

INSPECTION REPORT

Colne Primet High School
Colne

LEA area: Lancashire

Unique Reference Number: 119720

Headteacher: Mr P J Dixon

Reporting inspector: Mr B A Jones
T12087

Dates of inspection: 7 – 11 September 1998

Under OFSTED contract number: 700979

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

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Information about the school

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	County
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of Chair of Governors:	Dr T A Pickles
Date of the previous inspection:	31 August – 6 September 1994

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C Evers	History	
D Gaulton	Geography	The curriculum and assessment
K Gilliver	Physical education	
C Griffin	English, drama	
D Heath Lay Inspector		Attendance, attitudes, behaviour and personal development, pupils' welfare and guidance, partnership with parents and the community
A Holland	Mathematics	
J Radford	Religious education	Pupils with special educational needs, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
B Shillaker	Science	
T Slack	Design and technology Information technology	
J Tolley	Modern foreign languages	Equal opportunities
D Wigley	Music	Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- There is a high proportion of good teaching throughout the school. Staff development and the monitoring and support of staff are very effective.
- The teaching of General Certificate of Education (GCSE) courses produces good results for the high attainers that compare very favourably with schools in a similar context.
- Pupils make good progress in their basic skills of literacy and numeracy through Key Stage 3, particularly those pupils with special educational needs.
- Planning at all levels is strong, leading to a clear educational direction to the school's activities and is supported by very effective financial planning. A commitment to raising achievement permeates the whole work of the school.
- The school is very ably led and the Headteacher receives good support from the governing body and senior management team.
- Behaviour in the classrooms is good, due to a consistent approach by teachers, their high expectations and the establishing of good relationships between pupils themselves and pupils with their teachers.

Where the school has weaknesses

- I. Lower attaining pupils do not perform well at GCSE when compared with pupils in similar schools and too many pupils leave the school without any qualifications.
- II. The rate of absenteeism is too high.
- III. Pupils do not receive a coherent experience in information technology because of weaknesses in the management of the subject and attainment is below expected levels.
- IV. The standards of attainment are lower in history overall and French at Key Stage 4 than in other subjects.
- V. The teaching of a few classes of low attainers is unsatisfactory, particularly at Key Stage 4.
- VI. There is some poor accommodation and rooms are not always allocated to best effect.

The school has 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

- VII. Pupils make better progress through Key Stage 3, particularly in the acquisition of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Their attainment in the National Curriculum tests in English was above the national average and in mathematics it was in line with the average at Key Stage 3. It was well above the average of schools of a similar nature in 1997. This was achieved in the face of lower scores year on year in the standard tests taken when pupils enter the school.
- VIII. Standards overall at the end of Key Stage 4 show a rising trend in GCSE results since the last inspection and this is in the face of lower attainment year on year when pupils enter the school. This represents an improvement. The proportion of pupils obtaining five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C, at 41 per cent, was in line with the national average of schools in a similar context.
- IX. There has been a marked positive effect on the performance of pupils with special educational needs as a result of the greater emphasis on improving basic skills in literacy and numeracy and providing good quality assistance for these pupils from

within the school's own staffing resources.

- X. The quality of teaching has improved as a result of a good staff development policy that has emphasised a consistent approach to teaching throughout the school and the use of a wider variety of teaching styles. As a result, pupils are learning to become more independent and are taking more responsibility for their own learning.
- XI. There is better provision of specialist teachers and, where teachers operate outside their immediate areas of expertise; there is no falling off in standards.
- XII. Detailed planning has been a feature in the school for a number of years and has improved to the point where the school's aims are clearly reflected in planning at all levels right through to classroom practice.
- XIII. The curriculum provided for pupils is now more appropriate at Key Stage 4 and has better balance at Key Stage 3.
- XIV. The school has produced sufficient improvements to be judged satisfactory since the last inspection and it has strategies and systems in place to maintain its rate of improvement relating to standards of achievement and to behaviour. It continues to place a priority upon improving attendance but is not yet making sufficient headway in this area.

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	Key
			<i>well above average</i> A
			<i>above average</i> B
			<i>average</i> C
			<i>below average</i> D
			<i>well below average</i> E
Key Stage 3	C	A	
GCSE examinations	D	B	

XV. Results in 1997 Key Stage 3 tests range from above average in English, to average in mathematics and below average in science when compared with schools nationally. However, across all three subjects, pupils' performance was well above average in comparison with schools whose pupils come from similar backgrounds.

XVI. The strongest subjects at GCSE were English language and combined science, while information systems, history and French were the weakest subjects. GCSE results are better than in schools in a similar context because good teaching and high expectations of teachers ensure that the higher attainers do very well. However the teachers are not as successful with the lower attainers and too many leave without any qualifications.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in	Least effective in
Years 7-9	Good	Design and technology, English, geography, mathematics, music and science	Information technology
Years 10-11	Good	Design and technology, English, geography, German, mathematics, music, religious studies and science	French, history and information technology
English	Good		
Mathematics	Good		

Teaching was at least satisfactory in over 95 per cent of lessons; in 50 per cent of lessons it was good and it was very good in around ten per cent (and there were two examples seen of excellent teaching). In the small proportion of lessons where teaching was unsatisfactory, it was mostly in Year 10 classes with low attaining pupils. In these lessons, teachers did not engage the interest of all the pupils sufficiently and clearer, more detailed planning was needed to meet the particular needs of some of the pupils present.

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
XVII. Behaviour	XVIII. Good in classrooms, but far more boisterous around the S.
XIX. Attendance	XX. A continuing problem in the school and has not improved, iatives undertaken.
XXI. Ethos*	XXII. A good ethos in the school in general and in the large commitment to high standards. Good attitudes on the part of hips with each other and with their teachers.
XXIII. Leadership and management	XXIV. Very strong, positive leadership from the Headteacher e senior management team and the governors.
XXV. Curriculum	XXVI. Mainly broad, balanced and meets statutory or information technology is unsatisfactory and the time for music is
XXVII. Pupils with special educational needs	XXVIII. These pupils make good progress and benefit from the iding further support from other teachers in the school.
XXIX. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	XXX. Good overall with sound provision for spiritual
XXXI. Staffing, resources and accommodatio n	XXXII. Good overall. Some poor accommodation and not t. The Independent Learning Centre (Oracle) is a very positive
XXXIII. Value for money	XXXIV. Good overall. Given below average prior attainment, the Pupils make good progress and standards compared with similar d, particularly amongst the higher attainers in GCSE examinations.

* *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
XXXV. They feel welcome at the school and feel that the school handles complaints well. XXXVI. They feel the school enables pupils to achieve a good standard of work. XXXVII. It keeps parents well informed about their children's progress. XXXVIII. It encourages pupils to develop responsibility and independence. XXXIX. School reports and parent evenings are very good.	XL. The toilet facilities are poor.

The judgements of the inspection team support the views expressed by the parents. The school works hard and successfully to present a welcoming approach to visitors and sees its links with parents as central to improving standards and increasing attendance rates. The use of the student planner is a positive feature in this process.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

I. Improve the attainment and progress in information technology

XL. Improve the teaching of information technology across the school as a whole. Particular attention should be paid to ensuring more effective management of the subject to include further staff development and the closer monitoring and evaluation of the teaching that pupils receive in information technology and the manner in which it is assessed.

(Paragraphs 75,96,147-153)

II. Improve attendance

XLII. Work closely with outside agencies to encourage pupils towards an improved attendance record.

XLIII. Extend the good practice that exists in the departments where those poor attenders whose academic progress is being adversely affected are given more help. **(Paragraphs 22-24,58)**

I? Raise the achievements of the lower attainers

- ? Identify more precisely the factors causing individual pupils' reluctance to work consistently towards achieving their best results.
- ? Develop the use of individual action plans in setting agreed targets with pupils to help them to become more responsible and consistent in their approach to their studies. **(Paragraphs 36-38,72,157)**

I? 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 noted in parenthesis after each issue.

- ? Standards of attainment in history and French are too low. Currently the lack of opportunity for pupils to study a second foreign language puts too great a limitation

on higher attaining pupils. **(History, 140-146. French, 154-161. Second modern foreign language, 35,160)**

- ? Additional curriculum time is needed for music. **(35,167)**
- ? Lower attaining pupils should be offered courses at Key Stage 4 that are more relevant to their needs. **(36-38,72)**
- ? The toilets are in need of refurbishment. **(77)**
- ? Attention is needed to ensure that the kilns meet health and safety requirements. **(125)**

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

1. Colne Primet School is an 11-16 comprehensive, situated on the eastern side of Colne in the Waterside Ward. There are 936 pupils on roll, with many more boys than girls. The school has around 15 per cent ethnic minority pupils (total 138). Numbers have been consistent for some time and the school is consistently over subscribed. The social class profile of the school's admission zone places the ward in which the school is situated near the bottom of all local wards in terms of the proportion of pupils in high social class households and pupils living in homes with adults who have experienced higher education.

2. The school's pupils represent the full range of attainment, but the general level of attainment is below average. They enter the school from six main feeder primary schools and smaller numbers from another 22 primary schools. Average reading scores taken by pupils on entry to the school over the past five years have consistently been below average and in the last three years have dropped further each year. Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test results in English, mathematics and science show comparatively high percentages of pupils failing to reach average levels. Some 27 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs is 19 per cent, which is broadly in line with the national average but the percentage of pupils with statements of special needs, at five per cent, is above the national average. The intake appears to be similar in make up to that described in the 1994 inspection report, but the attainment levels on entry to the school are now lower.

3. Around 82 per cent of parents who responded to a questionnaire agreed that the school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on their children, ten per cent were undecided and eight per cent disagreed. In all other respects the large majority of parents indicate general satisfaction with the school. The school's aims centre upon helping pupils to 'Learn to live' and to achieve this by encouraging the full development of all pupils and preparing them to enter the community as mature and responsible adults. The school sets out to ensure that all pupils are given the opportunity to realise their full potential, irrespective of ability, gender or ethnic origin. Taking account of the lower attainment of pupils on entry, the school has set its immediate priorities as maintaining current levels of performance at GCSE and raising the attainment of boys throughout the school.

