

# INSPECTION REPORT

**Aston Comprehensive School**  
Sheffield

LEA area: Rotherham

Unique Reference Number: 106957

Headteacher: Mr D Light

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Reporting inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe  
1025

Dates of inspection: 8<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> February 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 704519

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	County
Age range of pupils:	11 to 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Austen
Date of previous inspection:	26 <sup>th</sup> – 30 <sup>th</sup> September 1994

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Mrs J W Biltcliffe, Lay Inspector		Teaching
Prof J L Taylor		Attendance
Mr H Heller	Equal opportunities	Accommodation
	Special educational needs	Attitudes, behaviour and personal development
		Support, guidance and pupils' welfare
		Leadership and management
Mr A F Barringer	English	
	Drama	
Mr A M Haigh	Mathematics	The efficiency of the school
Mr C P Hewson	Science	Staffing
Mrs W Burke	Art	
Mrs S M Mansell	Design and technology	
	Information technology	
Mr B M Greasley	Geography	Curriculum
Ms C Evers	History	Learning resources
Mr A E Nutton	Modern foreign languages	
Mr J D Ward	Music	Assessment
		Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
Mr R D Gaunt	Physical education	
Miss M A Warner	Religious education	Partnership with parents and the community
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	Economics	
	Vocational education	

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London WC2B 6SE

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## MAIN FINDINGS

### What the school does well

The core subjects of English, mathematics and science are strong.

- Geography and religious education (RE) are strong, too, at all stages.
- Pupils with special educational needs are well taught.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good, overall.
- Management and leadership are effective at all levels.
- Teaching is a major strength throughout the school.
- The school has a noticeable ethos of hard work and caring for others.
- The very wide range of extra-curricular activities.

### § Where the school has weaknesses

Inadequate system to measure pupils' and the school's overall performance.

- I. Boys' overall attainment is not high enough.
- II. The time for English and mathematics is too low at Key Stage 3.
- III. Insufficient use of information technology (IT) at Key Stage 4 - as in 1994.
- IV. Poor provision for collective worship throughout the school - as in 1994.

**Aston Comprehensive is a good school with significant strengths. It has considerably more strengths than weaknesses. The governors' action plan will, however, set out how the weaknesses identified during the inspection are to be tackled. The plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.**

### § How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has made sound progress since its last inspection. It has effectively tackled almost all the major weaknesses identified in 1994.

Pupils' overall standard of attainment in National Curriculum tests and in GCSE examinations has risen a little. Achievement in A-level work increased substantially to a point close to the national average level over the 1993-1997 period, but dipped in 1998. The school's teaching is good throughout and is now a major strength. The school has a potent ethos of hard work, pleasant companionship and orderly behaviour. In contrast, the school has still not done enough to ensure that pupils use IT sufficiently in Years 10-11. It is also far from providing the required daily collective worship for all pupils.

Overall, however, the school has management of high quality at all levels and has shown that it has a good capacity to improve its practice. It has the required quality of leadership and management to continue to make good progress in the future.

## § Standards in subjects

The following table shows standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds in national tests, GCSE and A/AS-level examinations in 1998:

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools	§ ey	K
			<i>well above average</i>	<i>A</i>
			<i>above average</i>	<i>B</i>
Key Stage 3 Test English	C	C	<i>average</i>	<i>C</i>
GCSE Examinations	C	D	<i>below average</i>	<i>D</i>
A/AS – levels	D	n/a	<i>well below average</i>	<i>E</i>

In 1998, the results of the tests in Year 9 of Key Stage 3 were, overall, about average and about the same as those achieved in schools whose pupils have a similar background. Performance was similar in all of English, mathematics and science. Results were at their highest in 1997.

Results in GCSE have been consistently around the average mark for the last few years and particularly so for the proportion of pupils achieving at least five grades A\*-C. The results in 1998 were a little below those in schools of a similar character, but were on a par with them in 1997. The strongest subjects in GCSE are mathematics, science, geography and religious education; art, design and technology, and modern foreign languages are consistently the weakest subjects. The major reason in school for pupils' rate of progress is the good quality of teaching they receive.

Attainment at A-level was a little below average in 1998, but average in 1997. Standards in vocational courses generally meet course requirements.

## § Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	good	mathematics, geography, history, IT, music, RE	
Years 10-11	good	mathematics, geography, modern foreign languages, RE	IT (across the curriculum)
Sixth form	good	English, science, art, design & technology, physical education, RE	
English	good	/	/
Mathematics	good	/	/

Teaching was at least satisfactory in 98 per cent of lessons and was very good (occasionally outstanding) in 23 per cent of these. A low two per cent is unsatisfactory. The best teaching is at Key Stage 3. Overall, teaching is good in virtually all subjects and year groups. It is a real strength of the school.

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

## § Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	High standards, with rare exceptions, in and around the school. Very orderly community. A major plus.
Attendance	Satisfactory in main school; good in sixth form.
Ethos*	A noticeable climate of hard work, solid concentration and of warm and easy relationships. A caring school.
Leadership and management	Clear, firm and purposeful at all levels. The school puts its aims and values into practice.
Curriculum	Broad and generally balanced throughout the school. Too little time for English and mathematics at Key Stage 3. Many extra-curricular activities.
Pupils with special educational needs	Provision is good. Pupils make sound progress. Strong team of teachers.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Good on all four aspects. In the main, school plans and promotes these well. Daily collective worship a long-standing gap in a good picture.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Sufficient, well qualified staff. Accommodation variable - both good and drab. Resources satisfactory.
Value for money	Efficient. Financial control tight. Funding is well below average. Noticeably good value for money.

*\*Ethos is the climate for learning: attitudes to work, relationships and the commitment to high standards.*

### The parents' views of the school

#### What most parents like about the school

- V. Pupils' high standards of attainment and progress.
- VI. Its effective and caring ethos.
- VII. The approachability of staff.
- VIII. Its wide range of extra-curricular activities.

#### What some parents are not happy about

- IX. Too much - or too little – homework.
- X. Insufficient information about what is taught.

Inspectors' judgements support the positive views parents express. The school generally enables pupils to achieve suitable standards of work and to make good progress. It is a friendly and caring place. Despite the large size of the school, staff are generally accessible and highly committed to maintaining close links with parents and the wider community. Pupils have many extra-curricular activities to enjoy.

In contrast, the school provides insufficient advance information about what pupils study in each subject. The amount and suitability of homework is generally appropriate, although the flexibility of the timetable for it does sometimes lead to occasional peaks and troughs.

Overall, parents are (rightly) well satisfied with the school and the major part it plays in the all-round development of their children

## § KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

To improve and build upon the good quality of education that pupils already receive, the governors and senior management of the school should:

- a) raise still further the attainment and progress of pupils by:
  - )establishing a comprehensive database about pupils' attainments, in order to assess accurately both pupils' progress and the school's performance, and to set appropriate targets for both (## 21 63 66 77 92 241);
  - )lifting the overall attainment of boys (especially in literacy) throughout the school, based on further research, a written plan of whole-school action and careful evaluation of success (## 8 10 13 17 21 120 121 174 177 180 181 193 202 211 216 249);
  - )assessing pupils' performance in Years 7-9 by consistent, objective criteria across all subjects (## 63 65 77 130);
- a) increase the amount of teaching time to at least the nationally recommended minimum of 25 hours at Key Stage 4 and improve the use of time in the daily twenty-minute tutorial period (## 54 55 77 116 130);
- b) examine carefully the extent to which the below average time spent on English and mathematics at Key Stage 3 lowers pupils' attainments and progress in these subjects (## 30 130 138 144);
- c) ensure that statutory requirements are met by providing:
  - ) sufficient experience of all aspects of information technology at Key Stage 4 (## 48 54 97 175 204-5 209-210);
  - ) thorough attention to all matters of health and safety (## 80 106 172 179 243);
  - ) a daily act of collective worship for all pupils (## 69 97); and
- a) improve the quality of recording pupils' attendance, particularly in the afternoon and ensure that registers are stored securely (#38).

In addition to the key issues above, other less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the school's future plan of action. These are indicated in paragraphs

44 46 47 147 158 170 177 216 219 237 (teaching);  
50 58 81 171 241 242 (curriculum);  
82 83 86 (partnership with parents and the community);  
96 104 118 178 201 (management);  
100 179 (staffing);  
73 103-105 107 111 118 131 137 172 179 210 232 243 260 (accommodation);  
114-115 117-118 (efficiency and funding); and  
109-111 166 190 210 232 253 (resources).

e) **INTRODUCTION**

e) **Characteristics of the school**

1. The school is situated about four miles south of Rotherham. It serves an area that is predominantly urbanised in character. It is fully comprehensive and has 1886 pupils on roll, including a large sixth form of 295. The number of pupils has increased steadily over the last few years.
2. The school draws its pupils from about 15 primary schools, of which four provide half the pupils. About a third of the pupils (including the largest proportion from one primary school) come from outside the area of the school's own local education authority (LEA). The headteacher has been in post since 1995.
3. The socio-economic background of pupils is mixed, but average, overall. The attainments of pupils before they come to the school are, overall, broadly in line with those achieved by pupils nationally. The school has 30 pupils, a broadly average proportion, with statements of special education need. There are 14 pupils (a very low proportion) in the school from ethnic minority backgrounds. About 11 per cent of pupils, a proportion that is broadly average by national standards, are known to be eligible for free school meals. About two-thirds of pupils at the end of Year 11 continue with full-time education at 16, either in the school or elsewhere.
4. In its prospectus the school incorporates its aims within a statement of values. The school aims to respect the individuality of all pupils and to promote excellence in all aspects of their education. It places strong emphasis on personal responsibility and development and wishes to work in close partnership with its local community.
5. The school's development plan (SDP) for the 1998-1999 academic year forms part of a larger 1998-2001 plan. Its major priorities for action largely fall into the following broad categories:
  - raising pupils' overall level of attainment, especially that of boys;
  - improving curricular provision and continuity, particularly from Year 6 to Year 11;
  - improving the school's use of data on pupils' performance;
  - enhancing the quality of pastoral care for all pupils;
  - increasing the amount and quality of training for staff; and
  - improving the quality of the school's buildings.

Individual subjects also have development plans which are constructed to a consistent format and broadly on the same themes as those of the SDP.

6. **Key indicators**

**Attainment at Key Stage 3<sup>1</sup>**

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1998	152	163	315

6. National Curriculum Test		English	Mathematics	Science
<b>Results</b>				
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	87	91	89
	Girls	124	111	97
	Total	211	202	186
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	67(69)	64(62)	59(71)
	National	65(56)	59(59)	56(60)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	31(38)	30(34)	23(33)
	National	35(22)	37(36)	26(29)

6. Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	84	93	93
	Girls	127	118	107
	Total	221	211	200
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	70(70)	67(65)	63(70)
	National	62(60)	64(64)	62(61)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	35(39)	37(38)	26(34)
	National	31(28)	37(37)	31(29)

.....

<sup>1</sup> Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

## Attainment at Key Stage 4<sup>2</sup>

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1998	164	152	316

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	56	141	158
	Girls	83	143	148
	Total	139	284	306
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	44(48)	90(91)	97(96)
	National	44(43)	90(89)	95(94)

Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and percentage of <i>such pupils</i> who achieved all those they studied:	Number	% Success rate	
	School	0	N/A
	National		N/A

## Attainment in the Sixth Form<sup>3</sup>

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examination in the latest reporting year:	Year	Male	Female	Total
	1998	34	41	75

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	15.7	15.9	15.8 (16.9)	2.1	2.0	2.1 (4.3)
National	N/A	N/A	17.5 (17.1)	N/A	N/A	2.8 (2.7)

Number in final year of approved vocational qualifications and percentage of <i>such students</i> who achieved these qualifications:	Number	% Success rate	
	School	Adv 23 Int22	Adv – 87 Int – 91
	National		N/A

.....

2 Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

3 Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

## Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year:	Authorised	School	%
	Absence	National comparative data	7.5
	Unauthorised	School	7.9
	Absence	National comparative data	1.0
6.			1.1
6.			
6.	<b>Exclusions</b>		

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year:		Number
	Fixed period	159
	Permanent	2

## 6. Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:		%
	Very good or better	23
	Satisfactory or better	98
	Less than satisfactory	2

## 6. PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

### 6. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

#### Attainment and progress

1. Pupils' overall level of attainment is broadly similar to what is expected nationally of pupils by the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4. In the sixth form, overall attainment is also close to average, both in lessons and in external examinations, even though the school accepts into the sixth form some pupils with very modest achievements in GCSE. Standards of attainment in the main school have risen by a small amount since the last inspection. In the sixth form they have increased noticeably over the same period to a point very close to the national average level.
2. When pupils come to the school in Year 7, their overall attainment is about average. Pupils' level of attainment in the National Curriculum tests taken in Year 6 in their primary schools in 1997 and 1998 was in line with national averages. In 1998 in these tests the overall performance of boys and girls was similar: boys were a little ahead in mathematics and science, but well behind girls in English. Other tests set by the school also suggest an average level of attainment and ability amongst pupils - except for a performance well below average on the Verbal test in both 1997 and 1998.
3. In the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998, the proportion of pupils who achieved the national standard of at least Level 5 was slightly above average in all the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In contrast, the proportion reaching at least Level 6 was a little below average in all three subjects. There has been a strongly rising trend over the last four years in English, a slight rise in mathematics, but a slight decline in science. The highest (above average) results of the 1995-1998 period were achieved in 1997 by the pupils currently in Year 11.
4. In 1997 and 1998, girls were far ahead of boys, overall, at Level 5 in English, appreciably in front in mathematics and a little ahead (only just in 1998) in science. Boys' attainment was at the average level for boys, nationally, but girls did better than the national average for girls. In both years, teachers' own assessments of pupils were very similar to the test results pupils' achieved in all three subjects and at both the significant levels (5 and 6).
5. When the results for 1998 are compared with those in schools which have a similar background (as measured solely by the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals), the performance of pupils is broadly typical. At Level 5+, for example, it was in line with similar schools in all three subjects. English was also in line at Level 6+. At this higher Level 6+, however, mathematics and science are below average and well below in the case of mathematics. The reasons for the comparatively lower performance of this subject are judged to be partly a shortage of teaching time. In 1997 the comparative performance in English was high, that in science average, whilst that in mathematics was a little below average.
6. In the five other subjects formally assessed at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1997 and 1998, teachers judged their pupils' overall attainments to be broadly average in geography, history and modern foreign languages, but above average in design and technology and in information technology (IT). Inspectors' assessments are that the standard of attainment is broadly average in most of these subjects, but a little above average in IT.
7. In 1997, girls' overall attainment was higher than that of boys in all five non-core subjects, very substantially so in history and modern foreign languages. The overall gap increased further in 1998. In that year the performance of boys and girls was close together only in design and technology. In other

subjects the girls' lead ranged from 13 points (in IT) to a very substantial 30 points (in history). The inspection also concludes that, by the end of Year 9, girls have established an overall lead over boys in most subjects.

