance. A number of opportunities are offered for pupils to show initiative and take responsibility, such as being year and school council representatives, leading class prayers, managing form notice boards or doing voluntary service. There are also outside activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the link with a village in The Gambia. The system of prefects is very successful, both in empowering Sixth Form pupils themselves and in building links with younger children, for example in the 'listening ear' service offered to Year 7 pupils.
14. Last school year there were 33 fixed term exclusions and four permanent, an above average number.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

15. Teaching is good overall. It is satisfactory or better in 95% of lessons and very good or better in over 20%. Teaching is best overall in the Sixth Form and better at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. There is no unsatisfactory teaching in the Sixth Form and very little at Key Stage 4. English teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and satisfactory in the Sixth Form, while mathematics teaching is satisfactory overall throughout the school. Science teaching is good overall and is very good at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. There is also very good teaching in ICT in the Sixth Form, in modern languages at Key Stage 4 and in physical education at Key Stage 3. The teaching of PSHE varies considerably but is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3.
16. Well-planned and carefully prepared lessons taught by enthusiastic staff with good subject expertise are generating an interest in learning amongst the pupils and an effective working atmosphere in most classrooms. This enables the pupils to concentrate, to consolidate their learning and to put considerable effort into their work. This was evident in a Year 9 rugby lesson, where the pupils benefited from the good rapport that had been established by the teacher. Questioning was used well and the lesson regularly halted so that important technical points could be emphasised. The very good atmosphere for learning and the lively manner of the teacher in a Year 7 numeracy lesson successfully fostered participation and engaged the pupils' interest.
17. The confident manner of the teacher in a Year 10 mathematics top set generated a brisk pace and helped to establish a purposeful atmosphere. Skilful questioning encouraged the pupils to think, and they responded well to the teacher's high expectations and the challenge of the lesson. The pupils were also highly motivated by the challenging tasks in an A Level ICT lesson. The excellent subject knowledge of the teacher and the good focus on the examination requirements resulted in high levels of concentration and perseverance from the pupils. High teacher expectations were also evident in a Year 7 French class. Clear objectives for the lesson were explained to the pupils and the teacher regularly checked that they understood and were able to follow the work. The monitoring of the pupils' understanding featured in a Year 13 biology lesson on photosynthesis. Confident and assured teaching and the establishment of an effective group discussion ensured that there was a progression to the development of new ideas.
18. Much of the brisk, confident and lively teaching is a result of the good subject knowledge of the teachers. The considerable expertise shown in a Year 8 geography lesson on coastal erosion stimulated the pupils and generated a high degree of interest and concentration. This was also

evident in a Year 12 business studies lesson, where the interesting activities used and the probing use of questions motivated the pupils to work hard and helped to generate a productive working atmosphere. Highly effective questioning was also used productively in a Year 12 mathematics lesson. The use of humour encouraged the pupils to respond and enabled the teacher to monitor their understanding. The very good background knowledge of the teacher in a Year 12 performing arts lesson coupled well-informed expositions with interesting activities. The pupils were fully engaged in the lesson and constantly challenged to give of their best. The lively and inspiring teaching in a Year 12 psychology class coupled with the good use of resources helped the pupils to visualise the ideas being taught about memory and recall.

19. Teaching by special educational needs specialists is mostly satisfactory or good, although there is some unsatisfactory teaching. Most class teachers, with or without the help of learning support assistants, are giving satisfactory support to pupils with special educational needs. The combination of class teaching and withdrawal is enabling most of these pupils to make satisfactory and in some cases good progress. The teaching of pupils with English as an additional language is sharply focused when the pupils are directly supported in the classroom; however, subject teachers are often unaware of the pupils' needs and do not adapt materials provided sufficiently.
20. Marking is used well in many subjects to provide the pupils with a clear picture of the quality of their work and what steps they need to take to improve. Marking is consistently diagnostic in mathematics, and extensive written feedback is given by teachers in art. Some of the science marking is very good, but targets for improvement are not always followed up. Some teachers use the final part of a lesson well to review what has been learnt, to check progress and to give the pupils feedback on how well they have done. This was seen in a Year 11 German lesson and in a Year 12 history lesson on party politics during World War 1. Homework is set regularly and generally used by staff to support learning in class. In modern languages the homework set is substantial, but it is unsatisfactory in music and not used to extend learning.
21. In the small proportion of lessons where teaching was unsatisfactory it was mostly from teachers who taught otherwise satisfactory or better lessons, or from temporary teachers and non-specialists. This usually resulted in the unproductive use of time and a limited challenge for the more able, with some inattentiveness and a slower pace to learning.

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

22. The school has responded well to national initiatives, including developing a strategy for improving the pupils' literacy, introducing a citizenship programme into Key Stage 4 and a key skills programme into the Sixth Form. These aspects are making a valuable contribution to the improvement of the pupils' skills and to the provision of a broad and relevant curriculum. The curriculum provision is further strengthened by a comprehensive and well-constructed PSHE programme. The organisation and quality of careers education has improved since the previous inspection. The impact of the PSHE programme is reduced significantly, however, because of a very wide variation in the quality of its delivery. The curriculum enrichment programme introduced into Year 7 is not having the impact intended. The organisation of the programme, on a carousel basis, means that some pupils are coming to key aspects too late. Furthermore, the environmental aspects included are not delivered in a sufficiently rigorous and focused way to be useful to the pupils. A review of this programme is urgently required.
23. There have been significant difficulties in delivering the full requirements for design and technology for several years. This is now most evident at Key Stage 4 where all pupils do not follow the required programme of study, and statutory requirements are therefore not met. Statutory requirements with regard to information and communications technology (ICT) are met, although greater use is needed to support learning in some other subjects including music and design and technology. Those pupils not wishing to follow the double GCSE course in science at Key Stage 4 can opt for either child development or agricultural science. At the moment there is no appropriately qualified teacher for the former option and the second lacks sufficient direction and

rigour. This arrangement is also in need of review. The range of courses offered to Sixth Form pupils is extended through collaboration with other schools in a consortium arrangement. Although this formal co-operation is in its early days, a good number of pupils take advantage of the opportunities offered. Overall, the breadth, balance and relevance of the curriculum at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form is good, but the weaknesses noted result in the curriculum at Key Stage 4 being unsatisfactory.

24. The curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory, with an appropriate variety of arrangements at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Pupils have equal access to the curriculum provided. This is frequently enhanced in practice by careful planning to match work to the pupils' prior attainment, particularly evident in science. Many Year 7 pupils are, however, finding their work in mathematics too easy because some teachers do not take sufficient account of the pupils' experiences and attainment from Key Stage 2. There are some shortcomings in the organisation of the provision for pupils with English as an additional language. There are good transition arrangements when pupils transfer from feeder primary schools. The pupils are supported well by a skilful support assistant who is fluent in the first language of some pupils; however, these pupils receive no support in mathematics and science and some miss modern language lessons when attending literacy withdrawal. Subject teachers do not make on-going assessments of the progress made and are unaware at times of the needs of these pupils.
25. There is good provision for extra-curricular activity in some aspects, including sport, which does much to enhance the curriculum and extend the pupils' learning opportunities and personal development. Mathematics 'Challenge and Masterclasses' are provided for higher-attaining pupils. A programme of fieldwork in geography extends across the age range and includes visits to other European countries. Other activities include theatre visits, lunch time film club and poetry competitions. Nevertheless, current staffing difficulties limit the contribution made by the music and drama departments.
26. The religious life of the school makes a strong contribution to the pupils' personal development, whatever their religious persuasion, and to expressing the values of peace, justice, truth and love. This was demonstrated most effectively in the week's assemblies on the theme of All Souls, and in the lower school mass on All Saints day. Substantial provision for religious education and the opportunity for annual retreat days contribute greatly to the spiritual development of the pupils, but opportunities are missed in other areas of the curriculum. Except for a pilot project promoting spiritual and moral development in science and design technology, most subjects do not include personal development in their planning. In practice there is much moral education across the curriculum. Pupils discuss issues raised by the holocaust and the evils of war in history. War poetry raises similar issues in English. In geography pupils consider the ethics of environmental decision-making. The school takes a firm line on any harassment of individuals, and Sixth Form pupils provide a listening ear for Year 7 pupils during their first term at the school. Pupils are encouraged to show compassion for others by collecting for charity during Outreach week. The school has a longstanding commitment to support the villagers of Tujereng in The Gambia, and parties visit twice a year. Pupils are expected to be responsible for their actions. They have free access to all areas of the school and representation on year and school councils. Social education is enhanced by a weekly lesson in citizenship in Year 10. The school has a strong tradition of sporting and cultural activities, foreign exchanges and visits, such as history fieldwork in Flanders, but at the time of the inspection, staffing difficulties in music and drama had reduced the opportunities for cultural development. In some subjects, notably design and technology, history and geography, pupils have the opportunity to learn about the richness of other cultures.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