Key indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key
For the latest reporting year:

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1997	92	96	188

National	Test Results	English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils At NC Level 5 or above	Boys	50	58	46
	Girls	74	58	40
	Total	124	116	86
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	66 (34)	68 (55)	45 (51)
	National	56 (57)	60 (57)	60 (57)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	33 (12)	36 (32)	25 (18)
	National	23 (26)	37 (34)	29 (22)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils At NC Level 5 or Above	Boys	52	65	58
	Girls	76	60	52
	Total	128	125	110
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	68 (64)	66 (61)	58 (61)
	National	60 (61)	64 (62)	61 (60)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	24 (34)	38(-32)	18 (22)
	National	28 (30)	37 (35)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1997	95	91	186

GCSE Results		5 or more	5 or more	1 or more
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	39	77	83
	Girls	38	77	83
	Total	77	154	166
Percentage standard specified	School	41 (41)	83 (86)	89 (94)
	National	43 (43)	86 (88)	92 (92)

Number studying for approved vocational
units, and percentage of *such pupils*
who achieved all those they studied:

	Number	% success
School	40	100
National		80

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

Attendance

Percentage of half days Missed through absence for the Latest complete reporting year:			%
Authorised Absence	School		10.6
	National comparative data		8.1
Unauthorised Absence	School		1.1
	National comparative data		1.0

Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory during the previous year:		Number
Fixed period		19
Permanent		4

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:		%
Very good or better		9
Satisfactory or better		97
Less than satisfactory		3

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

4. At Key Stage 3 the 1997 results in National Curriculum tests overall were in line with the national average. Girls performed better than boys and were at the national average, but boys' grades overall were below this average. In English, results were above the national average and represented a significant improvement in the grades obtained in 1996. In mathematics, pupils' grades were in line with this average. In science the results were below the national average in 1997. In 1998 results in English and mathematics were lower than the school's results in 1997 but were still in line with the national average of 1997. In science, scores improved but were still below the 1997 national average. When compared with schools in a similar context the results in English and mathematics for 1997 were well above average and in line with the average in science.

5. At the end of Key Stage 4 the proportion of pupils obtaining five or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) passes at grades A*-C, at 41 per cent, was in line with the national average in 1997 and maintained a consistency that has existed since the last inspection. The same pattern of consistency is found in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more passes at A*-G grades, (at 83 per cent), but this proportion is below the national average. The number of pupils gaining one or more GCSE grades at A*-G, (89 per cent), is below average and a higher proportion of pupils than the national average leave the school with no formal qualifications. Overall, pupils' performance at GCSE shows a rising trend over the past four years, but this improvement is at a slower rate than the national average. The lower attainment of pupils entering the school year on year over that period indicates a real improvement in results. In general, girls do better than boys and the boys are further behind girls than in most other schools. When the GCSE results are compared with schools in a similar context the school's scores are very high in the proportion of five A*-C grades obtained. However, it is in line with the average for five A*-G grades obtained and well below average in the category of one or more A*-G grades obtained. In 1998 the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-G grades and those gaining one or more A*-G grades were similar to 1997, but the proportion gaining five A*-C grades dropped to 37 per cent.

6. Standards are still better in some subjects than in others. The percentage of pupils gaining the higher grades A*-C in the 1997 examinations for GCSE was significantly below the national average in history and information systems, but significantly above this average in design and technology. The percentage of pupils gaining these higher grades was in line with the national average in English language, combined science, English literature, geography, German, mathematics and physical education. In comparison with the performances of pupils within the school, pupils gained significantly better grades in combined science, English language and German and significantly lower grades in French, history and information systems. In history and in French, standards are below average and in French the performance of the boys is significantly below that of the girls. The school has for some time targeted the boys in an effort to raise their attainment levels and there has been an improvement in the 1998 GCSE results, which brings them much nearer to the 1997 national average. It is still the case however, that the work of pupils in French is below average. In history the differences between the performances of boys and girls are not as marked and earlier poor GCSE results are improving but are still well below the national average for the proportion of A*-C grades awarded.

7. At Key Stage 3 in English, mathematics and science, levels of attainment overall are in line with the national average. In other subjects levels of attainment are below those expected of pupils aged 14 in design and technology, geography, history and information technology. In modern foreign languages, music, physical education and religious education, attainment is in line with levels expected, while in art levels of attainment are higher. Overall, in around a third of the work inspected at Key Stage 3, attainment was below that expected of pupils at this age. The higher attaining pupils show very good levels of attainment, for example in a Year 9 class in English, pupils attempted detailed and accurate analyses of characters and took account of the complex personality traits that Arthur Miller was attempting to portray in his play 'The Crucible'. On the other hand, in a Year 8 geography class the poor standard of keyboard skills and lack of familiarity with word processing routines slowed the progress of pupils when dealing with a straightforward word processing task.

8. At Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment is in line with the national average in the core subjects, but lower than is found nationally in information technology, French and history. In all other subjects, attainment is in line with the national average other than in religious education where it is higher. Pupils following vocationally orientated courses attain standards in line with national expectations. There is a general weakness in pupils' use of information technology. While some pupils are very adept in its use, the majority do not use these skills sufficiently and some find difficulty in using computers constructively. The recent opening of the school's Oracle suite, a new building of high quality accommodation designed to encourage independent learning, is starting to address this problem.

9. Across Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, pupils develop their literacy skills well, and subject departments make valuable contributions. In lessons, students listen well, both when attending to their teachers and when working in small groups. Higher attaining pupils make fluent and extensive contributions to class discussions, but the answers and contributions from other pupils are restricted in length. However, most pupils speak confidently and effectively in small groups. At Key Stage 4 most pupils read well enough to cope independently with the material they study in school. Higher and middle attaining pupils read fluently and often with expression. In history, pupils are encouraged to use a range of reading methods including skimming and scanning. Taking account of their attainment levels on entry, pupils, particularly those with special educational needs, make good progress in reading. Their writing skills also develop well, particularly when teachers give them support in planning their work and a chance to proof read and redraft. The highest attainers write with fluency and purpose and gain the interest of the reader. The school's literacy policy, while not yet complete, is having a positive effect upon standards, particularly in English, geography and religious education. In the latter two subjects pupils are given the opportunity to write in a range of styles and many do so to good effect.

10. The standard of basic numeracy on entry to the school is below average. The standard is raised during Key Stages 3 and 4 and pupils make good progress; and they attain average standards. Good progress is made by pupils with special educational needs at Key Stage 3, and is helped by the 'Numeracy across the Curriculum' initiative. This numeracy policy outlines to each subject department the aspect of numeracy it can best develop and details the way in which this should be done. Valuable contributions are made particularly by science and geography and to a lesser extent design technology, but other departments are not yet sufficiently positive in their contributions. The policy has been written only recently but the documentation is impressive and the planning is in place. The development of skills in numeracy and literacy occupies an important place in the school development plan and the strategy document that further informs the plan.

11. Standards overall have been maintained since the last inspection and in the face of lower attainment year on year when pupils enter the school. This represents an improvement. There has been a small fall in the proportion of pupils gaining five A*-C grades in GCSE in 1998, but a small rise in the proportion gaining at least one A*-G grade.

The maintenance of consistent results is indicative of the good progress made by pupils in recent years and the very good results of the higher attainers when compared with those achieved in similar schools is a measure of the progress made by these pupils.

12. The school has invested and continues to invest a great deal of time and resources in order to raise attainment and progress throughout the school, particularly amongst the boys. On entry to the school pupils have levels of attainment that are well below the national average in the core subjects English, mathematics and science, as shown by results in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests. Literacy and numeracy tests also show that, while some pupils are above average in their attainment levels, the majority are below average. Precise targets are set for individual pupils, and departments set targets based upon a good level of knowledge of their pupils' levels of literacy, numeracy and reading skills. These targets emphasise high expectations and are based upon accurate assessments of pupils' potential. The measures are well planned and appropriate; they are proving to be important factors in the school maintaining standards in the face of locally agreed targets that suggest a drop in the school's performance at GCSE over the next three years in terms of the proportion of pupils gaining five A*-C grades.

13. At Key Stage 3 progress is very good in around five per cent of the work seen, good in a further 45 per cent and satisfactory in all but a very small minority. At Key Stage 4 the pattern is much the same but there is unsatisfactory progress in around seven per cent of the work seen. There is some variation in the progress made by pupils in different subjects and through the key stages. However the progress made is at least satisfactory in all subjects other than information technology. In English, good progress is made through both Key Stages 3 and 4, as is the case with art, design and technology, geography and physical education. In mathematics, pupils make good progress at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory progress at Key Stage 4. In science, pupils' progress is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4, as is the case with music and religious education. In modern foreign languages and history progress is now satisfactory through both key stages.

14. There is some discrepancy between the overall progress made at the two key stages. At Key Stage 3 progress is good while at Key Stage 4 it is satisfactory overall, but less uniform. At Key Stage 4 a large minority make good progress and their GCSE results compare very favourably with those of pupils in similar schools, and their results are in line with the national average. The majority of pupils make satisfactory progress. This is seen in the consistency in the proportion of pupils who gain five A*-G grades at GCSE in the face of lower scores on standard tests on entry to the school than their predecessors. The figures are below the national average but in line with the average of pupils in similar schools. There is a small minority of pupils who make unsatisfactory progress through Key Stage 4 and leave the school without any formal qualifications.

15. Pupils who have contrasting levels of attainment often make good progress. In English, for example, higher attaining pupils are challenged appropriately and produce essay work in Year 11 that is well planned and structured and addresses the topic in a clear manner, indicating good progress made. Lower attaining pupils in the same year made good progress in their work on comprehension as they developed a clear understanding of the poet's intentions when discussing Seamus Heaney's work, 'Mid Term Break'. Similarly in science, a group in a higher set indicated good progress in their investigations into the rate of chemical reactions and a lower set showed good progress within an individual lesson in their understanding of what constitutes a balanced meal.

16. Girls generally make better progress than boys do. This is reflected in their higher attainment in GCSE, where they gain a greater number of A*-C grades. Many pupils coming into the school with low levels of basic skills reach the standards expected at GCSE. Most pupils with special educational needs make good progress in relation to their prior attainment, particularly in the small group and individual lessons where they are withdrawn and where they concentrate on developing their skills of literacy and numeracy. However there is some unsatisfactory progress made by pupils with special educational needs in their work in French where there is some inappropriate over-emphasis on reading and writing. Those pupils for whom English is an additional language make satisfactory progress.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

17. In the majority of lessons the pupils' response to teaching is good and pupils' work in general shows their good attitudes to learning. In a very small number of lessons pupils are slow to settle. The teaching is good in the great majority of lessons resulting in good responses from the pupils especially in the question and answer sessions. Pupils also maintain a good level of concentration and interest during group work. The majority of pupils display a responsible attitude in completing homework tasks on schedule. In the large majority of cases the school is successful in promoting positive attitudes in pupils and helping them in their personal development.

