

INSPECTION REPORT

SOUTH WIRRAL HIGH SCHOOL

Eastham, Wirral

LEA area: Wirral

Unique reference number: 105107

Headteacher: Mrs C McCormack

Reporting inspector: A A Henderson
2941

Dates of inspection: 30th October – 3rd November 2000

Inspection number: 223861

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	All ability
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr R Barker
Date of previous inspection:	9 th October 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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			The school's results and pupils' achievements
			Teaching and learning
			Leadership and management
			Key issues for action
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			Pupils' welfare, health and safety
			Partnership with parents and carers
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J Paddick 10308	Team inspector	Science	
J Clay 11966	Team inspector	Design and technology	
J Clark 27803	Team inspector	Information technology Equal Opportunities Special Educational Needs	
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J Ratcliffe 3793	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

South Wirral High School is a large mixed secondary school of pupils aged 11 – 18. There are 1114 pupils on roll, with similar numbers of boys and girls. The school is increasingly over-subscribed, and numbers have increased by 70 since the previous inspection. There are 105 in the sixth form, compared to 68 in 1995. The school is designated “all ability”, although the LEA operates a selective system which provides grammar school places for 30 per cent of its pupils. As a result, the attainment of pupils on entry to the school is well below average, and this is confirmed by national tests at the end of Key Stage 2. The attainment of the last two Year 7 intakes to the school is better than in previous years, but it is still below average. Slightly less than 13 per cent of pupils are on the register of special educational needs (below average), although almost 3 per cent have formal statements (above average). There are very few pupils for whom English is an additional language. The school serves an area which includes social and economic disadvantage, and more than a quarter of pupils in the school are eligible for free school meals, which is above average and an increase since the previous inspection.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

South Wirral High School is an effective school which provides a good education for its pupils. Achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 is good in relation to pupils’ starting points because teaching is good, pupils are well cared for and they respond very well. The school is well led and managed, and the headteacher and governors have established a strong agenda for raising achievement. The school is providing good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching is consistently good across the school.
- The school is well led by the headteacher and senior staff, who are providing clear direction and purpose.
- Pupils’ attitudes, personal development and relationships are very good.
- The school cares very well for its pupils, monitoring their progress, attendance and behaviour very well, and setting them appropriate targets for improvement.
- Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.
- Standards in drama are above average across the school.

What could be improved

- Pupils’ key skills in literacy, and particularly numeracy, which are weaknesses when pupils join the school, and hinder their progress.
- The length of lessons is too long for most subjects, and pupils are unable to concentrate fully for 75 minutes.
- Insufficient time is given for mathematics at Key Stage 3 for pupils to develop the full range of mathematical skills.
- The management of health and safety and electrical safety checks are unsatisfactory.
- Provision for information technology in Key Stage 4 does not meet requirements.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since its last inspection in 1995, improvement has been good overall. Most recent examination results in 2000 have improved at both GCSE and A-level but remain below the national average. Attendance has risen since the last inspection, although it is still below the national average. Teaching is now stronger, with notable improvement in Key Stage 3 mathematics. The school has made good progress with most issues raised by the previous inspection. Strategic planning is now closely linked to the school’s budget and is very good. Very good progress has been made in strengthening pupils’ spiritual and cultural development. Good practice in teaching and assessment have been shared effectively across the school, and sixth-form provision has been extended. Provision for information technology has improved, but work is still needed to ensure that all pupils in Key Stage 4 follow a coherent programme.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	D	D	D	C
A-levels/AS-levels	E*	E	E	

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

Overall standards are below average by the age of 14, but taking account of their well below average attainment when they join the school in Year 7, pupils' achievement is good. Results in the 1999 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were below average overall. They were average in English, but well below average in mathematics and science. Over the past three years, results show improvement at the same rate as the national trend, and the most recent results in 2000 are much better than in previous years. Standards of work seen at Key Stage 3 during the inspection are above average in drama, and average in art, English, information technology, modern foreign languages, physical education and religious education. In all other subjects standards are below the national average.

In 1999, GCSE results, both in terms of A*-C grades and average points score, were below the national average, but in line with that for similar schools (that is, for schools with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals). However, the proportion gaining A*-G grades was marginally above the national average, and well above average for similar schools. Girls attained more highly than boys, in line with the national difference. One of the school's important strengths is that the least able pupils, most of whom are on the register of special educational needs, make good progress and almost all succeed in the GCSE examinations. Subject results vary considerably. In 1999, music and physical education results were above the national average, and information technology was in line. Results in English and science were below the national average, and were very low in mathematics. In all other subjects, results were below average. Pupils did better in information technology and German than in their other subjects; they did significantly less well in English and mathematics. Girls' performance was stronger in art than in their other examinations, whilst for boys physical education and geography were stronger subjects. Boys did less well than girls in science.

Results for 2000 increased significantly, with improvement in the majority of subjects, notably for English language, drama, French, information technology and art. Standards of work seen at Key Stage 4 during the inspection are similar to the pattern of the examination results. Overall, the standards represent good achievement in relation to the pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3.

A-level results are well below the national average. In 1999, two thirds of students successfully passed their examinations, and results for 2000 show improvement. In 1999, all students passed their A-level examinations in art, biology, design technology, history and information technology. This was also the case with AS-level drama, and for those taking GNVQ courses. Standards of work seen during the inspection were below average overall. They were above average in art and drama. They were average in history, GNVQ and information technology, and generally below average in other subjects, except in science where the standards of work seen were well below average. For many students these standards represent good achievement, given their modest prior attainments at the end of Key Stage 4. The sixth-form arrangements are effective in meeting students' needs, enabling a good proportion to successfully complete their courses and continue to the higher education courses of their choice.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils enjoy school and are keen to learn. They strongly support and appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good overall. There are some difficult pupils, but they respond well to positive discipline, good relationships and good teaching.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are very good, and instances of bullying are few. Pupils get on very well with each other and with their teachers. They take the many opportunities for responsibilities in the school seriously and willingly.
Attendance	Attendance has improved but is below average. Unauthorised absence is lower than in most schools.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	Aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Good

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

Teaching is good overall. It was satisfactory or better in 96 per cent of lessons, and was very good or excellent in 18 per cent. Four per cent of lessons were unsatisfactory, spread across subjects in Key Stages 3 and 4. No subject was judged to be unsatisfactory and this consistency of teaching is a strength of the school. Teaching is especially effective in religious education, and good teaching predominates in art, English, modern foreign languages, history and information technology. It is also good in design technology in both Key Stages 3 and 4, is good in physical education and geography in Key Stage 3, and in mathematics in Key Stage 4. Teaching in music is often very good in Key Stage 4, whilst in the sixth form, teaching is also good in science and GNVQ courses. Pupils' learning is satisfactory. Their learning needs are met well, although many have problems in concentrating fully for the long 75-minute lessons, and the full impact of otherwise good teaching is reduced by a lack of pace and sharpness in some lessons. The main strengths of teaching are teachers' good knowledge of their subjects, their detailed planning, and their positive management of pupils' behaviour in the classroom. The school's literacy strategy requires further work in subjects, but is proving effective in raising standards. There is, however, no co-ordinated approach to the teaching of numeracy across the curriculum.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Curriculum provision is good, although the lessons are too long for most subjects. Particular strengths are the expressive arts, personal and social education, and the very strong extra-curricular provision.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision is good. Pupils with special educational needs have full access to the National Curriculum, and are entered for the full range of GCSE subjects. Management arrangements are good. There is no central resource base, but support is good.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils with English as an additional language are not at the early stages of language acquisition. Their progress is similar to pupils generally.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This area is a strength of the school. Provision for pupils' personal development is very good. Moral, social and cultural development are very good, and spiritual development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pastoral care, and procedures for ensuring pupils' welfare are good. Pupils' progress is well monitored, and targets for their achievement are regularly set. Procedures for promoting good behaviour are very good. Arrangements for health and safety are not efficient. Links with parents are very effective, and pupils' attendance is satisfactory monitored.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, supported strongly by the senior management team, is providing clear leadership and vision in setting an agenda for improvement. Both subjects and the pastoral system are well managed.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are conscientious and committed to the well-being of the school. They regularly check on standards, are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and are directly involved in its strategic planning. Not all statutory requirements are in place.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school's development plan is good, and focused in raising standards. The school is systematically reviewing its performance to ensure improvement, and senior staff are clear how it compares with that of other schools.
The strategic use of resources	There are sufficient teachers, learning resources are adequate, and provision for information technology is now very good. The accommodation is not adequate, and in some areas, is in poor condition. The school ensures best value when placing contracts, and longer term planning is closely linked to budget.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The school is well led and managed.• Teaching is good and pupils are expected to work hard and achieve their best.• The academic and personal progress that pupils make.• Their children like school and the standards of behaviour are good.• They are comfortable about approaching the school about any matter.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The amount of homework set.• Information about pupils' progress.• The school to work more closely with parents.

Inspectors agree with all of the positive remarks that parents make, but are unable to support their concerns. Many parents would prefer more predictable homework arrangements rather than the present system. However, homework is used constructively to supplement classwork and it contributes to pupils' independent study skills. Pupils manage the arrangements very well. Inspectors judge that parents are very well informed about pupils' progress through the school's reporting and communications arrangements. The school makes very effective efforts to work closely with parents through various methods of communication and consultation.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Standards of attainment on entry to the school have been well below average, and do not reflect those expected for a typical 'all ability' school. Most recently, attainment on entry has shown improvement, but results in national tests taken at the end of Key Stage 2 in 1999 show that the proportion of pupils reaching expected levels in English, mathematics and science is below the national average rather than well below. Although a wide range of ability is included in this entry profile, few pupils are above average, and there are no very high attainers. Overall, the results for pupils joining the school in 2000 are very similar to those for 1999.

2. In 1999, the school's results in national tests taken at the end of Key Stage 3 were below average overall, but were in line with the average for similar schools (that is, schools with similar proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals). This has been the case for the past four years, with overall results which are improving in line with the national trend. Performance in English in 1999 was in line with the national average, whilst for both mathematics and science it was well below. When compared with the results of similar schools, the 1999 results in English were above average, and were below in mathematics and science. Boys performed better than girls in mathematics, whilst the reverse was the case in English, and boys and girls performed equally in science. Overall, the most recent 2000 test results are much better than in previous years. Although they have dipped in English, results have significantly improved in both mathematics and science.

3. A very high proportion of pupils take GCSE examinations in eight or nine subjects at the end of Key Stage 4. Virtually all are entered for at least five subjects, which is impressive given the profile of the pupils on entry to the school. It is a strength of the school that pupils respond well and that the proportion gaining at least five A*-G grades is consistently above the national average. The school is successful in ensuring that a high proportion of its pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve worthwhile national qualifications.

4. In the GCSE examinations in 1999, the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades in five or more subjects was well below the national average, as might be expected, and below the average for similar schools. The proportion gaining five or more passes at grades A*-G was marginally above the national average, but well above the average for similar schools. The pupils' average GCSE points score has been below the national average since the previous inspection, and in line with the average for similar schools. This is not surprising, given the circumstances of the school where around 30 per cent of the highest attaining primary pupils transfer to grammar schools at age 11. As a consequence, at GCSE the school's average points score is constrained by the low proportion of the highest grades achieved by its pupils. In 1999, the performance of both boys and girls was below average, with little variation from the national difference. In the most recent GCSE examinations in 2000, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C improved significantly and exceeded the school's targets, whilst the proportion achieving five or more grade Gs was sustained, although falling short of the school's own expectations.

5. GCSE results in 1999, in terms of the proportion achieving A*-C grades, were below the national average for all subjects, with the exception of music and physical education which were above, and information technology which was in line with the national average. Results in art, business studies, German and resistant materials were below, but compared favourably with the national average. Results in geography and food technology were below the national average, whilst in all other subjects they were well below. In the core subjects, the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades was significantly below the national average in English and science, whilst in mathematics it was very low. Comparison across subjects show that both boys and girls did well in information technology and German, and less well in English and mathematics than in their other subjects. The relative performance of girls was strong in art, whilst boys did well in physical education and geography, and less well in science. In the most recent GCSE examinations in 2000 results improved in the majority of subjects, with substantial rises in English language, drama, French, information technology and art. There has also been improvement in the GCSE results for mathematics, science, business studies, food technology, resistant materials and English literature. Good results in German and music have been sustained, although performance has

fallen away slightly in geography. Results in physical education and history have dipped from their previous levels.

6. A-level examination results since the previous inspection have been well below the national average. Given the small size of the sixth form in 1999, statistical comparisons can be unreliable. However, the average points score per student, although well below average, showed improvement in 1999, and results for 2000 show further improvement. In 1999, two thirds of students achieved passes, including some at the highest grades A or B in art, business studies, geography and biology. All students successfully gained a pass in art, and from very small numbers, in biology, design technology, history and information technology. All students taking AS-level drama were successful, as were those taking GNVQ courses in 1999. The A-level results for 2000 indicate that three-quarters of students have successfully completed their courses, although the number of higher grades A-B passes is lower than in 1999. Given the modest prior attainments of many of its students, and the severe limitations of very small numbers in some courses, together with the commitment required by students to access some of the link course arrangements, the sixth-form arrangements are successful in meeting student need. Importantly, it is very effective in enabling its students to access higher education courses of their choice successfully.