27. The school has a strong and effective pastoral system which gives close support and guidance to all pupils. The high standards found at the time of the last inspection have been maintained, and are recognised and valued by parents.
28. Concerted action has been taken to improve attendance. The system of first-day response to absence for all pupils in Years 7 and 8 has made expectations clear to all. Certain targeted older

pupils also receive this treatment, which has had a significant effect in reducing truancy in Year 10. Pupils in the Sixth Form, however, do not always receive the same close monitoring as further down the school, and registration or form time periods are not consistently well used. A range of positive rewards for good attendance, such as certificates, as well as a clearly understood range of sanctions, have helped to raise the profile of attendance with the whole school community. The school is ably assisted in this by weekly visits from the educational welfare officer.

29. The pastoral team of form tutors and heads of year liaises closely and is very effective in monitoring and supporting good behaviour. A wide variety of rewards such as merits for younger pupils and credits on their Record of Achievement for older ones helps to reinforce the clear behaviour policy and code of conduct, which is widely displayed. The school is aware that some bullying does occur among pupils, but it is given a high profile in PSHE and pupils themselves are confident it will be summarily dealt with if reported. A clear system of graduated sanctions for poor behaviour, such as pastoral support plans, is fully understood by all. Procedures for child protection are good.
30. In the course of the past year the school has been examining aspects of its assessment, recording and reporting policy and practice through a working party and extensive consultation. In September 2000 a very useful booklet was issued to all staff containing final draft policies, explanations of various procedures and other information, such as exemplar reports. This booklet provides good support to staff for the school's new focus on diagnostic assessment, an area of weakness at the last inspection.
31. Most departments have policy statements which reflect the recent work done to re-focus assessment and make it more consistent and diagnostic, but the practice in departments is currently varied. There are satisfactory arrangements for assessing the pupils' work in most subjects. There is no formal assessment in music and arrangements are unsatisfactory in drama. The use of assessment is unsatisfactory in design and technology and there are weaknesses in different aspects of assessment in several other departments. Most departments use assessment information in their planning. The use of the very good data on pupils is an area for improvement in several departments. Where practice is good, as in science, physical education and modern foreign languages, there is evidence of rising standards. Pastoral staff and some subject departments are using assessment information well to track the pupils' progress and support those most in need. After the trial GCSE examinations, all Year 11 pupils are interviewed with their parents by the senior management team to discuss predicted grades and the pupil's targets to achieve them. This is a very good and fairly unusual feature, which illustrates the school's new approach.
32. The assessment of special educational needs and the transfer of this information to class teachers in individual education plans (IEPs) need to be improved. At present, targets, especially those for literacy, are too general and do not give sufficient guidance to class teachers on how they can help the pupils. Subject teachers are unaware of the special educational needs department's expectation that they will add subject targets to the IEPs. Targets are not updated sufficiently in recognition of the pupils' changing needs. Some targets do not adequately reflect the pupils' learning needs, placing an undue emphasis on behaviour and organisation at the expense of what the pupils need to do to improve their work. The initial assessment of pupils who have English as an additional language is secure. This information is available to mainstream teachers, but there is a lack of return information on what progress the pupils are making.
33. Staff give strong support and guidance to pupils to help raise their academic achievement. A well-regarded induction day for Year 6 pupils is also used for testing entry levels of literacy. Talks on study skills (for both parents and pupils) are offered at key points such as in Year 7 and Year 11. Some subjects set targets for pupils, and form tutors receive regular updates from their heads of year about pupils who may be underachieving. All pupils in Year 9 and Year 11 have individual interviews with senior staff before choosing options. Mentoring is offered to those who are felt not to be achieving their potential.
34. The school caters well for the everyday health, safety and welfare of its pupils. Office staff are knowledgeable about procedures for fire drills, injury and illness, and accident books are fully

maintained up to date. The minor health and safety issues from the last report have all been dealt with, and regular checks and risk assessments are made. There are safe working practices in science and in physical education (except for one outside court which still needs attention). Some minor health and safety concerns are apparent in design and technology.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

35. Relations with parents are good and a strength of the school. Parents' and carers' views of the school are very favourable. The overwhelming majority are happy with the standards that their children achieve, and with the good teaching and high expectations, though there are some inconsistencies which the inspection also found. They particularly praise the good results achieved by boys in modern foreign languages, which is contrary to the national trend. About 20% of parents indicated they were dissatisfied with the homework set, although the inspection found that, with the exception of music, all departments used homework satisfactorily. They feel the school is well led and managed and very approachable.
36. A very wide range and variety of information is provided for parents. The prospectus lacks some statutory information such as GNVQ results and national comparisons for National Curriculum tests and GCSE results. The governors' annual report to parents is readable and well presented but again lacks statutory information. There is, for example, nothing on the election of new parent governors (two of whose terms expire in September 2001), nothing on the school's targets for Key Stage 4 public examinations, and no reference to the action plan from the last inspection.
37. Annual reports to parents vary greatly. Some are full and informative but there are differences in format and information included. Some do not have Key Stage 3 test results and in many, targets are too general to be useful. A monthly newsletter gives the picture of school-wide achievements and now includes a special section for Year 11 news. Parents in Year 7 have been consulted through questionnaires. Open days help to keep parents informed about the life of the school. The pastoral staff are very effective at involving parents in their children's life at school. The parents of children with special educational needs are involved appropriately with their children's progress. Exclusions are fully discussed both with parents and, to a lesser extent, governors.
38. Parents are supportive of their children's learning and take an active part in it. They monitor the homework planners carried by all pupils and most attend consultations, whether group or individual. Many support school productions and religious events and help with sports coaching and transport to matches.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

39. The school is strongly led by the headteacher, who is very well supported both by staff and governors. There is a strong commitment to, and a clear focus on, raising standards. Progress has been made by concentrating on improving the quality of teaching and learning through systematic monitoring, the setting of targets for action and increasing staff expertise through training. Expectations have been raised, unsatisfactory practice challenged and, by and large, eliminated. The school's aims are successfully fulfilled and there is a strong Christian ethos permeating school life.
40. Considerable analysis of data and the monitoring of individual and departmental work have been introduced in recent years. The information gathered is used to influence policies and to improve classroom practice. A detailed review has been undertaken of the English, mathematics and science departments by senior management, with action plans established to bring about improvement. A programme is in place to extend these reviews to other departments. A careful and detailed analysis of examination and other assessment data is used to set targets for individual pupils, cohorts of pupils and departments. Progress is carefully monitored and is supported by a systematic programme of work sampling. Development planning procedures have been revised to take account of the information generated from the monitoring process. The priorities in the development plan are rooted firmly in the school's push for higher standards, but one shortcoming is that the plan does not identify clearly a long-term strategic view of the school.