18. Pupils respond well to the opportunities given to them to live their school lives within an agreed moral code. This has a positive impact upon learning in the classrooms. During lessons the majority of pupils behave well, they are attentive and concerned to do well. Behaviour in the corridors and in the dining rooms is occasionally boisterous but pupils always respond well to the duty teacher and there are no serious incidents. Relationships between pupils are good. They work well together in lessons and support one another in other school activities such as team sports. Pupils show respect for adults, and teachers encourage pupils to express their views and opinions. During the week of the inspection no occurrences of bullying or harassment were observed. During the year 1997/98 there were 19 fixed period exclusions and four permanent exclusions. This places the school below average for the number of fixed exclusions and around the average for the number of permanent exclusions. The school uses the sanctions of exclusion to promote good behaviour.

19. Pupils with special educational needs respond well to being supported in class by teachers from within the school who have received additional training for the role. They know the teachers well and good relationships are evident. Concentration during lessons and periods of individual tuition is good. Pupils collaborate well during group work and show initiative when carrying out practical activities. Most pupils with special educational needs have positive attitudes in mainstream lessons and in withdrawal lessons. The majority of pupils are keen to learn, and ready to help each other during group work.

· 20. Pupils are given good opportunities for both social and cultural development and they respond well. Many of the more senior pupils volunteer to act as senators at the school. The senators give support to younger pupils and assist with some supervision and administration responsibilities such as helping at major school events. The senators have their own senate which meets in order to discuss how the senator function can be developed. The school organises a welcome desk, which is operated by the pupils who enjoy greeting visitors and taking messages. The school invites local primary schools to take part in sports competitions and the events are organised by the school pupils. The school organises a good range of extracurricular activities including sport and the pupils support these well. The response of pupils to these various activities and the opportunity to contribute to the life of the local community is invariably positive and gives them the opportunity to show initiative and to take responsibility.

· 21. The response of pupils to the spiritual provision in school is satisfactory. In a whole school assembly they concentrated well, listened carefully and reflected quietly on the messages given. This was not always the case and other assemblies did not engage the pupils' attention sufficiently nor give enough time for reflection. In these cases pupils saw the assemblies as convenient times for listening to routine information rather than an opportunity for spiritual development.

Attendance

· 22. Attendance in the year 1997/98 was 88.3 per cent, which is below the national average. The unauthorised absence rate, at 1.1 per cent, was in line with the average but authorised absence at 10.6 per cent was in excess of the national average. The top three year-groups all had attendance below 90 per cent, as follows: Year 11 (83.9), Year 10 (85.8), and Year 9 (88). The provision made by the school to encourage good attendance patterns has a positive impact on the large majority of the pupils, but there is a minority who remain unpersuaded by the efforts made to encourage them into better attendance patterns.

· 23. The attendance patterns are influenced to a large degree by a small minority of persistent absentees whose unsatisfactory attendance has an adverse effect upon their progress and it reduces their examination prospects. Many of these pupils are low attainers and the school now has well planned strategies in place to modify the curriculum in order to make it more suitable and better match the aspirations of this group. The problem remains one of great concern to the school and continued efforts are made in conjunction with the education welfare system to improve the attendance of this small minority of persistent absentees.

· 24. Pupils are generally punctual to lessons. However there are two sessions during the day when movement directly from one lesson to another leads to some unpunctuality and loss of teaching time when pupils have to travel over a large distance. The school has well-developed plans in place to extend the time available to take account of this issue.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

25. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. There is very little unsatisfactory teaching and where previously there was little outstanding teaching, now nearly ten per cent is very good and there are a few examples of teaching of the highest order. There is now a high proportion of good teaching throughout the school and this is having a positive impact upon standards. The school has spent a great deal of time and resources in order to improve the consistency of approach in the classroom to ensure that pupils understand teachers' expectations and appreciate their own role in creating a good learning atmosphere. This has had a positive impact upon standards. The effect is most obvious at Key Stage 3 where standards have risen and are reflected in the improved National Curriculum test results. There is still some unsatisfactory teaching usually in Year 10 classes of low attaining pupils. The teaching in French and history is not as consistent as in other subjects and in art the teaching is polarised with some examples of excellent teaching along with some unsatisfactory teaching.

26. Overall teaching quality is now a strength in the school. Good teaching occurs in around a half of lessons and very good teaching in a further ten per cent. Teaching quality is consistent across both key stages. Good and very good teaching takes place consistently in all the core subjects. In mathematics in particular, around three-quarters of teaching is good and a further ten per cent is very good. Similarly in the other subjects of the curriculum good and very good teaching is common. Those subjects where there is the greatest consistency of such teaching include art, design and technology, music, physical education, religious education and vocational education. Where information technology was observed being taught it was by non-specialist staff in the context of their subject. For example in a business education lesson, pupils studying for a GNVQ qualification used their computer skills to good effect in preparing a presentation to make to the rest of the class on the subject of a visit to a local sports centre. Here the teaching of information technology skills was confident and helped the pupils make sound progress. In other cases the teaching was satisfactory in general but the progress made by pupils was limited to consolidating their skills rather than extending them.

27. Positive relationships are a feature of most classes. Teachers enjoy good relationships with their pupils and encourage good relationships between pupils. This approach enables them to maintain high expectations of pupils' efforts and behaviour and to be demanding of the best that pupils can offer. For example, in a mathematics lesson with Year 9 pupils in a lower ability set, these qualities helped pupils to make good progress on the subject of probability, and to enjoy the lesson.

28. Teachers use a variety of styles and strategies to maintain a brisk pace in lessons and to capture and retain the interest and involvement of pupils. In a Year 7 geography lesson pupils' enthusiasm was aroused as they explored how compass directions can be used and again in a Year 7 lesson in music, the teacher was able to enthuse pupils working on keyboard skills by the effective use of demonstration. In the best lessons teachers accurately match the tasks they set to the attainment levels of the pupils. Some good examples were seen, for example in English, where high attaining pupils were being stretched by being given more demanding work on more challenging texts and were taught more complex elements of punctuation. Similarly in mathematics where information technology was used in a Year 8 class to good effect. In a science lesson with Year 10 pupils dealing with food testing, the work was pitched accurately to the needs of the pupils and they made good progress as they developed an understanding of the principles of testing. Homework is used effectively in most subjects to reinforce and extend what is learned in school rather than to give the pupils more of the same.

29. Across all subjects, the best lessons are characterised by good planning by teachers secure in their knowledge of their subjects. Since the last inspection the degree of specialist teaching has increased and where teachers do operate outside their immediate area of expertise, they are well prepared and standards do not suffer. There is good quality specialist teaching in English at both key stages where teachers know their texts well and are fully aware of the demands of the examinations their pupils take. This allows teachers to respond to the needs of pupils as they arise during the lessons and to use telling examples to illustrate a point, for example in a Year 10 lesson on 'A kestrel for a knave'. Similarly good questioning in a design and technology lesson enabled the teacher in a Year 7 class to take work forward on the basis of the answers given. Teachers usually manage their lessons well, using both time and resources effectively and adopting a common approach across the school for example, in setting homework during the lesson rather than at the end to emphasise its importance. Teachers are prepared to use pair work and group work to encourage pupils to work together and this was seen being used very effectively across the whole range of subjects and noticeably in personal and social education at Key Stage 3 and religious education in Key Stage 4.

30. In the best lessons, for example in all core subjects, art, geography, music, physical education and religious education, teachers are clear in their objectives, often sharing them with the pupils; they conduct lessons with a shared purpose and pupils meet the targets described at the outset. In these lessons, teachers insist on pupils producing their best efforts, particularly relating to good behaviour and good standards of presentation.

31. In the few lessons where teaching was unsatisfactory, the level of demand was not pitched accurately and teachers do not plan with sufficient care to meet the needs of some demanding pupils, mainly in the low attaining sets in Year 10.

32. A feature of the teaching is the open approach taken by the staff. The presence of other teachers in a classroom is a common event and senior staff take the opportunities offered to mentor more inexperienced colleagues on teaching approaches. As well as this informal monitoring, all teachers are observed regularly, their teaching is evaluated and they are given formal feedback about their performance. The Headteacher is central in this process and the importance of thoughtful, positive and encouraging teaching is constantly emphasised to good effect in giving pupils a coherent and consistent experience. The findings of the last inspection have been carefully noted and the deficiencies have been successfully addressed.

33. Teaching within mainstream classes meets the requirements of pupils with special educational needs. The quality of teaching in mainstream classes and in small withdrawal groups for these pupils is good. However, there are occasionally some lessons in which pupils are not sufficiently well motivated. Most subject departments plan effectively for the requirements of pupils with special needs, paying careful attention to the targets set in pupils individual education plans. Teachers have a good knowledge of these targets and tasks and teaching styles are well matched to pupils needs. The effective cooperation between subject teachers and colleagues who take on the role of support staff enables pupils to make good progress. Those who are in most need of extra help are withdrawn from some lessons for small group and individual teaching in basic skills, and this is very effective in enabling pupils to make better progress in the subjects of the curriculum.

The curriculum and assessment

Curriculum

· 34. The planning and content of the curriculum are good and make a positive contribution to the progress made and the standards achieved by pupils. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. The total teaching time of 24 hours and ten minutes is in line with the recommended minimum at Key Stage 3 but below the suggested 25 hours at Key Stage 4.

· 35. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is mainly balanced and provides good breadth, but has three weaknesses. The time allocated for subjects is generally appropriate but is inadequate for music at Key Stage 3. This impedes progress through the Key Stage as the National Curriculum is not taught at sufficient depth and leads to some pupils starting their GCSE course from a low base. Both French and German are taught, but pupils currently may take only one foreign language and this can disadvantage able pupils at the next stage of learning. The school has addressed this issue and plans are well advanced to offer the opportunity for high attaining pupils to study a second language from 1998. Information technology is provided through the subjects of the curriculum but the present arrangements do not ensure that all pupils receive a well-balanced experience of the subject.