7. In work seen during the inspection, attainment is below average at the end of each key stage. At the end of Key Stage 3 it is below average overall, and in mathematics, science, design technology, geography, history and music. It is average in English, information technology, modern foreign languages, art, physical education and religious education, and is above average in drama. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is below average overall. It remains below average in mathematics, design technology and geography, and is also below average in English at this stage. In science pupils' attainment is well below average. In all other subjects attainment is average except in music, drama and religious education where it is above average. By the end of the sixth form, the inspection of lessons and review of students' work show that overall attainment is below average. In subjects, attainment is above average in drama and art, and generally average in history and information technology. It is below average elsewhere, but in science it is well below average.

8. The school has set overall targets for improvement in the attainment of pupils at GCSE. These are based on predictions for each pupil using data which links prior attainment and Key Stage 3 results with GCSE outcomes. Subjects are generally using this information well to inform their planning and monitoring of progress, and to develop strategies to promote improvement. The impact of this work is beginning to be seen in the improved GCSE results in 2000. There is a need to continue this work and extend the process from Key Stage 4 into the sixth form.

9. Given their low initial starting points, pupils' overall achievement is good in Key Stage 3. They achieve well in English, design technology, modern foreign languages, art, physical education, religious education and drama, mainly as a result of good teaching and positive pupil attitudes. Pupils' achievement in information technology is very good because the well taught programme is strongly supported by good resources. Achievement is satisfactory in all other subjects, except in music where progress for some pupils is unsatisfactory at this stage because of weaknesses in teachers' planning and National Curriculum coverage. In Key Stage 4, pupils' achievement in music improves as a result of strong teaching and pupils' commitment to the GCSE course. Achievement is also very good in religious education for similar reasons. It continues to be good in art and drama, and is generally satisfactory elsewhere. In information technology, achievement is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4; despite good GCSE results, those pupils not taking GCSE or another certificated course in the subject are underachieving because they are not taught a co-ordinated programme. Overall, pupils' achievements at this stage are good because the consistent quality of teaching ensures more pupils than usual gain GCSE grades A*-G in at least five subjects. Students' achievement in the sixth form is good in English, science, information technology, art, drama, and GNVQ where again good teaching combines with positive student attitudes and commitment. Elsewhere, progress is satisfactory in the A-level courses, except in mathematics where students' limited prior attainment and lack of independent learning skills are severely challenged by the course content. Overall, students' achievement in the sixth form is good, because as lower attaining entrants than usual, a good proportion successfully complete their courses and continue to the higher education courses of their choice.

10. Most pupils with special educational needs attain the standards they are capable of and make good

progress. The vast majority of pupils on the special needs register are entered for GCSE examinations, and in 1999, nearly all pupils gained at least seven passes at grades A*-G. The progress of pupils who attend paired reading or the spelling withdrawal group is particularly good.

Standards of literacy and numeracy

11. Overall, literacy skills are below average but are improving. The school has an effective literacy policy, and a majority of subjects are making positive progress in developing pupils' literacy skills in their specialist areas. The school has worked hard to improve reading and progress is good, especially at Key Stage 3. Positive initiatives including paired reading schemes and the ERIC reading scheme support progress well.

12. Basic numerical knowledge and skills are below average. Some improvement is being made because of an element of mental arithmetic in mathematics lessons, and some use of measurement and graphical skills, for example, in science and geography. However, there is no policy nor co-ordinated approach for numeracy across the school which would provide more opportunities to extend and improve pupils' skills further.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

13. Pupils have very positive attitudes towards school. Behaviour is good and pupils' personal development is very good. Attendance has improved but it is still below the average for secondary schools. These findings are similar to those of the previous inspection. Parents are pleased with pupils' behaviour and their personal development.

14. Pupils like the school very much and say that it more than lives up to the expectations that they had prior to joining. They enjoy almost all of their learning experiences and appreciate the wealth of extra help and support that is available. They support the numerous activities in and out of school. They have few dislikes but include among them the need for some improved facilities and dining arrangements.

15. Behaviour in lessons is almost always good and contributes to an effective learning climate. Pupils get on very well with their teachers and with each other. Self-discipline is not sufficiently developed by a minority of pupils, some of whom have personal learning or behavioural difficulties. Most pupils concentrate well, but in some lessons the behaviour of the minority is noisy and pupils do not settle quickly to their work or stay on task. In these circumstances teachers have to intervene to re-establish concentration and productivity. Pupils with special educational needs generally show a willingness to learn and respond well in lessons. They mix well with other pupils and are fully integrated into the daily life of the school. Their behaviour in class is usually good and the relationships they have with their teachers is marked by mutual respect.

16. Behaviour around the school is mostly good and for the most part pupils are orderly and considerate towards others. They are courteous and respectful towards adults. They conduct themselves responsibly yet are prone to drop considerable litter in the school hall at lunchtime and also in the grounds. Relationships between pupils are positive and, therefore, instances of bullying are few. The number of exclusions last year was less than the average for secondary schools.

17. Through the programme of personal, social and health education, assemblies, registration periods, religious education and the school's discipline system, pupils reflect on their actions and develop respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others. Many opportunities are provided for pupils to take responsibility and show initiative. They may become prefects, members of the school council, undertake charity work or be involved in a range of other initiatives such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Many older pupils help younger ones with their reading and assist tutors during registration periods.

18. Pupils' skills in self-evaluation and independent study are broadly satisfactory but they tend to depend on teachers' direction in these respects. The mentoring scheme enables many pupils to adopt more positive attitudes towards higher achievement and to take responsibility for their own progress. Overall, pupils make very good progress towards becoming mature and responsible members of the community.

19. The majority of pupils have a good record of attendance but a significant minority do not. Although

attendance improved to just over 90 per cent last year, it was still less than the national average for secondary schools. It has risen to over 92 per cent in the most recent half term but this figure needs to be consistently maintained. Approximately ten per cent of all absence is due to parents arranging family holidays in term time and nearly the same amount of absence is unauthorised. Whilst most pupils arrive promptly at the start of the school day, some are often late due to unreliable bus services.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

20. The overall quality of teaching is good. In both Key Stages 3 and 4 teaching is good or better in 64 per cent of lessons, and most of the remainder is satisfactory. In the sixth form, 87 per cent of teaching is at least good, and no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. One lesson in six is very good spread across the key stages, predominantly in religious education, information technology and English. Since the previous inspection, there has been improvement in the quality of teaching, particularly in Key Stage 3. Positive standards within subjects have been consolidated, and the overall proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has been substantially reduced to less than four per cent. The unsatisfactory teaching noted in the previous inspection, particularly in mathematics, has been considerably improved. The impact of the school's development work since the last inspection in raising achievement, together with the evaluation and improvement of teaching has clearly been effective. As a result, the generally good teaching combines with pupils' secure learning skills to ensure that they are making good progress, and is resulting in improvement in the most recent examination results.

21. Teaching is very good in religious education throughout the school. Good teaching predominates in art, English, modern foreign languages, history and information technology. It is also good in design technology in both Key Stages 3 and 4, is good in physical education and geography in Key Stage 3, and in mathematics at Key Stage 4. Teaching in music is also often very good in Key Stage 4, whilst in the sixth form, teaching is consistently good in science, and in the GNVQ courses. Since the previous inspection, teaching has improved in almost all subjects. No subject is judged to have unsatisfactory teaching overall and examples of good teaching feature in all subjects. The small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching arose where work lacked appropriate challenge, or strategies to ensure pupils' attention and good behaviour were ineffective. It was limited to single lessons in science, design technology, personal and social education, and information technology in Key Stage 3, and in science and geography in Key Stage 4.

22. Specialist teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects are strong generally. Where expectations of pupils' work and behaviour are high there is positive impact on their rate of progress and attainment, for example, in religious education, and in music at Key Stage 4.

23. Teachers generally explain to pupils what they are expected to learn. In the better lessons, for example, in religious education, art, modern foreign languages, design technology and information technology, good lesson summaries check progress and understanding. Teachers use a range of teaching strategies that are generally appropriate for the task in hand, and for the pupils concerned. Collaborative work features strongly in drama, physical education, art, and in some lessons in English, science and design technology. However, in some subjects, there is some over dependence on teachers, which limits the development of essential skills of research and independent writing; this becomes increasingly important as pupils move through Key Stage 4 and into the sixth form.

24. Most lessons are purposeful, sometimes with effective questioning which tests pupils' knowledge and understanding, and leads skilfully on to new work. This approach was notably successful in religious education lessons in Year 9 on Buddhism and in Year 12 focused on the Right to Life and Abortion, and in a geometry lesson in which Year 8 pupils successfully develop their understanding of transformations.

25. Teachers' planning is good, and tasks are generally matched well to the needs and capabilities of a majority of pupils in most subjects. The progress of the lower attaining pupils is well supported by the good use of in-class support, and also by the introduction of smaller teaching groups. Despite this generally effective planning, the full impact of the otherwise good teaching is adversely affected by a lack of pace in some lessons. Teachers do not always make the best use of the long 75-minute periods, and pupils are unable to concentrate and focus effectively for the whole period. As a result, many lessons are not as productive as they should be, and this has particular impact in mathematics, science, modern

foreign languages and geography.

26. Assessment and marking are strengths of the teaching in the school, and as a result pupils have a clear understanding of their progress and learning in most subjects. The generally good use of homework supports pupils' learning, and is having positive impact on standards in modern foreign languages, English, mathematics, science, information technology, geography, history and art.

27. The management of pupils in the classroom is a major strength of the teaching. Relationships are very good, and teachers set good examples, relating well to their classes and providing very positive levels of support and encouragement. Discipline is good, although teachers have to work hard to maintain full control in a minority of lessons, with time sometimes lost on checking the behaviour and concentration of a significant minority of pupils who find difficulty in tackling the long periods. However, pupils respond well to this essential feature of teachers' work in the classroom, and this is a key factor in their good progress and achievement.

28. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good. Teachers have a sound knowledge of each pupil's needs from the information provided by the school's special needs co-ordinator and are able to provide work of a suitable level. Most lessons are well planned with a good range of teaching methods and using a variety of resources. Classroom management and organisation is a strength and pupils are encouraged to work hard and do their best, for example, in a successful Year 7 geography lesson on the local environment. Teachers make effective use of support assistants and they are fully involved in lesson planning, but insufficient use is made of information technology in the teaching of special needs pupils and computer-based resources are limited.

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

29. Whilst the quality and range of learning opportunities are very good in most respects, current timetabling arrangements are unsatisfactory because lessons are too long and pupils have difficulty sustaining concentration. Consequently, there is a negative impact on progress. Also, the statutory curriculum is not entirely in place. Religious education is not provided the sixth form. Despite a big improvement in the provision of information technology since the previous inspection, a significant number of pupils still do not use and apply their skills in Years 10 and 11.

30. The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant and provides equally for girls and boys of all abilities. The insufficient time for mathematics in Years 7,8 and 9 restricts the development of independent study through investigative work. The contribution of the community to pupils' learning is excellent and the school implements its mission statement very effectively. This led to the Schools Curriculum Award in 2000. The quality and range of learning opportunities are good in art, dance, drama, GNVQ courses, history, media studies, music, physical education and religious education. Expressive arts are a strength of the curriculum, and the school's application for status as a Performing Arts College is appropriate and justifiable.

31. The curriculum has improved since the previous inspection. It includes all the subjects in the National Curriculum as well as personal, social and health education and religious education. In Years 7, 8 and 9, pupils take either French or German, but cannot take both, and all have drama. In Years 10 and 11, pupils can take up to ten GCSE subjects and most are entered for English literature and religious education. New GCSE subjects and a GNVQ ICT Intermediate course have extended the range and relevance of the options.

32. The sixth-form curriculum has developed since the previous inspection and is no longer an issue. The provision is cost-effective. Students are offered a wide range of A-levels and four GNVQ courses covering business, and health and social care. The school's provision for A-level is extended by a very effective link with a local college of further education. There are opportunities to re-take GCSE English and mathematics, together with an enrichment programme that includes key skills, work experience, careers and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. The students develop their personal responsibility through involvement with pupils in the school, for example, through a paired reading scheme. At the present time there is no timetabled recreation period but there are opportunities in extra-curricular sport.

33. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. They have full access to the National Curriculum and all statutory requirements are met. Pupils are entered for the full range of GCSE subjects. The paired reading initiative, involving sixth-form students working with pupils with reading difficulties on a one to one basis to improve their reading, is of excellent quality. Students are given training, records are kept and teachers are always on hand to help. This initiative has helped pupils improve their reading skills and achieve higher test scores.

34. The development of literacy skills is beginning to have positive impact on standards, especially in English and some other subjects. However, the school has not yet put in place a whole school approach to numeracy. Although numerical skills are developed to some extent in mathematics, science and geography, the lack of a co-ordinated approach to improving this area of weakness is restricting pupils' progress.

35. The provision for extra-curricular sport is excellent and the participation rate is very high. The school has the Sportsmark Award, and there are school teams in nine sports. Inter-house sport provides opportunities for many pupils to participate in competitive games. The provision of other extra-curricular activities is very good. There is a tradition of drama productions, art exhibitions and musical performances, and a wide range of clubs and most subjects offer pupils additional support time especially for GCSE coursework. There are many trips arranged locally, nationally and abroad for educational and recreational purposes. The curriculum is enriched by an annual multi-cultural arts festival. The success of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme is outstanding, with more than fifty pupils and students gaining their Gold Award during the last four years. Many staff contribute to extra-curricular activities and this work does much to broaden pupils' learning experiences.

