

INSPECTION REPORT

**St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More
Roman Catholic High School**
Colne

LEA area: Lancashire

Unique Reference Number: 119785

Headteacher: Mr. P. Donnelly

Reporting inspector: Mr. Ross Maden
T11520

Dates of inspection: 5th – 8th October 1998

Under OFSTED contract number: 700989

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:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Name of chair of governors:	Mr. David Carlile
Date of previous inspection:	October 1993

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Brian Hitchins	Geography	Assessment Key Stage 4 courses
Alan Holland	Mathematics	Staffing
Don Innes	English Drama Special educational needs	
David Sharpe	History	Attitudes, behaviour and personal development Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- Attainment at the end of both key stages which is well above that of schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds
- Very good leadership within the school
- Consistently good teaching setting high standards for pupils
- Very good relationships within the school supported by good pastoral care
- Most pupils are very well behaved and have very positive attitudes to work

Where the school has weaknesses

- I. The use of information technology by some subjects to support learning
- II. The standards of attainment and quality of education in design and technology
- III. The use of the library to support teaching and learning
- IV. The size of some teaching groups restricts the variety of teaching methods
- V. The timing of the school day results in a late start to many lessons

Overall the school has many more strengths than weaknesses. The governors' action plan will 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 responded well to the 1993 inspection report. Attendance has improved since the last inspection and, whilst the number of temporary exclusions has risen, the number of permanent exclusions has dropped since 1993. There has been an improvement in examination results with the proportion gaining 5 grades A*-C increasing from 45.8 per cent in 1993 to 52 per cent in 1998. The number of pupils on roll has increased from 636 to 689. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection with 85 per cent of lessons in 1993 judged satisfactory or better compared with 96 per cent in 1998. Monitoring of pupils' performance has improved over this period which has contributed to raising standards. All of the key issues in the last inspection report have been effectively tackled. Although many weaknesses identified within subject reports have been overcome there are still some which remain to be dealt with. The school sets ambitious targets for GCSE and in 1998 exceeded its target for the number of pupils gaining five grades A*-C by 4 per cent. The school has a realistic number of priorities in its development plan and is well placed to sustain its development. The high quality of leadership within the school provides clear insights of what needs to be done for the school to improve.

Standards in subjects

The following table shows standards achieved by 14 and 16 year olds in national tests and GCSE examinations in 1997:

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools	
			<i>well above average</i> A
Key Stage 3 test	B	A	
GCSE examinations	B	A	

The table does not reflect the increase in the school's GCSE successes in 1998 nor the significant increase in the proportion of pupils reaching level 5 and above or level 6 and above in English in the 1998 National Curriculum assessments at the end of Key Stage 3.

In 1997 GCSE results were significantly above the national averages for English literature, double award science and physical education. Only in art, single award science and geography were results below. On leaving school two-thirds of pupils remain in full-time education.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	English, mathematics, art, drama, modern foreign languages, music, physical education	Design and technology, geography, history
Years 10-11	Good	English, science, art, drama, information technology	Design and technology, geography, history
English	Good		
Mathematics	Good		

The quality of teaching is satisfactory or better in 96 per cent of lessons across the age range. Teaching is good in 42 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in a further 23 per cent. The proportion of teaching which is good or very good is one of the school's major strengths. Most year groups receive similar proportions of good and very good teaching, but teaching of this quality occurs less frequently in Year 7 lessons where teachers are still working to establish the very good attitudes to learning which exist in the rest of the school.

Good lessons are found in all subjects. The only subject with a significant proportion of unsatisfactory teaching is design and technology where work is sometimes not sufficiently challenging.

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	The behaviour of most pupils in lessons and around the school is very good.
Attendance	Attendance is good and most pupils arrive in school on time.
Ethos*	It is a warm and welcoming school. The excellent relationships and positive attitudes to work combine with a strong commitment to achieving high standards.
Leadership and management	Strong, clear leadership is provided by the governors, headteacher and senior management team. Most curriculum and pastoral leadership is very good.
Curriculum	The school has a broad and balanced curriculum with a very good range of extra-curricular activities. Not all subjects are using information technology to support learning.
Pupils with special educational needs	The school makes good provision and enables these pupils to make good progress.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	The school makes very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development and good provision for cultural development.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Sufficient, well qualified and dedicated teaching and non-teaching staff. Sufficient accommodation but some rooms are too small for the size of teaching groups. Resources are adequate with the exception of the library and resources for information technology.
Value for money	The school provides very 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	What some parents are not happy about
VI. The range of extra-curricular activities. VII. The behaviour of pupils in the school. VIII. Parents are encouraged to support the work of the school. IX. Information about the progress children are making and about the work expected from pupils. X. The positive values and attitudes in the school and good standards of work achieved by pupils.	amount of home

The great majority of parents are very satisfied with, and appreciative of, the quality of education the school provides for their children. A few parents commented that there is too much homework and others that there is too little. Pupils in Year 8 feel that they get too much homework but representatives of other year groups express satisfaction with the homework they receive. The inspectors' judgement indicates that the school does make regular and very effective use of homework to support and extend pupils' learning. Many of the tasks set for homework are particularly imaginative and interesting for pupils.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

In order to raise educational standards and improve the quality of education the governors, headteacher and senior management should:

- ◆ increase the rate of progress and raise attainment in design and technology by improving the quality of teaching at both key stages; (Paragraphs 8, 10, 26, 122-130)
- ◆ extend the access to information technology resources to enable English, mathematics, geography, history, modern foreign languages and the arrangements for pupils with special education needs to improve the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects by the planned use of information technology; (Paragraphs 11, 29, 37, 71, 81, 101, 107, 137, 141, 147, 154, 161)
- ◆ develop the library to provide improved access for pupils and expand the range of resources to enable all teachers to use the library to support teaching and learning. (Paragraphs 35, 81, 140, 145, 176)
- ◆ reconsider the start times for some lessons to ensure teaching time is not lost; (Paragraphs 23, 29, 74, 100, 105, 138)
- ◆ ensure the size of teaching groups, especially for higher attaining pupils, does not restrict the variety of teaching methods; (Paragraphs 12, 28, 38, 78, 139, 161, 168)

The school has very few weaknesses overall and a significant number of strengths. In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan. These are indicated in paragraphs: 11, 16, 42, 67, 68, 82, 134, 137, 143, 146, 162, 176

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

1. St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More School is a mixed 11-16 Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided comprehensive school. The school has 689 pupils, (338 boys and 351 girls). Ninety six pupils are eligible for free school meals and this proportion is broadly in line with the national average. There are 90 pupils on the school's register for special educational needs and 15 pupils have Statements of Special Educational Need which is in line with national figures for a school of this size. The majority of pupils are white reflecting the cultural composition of the local community. The school is popular with parents and over-subscribed.

2. Most pupils come from the immediate locality in Nelson, Colne, Brierfield, Barnoldswick, Earby and the outlying villages of Pendle. This is an area which has an above average number of children living in overcrowded households and below average number of children living in high social class households. The pupils represent the whole ability range and their attainments on entry are on average just below the national average. The school was last inspected in October 1993 since when the number of pupils has increased by 53 pupils.

3. The school's mission statement stresses a commitment to ensuring all pupils achieve their potential in a positive environment. The school's priorities for 1998/99 are to:

- improve the standards of teaching and learning;
- improve the whole school process for monitoring and evaluation;
- improve assessment procedures;
- improve the spiritual life of the school;
- achieve Investors in People status;
- improve access and achievement in information technology.

Key Indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3

1

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1998	60	57	117

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	49	45	45
	Girls	49	35	30
	Total	98	80	75
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	83 (60)	69 (71)	64 (58)
	National	N/A (56)	N/A (60)	N/A (60)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	55 (30)	45 (49)	32 (24)
	National	N/A (23)	N/A (37)	N/A (29)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	48	50	47
	Girls	51	38	41
	Total	99	88	88
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	85 (76)	77 (78)	64 (61)
	National	N/A (59)	N/A (63)	N/A (61)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	61 (44)	51 (58)	37 (24)
	National	N/A (28)	N/A (37)	N/A (29)

Attainment at Key Stage 4¹

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1998	57	72	129

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	26	57	57
	Girls	41	71	71
	Total	67	128	128
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	52 (48)	99 (93)	99 (98)
	National	N/A (43.3)	N/A (88.5)	N/A (94)

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year:

		%
Authorised Absence	School	7
	National comparative data	8
Unauthorised Absence	School	0.1
	National comparative data	1

Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year:

	Number
Fixed period	41
Permanent	2

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:

	%
Very good or better	23
Satisfactory or better	96
Less than satisfactory	4

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

2. In 1997, based on external examinations and testing, the overall standards achieved by pupils at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 are above those expected nationally. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school, indicated by the National Foundation for Educational Research testing in Year 7, is just below the national average. When the Key Stage 3 results and GCSE results are compared with the pattern of attainment on entry it is clear that pupils make good progress as they move through both key stages.

3. In the 1997 National Curriculum assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 and above and level 6 and above was above national averages in English and mathematics and average for science. These assessment results are well above the average for schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. Provisional results for 1998 indicate continued improvement and in English there has been a significant increase in the proportion of pupils reaching level 5 or above and level 6 and above.

4. In 1997 the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C was in line with national figures and achieving five or more grades A*-G was above the national averages. These results are well above the average for schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. In 1997 the average GCSE points score was above the national average and over the period 1994 to 1997 it has generally been above the average. The average GCSE points score has remained constant over this period while the national average has risen. Over the same period, girls' results were in line with the national figures and boys' were well above the national figures. Preliminary analysis of the 1998 GCSE results shows an improvement with 52 per cent of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C compared with 48 per cent in 1997.

5. Based on analysis of the 1997 results for individual subjects the performance of pupils gaining grades A*-C was above the national average in many subjects. The proportion was significantly above average in English literature, double award science, statistics and physical education. The only subjects in which results were below average were art, single award science and geography. Preliminary analysis of the 1998 results indicates that English language and literature, double award science, art, business studies, French, Spanish and physical education were above the provisional national averages with results in food technology, information technology, single award science and technology being significantly below provisional national averages.

6. In 1997 pupils achieved significantly better results in English language and literature, drama and physical education than they did on average in other subjects in which they were examined. However, their results in geography and information systems were below the average achieved by the same pupils in other subjects.