· 36. The curriculum includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum, religious education and personal and social education. Drama and dance are provided separately from English and physical education. Pupils are taught in mixed ability groups in Year 7 but can be grouped by their attainment in subjects from Year 8 so that work is more easily matched to their differing needs. This has a positive impact upon standards and most pupils progress at a rate commensurate with their attainment level. This is clearly seen in the results obtained at GCSE by the higher attainers. The same is not true of a minority amongst the lower attainers who go on to make poor progress through Key Stage 4 and leave the school without qualifications.

· 37. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is very broad and well balanced. All pupils follow a broad core of experience comprising English, mathematics, science, religious education, physical education and personal and social education. In addition all follow a full or short course in a foreign language, design and technology, an arts subject and history or geography. The breadth of the common curriculum restricts choice for pupils, but the introduction of vocational courses in collaboration with local colleges has improved the opportunities for some to choose courses that cater for their interests and aptitudes. However, there is further need for lower attaining pupils to be offered courses at Key Stage 4, which are more relevant to their needs.

· 38. All courses except personal and social education are accredited at Key Stage 4. Most pupils follow either full or short courses for GCSE examinations but the school offers additional forms of accreditation in order to meet pupils' needs more effectively. These include vocational qualifications for units of the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ), the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and RSA. A significant number of pupils fail to achieve a GCSE qualification at present. The Certificate of Achievement, which is accredited by the GCSE examining boards, has been introduced to meet the needs of lower attaining pupils more appropriately than the GCSE examination.

· 39. The curriculum is accessible to all pupils on the special educational needs register and meets their requirements. Lesson materials usually take account of different needs and individual specific needs are well met. Assessment is regular and rigorous, and departmental assessment for reviews of pupils' progress is very thorough. There are effective links with those primary schools from which the majority of pupils are drawn, and also with the local college which provides courses for pupils after the age of 16.

. 40. There is satisfactory provision for health, sex and drugs education through a programme of personal and social education that is taught in tutor groups in all years. Speakers from outside agencies, including the police, support the work of tutors. There is a planned and documented course for personal and social education that also includes careers education, study skills and aspects of personal development and relationships. Teaching is always at least satisfactory and sometimes good and pupils make satisfactory progress.

. 41. The planning of courses provides generally satisfactory and often good continuity and progression in pupils' learning as they move through the school. The arrangements for information technology do not ensure continuity in the development of pupils' skills, and progression in music is unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3. There is sound preparation for pupils' subject choices at the end of Year 9 and there are satisfactory opportunities for pupils to visit colleges and to gain information about opportunities after the age of 16. NVQ and GNVQ courses offer progression to full courses or work at higher levels at local colleges.

. 42. A good programme of extracurricular activities enriches the curriculum. There is a wide range of sport, especially team games, involving the majority of pupils. The school competes with some success in local competitions and also involves about half of its pupils in inter-form competitions. In addition to members of the physical education department, eight staff assist regularly with sporting activities. The school organises visits to the theatre and to art galleries, there is a range of musical activities and a popular annual production. There is a good range of regular weekly activities, especially at lunchtime, which include opportunities for help with work and revision in subjects and a supervised homework club. Other activities include the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, Young Enterprise, visits to Germany and a recent trip to the finals of the World Cup in France.

. 43. The school makes satisfactory provision for careers education and guidance. A planned programme of careers education is taught through personal and social education lessons from Year 9 which prepares pupils for decisions they have to make at the end of Key Stage 3 and when they leave school. The school's careers service adviser makes an important contribution to the work in lessons and also provides opportunities for individual interviews and advice in both Years 10 and 11. Pupils have ready access to up to date information in the new independent learning centre. The school makes good use of its links with local employers and colleges, for example in developing pupils' interview and presentation skills, and provides two weeks work experience for all pupils in Year 11. This is well managed and is carefully prepared and followed up to ensure that pupils derive benefit from the experience.

Equal opportunity

. 44. The school targets under achievers and monitors the achievement of all pupils and has a detailed policy for raising the achievement of boys in particular. There are sound guidelines followed by staff to teach the skills of literacy in all subjects across the curriculum. These strategies together with the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs have been successful in raising achievement, most notably at Key Stage 3.

· 45. In all classes pupils are encouraged to work with pupils of the opposite sex and all departments follow the school's policy for equal opportunities. This has been particularly successful in increasing the participation of boys in musical activities and in raising the achievement of boys in examinations in art, English, history and physical education.

· 46. Since the last report there has been significant improvement. Practice across the whole curriculum has become consistent and work across the whole school is now better coordinated by staff.

Assessment

· 47. Systems for assessing pupils' attainment are good at both key stages and meet statutory requirements. The schools' policies for assessment and reporting are regularly updated and provide sound principles and clear procedures to guide practice in departments. There are good systems in place in most departments and marking procedures and record-keeping are good. However, the assessment of information technology at Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory. The school actively involves pupils in the assessment process through discussion and target setting in two annual reviews, one of which is the basis for the report to parents. Reports contain appropriate and often detailed information and parents are satisfied with the information they receive. All pupils complete a Record of Achievement at the end of Year 11 and the quality of the schools' procedures has been recognised by the Local Education Authority (LEA).

· 48. The school uses assessment information well to evaluate its performance, to promote higher standards and to inform curriculum planning at both key stages. For some years, the school has tested pupils' attainment on entry in basic skill areas using nationally recognised tests. This has enabled them to establish effective support programmes to raise standards of attainment, especially in reading, in Key Stage 3. This data, supported by comparative information from the LEA, has also served as a benchmark against which to measure GCSE results for the whole school and for individual departments. More recently, the school has moved its emphasis to using assessment data to predict results and to set performance targets for the school, subjects and individuals. As a result, groups of pupils have been selected for support to enhance their examination performance. Pupils also develop general and subject specific targets to improve the quality of their work through the review system.

· 49. The school has made satisfactory progress in responding to the findings of the previous inspection report. The school included all the issues raised in its action plan and gave them careful consideration before deciding whether or not to make changes. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is now better balanced, although provision for music and information technology remains unsatisfactory. The curriculum and accreditation provided for pupils at Key Stage 4 is now more appropriate. The study skills programme has been reviewed. It is now better matched to the needs of subject departments and shows better progression in the learning. The distribution of timetable time has improved, as have teachers' comments and targets on pupils' work. The assessment of information technology at Key Stage 3 remains unsatisfactory.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

50. The school makes good provision overall for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. The school is a multi-faith community, and this is given sensitive consideration in the themes that are used in the school, year and group assemblies. There is a daily act of collective worship in which all pupils can share. These assemblies are satisfactory overall and some examples were of very good quality. One whole school assembly was of the highest quality but on other occasions times for reflection were often too limited. Pupils benefit from presentations given by outside speakers who work with schools in the area. Religious festivals are celebrated throughout the year, and the school's Christmas carol service is held at the local parish church. Some subjects of the curriculum such as English, drama, religious education and personal and social education offer opportunities for pupils to explore spiritual themes. However, there is still no whole school planning to ensure consistent and progressive spiritual development for all pupils, although this was a criticism made in the previous inspection report.

51. The school makes good provision for pupils' moral development. Through its motto: 'Learn to Live', it emphasises the importance of self-discipline in preparing pupils for entry into the wider community as responsible adults. Rules are based on courtesy and respect for others and there are clear codes of conduct for behaviour around the school and in the classroom. Adults set a good example and pupils learn about the difference between right and wrong in tutor time and assemblies, and through the daily routines of school life. Achievement in all areas of school life is celebrated through a well-established incentive scheme. The previous inspection report stated that the school worked hard to help pupils respect the school aims, and that moral issues were explored in drama, English, personal and social education, religious education and science. Other subjects of the curriculum now make a positive contribution towards the development of pupils' moral awareness. In history for example, pupils learn about the complexities of moral decision making in time of war, while in geography pupils have the opportunity to look at ethical issues relating to birth control and population growth.

52. Provision for social development is good. Pupils have many opportunities to work together in a variety of groupings in lessons and extracurricular activities such as sporting events, concerts and school productions. The school encourages pupils to take responsibility both collectively and individually. As members of the school council they discuss and put forward proposals affecting school life and senior pupils can become senators, who act as mentors to younger pupils and monitor behaviour around the school. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme gives pupils the opportunity to develop an understanding of citizenship and to show initiative. The newly opened Oracle suite offers an excellent incentive for all pupils to take responsibility for their own learning, and the routines of litter clearing encourage pupils to look after their environment. The school's strong community links encourage pupils to take an active role in community life. A community services group meets weekly in the school; there is a regular cycle of supporting charities, and good work is done with the elderly and with the young.

53. The school makes good provision for pupils' cultural development. It teaches pupils to appreciate and develop their own cultural traditions. There are good opportunities for visits to theatres and art exhibitions. The Oracle's facilities are available for research on many different topics, and pupils have the use of good software programs in information technology. School productions, concerts and the school's in-house radio programme offer good opportunities for pupils to take part in traditional and modern entertainment. Pupils are encouraged to appreciate the richness of other cultures through visits abroad and in subjects such as history, geography and art, while in religious education lessons they encounter the major world faiths and develop an understanding of the cultural diversity of modern British society.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

· 54. There are good procedures for monitoring and promoting pupils' personal development and academic progress. The form tutors provide pupils with strong pastoral support creating routines and relationships that are aimed at preventing crises. The tutors provide essential continuity for the pupil through tutorials, form activities and counselling and guidance on matters such as subject choices and careers options. This process makes a good contribution to the standards achieved. The school has established a well-planned programme of personal and social education that includes appropriate health and careers education.

· 55. The school recently opened the Oracle facility, which is an independent learning centre and an important extra resource. The centre opens before and after school so that pupils can use it as a homework club.

· 56. Strategies to achieve standards of good behaviour are achieved by means of consistent application of sensible rules. Pupils behave well in lessons and this makes an important contribution to their standard of education. There are successful measures that discourage bullying and Year 11 pupils are encouraged to support Year 7 pupils. There is a system of sanctions aimed at discouraging poor behaviour or lateness and in serious cases the school makes use of fixed period or permanent exclusion.