41. Financial planning is secure. Resources, including funding for specific purposes such as to support pupils with special educational needs, is directed towards the school's identified priorities. Adjustments are being made to accommodate the changes in the school's budget since the end of its grant maintained status. The surplus has been reduced sharply even with reductions in departmental capitation, and further adjustments will be required to avoid a budget deficit. The proportion of the budget spent on teaching staff is high and an area for attention, as the ratio of pupils to teachers is below average and the amount of time teachers spend teaching is considerably below the national average. Governors are provided with sufficient information to monitor spending and are using the principles of best value when purchasing goods and services.
42. The Governing Body is well organised, has considerable expertise and is very supportive of the school and the drive to raise standards. Its committee structure is effective in enabling it to scrutinise the work of the school and, with the exception of the National Curriculum requirements for design and technology at Key Stage 4, all statutory requirements are met. Governor visits to lessons have been instrumental in helping them to gain a good insight into the school and to identify its strengths and areas that require improvement. Where governors have had less impact is in taking an early and active role in planning for the development of the school. Governors recognise this weakness and are taking steps to play a more active part in establishing the school's future direction.
43. The school enjoys a pleasant rural setting on the outskirts of St Albans. There are extensive playing fields but they are badly drained and their use is restricted in wet weather. Maintenance and cleaning are generally satisfactory. Some parts of the school have been recently redecorated but other areas are in need of decoration. Some exterior windows and doors are due for replacement. Flat roof areas are scheduled for improvement.
44. For most subjects the accommodation is at least satisfactory and, for mathematics, history, modern languages, ICT and special needs, it is good. There are too few laboratories for science and some of the rooms for some subjects, for example drama, art and geography, are widely dispersed. One of the art rooms is inadequate and there is no soundproofing in the otherwise adequate music accommodation. The indoor space for physical education is unsatisfactory and there are no classrooms dedicated to theory work in physical education. The library provides sufficient space to enable it to function effectively as a resource centre. Administrative staff have adequate working space, although some of the offices, for example the bursar's office, are rather small.
45. The match of qualifications to the demands of the curriculum is satisfactory with two exceptions. These are music, where the teacher in charge is not a qualified teacher, and design and technology, where only two of the teachers are qualified in the subject. The recruitment of staff is becoming a difficulty for the school, with a considerable reduction in the number of applicants for advertised vacancies. There has been a high turnover of staff in recent years and a very high proportion of staff have less than five years' experience. There is, nonetheless, a good range of experience and the school continues to benefit from both continuity and the injection of new ideas and approaches from recently appointed staff. Job descriptions are being reviewed and redrafted.
46. A key issue at the last inspection was to develop training to support fully the school's developmental priorities. The professional development of teaching and support staff is now well organised. Spending on this area is above average. There is an annual audit of training needs, and demands for training are matched against departmental and school development plans. The school is well served by its non-teaching staff and they also have access to appropriate training. There is a well-planned and effective induction programme for new staff and newly qualified teachers. Staff are offered developmental opportunities, for example by working alongside a senior member of staff in a position of responsibility for a period of one year. A strong action plan has been prepared to move the school towards Investors in People status.
47. Learning resources are satisfactory overall; however, in some subjects, notably design and technology, mathematics and science, there are still insufficient textbooks for pupils to take home

for independent learning. Additionally, in some subjects, the range of books needs to be broadened particularly in science at Key Stage 3 and in modern foreign languages where there is a need for more reading material. Resources to support music are unsatisfactory; pianos are not tuned and there is insufficient percussion, both tuned and untuned, to support learning at Key Stage 3. There is also little evidence of a library of recorded music for use in music lessons.

48. The level of networked computer provision with Internet access has improved significantly since the last inspection and there is now an above average ratio of pupils to computers. There is still a significant weakness in the provision of computer-based resources to support electronic control in science and design and technology.
49. The school has a very well-managed library, which in the face of reduced funding is still able to offer a wide range of books to support and stimulate learning; however, it has a limited range of periodicals, newspapers, CD-ROMs, and computers with Internet access. Although the general book stock is ageing, the provision of books to support art has improved significantly since the last inspection. Plans to refurbish the library are in place, which will provide it with an opportunity to develop its role in supporting learning across the school.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

50. To build upon the good improvements made since the last inspection, the school should:
 - raise standards in design and technology by: (paragraphs 4, 23 and 81-90)
 - ensuring that National Curriculum requirements are met at Key Stage 4
 - adopting a common planning and assessment framework for all aspects of the subject
 - extending opportunities to use computers for designing and making
 - strengthening management arrangements in the absence of the departmental head;
 - improve the management arrangements for music by the appointment of a specialist subject manager and strengthening line management arrangements; (paragraph 115)
 - improve the teaching of PSHE by: (paragraphs 15 and 22)
 - improving teacher expertise in all aspects of the new requirements
 - providing staff with training to extend the range of methods that they employ
 - improving discipline in some classes.

OTHER ISSUES THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BY THE SCHOOL

51. The following minor issues should be considered by the school for inclusion in the action plan:
 - Improving the assessment of special educational needs and the transfer of this information to class teachers in individual education plans (IEPs). (paragraph 32)
 - Evaluating the effectiveness of the curriculum enrichment arrangements in Year 7. (paragraph 22)
 - Achieving greater consistency in the quality of annual reports to parents. (paragraph 37)

COMMUNITY LINKS

52. The last inspection noted that the school had good links with the community. The strong features have been maintained and others developed. There is much involvement with the local parishes, particularly with the primary schools from which most of the pupils come. A well thought out programme ensures that pupils have an early introduction to the school, sample some of its special features and enjoy a smooth transfer. There are also appropriate arrangements for receiving information about pupils' attainment and their pastoral needs. Parents of a new pupil are kept informed through induction meetings held shortly after the pupils arrive. Links with the primary schools are extended through, for instance, the catechist project, and visits by some Sixth Form pupils to help younger ones with their reading. There is a stated intention to develop these

- arrangements, so that everyone in the Sixth Form undertakes a voluntary community placement. A Sixth Form consortium offers pupils a wider choice of subjects.
53. There is further participation in the parishes through regular performances of music and dance, involvement in a local carnival and through charitable work. The school and the local Irish club promote each other's social functions, and parish newsletters are circulated via the school.
 54. Representatives of several external agencies, such as health professionals, community police officers and members of the educational welfare and psychological services, are utilised well and make valuable contributions to the life of the school. Pupils' awareness of the faith community is developed through strong links with the handicapped children's pilgrimage trust, and issues discussed within the Retreat programme. An understanding of life in a distant and very different community is enhanced for some Sixth Form pupils particularly, who travel to a village in The Gambia and then receive some of the villagers on a reciprocal visit.
 55. The school's commitment to fostering links with the community is demonstrated by the appointment of staff with specific responsibility for outreach work. This ensures quality provision and a co-ordinated approach. A well-established partnership with business enhances the curriculum and widens pupils' experience and understanding of the world of work. There are appropriate arrangements for all pupils to undertake work experience in Year 10; until recently this was also a requirement in Year 12 but in future it will be restricted to those taking GNVQ courses. The pupils' insight into industry is supported by well-prepared modules of work, done in advance of their placement, and by the completion of logbooks to chart their experiences. Pupils taking the child development course experience local nursery provision through their work placements. Selected pupils benefit from a mentoring scheme, and several receive help with interview technique. There is much useful activity between the school and the county careers service. For instance, Year 11 pupils are currently involved in a careers management project with support from the service's advisor. Most pupils move on to further or higher education; there are firm links with both which benefit the pupils, whether they leave at the end of Year 11 or after the Sixth Form. The school works in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire as part of the initial teacher training scheme.
 56. Within good overall provision for community links there is an important weakness, which has existed since the last inspection. Local people hire the sports facilities and, occasionally, parts of the building for private functions; however, the school is not used as a resource for community based projects or for adult learning purposes. Parents and staff were involved in an accredited ICT course, but this no longer exists, and similar opportunities are not being taken.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	199
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	53

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	20	38	34	4	3	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	807	150
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	79	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	29	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	214	9

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	28

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	14
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	27

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.6
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
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	104	59	163

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	63	68	63
	Girls	50	46	39
	Total	113	114	102
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	72 (73)	73 (75)	69 (66)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	28 (22)	46 (41)	33 (27)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	83	71	73
	Girls	63	46	44
	Total	146	117	117
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	85 (95)	75 (76)	76 (76)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	45 (44)	44 (29)	27 (40)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15-year-olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	89	66	155

GCSE results		5 or more grades A*-C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	24	70	73
	Girls	37	61	62
	Total	61	131	135
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	62 (44)	97 (94)	98 (96)
	National	49.0 (46.6)	88.8 (90.9)	94.4 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE points score
Average points score per pupil	School	44 (40)
	National	38.7 (38.0)

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

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-Level or AS-Level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	32	26	58

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	13.2 (12.8)	16.4 (11.2)	14.8 (12.0)	0 (4.5)	0 (0)	0 (3.0)
National	(17.7)	(18.1)	(17.9)	(2.7)	(2.8)	(2.8)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	12
Black – African heritage	20
Black – other	13
Indian	29
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	4
Chinese	9
White	813
Any other minority ethnic group	52