7. Standards of attainment from lesson observation and scrutiny of pupils' work during the inspection indicate that at the end of Key Stage 3 standards are better than expected nationally for pupils aged 14 in English, mathematics, art, drama and physical education. Standards match those expected for pupils aged 14 in all other subjects except in design and technology where standards of attainment are below expectations. In particular, standards of theory work in design and technology are weak at both key stages. At Key Stage 4 standards are better than expected nationally in English, mathematics, art, drama, French, music and physical education. In all other subjects standards are in line with those expected for pupils aged 16 except in geography and design and technology where attainment is below expectations.

8. At Key Stage 3 pupils make good progress in all subjects except for history, information technology and geography where progress is satisfactory and design and technology where progress is unsatisfactory. In geography, pupils' understanding is weak; in history pupils do not have the skills to evaluate source materials and in design and technology pupils make poor progress in the theory parts of the work. These weaknesses are evident at both key stages. At Key Stage 4 pupils make good progress in all subjects except for information technology, geography and history where progress is satisfactory and design and technology where progress is unsatisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, in relation to their prior attainment, in most subjects at both key stages which is reflected by the very high proportion of pupils leaving the school with five or more grades A*-G at GCSE. However their progress is only satisfactory in history and unsatisfactory in design and technology. In lower attaining science sets pupils often find it difficult to recall the detail of what they have learnt and in design and technology pupils need more effective support in order to make progress.

9. Generally pupils make good progress because they listen carefully, they are well motivated and respond enthusiastically to good teaching. Progress is restricted when the full range of teaching and learning strategies cannot be used in some very large teaching groups. Pupils' progress is restricted by the lack of access to information technology resources for English, mathematics, geography, history, modern foreign languages and special educational needs.

10. The school sets ambitious targets for performance in examinations. In 1998 the school exceeded its target for the number of pupils gaining five grades A*-C by 4 per cent. For 1999 the school has set challenging targets for the proportion of pupils gaining five grades A*-C, five grades A*-G and the average points score, along with targets for attendance. The school performs well in comparison with other Lancashire schools based on the Local Education Authority's detailed research.

11. From average levels at entry, based on their performance in Key Stage 2 tests, pupils develop good levels of skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. They listen attentively to teachers and to each other with good understanding. Speaking skills are good and are enhanced by opportunities provided by drama and public speaking. Pupils read widely both for pleasure and information with good understanding and increasingly identify how writers achieve their aims.

12. Written work is well presented with above average levels of accuracy in most subjects except for design and technology. Pupils write effectively for a wide range of purposes in most subjects except for geography and history. The secure development of these skills primarily results from the quality and variety of the work undertaken in English which is well supported by that done in most subjects.

13. Basic numeracy across both key stages is satisfactory and sometimes good. Pupils are encouraged to manage without a calculator as often as possible and quick mental arithmetic tests are a feature of many lessons. The school has monitored the use of numeracy across all curriculum subjects and recognised that some subjects are missing the opportunity to foster numeracy in their lessons. However, some subjects are successful in promoting numeracy, for example, music, where fractions are calculated mentally, geography in which the interpretation and presentation of data is developing well and modern foreign languages which encourage displays of birthday data. Geography and science make good contributions, with most pupils able to carry out calculations efficiently and demonstrate very good graphical skills. Design and technology and information technology both make a contribution with the former developing good measuring skills and the latter using spreadsheets and control to good effect.

14. In 1993 46 per cent of pupils obtained five grades A*-C and in 1998 this had increased to 52 per cent. In the main, subjects that had good results in 1993 were also successful in 1998.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

15. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, have very good attitudes to learning and towards school life as a whole. In very many lessons, in almost all subjects, they work with enjoyment, participating eagerly and offering, in English for example, extended oral answers to questions. In subjects such as drama, English, music and physical education, pupils demonstrate their ability to work without detailed teacher direction, but this is not uniform across all subjects and pupils' skills in personal study are not well developed in some subjects. For example, there was slow progress made by some Year 11 pupils when working on their own information technology projects. The very positive attitudes to learning are not so evident in Year 7 where teachers are still working to establish standards in line with the rest of the school.

16. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good. This is a very orderly community and the good opinion of an overwhelming majority of parents is confirmed. The behaviour policy is clear, consistently implemented and successful. Bullying is rare and is dealt with effectively. The school ethos promotes self discipline and when this breaks down a graduated tariff of sanctions, which includes a formal interview by the senior staff and ultimately a period of exclusion, is applied. Two pupils were permanently excluded last year and the number of temporary exclusions, 41 this year, is high. This is an indication of the seriousness with which the school supports good behaviour rather than the sign of an unruly school and also reflects the measures the school adopt to avoid making permanent exclusions. Reconciliation following the return to school is part of the policy and is appreciated by pupils and staff. At break times pupils have access to the building and this trust is respected. Furniture, fittings and books are respected and treated well.

17. Relationships between adults and pupils are excellent and between pupils themselves they are very good. Prefects, trained for their responsibilities, are respected and serious disagreements between pupils are rare. There is no racial tension. When given the opportunity to work collaboratively, pupils respond well. This was effectively demonstrated in a lunch time drama club when Year 11 pupils worked alongside those in Years 7 and 8. In drama, information technology and physical education pupils routinely appraise each others' work and invariably all members of the school community show great respect for each others' feelings. However, in science a small number of girls in middle and lower attaining groups lack initiative with their practical work.

18. Pupils have a multitude of opportunities to participate in the life of the school community, in its daily routines and through a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. They take up these opportunities in significant numbers. In organising their own form teams for sport, for the drama festival and the regular year group events to raise money for charity, pupils show a good deal of initiative. The school council, the prefect system, assistance in the library and the captaincy of form sports teams allow a few to exercise substantial responsibilities, but many more pupils accept the responsibilities implicit in being part of a school production, member of a school team or part of the system helping less confident readers to improve their skills. As a result pupils are confident, articulate and socially adept.

19. Improvement since the last inspection would be difficult, so good was the report. High standards have been maintained and pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are a strength of the school. In 1993 there were 23 fixed term exclusions and five permanent exclusions. The number of pupils on fixed term exclusions has gone up but the number of permanent exclusions has gone down. Parents are correct in their view that the school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on their children.

Attendance

20. Attendance in the school is good. In 1997/8 it was 92.9 per cent with unauthorised absence at 0.1 per cent. Pupils and parents understand absence notification procedures. Pupils generally attend school on time. Several instances were observed of pupils arriving in lessons up to ten minutes late. These pupils had usually travelled from the furthest points of the school after their previous lesson. The congestion apparent on staircases in some points of the building at lesson changeover times also has a significant effect on some lessons starting late which has a negative impact on standards.

21. The previous inspection report highlighted the occasional lateness to lessons with the 'one way' system as a contributory factor in the afternoon. Congestion, and large numbers staying for school lunch, are still contributing to some lateness immediately after lunch, although almost all pupils arrive within the five minute registration time.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

22. The quality of teaching is good at both key stages. It is at least satisfactory in 96 per cent of lessons across the age range. Teaching is good in 42 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in a further 23 per cent. The proportion of teaching which is good or very good is one of the school's major strengths. Most year groups receive similar proportions of good and very good teaching but teaching of this quality occurs less frequently in Year 7 lessons where teachers are still working to establish the very good attitudes to learning which exist in the rest of the school.

23. Teaching is good in all subjects except for design and technology, geography and history where it is satisfactory. The only significant number of unsatisfactory lessons is in design and technology. Hence, although there are some variations in teaching quality, there is a good degree of consistency across most subjects.

24. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of their subjects and they use their knowledge to plan lessons carefully. In most lessons the planned activities are good and in some lessons there are particularly exciting and stimulating tasks. For example, in English in Year 11 there was interesting group work on comic strips and in a Year 8 music lesson a computer backing track is used to accompany a rehearsal, with various elements of the track being removed as pupils progress. However for some lessons in history, design and technology and geography, while many aspects of the lesson are satisfactory, the planning is unimaginative and only a restricted range of teaching methods is used. For example, in geography there was an over emphasis on using textbooks and worksheets. In some generally satisfactory lessons in mathematics and science there is, nevertheless, not enough variety of activity to sustain pupils' concentration fully throughout the lesson.

25. Many teaching groups for higher attaining pupils are large, sometimes with as many as 36 in a group. Teaching rooms for these groups are often cramped and some activities, for example group work in modern foreign languages, cannot be undertaken, which restricts the rate of progress for these pupils. In mathematics the size of some teaching groups restricts the opportunities for teachers to help individual pupils. In music the large size of some teaching groups limits opportunities for group work.

26. Teachers generally make good use of resources. For example in modern foreign languages the overhead projector was well used to maintain pupils' attention. However in some subjects there are difficulties in gaining appropriate access to computer equipment and this restricts the use of information technology to support learning. Most teachers make good use of the time available and lessons are conducted at a brisk pace. However in many lessons there is a small but significant loss of teaching time because pupils arrive late for the lesson, having moved a considerable distance from one part of the school to another.

27. In most lessons teachers are successful in meeting the needs of pupils of all levels of attainment. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in lessons, both by class teachers and learning support teachers and assistants. They are provided with appropriate learning tasks and materials and are enabled to make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. In a particularly effective mathematics lesson, the teacher set individual targets for each pupil and ensured that all were fully involved in meeting those targets.

28. The very good relationships which exist between teachers and pupils form the basis for teachers' very effective management of pupils. Most teachers have appropriately high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attainment and those expectations are usually fully realised. In some English lessons there is a shortage of additional work for those who finish their tasks before the rest of the class.

29. In the very small number of unsatisfactory lessons, the common weakness is that the activities provided are not sufficiently challenging for some or all of the pupils in the group. The pace in these lessons is usually slow, and there is little sense of urgency.

30. Most teachers mark pupils' work regularly using the school's marking policy. Teachers' comments usually give pupils useful indications about how they can improve their work. In art, information technology and physical education teachers make accurate assessments as the lesson progresses and provide particularly helpful immediate feedback for pupils.

31. The parents' questionnaire responses indicate that approximately one in ten parents are dissatisfied with the work their children are given to do at home. A few parents comment that there is too much homework and others that there is too little. Pupils in Year 8 feel that they get too much homework but representatives of other year groups express satisfaction with the homework they receive. The scrutiny of pupils' exercise books and homework diaries indicates that the school does make regular and very effective use of homework to support and extend pupils' learning. Many of the tasks set for homework are particularly imaginative and interesting for pupils.

32. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the time of the last inspection. The percentage of lessons in which teaching is at least satisfactory has risen from 85 to 96 per cent. In most subjects there is now a good variety of teaching and learning styles, though there is still scope for further improvement, particularly in providing more opportunities for pupils to use information technology and library resources.