8. In GCSE examinations, pupils' overall achievement was average in 1998. The results in 1997 were, however, the school's best ever and (at 48 per cent) were five percentage points higher than the national average of 43 per cent. Over the period 1995-1998 there was a rising trend in the school's results, broadly in line with the rising trend nationally. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more of the higher (A\*-C) grades over the last six years was 31-48 per cent against a national average of 38-44 per cent. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more grades A\*-G was a little below the national average during the 1993-1996 period, but has been at least average in the last two years.
9. In the core subjects, pupils' achievements in GCSE in 1998 were above the national average in mathematics and science, but (unusually) below in English. In 1997, pupils' performance in all three subjects was above average. The proportion of pupils obtaining at least a grade C in *all* of English, mathematics and science in 1998 was 37 per cent slightly above average.
10. When compared with their performances in the other subjects they took at GCSE in 1996 and 1997 (the latest years for which full, nationally comparative data is available), pupils did significantly better in both years in science, geography and religious education (RE), but relatively worse in aspects of English, art, design and technology and drama.
11. Girls have achieved a greater proportion of the higher grades in GCSE than boys in all of the last six years. Based on pupils' average "points scores", boys have been (in most recent years) much further behind girls here than in most other schools. In both 1995 and 1998, for example, the proportion of girls who obtained five or more grades A\*-C was 21 percentage points ahead of boys' although the gap had been closing fast between 1995 and 1997. Over the last six years boys have trailed behind girls by between four (in 1997) and 21 percentage points. In 1998, girls obtained at least double the proportion of five A\*-C grades as boys in design and technology, modern foreign languages and drama.
12. When the school's results are compared with those in schools with a similar "free school meals" background, the school performed at a broadly average level for the proportion of pupils who obtained five or more grades A\*-C at GCSE. Its performance was, however, below average both for the proportion of pupils obtaining five A\*-G grades and for the average points score per pupil. This measure of "similarity" is, however, sensitive to small variations in the proportion of pupils receiving free meals.
13. In the sixth form, overall results at GCE A-level (based on "points scores") for those pupils who were entered for two or more subjects were a little below national averages over the 1994-1998 period, although only fractionally so in 1996 and 1997. In these two years the pass rates (89 per cent) were average, but the proportions of pupils obtaining the higher A-C grades (about half the entry) slightly below. In 1998, the pass rate dipped to 83 per cent, but the proportion of higher grades was largely sustained. The trend of performance has been strongly upwards from a low base in 1993.
14. Most pupils on General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses, taken at either Advanced or Intermediate level in 1998, achieved the full awards. At Advanced level the pass rate was 87 per cent and in business education over half the candidates achieved at least a merit. At Intermediate level the completion rates were above average in business education and in health and social care, but below average in leisure and tourism.
15. The school has not undertaken full analyses of information from its contributory primary schools, or

much internally, for differences in attainment by boys and girls at Key Stage 3. The limited evidence available about the intake of pupils suggests that girls and boys do not differ markedly in attainment in Year 7. Internal, standardised tests, however, suggest that girls' non-verbal attainment, often regarded as an indicator of innate potential, was a little higher than that of boys. By the end of Key Stage 3 (and continued into Key Stage 4 and GCSE), however, the gap has widened noticeably in favour of girls.

16. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' overall standard of attainment is broadly average (but just a little above) at the end of Key Stage 3 and average at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In lessons, the standard of attainment is average in half the classes, above average in a third and below average in one sixth. Attainment is broadly similar throughout the school, including the sixth form, but just a little higher (relatively) at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4. The standard of attainment is broadly average on the GNVQ courses at both Intermediate and Advanced levels.
17. In English, the overall attainment of pupils is in line with national averages throughout the school in all aspects of work, except in listening (which is above). Pupils' standard of reading across the school in other subjects is also average in fluency and accuracy. Most pupils write at an appropriate, average style and length for the tasks they are set, although a small minority have limited competence. Pupils' standards of presentation and handwriting are generally good and a little above average. Spelling and punctuation are average.
18. The vast majority of pupils listen carefully and concentrate hard. Their speaking is usually slightly above average in content, but frequently lacks clarity or sufficient expression. The quality of their debating or discussing issues at length is generally above average, partly because many teachers make it an important feature - a distinct improvement since the last inspection.
19. In mathematics, attainment is broadly average at Key Stage 3, but above average by the end of Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In numeracy across the curriculum, too, standards of attainment are generally above average throughout the school. This is particularly true of the use and interpretation of a variety of statistical data. Attainment in science is a little above average throughout the main school and average in the sixth form. A substantial proportion of pupils acquire good knowledge of at least the basics of the subject.
20. In other subjects, the attainments of pupils are usually in line with what pupils achieve nationally. Their attainments are, however, above average throughout the school in religious education (RE); at Key Stage 3 in art, IT and music; and at Key Stage 4 in geography, music, physical education (PE) and business studies. In the sixth form, standards are, overall, in line with the requirements of courses at Advanced levels (both GCE and GNVQ) and on other GNVQ courses, and are above average in art.
21. Results in a variety of national tests and examinations and the standard of work seen during the inspection point to the school generally sustaining pupils' performance well as they move through the main school from Year 7 to Year 11. At GCE A-level in 1998 pupils made good progress from their previous attainment in the same subject at GCSE in about one third of subject entries, satisfactory progress in a further quarter, but insufficient progress in about two-fifths.
22. Most pupils in the main school make at least satisfactory progress in their studies in line with their earlier attainments and in nearly three-fifths of classes they make good progress. Commendably, progress is below a reasonable level in only about three per cent of classes. Pupils get off to a sound start in Year 7 and make a similar rate of progress as they move through the school. The rate of progress varies from good to inadequate in the sixth form, but is broadly satisfactory, overall. In the main school girls generally make greater progress than boys, because they tend to sustain their concentration better, particularly on literacy tasks.

23. Pupils make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 in English; at Key Stage 4 in art, history and vocational courses; in the sixth form in history, IT, music and vocational work; and in science and in design and technology throughout the school. With the exception of unsatisfactory progress in IT at Key Stage 4, pupils make good progress in all other subjects and key stages. In particular, they make very good progress in geography at Key Stage 3, in art in the sixth form and in RE throughout the school.
24. There are several reasons why pupils generally make good progress in their studies. A major factor is the good quality of teaching. The school also has a pleasant, workmanlike atmosphere and a positive approach to learning. Most pupils behave well, feel they are at school to do their best and co-operate sensibly with one another and their teachers. They usually listen carefully, pay attention and are punctual to lessons. Only in a very small number of classes is there ineffective teaching. Sometimes pupils are held back a little by insufficient time for the subject (as in mathematics at Key Stage 3) or by the rotation of topics with insufficient continuity (as in design and technology). Both high-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs, however, generally make sound progress.

### **Attitudes, behaviour and personal development**

25. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are a significant strength of the school. Pupils of all ages and levels of attainment show very positive attitudes towards their work. They sustain high levels of interest and motivation throughout lessons and pay good attention to teachers' instructions and guidance. This very good picture is demonstrated in three-quarters of lessons. Pupils' attitudes to work are unsatisfactory in only a very small number of lessons. Where their response is very good, pupils engage actively in lively and thoughtful discussion and extend their learning well through independent study.
26. The school is a very orderly community. It has high standards of behaviour both in class and around the buildings and grounds. Pupils circulate calmly, despite the constraint of narrow corridors and staircases. The fabric of the building and its facilities are generally well respected, although there is often a high level of litter visible in the grounds. Pupils are courteous, polite and trustworthy and respect one another's property.
27. Pupils' relationships with one another and with teachers and other adults are very good. They work easily and naturally in groups and show a readiness to collaborate in finding solutions to tasks set for them. They are understanding of other people's values, feelings and beliefs. They show appreciation for one another's efforts and appropriate respect for other cultures.
28. Many pupils show enthusiasm in exercising initiative and assuming responsibility. They are ready to take on formal opportunities provided by the school, such as representation on the school council and receiving and hosting visitors to the school. In addition, many older pupils volunteer to help younger pupils to improve their reading or to build their confidence when they join the school.
29. The level of fixed-term exclusions is higher than the national average for a school of this size. The circumstances in which such exclusions are made are sound, are in line with the school's stated policies for managing behaviour and are carefully monitored. The level of permanent exclusions (two in the last year) is, however, low for a school of this size and this rate is static.

### **Attendance**

30. The attendance of pupils is satisfactory overall and is similar to the pattern of attendance nationally. In the last academic year pupils' overall attendance was 91.5 per cent. The annual level of authorised absence (7.5 per cent) and the amount of absence without good reason (1.0 per cent) are both broadly average. Attendance in the sixth form is good and at a higher level than that in the main school.

31. The level of attendance is broadly similar to that at the last inspection. Although the school does not underline the importance of good attendance and punctuality in its prospectus, it does so extensively in the pupils' Planner and successfully puts a high degree of emphasis in practice on pupils attending regularly.
32. The recording of attendance in official registers is broadly satisfactory, but a significant minority have a variety of minor flaws. The informal system used for registering pupils in the afternoon is insufficiently robust to ensure accuracy. The school has thorough and effective systems for analysing pupils' attendance and can access its data quickly and comprehensively. Registers are, however, insecurely stored, on open access, close to the school's entrance.
33. Pupils' punctuality for school and for lessons is generally good. There is some lateness for a minority of lessons, however, because of the long distance pupils sometimes have to walk between classes. The school's systems of cross-checking ensure that truancy after registration is only a minor issue. Systematic checks of registers and occasional random checks help to ensure that the good pattern of attendance is sustained.
- 39.
- 39.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED**

### **Teaching**

34. The quality of teaching is good and a significant strength of the school. It is the major factor in the pleasant, co-operative and purposeful atmosphere in which pupils learn and in the good quality of education they receive. This high quality of teaching (improved since 1994) and the increasing amount of systematic monitoring of departmental teaching have contributed substantially to the steady improvement in the school's performance since the last inspection.
35. The overall quality of teaching is broadly satisfactory or better in virtually all lessons, satisfactory in three out of every ten lessons and good in almost a further half of them. Additionally, nearly a quarter of the school's teaching is very good or outstanding - a substantial proportion. Only six lessons out of the 301 inspected had teaching that was unsatisfactory and needed obvious improvement. This is a better picture than usually found. The quality of teaching is similar throughout the school, but is slightly higher in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form than in Key Stage 4. Its quality is by far the most important reason for most pupils making a good rate of progress as they move through the school. The specialist teaching of pupils with special educational needs is always good and often very good.
36. Teachers generally have good (often very good) knowledge of the subjects they teach, although early unfamiliarity with new GCSE syllabuses (as in English and history) sometimes slows pupils' progress a little. Teachers usually select very relevant material to illustrate topics and help pupils to see clearly the purpose of their studies and how the different parts of courses fit together. The planning and preparation of lessons are done very conscientiously, overall. Teaching materials are usually of good quality and well presented.
37. Most teachers use appropriately a wide range of teaching methods. In nearly all lessons, teachers are good at explaining things to the whole class, although occasionally spend too long in doing so. In most lessons where it is appropriate, teachers organise pupils well in groups or pairs to develop their ideas or to undertake intensive practice. Most work is well matched to pupils' different levels of attainment or understanding (an improvement since the last inspection), including work for both higher-attaining

pupils and those with special educational needs.

38. With few exceptions, teachers quickly revise with pupils the content of earlier lessons and devote an appropriate amount of time to the different stages of new work. In the best lessons, they share with pupils the thinking, planning and purpose of the work being done and ensure that the main messages and conclusions are succinctly but comprehensively reviewed at the end of lessons. In the few weak lessons pupils are often unclear about what they are doing.
39. Teachers, almost without exception, manage classes well. They ensure that pupils work hard, keep to the tasks set and learn in a pleasant and purposeful atmosphere. Serious disciplinary problems are very rare. A suitable amount of ground is covered in most lessons. In the best cases, teachers keep up a cracking pace, use all lesson-time productively and ensure that research, discussion and memorisation are rigorous. They use searching questions to foster and check on pupils' understanding. They expect pupils to answer and put their points of view with clarity and suitable detail.
40. In the very small minority of lessons in which teaching is unsatisfactory, but occasionally also in others which are otherwise satisfactory, teachers do not expect enough of pupils, give inadequate guidance to them about how to improve their work, or cover insufficient ground. A more common fault is that a significant number of pupils who have much to say, but mumble or use poor syntax or grammar ("us books" or "we was", for example), are infrequently corrected.
41. Most parents are happy with the amount and frequency of homework set for pupils. A small minority, however, indicated to the inspection team that they felt the quantity set was unsuitable, more often too much, but sometimes too little. The inspection team judges that the quantity of homework set is broadly appropriate. There are, however, considerable gaps in the homework diaries of some pupils and the framework for arriving at homework programmes is unnecessarily cumbersome.
42. With the exception of IT (unsatisfactory across subjects) and of design and technology (satisfactory) in Key Stage 4, and of IT (satisfactory) in the sixth form, the teaching in all subjects is at least good, overall. It is very good in geography in Key Stage 3, in science and art in the sixth form and in RE throughout the school. A third of the teaching seen in Year 8 and a quarter of that in Years 9, 11 and 12 was very good. Virtually every subject has at least some teaching that is very good. Occasionally teaching is quite outstanding.