· 57. The school has recently moved to a system whereby the bulk of the support for pupils with special educational needs is provided by staff from within the school. The effective cooperation between subject teachers and their colleagues enables pupils to make good progress. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties receive good pastoral support from the school and the local support service, as do those pupils for whom English is an additional language. Individual education plans are reviewed regularly and pupils make their own contributions to the assessment of their progress. All these procedures help pupils to meet their targets and give them the confidence and the incentive to progress and achieve. Careers guidance is effective. It helps all pupils including those pupils with special educational needs to make informed choices at GCSE and afterwards.

· 58. Attendance registrations are entered on to optical reading sheets that are easily processed by the school administration staff and the school monitors attendance in detail in order to highlight any problem pupils. The system facilitates the production and analysis of attendance statistics, making it easy for the school to identify problem groups of pupils. Good attendance is rewarded by a certificate scheme but absence at the school is higher than the national average. Letters are sent to the homes of absentees where no communication has been received. If there is no response from the parents or guardian the head of year refers the matter to the education welfare officer, who then makes a home visit. There is good support from the education welfare officers who act upon these referrals. Home visits stimulate improved attendance but in the most serious cases even the legal process is ineffective.

· 59. The school has established effective child protection procedures that follow local authority guidelines. The Headteacher is the designated teacher and all staff are vigilant, ensuring that any concerns are referred to the appropriate authority. Other agencies such as the police, health, careers and social services give the school good levels of support. All school equipment is checked in accordance with safety regulations and there is a regular check of school buildings and grounds. There are regular fire evacuation drills. The kilns in the art department are not safeguarded sufficiently.

Partnership with parents and the community

· 60. Overall, the school links with parents and the community make an important contribution to the pupils' attainment.

· 61. The school has taken the trouble to establish a corporate image and all its publications are well presented. The information for parents is good including the prospectus and the annual governors' report. There are regular newsletters that cover all aspects of school life. The pupils' planner is exceptionally well designed, it provides a useful diary for the pupils and provides parents with an important means of checking progress and communicating with the pupil's form tutor. Those parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting commented favourably on the quality and usefulness of the planner, particularly in allowing them to monitor homework.

· 62. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire a significant majority of parents agreed that they are given a clear understanding of what is taught and that they are well informed about their child's progress. Other responses showed that parents are generally satisfied with the way that the school maintains its relationship with the parents. The degree to which the parents involve themselves with their children's learning is satisfactory. Attendance at open evenings when parents can discuss the progress of their children is good.

· 63. The school produces regular detailed progress reports for each pupil of a satisfactory standard and the pupils are invited to contribute with their own self-assessment. Parents' evenings are arranged on a regular basis and the school encourages attendance by various strategies such as offering a creche service. All parents are invited to be members of the Primet Association, which is successful in fundraising and assisting at major events at the school. The school involves the parents of those pupils with special educational needs by making early contact and by arranging regular meetings in order to discuss pupils' progress. In recent years there has been a steady increase in the numbers who attend.

· 64. The school receives good support from many local employers and organisations in the local community in providing work experience for Year 11 pupils. The local businesses also help by providing raffle prizes for fund-raising, participating in 'Industry Days' and by attending pupil interview sessions.

· 65. The school was recently awarded the Schools' Curriculum Award for being a school whose curriculum is centred on the community. The school has a strong relationship with the feeder primary schools. Every teacher is allocated to a school; they visit the schools to collect academic and personal information and to meet prospective pupils. Pupils are invited to visit sample lessons and other events so that when they make the formal commencement in the autumn they are familiar with the school and they make a good start to their secondary education. The primary schools share the school's facilities and equipment especially from the science and sports departments. Primary pupils spend a taster morning at the school and the school organises and hosts primary sports competitions. The school has established a wildlife area at one end of the school grounds, which the local primary schools find to be an important teaching resource.

· 66. The school maintains strong links with the local colleges and institutions. Trainee teachers from a local university gain valuable experience by spending time at the school. The school has excellent sports facilities, which are used on a commercial basis by organisations such as junior football clubs and the Brownies.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

· 67. The school benefits from strong leadership and effective systems to ensure good management practices. The school's aims underpin the work of the school in all areas and have recently been fully reviewed by the governing body strategic planning group. They are appropriate and the school is largely successful in meeting them through the implementation of policies that stem directly from the aims. The Headteacher, governing body and senior management team work effectively to ensure a clear educational direction for the school and a commitment to raising achievement permeates the whole work of the school. The management structure encourages an open approach where all staff can feel valued. Meetings are held regularly at a number of levels and all staff have the opportunity to contribute to the decisions made.

· 68. The governing body is closely involved in the strategic management of the school and governors play an important part in producing the school development plan and contributing to financial decisions. Their role in contributing to the evaluation and monitoring of the work of the school is well developed. They make a positive impact in all major areas of the school's decision making. They are in a good position to make informed judgements when holding the school to account for the educational standards achieved and the quality of education provided. They are generally successful in ensuring that statutory requirements are met.

· 69. The school staff continues to be well managed, with an effective review of the senior management team having been undertaken since the last inspection. The role of the middle managers in the school is well established. Heads of departments and heads of years have received appropriate training to acquire the skills to lead the developments in their particular areas. They have successfully developed their work in monitoring the learning experiences of pupils and, in conjunction with the senior management team, the quality of teaching. The contribution made by heads of department in the latter area is less formal than that of the Headteacher, but is valued by colleagues and is very helpful in establishing a common approach in using classroom management skills in line with the priorities established in the school. Teachers are supported well and staff development is effective in improving the quality of teaching throughout the school.

· 70. There are two areas of weakness. The first relates to the management of the provision of information technology in the school. Additional staff development is needed and the experience that pupils receive needs to be more closely monitored and evaluated, particularly since the skills are taught throughout the curriculum rather than as a subject area in its own right. The second area relates to the use of accommodation. Some subject areas, notably geography, history and modern foreign languages are required to teach in too many dispersed classrooms.

71. The very detailed school development plan sets whole-school priorities and targets. Much of the content of these priorities represents a direct response to the last inspection as well as longer term issues identified before 1994, for example, the raising of the achievements of boys. Key issues have been addressed at whole-school level and the planning has been extended to ensure that all subjects contribute to serving the school's priorities in addressing these issues. The process of establishing the school development plan includes wide consultation and is valuable in raising the awareness of all staff and governors of the issues confronting the school. The annual school plan is further informed by a useful longer-term strategy document that sets out to guide the school's development over the next three years. For example strategies are in place to retain the development of literacy and numeracy skills at the heart of the school's work.

72. The leadership in the school is very effective in moving the school forward, particularly in maintaining the standards among the higher achievers. However there are also strategies and systems in place to secure improvement among the lower attainers by offering a more appropriate curriculum and enhancing their basic skills. There is a strong commitment to special needs on the part of the school management with good support from the governing body. Day-to-day routines run smoothly and information on special needs is well disseminated throughout the different subject areas.

73. The school has set clear targets at department level and individual pupil level in order to raise standards further. Work has been successfully undertaken to analyse in detail the public examination results of pupils. This information is used effectively to establish a baseline against which accurate judgements can be made about the value added to pupils' education. A commitment to raising achievement is central to the life of the school and determines the good ethos for learning that is present. Pupils are usually very well behaved in class and teachers enjoy positive relationships with them based upon high expectations pupils produce the best work they can achieve.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

Staffing

74. The school has a fully qualified teaching staff with an acceptable pupil/teacher ratio of 16.3:1. Since the last inspection, there has been a significant change in the age profile of the teaching staff with a move towards a younger age range. This has had a beneficial effect upon the school in a number of ways, not least in providing greater financial flexibility. There have been recruitment problems in a number of subject areas, but these have now been resolved. Most pupils are taught by specialist teachers, but in the few cases where this is not so, the quality of teaching is at least satisfactory. The school has made effective arrangements for the training of teachers to support pupils with special educational needs.

75. An Investment in People award is held by the school for its commitment to the continuous professional development of staff, and this is a strong feature of the school. There is an annual review of all staff, and individual annual action plans contribute towards this form of appraisal. There is an observation of lessons scheme, which is regular and is closely monitored. An on-going programme of in-school and external in-service provision addresses a wide range of issues. It is closely monitored and planned. Further staff development is required to ensure that all can make a contribution towards teaching information technology through their own subject areas. All members of staff have either a generic or specific job description. There are sufficient technical and special needs support staff.

76. There are five newly qualified teachers (NQTs) who are mentored and supported by senior members of staff, and the Headteacher on a regular basis. This is a good quality programme and helps to ensure the continued professional development of these entrants to the teaching profession.

Accommodation

77. There has been a considerable programme of refurbishment since the last inspection, though more is required in order that a pleasant, attractive learning environment might be provided throughout the building, particularly in the toilet areas. Some areas are still in a poor state of repair. Bids for finance for building improvement are regularly made. There is an urgent need for the flat roof areas to be repaired as they cause leaks in some parts of the building. Areas which are particularly unappealing are the drama studio which needs decorating and more space, the art area and a number of general class teaching rooms. Parts of the school field drain badly and the all-weather pitch is uneven and potentially hazardous. The newly opened independent learning centre is already proving to be a valuable asset for a range of activities, and has provided extra room space.

78. The teaching of music in the curriculum is inhibited by a lack of adjacent practice rooms for group work. There has been a significant improvement in the provision for English and mathematics since the last inspection. However, there are still problems with the teaching facilities for modern foreign languages and in the humanities departments. Too many rooms are used, dispersed over too great a distance and this puts additional stress upon teachers within those departments and does not allow effective use of display materials to be used.

Resources

79. Resources in the majority of departments are satisfactory with funding allocated partly by a formula and partly according to needs identified in departmental development plans and the school development plan. Departments have a good range of resources including textbooks, booklets, and other materials. There are some deficiencies in some departments however, including insufficient books in science and not enough percussion instruments in music. Departments identified as being under-resourced in the last inspection have largely had their needs addressed. The library stock is below average in terms of the ratio of books to pupils. This is the result of an extensive exercise of weeding out of superfluous and out-of-date stock and has led to greater efficiency in the library. Book resources as a whole are satisfactory other than in science and French where there are some shortages of suitable material.