36. The programme for pupils' personal, social and health education is very well developed and has been much improved since the previous inspection. It includes all relevant elements including drugs education, sex education and the new requirements for citizenship in Key Stage 3.

37. The careers education and guidance programme is good, and has recently been reviewed and updated. Pupils and parents appreciate the quality of careers education and guidance received. The indications are that the new programme will enhance further the good provision.

38. The community makes an excellent contribution to pupils' learning. Over 18 institutions support the school by providing opportunities for the pupils to enrich their learning experiences including an extensive programme of work experience in Year 10. The school is a Health Promoting School and draws on the expertise of the school nurse, the local police and drugs counsellors in this work.

39. The relationships with partner institutions are very good and promote the quality of pupils' learning. Links with primary feeder schools include the successful "Bridging Project", involving curriculum links, high school staff teaching in primary schools, and induction days. The school is part of a post-16 consortium. It has a compact with a local university which includes visits and speakers and for whom it provides Initial Teacher Training.

40. The outstanding commitment to pupils' personal development is not only expressed very well in its aims and policies but, more importantly, is seen in action throughout the life and activities of the school. The provision for pupils' personal development, although of high quality at the last inspection, has improved even further in important areas and is now very good. Provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development is very good and for their spiritual development is good.

41. Pupils' experiences across a range of subjects make a strong contribution to their spiritual development. In religious education pupils reach remarkable depths in their discussions on the existence of God. Poetry and literature are used very well in English to evoke deep thinking and reflection. Drama is used very well to encourage pupils to reflect on values and beliefs. Attitudes to religions and war are discussed in history. Pupils in geography are encouraged to reflect through poetry, on the beauty of their surroundings.

42. Assemblies successfully promote very positive values and attitudes. These are often special occasions that are appreciated and valued by the pupils, who often plan, lead or take part. Clear moral,

social and spiritual messages are conveyed. Reflection is a key part of all assemblies, which are broadly Christian in nature. Despite the high quality of the assemblies the school does not fully meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily collective act of worship. The "Thought for the Day" is not always well presented to pupils in tutorial periods, partly because of insufficient planning.

43. The school is very successful in helping pupils to understand the differences between right and wrong. They have been involved in devising the code of conduct of "Treat all people with care, courtesy and consideration". Staff set very good examples. They have very high expectations and are very supportive of all pupils' efforts and achievements. They expect pupils to take responsibility for their actions, and have very good relationships based on mutual respect. This results in pupils who achieve well, behave well and are considerate of others. There are many opportunities in subjects to discuss moral issues. A-level drama pupils produce powerful productions depicting moral issues surrounding racism, and Year 9 pupils reflect on moral issues in their production based on the Seven Deadly Sins. Pupils hold mature discussions on abortion, euthanasia and marriage in religious education lessons.

44. Pupils' social development is a major aim of the school's work. It is very successful in giving young people an outstanding range of opportunities to take responsibility, broaden their horizons and learn to live and work as responsible citizens both in the school and the wider community. The school council is active and consulted by the headteacher regularly, for example, on the forthcoming building developments. Many pupils work as mentors to younger pupils. House executives and prefects take on many responsibilities and receive training for this from outside agencies. Pupils are encouraged to become involved in community projects, and school council members represent the school on the local Police Forum. Pupils show their concern for others in the considerable efforts they make in raising funds for charities.

45. All these activities reflect the school's policy and careful planning of "Active Citizenship". A well planned programme of personal and social education teaches the principles of active citizenship.

46. Provision for cultural development is very good, and a strong element of multicultural education now provided in many subjects. In addition to the very good opportunities for studying arts within the curriculum, the most important event of the year is the Community Arts Festival held in the summer term. It is a multicultural arts event that includes every pupil and the local community in a wide variety of cultural experiences. It clearly makes a considerable impression and many pupils recall events and experiences with excitement and an understanding of the variety of cultures they are studying. The wide range of topics include theatre, poetry, sculpture, mural design, cookery, storytelling, puppet making, music, art and dance from Africa, North and South America, and Asia.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

47. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection in its assessment procedures which are well used to set targets for groups and individual pupils, and enable teachers to monitor progress. This good use of the assessment system was a contributory factor to the improvement in the most recent national tests and examinations. Sixth-form students have not had the advantage of comparable systems; they have insufficient information to guide their future learning. However, plans are in hand to trial a system incorporating individual targets and regular assessments in the current year. Pupils and parents are aware of pupils' strengths and weaknesses and termly targets for improvement include personal matters.

48. Pupils' personal development is carefully monitored and very effectively promoted. Welfare and guidance were described very favourably in the previous inspection report but some concerns were expressed about aspects of health and safety. On balance the situation is similar. The overall management of health and safety is unsatisfactory because appropriate and effective procedures are not in place for risk assessment and safety checks. A number of procedures and checks have not been carried out for several years and arrangements for health and safety are unsatisfactory. Several potential hazards were brought to the attention of the school by inspectors which the school has already acted upon.

49. Satisfactory arrangements for child protection are in place. The school, together with relevant

specialist agencies, provides very good support to pupils and their families across a wide range of welfare and social needs. Pupils feel safe and valued and parents are pleased with the quality of support and guidance that their children receive.

50. Although attendance is closely monitored in most respects, completion of attendance registers is not sufficiently rigorous. Some are left open too long and late arrivals are not marked precisely enough to enable accurate monitoring of punctuality. Improved attendance is actively promoted by a wide range of strategies. Contact with parents of pupils on their first day of absence is proving to be very successful and the system of rewards and recognition for high attendance is effective. The various measures applied contributed to a significant improvement last year which is also continuing this year. The school is trying hard to influence bus services in order to improve punctuality. Whilst teachers on patrol encourage pupils to get to their classes quickly, some pupils have not yet developed a sense of urgency about getting to lessons on time.

51. Good behaviour is effectively promoted primarily by the high expectations and consistent approach of almost all teachers and the general ethos of the school. The system of reward, recognition and celebration works very well. The school seeks to work with pupils who have difficulties, and often families, for example, via a short programme including targets and monitoring, in order to achieve improvement. Pupils' personal development is very carefully monitored alongside academic progress. Very detailed records assist tutors to provide support and guidance to individuals.

52. Pupils feel confident and secure about reporting instances of bullying, intimidation or personal distress to their tutors or head of house. Those who prefer have easy access to a nursing sister. A bully box and school council is available for pupils to make representations. The school's procedures are good, and any kind of anti-social behaviour is dealt with effectively.

53. Procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs are good. Pupils are identified from their National Curriculum scores at the end of Year 6, from the tests that pupils do on entering the school in Year 7, from teacher observation and from information provided by parents and external agencies. The work of the school's recently appointed support assistants is good. Individual education plans are in place but these are too generalised and lack short-term attainable targets that pupils can achieve.

54. Additional support is available to pupils from learning support assistants in selected lessons. Before school, at lunch times and after school a study support centre provides opportunities for pupils to do their homework and they are able to receive assistance if required. Many pupils use this facility and they value it.

55. Year 11 pupils assist those who have potential to attain higher grades. This successfully raises their aspirations and positively influences their attitudes and effort and pupils involved express considerable appreciation for this support. This mentoring scheme is also currently being extended to the lower school in order to help pupils develop independent study skills and self-organisation.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

56. Parents are very pleased with the school. The school partnership with its parents is very effective and parents contribute well to the quality of learning. Parents' views and involvement are more positive than at the previous inspection. They are very positive in their opinion of, and support for, the school, and believe the school is well led and managed, that teaching is good, and that pupils make good progress. A few parents are concerned about the way in which homework is set although the large majority of parents support the school's system of requiring them to regularly check pupils' planners. The school promotes their involvement in this very well.

57. Parents are very well informed about pupils' progress. Annual school reports provide good quality information about academic attainment, effort and personal development. Whilst the school's own attainment grades are used in lower school rather than National Curriculum levels, the grades are explained and the standards achieved are clear to parents. Information about progress is supplemented by termly assessments and opportunities for parents to consult with teachers. The school communicates with parents frequently about pupils' individual achievements and planners and

achievement wallets are further sources of information.

58. All the school's formal publications comply with statutory requirements and the prospectus is very attractively presented, leaving prospective parents and pupils in no doubt about what they can expect in the school. Events are convened to provide curricular and other information for parents. There are opportunities for parents to discuss their children's subject options, careers routes, post-16 education and support with their work at home. Parents are consulted about their views via questionnaires and other means.

59. The school attempts to involve parents increasingly, for example, in trying to improve attendance or to reduce the incidence of holidays in term time. When pupils are absent, contact is made with parents on the first day and this has a positive impact on cooperation and actual attendance, but is not quite so successful in minimising lateness. Parents are contacted and their cooperation sought in order to assist pupils who are underachieving or who are having particular difficulties. Parents of pupils who have special educational needs are invited to the periodic review.

60. The parents' association is an active group that successfully supports the school and raises a significant amount of money to help improve the quality of learning.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

61. The overall leadership and management of the school are good, and are major strengths of the school. A clear sense of purpose and direction are evident. School aims have been reviewed and confirmed, and they are evident in documentation and clearly reflected in the daily life of the school and in its development priorities. The school is successfully combining its major strengths in pastoral work with its demands for improved attainment and achievement. Increasingly high expectation of pupils' efforts and behaviour are set within a framework of good relationships and discipline, with a positive impact on their attitudes and response to school.

62. The governing body is conscientious and committed to the school's well-being. Through their clear committee structure and appropriate programme of meetings, governors are kept well informed and provide good support to the school. They have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and have strong and productive links with the headteacher and senior management team. The governors' role in strategic planning is clearly seen in the planned improvements to accommodation funded through the private finance initiative. They also check on standards in the school, and receive regular reports from subject heads. Governors fulfil most of their statutory duties well, including setting challenging targets for GCSE examinations which were partially met in 2000. However, despite improvements in provision, the statutory requirements for information technology are not met in Key Stage 4. Requirements are neither met for religious education in the sixth form, nor for daily collective worship.

63. The leadership of the headteacher is very good, and her appointment in 1997 has resulted in a much sharper focus on raising standards. After thorough consultation with governors, parents, staff and pupils, the aims of the school have been confirmed and a series of changes set in place designed to move the school forward towards improved levels of attainment. The wide use of data relating to pupils' prior attainment and targets for improvement are the keystones in this process. The headteacher has high expectations of pupils and staff, and governors have endorsed her clear vision for the future. A dynamic agenda for development is in place, and staff are responding well to the energetic and open approach to management which has been developed. A positive impact has been made in a number of important areas, including review of management structures, clear roles and responsibilities reflected in job descriptions, the school's improved development planning process, and the strong performance review procedures which have been established.

64. The headteacher and senior management team work very well together to provide consistent leadership and clear educational direction for the school. Management structures are effective, and the senior team is playing a very positive part in supporting the initiatives that have been put in place since the previous inspection, for example, in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching. Their roles are explicit and well documented, and their responsibilities for annual performance review with subjects are well carried

out, with rigorous analysis of examination results and progress towards agreed targets.

65. Pastoral support is very well managed through a very effective house system, and the pastoral and academic roles of tutors are linked well. The arrangements for reviewing pupils' academic and personal development are very good, as are links with, and reporting to, parents. The majority of subjects are well managed and organised, although the co-ordination of design and technology is a weakness. Subject heads are generally very effective, and are increasingly taking responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning in their areas. There is need to ensure consistency and rigour across the school in, for example, the observation and review of lessons, and in sampling pupils' written work and homework to check on progress and standards.

66. The leadership and management of the special educational needs department is good. Since the previous inspection the school has developed a policy which has regard to the Code of Practice and which meets statutory requirements. The vast majority of issues from the previous inspection have been successfully tackled. The liaison arrangements with outside agencies are efficiently managed. There is now a whole-school approach to issues affecting pupils with special educational needs and despite having an very heavy teaching responsibility, the co-ordinator keeps the rest of the teaching staff up-to-date via newsletters and organised in-service training.

67. Since the previous inspection, the school development plan has been strengthened, and weaknesses identified in the last report have been tackled. The quality of planning for school development is good, and is now clearly targeted towards raising attainment. There are effective links to the budget cycle, with clear costs, responsibilities, time scales and expected benefits. Departmental plans reflect their contributions to the whole school plan, and provide a secure focus for review and evaluation by the senior management team.

68. Progress in tackling the other key issues of the previous report has been good. The governors' action planning was secure, and the school's response to the issues arising has accelerated following the appointment of the current headteacher. In particular, positive progress has been made in sharing good practice in assessment across the school, in developing systematic monitoring and evaluation, and in strengthening cultural and spiritual provision. The school's leadership is committed to driving up standards – its positive ethos and developing sense of purpose ensure that it is well placed to be successful.

69. The school has a sufficient number of appropriately qualified and experienced staff to support teaching and the smooth running of the school on a daily basis. Procedures for the induction of new and newly qualified staff are appropriate and support their professional development effectively. Good provision for the appraisal and performance management of all staff has resulted in appropriate staff development matched to priorities in personal and school development plans.