### **The curriculum and assessment**

43. The curriculum at both key stages and in the sixth form is balanced and broadly based. It helps to ensure that all pupils are suitably prepared for the next stage of education or for entering into employment and that they have appropriate opportunities for personal development.
44. At Key Stage 3 all subjects of the National Curriculum are covered. Pupils study either French or Spanish in Year 7 and both languages in Years 8 and 9. A worthwhile course of study skills, which includes IT, is taught for one period each week in Year 7 as part of an initiative to raise standards of literacy. The provision for design and technology includes business studies in Year 8 and IT in Years 8 and 9, but this results in a curricular organisation which is complex and fails to provide satisfactory progression in learning.
45. At Key Stage 4, pupils study the core subjects, PE, RE and personal and social education (PSE), and have the additional options of a humanities subject, a modern foreign language and a technology course. In addition an arrangement of options enables pupils to make an individual and balanced choice from a sound range of other GCSE subjects. A "transition" course is available for disaffected pupils, who attend

courses at a local college of further education. These pupils are sensibly disappplied from National Curriculum requirements in design and technology. They also receive suitable study support and are provided with an appropriate curriculum. At present, approximately 30 lower-attaining pupils study courses leading to GNVQ. This arrangement is proving successful. The school is also piloting initiatives to teach GNVQ core skills to all pupils in Year 10 in English, mathematics, science, child development and geography.

46. There is broad, curricular provision in the sixth form, including over 20 GCE A-level courses. The school has introduced a good range of GNVQ courses at Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced levels. In addition, all pupils in the sixth form are required to choose three from seven "extension study" courses and in Year 13 over 30 pupils study for the GCE A-level general studies examination. Although there is no compulsory PE course, pupils have the choice of sports studies at GCE A-level or to be involved in sports teams, the Community Sports Leader Award or the Basic Expedition and Training Award.
47. The PSE programme is taught on a different period each week throughout the school by form tutors, with an additional period at Key Stage 4. The course is well organised and is generally taught effectively. It includes the teaching of health and sex education, for which there are clear and sensible policies.
48. The curriculum meets statutory requirements, except for IT at Key Stage 4. Insufficient time is allocated to IT in the PSE programme in Years 10 and 11 and the use of IT in other subjects is neither sufficient nor co-ordinated effectively a weakness identified at the last inspection. In English in Years 7 and 9 and in mathematics throughout Key Stage 3, the depth of work that can be undertaken and pupils' progress are hindered, owing to lack of time. Since the previous inspection, the allocation of time for music has been increased and is now sufficient. The time allowed for PE at Key Stage 4 is inadequate, as it provides insufficient time for those pupils taking the GCSE short course to complete it effectively and does not enable them to participate in general core National Curriculum work.
49. The 20 minutes of tutorial time when pupils are not in assembly each morning is not used effectively, partly because there are no guidelines or a programme of work for form tutors to follow. The length of the school day, at 24 hours and 35 minutes, falls below the minimum 25 hours of lesson time for Key Stage 4 recommended by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE).
50. All pupils have full access to the curriculum. The arrangements for grouping pupils are reasonable and there is a sound matching of work to the needs of pupils in all subjects. Alternative accreditation has been provided for lower-attaining pupils in almost all subjects.
51. The overall quality of the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs is always sound, often good and sometimes very good. Most support is appropriately provided at Key Stage 3 by the withdrawal of pupils from normal classes and by intensive tuition. The school takes some good initiatives to provide relevant courses at Key Stage 4, including additional support for core skills on GNVQ courses. The team of teachers involved in all this work have a good range of complementary skills.
52. The procedures for curricular planning are effective. There are well-developed, formal links between the senior management team and subject departments. A good programme of monitoring the impact of the curriculum is undertaken. This includes procedures for monitoring teaching which are systematic and of good quality. The majority of subjects have schemes of work of good quality and they are very good in mathematics and art. Curricular co-ordination is at least good in all subjects, except for design and technology and IT, where it is unsatisfactory. Curricular links with contributory primary schools are inconsistent. They are excellent in science and very good in modern foreign languages but weak elsewhere, resulting in unsatisfactory subject continuity from primary education, overall.
53. There is very good provision of extra-curricular activities. There are many subject clubs and a wide

range of music groups and choirs meet regularly. Successful drama productions and visits to the theatre are a regular feature of the school. Many pupils are involved in residential visits in the British Isles, often linked to fieldwork. Other pupils travel abroad and there are exchange visits with schools in France, Italy, Spain and Tanzania. A large number of sporting activities also take place, involving about a third of the pupils and twelve adults, including all the PE staff.

54. The careers education and guidance programme is well organised and effective. The scheme for careers education is well planned and in Years 10 and 11 is taught by specialist staff. Daily support from the careers service helps to provide impartial guidance and support for pupils making choices in Years 9 and 11 and in the sixth form.
55. All pupils in Year 10 participate in well-organised work experience for two weeks. There is also provision for work experience for pupils taking GNVQ courses and a well-developed programme of work-shadowing for pupils in the sixth form. The school has good links with the business community. An easily accessible careers library is stocked with a satisfactory range of appropriate books and pamphlets and is supplemented by further provision in the main school library.
56. The school's policy for assessment is based on a range of agreed procedures, which include written guidance on the use and scope of the National Record of Achievement, criteria for marking pupils' work and advice on the compiling of reports for parents. A comprehensive record of attainments, which is finalised in Year 11, is built up as pupils move through the school. The record includes pupils' evaluations of their own achievements, strengths and weaknesses an important feature of the school's assessment procedures.
57. Systems of grading and recording pupils' achievements are effective at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. They are, however, somewhat confusing at Key Stage 3, where three different and imprecise descriptors are used to indicate pupils' attainment and effort. This lack of precision in recording pupils' early attainments means that the school cannot assess pupils' progress reliably across subjects or as they move from Year 7 through to Year 11.
58. Within subject departments, the quality of assessment is at least satisfactory and in most departments good. Overall, the assessment of pupils' work is accurate and relates well to National Curriculum levels, where these are applicable. In most subjects the day-to-day marking of pupils' work is good. Written work is graded not only for its content, but also for spelling and grammar. The large majority of teachers know their pupils' capabilities and attainments well. In lessons, they tell pupils clearly what is expected and frequently set individual targets to move them forward. The quality of assessment and use of individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs are good.
59. Reports to parents on pupils' attainments, progress and effort use different systems at each key stage. These systems are potentially confusing and imprecise and do not give parents clear and immediate information about their children's current level of attainment and rate of progress. A significant minority of parents also feel that the school does not convey this information to them satisfactorily.
60. The school uses National Curriculum assessment and standardised tests in Year 7 and pupils have formal examinations in all subjects from Year 8 onwards. At Key Stage 4 the assessment of units of work is closely related to external examination requirements, where the A-G grading system is well understood. The school has sufficient data to monitor the progress of individual pupils and to help to judge the overall performance of the school, but this data is insufficiently collated and used.
61. Assessment of the work of pupils with special educational needs is good and annual reviews are well managed. A wide range of tests and assessment instruments is sensibly used for diagnostic and review purposes. Individual education plans are generally accurate and well targeted. They are used soundly by

mainstream teachers. Work set for these pupils is usually soundly matched to their needs.

**67. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

62. The provision for each of these aspects of pupils' development is good. Spiritual development is well promoted within the RE curriculum, which includes opportunities for pupils to learn about Christianity and other major religions. These studies in RE enable pupils to consider and reflect on their own personal beliefs. Pupils also experience the spiritual dimension in some other subjects. In English, for example, they dramatise the Creation story and consider major issues such as birth, death and self-determination. Through history, they learn about the impact of Roman religion, medieval beliefs and the development of the Church in the 17th century. In art and music, they meet examples of great works which provoke feelings of wonder.
63. In assemblies, pupils perform music and read their own poems and personal essays to their year groups. These presentations offer insights into how others think, feel and believe. Assemblies do not, however, always provide an atmosphere which is conducive to sincere reflection. The statutory requirement for a daily act of worship for all pupils is not normally met, either in assemblies or by other means - a serious weakness which has not improved since the last inspection.
64. The good provision for pupils' moral development is rooted in the orderly and civilised ethos of the school. Teachers set good examples of respect and courtesy and have a consistent, firm and dignified approach to correcting pupils' behaviour, when necessary. Moral issues are presented, discussed and experienced in PSE lessons and in some other subjects - as, for example, in drama and history where they study the implications of war, poverty and oppression. In PE, they have very good opportunities to take account of the feelings of others and to learn about the importance of rules and fair play. The school's code of conduct is prominently displayed and well understood by pupils and staff. This is underpinned by an effective system of sanctions and rewards which pupils have helped to develop.
65. Pupils' social development is well promoted. The staff know pupils well and a firm emphasis on pastoral care helps pupils to deal with personal difficulties. The well-established code of conduct, the system of group tutors and the PSE programme all contribute well to the way pupils conduct themselves in and around the school. In spite of crowded conditions, pupils show a high level of awareness of the needs of others and a mature and polite approach to one another, to their teachers and to visitors.
66. In many lessons, pupils work well in groups or pairs. An extensive programme of extra-curricular activities, particularly in music and PE, enables pupils to work and play together in a wide range of friendship groups. Staff are enthusiastic in offering help with activities and trips. A very good range of local, national and international visits offers further valuable social experiences. The Aston-Makunduchi partnership, which provides good contacts and exchange visits, gives pupils excellent insights into the very contrasting lifestyles of the UK and Tanzania.
67. The school makes a good effort to provide social areas for pupils at break and lunchtimes. In bad weather pupils are able to use designated classrooms, the youth suite and the sixth-form common room. Lunchtime arrangements are very well organised. These and an all-day cafeteria allow pupils to interact in a mature manner. Pupils have a low awareness, however, of litter around the school and this remains a serious social problem.
68. There are good opportunities for pupils to exercise responsibility and learn about citizenship. Older pupils help younger ones with their reading and sixth formers help some classes in the lower school. Pupils are involved as school receptionists and visitors - including teachers who attend for job interviews - are shown round the school by pupils. An active school council, which is chaired by pupils, deals effectively with matters such as arrangements for meals and transport. These meetings are properly

conducted, recorded and reported.

69. The Aston-Makunduchi partnership is an important feature of the school's good provision of cultural development. As well as this initiative, pupils visit other countries, including France, Italy and Spain. A particularly enriching example of these is a visit organised by the art department to Padua, Venice and Ravenna. Pupils have the benefit of a large number of visits to museums, theatres and places of special environmental interest.
70. Cultural provision is further enhanced by a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. These include music ensembles, sports teams, a national mathematics competition, drama workshop and art club. Visitors to school have included a writer, a London-based music ensemble and many ex-pupils who have achieved substantial professional status. In RE, pupils visit mosques and a gurdwara in connection with their study of people who have beliefs and traditions which are very different from their own.

### **Support, guidance and pupils' welfare**

71. The school's arrangements for providing support, advice and guidance for pupils are very good. They are well implemented by an experienced and committed group of staff who work systematically together to ensure that pupils' needs are met. Pupils' progress in attendance, behaviour, personal development and academic progress are carefully monitored. This successful monitoring is achieved through regular personal supervision and effective management systems. The tracking of academic progress, however, lacks a comprehensive information system, especially at Key Stage 3, to underpin the personal knowledge of pupils held by their tutors. The use of daily tutorial time varies in quality from very good to poor, but, overall, does not represent an effective use of time.
72. The school has clear and positive policies to improve behaviour and to eliminate bullying and other forms of unacceptable conduct. Pupils feel very secure in the school and able to approach a wide variety of staff, if they have any concerns. Some of the more vulnerable pupils complain of occasional teasing and mild bullying. These concerns are swiftly and effectively dealt with, once they are known to staff. Arrangements for Child Protection within the school are good and all staff are kept appropriately informed and updated. Any incidents involving individual pupils are handled with sensitivity.
73. Provision to ensure pupils' health, safety and wellbeing are generally good. The availability of a matron allows specialist help to be provided on a regular basis to pupils who are unwell or distressed. This good facility is shortly to be supplemented by a "drop-in" consultation service for pupils, to be provided by the school nurse. The school seeks to meet pupils' social, emotional and physical in a variety of ways. A shop for school uniform allows clothing needs to be dealt with rapidly on site. Opportunities for social mixing during the day are provided for many pupils, despite the difficulties of the building. The provision of meals and snacks is of a high standard.
74. A small number of significant hazards, however, were detected during the inspection. The kiln in the art area, for example, is not adequately guarded. The swimming pool (which has separate management from, but is used by, the school) shows signs of asbestos in its fabric. Some other hazards, such as fire-doors in a new building having instructions on them (at commissioning) to be kept locked, were immediately remedied by the school.
75. Programmes to provide personal, social and health education (PSE) are well planned, carefully structured and very relevant. Sensitive areas, such as education about sex and drugs, are well managed. The teaching of PSE is generally sound and pupils' response is often good. The monitoring and co-ordination of the various strands of these programmes are not, however, sufficiently rigorous and regular.

## Partnership with parents and the community

76. The school's partnership with parents and the community is satisfactory, but little progress has been made since the last report in developing these links. The school provides parents with a suitable range of information about its activities, but insufficient written information about the curriculum and about pupils' attainment and progress. Its prospectus, which is a detailed and informative, loose-leafed "Guide for Parents", meets legal requirements. The governors' annual report also meets statutory requirements and is attractively presented, but the meeting at which the report is publicly presented is poorly attended.
77. The school has regular parents' evenings and writes formal reports about pupils annually. Parents' meetings and pupils' reports are, however, planned for different terms; the reports come too late in the year for parents to discuss them with teachers, with a view to helping their children. Most parents are happy with the curricular information the school provides. A significant minority, however, wish to know more; for example, when different topics are to be taught during the year, or to receive book lists in subjects such as English, so that they can prepare, in advance, to help their children. The relative shortage of such information, particularly in Key Stage 3, is confirmed by the inspection.
78. There is a formal parent-teacher association (PTA) structured in year groups, which, with the school's co-operation, arranges well-planned, half-termly evenings on different subjects and topics such as information technology and awareness of drugs. These PTA meetings are quite well attended, with about 80-90 parents, for example, attending the meetings about computers. The school also arranges an evening meeting for parents of pupils in Year 7 on how to make the most of school.
79. Parents' involvement with the work of the school and with their children's work at home is satisfactory. No parents work voluntarily on a regular basis in school, however, although some contribute occasionally to working parties with teachers, to the school's work on accreditation and records of achievement, or to help in arranging work experience. Some listen to pupils read, give talks on careers work and leisure activities, help on the health education programmes or have provided specialist help, such as in developing computer software. Parents support and coach sports teams. The school's concerts are well attended.
80. The school has very positive links with welfare services and the police. There are positive links with various places of worship and with employers in the area. The steel industry has made a significant contribution to investment in computers and software for pupils with special educational needs and on the literacy initiative.
81. Links with contributory primary schools are formalised through a well-planned induction programme; a member of staff is released for one day a week for this purpose. Curricular links are not strong, however, but reporting back to primary schools on pupils' progress is good. There are appropriate links with further education and the careers service. The school works closely with the Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) on the Management Charter Initiative. Project Trident supports work experience and work-shadowing by pupils in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
82. The school has strong links with its community. The library has joint provision for the school and the community and is open for study and homework after school hours. It is not, however, very accessible to most pupils during the day. The school uses the swimming and sports facilities of the community, which are located on the school site. The youth service provides three youth clubs and shares the school's facilities.
83. Pupils make satisfactory contributions to the community through, for example, visits to residential homes and social contacts in their sports events. The on-site playgroup is appropriately used by pupils studying GCSE child care. Summer play-schemes and regular lettings, particularly through the adult education

programme, benefit from the use of the school's site. Further afield, the school has major links with Makunduchi in Tanzania. There are regular exchanges and visits to France, Italy and Spain.