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	2	
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian	2	
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	28	4
Other minority ethnic groups	1	

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	61.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	15.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	350

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.7
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	25.0
Key Stage 4	21.6

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	2795197
Total expenditure	2786471
Expenditure per pupil	2943
Balance brought forward from previous year	91258
Balance carried forward to next year	99984

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	947
Number of questionnaires returned	279

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	49	42	7	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	42	49	6	2	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	58	8	2	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	51	15	5	1
The teaching is good.	34	54	7	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	33	47	12	2	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	40	7	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	54	40	4	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	36	47	10	2	5
The school is well led and managed.	39	47	9	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43	44	8	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	33	43	11	1	12

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

ENGLISH

57. Results in English are improving and attainment is good overall. Results in the Key Stage 3 Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) have fluctuated considerably over time, but are better overall than at the last inspection. Until 1999, the results were better than those in the other core subjects: since then they have been a little below those in mathematics and science and also below the average for similar schools. Overall SAT results in 2000 were close to the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving Level 5 and higher was a little less than the previous year while the proportion reaching Level 6 was higher than in 1999. Although girls have consistently done better than boys, of particular significance is the fact that boys' attainment in English since 1996 has been well above the national average for boys. The GCSE English results in 2000 were a marked improvement on those in 1999, and were well above the national average. Girls again achieved better results than boys, but again, boys' results were particularly high in relation to the national average for boys. There has been no clear trend in GCSE English literature results over the last three years. Those in 2000 were above the national average, but considerably lower than 1998, when 80% of pupils gained grades A*-C. English literature results reveal a wider difference between boys' and girls' achievements, with girls in 2000 well above the previous year's national average for girls. The pupils entered for both English and English literature did better in 1999 than in the average of all of their other subjects. A Level results in 2000 were close to the national average, and although not as high as in 1998, were considerably better than those in 1999, when they were well below the national average.
58. There is a close correspondence between these results and the work seen during the inspection. At Key Stage 3, most pupils speak with confidence and their listening skills are generally good, although pupils have more opportunities for listening to their teachers than to each other. Reading aloud is usually fluent and often expressive, while pupils' comprehension is at least satisfactory. When the pupils are given structured help from their teachers, comprehension is good. Higher-attaining pupils produce lively narrative writing, mainly of a personal nature. They have an accurate grasp of punctuation and use well-controlled, varied vocabulary. Only a small minority show serious weaknesses in writing, mostly linked to poor spelling. More challenging work is needed for some pupils. The range of written work is limited: little extended or analytical writing is seen and there are very few opportunities for developing an appropriate discursive style. At Key Stage 4, speaking and listening standards are at least satisfactory and frequently better, with boys noticeably more forthcoming than girls in oral work. Most pupils respond well to the wider range of literature studied for GCSE. Writing standards are good overall, but vary considerably. Higher-attaining pupils are capable of interesting reflective and analytical writing, while weaker pupils have a restricted vocabulary, often write in an inappropriate style and need more structured help in planning and organising their essays. At A Level, higher-attaining pupils are capable of very competent critical evaluation, showing perceptive insight and sound knowledge of the texts studied. Weaker pupils have difficulty in writing about language and style and their own ideas are often clumsily expressed.
59. Standards of literacy across the curriculum are at least satisfactory, and often good. Pupils are confident speakers and usually attentive listeners. Most pupils' reading skills are sufficient to cope with the demands of the curriculum and most writing is of a satisfactory standard. The school recognises that it is the responsibility of all departments to foster literacy. A sound policy has been developed, which, however, has still to be monitored and evaluated. There is evidence of inconsistent implementation in some subjects. Good standards in various aspects of literacy are fostered in science, physical education, history and geography in particular, where subject-specific terms are taught, oral skills are developed, and most teachers have common expectations about the need for accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar. On the other hand, the carousel of literacy lessons recently introduced for all Year 7 pupils is not effective in the promotion of literacy. The content of the lessons overlaps with aspects of the English curriculum, the methods do not tie

in with that of the Key Stage 2 Literacy Strategy, and there is no system for monitoring the progress of pupils.

60. The pupils make good progress in English. Good progress is frequently linked to good teaching, but at times is also the result of good or very good attitudes to learning on the pupils' part. Pupils generally behave well; most come to lessons prepared to learn and usually settle quickly to work. Very good progress was seen in a Year 7 lesson on *Beowulf*, for example, when pupils were very keen to participate and the teacher's brisk pace, very competent classroom management and clear explanations ensured that interest was maintained. Teachers are aware of the wide variety of learning needs in their classes and frequently give individual help, particularly to those with special educational needs, who make good progress. Very few of pupils with English as an additional language were present in the classes observed, but those that were seen had made good progress in the acquisition of English. At Key Stage 4, good progress is ensured by the teachers' thorough approach and well-structured lessons. Progress in A Level classes is at least satisfactory, mainly due to the teachers' very good subject knowledge and familiarity with the requirements of the examination, but pupils would benefit from taking a more active part in some lessons.
61. Good and sometimes very good teaching is a strength of work in English. The even quality noted in the previous inspection report has been maintained. Apart from the features already mentioned, a further strength is seen in many teachers' good questioning skills. This was exemplified in a Year 9 poetry lesson, where the teacher's probing questions helped pupils to clarify their own response to the poem and to develop a wider understanding of the poet's intentions. The approach gave pupils confidence in expressing their own ideas, and ensured that there was a high level of participation from pupils of all abilities in the class. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed but there is a lack of consistency across the department in the way lessons are introduced and concluded. Lesson objectives are not always clearly articulated and are not referred to when lessons are ended, so that pupils do not always have a clear focus on what they should be learning, and opportunities for consolidation are lost.
62. Homework is regularly set. It is generally used to develop the pupils' learning, but does not always take account of the different ability levels in a class: some pupils need more challenging work. Marking is satisfactory, but would be more effective if all teachers ensured that pupils corrected their spelling mistakes and responded to suggestions for improvement.
63. Sound management, together with the work of a committed team with a strong supportive ethos, has contributed to improvements since the last inspection. There has been a comprehensive monitoring exercise carried out by senior management, but this now needs to be taken further within the department, and the planned development of peer observations should help to share much of the good practice that already exists. Since the last inspection, attainment has improved and there is now increased use of IT in English, although this is not consistent across all teachers in the department. There is a need to ensure greater consistency of curricular experience in general for pupils at Key Stage 3 by rationalising schemes of work and developing a clear common core. The previous report contained a recommendation to foster greater formality of expression. This has not yet been achieved, particularly at Key Stage 3. In addition, teachers should ensure that pupils at Key Stage 3 have more opportunities for analytical and discursive writing, and should develop strategies that will extend the higher-attaining pupils at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

MATHEMATICS

64. The pupils' attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4 is above the national average, and in the Sixth Form it is in line with expectations for the Advanced Level course. When pupils enter the school in Year 7 their attainment, as assessed by Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests, is below average. The results from the corresponding tests for Key Stage 3 in 2000 were above average and in line with those of similar schools. These results were similar to those in science and above those in English. While the proportion of pupils gaining at least Level 5 is little changed from the time of the previous inspection, more pupils are currently achieving Level 6. The GCSE results in 2000 were above average for grades A*-C and this represents a small improvement from the time of the previous inspection. Recent results from the A Level examinations are below average and below

those at the time of the previous inspection. In 2000 half the candidates failed to achieve any grade; this is a far higher proportion than nationally and reflects the school's low entry requirements when pupils joined the course.