80. The ratio of computers to pupils is favourable at 1:6, which is higher than the national average. Departments have satisfactory access to computers and their provision has a positive impact on the learning of those pupils who avail themselves of the opportunity to use the new learning centre.

81. The independent learning centre is a new building of high quality that enhances the opportunities of pupils to develop good learning skills. It is well stocked, freely accessible and provides a stimulating and pleasant atmosphere in which to work.

The efficiency of the school

82. Financial administration is very good. Clear priorities are described in the school development plan and the governors and the senior management team work effectively to ensure that spending is carefully controlled, in accordance with these priorities. Spending is very prudent. Unit costs per pupil are at the average for schools of a similar nature and the school has in recent years achieved a saving against the budget to produce a sizeable surplus that is used to refurbish and extend the accommodation in line with the school development plan. There is a regular programme of external audit and the school has responded in a satisfactory manner to the last auditor's report and recommendations.

83. The budget is constructed very carefully in close conjunction with the school development plan. The governing body is fully involved in the process and makes a valuable contribution to the decisions made. In allocating resources over the past four years the school has responded positively to the last inspection report. The provision for information technology is now good but the management of the teaching of the subject currently has some weaknesses and this represents an inefficient use of this particular resource. In other respects the management of resources is good. In the main the accommodation is used effectively and is satisfactory other than in the allocation of too many rooms to some classes in, geography, history and modern foreign languages

· 84. The amount of the school's income expended on staff costs is broadly average. There has been a relatively high turnover of teachers in the past two years, during which period 22 teachers have left and 14 new teachers have been appointed. In the main, many of the appointments are comparatively new entrants to the profession. The school organises an effective induction system and the changes have not resulted in any adverse impact upon standards. There is a very effective team of technical, administrative, clerical and special needs support staff, together with a team working to the property manager. They play an integral part in the smooth running of the everyday life of the school. The school staff as a whole constitute a caring, dedicated team, working hard to bring out the best in the pupils.

· 85. The specific grant for education support and training (GEST) allocated to the school is managed very efficiently. The professional development of the teachers is very well planned and coordinated to meet the priorities of the school as identified in its development plan. Staff development encompasses all contributing members of the wider school staff and the Investors in People Award acknowledges the efficiency of the training given to ensure that all staff contribute to the smooth running of the school. The funds allocated for pupils with special educational needs are carefully accounted for and effective use is made of staff, accommodation, learning resources and funding for pupils with special educational needs. Most of the staffing provision is made from within the school and teachers have undertaken professional training to ensure good quality support. This has proved to be an effective and efficient use of funds.

· 86. The school development plan and the departmental plans that derive from it set medium-term and longer-term plans to augment the detailed short-term planning. This gives a clear basis for decision making, relating curriculum, staffing and accommodation issues to the budget setting process. The school development plan is informed by a longer-term strategy document that helps to ensure a clear educational direction to the school's financial planning.

· 87. Pupils enter the school with below average attainment and subsequently attain good standards compared with similar schools. The spending per pupil is around the average for schools of a similar type. Pupils' responses to the teaching in school are good, and often very good. They demonstrate good attitudes towards their learning and their personal development and behaviour are good. Pupils make good progress. The quality of teaching is good. The school is very well led and the finances managed very effectively. The school gives good value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

· 88. The proportion of pupils who achieved the expected Level 5 or better in the 1997 Key Stage 3 tests was above the national average and well above the average of schools with similar backgrounds. The year group in question contains a larger proportion of higher attaining pupils than is normally found in the school. Provisional results for the 1998 tests show that the proportion of pupils achieving the expected level is in line with the national average for 1997. Key Stage 3 test results have improved over time.

· 89. The proportion of pupils who achieved the higher grades A*-C in the 1997 GCSE English language and English literature examinations was in line with the national average. Performances over the whole A*-G grade range are in line with national averages for both subjects for both years. Girls perform better than boys do, although the proportion of boys gaining the higher grades was in line with the national figure for 1997. In 1997, pupils performed significantly better in GCSE English than in most other subjects in the school.

· 90. The work inspected indicates that the proportion of pupils who are working towards the expected level at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with that found nationally. Most pupils speak and listen with confidence and clarity in small groups while higher and middle-attaining pupils make extensive and articulate contributions to whole class discussions. Higher and middle attaining pupils read fluently and often with expression and their response to literature is a strength. A Year 9 higher set showed mature insight when discussing characters in 'The Crucible'; a Year 9 lower set made sensible judgements about characters in 'Buddy'. Lower attaining pupils are able to read well enough to cope with the demands of the syllabus and to work independently. Many pupils write accurately, although the work of some middle and most lower attaining pupils lacks consistent accuracy.

· 91. At the end of Key Stage 4 most pupils perform at the expected national level in speaking and listening, such as the Year 11 middle set discussing Heaney's 'Mid-term Break'. This lesson also provided evidence of the pupils' positive approach to literature. Pupils read with confidence and competence. The improved reading levels are an indication of the positive impact on standards of the emphasis the department and the school place on reading. They reflected and talked thoughtfully about the poem's moving narrative. A majority of pupils write with the required accuracy and control. A lack of consistent accuracy undermines the writing of the rest of the pupils.

92. Pupils make good progress during both key stages and their attainments are higher than their attainment on entering the school may suggest. Reading and other standard assessment tests show that every year the majority of pupils start in Year 7 with below average levels of literacy. The test results at the end of Key Stage 3 and the examination results at the end of Year 11 show that most achieve national averages by the time they leave. In some cases pupils whose attainment on entry was well below the norm achieved grade C in GCSE English and English Literature. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. In Year 11, pupils with statements of special needs can plan, draft and write lengthy responses to challenging titles such as comparing themes in 'Hard Times' with a 'A Kestrel for a Knave'. Their written work over a period indicates good gains in their writing skills and in their understanding and knowledge of the texts they study. A small proportion of pupils who do not enter GCSE English each year because of attendance problems is a cause of concern.

93. Pupils generally respond well in class. They maintain interest and concentration in both whole class and small group work. Their behaviour is normally good. They usually complete the work set in lessons and this has a positive effect on their progress. The nature of much of the material they read and talk about in English also helps them to develop as people and they form thoughtful opinions about moral, social and cultural issues. Behaviour is less satisfactory when a pupil - or a small group of pupils - are unclear about what they have to do or lack the required skills to achieve the task. However, this rarely happens.

94. Teaching is mainly good, occasionally very good and never less than satisfactory. All teachers know their subject well and use this knowledge to inform pupils. They plan thoroughly; identifying a range of activities, and allocating clear time limits for each activity. These are normally adhered to. The teachers are particularly strong at carefully structuring small group discussions so pupils are clear about their targets and how long they have in which to achieve them. Expectations of standards of work and discipline are high. Teachers make good use of assessments to plan what they teach and this is shown by the way they prepare different schemes of work to suit different levels of attainment. Most marking is helpful, setting clear targets for improvement, but some tends to be bland and so of less value. Teachers set homework regularly, telling pupils what it is in the middle of a lesson so pupils have enough time to write it down and sort out any misunderstandings. Only in a very small proportion of lessons did a minority of pupils struggle to make progress because of inappropriate tasks. In the overwhelming majority of lessons the quality of teaching is effective and has a positive impact on pupils' progress.

95. The department is a well-led, close-knit team. The teachers are supportive of each other and work well together. They are also enthusiastic and many are relatively recent entrants to the profession. The head of department provides clear and strong educational direction and support. There is a well-planned curriculum, matched to the differing ability levels of the pupils. The department has a good range of resources and looks after them efficiently. Its policy on setting in Key Stage 4 gives pupils, especially boys, opportunities to succeed in motivated groups of pupils. Checking pupils' progress against previous assessments and responding to underachievement are strengths of the department. However, it does not make enough use of National Curriculum information for initial assessments and setting targets for pupils. The head of department monitors teaching and core curriculum materials rigorously, although monitoring of the teachers' non-core schemes of work is not so formal. English teachers make an effective contribution to the reading programme for slower readers.

96. The department has made a good response to the findings of the last report. The appointment of full-time specialist English teachers has effectively addressed weaknesses in teaching. Entry rates for GCSE have increased. Pupils make better progress in writing, spelling and punctuation because of new schemes of work on language; chances to draft and redraft their work, and a well-planned spelling programme. The well-established silent reading sessions at the start of each lesson help pupils to read more regularly and widely. The use of information technology in writing, however, is still underdeveloped.

Speaking and listening and reading and writing across the curriculum

97. Pupils listen well in lessons, both to their teachers and to other pupils when working in small groups. Higher attaining pupils make fluent and extensive contributions to whole class discussions, but the answers and contributions from other pupils are restricted in length. Pupils speak confidently and effectively in small group situations.

98. By the end of Key Stage 4 most pupils read well enough to cope independently with the material they study in school. Higher and middle attaining pupils read fluently and often with expression. In history, pupils use a range of reading methods such as skimming and scanning to good effect. One Key Stage 4 history teacher requires pupils to read a fiction or non-fiction book about each topic they study. Every English lesson starts with a ten-minute silent reading session. Pupils are conscientious about bringing their books. They also have opportunities for silent reading in personal and social education lessons. Given their attainment levels on entry to the school, pupils make good progress in reading.

99. Pupils' writing skills also develop well, particularly when teachers give them support in planning their work and a chance to proof-read and redraft such as in English lessons. In geography and history pupils have the chance to write in a range of formats. In Key Stage 4 geography, middle and higher attainers can produce work of good quantity and produce arguments at greater length. The highest attaining pupils write with fluency and purpose and succeed in gaining the interest of the reader. There are good examples of pupils writing well in investigation work in mathematics.

100. The school is drafting a policy on literacy to support the teaching of language skills. The policy's guidance on speaking and listening has had a positive effect, particularly in English, history and religious education. The section on reading has not yet been completed. The draft policy is essentially a practical document containing good advice. Although teaching in most subjects reflects the draft policy to some degree, departments have yet to implement its guidance on a whole-school basis.