89.

## **THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL**

### **Leadership and management**

84. Leadership is firm and clear across all aspects of the school's life and is supported by a strong sense of purpose and shared values. The governing body is effective and strongly committed to the success of the school. Its business is well managed through a clearly defined structure of committees. Many governors bring valuable specialist knowledge to the school's work and take a broad view of their responsibilities. They play a full part in the school's development and improvement.
85. In the four years since the last inspection, the headteacher (new in 1995) has formally defined and extended the roles of staff and has involved them fully in planning and decision-making. He is a visible leader and is highly accessible to pupils, staff, parents and governors. He has introduced mechanisms, such as "work review", which support and extend staff well in their professional development and responsibilities.
86. The senior management team has been enlarged since the last inspection. Its composition and functions are well matched to the current and likely future demands that the school faces. Its members carry managerial and operational responsibility for key aspects of the school. This team has begun to assemble the elements of a whole-school information system to monitor pupils' progress and overall performance of the school. This system is not, however, sufficiently detailed or comprehensive to provide key information readily to all those who need access to it.
87. The quality of leadership shown by staff with responsibilities for subject areas and pastoral teams is high. This is characterised by effective planning, sound documentation and strong teamwork. The school-based programme of management development, organised under the Management Charter Initiative, has contributed positively to this competent performance.
88. There are sound systems for monitoring and evaluating teaching and curricular provision across the school. The system of work review involves senior staff conducting careful monitoring of the work and teaching of their subordinates. Staff generally welcome this as a helpful means of assessing their work and a basis for self-improvement.
89. The school's aims, values and principles are clear and well articulated. There is a good match between these values and the curriculum seen in action in the school. An additional indication of this close match is the degree to which pupils readily support the school's policies and parents identify with the values espoused by the school.
90. The process of planning for the school's development is widely based. Outlines provided by the senior management team are considered and, if necessary, modified by governors and staff. The school's overall plan, which is organised on a rolling three-year basis, is well supported by departmental planning. Priorities, phasing, costings and criteria for measuring success are provided for all the major targets, but they are insufficiently detailed and specific.
91. The school has a humane and considerate ethos. This is typified by very good relationships and strong collaborative working at all levels. Opportunities for all pupils to participate fully in the work of the school are carefully safeguarded. The school has a positive and reflective learning environment which is valued by staff and pupils alike. The school does not, however, comply with statutory requirements in

two areas: its procedures for daily collective worship are very deficient; and it makes insufficient provision for pupils to experience IT across the curriculum at Key Stage 4.

### **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

92. The school has sufficient, appropriately qualified teachers to cover the subjects it teaches. The recent appointment of competent young teachers has complemented well an experienced staff. There is a good match between teachers' initial qualifications and the subjects taught. Over half the staff carry some management responsibility. Although there are more women than men on the teaching staff, men outnumber women in senior posts.
93. The deployment of teachers is fair and effective and most staff teach across all ages and abilities. Both the proportion of time spent by teachers in class and the overall size of classes are slightly above national averages.
94. The number of support and administrative staff, overall, is about average for the size of the school. Support staff are deployed across a wide range of areas in the school, and, unusually, include a curriculum assistant in modern foreign languages. Learning support assistants make a valuable contribution to the education of pupils with special educational needs. The IT technician is under some pressure, however, owing to the unreliability of the network and its widespread location around the school. There is insufficient technical help for classes in food.
95. Staff development is highly regarded and seen as essential to the further development of the school. It is well organised and is based on the school's development plan, with a suitable emphasis on balancing the needs of the whole school, departments and individuals. These latter needs are derived from the valuable system of work reviews, complemented by the Management Charter Initiative, for both teaching and non-teaching staff.
96. New and newly qualified teachers are well supported by a well-planned series of meetings and by in-service courses particularly aimed at the issues of discipline facing young teachers. The mentoring system, based on the procedures for teachers in initial training, is valued by new teachers.
97. The school occupies a large site and a diverse range of buildings of uneven quality. The accommodation is internally well decorated and adequately cleaned. Both the external fabric and the site's hard landscaping receive limited maintenance and inadequate attention, overall.
98. The school has sufficient and suitable accommodation for its needs. Most rooms are very well used and the school monitors the levels of room utilisation. There is some good accommodation in the new blocks for English and mathematics, as well as elsewhere for geography and some design and technology activities. The facilities and their groupings have unsatisfactory features in science, art, food and textiles, history, RE and GNVQ. Accommodation for the library and for sixth-form study is both limited and cramped.
99. The school has 11 mobile classrooms instead of the 25 at the last inspection. Nine of these classrooms are used for teaching and the remaining two for storage. All the mobile classrooms have been upgraded, involving considerable refurbishment and redecoration, coupled with improved heating. The mobile classrooms are, however, widely scattered about the site and do not have any canopied links to the buildings of the main school.
100. Circulation about the site is complex. It is, however, sensitively managed, overall and, together with the pupils' good behaviour, ensures that a safe environment is maintained throughout the school's restricted

corridors. The monitoring and assessment of risks to health and safety are being addressed, but are not carried out sufficiently systematically or comprehensively. The installation of CCTV surveillance systems and the introduction of security patrols at night have improved security and reduced the number of break-ins and attacks of vandalism.

101. Various examples of good displays of pupils' work, exhibitions of art work and enhancement of the landscape do much to lift the quality of the school's environment. Despite the impact of this work, much of the external site and fabric is drab and uninspiring. Signs throughout the site are minimal and have no coherent house-style.
102. Numerous external groups and individuals regularly use the school's facilities throughout the day, in the evening, at weekends and in holidays. This wider community involvement is a very significant part of the life of the school. It is properly recognised as helping to forge many important local links, as well as generating a useful income.
103. Spending on learning resources is above average for a school of this size and type. The provision of resources is good, and much progress has been made since the last inspection in remedying the deficiencies identified then. The provision of textbooks is very good in art, good in mathematics and history and satisfactory in all other subjects, with the exception of PE, where there is a shortage of books for pupils taking GCSE and some shortages in RE. The provision of equipment is satisfactory. There is a very good range of resources, and satisfactory provision of IT, for pupils with special educational needs.
104. The ratio of pupils to computers is in line with the national average. The number of machines has declined since the last inspection, but the provision has been improved through up-to-date, industry-standard machines and is now good. Within departments the provision of IT is variable. It is good in science, art, history and modern foreign languages, but is poor in English and art. The installation of new machines in the English department is imminent.
105. The library is open to the local community as well as to the school. It provides an attractive and welcoming environment, with a very good stock of books, especially of junior fiction. A good range of national newspapers of good quality and magazines is taken. There is good provision of IT facilities and a large stock of CDROMs. The careers library contains a satisfactory range of resources. This library is too small for a school of this size and type and, as a result, most pupils do not have access to the library at lunchtimes. Pupils benefit from the late opening of the main library after the end of the school day. Since the last inspection the library has been improved by the installation of a security system.
106. The school makes very effective use of off-site resources. There are, for example, theatre visits in English, fieldwork in geography and history and residential visits in the UK and abroad. The school makes excellent use of its links with Tanzania.

### **The efficiency of the school**

107. The school has responded well to an issue raised in the last inspection report about establishing a formula for funding the subjects of the curriculum. The formula is appropriate and staff understand how it works. There is also a development fund from which departments can receive extra money, if their plans meet the stringent criteria of a committee consisting of teachers and governors. The school does not, however, have a fully satisfactory system of evaluating the outcomes of its spending decisions or of knowing if it provides value for money.
108. The level of funding the school receives is well below average for the type and size of school. Its budget has balanced in recent years, although the surplus funds for contingencies have been small. It is expected

that the budget will balance in the present financial year. All spending decisions are made carefully, particularly as there is no leeway for unnecessary spending. The money available for educational developments is very tight. Financial planning is careful and the school's key educational aims are met and funded appropriately. The funds allocated for pupils with special educational needs are used effectively. The sixth form is cost-effective.

109. The teaching staff is used effectively and lessons are taught by subject specialists. The spending on teaching is an above average share of the budget, because total income is well below average. The ratio of pupils to teachers is above that in most similar schools and many classes are large, some with 34 or 35 pupils. Groups of low-attaining pupils are much smaller, often having fewer than 20 pupils.
110. The proportion of time teachers spend in class is above average. Teachers use their non-teaching time well to attend to their other responsibilities. Senior staff spend some of this time monitoring the quality of teaching. The total time for teaching is in line with the DfEE's recommendations at Key Stage 3, but a little below at Key Stage 4. Time is used well in the main, but the morning registration and tutorial time of 20 minutes is often used poorly.
111. The non-teaching staff contribute well to the efficient running of the school. For example, the caretaking staff do minor repairs and decorating which are cost-effective, so removing the need to buy in services from outside. They also undertake cleaning duties, but this is an expensive arrangement. The technical, clerical and other support staff are efficient. The support assistants working with pupils with special educational needs are deployed effectively. The amount of clerical support is a little below average.
112. The accommodation is, in the main, used well, but there are inefficiencies in heating. Some rooms are too warm and others too cold and few have double-glazing or thermostatic controls. Exterior doors are often wide open, so wasting heat. The boiler system is inefficient. The sports accommodation is used for examinations and is unavailable for its intended use for about 75 days each year. The use of energy and resources is inadequately monitored; there is, for example, wastage of water from leaking taps. There are some controls on the use of electricity and water in the new buildings. The use of the resources for learning is mostly good and the computers are used very well.
113. The control of the school's finances is good. The last external audit in June 1998 raised only minor concerns which have been addressed. The governors are adequately informed about financial matters and exercise appropriate supervision of spending. The school achieves average academic success and provides its pupils with a good education, with a funding per pupil that is well below the national average. It demonstrates an awareness of the need to spend carefully. Overall the school provides noticeably good value for money.

## 119. PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

### 119. ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

#### English

114. The overall standard of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, as seen in current work, is in line with the national expectation. The average grade scored in the National Curriculum tests in 1998 was close to the national average. When this average grade score is compared with that in schools with a similar proportion of free school meals, results were average. Performance in these tests has improved substantially over recent years. Girls did substantially better than boys in 1998 in reaching at least Level 5. Over the last three years the average scores of boys and girls have exceeded their own national averages.
115. The general standard of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is average. In GCSE for both English language and English literature in 1998 the number of pupils achieving grades A\*-C was below the national average. These results were in marked contrast to the steady improvement over recent years, especially in English language. This drop in attainment in examinations was partly anticipated in long-term predictions of achievement; standards were also adversely affected by teachers' inexperience of a new examination syllabus. Girls did much better than boys and boys are significantly further below their own national average than girls are below theirs. Attainment in the sixth form is average. At A-level in 1998, results in English literature were above the national average and those in English language were below.
116. The quality of listening is good in all years. Pupils listen attentively and work effectively in pairs and small groups. Some aspects of speech are average: pupils answer willingly and can expand a point of view and justify opinions. Some pupils speak audibly and fluently, making meaning clear. A significant number, however, fail to speak clearly and, consequently, do not communicate effectively. This weakness in articulation amongst pupils affects all years and is sometimes combined with the use of non-standard grammar and pronunciation. Pupils are generally courteous and confident when talking to adults.
117. Attainment in reading is average. Various effective methods for the improvement of the standard of reading are in place, particularly in Year 7 when paired reading with sixth-form pupils is popular and successful. A project to improve literacy through widening and encouraging reading is proving very effective in Year 8; teachers and older pupils give their own time and effort to this initiative. Good use is made of the very good junior section of the library. Throughout the school, all pupils study a wide range of literature. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils accurately identify elements such as character, plot and themes in their study of "Romeo and Juliet". In the sixth form, pupils studying "Mansfield Park" carry out a mature, critical analysis of the writer's style, using the appropriate language of literary appreciation.
118. The presentation of written work is, in the main, sound and handwriting is legible. At the end of Key Stage 4 average and high-attaining pupils write effectively for a range of purposes and readerships. The standard of their work is close to what is expected of their age group, with reasonably accurate spelling and punctuation. Some low-attaining pupils, at the end of Key Stage 3, experience difficulties with common spellings, but the overall standard of spelling shows improvement upon that reported at the last inspection. The great majority of pupils draft their work effectively. Much lively and interesting writing is on display in classrooms. Some high-attaining pupils, at the end of Key Stage 4, produce assignments of well above average standard, especially during their study of literature.
119. In Key Stage 3, the majority of pupils make satisfactory progress. Levels of literacy on entry are about

average and, with results of the National Curriculum tests close to the national average, the indications are that steady progress is maintained. Pupils with special educational needs generally make good progress. Through support with reading in Years 7 and 8, a significant number of pupils who encounter some difficulty with language receive valuable help and make rapid gains with their reading.