65. Inspection observations confirm that at Key Stages 3 and 4 the pupils are attaining slightly above average while attainment in the Sixth Form is close to that expected for the A Level course. The school has sensibly tightened the entry requirements for this course, although teachers have still found it necessary to spend significant time at the start of Year 12 in strengthening pupils' algebraic skills; this has delayed the start of some A Level topics. By the end of Year 9 all pupils can find the area of triangles while the higher-attaining pupils can calculate the volume of cylinders. All have met percentages but, while the ablest can use these confidently, the weaker pupils are not comfortable when converting between fractions, decimals and percentages. By the end of Year 11 all understand the angle properties of triangles and quadrilaterals while the higher-attaining pupils can apply the sine and cosine rules to solve problems. Investigative skills are appropriately developed.
66. Most pupils' knowledge and skills in number are adequate for the stage in which they are working. There is a much greater range of competence in mental arithmetic where only a minority of pupils are secure and therefore many rely unduly on calculators. The school is aware of this and is intending to draw upon the strategies of the National Numeracy Initiative. This merits urgent implementation as teachers' current approaches are directed more towards maintaining existing mental skills rather than extending them. The application of mathematical skills to support learning in other subjects is exemplified in science by the productive use of graphs to assist the interpretation of experimental data. More generally, however, the application of numeracy across the curriculum is not properly developed.
67. The teaching was satisfactory in approximately two-thirds of the lessons observed and was good, very good or excellent in nearly another third. There is clearly much scope for raising the overall quality of teaching. In only one of the twenty lessons observed was the teaching unsatisfactory. This occurred when the poor teaching and planning of a temporary teacher signally failed to ensure adequate progress. The most effective teaching is characterised by appropriately ambitious planning to ensure productive use of time together with a liveliness of approach that sets the tone and pace for the whole lesson. These features were evident in a Year 12 mechanics lesson where the teacher's well-judged use of an improvised teaching aid to demonstrate a ladder sliding down a wall together with skilful questioning resulted in the pupils gaining much deeper insight into frictional forces.
68. Most pupils are progressing at least satisfactorily in all but two lessons. In some lessons where most pupils are progressing satisfactorily the ablest pupils are not sufficiently challenged. This is most marked in Year 7 where teachers are not always taking sufficient account of pupils' previous attainment in primary schools. This under-estimate of the capabilities of the most able pupils emerges also from teachers' assessments of the higher-attaining pupils at the end of Key Stage 3. Most pupils with special educational needs are progressing satisfactorily especially when there is additional support in lessons. When the special needs relate to mathematics they are appropriately identified but teachers are making little use of this to inform the focusing of support to individual pupils.
69. Pupils are strongly motivated. Their attitudes to work were at least satisfactory in almost all of the lessons seen, the sole exception being when a Year 8 class encountered poor teaching. In nearly half the lessons their attitudes were good or very good as in a Year 11 lesson where, despite difficulties with algebra, all pupils were making a determined effort to succeed. These positive attitudes owe much to the quality of relationships between teachers and pupils and to the regularity and helpfulness of teachers' marking. The pupils' commitment to work is reflected in the generally high quality of their written work.
70. Textbooks are loaned only to the pupils in Year 9. This means that even in the final approach to the GCSE examination in Key Stage 4 pupils lack this important support and encouragement for independent study. As at the time of the previous inspection the curriculum time allocated to mathematics at Key Stage 4 is below the national average; this continues to be unhelpful to pupils'

achievements in the subject. While the department's overall response to the previous inspection report has been satisfactory there remain issues needing further attention, as indicated above. In particular, there is need for stronger leadership to raise the overall quality of teaching by ensuring that lesson planning is geared to maximising pupils' progress.

SCIENCE

71. Results in Key Stage 3 national tests in 2000 were above the national average and in line with those achieved in similar schools. This was an improvement on previous years. The 2000 results were equivalent to those achieved in mathematics but better than those in English. Boys have usually performed significantly better than girls. There has been a very large increase in the proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades at GCSE since the previous inspection. Results in 2000 were well above the national average. Results at A Level have been much more variable. In 1999, physics and chemistry results were below the national average. Results in biology were much closer to the national average, but with a lower proportion of A and B grades. All three subjects improved in 2000, but with a small number of candidates.
72. The generally high level of attainment in Key Stage 3 SATs and GCSE examinations is also found in lessons, where the majority of pupils are working at or above the expected level. Attainment is high for many pupils. For example, pupils in a top Year 8 set have a very good understanding of the motion of particles in a liquid and were able to use their ideas to explain why the mercury in a thermometer expands on heating. Similarly, the top Year 11 set had a good understanding of chemical quantities and conventions, and were able to use this to carry out calculations. Attainment is high at Key Stages 3 and 4 because pupils make good progress in lessons as a result of effective teaching. The planning and preparation for a Year 11 single science group exploring equations of motion was very good, with a clear focus on what the pupils were expected to learn and how this would be achieved. A series of activities, some carefully structured so that examples got more complex as pupils worked through them, was skilfully used to develop the pupils' understanding in a systematic and coherent way. The pupils responded well to the variety of stimuli used, applying themselves to their tasks and completing work at a good pace. Consequently they made very good progress and had a firm grasp of ideas by the end of the lesson. The curriculum is carefully planned and structured to ensure that the high attainment in lessons builds into good results at the end of both key stages. Pupils of all levels of attainment and including those with special educational needs consequently make good progress over both key stages.
73. The standards observed in Sixth Form lessons are above those in recent A Level examinations in all three sciences. This is again directly as a result of the effectiveness of teaching and curriculum planning. Year 13 biology pupils, for example, made very good progress in developing their understanding of the light-dependent aspects of photosynthesis. The teacher offered an effective framework for learning and provided very good support, while at the same time encouraging the pupils to work independently in small groups. The process required the pupils to evaluate their own progress and support the understanding of their peers. There was an excellent openness and honesty to the ensuing discussion, which ensured that the pupils' understanding was significantly strengthened. The courses are also proving more popular and numbers are increasing, particularly in Year 12 where pupils are taking the opportunity offered by the new examination system to broaden their studies. Careful consideration needs to be given to the maximum number of pupils allocated to each teaching set if this popularity is repeated next year. The current Year 12 biology group, for example, is very large and placing considerable pressure upon the resources of the department.
74. A good emphasis is placed on developing an understanding of the key words encountered in science, and many activities support the development of the pupils' language skills. Many activities also draw upon the pupils' number skills, applying them to a range of new contexts and using them to analyse and evaluate data. Skills of scientific enquiry are secure and the pupils' attainment is broadly in line with their knowledge and understanding.

75. Teaching is never less than satisfactory, usually good and very good in a high proportion of lessons. Consequently it is very good overall. There is an excellent emphasis on developing the pupils' understanding and skills, with very careful consideration given to the best activities and strategies to achieve the intended outcomes. Coupled with high expectations, good pupil management, some very good marking and feedback, a very wide range of methods and strategies and effective matching of the work to the pupils' prior attainment, this ensures effective learning. There is a consistency to the work of the department that reinforces the work of individuals. Very good management has developed an excellent ethos within the department resulting in a substantial improvement in standards, particularly at Key Stage 4.

ART

76. Pupils take a GCSE examination in either painting and drawing or graphics. The combined results in 2000 were below the national average in the A*-C range. The last inspection reported the results to be above average. Since then they have been below, except in 1998, when they were broadly in line with national figures. The results in graphics are usually better than in drawing and painting, although the position was reversed in 1999. Small numbers enter A Level, making a comparison with national results invalid; however, pupils rarely achieve above grade C.
77. The below average examination results reflect the attainment of the younger pupils who do not reach the nationally expected level by the end of Key Stage 3. The work produced by Year 7 pupils indicates low attainment on entry to the school; although they make satisfactory progress, their work, and that done by those in Year 8, remains below the expected level for their age. Progress slows in Year 9 and standards decline. In all three years, most pupils have weak technical and expressive skills. Observational drawing, a weakness noted in the last report, remains underdeveloped, both as a discrete skill and as a starting point for creative work. Sketchbooks are used widely, but too much work remains in this form, and pupils do not fully understand their purpose as a means of recording information and exploring ideas. The pupils' knowledge of artists and art movements, and their understanding of how their own work can be influenced by a range of factors, do not increase sufficiently over the key stage.
78. Standards are relatively higher in Years 7 and 8 because the teaching is mostly good, and sometimes very good. For instance, a very successful Year 7 lesson ensured the consolidation of painting skills and rapid progress in pupils' understanding of how natural light affects the colour of a landscape. Year 8 pupils, after drawing from observation, produced a piece of work in pairs which required them to manipulate images and use collage to show tonal effect. Pupils in both years learn well because they are enthusiastic, and most teaching is lively. Lessons often include effective questioning and high expectations about the standard of pupils' work. Progress slows in Year 9 for a variety of reasons. Although pupils generally behave well, they have a less positive attitude. Teaching is mostly satisfactory but it does not excite or inspire pupils with the same drive and purpose as in Years 7 and 8. Some of the units of work are constraining in the way they are presented and this also contributes to the fall in standards. For example, pupils are taught several techniques too far in advance of applying them in a final piece of work. Too few units enable pupils to experiment and then choose to work in two or three dimensions, using their own methods and style. As a consequence of not having this experience, those who continue with the subject after Year 9 have much ground to make up. When the limitations of a project combine with poor use of time and other weaknesses in classroom practice, the teaching is unsatisfactory, as it was in one of the eight lessons seen at this key stage.
79. At Key Stage 4, teachers ensure that the pupils' final pieces are preceded by research, experimentation and documented evidence; however, these GCSE course requirements are not embedded in the way many pupils think and work, and as a result attainment is depressed. The teaching varies greatly. In good and very good lessons, teachers challenge and extend pupils' ideas, while helping to improve their technical skills; this motivates pupils and builds on their willingness to accept advice. In contrast, occasionally a lesson is dull, explanations lack clarity, and there is insufficient time for pupils to work practically; this exacerbates some pupils' casual approach to the subject and results in unsatisfactory teaching. The attainment of Sixth Form