The curriculum and assessment

33. The curriculum is broad and balanced. It meets the needs of pupils and conforms to National Curriculum requirements with the exception of the current Year 11 pupils who do not receive their full entitlement to design and technology. At both key stages it complements well the school's Catholic ethos and its mission statement. Arrangements for health and sex education are made in science, and aspects of personal and social education are included in religious education, which enjoys a generous time allocation reflecting the priorities of the school. The school offers a good range of subjects at Key Stage 4, all leading to external examinations. There is very good planning at both school and subject level to ensure progression and continuity between key stages. Additional time has been provided for

geography since the last inspection and several departments are actively involved with feeder primary schools to ensure smooth development of the curriculum between Key Stages 2 and 3.

34.The school has made a positive response to the last inspection report. Two modern foreign languages are now compulsory in Years 8 and 9. The provision and curriculum planning for pupils with special educational needs is good with most of these pupils being taught in small classes. The school's policy with regard to pupils with special educational needs is now carried through well in all subject departments and is particularly effective in art and information technology. Design and technology is now available for all pupils, but not all current Year 11 pupils receive their full National Curriculum entitlement. In English, mathematics, geography, history and modern foreign languages there is limited access to information technology to support learning. There are similar difficulties in gaining access to computers for use with pupils with special educational needs.

35.Setting is used at Key Stage 3 and for core subjects at Key Stage 4 to allow pupils to be taught in sets according to their prior attainment. Although lower attaining classes are appropriately small, there are some large teaching groups for higher attaining pupils. In some of these large teaching groups there is a restricted range of learning opportunities, which has an impact on standards, and there are difficulties in moving pupils between bands.

36.There is an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, which, as in the last inspection, continues to be a major strength of the school. Many teachers are involved, and significant numbers of pupils take part, particularly in sports, drama, art, music, and information technology. Weekend residential outdoor pursuits courses are also popular. These make a major contribution on pupils' personal development.

37.The whole curriculum progressively and effectively promotes intellectual, physical and personal development. Good examples of these were observed in most subjects, and in particular in English, modern foreign languages, science, physical education, history and art. A good careers education programme is delivered throughout Key Stage 4 and good links are established with the local careers service and colleges of further education. All pupils are encouraged to take part in work experience and take up the personal challenge of community involvement. A particularly effective example of this is the Year 11 residential course run by the religious education department to prepare for life beyond school. The school's mission statement stresses the importance of equality of access and opportunity. In practice all departments are effectively implementing equal opportunities practices.

38.There are good procedures for assessment. The school has a sound, detailed policy on assessment and has recently adopted a common marking policy which is applied consistently across the subject departments. Teachers in all subject areas mark work thoroughly, promptly and maintain good records of grades obtained by pupils. There is a very effective whole school system for monitoring pupils' progress on a regular basis and for identifying those pupils who are doing particularly well and those who are causing concern. Pupils are encouraged to comment on their work and set targets for improvement. Extensive use is made of the Local Education Authority research in comparing standards with other schools in Lancashire and the school also carries out a detailed review of external examination results in order to identify areas of strength and weakness and to seek strategies for improvement.

39.Most subject areas use assessment to inform future planning to raise standards and this process is particularly effective in music, English, physical education, modern foreign languages and in science where information from assessments has led to a revision of the curriculum in both key stages. However in geography and design and technology there is a lack of a suitable system for assessing pupils' attainment in relation to the National Curriculum attainment targets.

40. Sound procedures for identifying and monitoring the progress of pupils with special educational needs are in place. A special needs register is kept and individual education plans are provided for all eligible pupils. These are reviewed regularly. Parents are invited to attend the review meetings and most subject departments contribute to the individual plans.

41. National Curriculum levels are applied to pupils' achievements at the end of Key Stage 3. At the end of Year 11 pupils receive a comprehensive 'Record of Achievement' which records their interests, activities and achievements. These are built up jointly by pupils with strong support from designated teachers using detailed guidelines provided by the school.

42. The school has successfully tackled the concerns about assessment listed in the last inspection report and has now established effective whole school policy and practice for the assessment, recording and reporting of pupils' standards of attainment.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

43. The school makes excellent provision for developing pupils' moral and social development. The provision for pupils' spiritual development is very good and the provision for cultural development is good.

44. The school, in its commitment to the encouragement of Christian values and practice, makes very good provision for pupils' spiritual development. Subjects such as drama and art help pupils to gain insight into values and beliefs and in music lessons pupils reflect on what they hear, yet few other opportunities are offered in the curriculum to promote pupils' spiritual development. 'Days with a Difference', enjoyed by each year group in turn on one occasion each year, make a powerful contribution to pupils' spiritual, as well as moral and social, development.

45. Excellent provision is made for pupils' moral development. Pupils are required to take responsibility for their own actions, helped by the clear moral teaching provided formally through the programme of education for personal relations and informally by all the adult members of the school community, who are first rate role models. Re-admission to school following exclusion involves reconciliation and this has a profound effect on most pupils. Work on relations with the developing world in geography, on the slave trade in history and the exploration of moral issues in drama support this provision well.

46. Pupils' social development is encouraged very effectively indeed. There is a strong sense of community within the school, and, through the formal pupil - parish links, between the school and all those that it serves. Participation in the many and varied competitions entered by the school gives a significant number of pupils extra confidence. Prefects, members of the School Council and captains of form sports teams have genuine responsibilities, and so too, to a lesser extent, do many other pupils involved in the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided. Each year group selects the charity it wishes to support, developing awareness of the needs of others. Well supervised litter collecting along the railway embankment and on the lengthy approach road to the school illustrates the responsibility the school accepts for its community. Pupils grow in maturity through the residential experience at Castlerigg, on residential visits to France and in their acceptance of the personal challenge section of the work experience programme.

47. The very good provision made to enable pupils to appreciate their own culture is not extended to that of the other cultures represented locally and nationally. Pupils visit theatres and have many opportunities to hear music from the western, European tradition, but do not have the same opportunities to share in the arts of other cultures. While in art, music and English lessons pupils are exposed to works from Asia and the Caribbean, and Islam is studied in religious education, this is not pursued vigorously, nor is it reflected in displays around the school. In this respect, insufficient progress has been made since the last

inspection.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

48. Overall the arrangements for support, guidance and pupils' welfare are very good and pupils feel secure within a caring community.

49. The support, guidance and welfare of pupils has a high priority in the school. A safe, secure and caring environment is provided by staff who know their pupils well. They set a very good example to pupils in their respect for all members of the school's community.

50. One of the strengths of the school is the development of detailed systems for monitoring pupils' attainments. The testing of all pupils in Year 7 is very well used to target individuals and groups of pupils. Underachieving pupils are supported by mentors whom they meet weekly and who identify specific targets for raising attainment. Assessment, testing and marking are efficiently used to support pupils' progress in a consistent way across the school. Pupils are encouraged to carry out self-assessment and participate in setting their own targets, so that they know how well they are doing compared with national levels of attainment.

51. All pupils with special educational needs who are eligible have effective individual education plans which contribute to the levels of progress they make. Some subjects, for example, art, mathematics and physical education have their own subject individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs. Other departments contribute to the school's individual education plans. The procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour are excellent. The very effective pupil monitoring system identifies both good work, effort, attitudes, behaviour and attendance and instances of poor performance in these areas. Pupils and teachers value this system, which leads to high standards of behaviour and attendance. The previous inspection highlighted an issue with regard to the marking of registers. The school has ensured that registers are completed satisfactorily at the beginning of the afternoon session. Pupils are questioned about their reasons for lateness. The procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance are excellent. Parents support the school in its efforts to promote good attendance.

52. Through examining records regularly at pastoral management meetings, senior staff have been able to refine and improve this system to enable them to analyse pupils' academic and personal development very effectively. Pupils know that a letter is the first stage of the sanctions list, which culminates in a meeting with governors. This is rarely used because most pupils respond to the letter home.

53. The school has good arrangements for ensuring pupils' health and safety. Procedures for fire, first aid, medicines, illness and accidents are good. A health and safety sub-committee of governors and staff monitor health and safety issues. Child protection arrangements are very good. There is a very clear and concise policy which staff are made aware of through the staff handbook and in-service training. Health and sex education are taught appropriately within science and personal and social education. Lessons and assemblies are also used to teach pupils about caring for each other, relationships and attitudes. Many visitors, including several parish priests, contribute to pupils' personal development. Teachers ensure that all pupils are aware of their progress and achievements, particularly those with special needs. Pupils celebrate their successes and have high expectations of themselves, as do teachers.

Partnership with parents and the community

54. The partnership between parents, the school and its community is good and makes a significant impact on pupils' experiences, contributing well to their academic and personal development.

55. Parents feel welcome in the school. They value the information they receive about the curriculum to be followed, their child's progress and the events in school. They are particularly pleased to receive letters of commendation about their children when they have shown good progress personally or academically. They actively support the parent teachers' association which, through the efforts of staff and parents, raises considerable sums to help the work of the school, through an imaginative programme of social events.

56. Parental involvement is good. There is effective use of the homework diary which parents and teachers use well to communicate about pupils' progress. Parents also help in providing transport for trips and sports matches. Parents' evenings are well attended; some parents would prefer them to be more frequent, but they generally say that teachers are available to discuss progress or concerns on an informal basis.

57. The school has very good links with its community, all of which contribute very well to pupils' personal and academic development. Links with the feeder primary schools are good. Since the last inspection the school has developed curriculum links, particularly in English, mathematics and science, through teachers visiting to teach Year 6 pupils. Transfer arrangements are well organised and effective in providing a smooth transition to the secondary school. Links with the parishes which serve the school are excellent. Pupils go out to provide music at community and church events, and the priests regularly visit school to counsel their parishioners.

58. Through its excellent work with further education, the Education Business Partnership project involving several local employers, and the careers service, the school enables its pupils to gain the maximum benefit from work experience and visits, to enhance the school curriculum and provide support with professional advice about careers and further education.

59. Pupils have opportunities to experience outdoor education and they benefit from the many visitors into school who include the school nurse, educational welfare officer, theatre groups, peripatetic music teachers, police, fire service and visiting artists. These all contribute to improving the quality of education for pupils.

60. Several local companies support the Young Enterprise club in school and a design manager has visited to help these pupils design their own product as part of establishing a business.

61. Pupils are taught citizenship through the various fund raising activities they take part in for those less fortunate than themselves and several charities are strongly supported.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

62. The quality of leadership and management in the school is very good. The headteacher, governors and senior management team are committed to raising standards in the school whilst maintaining a high level of pastoral care for all pupils. This commitment is evident in the school's excellent ethos of expecting all pupils to achieve their potential in a positive environment, and strongly reflects the aims and values of the school, as expressed in the mission statement.