70. Although the accommodation is spacious it is inadequate for the growing number of pupils on roll. The mobile classrooms are in very poor condition and not conducive to good learning in subjects taught in them including English, modern foreign languages and mathematics. Accommodation for special educational needs pupils is also poor, and there is no central resource area for pupils or teachers. Other buildings in the school, for example, the sports hall, also show signs of neglect and poor maintenance. Teaching resources have improved since the previous inspection, particularly for information technology where they are now good. The provision of a study support centre equipped with up-to-date computers and accessible to pupils of all ages promotes pupils' initiative and control of their own learning and offers excellent support for pupils with special educational needs. It has displaced the library and, as a result, library provision is currently unsatisfactory, and hinders pupils' progress.

71. Systems for financial planning are very good. The budget is planned carefully each year and the proportions of the total expenditure are broadly average compared to other schools nationally. The proportion of the budget spent on the sixth form is equivalent to the income received for these students. The financial deficit, which was beginning to be accumulated at the time of the previous inspection, has now been eliminated, and recently, as a result of careful planning, the school has been able to employ more teachers to reduce class sizes.

72. The principles of best value are applied very well. School development planning, which links improvements in all subjects to major school developments, is discussed at all levels including three committees of the governing body. Proposed improvements are accurately costed. Specific grant is always used for its designated purpose.

73. Financial control is very good. The bursar, headteacher and governors all play their part in a secure system which compares actual spending with intentions at very regular intervals. Budget cost centres are monitored regularly and cannot be overspent without the approval of governors; this will only be given if a virement of funds from one budget heading to another is proposed by the headteacher and authorised by the finance committee.

74. The school receives average funding per pupil although the intake is relatively disadvantaged in a socio-economic sense. Teaching is good, and attitudes and personal development of the pupils are good. Although examination results are below average, they represent good achievement from relatively low starting points on entry to the school. Hence, the school gives good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

75. In order to further improve the quality of educational provision and educational standards achieved, the governors, headteacher and staff should focus on:

- (1) **Raising standards by:**
 - continuing to teach literacy skills systematically through all subjects;
(see paragraphs 11, 34, 84, 85)
 - developing a whole school strategy for teaching numeracy skills, and
(see paragraphs 12, 34, 100)
 - teaching numeracy skills, systematically and consistently, in all subjects;
(see paragraphs 12, 34, 100)
 - increasing pupils' opportunities to develop and apply skills in information technology at Key Stage 4;
(see paragraphs 9, 28, 143, 144)
 - consolidating the current good use of information on pupils' prior attainment in setting targets for improvement;
(see paragraphs 8, 47)

- (2) **Improving the curriculum by:**
 - establishing a more flexible timetable, and reducing the length of the teaching periods;
(see paragraphs 25, 29, 98, 126, 146)
 - ensuring that sufficient time is allowed for mathematics at Key Stage 3.
(see paragraphs 30, 98)

- (3) **Ensuring the safety and welfare of pupils and staff by:**
 - carrying out regular checks on electrical appliances;
(see paragraphs 48, 111, 125)
 - confirming that health and safety policy and practice complies with national regulations and LEA guidelines.
(see paragraph 48, 111, 125, 160)

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

- improving the quality of accommodation, in particular the temporary mobile classrooms.
(see paragraph 70)
- establishing library facilities at the earliest possible opportunity.
(see paragraph 70)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	155
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	48

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	16	46	32	4	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1009	105
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	298	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	28	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	259	3

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	17
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	22

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	9.9
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
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
	1999	93	105	198

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	57	52	30
	Girls	78	50	27
	Total	135	102	57
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (74)	52 (48)	29 (40)
	National	63 (65)	62 (59)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	16 (45)	16 (13)	5 (11)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	48	52	33
	Girls	75	50	35
	Total	123	102	68
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	62 (56)	52 (45)	34 (42)
	National	64 (62)	64 (63)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	19 (21)	15 (13)	4 (3)
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	101	100	201

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	20	92	94
	Girls	34	95	98
	Total	54	187	192
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	27 (29)	93 (89)	96 (96)
	National	46 (45)	91 (90)	96 (95)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	31.25 (31.5)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year Who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	15	14	29

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	10.2	9.8	10			
National	-	-	17.9 (17.6)			

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	1
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	9
White	1099
Any other minority ethnic group	2

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	26	4
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	68.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	
Total aggregate hours worked per week	40

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11

Key Stage 3	23.1
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Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	2641844
Total expenditure	2585979
Expenditure per pupil	2402
Balance brought forward from previous year	22720
Balance carried forward to next year	78585

Key Stage 4	20.7
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Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1114
Number of questionnaires returned	471

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40	53	3	2	2
My child is making good progress in school.	37	51	2	1	9
Behaviour in the school is good.	37	48	5	1	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	29	52	11	4	4
The teaching is good.	34	55	2	1	8
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	34	43	10	2	11
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	58	35	4	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	35	2	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	34	47	8	2	9
The school is well led and managed.	45	44	2	1	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	42	48	2	1	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	39	44	4	1	12

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

ENGLISH

76. Results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were broadly in line with the national average. Although not as high as the results in 1998 they were an improvement on the results of 1997. They were above average in comparison with similar schools and better than the school results in mathematics and science. Girls outperformed boys. The percentage of pupils reaching level 6 or above was below the national average in 1999. In 2000 there was a rise in the number of pupils gaining the higher grades.

77. Virtually all pupils achieved A*-G grades in both English and English Literature GCSE in 1999 but the proportion gaining A*-C grades was below the national average. Girls did considerably better than boys. In 2000 the number of pupils gaining grades A*-C improved by 17 per cent. Results in A-level English were below average in 1999 and although still below average in 2000, they showed an improvement, as all eighteen candidates obtained pass grades. Most pupils entered the school with levels of attainment which were well below average and so these results represent good achievement. This is particularly the case in GCSE English literature as the number of pupils taking the examination in 1999 was above average.

78. Work seen during the inspection matches the standards expected by the end of Key Stage 3 but is below average at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. However, by the time they leave the school many pupils are achieving standards which are better than expected, given their attainment on entry. The majority of pupils, both boys and girls, express themselves clearly in short oral responses. Drama lessons play an important role in helping pupils to gain confidence in putting forward their ideas. In class discussions most pupils can support their viewpoints effectively with reasons and with references to the books or plays they have been reading. However, although some are fluent, audible and lively, many pupils have difficulty in projecting their voices and sustaining clarity of thought when speaking at greater length. Most pupils are ready to listen to others and they work together constructively in group tasks. The majority of pupils attain average standards in reading. The school has made determined efforts to improve standards of reading and by the end of Year 9 only a small number of pupils are not reaching the expected levels. Both boys and girls enjoy reading aloud, even though they might have difficulty in coping with unfamiliar words, and many pupils read with expression. The sessions of silent reading at the beginning of the lesson offer pupils good opportunities to concentrate on a book of their own choosing. By the end of Year 11 the majority of pupils show a reasonable understanding of a wide range of texts. They can select essential points and retrieve information from a variety of sources including the media and the internet. Although a minority of pupils have below average standards in reading, most lower attainers are able to read well enough to cope successfully with the texts they encounter.

79. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards in writing are average. They write effectively for many different purposes and use information technology successfully in presenting their work. Handwriting is usually well formed and punctuation is accurate. Work displayed in classrooms includes letters to newspapers, scripts, narrative writing and factual descriptions. Higher attainers write at length and the quality of their imaginative writing is a strength. Lower attainers do not write in enough detail and their writing lacks the necessary structure. Sentences are short and there are errors in basic punctuation and spelling. However, most pupils have learnt how to improve the style and accuracy of their writing through redrafting. By the end of Key Stage 4 higher attaining pupils use their research notes effectively as a basis for their GCSE written assignments. Their essays are well structured and of a good length. Middle and lower attainers express their understanding and viewpoints in less depth and their grasp of grammar and spelling is weak. The final drafts of essays produced by sixth-form students are generally structured with care and presented neatly, but themes are often treated superficially and opinions are not always clearly explained.

80. Pupils' attainment in English is well below average on entry to the school. The good teaching and additional support in literacy helps pupils to make good progress so that attainment is average by the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils make good progress throughout Key Stage 4 with the result that their grades at GCSE, although below the national average, are higher than would be expected, given their attainment at the beginning of Year 7. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well, especially in those lessons

where emphasis is laid on working towards the targets set in their original education plans. Sixth formers generally achieve higher results than their attainment at GCSE would indicate.

81. Pupils' attitudes towards their work are generally very good. They respond in a lively way and usually sustain interest and concentration in their work, as was evident in an extended discussion on Shakespeare and his plays in Year 9. However, pupils can become restless and waste time in unnecessary chat when they spend too long on one activity or when the tasks set do not hold their attention. Behaviour is generally good and there are very good relationships within the classroom. Pupils of all levels of attainment work constructively together in groups and pairs, and usually give careful consideration to the views of others. The nature of much of the material which pupils read and talk about helps them to form thoughtful opinions about moral and social issues. Their original writing, particularly poetry, reveals a capacity for reflection and a growing awareness of the spiritual dimension to life.

82. The quality of teaching is good overall and makes a positive contribution to pupils' achievement. There is no unsatisfactory teaching and teaching is either good or very good in over half of the lessons throughout the school. The better lessons are characterised by effective planning and work which is well matched to pupils' different levels of attainment. Teachers' good knowledge and understanding of the chosen texts is successfully transmitted to pupils who are then well equipped to respond promptly and accurately in discussions. Aims are clearly explained so that pupils know what is required of them and end of lesson reviews establish what has been learned as well as giving pupils the opportunity to evaluate their own progress. Teachers build up good relationships with their pupils so that there is mutual trust within the classroom. Lessons are supported by good quality resources and guidelines for writing tasks. Homework is regularly set and marked and pupils receive very helpful advice on how to improve their work. This is particularly the case with those pupils who are working towards public examinations. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils were given excellent preparation for a timed writing task and their coursework had been very carefully marked with detailed analytical comments and precise targets for improving the quality of their essay writing. Sixth formers studying Jane Austen's "Mansfield Park" benefited from well structured guidelines which helped them to appreciate the significance of different events in the development of themes and the understanding of character. The most effective lessons also have a range of carefully chosen activities and good use of time. For example, the purposeful pace to the lesson and a variety of activities which involved group discussions as well as reading and writing tasks enabled pupils in a Year 8 class to develop their oral skills and extend their knowledge of the differences between biographies and autobiographies and the various ways of finding sources of information. In the lessons which were satisfactory but not better, fewer demands were made on the pupils and activities were conducted at a more leisurely pace so that pupils' rate of progress was slower.

83. The department has made good progress since the last report. Teaching and learning has improved and pupils' achievement in lessons is now good. However, the main accommodation, which is in the mobile classrooms, is still poor and restricts the scope of lesson activities. The department is well managed and effective action has been taken to raise standards and improve examination results. Recent initiatives aimed at raising standards in literacy are helping lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs gain confidence and make progress.

Key skills: speaking and listening, reading and writing across the curriculum

84. The school has worked hard and with considerable success to develop ways of improving pupils' language skills, and a wide ranging whole school policy provides a firm framework for the raising of attainment, although standards of literacy are below average overall. Although a few departments have made only limited progress in integrating literacy strategies into their planning, most subject departments have a clear focus for developing literacy in the teaching of specialist key words which are prominently displayed around the classrooms and emphasised in lessons. For example, in geography, Year 8 pupils learn words about types of industry and Year 10 pupils become familiar with vocabulary connected to weather systems. The selected word lists in student planners also enable pupils to extend their vocabulary. In addition, initiatives such as the paired reading scheme in which Year 11 pupils act as tutors to younger pupils, the ERIC reading scheme in tutor time, the sessions of silent reading at the beginning of English lessons, focused work on key skills, and the use of structured aids to writing are proving effective in raising standards of literacy.

85. The majority of pupils are able to express themselves with reasonable fluency although some are reluctant to take an active part in class and group discussions. Many pupils adapt their speech effectively

to different contexts, especially in role play in drama, and most pupils listen readily to their teachers and to each other. Pupils read aloud expressively in French and German and also in English and religious education lessons. Most pupils read well enough to cope independently with the material they use in their lessons and successfully carry out research projects. However, in mathematics, there is some weakness in comprehension. Some departments make good use of texts which have been specially modified, as in history, where large numbers of pupils with special educational needs choose to take the subject at GCSE. The range of writing undertaken and the degree to which pupils write accurately and clearly is inconsistent across subjects. Although attention is paid to the accurate spelling of specialist key words, there is no whole school approach to the correction of mistakes in the spelling of everyday words and consequently many basic spelling errors are not picked up during the marking of written work. In science the writing of many pupils is imprecise and lacks logical sequence. Spelling is inaccurate and pupils often do not write at sufficient length. However, in geography some pupils write sensitive poetry on the beauty of the landscape, and in religious education older pupils write well about moral issues.

Drama

86. Pupils achieve well in drama. All pupils have drama lessons at Key Stage 3 and the subject is a popular option at Key Stage 4. Forty-two pupils, the majority of whom were girls, took the GCSE drama examination in 1999. The number of entries was higher than average. Although the proportion of pupils obtaining grades A*-C was below the national average, all the candidates gained a grade. Two pupils attained grade A* and three pupils gained grade A. These results represent good achievement for pupils whose attainment on entry to the school was well below average. Results in 2000 were within a similar range, although with a smaller number of entries. The numbers of students taking drama at A-level in 1999 and in 2000 were too small for the results to have any statistical significance.