120. In recent years there has been steady improvement up to the end of Key Stage 4 and GCSE results have demonstrated sustained progress. The (untypical) lower examination performance in 1998 suggests that progress that year was slower. In the sixth form, the percentage of higher grades in A-level over the last two years indicates continuing sound progress at that level.
121. Behaviour is good and attitudes to learning are positive. Pupils are well motivated and collaborate productively in small groups. They generally sustain concentration well and many enjoy their work.
122. The quality of teaching throughout the school is always satisfactory and is good, or better, in two-thirds of lessons. In a quarter of lessons teaching is very good. It is best at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection. Relationships with pupils are exceptionally positive and purposeful. This is partly a result of the pupils' respect for their teachers' hard work in the planning and preparation of lessons.
123. A wide range of successful and imaginative teaching methods is used. Teachers' knowledge of their subject is good. They have high expectations of good behaviour and attainment. Teaching of mixed-ability groups is skilled and effective and tasks are carefully matched to pupils' levels of attainment. All pupils, from low attainers to the highest-attaining pupils, are set work which challenges them appropriately. Pupils' work is marked conscientiously and constructively.
124. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and provides equality of opportunity to all pupils. The allocation of time for the subject in Years 7 and 9 is well below the national average. There are also some very large classes, especially of high-attaining pupils, in Years 10 and 11. Departmental documentation is relevant and helpful. The overall quality of assessment is sound, but at Key Stage 3 the everyday marking system does not relate to National Curriculum levels.
125. Since the last inspection, accommodation has improved radically with the building of the very attractive new block for the subject. A significant number of lessons still take place, however, in inadequate, temporary buildings. The quality of the environment within classrooms is nevertheless very good, with much attractive display. Teachers are very well motivated and share a clear vision and purpose. During the current secondment of the head of department (for research inside the school) the subject has been efficiently and capably managed by the acting head of department.
126. In other subjects across the curriculum, pupils generally listen very attentively. The quality of speaking is close to average, but frequently lacks clarity or expression. Pupils generally develop a point of view and sustain discussion and argument well, when required to do so. The use of subject-specific vocabulary is better than average.
127. Pupils in all departments have levels of reading comprehension adequate for understanding the tasks set for them. Reading aloud is, on the whole, fluent and accurate. In geography, history and RE, pupils read extensively for research and to enlarge their knowledge and understanding.
128. The standard of presentation of written work and handwriting in most subjects is higher than average. There is little extended writing, but note-taking is effectively practised in a variety of subjects such as mathematics, history and (at A-level) in PE. Standards of literacy are average, overall, but better than generally encountered in art, modern foreign languages and music.

134. *Drama*

129. Standards of attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with the national expectation. Results in GCSE in 1998 were, however, below the national average. Pupils quickly learn the discipline of appropriate behaviour in the studio. They work effectively in pairs and groups. The quality of listening is good and pupils make rapid progress in trusting others and being reliable themselves. They gain in confidence and self-awareness and become increasingly adaptable. In Year 8, pupils work together at a good pace and with total concentration.
130. Pupils steadily develop a wide range of skills in movement, speech and control of gesture, body-language and facial expression. Pupils in Year 10, for example, showed good levels of commitment and concentration in preparing and presenting a challenging assignment. Some contributions reach a high level of creativity, especially in extended, improvised dialogue. As part of their assessed practical work for A-level, pupils in the sixth form presented an outstanding sequence of work based upon significant themes. This culmination of ten weeks' preparation reached a very high standard of concentration, skill and creativity.
131. The quality of teaching is always good and sometimes excellent. Schemes of work are thorough and ensure effective continuity and progression. Accommodation is adequate, but the department is growing rapidly and does not have a large space properly equipped for productions. The subject is a popular option at GCSE. Management of the subject is energetic and efficient.

**Mathematics**

132. Pupils arrive at the school with standards that are a little above the national average. Pupils' attainment in the National Curriculum tests, taken at the end of Year 9, are above average for the proportion of pupils reaching at least Level 5, but about average, overall. They have improved a little since the last inspection. The average grade score in 1998 was below that in similar schools, as judged by the criterion of the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. The reasons for this include insufficient time for lessons at Key Stage 3 and large teaching groups for higher attainers. Teachers' assessments of the pupils at this stage have indicated standards of attainment very close to the test results. Girls have done better than boys since 1996.
133. Results in GCSE have been above average in recent years and the trend has been slowly upwards since the last inspection. Girls' results have improved more quickly than boys' and they now do better than boys. The highest-attaining boys and girls do very well. The proportion of pupils achieving a GCSE grade A\* or A in 1998 was well above average. Results at A-level have been average and sometimes above in recent years, although in 1998 fewer than average gained grades A or B.
134. The standards attained by the end of Key Stage 3 are a little above average. The most able reach very high standards. Number work is good, reflecting an appropriate emphasis on this. Many pupils are secure in algebra. Most cope well with work on shape and space, but some low-attaining pupils in Year 9 have an insecure grasp of line symmetry. Pupils know the names of many two or three-dimensional shapes and many work out the angles in polygons. The standard of investigational work is generally above average at all stages.
135. Standards attained by the end of Key Stage 4 are above average. Many pupils have good number skills. Low attainers are confident with factors, multiples and prime numbers. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 11 have a secure grasp of circle geometry and use the sine rule and cosine rule well. Most pupils use calculators sensibly. The standards in algebra are good and some pupils solve quadratic equations by a

range of methods.

136. It was not possible to see the work or lessons with pupils in Year 13, but the available evidence shows that standards in the sixth form are above those normally found. Many pupils have a secure grasp of probability distributions, a secure understanding of mechanics and a good awareness of the graphs of trigonometric functions.
137. The standards of mathematics across the curriculum are above average. Pupils have sufficient skills to enable them to make progress that is often good. They calculate accurately and use graphs well in science. They measure accurately in design and technology and their skills of estimation are used well. Number work is above average in geography and pupils use data-handling and other statistical techniques well. Pupils use spreadsheets and databases in IT, calling on their knowledge of algebra well. There is little use of mathematics in other subjects.
138. Pupils' progress at Key Stage 3 is mostly good. In no lesson was it considered unsatisfactory. The pattern is similar at Key Stage 4, except that progress was unsatisfactory in one lesson. Sixth formers usually progress well. The generally high level of progress arises from the purposeful working environment created by teachers. The whole ethos of the department is one of hard work by both pupils and teachers. The skilful matching of work to pupils' needs enables this good progress to be maintained. The shortage of lesson time at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form prevents progress from being even better. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and often receive well-focused support.
139. The pupils' response in class is good, overall; in only one lesson was it unsatisfactory, because a small number of pupils were discourteous and uncooperative. The standard of behaviour in the vast majority of lessons is very high and pupils come to class with an eagerness for learning. Pupils listen well, generally take a pride in their work and, in the main, co-operate sensibly with one another and with their teachers. Most are very courteous and polite. Many enjoy their work and respond very well to the abundant and appropriate praise bestowed upon them. Sixth formers work hard. Most are well organised and keep their folders of work tidy.
140. All teaching is at least satisfactory and more than four-fifths is good or even better. Many lessons have a wide range of appropriate tasks. Practical and investigational work are common features. Much teaching is innovative and is creative in its planning. For example, the "24 game" reinforces skills in mental arithmetic, and there are imaginative approaches to teaching negative numbers and solving equations. Teachers make good use of overhead projectors and other modes of display. One particularly successful lesson with very low attaining pupils in Year 11 benefited from the use of a large box of supermarket products and then a computer spreadsheet to bring the results together.
141. Teachers use praise liberally and appropriately and much of their marking is good. The targets set in lessons are clear. Pupils are nearly always handled sensitively, with effective discipline and very good relationships. Occasionally some teachers use imprecise mathematical language or are not firm enough with the very few uncooperative pupils. Lessons proceed at a good pace and often end with a good review of what has been learned.
142. The management of the subject is very effective. Documentation is of a high standard and schemes of work are very good. There is a positive team spirit amongst the staff. There is some monitoring of the teaching, but insufficient mutual observation. The requirements of the National Curriculum are met. The department has first-class accommodation, is adequately resourced and makes particularly effective use of these resources.

## Science

143. Overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is slightly above the national average. In 1998 the proportion of pupils achieving Level 5+ in National Curriculum tests in Year 9 was in line with the national average, overall, but the proportion gaining higher levels was below. The school's most recent performance in these tests is, however, in line with that of schools with a similar intake. Over the last three years there is little difference between boys' and girls' performance in the tests.
144. Pupils have a good grasp of the basic laws and concepts in science and use them well to gain new insights. The standard of investigations is high and matches pupils' knowledge and understanding in other aspects of the subject. Pupils have a clear idea of a fair test, understand the meaning of prediction and hypothesis and describe accurately the results of their investigations. High-attaining pupils explain physical and biological phenomena in terms of previously acquired concepts, which they can apply to new observations, as in the process of photosynthesis. Pupils of average attainment measure physical quantities accurately when investigating, for example, the composition of soil. Low-attaining pupils set up apparatus skilfully, but find concepts such as chemical combination difficult to understand.
145. At the end of Key Stage 4, overall attainment is slightly above the national average. In the 1998 GCSE double science examination the results were well above the national average at grades A\*-C. Although girls did better than boys at these grades, they did not perform as well as they might have done, when compared with girls' achievement in the subject nationally. Since only about two-thirds of the school's pupils are entered for this examination, however, a better comparison is with the total entry for science. In this case, the performance of pupils at grades A\*-C is still above the national average for science, overall and girls still do better than boys. Over the last three years the results in GCSE examinations have gradually improved; girls have improved most.
146. Investigational work is carefully presented at this key stage and shows a high standard of interpretation and evaluation. High-attaining pupils understand a wide range of scientific concepts which they associate with physical and biological phenomena, such as genetics and inheritance. Average pupils recall many facts and ideas, such as information about the nervous system, but are less sure of their application to new situations. Lower attainers find it difficult to derive a pattern from their investigations, such as in the chemical explanation of combustion.
147. In the sixth form, A-level results vary from being on a par with the national average, as in biology, to being slightly below, as in physics. Over the last three years, results have varied widely, partly owing to considerable differences in numbers taking the subjects. Pupils understand a wide range of concepts in all three sciences and explain them confidently. On the GNVQ courses, pupils have performed satisfactorily over the last four years and some have succeeded at the Advanced level.
148. Over Key Stage 3, pupils maintain steady progress. High-attaining pupils make good progress by readily acquiring fresh ideas and refining previous knowledge, such as about the flow of electricity, chemical reactivity and photosynthesis. Average and low-attaining pupils consolidate previous learning satisfactorily and gain new knowledge in their lessons, although they have difficulty in retaining this securely. Across the key stage, girls make slightly better progress than boys.
149. Over Key Stage 4, most pupils continue to progress satisfactorily. High-attaining pupils in particular meet the challenge of more demanding work on, for example, the structure of compounds and biological cycles. Average and low-attaining pupils persevere with their studies, but find understanding the advanced concepts more difficult than at the earlier stage. Girls progress better than boys and tend to produce more consistent results. Over both key stages, pupils with special educational needs progress well in small groups and receive careful teaching. In the sixth form, progress in the A-level courses is variable and some pupils do not fulfil their earlier potential. Progress is satisfactory, overall, but some pupils find the transition from GCSE double science too much for them.

150. In both key stages, pupils are interested in their work and many in Key Stage 3 are excited by the science they learn. Throughout most lessons pupils are diligent and concentrate closely on their studies. They are well behaved and conduct themselves sensibly in the laboratories, where they look after apparatus carefully. Pupils co-operate well with one another during practical sessions and, through discussion, show commitment to finding out ideas from experiments. When given the opportunity, pupils work on their own and produce thoughtful presentations. In the sixth form, the ethos of sustained study is maintained.
151. In both key stages, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory and often good (sometimes very good). It is very good in the sixth form. All lessons are well planned in detail usually with clear objectives for pupils to aim at. In most lessons, the level of work closely matches the ability of pupils, who are encouraged to think scientifically and draw conclusions. Teachers maintain pupils' interests by the use of a variety of methods (such as demonstrations and games) and by a wide range of equipment such as overhead projectors, video-recorders and computers. The discipline is relaxed and creates an atmosphere of mutual respect.
152. Teachers use time well. Lessons start punctually and there is little slackening of pace. Questioning is generally thorough and probing and tries to elicit what pupils really know. Some of these exchanges, however, are not sufficiently long or challenging. Homework is set regularly and follows the pattern of the lessons. Its marking is mostly detailed, with helpful comments, but it is sometimes superficial and does not help pupils to improve. Teaching in the sixth form is well prepared and intellectually challenging. Advanced concepts are carefully presented to pupils.
153. Work schemes are clearly produced. They not only conform to the National Curriculum, but also reflect work already covered at Key Stage 2. Links with most of the feeder schools are particularly close and children from these schools attend taster lessons throughout the year. This is much appreciated by teachers and pupils in primary schools. The assessment of pupils' work is thorough and their progress is carefully monitored by target- setting.
154. This large department is well led by an able management team. It has clear policies linked to those of the school and a departmental plan. Its achievable targets are not, however, always accurately costed. Work reviews are considered valuable by both teachers and technicians as a means of co-operative improvement in teaching and learning. Accommodation and resources, although worn, are sufficient for the present provision of the subject.

## 160. **OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES**

### **Art**

155. In 1996 and 1997, GCSE results were well below national averages for A\*-C grades, and slightly below in 1998. During the same period of time GCSE results have been consistently above national averages for A\*-G grades. The subject showed an under-performance at this level in 1996 and 1997, when compared with pupils' performance in most of their other subjects. During the last three years A-level results have varied from below to well above national averages for the higher A-B grades, whilst remaining constantly above average for A-E grades.
156. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average, overall. In Year 9 many pupils demonstrate above average skills in drawing, painting and three-dimensional studies and in their speaking and listening. Sketchbooks are well used for observational drawing and research purposes. Knowledge about cultures and artists and the application of that understanding to their own work is average. The highest attainment is in colour work, either in the individually produced still-life studies or in group work, where textured columns, for example, have been developed in the style of different artists.