63. The headteacher provides the school with decisive and effective leadership. He has a particular strength in setting high expectations for all pupils. He is well supported by his senior management team, consisting of two acting deputy headteachers, in providing a clear direction for the school's future.

64. The quality of middle management in providing effective pastoral and curriculum leadership

including special educational needs is mainly very good with the exception of design and technology where there are weaknesses caused by the long term illness of the head of department. One of the strengths of middle management is the quality of department development planning in identifying strategies to raise levels of attainment and in reflecting the aims, values and policies of the school. All departments have received useful guidance from the special educational needs co-ordinator on issues and strategies to support pupils with special educational needs. All departments have clear and comprehensive department handbooks. A further strength of middle management is the good co-ordination of the members of their teams in the joint planning of schemes of work.

65.The headteacher monitors and evaluates the teaching of all members of staff. In addition some heads of department monitor teaching and the lesson plans of other members of their departments and sample pupils' work. However, the quality of evaluation by heads of department is more variable. There is some very good practice in most departments, which is well documented with clear precise targets for improvement but in geography and history evaluation of the work tends to be more informal with no specific mechanisms or targets for improvement.

66.The governors are very knowledgeable and supportive of the school. They share the aim of raising levels of attainment and make a contribution to evaluating the work of the school and in determining the school development plan's priorities. Governors meet regularly either as a full governing body or in one of five main committees. Attendance is good and all meetings are supported by detailed written reports and information. In particular, pupils present the minutes of the school council meetings to the governing body for action.

67.There is an excellent ethos within the school. In both school and department planning there is a clear commitment to achieving high standards. Relationships within the school are very good. There is a high level of respect for teachers from their pupils and teachers care for and respect pupils. There is an equality of opportunity for all pupils and pupils' attitudes to work are very good. The combination of these factors produces a positive climate for learning and enables pupils in the school to make good progress. The high quality of administration and efficient organisation and communication contribute to the positive climate within the school.

68.The statutory requirements of the National Curriculum are met with the exceptions that English, mathematics, geography, history and modern foreign languages are not using information technology to support learning and teaching and not all pupils in the current Year 11 are receiving their full entitlement to design and technology. The governing body meets all of its other statutory obligations.

69.The number of priorities identified in the school development plan is realistic. The school's priorities for the current year are set within a four year strategic plan. All priorities have realistic timescales, success criteria, are fully costed and persons identified for leading and evaluating the initiative. In determining the priorities for the current year governors evaluate the previous year's plan.

70.The school has responded to all the management weaknesses in the last inspection report. The number of targets in the school development plan is now appropriate. Links between department planning and school development planning are clear. Procedures for monitoring and evaluation have been effectively developed, although not consistently applied in all departments. The role of heads of department is now clearly defined and the large number of ad hoc groups has been reduced.

71.The quality of leadership in the school is further demonstrated by the progress made since the last inspection. The action plan drawn up in response to the previous inspection report has been successful in raising standards within many areas of the life of the school. All of the key issues identified in the last inspection have been effectively tackled and no longer remain issues. However, the consequence of changing the length and organisation of the school day has led to a problem for lessons starting on time for periods 2 and 5. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching since the last report, in part because of the effective review of teaching and learning styles and the systematic evaluation of teaching. It is the very good quality of leadership which provides the capacity for moving the school forward.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

72.The school has a sufficient number of qualified and experienced teachers to meet the demands of the curriculum. The vast majority of pupils are taught by specialist teachers but a high proportion of staff teach more than one subject.

73.The school is working towards an Investors in People award and a very strong feature of its planning is the commitment to the professional development of all staff. This development has led to the provision of very good in-service training at all levels; school, departmental and individual. An effective annual review of staff takes place with lesson observation and an in depth interview with the teacher forming an important part of the process. There is a good induction programme for newly qualified teachers and new staff members are well supported by senior members of staff and the headteacher.

74.The school has a very good number of suitably qualified and experienced support staff to meet the demands of the curriculum. The very effective technical, administrative, clerical and special needs support staff, together with a team working with the site manager, are all highly valued. They play a very important part in the everyday life of the school and help to create a caring environment in which pupils learn.

75.Accommodation at the school is sufficient to enable all National Curriculum subjects to be taught. There is good provision for food technology, art, information technology, English and drama. At the time of the last inspection mention was made of the small size of some rooms for the size of teaching groups and this continues to be a problem. For example, in modern foreign languages the size of the room inhibits group work in lessons. Subject rooms are generally arranged together and most have been made attractive with displays of pupils' work.

76.The library is small in size and is popular with pupils at breaks and lunchtime but is rarely used by pupils looking for specific information or researching a topic. Since the time of the last inspection the reception and administrative areas have been extended and improved. Social areas for pupils and the storage of their bags at lunchtime has also improved. However, the movement of pupils through narrow corridors at the change of lessons remains an intractable problem despite arrangements made by the school to control the flow of pupils. The good behaviour of pupils around the school is significant in easing this problem.

77.The school is clean and well cared for by the caretaking and cleaning staff. The outdoor facilities for games are unsatisfactory. There is an 'all-weather' pitch for some games but no soccer or rugby pitch which prevents pupils from making very good progress in these games. The small area of grass used in class lessons is quickly churned up in wet weather. The school has to hire pitches at another school for fixtures.

78.Resources are adequate to deliver the curriculum but there are insufficient text books in mathematics and modern foreign languages. The provision of computers, for a school of this size, is below the national average. Access to information technology is restricted for pupils in many subjects and for those with special educational needs. The small size of the library, the level of resourcing and the opening times of the library restrict opportunities for many subjects

to use the library fully to support pupils' learning, particularly at Key Stage 4. There are insufficient reference books in the physical education and geography sections of the library.

79. Since the last inspection there has been an improvement in the provision of text books for history, science and geography and facilities for food technology have now been improved in order to fulfil National Curriculum requirements. There is still no security system to prevent the loss of books from the library. Formal monitoring and evaluation of the budgetary system now take place on a regular basis.

The efficiency of the school

80. The quality of financial planning is good. Expenditure patterns are regularly monitored by both senior staff and the governing body. Long term financial planning is in place to take account of the trend in increasing pupil numbers at the school. Resources are targeted to meet the priorities of the school development plan.

81. The school has a total income of over £1.3 million. The income and expenditure per pupil are below the national figures. In 1994 there was a budget deficit created by a combination of a reduction in the budget from the Local Education Authority and unforeseen long-term staff absences at a time when the school had no insurance to cover the salaries for supply teachers. The school has budgeted for a reduction in the deficit it carried forward into the current financial year and this is in line with the plan agreed by the governors and the Local Education Authority to eliminate the deficit by 2002.

82. Teaching staff costs represent three-quarters of the total budget which is higher than similar sized schools nationally and reflect historically the high number of very experienced staff in the school.

83. The proportion of the budget dedicated to learning resources is in line with national figures. Most of the funds allocated to departments are distributed by a formula determined by the governors. A centrally held fund, determined by governors, is well used to support additional bids from departments to implement school development priorities.

84. Within the total income for the school there is a specific budget for supporting pupils with special educational needs. These funds are effectively targeted as the school makes good provision for these pupils. Many of them achieve examination results which exceed expectations based on their attainment on entry to the school.

85. The additional grants for professional development are well used and most of these funds are allocated following a detailed analysis of school, department and individual needs. In particular, newly qualified teachers are well supported.

86. The school receives additional grants to identify and support underachieving pupils. These funds are carefully targeted on a number of pupils to improve their levels of progress and attainment and the funds have been used effectively to increase these pupils' opportunities to use information technology and to provide suitable accommodation to help with their homework. In addition, parents and pupils raise substantial sums to improve the quality of educational provision for pupils. For example - the school 'fun run' raised £1800 to supplement resources for physical education and games.

87. In many areas of the curriculum very good use is made of teaching and support staff and in all areas the use is at least satisfactory. Similarly there is good use made of the accommodation and resources available. The school has made a substantial bid for lottery funds to improve the sporting facilities. At present the school has to pay for the hire of football pitches as there is no pitch on site.

88. Financial control within the school is effective and the day-to-day financial management carried out by the administrative staff and budget holders is very efficient as reflected in the comments made in the last auditor's report.

89. The governing body has responded positively to the issues raised in the last inspection report. The high number of staff on responsibility allowances has been reduced. Some progress has been made in increasing the number of non-fiction books in the library. Teaching time has been increased from under 23 hours to 25 hours. Development plans are now used effectively to monitor and evaluate major spending decisions.

90. In relation to its level of income and in terms of the quality of education provided and the educational standards achieved, the school provides very good value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

91. Standards of attainment are above the attainment expected nationally for pupils aged 14 and 16. At entry, pupils represent the full range of attainment with average levels matching those that apply nationally. In National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils attaining levels 5 and above and level 6 and above are above that which applies nationally and well above that for similar schools. At GCSE, in both English and English literature, the proportions attaining grades A*- C exceed national averages with a steadily increasing number gaining grades A* and A to a proportion well above national levels in 1997. The 1997 GCSE results for English language and literature exceed pupils' average attainment in their other subjects.

92. The school enters a greater proportion of its pupils, usually all of them, for GCSE examinations in English than happens nationally, particularly for English literature and with rare exceptions all achieve grades. The average attainment for both boys and girls are above the national averages.

93. Pupils demonstrate good speaking and listening skills throughout the age and ability ranges. They listen attentively to teachers and each other with quick understanding. If necessary, they are confident in asking for further explanation. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils are competent in the use of language. They offer extended answers to challenging questions. These skills are evident in the high quality of group work achieved by pupils by the end of Key Stage 3 and in the lively, fluent and purposeful discussions reached by the end of Key Stage 4. At the age of 14, pupils read at least well enough to understand the main sense of texts. Most read challenging texts for information or pleasure with good understanding, including recognition of significant detail. At the end of Key Stage 4, many are able to recognise implication and have good understanding of how writers achieve their effects. In written work, standards of presentation are good. At the end of Key Stage 3, almost all communicate clearly in recognisable sentences. Many write fluently and use rich vocabularies appropriately and effectively. Pupils' good understanding of the craft of writing is evident by the end of Key Stage 4, particularly in extended pieces.

94. In most subjects across the curriculum, pupils develop good levels of skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing. They listen attentively to teachers and to each other with good understanding. Speaking skills are good and are enhanced by opportunities provided by drama and public speaking. Pupils read widely both for pleasure and information with good understanding and increasingly identify how writers achieve their aims. Written work is well presented with above average levels of accuracy in most subjects except for design and technology. Pupils write effectively for a wide range of purposes in most subjects except for geography and history. The secure development of these skills primarily results from the quality and variety of the work undertaken in English which is well supported by that done in most subjects.