87. By the end of Key Stage 3, most pupils attain above average standards, and have acquired a range of skills which they use well, including effective use of space and movement, and of gesture, facial expression and language. Pupils work well in pairs and groups, and they usually listen considerately to each other as they plan their presentations, as Year 7 pupils did in a lesson where they were preparing a performance of the witches' spell-making in "Macbeth" to present to another group. In evaluating their work, they respect each other's comments and efforts. The high standards in practical work are maintained throughout Key Stage 4 in the examination option group. In their original dialogues and short plays Year 11 pupils can create and sustain credible roles and put across powerfully the inhumanity of racism.

88. Sixth-form students attain average standards in their practical work. Their sound knowledge and understanding of the place of ritual in the theatre and of choral techniques is put to effective use in their group presentations. They show confidence in performing and in evaluating their work.

89. The response of pupils in lessons is good and it is very good in the extra-curricular productions. Most pupils show a good sense of responsibility when working in large areas such as the drama studio and the hall. In their pair and group presentations they develop self-confidence and become adept at innovation. Through the themes they explore, such as love and hatred, sorrow and rejoicing they show a growing awareness of the spiritual and moral dimensions to life.

90. The quality of teaching is good overall, and some is very good. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject and an enthusiasm for it. Lessons are well planned with good opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and groups. The good relationships in the classroom enable pupils to gain self-confidence and to benefit from their teachers' evaluation of the work in progress. Accommodation in the drama studio is good, but because of timetabling arrangements not all classes at Key Stage 3 can use it. The drama department is very well managed and led, and pupils enjoy a wide range of activities which include joint school productions and theatre visits.

91. The performing arts are an integral part of school life and a strength of the school. They make a very good contribution to pupils' social and cultural development through the very popular programme of extra-curricular activities such as the musical productions and the Christmas dance drama performances which are given to local primary schools and senior citizens.

Media studies

92. Media studies is an integral part of the English syllabus at Key Stage 3 and is a well established option subject at Key Stage 4. It is a popular choice for pupils with special educational needs. Media studies has recently been introduced as an examination subject at Advanced Supplementary-level in the sixth form.

93. In the 1999 GCSE examinations the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was below the national average. However, all the pupils who took the examination obtained a grade and the majority achieved well, given their attainment on entry to the school. Girls did better than boys. Results in 2000 were broadly similar.

94. Pupils' attitudes are very good. They research their assignments carefully and take pride in presenting their coursework attractively. They enjoy the variety of activities, particularly the practical work, and the opportunities for developing their speaking and listening skills in discussions. Teaching and learning are good and pupils achieve well. Students in a Year 12 lesson collaborated successfully in a discussion on ways of presenting characters in the opening sequence of a thriller film.

95. Pupils taking media studies as an examination subject derive great benefit from the strong links with the drama department as the two subjects complement each other. Resources are very good and pupils become skilled in the use of information technology and film equipment. A strength of the subject is the excellent contribution it makes to pupils' personal and social development.

MATHEMATICS

96. Until the last two years, when it rose significantly, attainment in mathematics on entry was well below average. By the time pupils are 14 and 16, standards of work are below average, but steadily improving. This is mainly due to more highly focused teaching than at the time of the previous inspection and better use of assessment to identify and remedy underachievement. By the end of Year 11, pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in relation to their starting points.

97. In 1999, the proportion of 14 year old pupils reaching the expected standard for their age in national tests was below average. It improved significantly in 2000, with 30 per cent of pupils reaching level 6. A culmination of factors has led to the improved results; in addition to those noted above, the adoption of courses and textbooks specifically suited to pupils' ability levels is particularly relevant. In 1999, pupils' results in GCSE examinations were well below average at grades A*-C and average at grades A*-G. Results for 2000 show improvement at the higher grades. This represents good achievement considering the attainment on entry and the fact that all pupils, including those with special educational needs, are entered for the examinations. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls. The number of pupils completing A-level courses in the sixth form is small, and the pass rate in recent years has been well below average. Students find the courses challenging and most have difficulty in working at the depth required.

98. From Year 8, pupils are grouped by ability. This is effective and positively promotes good learning because pupils gain knowledge at a pace appropriate to their level of understanding. The continuous assessment method used with lower attaining pupils works particularly well; they are self-motivated by success at the end of short intervals. Progress in the mixed-ability classes in Year 7 is satisfactory. In a few classes the work set is too repetitive for higher-attaining pupils; teachers spend a disproportionate of time supporting the least able without moving others on to more challenging work or to the next topic. The long length of lessons exacerbates this situation. Many pupils, but particularly the lower attainers, find it difficult to sustain attention over such a long period. Consequently teachers sometimes find it inappropriate to introduce a new topic in the latter part of the lesson. This, combined with the below average allocation of time for mathematics in Key Stage 3, results in pupils having too few opportunities to engage in independent investigative work and problem solving. Extra time is given to the subject in Key Stage 4 which accounts for a faster rate of progress. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to supplement and reinforce their learning through after-school classes. These are contributing to the rising standards of attainment.

99. Throughout the school, pupils gain a thorough grounding in algebra, graphical work, shape and

measure, and data handling. The use of information technology skills is an integral part of the work and provides good opportunities for pupils to self-test their own knowledge and analyse/display data. A good example was the Year 7 lesson in which pupils successfully entered their own survey data into the 'Chartmate' programme. They were quick to learn and use appropriate operational skills to print off meaningful and informative display material.

100. Standards in numeracy are below average. Pupils satisfactorily apply their mathematical knowledge in other subjects, such as science and geography, but there is no co-ordinated approach to the development of numerical and mathematical skills. Most pupils use calculators effectively but weaknesses in basic numerical knowledge, such as multiplication tables, and in fundamental computational skills such as subtraction and long multiplication adversely affect pupils' progress. An element of mental mathematics is successfully being introduced in many lessons but this needs to be routinely included in the schemes of work for all classes.

101. Overall, teaching is good. This represents a significant improvement since the previous inspection when the number of good lessons seen was small and a third of the teaching in Key Stage 3 was unsatisfactory. All the lessons observed in the current inspection were satisfactory or better. Good teaching was observed in Key Stages 3 and 4, predominantly so in the latter. It leads to progressively good learning as pupils move upwards through the school and by the time they are 16 they apply knowledge to questions of increasing complexity. Teachers promote literacy skills through their use of appropriate mathematical language. Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory. It tends to be more instructional than expected at this level, reflecting the students' lack of self-confidence to tackle the work independently. Many find difficulty in making the transition from GCSE to A-level, particularly, although not exclusively, in pure mathematics. The good teaching stems from the knowledge and expertise of specialist teachers. Pupils say they enjoy mathematics because teachers make it interesting, relevant and explicit. A brisk pace is maintained in lessons and pupils' attention is sustained. A typical example was a stimulating lesson on circular measure in Year 10. Pupils tackled the groundsman's problem of planning the marking out of the school's athletic track and pondered on the calculation of the distance covered by a moving bicycle wheel in contrast to that of an unrolling swiss roll cake. The teacher's thoughtfulness in planning this lesson overtly provided instruction and challenge whilst promoting inquisitiveness and independence. Where teaching was satisfactory in contrast to good, objectives were not sharp enough and there was a lack of urgency in pupils' speed of working. This, rather than the teacher, tended to dictate the pace of the lesson. Marking is generally well used to draw pupils' attention to how to improve but the marking policy is not implemented consistently by all teachers. Good practices, such as the organisation of a Year 11 lesson in which written and aural testing of a few pupils was carried out simultaneous with support for others working independently, and in a very well planned and fast moving lesson on translations in Year 8, need to be shared.

102. Overall, pupils have good attitudes and a desire to succeed. They have confidence in the teachers and follow their instructions and advice. This shows in the presentation of written work and in pupils' understanding of the need for evidence of the working, underpinning an answer. Higher attaining pupils learn how to think for themselves and come to independent conclusions. Other pupils need more assistance in problem solving, especially in the translation of written words to numerical concepts. Behaviour is well managed and generally good. Progress in lessons is occasionally slowed by the poor behaviour of a few pupils. This distracts others and diverts the teacher's attention from taking the lesson forward as fast as was initially planned.

103. Most mathematics lessons are taught in mobile classrooms which are in very poor condition. The staff work hard to improve the learning environment as much as is possible through the use of creative displays. They encourage pupils to engage in extra-curricular activities, such as the Millennium Challenge competition and master classes at Liverpool University. There is good capacity for improvement, particularly through provision for more investigations and the development of mental strategies for handling numerical work. Ongoing targets set for pupils' attainment at 14 and 16 are realistic and achievable.

SCIENCE

104. National test results at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were well below average, and below average

for schools taking their pupils from similar backgrounds. Boys did better than girls. Results were lower than those in English and mathematics, and reflected some underachievement. However, there was a dramatic improvement in 2000, to the extent that the proportion of pupils achieving National Curriculum level 5 almost doubled. Achievement reflected in these results was satisfactory. GCSE results have shown a slight rising trend between 1995 and 2000, and reflect satisfactory levels of achievement. In 1999, the proportion of results in the A*-C range was well below average. However, the school successfully entered a greater proportion of its pupils for the examination than the national average. Significantly, almost all these pupils achieved a pass. Girls did better at GCSE than boys. A-level results in 1999, from the small group in biology, were well below the national average overall, but they represent good levels of achievement as the students had started the course with fairly modest GCSE results. In 2000, there was also a small group in chemistry. Results were still well below average in biology and chemistry but again represented good achievement.

105. Observations of work in class and scrutinies of written work show that pupils at the ends of the key stages and the sixth form are reaching standards which are broadly similar to those reflected in the 2000 Key Stage 3, GCSE and A-level results. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are below average for age but they represent satisfactory achievement as the pupils entered the school with rather modest levels of attainment in science. Higher attaining pupils are confident with work at level 6 of the National Curriculum, average pupils are at level 5 and the lowest attainers are at level 3. Biology, chemistry and physics are being covered equally well, and pupils have average skills in practical work. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards are well below average. The highest attaining pupils are working at GCSE grade A. They are able to produce extended written work of good quality. Average pupils are working at a level consistent with GCSE grades D and E. Their understanding and knowledge are frequently good but they often have difficulty expressing their written answers in a logical and precise manner. The lowest attaining pupils are working at GCSE grades F and G. However, this represents good achievement as many of them came to the school with very low reading ages. A-level groups in chemistry and biology are achieving well as they joined the sixth form with often no more than C grades at GCSE. Although standards are generally well below average, they are, nevertheless, consistent with pass grades in the range C, D and E.

106. Standards of work seen represent broadly satisfactory levels of achievement in all year groups. However, pupils do not use enough information technology in their work nor do they experience the opportunity to present work to the rest of the class. They normally listen and concentrate well when work is being explained and they answer questions readily. However, too often they guess at oral answers in an attempt to please the teacher. Pupils' records of work are normally neatly presented and are extensive. Laboratories are usually characterised by good atmosphere where pupils co-operate fully, behave well and try hard. Attitudes to homework are normally good. Written work of pupils of all ages, including several in the sixth form, is often incorrectly sequenced and lacking in sufficient precision. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as they move through the school. In Key Stage 3, there is the security of lessons in relatively small classes for those with the greatest problems and teachers give good quality individual help both here and in GCSE classes.

107. Teaching is satisfactory with good features at Key Stages 3 and 4, and is good in the sixth form. 90 per cent of all lessons were satisfactory or better and 50 per cent were good or very good. The two unsatisfactory lessons were in Years 9 and 11. A careful scrutiny of pupils' previous written tasks confirms that teaching is satisfactory overall, and good in the sixth form. It is clear that pupils learn at a satisfactory rate, and develop practical skills reasonably quickly.

108. Strengths in the teaching lie in the introductions to lessons, question and answer sessions and clarity of explanation. In the best lessons, teachers plan so that the whole of the time is used effectively; this means that the pupils move through a series of well designed activities usually involving either a demonstration or a class practical or both. Teachers have good subject knowledge and know how to present science to pupils in a form that enables them to grasp concepts quickly. This is particularly true at A-level where teachers are skilled at supporting pupils with very moderate GCSE results. Similarly, the teaching of pupils with special educational needs in the small groups in Key Stage 3 is good. Scientific concepts and phenomena are explained in a way that enables pupils to increase their knowledge and understanding more quickly than might be anticipated from their rather limited vocabulary. Relationships with pupils are usually good.

109. In the small number of lessons, which have significant weaknesses, the pace of learning drops to being satisfactory, and very occasionally unsatisfactory. In these lessons, there is often insufficiently detailed planning, resulting in a lack of urgency in class, and unsatisfactory use of time. Other weaknesses relate to explanations which are too long. Several teachers do not pay sufficient attention to the correction of the spelling of scientific words nor do they ensure that pupils write in a sufficiently precise and logical manner. Occasionally, pupils in Key Stage 4 are presented with work previously covered in Key Stage 3 but with no real extension or greater challenge.

110. There have been several improvements since the previous inspection. Teaching has improved and there has been a gradual rising trend in Key Stage 3 results, GCSE results and numbers of students studying science subjects at A-level. The underachievement in Key Stage 3 at the time of the previous inspection has been eliminated, and a good feature is now the progress of the small special educational needs groups in Key Stage 3. However, teachers still do not use enough information technology to enable pupils to experience its advantages in calculation, writing and data-handling.