157. In Year 7, pupils' attainment is above average, overall. The highest attainment is in the Aboriginal and African-inspired colour studies. Links with a school in Africa help pupils to understand the differences between the two cultures. In Year 8, pupils' attainment is average in graphic design and above average in such studies as the relief panels of fish which illustrate pupils' understanding of camouflage techniques in nature.
158. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment is average, overall. It is occasionally above average in such things as designs for cushions and waistcoats or decorative quilted panels, based on the work of the artist Lichtenstein, as well as in batik and ceramics. The supporting research is of a good standard. Below average attainment occurs where pupils have low levels of skill or do not fully appreciate the level of commitment necessary for work at this level. In Year 10, pupils produce above average studies of poppies, using emulsion paint and charcoal, after being inspired by the excellent work of an art student.
159. By the end of the sixth form, pupils' attainment is generally above average. Pupils demonstrate good oral skills in discussion and show independence of thought in following their chosen line of research. One pupil, for example, assembled a very impressive portfolio of photographic evidence after visiting the Lloyd's building in London. In Year 12, pupils have average skills in ceramics, but above average skill in producing large-scale relief panels, after the style of Matisse and Dufy.
160. Progress in Key Stage 3 is good (though occasionally satisfactory and sometimes very good) in the way pupils express themselves through painting, collage or clay, based on their work with sketchbooks or other forms of supporting material. The best progress occurs in groups where pupils have the opportunity to share ideas and support one another in reaching agreed goals, as, for example, in the large-scale panels for public display in Year 9. Good progress in graphics is considerably impeded by pupils having insufficient regular access to appropriate IT. Plans are in place for this deficiency to be remedied. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, are well supported by the display of key words and by the regular revision of new ideas and ways of working. Prompts such as time-lines are not, however, in use to help pupils to locate artists in their historical periods.
161. Progress in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory, although quite often good and occasionally very good. Pupils are well supported by the course requirements, the shared learning goals and the good resources (which include relevant videos). Self-assessment is used constructively to help pupils to evaluate their work and gain understanding of what they have to do to reach the appropriate level in GCSE. Teachers make good use of individual assessment interviews to highlight problems and to help pupils to focus on areas for improvement. Lower and middle attainers benefit from this tightly structured system. Potentially high attainers are, however, somewhat constrained and do not demonstrate sufficient originality to gain the highest grades.
162. Progress is very good in the sixth form for all pupils, because they are challenged by the topics offered to develop new skills, as well as to extend existing ones. Their knowledge and understanding are further developed through discussion, access to a range of slides, books and videos, and by visits to galleries. Whilst pupils can attend life-classes in their own time, this facility is not part of the school's provision, so limiting progress in understanding the human figure.
163. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are good, overall. The best response and behaviour are in Years 7, 9 and 10 and in the sixth form. Here pupils listen well and follow instructions diligently. The exceptions, in both key stages, are where pupils lack self-control, have low levels of concentration or engage in inappropriate behaviour, such as calling out or chewing gum in class.
164. The quality of teaching is good, overall, in both key stages and very good in the sixth form. Teachers' knowledge of the subject and their technical skills are good and they are committed to achieving high

standards. They currently succeed in raising the standards of middle and lower attainers rather than those of potentially high attainers. A recently appointed teacher has IT skills and is currently organising this aspect of the curriculum. All teachers are enthusiastic specialists and communicate that enthusiasm to their pupils. They work well as a team, have agreed teaching aims and methods and are well served by an efficient and knowledgeable technician. An unusual feature is the opportunity provided every second year for pupils at Key Stage 3 to visit Italy.

165. Statutory requirements are met. The head of department has a clear vision of how the subject should develop and recent experience of moderating external examinations. Schemes of work are good. Assessment, recording and reporting are well used to improve standards and to guide teachers' planning. The lack of a timetabled double period at Key Stage 4 limits pupils' progress in coursework.
166. Improvements since the last inspection include raised percentages of A\*-C grades at GCSE, improved assessment procedures and more opportunities for pupils to talk about art, to use IT and to learn independently. The dispersed nature of the accommodation and the lack of adequate safety precautions for the kilns remain unresolved.

### **Design and technology**

167. At the end of Key Stage 3 the attainment of the majority of pupils is about what would be expected for their age. Girls' results are ahead of boys', although by a narrower margin in 1998 than in 1997. By the end of Year 9, pupils confidently use an increasing range of techniques, methods of construction and materials, although they have insufficient knowledge and skills in systems and control. Research and design skills are well used, particularly in food and textiles. For example, when designing a hat of their choice, pupils in Year 9 work from plans they have produced and use a range of tools, materials and processes with reasonable accuracy. Higher attainers investigate well the properties of materials used to design and make products.
168. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils show about average competence in managing projects of increased complexity. The overall GCSE results in 1998 in the subject improved to near average, although results varied in different aspects of the subject. Results were average in food and in graphic products at GCSE in 1998, but below average in electronics and resistant materials. Results at GCSE are rising, broadly in line with the rising trend nationally, although boys' results have lagged consistently behind those of girls in recent years. A small number of pupils with special educational needs follow alternative vocational courses. Attainment in the sixth form is broadly average.
169. Pupils usually make satisfactory progress in both key stages and in the sixth form. Higher-attaining pupils learn to solve successfully more complex design tasks, as they move through the school. Pupils usually make good progress in food and in textiles, because tasks are carefully structured to suitably widen their experience. Pupils have insufficient teaching in systems and control and in resistant materials at Key Stage 3; this lowers their attainments and progress at Key Stage 4. At both key stages, pupils with special educational needs are well supported by adapted materials and make satisfactory progress.
170. Pupils' attitudes to learning are usually good at Key Stage 3 and are very good in the sixth form. They are generally satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Occasionally in lessons at this key stage, pupils work with little sense of urgency, because they are not clear about what is expected and rely too heavily on their teachers for direction. In most lessons they listen effectively and are willing to learn. They use tools and equipment safely and enjoy discussion about the work done.
171. Teaching is good (sometimes very good) at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. It is satisfactory, overall, but often good, at Key Stage 4. Teachers have a thorough understanding of their specialist subjects.

Teaching has improved since the last inspection by more sharply focused planning and assessment. The under-achievement of some pupils (especially boys) is, however, not analysed sufficiently. Occasionally, at Key Stage 4, teaching is ineffective because pupils are unsure about the standards expected and rely too heavily on teachers for direction.

172. The management of the subject has changed since the last inspection and the co-ordination of the subject is now less effective. This is mainly because there is no standardised approach to planning. Sometimes it is because inadequate account is taken of National Curriculum requirements or expected levels of working, especially at GCSE. Industrial and community links are good.
173. Teaching rooms are located in different parts of the school. This hinders effective teamwork and the efficient sharing of resources. Although the school has made some small improvements by providing, for example, some new work-benching in workshops, the overall adequacy of accommodation for the effective delivery of the subject is low. Deficiencies in accommodation were also highlighted at the time of the last inspection. The storage of gas cylinders in workshop areas is in breach of health and safety regulations. Technical support is good in work with resistant materials, but insufficient in food. The department has a good range of resources.

## **Geography**

174. Pupils' level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly average (though often slightly above), and in the sixth form is in line with course requirements. At the end of Key Stage 4 it is above what is typical nationally. At the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998, when teachers assessed pupils' work, girls achieved higher levels than boys overall.
175. In 1998 the GCSE results were above the national average. Girls achieved better grades than boys, overall, although both achieved similar grades at the highest levels. In 1996 and 1997, pupils performed relatively better in geography than in most of their other subjects. These results have shown a steady improvement over the last three years.
176. The GCE A-level results in 1998 were in line with the national norm and have improved steadily during the last four years, particularly at the highest levels. The standards of attainment are broadly similar to those at the previous inspection. The department analyses results rigorously and is undertaking a systematic, carefully planned programme to improve the level of attainment.
177. Pupils have an average knowledge of how landscapes are formed and what places are like. They have a good understanding of the impact of people on the environment and the different views people hold. One group of pupils in Year 10, for example, clearly understood differing viewpoints about the use of beautiful landscapes and were using this knowledge skilfully to discuss the issue of a road-widening scheme in a National Park. Pupils have a good knowledge of examples of the concepts they study. In the sixth form they apply their knowledge effectively to new examples. In one lesson, pupils in Year 12 correctly identified and discussed the formation of features of landscapes on slides shown by the teacher.
178. Pupils have sound skills in using maps and atlases. They are competent at collecting and recording information and data from textbooks and during fieldwork. Higher-attaining pupils structure lengthy pieces of work effectively, write fluently and make good use of geographical terms. Lower-attaining pupils have a sound basic knowledge of the subject, but lack depth of understanding. Their written answers are brief and often contain elementary spelling errors. All pupils have good numerical skills.
179. Pupils' progress is good, overall, and is very good at Key Stage 3. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils have made very good progress in extending their knowledge and understanding of the reasons for changes in

the environment and of what some places in the world are like. This progress is due to a well-structured variety of work which is clearly presented and to lessons which proceed at a good pace. Pupils in one lesson in Year 8, for example, made good progress in understanding the causes of acid rain through a variety of carefully structured activities; these included discussion in class, comparing photographs, sorting cards, testing partners and completing a diagram.

180. Pupils make good progress throughout the school in gaining knowledge of geographical terms through their skilfully planned introduction and consolidation throughout most lessons. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in gaining basic knowledge and skills owing to good support, a clear structure to the work set for them and a close match of tasks to their needs.
181. Pupils are very well motivated, interested and very positive in their attitudes to the subject. They are attentive, listen with understanding, and maintain their concentration and focus throughout lessons. When asked to work in pairs and groups, they co-operate effectively and listen to the views of others. Behaviour is very good and pupils work hard to produce their best work. They use equipment responsibly and maintain their books in good order. The presentation of work is good. The extended pieces of work displayed in classrooms show a high degree of commitment and pride in their work.
182. The overall quality of teaching is good (very good at Key Stage 3) and in two-fifths of lessons is very good. This represents a clear improvement since the last inspection. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject, explain things clearly and use good illustrations. Lessons are planned with a clear focus and are very carefully prepared and organised. Teachers make good use of all resources, as in one lesson where, at the beginning, the teacher took advantage of the prevailing weather conditions to revise pupils' knowledge of anticyclones before starting the planned, main topic.
183. A strength of the teaching is the variety of activities which are skilfully structured to ensure that pupils gain clear understanding and make progress. In one lesson in Year 9 about the use of energy in Japan, for example, the teacher clearly identified the aims of the lesson, briskly developed a series of exercises in which the pupils interpreted photographs, used a diagrammatic method to record and consolidate their ideas, developed a graphing technique to analyse data, discussed their findings in groups and concluded the lesson crisply with a review of the work.
184. Relationships in the classroom are very good. Teachers know pupils well and give positive encouragement and support to them. Expectations are high. Marking is of good quality and teachers regularly set pupils short-term targets for improvement.
185. The curriculum and the teaching scheme meet national requirements, but require standardisation across the key stages to indicate progression effectively. There is a good programme of fieldwork at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, but the programme for it is not coherent at Key Stage 3. The use of IT is limited by restricted access to up-to-date equipment. Procedures for the assessment of pupils' work and recording results are very good. They are used effectively to support the progress of individual pupils through target-setting.
186. The leadership of the team of hardworking and committed teachers is very good. Accommodation is generally good and is enhanced considerably by the efforts of staff and pupils to provide a tidy and stimulating environment with good displays of pupils' work. The quality of resources is good. The quantity of these has improved since the previous inspection, so that pupils no longer need to share textbooks.

## **History**

187. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' overall attainment is slightly above that expected nationally. The overall attainment of girls is well above that of boys. Teachers assessed their pupils as above the national average in 1997. In 1998 girls reached a similar standard, but boys' attainment was significantly lower than in 1997.
188. Pupils who take the GCSE examination at the end of Key Stage 4 reach standards which are close to the national average, an improvement since the last inspection. The percentage of pupils who achieved grades A\*-C between 1995 and 1997 was in line with the national average. In 1998 there was a significant decline in the attainment of both boys and girls, leading to results at grades A\*-C well below the national average. Teachers' lack of familiarity with a new examination syllabus was a contributory factor in this decline. The work of both boys and girls seen during the inspection was in line with that expected nationally. The attainment of pupils who take A-level is close to the typical national standard.
189. Pupils in Key Stage 3 see the causes and effects of past events well. Lower attainers use sources competently for information and to make deductions and higher attainers successfully evaluate the reliability of sources. Most pupils see that there may be different views of the past and higher attainers begin to explain why this may be so, as, for example, in work on the actions of Haig as a commander in World War 1. Many pupils produce written work of good quality.
190. Most pupils taking GCSE have a satisfactory knowledge of the basic content of the course and explain reasons for actions taken in the past, as, for example, in work on Stalin's policies in Russia. Higher-attaining pupils successfully evaluate sources, commenting on their usefulness for studying aspects of the past. Pupils taking A-level have good levels of knowledge and understanding about the past, see and explain the motives of individuals (for example, in work on the religious policies of Louis XIV) and confidently present the results of their research orally and in writing.
191. Most pupils in Key Stage 3 make good progress. They acquire good levels of knowledge and extend their understanding of and ability to use an appropriate range of sources for evidence. A lesson in which groups investigated different types of sources available for the study of trench life in World War 1 was especially effective in developing pupils' understanding of sources. Pupils with special educational needs generally make good progress in lessons and especially do so when work is closely matched to their needs and when support staff are available. Challenging work and often complex resources ensure that higher attainers usually make good progress.
192. The majority of pupils in Key Stage 4 make at least satisfactory progress. Those pupils who approach their work with commitment make good progress. Higher attainers often make good progress as a result of work which stretches them, as, for example, in a lesson in which pupils were asked to prioritise the most important reasons for the Cold War and justify their choice. For a small minority their progress is limited by their low levels of literacy. This hinders their ability to use sources effectively and leads to slow and often inadequate completion of written work. The mature approach of pupils taking A-level leads to satisfactory progress in their ability to research and present a view of history, orally and in writing.
193. The behaviour of the vast majority of pupils and their attitude to work are good. Most listen carefully to their teachers, show interest, and participate well in lessons. They work very co-operatively in groups and take opportunities to work independently seriously. They are polite and respectful to staff, other adults and one another.
194. The quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory and is good, overall, throughout the school. Teachers plan their work effectively, match work and resources appropriately to pupils' needs and expect pupils to work hard and behave well. Teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching methods, including good whole-class teaching. Group work is used very effectively to ensure the participation of all pupils in mixed-ability classes in Key Stage 3. The teaching of examination groups at GCSE and A-level is

thorough and pupils are prepared carefully for examinations. Teachers know their pupils well and set appropriate targets to help them to improve their work. Lessons are brisk and business-like in a friendly atmosphere.

195. Statutory requirements are met at Key Stage 3. Very good leadership can be seen in the monitoring of the curriculum and teaching, in the very good learning environment, in good provision for both pupils with special educational needs and for higher attainers and in the effective system of assessment and target-setting. Short-term planning is of good quality, but the lack of long-term planning is a weakness. There is a good range of appropriate textbooks for all levels of attainment. The department makes satisfactory use of newly installed IT hardware.