95. The progress made by pupils at all levels of attainment is good at both Key Stages 3 and 4. In lessons, pupils show good recall of earlier learning. They work purposefully to extend their skills and to complete work to a good standard. Progress is good, particularly because pupils welcome the active participation in lessons. This response is typical of all classes and was noted particularly in Year 11 groups identifying the principal features of horror stories and comic strips and in a Year 9 group withdrawn to improve their spelling skills. The progress made by pupils with special educational needs is good.

96. Pupils have positive attitudes to their lessons. They aim at high standards, work hard to achieve them and show pleasure in their successes. They are supportive of each other in group work and drama activities and enjoy relationships of mutual respect with their teachers. They sustain concentration and work at a good pace. Behaviour in lessons is good. However, in some Year 7 lessons teachers are still working to establish the very good attitudes to learning which exist in the rest of the school.

97. The quality of teaching is good, often very good and sometimes excellent at both key stages. Teachers have good levels of subject knowledge. They plan lessons carefully, with clearly identified aims which they almost always work towards at an appropriate pace. Teachers link lessons to previous and future work and explain to pupils how their work will be assessed. They make skilful use of questions both to confirm and develop understanding. Teachers have high expectations of achievement and behaviour. They value the contributions of pupils and are skilful in class management. In some English lessons there is a shortage of additional work for those who finish their tasks before the rest of the class. On occasions teaching time is lost when pupils are unable to arrive at lessons on time.

98. The department has highly effective leadership. It has built upon the strengths identified in the report of the last inspection. There is a strong collaborative spirit and a shared determination to support every pupil fully. This is assisted by careful analysis of data and appropriate response to identified needs. The curriculum is especially well balanced to provide a clear development of skills and appropriate challenge for pupils at all levels of attainment. There is insufficient access to computers which prevents the department making a planned contribution to pupils' development of capability in information technology. The department has made good progress since its last inspection.

Mathematics

99. In 1997 the proportion of pupils achieving GCSE grades A*-C and A*-G were above the national average. At the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 standards of attainment are above the level expected for pupils aged 14 and 16. In comparison with schools of a similar nature the standards are well above expected levels. In National Curriculum assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 over the last three years pupils have consistently achieved above the national average at both level 5 and above and level 6 and above. Mathematical skills are good and most pupils cope well with number work. Higher attaining pupils at the end of Year 9 have developed a sound knowledge of algebra while those of low attainment deal competently with the basic concepts of probability. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 3. In 1997 boys outperformed girls in gaining the higher grades at GCSE. Some pupils are entered for statistics at the end of Year 10 and achieve considerable success and some are now also entered for an additional mathematics examination at the end of Key Stage 4, again achieving good results. In the 1997 GCSE results match pupils' average attainment in their other subjects.

100. At both key stages progress in numeracy skills made by pupils of all levels of attainment is good. Much of the progress stems from the good use of previous skills and knowledge in developing new concepts and learning. National tests at the end of each key stage show pupils, particularly boys in GCSE, achieving above the national average. Progress in lessons is good in the main because of good teaching and the positive attitudes of most pupils. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans and their progress in lessons is particularly good. Basic numeracy across both key stages is satisfactory and sometimes good. Pupils are encouraged to manage without a calculator as often as possible and quick mental arithmetic tests are a feature of many lessons. The school recognises that some subjects are missing the opportunity to foster numeracy in their lessons. However, some subjects are successful in promoting numeracy. For example, music, where fractions are related mentally, geography in which the

interpretation and presentation of data is developing well and modern foreign languages which encourage displays of birthday data. Geography and science make good contributions with most pupils able to carry out calculations efficiently and also demonstrate some very good graphical skills. Design and technology and information technology both make a contribution with the former developing good measuring skills and the latter using spreadsheets and control to good effect.

101. Pupils' attitudes are good across both key stages. The vast majority show interest in, and enthusiasm for, their work and they behave well. There are few lapses of concentration and the majority are able to accept responsibility for remaining on task. The relationships between pupils and each other and pupils and teacher are of a high standard. There is a mutual respect created which greatly assists the learning process and reflects the ethos of the school. However, in Year 7 teachers are still working to establish the very good attitudes to learning which exist in the rest of the school.

102. Teaching at both key stages is always at least satisfactory, mostly good and occasionally very good. Subject knowledge and lesson planning are of a high standard. The pace of lessons leads to good progress being made but a weakness is the failure of some teachers to explain to pupils in each lesson just what they should know by the end of it. In some lessons there is a lack of variety in the learning activities to sustain pupils' concentration for the whole of the 60 minutes. Expectations are high with all pupils encouraged to perform to the best of their ability. Virtually all pupils are now entered for the GCSE examination. Some lessons start up to ten minutes late because they have some distance to travel between the end of one lesson and the start of the next.

103. The curriculum is broad and balanced and schemes of work are good. Resources are in short supply with many old and unsuitable textbooks and an over reliance on worksheets. An almost complete lack of computer equipment is denying pupils a valuable learning resource. The use of information technology to support learning is underdeveloped. Although the four mathematics classrooms are in close proximity to each other they are small and restrict the ability of the staff to help individual pupils when being taught in large groups. In all classrooms there are very good displays of work.

104. Since the last report in 1993 improvements have been made on many issues. All teachers are now qualified in the subject, good monitoring procedures are in place, standards of attainment have risen and a more consistent marking policy has been introduced. In addition the pace of lessons has increased with a corresponding effect on progress made by pupils. On the other hand, teaching spaces are still small and there has been little improvement in the provision of information technology within the subject area. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection.

Science

105. Pupils' attainment at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 matches the attainment expected nationally for pupils aged 14 and 16. The National Curriculum assessment results at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with national averages and with the results from schools taking pupils from a similar background. However the results are not as good as those in mathematics and English for the same pupils. Boys achieve better results than girls at this stage. The proportion of pupils achieving level 6 and above is higher for 1998 than 1997. GCSE results in double award science are above the national average, as they were at the time of the last inspection. However a quarter of pupils in this school follow the single award science course, which is a higher proportion than that found nationally. Results in the single award examination are below the national average at grades A*-C and average at grades A*-G. Overall the GCSE results in science broadly match those expected nationally and match pupils' average attainment in their other subjects. Similar percentages of boys and girls achieve grades A*-C but more boys than girls achieve the higher grades A* and A.

106. Most pupils, at the end of both key stages, have at least satisfactory basic knowledge and understanding of topics they have studied recently. Higher attaining pupils give detailed explanations, using appropriate scientific terms, and use their understanding to make predictions. For example, in Year 9 pupils predict which foods will have the highest energy content using their knowledge of the components of those foods. Pupils' exercise books in Year 11 reveal that many successfully balance straightforward chemical equations. However, in lower attaining sets, pupils often find it difficult to recall the detail of what they have learnt. Most pupils have good practical skills and standards in investigations match those expected for their age. However there is a weakness in some pupils' skills in building electrical circuits in Year 9 because they have not had enough experience of electricity topics in earlier years. The standards of presentation of pupils' written work are at least good and often very good.

107. Pupils of all levels of attainment make good progress during both key stages. This is a result of the good teaching they receive and their own very good attitudes to learning. Pupils enter the school with a pattern of attainment in science which is not quite as good as that expected nationally, on the basis of Key Stage 2 testing, and with skills in investigation work which are under-developed. They make good progress as they move through the school and achieve average GCSE results. Progress over shorter periods is also good. For example, pupils in Year 10 have acquired a secure understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of various energy sources. Progress in individual lessons is often successfully consolidated by requiring each pupil, at the end of the lesson, to state something new they have learnt during that lesson. However, in many lessons there is a loss of teaching time due to pupils moving from one part of the school to another and this reduces the progress which can be made. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. They are well supported by both class teachers and, in some lessons, the learning support teacher, and are enabled to make progress which matches that of the others in their group.

108. Pupils have positive attitudes to their work in science, apply themselves conscientiously to the tasks they are given, concentrate well and usually enjoy their lessons. They are particularly polite and well behaved. Pupils discuss their work sensibly and co-operate well in practical activities. A small number of girls in middle and lower attaining groups lack initiative and are inclined to ask for help with practical work rather than making enough effort themselves.

109. The quality of teaching is generally good at both key stages. At Key Stage 3 teaching is good or very good in over half of all lessons. Teaching is more consistently good at Key Stage 4. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subject. They plan their lessons carefully and usually provide a good variety of activities for pupils. Teachers have very good relationships with pupils and manage them well. In one very good lesson for lower attaining pupils the teacher sustained an emphasis on a particular chemical equation as the basis for the lesson and used very subtle and imaginative repetition to reinforce the key facts. In another lesson the teacher gave very clear information to pupils about how they could improve their levels of attainment. In the isolated example of unsatisfactory teaching the tasks provided for pupils were too demanding and they could not make sufficient progress. In some lessons, which are otherwise satisfactory, there are weaknesses; sometimes the pace is rather slow or there is not enough variety of activity to sustain pupils' interest.

110. Some of the teaching groups for higher attaining pupils are large, containing as many as 34 pupils. These classes are well organised and both teachers and pupils take appropriate safety precautions. However, when so many pupils are taking part in practical work in a restricted laboratory space there is inevitably an increased risk of accidents.

111. The last inspection report indicated that the department could be managed more actively to raise pupils' attainment. Since then, most of the weaknesses identified in the report have been overcome and several valuable initiatives have been introduced, including new courses at both key stages. A good start has been made in developing the use of information

technology within science lessons. The department is now well managed and the teachers, support teacher and technician work effectively together as a team. However there is a need for more monitoring of, and support for, those teachers who are not experienced science teachers and teach only a small number of lessons in the department. Their teaching, while usually satisfactory, does not match the quality provided by the 'core' team.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Art

112.The proportion of pupils gaining GCSE grades A*-C in 1997 was well below the national average. In that year pupils taking art achieved grades which were lower than the same pupils achieved in their other subjects. The attainment of Year 11 pupils in lessons seen during the inspection however, is above national averages and is a closer match to the GCSE results achieved in 1998. Changes made to the course content which more closely adhere to the objectives of the examination are significant in achieving this improvement.

113.By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment in art is above average compared with national expectations for pupils aged 14. From Year 7 and throughout the key stage they develop very good drawing skills and know how to describe light, shade, texture and shape especially when working from real objects. Most pupils use a range of materials and media with growing confidence and skill, gathering information from a range of sources to help them develop their final work which is often of good quality. Pupils' drawing and observational skills are better developed than their ability to use imaginative and expressive ways of creating original ideas. Their knowledge of other artists and the impact of this in their work is weak.