111. The subject is well organised. For example, teachers work in a consistent manner in the marking and assessment of pupils' work, enabling them to know what to do to improve. Modular tests are cross-referenced against National Curriculum levels and GCSE and A-level grades so that the progress made by pupils is always apparent. The departmental managers observe lessons to monitor the quality of teaching and check on pupils' books from all teaching groups. Technical staff provide an efficient service, and contribute well to the quality of work taking place. Subject development planning is good. However, as at the time of the previous inspection there are health and safety issues which need attention. Neither the arrangements for the electrical testing of mains equipment nor the logging of authorised movements of radioactive sources meet requirements.

ART

112. At the end of Key Stage 3, the results of teacher assessments are broadly average. At the end of Key Stage 4, in the 1999 GCSE examinations, one half of pupils gained passes at A*-C. When set against the national average of two-thirds, results are below average. In addition, examination results at GCSE in 2000 show a significant improvement over previous years. In the A-level examinations all students achieved passes over the last three years with a broadly average spread of grades in 1999, although the number of students taking the examination is small.

113. In the work seen in the school, standards are average at Key Stage 3. Pupils can use a variety of materials to produce work in two and three dimensions, and show a good grasp of joining and building techniques when making constructions in card and paper. They study a range of artists and art movements including the Cubists and Pop Artists, as well as a range of art and design work from non-western cultures. They use this knowledge to create a wide range of work, which includes large murals, collages and constructions. Pupils' attitudes at both key stages are good and very good in the sixth form, and they show interest and application to their study of the subject. At Key Stage 4 standards are average. Pupils can draw using chalk, pastel, pencil and graphite with confidence, and some good large scale graphite drawings are seen which are above average, and show a good ability to depict textural qualities. Pupils can use information technology effectively at both key stages to extend and enhance their work, and they use computers freely during the lessons. Sixth-form standards are above average. Students can produce large paintings in oils and in acrylics that show a good control of the medium and are strongly composed. For example, some high quality paintings of plant and animal studies are seen which handle colour and texture in an impressive manner. They research and develop their ideas well, and some very good sketchbooks are seen which combine evidence of gallery visits, drawings, scrap materials and paint in a lively and interesting way.

114. Achievement at Key Stage 3 is good. Pupils make gains in their ability to use a range of materials in both two and three dimensions, and they gain knowledge of a range of artists and use this to initiate and extend their own work. For example, some bold collages are seen which use metallic paper as well as coloured tissue, informed by Hindu artists. In this work there is a good match between the pupils' interests and abilities and the activities they are given to do, and they achieve well as a result. At Key Stage 4 achievement is good. Pupils learn to develop their own ideas using planning sheets which bring together research and experimentation and they work with increasing independence. All pupils achieve

well in drawing and in constructions, and higher ability pupils can draw with a good level of control of pencil and graphite to produce very good results. However the teaching rooms are only just adequate in size for the range and scale of the work, and this helps restrict learning to a good level in some of the lessons. In the sixth form, achievement is good. Students develop and extend their skills in handling materials, especially when making relief panels and working in three dimensions. For example, strong sculptural forms informed by the work of Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore are seen which demonstrate a good understanding of form and surface. Students are also able to undertake a good level of personal research, which results in a good range of outcomes in both two and three dimensions.

115. Teaching and learning are good at both key stages and in sixth form. In the lessons seen, all were good or better. At Key Stage 3, in the best lessons there is very good use of questioning to extend pupils understanding. This was seen in a lesson on hat design where the advantages and disadvantages of using different materials to achieve realistic shading effects were drawn out. This enabled pupils to make their own informed decisions and they were able to learn at a very good rate as a result. In addition, very good explanations of complex ideas are seen, for example in a lesson where the expression of form was discussed. This was very well illustrated by a teacher's very clear drawing, combined with very good questioning. Another feature of the teaching seen is the high level of encouragement used, and this helps pupils of all abilities to achieve well. In Key Stage 4, a strong feature of the teaching is the development of work in partnership with the teacher. This was seen in a lesson on making constructions based on a study of clothing, where the teacher encouraged pupils to think about what they were doing, guiding their responses. This helped pupils to solve problems and think for themselves. However, there were occasions when the pace of lessons slowed. In sixth form, teachers' good subject knowledge resulted in unusual connections being made between different aspects of art. This was seen in a lesson where the works of Peter Blake, Roy Lichtenstein and Georges Braque were discussed which extended pupils research skills and resulted in good learning.

116. Since the last inspection, there has been good improvement. Shortcomings in the provision for multi-cultural education have been addressed and it is now very good. The subject now makes a very good contribution to the cultural development of the school community. The quality of teaching has improved, curricular planning has improved and successful action has been taken to address the poor performance of boys. Standards are rising, as recent examination results at GCSE and the quality of work in the sixth form show.

117. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is very good reviewing of the projects on a yearly basis, with effective action taken to address concerns. The work of the department is monitored and the quality of teaching has improved significantly to a consistently good level as a result. In addition, the subject makes a very good contribution to the cultural development of pupils and the multi-cultural arts festival, the use of many artists in residence, and the gallery visits all contribute to an ethos where creative work is valued.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

118. GCSE results in 1999 were below the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C was below the national average but the proportion achieving a grade G or better was above average. The results in 2000 were below those of 1999 although there has been a trend of improvement over the past three years in both resistant materials and food technology. Results in GCSE resistant materials are higher than other areas of the subject and are close to the national average for the subject as a whole. The GCSE results for graphics products, for which the school entered pupils for the first time in 2000, were low. Girls have achieved better results than boys in each of the past three years. GCSE results in design and technology are amongst the best in the school. Only small numbers of students take the A-level examination in design and technology and achieve results which are below the national average.

119. Although standards are below average by the end of Year 9, pupils make good progress in a range of skills and knowledge across all aspects of the subject. Pupils with special educational needs make particularly good progress because of the good quality of individual help. There is some repetition of similar work between projects in different areas of the subject and hence the most able pupils do not

achieve as much depth of skill and understanding as they could, and make only satisfactory progress. Nevertheless, standards are being raised by developing more learning about decision-making in designing and making. Good examples are a Year 7 project in which pupils adapt recipes to make them more healthy, and a textiles project in which pupils design and make imaginative designs for a personal organiser to reflect the interests of a specific person. Pupils' drawing skills are satisfactory and they take care over the presentation of their work, but sometimes at the expense of time which would be better spent on developing their designs. Standards of making are satisfactory in all areas. Pupils make good use of information technology for drawing as well as for presenting aspects of their work but there are no facilities for computer aided manufacture.

120. Although standards are below average by the end of Key Stage 4, the work represents satisfactory achievement for these pupils. Pupils are given a structure for their designing and clear guidance on how well they are achieving and how to improve. They take care over their work and their design folders are well presented, although, in some cases elaborate design of borders and lettering inhibits pupils' freehand drawing and development of ideas. Pupils use information technology well to analyse and present information and for drawing. Most are able to present a range of ideas in their folders but more development through experimenting and testing is needed to achieve higher standards.

121. Standards are below average in the sixth form but they represent satisfactory progress in relation to pupils' prior attainment. Whilst pupils again take care over their work many find it difficult to take the more rigorous approach to designing demanded at this level. In particular, they tend to approach designing through an end product rather than a need to be met or problem to be solved. However, there are some good examples of problem solving by students from earlier years.

122. Teaching is good. Only one lesson observed was unsatisfactory and over half of the lessons at both key stages were good or very good. Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory. Good use of questioning to reinforce knowledge, and thorough individual teaching in the context of a well-planned sequence of lessons, are strong features. Teachers mostly have good relationships with pupils. All teachers have a good knowledge of their subject. In some lessons teachers do not give sufficient attention to developing pupils' enthusiasm for designing and making. Where the teaching was unsatisfactory the lesson was poorly organised and insufficient attention given to focusing pupils' attention on the key points of the lesson. As a consequence, pupils did not learn as much as they should have done.

123. The positive attitudes of pupils are a significant factor in their progress. They enjoy their work and work hard during lessons. In practical lessons they organise themselves well and are responsible in their use of materials and equipment. They take care with their work and are mostly proud of it.

124. Although teaching is mostly good and pupils make at least satisfactory progress in each area of the subject, the co-ordination of food technology, textiles, resistant materials and graphics areas is unsatisfactory. Better co-ordination would help to raise overall standards by ensuring that teachers build on, rather than duplicate areas of the curriculum, by ensuring consistency through moderating teacher assessment, and by encouraging the sharing of the examples of good teaching and curriculum practice which exist in both areas.

125. The present practice of pupils lifting heavy machine vices to convert benches for metalworking is unsafe and an alternative system needs to be devised. There is an urgent need to carry out electrical safety checks on all equipment.

GEOGRAPHY

126. Standards of work in geography are below average at the end of each key stage and in the sixth form, and are affected by the length of lessons. Whilst teaching is generally satisfactory, pupils frequently fail to sustain concentration for such long periods of time. These impede the efficiency of learning and adversely affect attainment.

127. Attainment on entry to the school is considerably below average. In 1999, teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate that attainment is below the national average. In 2000 these assessments show attainment to be in line with the national average, but inspection evidence suggests that these

results are too high and that standards are below average. The achievement of most pupils is satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 vary from excellent to satisfactory; overall it is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and set clear learning objectives but do not consistently plan lessons to make best use of the time. In a Year 9 lesson the pupils worked very well in small groups brainstorming their ideas on economic development. The teacher then dominated the sharing of their ideas with the class, the lesson slowed considerably and a significant number of pupils were off task. The very best teaching was observed in classes of pupils with similar abilities. A class of pupils with special educational needs used fieldwork around the school to successfully introduce them to the environment. The contribution of support staff was excellent and ensured these pupils made good progress acquiring new knowledge and understanding of how they could measure the quality of their surroundings.

128. Pupils are now posing geographical questions with more confidence in enquiries and fieldwork, which have developed since the previous inspection. Teachers manage pupils well and insist on good behaviour. In the last quarter of the lessons many pupils lose concentration and in response to generally good teaching only make satisfactory progress. Good relationships are evident in the effective manner in which teachers help pupils on an individual basis. A weak feature of the teaching is low expectations, particularly of the higher attaining pupils. For example, pupils are not challenged to explain the formation of the features of rivers in relation to the processes of erosion. As at the time of the previous inspection different resources are not used with pupils of different ability. The use of information technology, for example, in collating the data of a river channel and drawing a cross-section has improved since the previous inspection. However, there is scope for further development of this basic skill. Marking is regular in Key Stage 3, but does not provide enough guidance for improvement.

129. The 1999 GCSE examination results were below the national average. The pupils achieved as well as they had in their other subjects. The results have declined in 2000 in terms of A*-C grades. In the last two years all pupils on the course were entered and all passed the examination. However, results are lower than they should be because many pupils do not complete their coursework.

130. Pupils in Year 10 begin the GCSE course with below average attainment in geography. At the end of Year 11 standards remain below average. The achievement of most pupils is satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is generally satisfactory. The best teaching had high expectations, for example, a very good homework exercise challenged pupils to map and graph a table of statistics on the changing characteristics of agriculture in Europe. Pupils of all abilities were able to describe and beginning to explain the changes that the variety of maps and graphs illustrated. The weakest teaching used good resources poorly and failed to match the work to the pupils' abilities. Consequently the pupils struggled to understand the formation and development of a depression and its associated weather pattern. Higher attaining pupils write at length on case studies of the changing industrial structure of Wakefield and South Wales, and the attention teachers give to the development of both literacy and numeracy is good. Marking uses praise and informs pupils how to improve.

131. The A-level results in 1999 were in line with the national average, and this represents a considerable achievement for those students. The results in 2000 were lower, but represent satisfactory achievement for the students in relation to their GCSE results. The quality of teaching varies from good to satisfactory. A variety of good resources enable the students to increase their knowledge and understanding of the patterns and changes of the intensification of agriculture and its impact on the landscape and communities. They develop their skills of reading and interpreting a variety of maps and graphs and they begin to use statistical techniques to handle and analyse data. Students had difficulty explaining the decline of tin mining in Malaya when interpreting a table of information about lead production in the world.

132. The management of the department is satisfactory. Although the overall quality of teaching has improved slightly since the previous inspection the monitoring of its quality to extend the very best practice has yet to have an impact on standards. Although the subject development plan is now systematic and relates to the school improvement plan it still lacks examination targets and is not sufficiently rigorous to effect significant improvement.

HISTORY

133. Attainment overall is below national averages in both key stages and in the sixth form. In comparison with similar schools attainment is average. Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching has improved, along with the resources available for learning, and pupils' achievement and progress is good.

134. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is below average as shown in teacher assessments. Progress is good, raising achievement from a very low point on entry. Pupils understand basic chronology and can interpret events well. They speak and listen well and, at times, show considerable interest in history when the past is recreated for them, helped by videos and well illustrated text books. One class in Year 8 was interested in the dramatic events of the trial of Charles 1. Another Year 8 class was clearly involved in the detail of how a musket was fired. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as they are taught in small classes by a specialist teacher, and, because, since the previous inspection, additional materials, such as foundation level textbooks, have been developed suited to their needs. Teaching is good and never less than satisfactory. Teachers adopt a clear strategy of raising standards of literacy, by the use of key words and writing frames, with wall displays of important words and phrases. Pupils with special educational needs also have separate vocabulary sheets, which help in their written work and are valuable for their homework. Teachers have well prepared lessons with clear objectives and use their good materials of texts and videos to stimulate an active response. There are, however, some lessons in Key Stage 3, which are too slow in pace, where the content could be covered in a much shorter time and where more able pupils could be challenged more. In these lessons, effective learning is rarely sustained beyond one hour. The behaviour of pupils, particularly those with special educational needs, is almost always good and contributes to their good progress. Attitudes to the subject are good and clear interest is shown. Relationships with teachers are very good; classes are orderly, polite and well managed. Pupils' work is marked carefully and good positive feedback is given on homework. The department tracks pupil progress in detail and keeps close contact with parents.