### **Information technology**

196. At the end of Key Stage 3, the attainment of the majority of pupils is above the standard expected for their age. Boys' results in the National Curriculum tests taken in Year 9 were below those for girls in 1997 and 1998, although by a narrower margin at the higher levels of attainment in 1998. By the end of Year 9, most pupils are very competent in handling information and data, using databases, spreadsheets and desktop publishing.
197. Pupils at this stage know that computers can be used to control other devices or to process data from sensors to measure light, heat or sound. Higher attainers work largely independently, for example, to design an information system for others to use, interpret and draw their conclusions in a substantial report and present it to a professional standard. Since the last inspection standards of attainment have significantly improved at Key Stage 3. This is largely because of improved resources, better structured teaching and a wider use of IT in other subjects.
198. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is average, overall, although sometimes higher. Pupils' above average attainment at Key Stage 3 is often depressed in Key Stage 4, because they have inadequate opportunities to utilise their skills in other subjects. Higher attainers work independently to select and use appropriate software to enhance their GCSE projects. In 1998, no pupils were entered for a GCSE course in IT. In 1996 and 1997 the GCSE results in information systems, taken by a small number of pupils (mainly boys), were above average. Results at A-level in information systems in 1998 were good.
199. Pupils usually make good progress at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory (sometimes better) progress in the sixth form. Progress is unsatisfactory, overall, in Key Stage 4. This is because, apart from a short course in IT in the PSE programme in Year 10 (and in Year 11 from September 1999), pupils' experience comes solely through other subjects. They usually make good progress in those courses with a recognised IT content, such as office studies taken by about a third of the pupils, although this is mainly in handling information and data. Pupils following GNVQ courses in the sixth form acquire the IT skills needed for the completion of "core skill" requirements.
200. Throughout the school, higher attainers enhance their knowledge, understanding and critical judgement in using IT where they have the opportunity to do so. Aspects of control, such as computer-aided design and manufacture, are weak. At both key stages, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory improvements in their English and in their standard of presentation of work. Higher attainers follow increasingly complex lines of enquiry and present their ideas in their preferred format.
201. Pupils behave well in lessons in all years. They are willing to learn, listen well, concentrate, follow instructions carefully and use equipment responsibly. Pupils work independently with good levels of confidence. This aspect has significantly improved since the last inspection, mainly because pupils have more opportunities to use IT in other subjects at Key Stage 3 and, increasingly, at home.

202. Staff in the taught lessons of IT are specialists in the subject and their teaching is usually good (often very good) in all years. Their lessons are very well planned and have clear aims and objectives which are carefully discussed with pupils. Assessment is well used and helps to promote high standards. Teachers use time and resources very efficiently and this contributes much to the good progress of pupils. Reporting to parents about IT now fully meets statutory requirements. These aspects have improved since the last inspection.
203. At both key stages teaching is usually at least satisfactory in those subjects which have a clear and well-planned IT content, as, for example, in mathematics, science, design and technology and in business studies. In other subjects, especially at Key Stage 4, however, pupils often have little opportunity to use IT appropriately.
204. Since the last inspection, the school has made good progress in developing IT across the curriculum at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, but IT provision at Key Stage 4 is generally weak. This is mainly because the school has had inadequate equipment and software for the subject, so lowering teachers' confidence to use IT in teaching. Effective co-ordination of IT has also been hindered by the scattered location of some teaching rooms. Improved resources are being efficiently managed and technical support is good. The school recognises that present provision at Key Stage 4 does not meet National Curriculum requirements and is planning carefully to make the necessary improvements.

### **Modern foreign languages**

205. In 1997 the percentage of pupils attaining grades A\*-C in GCSE examinations was above the national average in French, but below in Spanish. The average grade obtained by candidates was in line with the national average in French, but below in Spanish. Pupils did as well in French as in most other subjects, but much worse in Spanish than in other subjects. In 1998, when twice as many pupils were entered for GCSE in French and Spanish than had previously been the case, the proportion of pupils attaining grades A\*-C was well below average in both languages. In both years, the performance of girls was much better than that of boys. Teachers' assessments at Key Stage 3 indicate attainments slightly below the national average in 1997, but in line with it in 1998, with girls outperforming boys.
206. Results at A-level have been variable in the last two years and only a small number of pupils have taken the examination. The proportion of pupils passing A-level was below the national average in French in 1997, but in line in 1998. In Spanish the reverse was true. In 1997 the proportion of pupils gaining grades A or B was in line with the national average in Spanish, but no pupils attained these higher grades in 1998, or in either year in French.
207. Standards are broadly in line with the national average at the end of both key stages. They are rather better in listening, reading and speaking than they are in writing. By the end of Key Stage 3, higher-attaining pupils have little difficulty in understanding both written and spoken language and they respond confidently. They are beginning to write independently. Lower-attaining pupils mostly understand what they read and hear, with appropriate support from the teacher. They speak readily in response, when questions are carefully matched to their knowledge and skills, although in both speaking and writing their responses are brief.
208. By the end of Key Stage 4 higher-attaining pupils understand language from a variety of sources and express ideas and opinions over a range of topics in both spoken and written language. Lower-attaining pupils understand well and can usually answer questions orally, when carefully supported by the teacher, but their writing skills are weak both in the use of a range of vocabulary and in accuracy.
209. No evidence of attainment was available from Year 13, but teachers' records indicate average attainment.

The small number of pupils in Year 12 who are studying French and Spanish achieve high standards in all skills and are on target to attain very high grades by the end of the sixth form.

210. Most pupils make good progress in both key stages and in the sixth form. In around a third of the lessons seen pupils made very good progress. Girls generally make better progress than boys. In a class in Year 11, containing only lower-attaining boys, all made very good progress in their ability to express likes and dislikes and to justify their views, because the teacher's expectations were very high and pupils were made to work hard. In a few lessons, however, the overall progress was only just satisfactory, because teachers' expectations were not high enough and the pace of lessons was slow. Pupils with special educational needs progress well, because teachers are very aware of their needs and help them appropriately with their learning.
211. Pupils' attitudes to their work are mostly good. They work hard and co-operate well with each other in groups and pairs. They respond extremely well to the high standards expected of them in many lessons. In only one class was the pace of the lesson restricted by pupils' poor attitudes.
212. Teaching is predominantly good at both key stages and in the sixth form, but it varies from excellent to barely satisfactory. Around a third of the teaching observed was very good. For example, the very careful planning, the high expectations and the imaginative use of resources enabled a group of higher-attaining pupils in Year 11 to produce a range of appropriate and accurate phrases in Spanish to describe the scene of a road accident, whilst at the same time developing their understanding of verb forms.
213. In most lessons teachers speak almost totally in French or Spanish and expect pupils to use the foreign language in reply. In the best lessons teachers' expectations are high and are based on a good knowledge of pupils' attainments; planning is thorough and both teachers and pupils are clear about what is to be learned by the end of the lesson. In a small number of lessons too much English is used, the pace is slow and tasks are not well matched to the pupils' levels of knowledge and understanding. All pupils in a class in Year 7, for example, were asked to perform the same tasks, even though it was clearly too hard for some and too easy for others. In this class there was also too much use of English by the teacher.
214. All teachers are appropriately qualified and deployed and there is excellent support from a Curriculum Resource Assistant, who not only relieves teachers of administrative responsibilities, but also effectively supports learning in the classroom. The use of IT to support the learning of languages is sound. The department is very well managed. Good progress has been made in addressing the small number of weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report: many changes in both practice and resources have been introduced and there is a clear vision of how to develop language in the future. The department meets the statutory requirement to teach the National Curriculum programmes of study.

## **Music**

215. By the end of Key Stage 3, the attainment of pupils is above the national average. Pupils perform and compose to a good standard. They use tuned percussion instruments, recorders and their own orchestral instruments to play melodies and chords, for example, in a simple arrangement of Eine Kleine Nachtmusik. They read music satisfactorily, using staff notation and chord symbols and some pupils improvise their own phrases or melodies based on given themes (for example 'Tubular Bells'). Pupils learn about the major composers of the classical period and understand musical terminology such as triad, cadenza and concerto. The good standards attained at the last inspection have been maintained and slightly improved.
216. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is a little above the national average. On the basis of the 1997 and 1998 results together, over 65 per cent of pupils who entered the GCSE examinations gained grades A\*-C. The improvement of results after 1993, suggested in the last inspection report, has been maintained

and over the ensuing period there has been a trend of general improvement. Forty-one pupils are currently enrolled on the GCSE course in Years 10 and 11.

217. At Key Stage 4, pupils perform with confidence and on a fair range of instruments, including the voice. Repertoire for performance includes a good balance of music of all styles and periods. Pupils compose for piano or for small ensembles, usually in an accepted tonal idiom, for example, using expected melodic progressions and primary and secondary chords. Knowledge and use of the rudiments of the subject are always rooted in practice. Pupils have a good working knowledge of musical terms and features, as for example syncopation, polyphony and counterpoint. The last inspection report identified pupils' lack of facility on keyboards as a weakness. This has been addressed by an emphasis on acoustic instruments and singing, through which good, all-round musicianship is promoted.
218. A small number continue their musical studies into the sixth form. Attainment at this stage is broadly in line with the national average. Standards of attainment here are judged by the A-level syllabus and the relationship to Associated Board or equivalent grades. In the last three years, A-level results have been variable and no A-C grades were achieved in 1996 and 1997. In 1998, however, three out of six pupils achieved these grades.
219. Pupils in the sixth form perform at approximately Grade VII/VIII level and compose with a fair level of confidence. The strong emphasis which is placed on technical competence is reflected in their work. Written assignments are done competently. In the music technology option pupils use the computer and multi-track recording studio well to sequence music and to record and mix both acoustic and electronic tracks. Challenging dictation tasks ensure that pupils recognise and correctly name intervals, cadences and harmonies.
220. Progress in Key Stage 3 is good. Pupils enter Year 7 with broadly average musical attainments. In their early lessons a good foundation is laid in learning aspects of time and tune, playing simple melodies and phrases, and in holding a part. Good emphasis is placed on singing, not only for performance but also as a means of learning notation and musical forms. In Year 8, pupils work on Latin American rhythms particularly to consolidate co-ordination and develop an understanding of this element. By the end of the key stage, they acquire a sufficient level of skill in performance and composition, as well as sufficient knowledge and understanding of music, to begin the GCSE course.
221. In Key Stage 4, pupils make good progress. They are not screened for entry to the examination course and in consequence some candidates need additional tuition, especially in reading music and in the more academic elements of the work. All pupils consolidate and build on their skills in performance. The department organises a regular programme of performances in school to help pupils to develop confidence before an audience. Some pupils progress very well in composition, which they produce with the aid of computer-sequencing and software which produces notation. Overall, progress in the listening element of the course is satisfactory.
222. In the sixth form the challenging A-level work requires pupils to practise hard on their main instrument both for solo and ensemble playing. The provision of various ensembles enables pupils to make satisfactory progress at this level. They also make satisfactory progress in the other elements of the coursework. Aural work and analysis reinforce their understanding of musical structures, harmonic devices and identification of features such as imitation, counterpoint and fugue.
223. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good at all stages. They listen carefully in lessons and almost all of them take an intelligent and serious interest in the lesson material. Every lesson includes practical work in pairs and groups, in which pupils cooperate very well. They concentrate well in both their practical work and during the whole-class expositions.
224. Behaviour is very good. Pupils are punctual for lessons and wait quietly outside the classroom, if

required to do so. They are polite and respectful to one another and talk to staff and visitors in a mature and interesting manner. Equipment is treated with due care and instruments are put away tidily. Those who receive individual lessons or participate in extra-curricular activities attend with a good level of commitment. All pupils who play and sing in the ensembles show good discipline in the rehearsals and performances.

225. Teaching throughout the department is consistently good. Teachers adopt not only common curricular content, but also similar methods of working. For example, they often use the technique of "silent practice" as a preparation for performance. They know the subject well and all have good skills which they use to model performances for pupils. All staff accompany and use the keyboard well as a teaching aid. Long-term planning is very good and lessons are almost always well prepared, organised and managed. Teachers devote extra time to pupils who have particular needs. Those with special educational needs are well identified and taught.
226. Assessment of pupils' work in progress is good and appropriate feedback is given to them. Teachers frequently identify particular aspects of work which need more attention and give clear targets for improvement. Visiting instrumental teachers, who cover all the main orchestral instruments, make a good contribution to the work of the department.
227. The department is well managed. Staff, resources and accommodation are all used efficiently. Some class sizes are too large. At Key Stage 3 the available classroom only barely accommodates 30 pupils and at Key Stage 4 one large year group (24) puts great strain on the resources available. The department has no large space for orchestral rehearsals in class time. Approximately 120 pupils take part in a wide range of ensembles, which meet at lunchtimes and after school. The department is involved in regular musical productions. Pupils often play music in assemblies and on other occasions in school and in the community. A highlight of recent activity was a visit to Venice, where pupils performed in some of the major churches.

### **Physical education**

228. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is largely average. A significant minority of pupils, especially those who participate regularly in extra-curricular activities, attain above average standards in games. Most pupils have sound basic skills in a range of games and use them effectively in appropriately adapted games. A smaller minority (mainly girls) attain above average standards in gymnastics and dance. They perform their sequences with fluency, control and precision. Boys attain mainly average standards and move less fluently than girls. Both boys and girls plan their work well and are good at evaluating the quality of sequences performed by their peers.
229. At the end of Key Stage 4, a substantial minority of pupils play at least one major competitive game to a standard beyond that expected nationally. The highest standards are attained by boys in rugby lessons and by girls in netball lessons. Many perform to a good standard and have a good knowledge and understanding of more advanced techniques and tactics. Standards in badminton, dance and aerobics are broadly in line with those expected nationally.
230. Most pupils taking the short GCSE course attain at least average and often good standards. The limited time available for practical work, however, restricts the attainment of these pupils. A significant minority of lower-attaining pupils find the theory of the subject difficult and their knowledge and understanding are below average. Pupils who have chosen to take the subject at GCE A-level attain average standards, overall. They have a good grasp of the scientific aspects of the course. Their attainment in the sociological and historical aspects is less secure, but broadly average. From the limited evidence available, standards at both key stages are similar to those attained at the last inspection.