114.By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils have further refined their skills in drawing from observation. Their work is accurate and shows the pupils' ability in developing from initial investigation to a final image or artefact. For example, project work in Year 11 shows drawings of natural forms successfully translated into ideas for fabric or stained glass designs. Pupils increasingly make good use of digital technology to help develop their ideas and designs. As in earlier years the expressive and experimental use of materials is less well developed and research and preliminary studies therefore lack depth.

115.Progress is at least good throughout the school. It is often very good at both key stages. All pupils acquire knowledge well during lessons as a result of appropriately devised tasks that challenge and stimulate them. Very good gains in practical aspects are made when working from real objects and when learning is reinforced through new approaches and carefully planned teaching. The aims for lessons are made clear to pupils and they are generally well motivated. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in most aspects of the subject when teaching methods are adjusted to account for the range of pupils' abilities.

116.Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good in lessons. They enjoy their work and remain engaged with the tasks throughout the lesson. They maintain very good relationships with the teacher and their peers which have a positive effect on their learning and progress. When working together in groups or pairs they co-operate well.

117.Teaching is at least good and it is often very good in both key stages. Lessons and projects are carefully planned and tasks are appropriate for the range of age and needs within groups. This, along with the use of carefully selected resources to stimulate interest, contribute to the good progress made by all pupils. Expectations of the quality of work and behaviour of pupils are very high and pupils are successfully encouraged to concentrate through extended tasks. The enthusiasm and commitment of the teacher is evident within the classroom and reflects the very good response by pupils. Verbal feedback given during lessons and the written comments on homework are encouraging and often identify ways for pupils to improve their work.

118.The department has made good progress since the last inspection. The issues identified in the last report have all been tackled effectively although pupils' knowledge of other artists and their impact and influence on pupils' own work is weak.

Design and technology

119.The 1997 GCSE results in design and technology broadly match those expected nationally and match pupils' average attainment in their other subjects. The percentage of pupils gaining grades A* to C in the latest GCSE examinations in home economics and technology is lower than the school's 1997 results. Pupils' attainment in design and technology at the end of both key stages is lower than the levels expected nationally at age 14 and 16.

120.By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils have a basic knowledge of tools and materials and use them safely in designing and making projects. Attainment in practical work is slightly higher than in theory, but remains low when compared with expectations for pupils of similar age. Year 9, making wooden toys, understand about levers and movement, but few pupils create more than one simple action on an item. Another group, designing a mini disc player, found difficulty in putting ideas on paper. A third group, searching for pastry recipes, lacked imagination in modifying their design briefs. Theory work is weak. A few pupils write and draw neatly, but much of the work is poorly sequenced and presentation is poor.

121.By the end of Key Stage 4, most pupils in their practical work are competent in using the range of tools and equipment. A few pupils show capability in cooking and produce interesting dishes, but they do not know how to work methodically. Pupils answer design problems and some make good efforts in presentation of neatly illustrated work. Some pupils in Year 11 draw well and understand how to represent textures on working drawings, but most portfolio work, especially page arrangement, is weak. Pupils do not think technologically do not have effective lettering and drawing skills. Pupils do not use information technology often enough in food lessons.

122.Over the past two years, results in food technology have been higher than the national average. However, in 1998 results for home economics and technology were lower than the 1997 results. Pupils' knowledge and understanding are poor and are contributing to the current downward trend.

123.Throughout the school, progress in understanding theory is unsatisfactory, although in some lessons, pupils make satisfactory progress in their practical tasks. Year 7 pupils, with little previous knowledge of working in wood, are making an interesting range of animal pencil holders. They show confidence in using hand and some machine tools. Pupils in Year 8 made good progress on a bridge project. They collaborated well in groups, planned thoroughly, measured carefully and most bridges were nearly ready for testing. A group of pupils in Year 10, who have difficulty in coping with theory made good progress in casting small items in aluminium. Where lessons contain low level theory tasks that do not inform, challenge or interest the pupils, progress is poor. Pupils of differing ages cannot all progress satisfactorily if they are doing identical tasks, as seen in the mini disc player graphics project. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in practical work, but insufficient in theory, as the tasks do not always match their needs. Adult helpers waste valuable time in explaining complicated terminology.

124.In nine out of ten lessons at Key Stage 3, the response to design and technology is good. Pupils listen to their teachers, settle to work quickly and try hard. They watch demonstrations with interest and most keep themselves busy. They are polite and co-operate well with each other, sharing tools and materials. Many pupils enjoy practical work but dislike the theory. Many pupils enjoy explaining what they are doing. At Key Stage 4, response is variable. It is at

least satisfactory in four-fifths of lessons, but unsatisfactory in the remainder. Most pupils behave well, but a minority waste time chatting, show little interest in the work and make the minimum of effort. Some pupils in Year 11 have not set themselves targets for completing work and are drifting. Some higher attaining pupils work well unaided, but a few lower attainers in Year 11 become anxious about portfolios and need extra adult help.

125. The quality of teaching is often at least satisfactory but there is unsatisfactory teaching in a third of lessons. The quality is similar in all the materials areas, through both key stages and between individual teachers. Teachers have sound subject skills and are good demonstrators. Planning is occasionally good as some work is challenging and motivational, for example, the bridge construction project in Year 8 and the casting work in Year 10. However, in many lessons, teachers have incorrectly planned the work to match pupils' age and experience and needs. Many food lessons lack a technological approach. Class control and relationships are good in most lessons. In the better lessons, teachers begin with clear instructions and ensure pupils have plenty of time for work. In other lessons long introductions bore many pupils who then cannot complete enough work. Marking of classwork and homework follows the school guidelines, but lacks information about National Curriculum targets. Teachers and assistants give extra help to pupils who have special educational needs and give them good support but the tasks set for their theory work do not match their needs.

126. The head of department is on long term sick leave. The department, including a newly-qualified and a supply teacher, are trying to raise standards and plan purposeful work for the pupils, but are experiencing difficulties. Many pupils do not have the necessary background skills and knowledge required for their ages. Teachers spend too much time doing routine duties because a technician is only available for part of the week. Information technology appears in workshop activities for all year groups but is not used in food technology.

127. The department has responded well to some comments made in the last inspection report and poorly to others. Accommodation for food technology has improved. Two new teachers have worked hard in clearing clutter and improving the appearance and safety of the workshops. A new scheme of work remains under review, but covers all aspects of design and technology, complying with the requirements of the National Curriculum. Assessment is sound. Some pupils in Year 11 do not take a technology subject, which contravenes statutory requirements. There has been little change in pupils' attainment and teacher expectations are too low. The quality of teaching has not improved since the last inspection.

Drama

128. Pupils achieve standards which are better than expected for pupils aged 14 and 16. The subject is taken by all at Key Stage 3 and is a popular option at Key Stage 4 for pupils from the full range of attainment. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C matches national figures and exceeds them for grades A*-G. In 1997, the most recent year for which the calculation has been made, pupils achieved significantly better GCSE grades in drama than they did in other subjects in which they were examined.

129. The subject makes a major contribution to the development of the skills of speaking, listening and working in groups which strongly support the achievement of good standards across much of the curriculum. It also provides opportunities to learn the skills specific to drama. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils plan, perform and evaluate their work and that of others with good levels of skill. This progress continues so that at Key Stage 4 pupils are capable of extended improvisation and effective use of gesture and body language to communicate effectively with an audience. Performances of Year 11 dramatic monologues of very good quality are subjected to perceptive but supportive criticism by other members of the class. Pupils enjoy their work. They respond well to challenge and relate positively to teachers and each other. A lunch-time drama club meeting was observed when Year 11 pupils worked with some 40 pupils from Years 7 and 8 with only occasional intervention needed by the five

teachers present.

130.The quality of teaching is good. It is often very good and sometimes excellent. Teachers have good knowledge of pupils and high expectations of them. They use questions to develop understanding and are skilful in encouraging pupils' confidence in making decisions for themselves. The subject benefits from hard-working and richly talented leadership.

131.The drama studio provides excellent opportunities for effective learning but there is a lack of other suitable spaces when two groups are time-tabled simultaneously which restricts the range of teaching strategies and disadvantages some classes. The high standards achieved in drama at the time of the last inspection have been maintained.

Geography

132.In 1996 GCSE results at grades A*-C were above the national average, but in 1997 the pass rate dropped very considerably largely due to poor marks obtained by candidates in their fieldwork project. In 1996 the results obtained by candidates in geography were on average significantly below those obtained in their other subjects and in 1997 they were further depressed. There was an increase in the proportion of pupils obtaining GCSE grades A*-C in 1998 in comparison with the school's results in 1997. In the last three years the percentage of pupils obtaining passes at grades A*-G has been slightly higher than the national average.

133.The standards achieved by pupils in geography are in line with those expected nationally at the end of Key Stage 3 but slightly lower at the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 achieve good standards in basic geographical skills. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils have a good knowledge of place and can identify the major countries and cities of the world. They use atlases to find and apply a wide range of information about a geographical area. Pupils demonstrate good basic skills when using keys, scales and directions in mapwork. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils use statistical information effectively and can use a wide variety of graphical techniques. Pupils throughout the school show good skills in identifying geographical patterns, but they find difficulty in providing accurate explanations for these, as their geographical understanding is weak.

134.Pupils make sound progress in acquiring knowledge and basic skills as they move through the key stages. In relation to their age and prior levels of attainment pupils gain a good vocabulary in the subject. Although they explain the meaning of geographical terms, they find difficulty in describing how these features are formed and interrelated. Pupils with special educational needs, taught in small sets with a lot of individual help and generally make good progress. In geography pupils are not provided with sufficient opportunities to develop their skills in information technology, to take part in group work or to carry out investigative work. They also fail to write for a wider variety of purposes, to engage in discussion, decision making and independent learning.

135.Pupils are very well behaved, courteous and considerate to others. The quality of classroom relationships is very high both amongst the pupils themselves and between the pupils and their teachers. Pupils maintain good concentration throughout their lessons. They are keen to make progress and to succeed with the tasks they are given. Pupils respond to questions and instructions quickly and politely and readily ask for help and advice when they need it. They take pride in their work, but have few opportunities to show initiative and to take responsibility. Some pupils can be late for the start of lessons when they have to come directly from another subject area at the other side of the school. In Year 7 lessons teachers are still working to establish the very good attitudes to learning which exist in the rest of the school.