135. In 1999, GCSE results were below the national average. This has been the case since the last inspection. Results for 2000 have not improved. However, the interest shown by pupils with special educational needs leads to a high proportion of them opting for history, with around one third of those entered for the GCSE being in the lowest ability level. Almost all lower attaining pupils achieve a GCSE grade and are proud of their achievement. Pupils extend their historical knowledge and vocabulary, and good oral work is matched by more extended writing. The topics chosen are particularly suitable and meet the new National Curriculum guidelines. The history of medicine scheme enables pupils to grasp a wide sweep of European and world history, involving them in many moral and spiritual areas, with several cultural influences. One Year 11 class, studying the American West, was able to understand the ethical, racial and moral issues concerning the fate of the native Americans. In all cases teachers stimulate their interest with very well prepared materials, and deal with ethical and moral issues with tact, often relating such issues to contemporary citizenship. Teachers have set targets to improve literacy skills and to prepare pupils more effectively for written examinations.

136. In 1999, A-level results were also below the national average. They showed some improvement in 2000 when all students gained a pass, although none at the higher grades A or B. In work seen in the sixth form, attainment is below the national average, but numbers are gradually increasing, reflecting the school's policy of providing opportunities for moderate to lower ability students. Students are very well supported on a programme which does not exist elsewhere and which could still allow them to enter higher education under the school's compact with John Moore's University. Teachers adopt a good, highly focused style, encouraging students to work on well-structured materials and relevant texts. This is accompanied by intensive individual coaching. Teachers concentrate very well on developing better study skills, to overcome the students' basic weaknesses in literacy and their difficulty in organising complex ideas. Students are well motivated and work hard at developing their planning and essay writing skills. They have also started to use information technology to develop more independent research skills.

137. The organisation of the department is very good. Clear targets are being set to raise standards, but have not yet been successfully achieved. Teaching is monitored by observation and effective curriculum planning takes place. Sampling of pupils' work is undertaken and pupils' progress and attainment are tracked in detail to allow clear targeting to take place. Since the previous inspection, very good progress has been made in improving resources, expanding the range and quantity of textbooks and visual materials and providing a very good range of materials suitable for the requirements of pupils with special educational needs. There has been not enough development in the use of information technology in the

department. The standard of accommodation has been improved, but rooms are not yet suited. Good professional development for staff takes place, regular meetings are held to share good practice about teaching and assessment, and staff cooperate in very good curriculum planning.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

138. GCSE results in information and communications technology for 1999 were slightly higher than the national average and over half of the pupils entered gained a pass at grades A*-C. The results for summer 2000 were even better.

139. Standards by the end of Key Stage 3 are average for pupils of this age. The majority of pupils who enter the school in Year 7 have mixed experiences of the subject but their attainment overall is well below average. By the end of Year 9 attainment has improved to average mainly due to the good teaching they receive. In Key Stage 3, the majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, develop a sound base of essential knowledge and skills. In one Year 9 class, pupils created a newspaper article on alcoholic abuse. They retrieved and analysed information, created attractive designs and used to the full the software packages they were using. Most pupils, however, have a very limited experience of the use of information technology in solving problems by building models, constructing procedures and then measuring or controlling the results. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is mixed, with a marked difference between examination and non-examination groups. For pupils who take a GCSE course attainment is at least average, but for non-examination pupils' attainment is below average. Standards in examination classes are good. In one GCSE class, pupils were designing an upgraded system for a leisure centre that involved identifying the advantages and limitations of different data-handling applications. They were able to choose the major software packages to use based on suitability for the purpose they had in mind.

140. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject and set high standards. They make the aims of the lesson clear so that pupils know what they are expected to learn. In Key Stage 3 pupils' work is assessed and graded at the end of each half-term, a process that involves pupils in their own self-assessment and evaluation. This contributes to the sound progress that pupils make at this stage. Teachers provide appropriate learning activities for pupils of all levels of attainment and pupils with special educational needs are enabled to make progress that matches that of other pupils in the class. When teaching is very good, pupils share the teacher's enthusiasm, become fully involved in the activities provided, enjoy the lesson and learn quickly. Pupils usually work in pairs at one computer. They collaborate well and learn from each other. A support technician has been appointed since the last inspection which has improved efficiency.

141. Pupils enjoy their work and behaviour in lessons is good. They listen attentively to instructions and co-operate with each other when sharing resources. Pupils show initiative and start work without waiting to be told. Pupils are well managed and relationships are good. They concentrate on their tasks for most of the lesson and are keen to learn. It is only towards the end of some of the 75-minute lessons that energy and concentration wanes, a reflection on the overlong lesson time rather than a lack of pupil concentration. Many pupils take advantage of the Study Support Centre which houses a suite of internet-connected computers and is always manned by a teacher, often assisted by a learning support teacher. This excellent facility allows pupils to work independently and complete their information technology homework before school, during the lunch-hour or after school. Because of this facility homework is a regular feature of information technology lessons and teachers make good use of the opportunity, setting relevant homework for all pupils that often requires research and the downloading of information via the internet. This saves valuable teaching time and is significant contributor to the very good progress pupils make during their first three years in the school.

142. The department is very well led and managed. There is a clear strategy for the development of the subject, the first part of which has been achieved with the replacement of outdated machines with newer pentium processors and the development of suited accommodation. Such has been the progress since the previous inspection that the ratio of computers to pupils is now at the national average.

143. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection. At that time pupils' progress was below average and now it is above average. There was little cross-curricular work - now there are working parties producing ideas as to how subjects can use information technology in their

teaching. There were no timetabled lessons - now there are. Assessment procedures have improved and are now excellent in Key Stage 3. There is now an appropriate staffing structure and a high number of well-qualified staff. Some issues still remain. There is still insufficient control and modelling work for all pupils and the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 does not cover the statutory requirements for all pupils.

Key Skills: the use of information and communications technology to support learning across the curriculum:

144. Information and communications technology skills are mainly limited to using word-processing and desktop publishing packages. This is generally well done and across a range of subjects and curriculum areas. Pupils can use different fonts and colours in their text. They import images or clip art into text and lay out their text well. They can use data-bases and graphics packages. Other than in music where information technology is proving a valuable tool in both Performance and Composition, there is no evidence that any other information and communications technology skills are significantly encouraged or integrated into the curriculum in order to enhance learning.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

145. Overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is average in relation to national standards. This matches exactly the school's own teacher assessments carried out a few months ago. Half the pupils study French, the other half German; with attainment in German remaining consistently better than in French. Listening and speaking are relative strengths, although writing is also not neglected. By encouraging pupils to understand simple grammatical terms, to read aloud and to focus on key words, the department makes a worthwhile contribution to pupils' progress in literacy. Achievement is good. By the end of the key stage, for example, both higher and lower attaining German groups can say and write about where they have been and what they have done. In French classes pupils have also worked with verbs in the past tense, though here they are less secure. Pupils do not yet have access to information technology in their learning of foreign languages, and no pupil takes a second foreign language. In each year, a group of pupils has special educational needs. In Years 8 and 9 they take French, but in Year 7 they take German. These pupils are making satisfactory gains in knowledge of vocabulary which represent good achievement for them.

146. Standards of attainment in Key Stage 4 are also average overall. All Year 11 pupils including those with special educational needs are now working towards a grade at GCSE. Results in German in 1999 were close to the national average and they improved still further in 2000. French results were well below average in 1999, but they too improved considerably in 2000, and a review of pupils' progress over time shows that 1999 was an exceptionally disappointing year. Pupils with special educational needs in Year 10 now take a Certificate of Achievement course which provides well for their learning needs, and good learning was seen in one of their lessons. Learning overall at Key Stage 4 is supported by a very good match with assessment objectives and by the provision of appropriate course books which pupils can use at home. Pupils are well trained in learning routines such as the recording of vocabulary specific to the topics set for GCSE. However the learning of some Year 10 pupils was unsatisfactory because they failed to sustain concentration for the full extent of the 70 or 75-minute lessons

147. Standards in the sixth form continue to reflect the fact that throughout the school German is stronger than French. Some satisfactory learning was seen, but overall there is as yet no firm foundation for A-level. The record of A-level results from previous years is poor. There are no candidates for A-level in Year 13 nor were there in the previous school year. The curriculum of Year 12 could benefit from the offering of a new language, which could be geared to local needs.

148. Teaching seen during the inspection was good overall. Teachers speak their languages well and use them effectively in the conduct of lessons. Two foreign language *assistantes* as well as a permanent member of staff who is a native speaker of German make a good contribution to the foreign language atmosphere. Teachers manage their pupils well even when confronted with unsatisfactory behaviour, and they maintain good relationships. Assessment leading to target setting is good, and pupils understand what they have to do to improve. Encouragement is given by the award of various forms of commendation. Homework is well used because the pupils have to take responsibility for their own textbooks, which they then learn to use as a source of information. Teachers are eager to see their pupils succeed, but this can mean doing too much for them, which may be counter-productive. Also,

lessons are too long, which is especially problematical for teachers of languages.

149. Management of the department is good, and in a short time the head of department has succeeded in building a good team spirit. By means of a clear and functional handbook and supportive schemes of work she has effectively co-ordinated the work of the department. Routine monitoring ensures consistency of best practice, thus contributing directly to pupils' progress. The department reviews its own work systematically, and has succeeded in eliminating an earlier perceived weakness of lack of pace and variety in lessons. Future plans are thought through and costed.

150. The quality of teaching and learning stemming from good organisation and management of the department have been sustained since the previous inspection of 1995. Standards have clearly improved in German, whilst results in French have recovered in 2000 after a period of decline.

MUSIC

151. Numbers taking GCSE have varied considerably over the past three years, but results have been very high. In 2000, all 13 candidates gained A*-C grades. In the previous two years, when there were 22 (1999) and seven (1998) candidates, results at the higher grades were above the national average. Three candidates have taken AS-level in the past two years. None achieved a pass grade.

152. Assessment by the school indicates that more than half of the pupils are attaining at or above the expected level for age 14. However, the attainment of pupils in the current Year 9 is below average, because planning is unsatisfactory and schemes of work do not build progressively on the elements of music prescribed in the National Curriculum. Pupils have satisfactory knowledge of form and style in a Beatles song. They were able to write a review using appropriate technical language, although the spelling and grammar of lower attaining pupils were careless. In another Year 9 lesson, pupils were expected to compose a melody above a specified chord progression, perform melody and chords together and write them down in traditional notation. Most pupils' knowledge was inadequate for the task. Pupils were not made aware of the qualities of a good melody and the task was too difficult for almost all pupils. However, most pupils showed a good facility in using programmable keyboards and progress in the lesson was satisfactory overall, even though it did not achieve its intended outcome. There are good opportunities for keen pupils to supplement what is done in lessons at keyboard clubs, which are organised out of lesson time. Several pupils showed well developed skills on the computer, using a program which enabled them to select options to create a pop music ensemble. Standards at Key Stage 4 are above average, and represent very good achievement for the pupils concerned. Recordings of candidates' compositions from the 2000 GCSE examination indicated that pupils have well-developed skills in using the computer for composing. Their pieces had logical harmony. Carefully chosen and appropriate sounds were combined together to produce very good ensembles. Word-setting in songs incorporated appropriate stress and rhythm, there was confident use of major and minor keys, and styles were varied but consistent within each piece. Standards of performance were good. The scores, generated by computer were carefully edited.

153. Teachers communicate their enthusiasm well to pupils. They are accomplished practical musicians and there is a high level of teaching expertise in the use of computers. Teaching is satisfactory overall in Key Stage 3. While progress in individual lessons observed was satisfactory overall, progress across the key stage is unsatisfactory, partly because best use is not made of lesson time, which is in most cases 75 minutes. Because of the practical nature of all activities, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make similar progress. In Year 7, during the inspection, pupils spent almost the whole lesson singing, but there was too little attempt to improve its quality and the pupils' learning was barely adequate in the later stages. In Year 8, they listened to a carefully chosen selection of recorded pieces from around the world. This was a very good opportunity for them to appreciate varied styles, instrumentation and cultural characteristics. However, the topic was treated superficially and opportunities for pupils to develop their powers of description were limited. Information, which they willingly provided, was written haphazardly on the board with the result that their learning was not methodical or precise. In Key Stage 4, teaching is very good. The culmination of a series of lessons was observed in which Year 10 pupils had written and composed Christmas songs using computers. The compositions were very assured for this stage in the course. Pupils had made very good progress in the time and demonstrated a high level of skill and technical knowledge. Good teaching of the skill of

editing printed music by computer enabled the one sixth-form student to make good progress. Pupils at all levels are very responsible in their use of equipment, and they are, with few exceptions, very attentive during lessons.