pupils remains below course expectations. Some struggle because they have achieved modest GCSE results, and all have limitations in their knowledge and ability to produce vibrant and exciting work. Teaching is mostly satisfactory, and pupils make steady progress; however, even when lessons are good the teacher is hard pressed to enthuse or encourage them to become thinking and imaginative artists.

80. Teaching is satisfactory overall. A strength is the variety of ways that resources, including the outside environment, are used as visual prompts. One significant shortcoming is the lack of regular opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own and others' work. The accommodation is inadequate. Not all of the rooms have specialist facilities and they are each located in different areas of the school. The marking of pupils' work is sometimes very good, with valuable advice on how to improve. On the other hand, assessment procedures at Key Stage 3 are not effective because they do not use the National Curriculum criteria to measure and inform pupils about their attainment and progress. At GCSE and A Level, assessment is based on the course criteria, but these need to be made more explicit, particularly for the lower-attaining pupils. Good administrative systems ensure good day-to-day management, but there is not enough rigour in monitoring the department's effectiveness and applying strategies to raise attainment. Since the last inspection, coverage of the National Curriculum has been secured, there have been refinements to other aspects of the department's work, but there has been insufficient progress overall.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

81. The proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades at GCSE in 2000 in design and technology was below the national average. Results in food technology were above average. In 2000 results improved overall but still remained unsatisfactory when compared with national figures. Results were good in food technology but they continued to be very poor in resistant materials.
82. Attainment in lessons at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall but there are weaknesses in resistant materials, systems and control as well as in computer-aided design and manufacture. Where attainment was good in a Year 7 textiles lesson it was because the teacher had high expectations, managed the pupils' learning well, and used ICT to good effect in producing a range of teaching materials to support or extend individual learning. In the best lessons at Key Stage 3, teachers intervene purposefully, using their knowledge about individual pupils to improve learning.
83. Progress is good when pupils are given clear guidance about what they are to learn and the teaching methods match the learning objectives. In a Year 7 textiles class the pupils were actively engaged throughout on a range of learning activities ranging from hand and machine sewing to working with graded questions to improve technical vocabulary and understanding. Progress is also good when the teachers make effective use of manufactured products to teach design skills, as in a Year 8 graphic products lesson where pupils were producing 'pop-up' cards using knowledge that they had gained from looking at commercially made items. Progress was unsatisfactory when pupils were engaged in tasks that were inappropriate such as cleaning equipment or as in a Year 8 resistant materials class where materials were being classified using inaccurate information without any meaningful practical outcomes.
84. By the end of Year 9 the standard of graphical presentation, the use of technical equipment, the discussion, planning and modelling of design ideas have all improved in those classes taught by specialist staff. Pupils can also use a limited range of materials, tools and equipment with increased precision and control except in resistant materials where there is no opportunity for practical work. Opportunities are limited for pupils to engage in more open-ended design work or to use computers for design, which affects overall progress at Key Stage 3.
85. The school does not meet its statutory requirements for design and technology at Key Stage 4. Attainment in lessons is satisfactory overall. Standards are improving in food, textiles and graphic products but remain below average in resistant materials. Attainment was good in a Year 11 graphic products lesson where the teacher set high expectations for the lesson and provided a range of stimulating resources including a digital camera to support the pupils in designing their

point of sale merchandise. The pupils respond well in those lessons that are well structured and where the examination requirements are clearly explained and commented upon in the marking of their work.

86. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. There is high proportion of good and very good teaching at both key stages; however, one in five lessons is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3 because they are poorly planned and do not take account of previous learning. They often lack rigour, use time unproductively because they do not relate to the scheme of work for design and technology, and are taught by non-specialist staff. There are also some weaknesses in otherwise satisfactorily taught lessons at Key Stage 3 where pupils are not always clear about their achievements and what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils with special educational needs receive teaching of the same quality as other pupils and they make satisfactory progress overall.
87. The leadership and management of the department are inadequate. The quality of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and its impact on standards does not reflect the good practice seen elsewhere. A significant number of issues raised in the last inspection report remain unresolved. There is still a lack of continuity and progression in pupils' learning at Key Stage 3 and there has been insufficient improvement in the monitoring and assessment of learning. The moderation of standards across the contributing areas is weak and therefore the staff are unable to take account of the pupils' prior achievement when planning their lessons. There are still missed opportunities for extending the more able, and standards of practical work in resistant materials at Key Stage 4 remain low.
88. The match of teachers to the demands of the subject curriculum is unsatisfactory. The school has been unsuccessful in recruiting a resistant materials teacher and this, coupled with the long-term absence of the head of department, is affecting standards at both key stages. Accommodation for design and technology is outdated and unsatisfactory, with several rooms in need of refurbishment to reflect better the curriculum demands of design and technology. The lack of a specialist textiles room affects the curriculum that can be offered to pupils. As a result there is a lack of opportunity to undertake activities such as screen printing and other wet processes, and this is depressing standards in what is an improving subject. The rooms for resistant materials provide a stark and uninviting environment in which to learn.
89. Since the last inspection there has been some improvement in resources to support learning but the lack of books for use by GCSE pupils for independent learning at home is a significant weakness that is affecting standards. The overall provision for computer aided design and manufacture remains poor in spite of improvements in textiles and in the limited provision of computer software for designing. There are no computers to support GCSE pupils working independently in the food room, but good use is made of the school's computer rooms for project work.
90. A recent review of the work of the department highlighted some areas for development. In order to improve standards the school should consider the ways in which the staff presently in post could contribute to the management of the subject especially at Key Stage 3. The present curriculum is unbalanced because of deficiencies in the deployment of capitalisation. This affects the provision of learning resources to support and develop the curriculum, and pupils have little opportunity to use computers for designing and making. The school should consider the benefits to be gained from the adoption of a common planning and assessment framework based on National Curriculum requirements such as that which is outlined in the exemplar scheme of work for design and technology at Key Stage 3.

GEOGRAPHY

91. GCSE results in 2000 were below the national average. The 1999 grades showed a significant fall from 1998 but they improved in 2000. In the short GCSE course, the pass rate has been 100% in the past two years. At A Level, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A or B has been consistently low in recent years. Pass rates were in line with the national average in 1998, but fell to below the national average in 1999 and 2000.