136.The quality of teaching in both key stages is satisfactory. There is a minority of good teaching. Teachers have very good control of their teaching groups and maintain strong supportive relationships with their pupils. However, far too much teaching is based on textbook and worksheet exercises. Too much time is spent on needless copying and repetition. There is a lack of variety in the range of teaching methods used.

137.At the start of this academic year the amount of time allocated to geography in Key Stage 3 was increased significantly, but not all schemes of work have been revised to reflect the additional time. Day-to-day marking is carried out promptly and thoroughly, but a suitable system for assessing pupils' attainment in terms of the National Curriculum has not yet been developed. The department is satisfactorily resourced, but the stock of geography books in the school library is poor.

138.A number of the deficiencies identified in the last inspection report have not been adequately tackled. There is still too much emphasis on photo-copied text book extracts and worksheets, whilst the use of information technology remains weak and the range of learning opportunities too limited. The current development plan for geography correctly identifies the priority areas that need improvement. Standards of attainment have not improved significantly since the last inspection.

History

139.Pupils' attainment at the end of both key stages matches the levels expected nationally at age 14 and 16. GCSE results for 1997, the most recent year for which comparative data is available, are above national averages and show that pupils do as well in history as in their other subjects. Provisional results for 1998 indicate the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C are above the national averages. Recent changes in the option system have resulted in pupils from a much greater range of prior attainment choosing the subject, and inspection evidence suggests a move towards the national norm.

140.Pupils have a sound grasp of chronology by the end of both key stages, using it in Year 7 to understand the development of castle building and in Year 11 to make clear the overlapping changes in transport in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their factual knowledge of the main people and events of the periods studied is good, though pupils of below average attainment have poor powers of recall. Most pupils understand and can apply the concept of cause and effect, whether in the context of the First World War or of the eighteenth century agrarian changes, but few look beyond a single cause and a couple of effects. Most pupils at both key stages have a narrow range of skills. They undertake little personal research, do not evaluate a wide enough range of source material, and too much of what they produce is briefly written.

141.At both key stages almost all pupils make sound progress overall. What they are taught is appropriate and adequately challenging. A Year 7 class made good progress over a couple of lessons in learning how castles developed in the 400 years after the Norman Conquest, thanks to sharply focused teaching at a brisk pace and the effective use of a good video. Pupils with special educational needs make the progress typical of the others in their class as teachers follow their individual education plans and adults provide appropriate support. Pupils in the mixed ability GCSE groups and those in the lower sets who have attainments higher than the average of that group or set make unsatisfactory progress when the pace of the lesson slows.

142.Pupils respond well, especially to lively teaching, seen in a Year 8 class working on changes to buildings from 1500 to 1700, and they enjoy history. Almost without exception they concentrate hard for long periods and are keen to do their best. Relationships and behaviour are both very good, so that work proceeds quickly, uninterrupted by disciplinary matters. Almost all pupils are well motivated and eager to learn. Pupils can work together when asked,

but most lack the skills to find things out for themselves and the library is not used as it should be in the development of this skill.

143. Teaching is satisfactory. In about a third of lessons good features predominate. In the best lessons teachers show good subject knowledge, have a lively approach that enthuses pupils, use resources well, teach at a brisk pace and review what has been learned to consolidate it. Class management is always good and most activities provide appropriate challenge to most pupils. Unsatisfactory features of some lessons are, planning that fails to indicate precisely enough what pupils should learn and the failure to check that it has been learned, and the reliance on a narrow range of teaching styles that in turn demand a narrow range of pupil responses.

144. Since the last inspection standards of attainment have been maintained. A good scheme of work is now in place and while resources have been improved they are still narrow in range. No progress has been made in the introduction of information technology. In some respects teachers' expectations are still too low and pupils are still too dependent on text books and worksheets.

Information technology

145. Pupils' attainment in information technology at the end of both key stages is in line with the levels expected nationally at age 14 and 16. The percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-C in the 1997 information systems examination was well below the national figures and below the average achieved by the same pupils in other subjects. In 1998 the proportion of candidates gaining A*-C grades in GCSE information technology is much lower than the school expected. Attainment by Year 11 pupils in lessons and in the scrutiny of work does not match the attainment suggested by these low figures and the school has asked for a review of the 1998 results.

146. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils know how to log on to the network, call up programs and use them in writing, drawing and number work. Pupils import graphics, create graphs and most create simple coloured pictures using drawing programs. They present text in various forms, show how to use emphasis and add pictures to make the work more attractive for the reader. Year 9 are compiling a 'Guide to Pendle'. The majority show good skill in creating their own pages using a desk-top publishing package to present words, illustrations and statistical data. Most pupils can enter formulae in calculations when using a spreadsheet. Many can add to a database and arrange information, but are less sure of framing questions to get results. In science, some classes use sensors linked to computers to record temperature changes over time and, in music, pupils use computer-linked equipment when performing to add background effects. Pupils have a basic understanding of computer control. For example, some pupils draw geometric patterns in mathematics and others write commands in design and technology that make items move or light up.

147. By the end of Key Stage 4, most pupils are competent in using skills learnt in previous years. Many pupils have gained good keyboard skills and mouse control. They choose appropriate ways of presenting work and analysing results. Although a few pupils find difficulty in expressing themselves logically, the majority present arguments sensibly. Pupils' files are full and contain good quality work on projects, but not all work is dated.

148. Throughout the school, progress in knowledge and understanding is satisfactory. Pupils in Year 7 make good progress as they have to become familiar with the computers and how they operate. All pupils take responsibility for saving and retrieving their own work. Pupils who do their research for homework and use it in class make good progress in lessons. Year 8 pupils visited estate agents to find information about local property before effectively adding it to a database. Year 7 boys who show curiosity and other pupils who are confident in exploring menus make good progress by questioning why things happen. Pupils with special

educational needs make good progress. They are often taught in smaller groups and usually have additional support from special needs staff.

149. In most lessons, the response to information technology is always at least good and often very good. Pupils are polite and attentive, obey instructions, show interest and say they enjoy their lessons. They settle well to work and most keep busy throughout the sessions. Most try hard, even when they find things difficult and persevere even when computers do not do what they want them to do. Pupils know not to tamper with the equipment or deface work on display. A few of the more skilled and confident pupils readily help each other and relationships are good when pupils have to share machines. The higher attaining pupils work well unaided, but a few lower attainers in Year 11 are sometimes slow and do the minimum. Most pupils are proud of their work. Many pupils gain in confidence by discussing their work and showing each other what to do.

150. The quality of teaching is good. It is always at least satisfactory and is very good in three out of ten lessons. Teachers have good subject skills. Strengths are in planning, setting work to interest and motivate the pupils, class control and relationships. The best lessons begin with clear, short introductions, allow pupils ample time to practise and end with questions. Occasionally teachers allow pupils, especially those in Year 11 who are working on their own projects, to work at too slow a pace. Marking often includes comments or suggestions about presentation or improvement. Teachers and assistants give pupils with special educational needs good support.

151. There is good leadership within the department. The co-ordinator has recently completed an audit of cross-subject coverage, but the results are disappointing. Some departments, such as art, design and technology, music and science use information technology well in lessons, but others such as geography, history and modern foreign languages do not. Occasionally, lessons in English and mathematics and for pupils with special educational needs include use of the computers but such provision is limited. Subject teachers do not plan to give pupils enough opportunities to show what they can do with information technology and use the skills gained. Currently, some subjects, in particular English, mathematics, geography, history, modern foreign languages are not complying with the requirements of the National Curriculum in the use of information technology to support teaching and learning.

152. The school has responded well to the suggestions made in the last inspection report. There is a new scheme of work covering all aspects of information and communications technology, complying with the requirements of the National Curriculum. Assessment is good. Pupils of different levels of attainment take different examinations at the end of Key Stage 4. The accommodation and equipment have improved. There are two rooms, both containing sufficient modern equipment for delivery of the curriculum. Some older computers are in use by subject teachers. The two multi-media computers in the library are used well by staff and pupils. A training programme, intended to give teachers skills and confidence in using information technology, began well and has been well supported.

Modern foreign languages

153. GCSE results in 1997 were above national averages in French for the proportions gaining both A*-C and A*-G grades. In Spanish the proportion achieving A*-C grades was below national averages and A*-G grades was in line with national averages. In 1998 provisional results in both languages improved significantly for both A*-C and A*-G grades. Since the last inspection there has been a significant improvement in levels of attainment in both languages. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 for French and Spanish matches the attainment expected nationally for pupils aged 14. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 for French are above and for Spanish match the attainment expected nationally for pupils aged 16. Overall the GCSE results match pupils' average attainment in their other subjects.

154. By the end of Key Stage 3 all pupils are confident speakers and listeners in both French and Spanish; they identify the main points and specific detail from extracts of speech containing familiar language with some repetition and higher attainers deduce the meaning of unfamiliar language and need little repetition. All participate in simple dialogues and the majority can express opinions and describe events in the present and past. Most identify and apply patterns in the languages and are beginning to adapt the languages to suit their own needs. Most identify detail from texts and use reference materials effectively and lower attainers match print and sound with meaning. Writing is largely accurate; most write sentences and lower attainers can label and copy accurately.

155. By the end of Key Stage 4 listening skills are very well developed; higher attainers can identify detail from speech at normal speed containing some unfamiliar language and structures from a variety of topic areas with little need for repetition. Most extend their range in speaking tasks. Pupils deal effectively with a variety of authentic texts containing some unfamiliar language and vocabulary from a variety of topic areas. Higher attainers write accurately at length using a good range of vocabulary and structures. Lower attainers write simple sentences using set phrases substituting words to change meaning. Mixed skill activities such as speaking and listening or reading and speaking are less well developed.

156. Overall, pupils make good progress, throughout the school, consolidating previously learned work, increasing their range of vocabulary and structures. Pupils are increasing in confidence and competence in language skills. Lower attainers and pupils with special educational needs are confident speakers and listeners and make good progress towards the goals set for them on their individual education plans. Higher attainers make very good progress when expectations are high and they are challenged to reach their full potential especially in identifying and applying patterns in the languages and in speaking and listening tasks. They rise to the challenge of the exclusive use of the language being learned in lessons and as a result pupils' listening skills are well developed. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils improve writing skills and the higher attainers are able to write at length and with some detail, describing events in the present and past tenses. Very good progress has been made in extended writing by the majority of pupils by the end of Key Stage 4.

157. Pupils are very well behaved and well motivated. They listen attentively and when asked to work in pairs they do so sensibly and concentrate on tasks set. They are eager to participate in oral work both in class and group activities. They work together well to solve problems.