101. Drama is taught throughout the school. The quality of teaching is mainly satisfactory. The standards of most pupils at Key Stage 3 are in line with national expectations. They learn and use a range of drama techniques to a satisfactory level. Drama is a popular option at Key Stage 4. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades in GCSE drama in 1997 was below the national average but in line with it in 1996. Standards in class at Key Stage 4 are in line with national expectations. Pupils choose from a range of topics including performance, make-up, stage design, lighting and sound. Key Stage 4 pupils talk enthusiastically about their work and reveal a satisfactory level of knowledge and understanding of it. Drama makes an important contribution to the extracurricular life of the school with an annual large-scale production interspersed by smaller, less formal performances. Drama benefits from specialised accommodation and storage with an extensive range of costumes and properties. The drama studio is relatively small in area but is well equipped with lighting. It requires some redecorating.

Mathematics

102. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards of attainment as measured in the National Curriculum tests are in line with the national average and this has been so over the last three years. When these results are compared with schools of a similar nature, they are well above average. There are no significant differences between the performances of boys and girls. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards of attainment are slightly above the national average of those pupils obtaining A*-C grades in 1997. All pupils at Key Stage 4 are now entered for the GCSE examination and while the proportion gaining grades A*-C in 1997 is still in line with previous years, the proportion of pupils achieving A*-G grades has fallen to slightly below the national average. However, the trend continued in terms of pupils gaining higher than average points score in mathematics. When compared with other subjects in the school the performance of pupils in mathematics is significantly better.

103. The level of attainment in the work seen at both key stages is generally in line with that expected of pupils aged 14 and 16 respectively. For example, by the end of Year 9 most pupils can cope well with basic number work. At Key Stage 4 high attaining pupils produce work of a high standard for example on the topic of probability while those of low attainment deal well with the basic concepts. At Key Stage 4, although attainment has remained largely static, this must be seen in the context of the level of attainment on entry falling year on year.

104. Key Stage 2 tests show that on entry to the school the number of pupils with Level 4 and above is significantly below the national average. These figures are confirmed by results of other standard tests of numeracy taken by pupils in Year 7. At Key Stage 3 progress overall is good and pupils clearly benefit from the initiatives taken to emphasise the importance of pupils gaining confidence in basic numeracy skills. By the end of the key stage, as evidenced by national tests, attainment is not significantly different from national levels. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards meeting the targets on their individual education plans that are determined by the department.

105. Progress through Key Stage 4 is satisfactory, good algebraic skills and understanding are in evidence and there is some coursework of high quality that indicates very good progress on the part of the higher attainers, for example. There is little difference in the progress made by girls and boys or by different ethnic groups. The continued support given to pupils with special educational needs plays a large part in ensuring they make the progress expected of them. However, throughout both key stages, but more pronounced at Key Stage 4, there is an important issue relating to the lack of progress made by a significant minority of habitual absentees. In both key stages, attainment in the use of information technology in the mathematics context is restricted by the low amount offered to pupils. It needs to be substantially increased.

106. Pupils' attitudes are generally good across both key stages. The majority show interest in and enthusiasm for their work and are able to work well in pairs, groups or independently. Behaviour is very good and there are few lapses of concentration even towards the end of a 70-minute lesson. Personal study is fostered to a large extent by the homework policy of the school and by the recent opening of the Oracle centre. The great majority of pupils are friendly and polite to each other, to staff and visitors and the very good relationships formed with the staff help to create mutual respect and a secure learning environment. Pupils with special educational needs benefit greatly from these relationships and react positively.

107. Teaching across both key stages is always at least satisfactory, often good and occasionally very good. Subject knowledge and planning are of a high standard and the assessment procedures employed at both key stages enable staff to keep a close watch on individual pupils. The pace of lessons is almost always good but on occasions the introduction of a new activity into the lesson is lacking when needed to stimulate further interest and enthusiasm. The teachers' expectations of all pupils are high and the enthusiasm generated by teachers has much to do with the progress made. The use of paired work often generates lively discussion and firm and fair discipline allows pupils to move forward. Lesson objectives are always made known to pupils which enables them to focus on what they should have learned by the end of the lesson. Pupils acquire skills and knowledge at different rates relating to their attainment but good lesson planning meets their needs. The rate of progress in lessons is usually good with planning, teaching methodology and class control being major factors in moving pupils forward. This is generally better at Key Stage 3. Overall the teaching in the department is very effective and makes a positive impact upon the progress of the large majority of pupils.

108. Strong leadership of the department allied to the dedication and commitment of staff plays an important role in the progress made by pupils. The excellent documentation gives clear direction and a 'Numeracy across the Curriculum' booklet indicates to other subjects how and where they can give positive assistance in the development of basic skills. This has been put to good use by the science and geography departments and to a lesser degree in design and technology, but other subjects currently fail to grasp the opportunity to do so. A new scheme of work at Key Stage 3 has given the mathematics curriculum a more rigid structure and has also aided assessment procedures; its extension into Key Stage 4 will benefit the older pupils.

109. The last report prompted a good response from the department. The blocking of the subject on the timetable has led to a more rigid system of setting. While it has caused one or two minor accommodation problems it has had a major effect on the ability to support pupils with special educational needs and low attainers in a much more productive way.

Science

110. The Key Stage 3 National Curriculum test results were well below the national average in 1997 for those pupils reaching Level 5 or above, but in line with the average of the pupils reaching Level 6 or above. Pupils' performance in 1998 shows an improvement, but still to a level below the national average for 1997. At age 14, pupils' performance in the national tests and teacher assessments is above average in comparison with schools of a similar nature. The 1997 GCSE double award science results are in line with the national average and pupils performed significantly better in science in the school than in most other subjects. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-G grades was in line with the national average. In 1998 the proportion gaining A*-G grades increased slightly and was still in line with the 1997 averages, but the proportion gaining A*-C grades dropped slightly. There is no discernible trend in results, although results are lower than at the time of the last inspection, and there was no significant difference between the performances of boys and girls.

· 111. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the levels expected. For example, Year 9 pupils in a lesson on the topic of forces were able to comprehend the basic concepts and discuss levers and the relationship between force, pressure and area. In the work seen of Year 11 pupils, attainment is at the level expected of 16 year olds. For example, pupils show good levels of understanding and the necessary practical skills when investigating the factors affecting the rate of a chemical reaction. In lessons, the majority of pupils are achieving at, and often above, the average for their age at both key stages

· 112. At Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. Work seen shows that pupils are improving on their scientific knowledge, understanding and their development of practical skills as they move through the key stages. In Year 8, pupils make good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the role of the skeleton and joints in movement, and in Year 10 pupils make good progress investigating the reactivity of various metals. A comparison of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum test results with the Key Stage 2 tests results of those pupils entering the school in Year 7 confirms the judgement that good progress is being made at Key Stage 3. Pupils reach levels that, while below the national average, are above the average when compared with schools of a similar nature. The majority of pupils continue to make good progress at Key Stage 4 and this is reflected in the GCSE results where the proportions of pupils gaining A*-C and A*-G were in line with the national average.

· 113. At both key stages pupils have good attitudes to learning. They behave well, are attentive and involved in the lesson. They answer teachers' questions readily. Pupils' written work is generally well presented and diagrams showing the apparatus used in experiments are usually well drawn using a ruler and pencil, indicating the pride pupils take in their work. Pupils work with each other in groups in a cooperative way when carrying out experiments and have good relationships with the teacher. This results in a pleasant atmosphere invariably being maintained in lessons.

· 114. The quality of teaching is always at least satisfactory, is good in most of the lessons and is sometimes very good. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and this is used effectively to plan lessons with clear and identifiable aims. There is good control of classes. The good questioning techniques allow teachers to assess the level of knowledge and depth of understanding of the pupils and modify their planning and their teaching accordingly. Teachers do this to good effect and ensure a positive impact upon the progress pupils make. Practical work features prominently, much of this relating to investigative work for Attainment Target 1. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to plan investigations, make observations and measurements, record these systematically, and interpret their findings. With pupils being grouped to some extent according to attainment, the work is usually well matched to their attainment. In Year 7 pupils are taught in mixed ability sets. Although the pace of lessons is generally good, in some lessons involving planning investigations, the progress of some pupils is too slow because of their uncertainty of the aim of the exercise. Information technology is used in the teaching of science, but to only a very limited extent.

· 115. The science department is effectively managed. The schemes of work being developed that relate to the National Curriculum programmes of study and the GCSE syllabus provide a suitable basis for the teaching, which is reinforced by appropriate procedures for assessment. At both key stages the time allocation for science is generally satisfactory, although in Year 11, the proportion of curriculum time allocated for science is less than that normally found. Some science classes contain 28-32 pupils which is too large a number for a practically based subject involving an investigative approach and this does, on occasion have an adverse effect upon the pace of progress.

· 116. At the time of the last inspection the results of pupils in the GCSE examination were above average. Since that time, the scores of pupils on standard tests taken when they enter the school show lower grades year on year. The current GCSE results are in line with the national average and represent an indicator of the satisfactory levels of improvement reached in the department as it attempts to maintain standards. Three laboratories have been refurbished since the last report but there is still a need for further improvements in laboratory provision. It is much to the credit of the science staff that they are able to organise their work when a substantial proportion of the teaching is carried out in ordinary classrooms and the rooms used for science are situated in various parts of the school. Rain leaks through the roofs of the two outside laboratories. The last inspection drew attention to the inadequate amount of time for technician support. There has been an improvement with the appointment of a technician for science, who, together with contributions from other technicians, provides efficient support in the department.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Art

· 117. In 1997 the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C was in line with the national average. Recent examination results at GCSE have fluctuated year by year, sometimes slightly above, occasionally just below the national averages for grades A*-C. In 1997 all pupils gained a grade at least at the level A*-G and this has been the trend in recent years. There is no discernible trend in terms of the different performances between boys and girls. Attainments at Key Stage 3 are mainly in line with, and often better than, those expected for students of similar age.

· 118. At Key Stage 3, students have worked with a range of drawing and painting media, and have gained some experience in working with clay and with printing equipment. As a result, most students understand line and shape and many can represent tone in drawing and pastel work to a good standard. Paint is used carefully, but most students lack sufficient experience in handling a wider variety of paint for use on a larger scale. Pupils in Year 9 understand the need for presenting letter styles differently in graphics and can manipulate them to make a word appear as it sounds. Students' attainment is lower in the theoretical aspects of their work than in their practical work. However they can, for example, analyse and compare works of artists and are learning to appreciate quality in art and craft from ancient times and other cultures, such as American Indian art, currently being studied by another Year 9 group.