92. Most pupils make good progress at Key Stage 3 and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with the national average. The pupils develop their enquiry skills effectively through the good opportunities provided by their teachers. In Year 7, they develop a basic range of map skills. In Year 8 they show their investigative skills by analysing a photograph of Durdle Door and working out how it may have been formed. In Year 9, they use their ICT skills to access a map and annotate it using the computer. The pupils are confident in oral work, and their best writing is clear and expressive, as, for example, when discussing images of the USA seen through the media.
93. The pupils continue to make good progress at Key Stage 4 and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is broadly in line with the national average. Their enquiry skills continue to develop well. In Year 10, for example, pupils were involved in analysing data to make decisions about appropriate coastal management schemes. Their discussion in groups was very productive. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils used their ICT skills to complete a table about types of industry. The best writing is achieved when pupils are stimulated by the work, as for example when studying volcanoes and earthquakes. The pupils can draw a range of graphs and diagrams effectively. Lower-attaining pupils leave too much work unfinished and have a more limited grasp of key ideas.
94. Standards in the Sixth Form are higher than recent A Level examination results. The pupils make good progress and their attainment is broadly in line with the national average. They capitalise on the skills and abilities acquired earlier and develop these further with enthusiasm. In a Year 12 lesson for example, the pupils organised themselves well when researching weathering and worked hard to report back to their colleagues on time. In a Year 13 lesson, pupils showed good use of subject vocabulary when discussing how the St Albans city centre might be developed. They had a sound understanding of the concepts involved.
95. This good progress and generally satisfactory attainment is the product of good teaching across the age range, the best of which is stimulating and challenging. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils and are rewarded by very good behaviour and positive attitudes. Pupils make a good effort to present their work well, and maps and diagrams are drawn with care. Teachers are well organised, prepare work effectively and ensure that pupils know what is expected of them. Assessment of pupils' work is regular and thorough and provides constructive guidance to help pupils improve.
96. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Although the proportion achieving grades A and B at A Level has remained low in recent years, there is promise of improvement with current groups. There has been thorough development of ICT work, and computers are now used in a good proportion of the work across the age range. Pupils are now clear about their objectives and their work is carefully monitored. To improve, the department should continue to work to raise attainment across the age range. A more formal approach should be developed to involve both pupils and teachers in setting clear individual targets. Schemes of work should be reviewed to ensure consistency from topic to topic. A policy on personal development should be developed, to highlight the subject's contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development.

HISTORY

97. Prior to this year, history GCSE results had been in decline, falling from a position above the national average in 1997 to below average in 1999. The results in 2000 improved considerably to be well above the national average. The same success was achieved at A Level in 2000. Again, 1999 was a low year, when results fell below the national average for the first time in three years, and six of the fifteen candidates failed to achieve a grade. By contrast, only two out of eighteen candidates failed in 2000 and ten achieved grades A or B.
98. At Key Stage 3 attainment is in line with national expectations. Pupils are making good progress in explaining the causes and consequences of events and using historical sources. Good teaching

targets these skills and develops them throughout the key stage. Through project work, teachers encourage pupils to find out information themselves. In Year 7 pupils learn how to use the Internet to research topics but they tend to download information without processing it to select what is relevant and meaningful for their purpose. By Year 9 pupils' writing is becoming more structured. In their essays on the development of the factory system in the 19th century, pupils were able to discuss the relative importance of economic and technical factors and the role of entrepreneurs. Teachers adapt worksheets and use small group discussion effectively to enable lower-attaining pupils to make good progress. Pupils respond well to instruction, concentrating on their work and enjoying the many opportunities to work with a partner on exercises.

99. In Key Stage 4 attainment is above national expectations. The higher standards achieved in examinations this year are being maintained by the current Year 11. Their fieldwork on the battlefields of World War 1, in Year 10, inspires a high standard of coursework. The same quality of written work was evident in recent essays on the causes of the Cold War. Teachers are helping pupils to reach this standard by focusing on examination techniques and giving detailed feedback on work, showing pupils what they have to do to improve. In lessons on the Vietnam War, pupils showed critical awareness in their ability to evaluate media coverage of the war and its influence on US public opinion. Lower-attaining pupils responded well to guidance over what to include in their own reports of the My Lai massacre but higher-attaining pupils needed more scope to use their own creativity. Year 10 pupils have difficulty grasping political concepts, such as fascism, needing more concrete examples to help their understanding. In general, work is suitably adapted to meet the learning needs of pupils in the different sets, so that all are able to make good progress on the course.
100. In the Sixth Form, attainment is in line with national expectations. Year 13 students are displaying the necessary A Level study skills. Their essay work is becoming more detailed, substantiating arguments with factual evidence and by quoting views of prominent historians. There has been some disparity in the assessment of pupils' essays, which needs monitoring to ensure standardisation of marking. Pupils discussed issues well, such as arguing the views of the major powers in a lesson on the Versailles peace conference, but needed more detailed information to deepen the understanding they gained at GCSE. The large class of pupils on the A/S course in Year 12 is highly motivated. This has been achieved by good teaching, making use of small groups to research, present and discuss topics, as in a lesson on party politics during World War 1, where different groups examined information on the three parties and then pooled their findings. They are making very good progress on the course.
101. The quality of teaching observed was good in all key stages and in one in three lessons it was very good. It is characterised by an enthusiastic exposition of the subject. Teachers use a variety of activities and stimulating resources to promote good learning. Most of the marking is particularly helpful to pupils, offering constructive criticism on how to improve. There is a need for more objective assessment of pupils' attainment over the broad range of history skills in Key Stage 3. The recently introduced pilot scheme for collecting a profile of test pieces should enable teachers to track pupils' progress more accurately.
102. Progress has continued since the last inspection, culminating in a major improvement in examination performance this year. The curriculum has been developed with the introduction of new courses, including a local history unit in Year 9, drawing on archive material from the local records office. Revised schemes of work are beginning to include a focus on those aspects of the subject curriculum that offer scope for promoting pupils' personal development, in keeping with the school's mission statement. Plans to improve the accuracy of assessment procedures and extend the learning of higher-attaining pupils will take the subject further forward.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

103. Attainment in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) at Key Stage 3 is improving and moving closer to the national average. The time available for discrete ICT lessons has increased in Years 8 and 9, and this is having a favourable impact on standards. A*–C grades in short course

GCSE IT were below the national average in 2000 but attainment in ICT lessons at Key Stage 4 indicates that current work is at least in line with expectations and some work in Year 10 is good. Examination results in A Level computing have been variable in recent years and generally below the national average. A more appropriate course is now being followed in the Sixth Form. Attainment in ICT lessons, and the standard of coursework are good. Attainment in ICT key skills lessons in the Sixth Form is satisfactory. There is a good level of autonomous ICT use at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form.

104. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils have appropriate keyboard skills and generally have a satisfactory knowledge of wordprocessing and some basic spreadsheet skills. Few pupils are, however, able to demonstrate some of the more advanced spreadsheet skills as required. In Year 10, where all pupils follow the GCSE ICT short course, timetabled lessons have enabled good progress to be made. Pupils are able to use the school Intranet to good effect, where they have access to subject specific resources. Many pupils are developing good skills in the use of ICT to communicate information. Good ICT skills are also being developed in GCSE business studies where pupils have regular access to computer rooms in both Years 10 and 11. In all ICT lessons at Key Stage 4 coursework targets are discussed in detail providing a clear focus for the work. In Year 11 access to ICT experiences are currently based upon a cross-curricular approach but this is still insufficiently developed to ensure equality of access for all pupils. When the current GCSE cohort reaches Year 11, all pupils will have discrete ICT lessons throughout Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Many subjects include ICT in their schemes of work and it is often used well; however, there is further scope for greater use in some, notably design and technology and music. Opportunities for using computer control need to be improved at both Key Stages 3 and 4.
105. Teaching observed in ICT lessons was mostly good in Key Stage 4 and very good in the Sixth Form. There was more variation at Key Stage 3 but the majority was good. Lessons were well planned with clear objectives. Classroom management was mostly good and pupils responded well, with enthusiasm, in the majority of lessons although there were some lapses in concentration in several Year 8 and 9 lessons. Appropriate feedback to individual pupils in lessons and regular assessment, which is linked to target setting, is helping to improve standards in all years.
106. The school is well equipped with a better than average ratio of computers to pupils. All machines have Internet access, which is effectively used as a learning resource throughout the school. ICT resources in the library are limited but are soon to be improved; pupils have good access to computer rooms at lunchtime and after school.
107. There is a clear direction for the ICT curriculum and there have been appropriate improvements since the last inspection, although there is still more scope for the use of ICT in several subjects.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