231. Most pupils at Key Stage 3, including those with special educational needs, make at least satisfactory progress in lessons and many make good progress. Boys make largely good progress in games. In a hockey lesson for boys in Year 8, for example, demanding teaching ensured that pupils improved greatly their dribbling skills. Similar, very good teaching in a dance lesson for pupils in Year 8 enabled girls and boys to learn a new dance and improve the quality of their performance. Progress in gymnastics is largely satisfactory, but is slower than it should be because pupils spend too much time planning and evaluating their work at the expense of much needed time for practice. The regular withdrawal of gymnasia for examinations also restricts opportunities for pupils to improve.
232. At Key Stage 4, the vast majority of pupils make good progress in nearly all lessons and over longer periods. Boys taking the GCSE course make especially good progress in rugby. In one lesson they much improved their scrummaging technique and furthered their understanding of safe practice. Many girls make good progress in aerobics lessons where they improve their techniques and their knowledge of the effects of exercise on their bodies. Pupils taking examination courses make broadly good progress, especially in the scientific areas, where they benefit from enthusiastic and innovative teaching. Progress in the sixth form is good.
233. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. In nearly all lessons at both key stages and in the sixth form pupils work with much enthusiasm and sustained commitment. They are keen to improve and normally make optimum use of the time available to practise and refine their skills. They work well together in groups and teams. In competitive situations they are positive and abide by rules. Pupils respond well to instructions and observe demonstrations carefully. Pupils in the sixth form have a very high level of commitment and several regularly attend lessons at Key Stage 3 where the teachers help them to appreciate how younger pupils learn and improve their skills. The high participation rate in lessons is indicative of the pupils' desire to learn. Standards of dress for practical lessons are high.
234. Teachers usually expect pupils to work hard and attain high standards. Teaching is good in about half the lessons and very good in about a quarter. The quality of teaching differs little between the two key stages. In the sixth form it is good and sometimes very good. Teaching is never less than satisfactory. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject, prepare their lessons in much detail and conduct them at an appropriate pace. Pupils benefit from practices that are both appropriate and progressive and that usually enable them to make progress, whatever their prior attainment. Occasionally, especially in gymnastics lessons, teachers expect too little. Pupils taking the GCE A-level course are challenged by good teaching that keeps them fully involved throughout lessons.
235. Pupils are nearly always taught in mixed-ability groups. Too little use is made of grouping by prior attainment. This sometimes results in higher-attaining pupils being insufficiently challenged. Teachers set appropriate homework and keep pupils on examination courses aware of their attainments and progress. The recording of attainment for other pupils has only just begun and consequently little use has been made of assessment data to help pupils to make maximum progress. Reports vary in their usefulness to parents. At best, they provide excellent information of what pupils know, understand and can do. In others, however, there is too much comment on pupils' attitudes and effort at the expense of attainment and progress. Teaching is of a similar standard to that reported at the last inspection.
236. The curriculum has appropriate breadth and meets statutory requirements. The combination of the minimal time allocated for the subject and the short, fifty-minute lessons inhibits progress in outdoor games, especially for pupils taking the GCSE course. These pupils do participate in the full range of the practical work enjoyed by the majority of pupils. Schemes of work are good and detailed. The department is well led by an experienced teacher who sets high standards for herself and others. Two newly qualified teachers have received excellent help and good opportunities to extend their knowledge. Arrangements for the professional development of subject specialists are very good and good progress has been made in monitoring the quality of teaching.

237. Indoor facilities are largely satisfactory, but their considerable use for examinations adversely affects pupils' attainment and progress. The extensive playing fields are well used. The surfaces of the tennis courts are unsatisfactory and are a risk to pupils' safety. The money allocated for the subject, including the Challenge Funding that has been achieved, is well spent on necessary equipment and other relevant activities. About a third (over 650) of the pupils participate regularly in one or more of a good range of extra-curricular activities that significantly enhance their skills and their personal and social development. Twelve members of staff, including all specialists, give up much time to coach, supervise and officiate at these activities.

243. **Religious education**

238. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The overall standard of attainment at the end of both key stages and in the sixth form is above what is usually found and meets well what is expected by the local Agreed Syllabus.

239. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is above average and higher-attaining pupils' work is well above. From Year 7 onwards pupils are able to put forward arguments for and against beliefs. When studying Christianity, they learn much about the Bible and the life of Jesus, the reasons behind Christian ceremonies such as weddings and funerals and know about festivals such as Holy Week and Easter. Their understanding of Christianity is promoted through clear teaching, as, for example, on the difference between a miracle, chance and luck. Their understanding of Judaism, Sikhism and Hinduism is good. By the end of the key stage pupils are able to compare well religious with secular values and those in the media.

240. At Key Stage 4 the number of pupils obtaining grades A\*-C (four-fifths of the entry in 1998) has been constantly improving over the last three years. The standard of work in class is above average, overall, particularly in coursework (where standards are sometimes very high). Pupils have average understanding of religious experience and the reasons for belief. They research soundly from a variety of texts, make notes and report back to the class on topics such as the importance of pilgrimage. Pupils with special educational needs in "setted" classes put forward their own views with confidence. In mixed-ability classes, they are well supported with appropriate worksheets which encourage them to show their knowledge. Pupils taking the short GCSE course give lively presentations to inform other pupils about the main religions of the worlds. In 1996 and 1997 pupils did better at GCSE in RE than in many other subjects.

241. A-level results have improved over the last two years and all pupils passed in 1998. Standards in the sixth form are generally above average, but range from well above average to below average. Pupils identify and explain well issues fundamental to religious traditions. They demonstrate in their writing the different ways religion is reflected in experience, belief, practice and religious writings. Higher attainers make good use of quotations from their research on, for example, Islamic theologians. In their study of ethics pupils discuss well, for example, the relationships between religion and morality, philosophy and religious thought.

242. Pupils make very good progress in both key stages and in the sixth form. One of the main reasons for this is the pace at which lessons are conducted and the time limits given to pupils to complete tasks within lessons. In Key Stage 3, progress is particularly good, because very good use is made of imaginative homework to link a series of lessons on the same topic and of discussions with partners about their own beliefs, based on the knowledge they have gained in lessons. In Key Stage 4, pupils make very good progress in their knowledge of moral teaching and beliefs, because of the rigorous teaching they receive and the many opportunities provided for research and presentations. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory and sometimes good progress, particularly when reading aloud to the class and supported by the teacher.

243. Pupils make very good progress in class in the sixth form in analysing information and applying what they learn, partly because teachers constantly question, explain and enlarge on what pupils already know. Pupils learn to hypothesise, develop an argument and solve problems. They sometimes make unsatisfactory progress, however, from GCSE to the A-level examination. This is partly because pupils (especially boys) tend to gain higher marks in coursework than in the examination itself and partly because they do not write in enough detail and depth, especially on philosophical questions.
244. The response of pupils is very good, overall. It is usually so in Key Stage 3, where pupils are very attentive and are keen to ask, as well as answer, questions. Most pupils are mature and need very little direction when changing from class to group activities. Pupils are respectful when, for example, they discuss and try on artefacts. They work well at written evaluations of their work and are very willing to attempt answers. Some pupils in Key Stage 4, however, are reticent and leave the answering of questions to those of higher attainment. Very occasionally, pupils in Year 7 show a lack of respect and time is then wasted establishing good discipline. Pupils in the sixth form are thoughtful, work hard and quickly and sustain their concentration.
245. The quality of teaching in both key stages is very, good overall. Teachers are well qualified and have secure knowledge of the subject. Throughout the school the subject is taught rigorously and with a wide variety of appropriate techniques, such as writing stories, conversations or plays. Work is marked very conscientiously and comments are encouraging, diagnostic and helpful. Time is very seldom wasted on unnecessary tasks, a weakness identified in the last inspection. A very wide range of ways is used to record pupils' work. The work set is coherent, following clearly the scheme of work and provides a good degree of challenge. Imaginative tasks are set for homework in accordance with the homework timetable.
246. The quality of teaching in the sixth form ranges from good to excellent and is very good, overall. Teachers research subjects thoroughly and keep up to date with current affairs. Time is used very effectively to develop pupils' views. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and sustain high standards by thorough questioning and constant repetition of technical language. Occasionally, not enough is done to enable pupils who are less confident to articulate their thoughts.
247. The subject is strongly led by a new head of department. The department has a wide range of books, posters, videos and artefacts, but insufficient textbooks and library books for the number of pupils now studying the subject. A satisfactory scheme of work is in line with the local Agreed Syllabus, but is being updated to give greater detail and structure. The departmental handbook is well prepared and the teachers work exceptionally well as a team. Classrooms are lively places at lunchtimes for pupils to meet socially, to work or to seek help from one another and teachers. Pupils visit a variety of places of worship. The subject has a high profile in the school. The requirements of the Agreed Syllabus are met.

### **Business studies and economics**

248. Both attainment in these subjects at Key Stage 4 and the number of pupils taking the GCSE examinations have fluctuated over the last three years. Recent performance has been a little above the national average. At A-level, attainment (on small numbers) was above the national average in 1998. Attainment, overall, on GNVQ courses at Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced levels is a little above national averages. All work at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is of at least an average standard. A new GCSE syllabus in information studies is being offered in business education and the first external measure of attainment in this subject will be in the Summer of 1999.
249. Pupils make at least satisfactory progress and complete their work conscientiously. The best written work is detailed, clearly presented and often word processed. Discussions and oral presentations are performed with enthusiasm and, in some cases, at an above average level. An A-level economics group,

for example, explored issues on market structures in depth, drawing not only on previous work in the subject but also on related work in another subject. A small number of groups, however, do not extend their discussions beyond limited, though in the main accurate answers to direct questions.

250. Pupils settle quickly to work, plan the productive use of their time and keep to deadlines. A group in Year 11 anticipated the requirements of their project by writing thank-you letters following a visit and by beginning to record their findings on computer before their next lesson. Relationships in class are excellent and pupils support one another's work well.
251. Teaching is always at least broadly satisfactory and often good. Pupils are encouraged to work at an appropriate standard for their courses by teachers who have good knowledge of the subject, provide constructive support, set challenging targets and provide firm leadership in clearly constructed lessons. Oral and written feedback to pupils on GCSE, A-level and GNVQ courses is, in the main, full and explicit. In a significant minority of examples, however, written feedback from teachers was minimal and spelling was uncorrected.
252. The management and organisation of the courses are, on the whole, sound. There is a coordinator for GNVQ courses who is supported by assistants at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In the sixth form, staff from five departments (some, however, contributing only one or two lessons per week) teach the courses provided at Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced levels. The complexity of managing this work is increased by the use of two awarding bodies. Staff in general, however, show a thorough awareness of GNVQ requirements and systems. Business education and economics are systematically organised, partly through frequent informal staff contact, as well as by formal meetings.
253. At Key Stage 4, provision in business education, in health and social care and in leisure and tourism at the Foundation level of GNVQ is specifically for a group of pupils which the school judges, on the basis of prior performance, will benefit from an alternative curriculum. In the sixth form, routes of progression from Key Stage 4 exist in business education, health and leisure, but GNVQ science is offered only at Advanced level. The school has responded well to a key issue in the previous inspection report by using appropriate teaching methods to increase the amount of independence in pupils' learning.
254. Most staff are well qualified and experienced to teach vocational courses. Many have achieved the National Vocational Qualifications to enable them to assess and verify GNVQ work and some have industrial or commercial experience. There are, however, no recent examples of staff undertaking placements in industry to increase and update their range of expertise. The two designated rooms for GNVQ are small and poorly equipped. Accommodation and learning resources in other specialist rooms used by business education, economics and GNVQ pupils are satisfactory.

260. **PART C: INSPECTION DATA**

260. **SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

**Time spent observing lessons during the inspection**

260. KEY STAGE		3	4	6	TOTAL
lessons seen	137	112	52		301
hours	105	62	31		198

255. The team of 16 inspectors visited the school for a combined total of 66 days. During the week of the inspection the team observed 301 whole lessons or parts of lessons, many morning registration and form-tutor sessions, all assemblies and a range of extra-curricular activities.

256. All full-time teachers at school during the inspection, including the headteacher were seen teaching, nearly all more than once. Virtually all part-time teaching was inspected. One hundred and fifteen planned discussions and feedbacks were held with governors, the headteacher, the senior management team, all heads of departments and other staff responsible for particular policies or aspects of the school's work. Inspectors had 15 further discussions with a wide range of non-teaching and support staff, including staff from the local authority. The headteacher of a contributory primary school was also interviewed. Inspectors offered personal feedback on teaching performance to all teachers and most accepted the offer.

257. Inspectors looked in depth at all the work of a representative sample of 19 pupils (three drawn from each of Years 7 to 11 and four from the sixth form) and of the work of pupils with statements of special educational need. Planned, formal discussions were held with these pupils and informal discussions took place with many more.

258. Much documentation, provided by the school about all aspects of its work, was analysed by the team in detail before and during the inspection. Three meetings were held at the school before the inspection - with the teaching staff, with the governing body and with 22 parents at a specially arranged meeting. The team considered responses from 711 parents to a questionnaire about their opinions of the school. The Registered Inspector reported back after the inspection to the headteacher (both orally and in writing) and to the governing body.

## 265. DATA AND INDICATORS

### 265. Pupil data

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 – Y13	1886	30	251	178

### 265. Teachers and classes

#### 265. Qualified teachers (Y7 - Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	107.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher:	17.6

#### 265. Education support staff (Y7 – Y13)

Total number of education support staff:	20
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	466

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes: 80.5

Average teaching group size:	KS3	25
	KS4	21

### 265. Financial data

Financial year: 1997/1998

	£
Total Income	3,646,709
Total Expenditure	3,694,065
Expenditure per pupil	2,027
Balance brought forward from previous year	55,235
Balance carried forward to next year	7,879

265. **PARENTAL SURVEY**

Number of questionnaires sent out: 1630  
 Number of questionnaires returned: 711

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school	17	67	9	6	1
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	32	59	6	2	1
The school handles complaints from parents well	22	57	19	1	1
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	19	62	10	8	1
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	22	63	10	5	0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	30	65	4	1	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	23	65	6	5	1
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	18	70	5	5	2
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	17	65	16	2	0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	23	61	12	3	1
My child(ren) like(s) school	27	47	19	6	1

265. **Other issues raised by parents**

There were additional comments from parents on 62 of the 711 questionnaires returned.

Amongst the positive points mentioned were:

- satisfaction with the attainments and progress of their children;
- the school's approachability;
- the effective and caring way in which problems are usually handled; and
- the wide range of extra-curricular activities available at the school.

Amongst the concerns expressed in some questionnaires were:

- Too much - and sometimes too little - homework; and
- insufficient information in advance about what is taught.