158. The quality of teaching is good overall. It is often very good at Key Stage 3. Short term learning outcomes are clear and shared with the pupils. Teachers' command of the languages they teach is very good. Control and management of pupils are very good and pupils settle very quickly. In most lessons there is effective monitoring of individual progress and frequent and encouraging feedback. In the majority of lessons there is a good variety of appropriate and well sequenced activities and resources are well matched to pupils' needs. However, many teaching groups for higher attaining pupils are large. Teaching rooms for these groups are often cramped and some activities, for example group work cannot be undertaken which has a negative impact on standards. The language being learned is used effectively and often exclusively and this is effective in developing pupils' listening skills. However, pupils are not always given sufficient opportunities to put their skills to the test in real situations and have little access to use information technology. Relationships are very good, the atmosphere is supportive, pupils are given frequent opportunities to practise informally and activities are often conducted with humour. Presentations are clear, good use is made of time and resources and the use of games to reinforce work from previous lessons is very effective.

159. Most pupils are taught both languages and this is effective in developing their understanding of the way language works. Schemes of work are detailed and the department

works well as a team, observing each others' lessons and meeting informally to develop strategies and to share ideas which contribute to positive impacts on standards. There are insufficient text books and this results in much photocopying for pupils to be able to complete homework. Noise from classrooms above sometimes makes oral and aural work difficult.

160. Since the last inspection standards have improved significantly in both languages; pupils are involved in tracking their own progress through the National Curriculum levels of attainment and in setting their own targets. The department uses the languages being learned effectively and frequently exclusively to conduct lessons; pupils' listening skills are very well developed as a result. Pupils are given the opportunity to practise informally in pairs and this is effective in increasing confidence and competence in speaking and in identifying and applying patterns in the language. This, together with the development of dictionary skills, is effective in increasing pupils' independence in the languages. All resources are now linked to schemes of work and are accessible to all members of the department. Responsibilities within the department are now clear and the department works well as a team. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection.

Music

161. Pupils' attainment is average at Key Stage 3 compared to the level expected nationally for pupils aged 14 and above average at the end of Key Stage 4. GCSE results are good. Although results in 1997 were slightly lower than expected, the proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades over the last three years has, on average, been significantly above the national subject level. Most GCSE pupils have a good understanding of musical concepts generally, which they exploit in their compositions, some of which are well supported by music technology or with conventional scores in staff notation. By the end of Key Stage 3, performing and composing are frequently combined in mainly instrumental ensemble work, using tuned and untuned percussion instruments and keyboards. Pupils make good use of their opportunities to improvise short melodies and incorporate basic information technology skills. Overall the GCSE results in music match pupils' average attainment in their other subjects.

162. Progress is good at both key stages for pupils of all levels of attainment. Musicianship is related frequently to the use of notation which is adapted to the needs of all pupils, so that, by the end of Key Stage 3, a significant number have learnt to do without the support of written letter names when they play music. Most pupils control instrumental performances of short melodies like 'Ode to Joy' and 'Lightly Row' capably on keyboards. High attainers maintain and combine individual parts in short ensembles and group compositions confidently. They keep together well and, at times, achieve sensitive results. At Key Stage 4, many perform their own compositions, and some use a significant degree of music technology to present their work in imaginative instrumental colours. Pupils are increasingly able to converse in the correct technical terms. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress.

163. Pupils' response to music is good and there is a lot of enthusiasm for music making. Behaviour is excellent. Pupils collaborate well in small groups, sharing ideas and helping each other musically. They enjoy playing instruments responsibly, and react positively to the intellectual challenges needed in co-ordinating the skills required. Practice time is used efficiently; pupils really want to improve. The take-up rate for GCSE is good. A significant number enhance their personal development by participating in the wide range of extra-curricular activities available. Some of these provide opportunities for more advanced music making. For example, the guitar ensemble was practising a Baroque concerto.

164. The quality of teaching is good. There is an experienced approach to meeting the musical needs of all pupils, and the subject is presented in a practical and challenging way which encourages pupils to think for themselves. For example, pupils in a Year 9 class had to solve for themselves the problems of speed when fitting chords to melodies. Computer technology is used well as a teaching aid, providing effective musical support when necessary. Classes are rehearsed at a rigorous pace and tasks are adapted to challenge all levels of musical ability. The quality of peripatetic teaching is never less than satisfactory.

165. The decoration and furniture of the suited accommodation have, since the last inspection, been improved, making it adequate for present needs. The size of some very large classes, however, restricts the effectiveness of group work, acts as a constraint on the use of good resources and has a negative impact on standards. Moreover, as the department is expanding, there is little room to accommodate large numbers of instruments. There are not enough full size keyboards with 'record facilities', and one of the pianos needs to be fitted with stabilisers to comply with health and safety requirements.

166. In response to the last inspection, the time allocation for music at Key Stage 3 has been dramatically increased. Demand for instrumental lessons exceeds the teaching time at present available. The enthusiasm of pupils continues to increase and extra-curricular activities are popular. The department values and is valued by pupils. There have been several changes in teaching staff since the last inspection and the new head of department has worked hard to restore and maintain high standards within the department.

Physical education

167. At end of Key Stage 4 the attainment of most pupils is above that expected nationally of pupils aged 16. In 1997 GCSE results followed the trend of recent years when the percentage pupils gaining A* - C grades was significantly above the national average. There is little difference in the performance of boys and girls. Pupils' attainment in GCSE physical education in 1997 was better than their attainment in their other subjects. These good results were repeated in 1998.

168. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above that expected nationally of pupils aged 14. Their work in games is particularly strong and by the end of the key stage they apply well established skills to a number of games. They have a good knowledge of rules and tactical play. Pupils devise and perform simple sequences of movement in gymnastics and dance. They have an understanding of the effect of exercise on the body and warm up for lessons appropriately.

169. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils use physical education terms accurately when explaining or discussing their work. They have a good understanding of how to plan activities that prepare the body for physical activity and confidently use their ideas to lead other pupils at the beginning of lessons. Their performance in games is consistently good and they sustain their skills when under pressure in a game. Pupils discuss and refine tactics in order to improve their performance.

170. Pupils always make at least satisfactory progress in lessons. Their progress is usually good. Throughout Key Stage 3 they are highly motivated to improve and always work hard in lessons. The basic skills of Year 7 are carefully consolidated and built upon so that by year 9 they are playing games with confidence and a good knowledge of the rules. They have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their performance. In Key Stage 4 their motivation remains high as they respond to challenging activities. Pupils' observational skills become more accurate and they can use this to improve their own work and to help others. Pupils with special educational needs take a full part in lessons and make good progress. Higher attaining pupils progress very well in school and many represent the school in local district and area teams.

171. Pupils' attitudes to physical education are very good; they are always smartly dressed and participation rates are high. Their behaviour is very good. Pupils are proud of the success of their school in local sporting activities. They listen carefully and respond quickly as they take responsibility for organising themselves in groups or when collecting equipment. There is a high level of co-operation when they play in teams and work together in gymnastics and dance. Pupils are encouraged to be independent in their work and respond well to this.

172. The quality of teaching is always at least satisfactory and the majority is good. Teaching is better at Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4 where there is a greater proportion of good and very good teaching. Teachers have good subject knowledge which they use to plan interesting activities and practices that challenge pupils and help them improve. For example, in a Year 11 GCSE class pupils worked in pairs to combine their knowledge of the principles of training and their practical work when analysing the skills of a game. In a very few lessons this link between theory and practical work is not always so clear. The best teaching is planned to take account of the wide range of needs in classes but this is not consistent across all lessons. A particular strength of teachers is their ability to coach pupils when they are playing a game. Teachers then make accurate assessments of pupils' skills and give clear pointers as to how they can improve. Lessons are brisk and purposeful and, because teachers organise equipment and groupings of pupils very clearly, there is no waste of time. Teachers have high standards; they expect pupils to behave well, have the correct kit and to take a full part in lessons. Homework in examination classes is regularly set and marked.

173. The department is very well led. Teaching is regularly monitored and the good standards identified by the last inspection have been maintained. The well planned curriculum is enhanced by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities supported by many pupils. The school is very successful in local competitions. Indoor accommodation is adequate to meet the demands of the curriculum but the boys' changing rooms are in a poor state of repair. Outdoor facilities are unsatisfactory for the range of games and numbers of pupils involved. There is an 'all-weather' pitch for hockey but no adequate area for rugby and soccer games which restricts the opportunities for pupils to make good progress. Outside pitches have to be hired for fixtures. The grass area used for small group games in lessons is heavily used and the surface quickly breaks up in wet weather. Resources and equipment are good. However, there are insufficient books in the library to encourage research and independent study, particularly by examination groups. The high standards achieved at the time of the last inspection are being well maintained.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

174. The inspection team consisted of 12 inspectors. During the four days of the inspection, 161 lessons, 23 registration sessions, eight assemblies and a number of extra-curricular activities were inspected. Most teachers were seen teaching at least twice and many several times. Forty-two planned meetings were held with members of staff and there was a meeting with members of the governing body. Inspectors looked at the written work of many pupils. All the available written work of a representative sample of pupils from Year 7- Year 11 was inspected. Planned discussions were held with these pupils. Informal discussions were held with many more. Religious education was subject to a separate inspection report.

175. A large amount of documentation from the school was both analysed before and during the inspection period. The registered inspector held a very positive meeting attended by 31 parents prior to the inspection and 361 parents completed a questionnaire indicating their views of the school. A local feeder primary school was visited and there were interviews with the school's careers officer and the educational welfare officer.

DATA AND INDICATORS

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 – Y11	689	15	90	96

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers (Y7- Y11)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	37.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.6

Education support staff (Y7 – Y11)

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked each week	174

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	76
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Average teaching group size:	KS3	25.5
	KS4	23.7

Financial data

Financial year:

1997/1998

	£
Total Income	1 306 970
Total Expenditure	1 301 746
Expenditure per pupil	1 934
Balance brought forward from previous year	(72 093)
Balance carried forward to next year	(66 868)

Figures in parenthesis indicate negative values

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:	670
Number of questionnaires returned:	361

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	47	50	3	0	0
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	46	47	4	3	1
The school handles complaints from parents well	24	57	12	5	1
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	35	57	4	4	0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	44	48	6	2	0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	43	53	2	3	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	45	49	4	2	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	35	52	5	7	1
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	44	49	6	1	0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	47	48	3	1	0
My child(ren) like(s) school	42	50	5	3	0

Other issues raised by parents

There was a very high response by parents in completing the questionnaire and it is clear from the replies that the majority of parents are pleased with the school and the quality of education that their child(ren) receive.

¹. Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year