154. A major part of the department's output is the extra-curricular ensembles, which attract good support from pupils. These activities, choral and instrumental, provide very good opportunities for pupils' social and cultural development. The department links with primary schools involve joint events. These are much valued by the feeder schools and are part of the significant contribution made by the school's musicians within the community. There is flourishing instrumental tuition which is well organised. The department is well managed on a day-to-day basis. The teachers give their time generously out of lessons so that pupils can further their musical interests and skills. This dedication has enabled many pupils who do not have the benefit of private music lessons to achieve very successful results at GCSE level. A significant area for development at present, however, is the planning of provision in Key Stage 3. Pupils need opportunities to develop specific skills and understanding more regularly and more gradually than is allowed for in the present system of blocked topics. Individual lessons need more variety to add interest and ensure that the whole time is used productively. Assessment needs to be linked to clearer lesson objectives in Key Stage 3 to ensure that pupils over the whole range of ability achieve appropriately, as is clearly done so successfully in Key Stage 4. Provision for music is similar to that found in the previous inspection. The curriculum has been improved, as suggested, by the inclusion of some good opportunities to study more examples of world music.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

155. Standards overall are broadly average in physical education in both Key Stage 3 and 4. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 and those taking GCSE make good progress and achieve well from a below average starting point. The excellent provision of extra-curricular activities enables pupils to excel in a range of sport and dance activities, and well over half of the pupils benefit from participation in a very wide range of activities. Teaching that is good overall, and with greater strengths in Years 7 to 9 and in GCSE, contributes to pupils' achievement and in particular to their very good attitudes and personal development.

156. Results in the most recent GCSE examination, although not as high as the previous year, reflect good achievement for these pupils. A good proportion of pupils achieved very high grades (A* and A). In 1998 and 1999, GCSE results were well above average and pupils achieved very well in comparison to those in their other subjects. Over the past four years results at GCSE have increased at a greater rate than found nationally.

157. In the work seen during the inspection standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are broadly average with no significant difference between girls and boys. A small proportion of pupils are performing at above average levels. These standards are confirmed by teachers' assessments. By age fourteen, boys have a good understanding of invasion games as demonstrated in basketball, although their skills are less consistent. Girls have good overall body management as demonstrated in their control of basic bounces in trampolining. In dance girls can plan and perform group dances taking on the style of Salsa dance and using their knowledge of dance to develop and improve their performance. Although pupils know how to warm up they seldom take responsibility for this or for cooling down. Their ability to evaluate and improve performance is limited mainly to responding to teachers' questions after watching demonstrations. Their use of the language of the subject is adequate for this purpose. Although teaching is good overall in Key Stage 3 standards are no higher than average. This partly due to the large number of activities taught for just six lessons every year. Pupils need more time to consolidate and develop continuity in fewer activities if they are to improve standards overall.

158. In the work seen in Key Stage 4 the strength lies in GCSE. Football and netball are strong practical areas. In netball girls have secure footwork skills and use a variety of passes appropriately. They have a good understanding of attack and defence tactics but do not adopt specifically planned strategies. Most pupils make good progress in learning the theory in GCSE in response to well structured lessons and regular homework tasks. However a lack of textbooks or tasks designed to extend and challenge mean that higher attaining pupils are not sufficiently challenged. In National Curriculum lessons pupils achieve satisfactory standards. In football boys consolidate skills, plan and practice set pieces. In their team play they show a good knowledge and use of tactics. However they have few coaching or officiating skills

because there are few opportunities to learn these. High attaining pupils achieve well because of their involvement in extra-curricular activities but in lessons there are few occasions when they are fully challenged. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall because the teachers know them well and give them additional support in the form of equipment or guidance where it is appropriate.

159. Teaching and learning overall are good. In Key Stage 3 and in elements of GCSE, teaching is good and pupils learn at a good rate. In Years 10 and 11 National Curriculum lessons teaching and learning are satisfactory. The greatest strength of the teaching lies in the very good relationships teachers have with the pupils. Teachers value all the pupils and a strong mutual respect is clearly evident. From this basis teachers establish very good discipline that allows pupils to learn, make progress and enjoy lessons. This element of the teaching is responsible for the very good attitudes and behaviour throughout the school. Participation rates in lessons and extra-curricular activities across the school are high. Teachers have a good knowledge of the activities that they teach and consequently students learn correct techniques and improve their knowledge and understanding. In the most successful lessons they are encouraged to work out strategies, for example in Year 10 netball, and discuss their success. Once lessons get underway pupils work at a good rate and maintain good levels of physical activity. A Year 7 lesson on health related fitness when boys completed a challenging circuit of activities was a good example of this. In most lessons teachers question pupils frequently to check on what they have learnt and to develop their understanding, for example of basketball techniques. Teachers have produced well structured booklets to support learning in GCSE theory. However these are aimed primarily at average and lower attaining pupils. The tasks and content do not challenge the moderate number of more able pupils who would benefit from access to textbooks. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen but there are areas for improvement. The range of teaching approaches is narrow overall. Most of the teaching is direct and teacher led. Consequently pupils do not take responsibility for their learning often enough. There are a number of lessons where activities are not planned to match different stages in learning, and as a result in some lessons, higher attaining pupils are not fully challenged and make less progress than they could do. Targets for the lesson are not always made clear in planning, nor shared with pupils either at the start or finish of lessons and as a result there is insufficient sense of achievement. Teachers could make better use of display to enhance the poor quality of some of the teaching spaces and to support learning of the language of the subject. A serious concern is the inattention to pupils' health and safety evident in some lessons.

160. The department is soundly led and managed. The strength of the leadership is in the example the head of department sets in maintaining an excellent extra-curricular programme and in having secured the Sports Mark Award for the school in 1999. The dedication and commitment from the staff in the school to a varied programme that includes dance and gymnastics in addition to many sports, is outstanding. However, there are a number of weaknesses in management. Formal risk assessment of all activities and working areas has not been carried out and there are a considerable number of serious health and safety concerns that require immediate attention. The head of department has no formal role in monitoring, developing and supporting teaching and learning. Whilst there are strengths in the teaching there is a need to share the best practice and so raise the quality of teaching to that of the best. The accommodation, although extensive, is poor in quality and not conducive to the high standards to which the department aspires. Many working areas, store cupboards and changing areas are unacceptably dirty, dingy and poorly maintained. The teachers do very well to inspire and motivate pupils in such dismal surroundings.

161. Since the last inspection the department has made satisfactory improvement. GCSE results have improved and standards in lessons have been maintained and there is no longer any significant underachievement. The quality of teaching has improved in Key Stage 3 and in GCSE. There remain concerns in the management of health and safety.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

162. In 2000, the school entered pupils for GCSE in religious education for the first time in recent years. 44 (33 percent) of the 133 candidates passed at A-C level. National averages are not yet available for comparison, but individual pupils' results compared favourably with those in other subjects. Pupils prepared the full GCSE course in the very low time allocation of a weekly, 75-minute lesson. Standards

at the end of Key Stage 3 are very good. Pupils' results, as assessed by teachers, are amongst the highest achieved by schools which follow the South Wirral locally agreed syllabus. Inspection findings support the teachers' assessments. The level of girls' attainment is higher than that of boys' throughout the school.

163. Pupils' achievement work seen is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4. It was clear, from lessons and written work seen, that pupils gain substantial knowledge about Christianity and the other principal world religions. They learn about the value of religion and how it can affect people's lives. In Year 7, they consider their own place in the family and the community. This leads to thinking about the functions and activities of religious communities. Pupils gain a good understanding of difficult social and moral concepts, such as 'responsibility' and 'justice'. In Year 8, they learn about what is important in Jewish family life, and gain a good understanding of symbolism, for example, in the Jewish observance of the Sabbath. By Year 9, are developing a thorough knowledge of technical language associated with religions. They can define, for instance, 'theist' and 'agnostic'. They carefully present the findings from their families of a questionnaire on religious belief. They consider different explanations of creation, and moral issues, such as the roots of evil and why God allows suffering. Religious education makes a very good contribution to pupils' development of writing and speaking skills. Key words for each topic are stressed and pupils develop their speaking significantly in class discussions. In Key Stage 4, pupils develop their knowledge and understanding very well in a very challenging course. They consider traditional ideas on reasons for belief in the existence of God and compare these with their own ideas. They can distinguish between fundamentalist and liberal views in the interpretation of religious beliefs. Pupils develop their own views on important matters, such as euthanasia and human relationships, through candid and thoughtful personal writing, which is often of a very high standard.

164. Teaching is good in Key Stage 3. It is very good overall in Key Stage 4, and sometimes excellent. Teachers have very thorough knowledge of the topics they teach. They plan lessons very well, with clearly stated objectives and using carefully organised and appropriate resources. There is effective use of questioning to recall a topic and establish a very good pace of working. This helps pupils to make very good progress. Teaching is appropriately targeted so that pupils of all levels of ability are constantly challenged, and they often make progress beyond their own expectations. Some of the best teaching was of the lowest attaining groups, where pupils with special educational needs were encouraged and challenged so that they made very good progress in developing their understanding of difficult, religious ideas. Time is usually very well organised so that the best possible use is made of the long, 75-minute, lessons. There is much consolidation of pupils' learning. In particular, procedures for assessment are carefully woven into the teaching so that they improve pupils' understanding as well as test it. The skills of note-taking and the orderly and neat presentation of work are carefully taught, which assists pupils' learning. Pupils effectively learn how to structure answers to examination questions. The small amount of teaching observed in the sixth form was excellent. The teacher's sensitively paced guidance helped the small group of Year 12 students, who were very reliant on her, to make very good progress, extending their thinking significantly on the question of 'What are rights?'

165. The management and organisation of religious education are excellent. Provision fully reflects statutory requirements in Key Stages 3 and 4. However, the absence of religious education from the general sixth-form curriculum is a breach of the school's statutory duty. There is an effective balance between factual knowledge and the evaluation of religious and moral ideas. Schemes of work are very carefully planned, which largely compensates for the limited time allocated in Key Stage 4. An extensive range of religious artefacts enhances the impact particularly of topics on different world religions. There are firm plans to extend the use of computers for research and presentation, which is at present limited. The subject handbook is a very thorough working document, containing valuable guidance for teachers. The head of department monitors colleagues' work very effectively and provides appropriate support for non-specialist colleagues. This is a significant factor in the high overall standards of teaching. Religious education provides excellent opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of spiritual and moral issues, and to appreciate the multicultural nature of contemporary society. There have been very good developments in the provision for religious education since the previous inspection.

VOCATIONAL STUDIES

166. The development of vocational subjects has been very successful over the past four years and provides the school with a valuable alternative curriculum. Results in GNVQ examinations are above the national average and current students are making good progress. Results in the GNVQ in information technology in Key Stage 4 are average. In business studies at GCSE and at A-level, they are just below the national average.

167. Students taking the Intermediate GNVQs in health and social care and in business studies are attaining at just above the national average and progress is good in both groups. Learning is active and students are already working independently. They are very enthusiastic in their work and have good attitudes to the subject. The health and social care group were involved in a very lively discussion based on a case study about moral choices. This group consisted entirely of girls, all with a clear vocational intention of working with children, in caring or nursing. They are following the new GNVQ schemes, which they are finding clearer in content and description. The more focussed assignments and simpler assessment methods are easier to understand for staff and students. Teachers believe that this is an important factor that will avoid the very high drop out rates of former years. Teachers in GNVQ subjects are suitably trained and are qualified as assessors and verifiers. There is a need, however, in health and social care, for more expertise in specific areas. Teachers use good interactive methods and encourage students to work independently. Information technology is very well integrated and students have easy access to a good range of computers. Standards are enhanced by the school's policy of entering students for accreditation in key skills, even though this is not a mandatory requirement for the new GNVQ schemes.

168. Students in the Advanced GNVQ are attaining at levels above the national average. Progress is good as a result of the small numbers, which enable teachers to give intensive coaching. Students' work is carefully assessed, the school being commended for its standards by the awarding body. Students are very well motivated and mature in their approach to learning. Most of their work is the result of research outside school with local companies, using questionnaires, interviews and the internet. Standards of literacy, numeracy and information technology are being gained at the Level 3 in key skills.

169. The school offers business studies at GCSE to a large number of pupils, with attainment just below the national average. Pupils acquire good business knowledge and make good progress in absorbing unfamiliar language and concepts, helped by good information technology integration in their work. One Year 11 class was able to use spreadsheets in analysing business data successfully. Many pupils have acquired an interest in the subject and intend to follow this up in their post sixteen choices. Teaching is good, with well-qualified and experienced staff, who are able to refer to their own business experience to enhance pupils' understanding. Teachers use very good resources and make extensive use of the overhead projector to help pupils to understand difficult concepts.

170. At A-level and at the new AS-level, standards are just below average. Students acquire good understanding of business techniques and language and use information technology very well into their work. Teaching is good and a range of suitable materials is used. Many A-level students proceed into higher education, assisted by the school's compact with John Moore's University. The new AS-level qualification is already benefiting students of moderate ability, in line with the school's policy.

171. Business studies and GNVQ play an important part in broadening the scope of the sixth form. They are very well managed and have been very well resourced, with very good suited accommodation, which is well equipped with computers and appropriate textbooks. Teachers are very well trained and undertake many days of updating and continual professional development every year. A start has been made in developing more links with business, particularly for GNVQ students. However, for pupils in GCSE, there is considerable scope to develop more links with local companies to enhance the pupils' business experience.