108. Standards in modern languages have risen since the last inspection. Almost all pupils sit the GCSE examination in French or German and gain an A*-G grade. The percentage of A*-C grades has been mainly well above national averages, with a good proportion of A* and A grades. Boys perform particularly well, against the trend nationally. For the first time in 2000, the top Year 10 French group sat the GCSE examination a year early with excellent results. The proportion of the higher grades rose to a very high level in both languages in 2000: in German to 70%, with a large entry and in French to 80%, with a smaller entry. A Level results have been varied but often disappointing, with small groups of pupils in German and no French group between 1997 and 1999.
109. At Key Stage 3 current standards range from above to below average, but are mainly at or slightly above average. Many pupils are achieving well and sometimes very well, despite a substantial reduction in time for the pupils who study two languages. Most pupils in a Year 9 French higher set made very good progress in a well paced and varied lesson which provided extensive oral practice of the past tense and made very good use of language games, which demanded a high level of accuracy from the pupils. Some of the good or very good features of this lesson were seen in other lessons across the key stage. Teaching is never less than satisfactory and is mainly good at Key Stage 3. Lessons are usually taught in French or German. This, and the regular use of

work on cassette, has a very positive effect on the pupils' listening skills, which are good. Many pupils are confident orally and there is a strong emphasis on thorough oral practice in many lessons. Most groups were at the beginning of new topics and acquiring and practising vocabulary, but many pupils were able to respond with clear pronunciation to simple class exchanges without written support. At the time of the last inspection, work was beginning to extend the pupils' reading from textbook extracts to longer stories or short books. Some pupils occasionally read more widely, but this is still an area for development.

110. Writing, practised at Key Stage 3 in the form of short narratives or letters, develops rapidly at Key Stage 4, particularly in the upper groups. Many pupils in these groups are able to write at some length, in a variety of tenses and on a range of topics. Accuracy is helped by good diagnostic marking both at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form in both languages. As at Key Stage 3, speaking and listening skills are good for many pupils. They are very good for some, as demonstrated in the large Year 11 double linguists group in German, where many pupils understood both the gist and detail of a difficult cassette and made very good progress from acquiring language about travel to using it in role play. These pupils studied only French last academic year and sat GCSE French a year early. They are now returning to German to take GCSE German in one year. Attainment, motivation and achievement are also high in the Year 10 French double linguists set and in the Year 11 second set in German, where the group responded very well to high expectations and excellent teaching. Most were able to demonstrate a thorough knowledge of previous work, including accurate use of tenses, and develop an extensive oral narrative of a journey. Across the key stage there is a wide range of attainment from well above to well below average in the lessons and work seen. Achievement is at least satisfactory and often good or very good. There are positive relationships in most groups at Key Stages 3 and 4 and many pupils are able to work productively in pairs and small groups. Very good teaching was seen at all stages, but the best teaching was at Key Stage 4, where overall it was very good. A strength of the teaching at all stages is its clear focus, with the objectives for lessons on the board and often explained to the pupils. There is very often a review of what has been learned at the end of lessons. This is a substantial improvement in what was an area of weakness at the time of the last inspection.
111. In the Sixth Form there is a very wide range of attainment both within and between the different groups and in the different language skills, although all are consistently developed. In German it is close to the average at the beginning of the course, with very good progress in some aspects. In French it is a little below average in the work seen, with listening skills much stronger than speaking skills for most pupils. There are much larger groups at A Level in both languages than in the recent past. The schemes of work which have been used until now are unsatisfactory, but a co-ordinator has been appointed for this area and work has just begun on new schemes.

MUSIC

112. Overall GCSE results in 2000 were below the national average and below results in 1999, although 6 out of the 16 candidates achieved A* or A grades. The 100% A*-G grades in 2000 included pupils with special educational needs, entered for the examination for the first time.
113. By the end of Key Stage 3 the majority of pupils are in line with national expectations. A few more able musicians, who have had continuous specialist teaching, reach above average standards in composition and a significant number in Year 9 can play music accurately, including a two-handed theme and a complicated rhythm. Teacher absence is limiting learning and progression for many pupils who have been doing routine cover work. Although, with specialist teaching, some Year 9 pupils who have special learning needs achieve well in composing and performing a bass line and in understanding texture, there is considerable underachievement overall at Key Stage 3. Pupils' attitudes are generally positive and they are usually well behaved, although some higher-attaining pupils are not challenged sufficiently and waste time. The teaching seen was satisfactory overall. It was never less than satisfactory and nearly half of the lessons were good. Specialist, qualified teaching is well planned to sequence learning and vary activities. Resources are well used and good subject expertise generally supports pupil learning. Relationships are good.

114. By the end of Key Stage 4 the majority of pupils are on course to achieve the national average in composition and performance, with a significant number likely to be above average and a few below national expectations. Standards in listening to music and in critical evaluation are currently unsatisfactory. The teacher in charge of music, who teaches both GCSE groups, is on long-term absence. The pupils are very well motivated, and are making good progress in their performance and composition without a regular specialist teacher, but with good support from peripatetic staff. The best compositions demonstrate good use of a variety of rhythms and techniques such as a change of key. Most pupils are developing appropriate ICT skills, used well in multi-tracking.
115. There is poor management, which leads to a dearth of appropriate procedures and administrative arrangements. There is no planned focus on learning objectives, assessment procedures or resources to meet individual pupils' needs. Lack of grade-related assessment criteria, target setting and Key Stage 4 predicted grades means that at both key stages pupils do not know how well they are doing and how to improve, limiting their achievement. At both key stages, homework is not planned and used consistently to extend pupils' musical knowledge or skills and to improve skills in research and analysis and raise literacy standards. There is a lack of rigour and consistency. Monitoring and evaluation by senior management and within the department are unsatisfactory. Over the last two years there has been little specialist training for either of the teachers, including the unqualified teacher in charge. There is no tuned percussion and there is insufficient untuned percussion to meet National Curriculum needs at Key Stage 3. ICT is not used to develop pupils' musical expertise at Key Stage 3.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

116. GCSE results at A*-C in 2000 were close to the national average, an improvement from 1999. The percentage of pupils taking this subject at examination level is higher than in most schools with the groups being dominated by the numbers of boys. All pupils at A Level for the last two years have passed, a large majority of the pupils being boys. The numbers of pupils taking A Level have been very small in comparison to other subjects; however, the number of pupils taking A/S Level this year has increased significantly.
117. In lessons, pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 are achieving standards of performance at least in line with national expectations for their age group in both games and dance. Some pupils are achieving higher standards in games particularly in rugby and football. Many pupils are able to apply the techniques, skills and competition rules to several areas of games, gymnastics, trampoline and dance. Knowledge and understanding of how to prepare for the specific activities are well established. In some games sessions, a good understanding of principles of play and rules accompanies skilful performance.
118. The majority of teaching is good or very good. Planning with clear learning objectives ensures that pupils make good progress through structured units of work. Teachers have good subject knowledge allied to accurate knowledge of their pupils through a well-established assessment system that enables both high attainers and pupils with special educational needs to succeed. The assessment procedures are used diagnostically and include target setting and mentoring pupils on a regular basis. The most effective teaching engaged the pupils in their learning throughout the lesson, challenging their understanding through questioning and using their skills of observation in coaching and refereeing or umpiring. The theory aspects of GCSE, A and A/S Level teaching have been part of the subject area development plan and have resulted in creative and innovative approaches to teaching. The department has integrated ICT within the presentation of work and organisation and would benefit from access to similar resources to support practical work. Good management of pupils is a feature of most lessons. The relationships established between teachers and pupils have a positive impact on learning. Most boys and girls have a good attitude to this subject, and where they are taught together positive relationships and collaboration are evident. Many pupils take advantage of the opportunity to advance and refine their skills through a strong extra-curricular programme and the school journeys organised by the department. Some individuals and teams progress to achievements at local and area level. Parents are particularly appreciative of the range of activities offered, with some showing tangible support by coaching

within the extra-curricular programme.

119. Apart from the desired sports hall provision all areas for improvement since the last inspection have been resolved. The lack of further specialist indoor provision is a shortcoming that undermines the high standards set by the department.

120. The department has a clear vision for the overall development of physical education in the school. The individual strengths of the team are drawn on and effective practice is shared as part of a departmental professional development programme. A sharp focus has been put on raising standards at GCSE and the teaching of theory lessons at both GCSE and post-16, both of which have been very successful. This year the department has gained the Sportsmark Award, which is a notable achievement and acknowledges the standard of sport offered at the school.