· 119. Attainment at Key Stage 4 matches the levels expected nationally. Most students observe well, draw carefully and handle paint successfully. Paper collage is often of a good standard and some textile art from both boys and girls is presented with neat stitching. In some instances, written work is good, but a few cannot follow support sheets and many students show greater aptitude for practical work. Few appear to act upon teachers' comments on their work. Most students attempting GCSE produce original designs in a wide range of media and present neatly-mounted work.

· 120. Pupils throughout the school, including those with special educational needs, make at least satisfactory progress in art and a majority of pupils at Key Stage 3 make good progress. Through Key Stage 3, pupils make good progress when they are engaged in work that interests them, where they are learning new skills and gaining knowledge and understanding of art and craft. During lessons most second and subsequent attempts showed greater skill and accuracy than the first. Greatest progress is seen at the beginning of the key stage where most of the work is new and exciting. Currently, Year 7 pupils are studying Celtic art. Most students can trace knotwork successfully and recreate the designs of the monks, demonstrating an understanding of the symbolism of the shapes and creatures that depict the Gospel writers. In these lessons, they progressed well using their previous knowledge of history, mathematics and religious education. Work in sketchbooks is developing satisfactorily, although most students use the books solely for homework tasks and are not recording their own interests in work. Insufficient progress is made in using information technology.

· 121. Progress through Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. By the end of Key Stage 4 students develop good powers of analysis, can justify their choices and opinions about art projects and produce some lively work. Colour is used brightly and boldly and good progress is made in observational skills. Pupils also improve their drawing skills and learn to use their painting skills more successfully. Paper collage is often of a good standard and some textile art from both boys and girls is presented with neat stitching. In some instances written work is good, but the attainment of some is adversely affected, as they cannot follow support sheets. Many of these pupils show a greater aptitude for practical work.

· 122. In both key stages the majority of students demonstrate positive attitudes to art and appear to enjoy their lessons. Once settled, they listen well, show interest in what they see and the techniques being demonstrated. Most are polite. Many are keen to answer questions, but few ask them. On occasions students work mechanically and without enthusiasm if work is beneath their capabilities or where it is outside their interest. During lessons, most share equipment fairly and help each other willingly. Many show responsibility for giving out work and clear away without undue fuss towards the end of sessions. Most students try hard and keep to the task set, although a few show immaturity by showing off at times.

· 123. The quality of teaching is good overall, but there is some unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers have a secure knowledge and communicate it effectively. Most lessons are carefully planned, timed and conducted well. In the better lessons, expectations are high, information is delivered well, resources are carefully chosen and used to extend the learning, relationships are secure and students are left in no doubt about what is expected of them. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, the planning is weak, work is wrongly pitched for age, attainment level and interest and results in attainment being below expectations. Appropriate homework is set each week, teachers mark this and class work sensitively and comment upon it, but the good practice of adding diagnostic comments, seen at Key Stage 4, is not found as commonly at Key Stage 3.

· 124. The department has responded well to the last inspection report. The rotational system has ceased and all Key Stage 3 students now study art each week. The increased time allowance is having a beneficial effect upon standards. All examination results are analysed and there have been changes to the curriculum to make modules more meaningful and attractive to the students. Two computers are now available and teachers have received training in their use. Plans have been formulated to include information technology in lessons, but currently the equipment is underused.

· 125. The department, which now has a new leader and two new teachers, is efficiently led and works well as a team. Responsibilities are shared. Statutory requirements for curriculum and assessment are met. There are adequate resources, display space is well used, and sufficient rooms for the teaching of art. However, the pottery room is dirty and cluttered, the pug mill is badly sited and neither of the two kilns is guarded. As a matter of some urgency, the kilns should be guarded.

Design and technology

· 126. Pupils' attainment at Key Stage 3 is below national expectations for pupils aged 14. At Key Stage 4 attainment overall is broadly in line with the national averages. The attainment of boys and girls is similar in both key stages. GCSE results in 1996 and in 1997 at the higher grades maintained a trend in results that was higher than the national average, but from a relatively small entry. In 1998 the number of pupils entered was much higher and overall results were marginally lower than the 1997 results. However, in the resistant materials and graphic products courses, more than half the pupils entered gained higher grades. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-G was above the national average in 1997. Overall, the results gained by pupils in design and technology were in line with the results gained in other subjects in the school.

· 127. At the end of Key Stage 3, practical making skills with a range of materials are in line with the levels expected at age 14. Design skills are less well developed and fall below this level. Higher attaining pupils are able to use their graphical skills to a satisfactory level and these pupils attain better standards in all aspects of the subject. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make achievements that are good in practical making and generally satisfactory in other areas of their work. Subject knowledge and understanding and the acquisition of the specialist vocabulary are sound for the middle and higher attaining pupils. In Key Stage 4 attainment follows a similar pattern with design skills being good and making skills being satisfactory.

· 128. Pupils make good progress in relation to their prior attainment through both key stages. The progress of girls and boys is broadly similar. Pupils progress well in the manner in which they handle tools, materials, equipment and machines safely and with increasing accuracy in all the material areas. Good progress is also made with the acquisition of subject knowledge and the technical vocabulary that underpins it. Progress with design and graphical skills is slower particularly for middle and lower attaining pupils. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

· 129. Pupils are interested in the tasks presented to them and they concentrate well and show good attitudes to their work. They listen attentively to teacher expositions and demonstrations but their responses to questions are often tentative. Behaviour is good and pupils cooperate effectively when working in pairs and groups. Resources, tools, materials, equipment and machines are treated with care. Most pupils are able to work independently but lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs have to rely too much on teachers to structure and support their work.

· 130. Teaching is always at least satisfactory and often good in both key stages. Teachers are very effective in helping all pupils to make progress. In the best lessons teachers use appropriate strategies to engage pupils with the task. Teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. They give clear informative demonstrations and expositions, and use questioning effectively to review and test earlier learning. Individual lesson plans identify learning objectives but they are rarely shared with the pupils, nor are time deadlines given for the completion of intermediate tasks and this leads to a loss of pace in some lessons. Good individual support is given to the pupils and includes verbal feedback that helps progress. Routines are well established and classroom management and organisation are good, enabling pupils to make best use of their time in lessons.

· 131. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 has breadth and the projects undertaken are appropriate. However, it does not sufficiently promote the development of design skills using a full range of materials in a systematic way. Also not enough use is made of activities in which pupils investigate, disassemble and evaluate products to further their design understanding. The department has good facilities for information technology and these are used effectively to support pupils' learning.

· 132. The department is well led and managed and resources are used effectively. Documentation is good and the development plan identifies appropriate targets. The department has a good balance of experienced and more recently trained specialist teachers. The last inspection report did not identify any significant weaknesses. However, since then the extension and refurbishment of the accommodation have been completed and the department now has good facilities.

Geography

· 133. The attainment of 16-year-old pupils in GCSE examinations has been consistently in line with the national average in recent years. In 1997, 60 per cent of pupils entered for the GCSE examination achieved grades A*-C and the 1998 results are similar. The results gained in geography are in line with those obtained by pupils in the school in other subjects. More boys than girls gained the higher grades A*-C in the past three years, but the trend overall in terms of average points scored and the proportion gaining A*-G indicates that no significant difference exists between the performances of boys and girls. Teacher assessments in 1997 indicated levels well below those expected at the age of 14.

· 134. The work inspected shows pupils at Key Stage 3 to be gaining levels a little below those expected at age 14, although many attain higher levels. In Year 9 pupils use a wide range of geographical skills effectively, using information technology to plot the relationship between wealth and use of energy. At Key Stage 4, pupils are attaining standards expected nationally at the age of 16. For example, they demonstrate a sound appreciation of the relationship between human activity and natural processes, as in a Year 11 class examining the impact of winter sports in the Alps.

135. Pupils make good progress through the both key stages. Across both key stages, the work inspected demonstrated that the majority make good progress and most others make satisfactory progress. Regular and systematic attention by teachers to the learning of geographical terms results in good understanding by pupils of all ages. For example, a Year 10 class when using photographs to interpret housing patterns in towns, utilised their geographical skills effectively to plot the relationship between wealth and the use of energy. In a Year 8 class, pupils developed both their knowledge and their understanding of geographical concepts. They showed this to good effect in their study of volcanoes where they examined the effects of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes on human activity. The quality of the learning resources makes an important contribution to pupils' progress, although progress was reduced in one Year 9 class due to a poor atlas. Some average and lower attaining pupils make unsatisfactory progress at Key Stage 4 because of poor attendance. Most pupils with special educational needs make good progress, and almost all others satisfactory progress, because teachers give them good individual support and devise appropriate materials for them.

136. The great majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, have positive attitudes to learning. They settle quickly and concentrate well. Most, and especially higher attainers, take care with the presentation of written work and diagrams. Pupils listen well to teachers and to each other and many are keen to answer questions, but a few lack confidence in whole-class activities. Relationships with each other and with teachers are almost always sound and frequently good and this encourages a good learning atmosphere in classes. Pupils work well together in pairs and groups, almost all contributing sensibly to activities. The number of occasions on which pupils have to work together to complete a task contributes significantly to their personal and social development. Behaviour in lessons is of a very high standard.

137. Teaching is always at least satisfactory. Most is good and some very good. Teachers know their subject thoroughly and plan their work well, ensuring a positive impact on pupils' learning. There is a strong ethos for learning that is reinforced by all teachers. Work starts as soon as pupils enter the room and there are well-established routines. Pupils are very well managed, know what is expected of them and respond well. Lessons contain a variety of activities, none of which is allowed to continue for too long, and teachers use a range of resources and groupings of pupils to ensure good progress and maintain interest. Homework is used very effectively to extend pupils' learning and develop their research skills. Marking of work is thorough and teachers monitor pupils' work and progress very closely in lessons to promote high standards.

138. Leadership of the geography department is very effective and gives very clear direction that is reflected in the quality of teaching, the good progress made by pupils and standards they achieve. Curriculum planning is good and ensures pupils receive a broad and well-balanced experience of geography. There are good procedures for assessing pupils' work, and information gained from assessment is used effectively to plan work for pupils and to identify opportunities to improve teaching and the curriculum. The main geography teaching room is equipped and used well, with very good display of pupils' work, but far too many rooms are used to teach the subject and these are often some distance from the main base. This requires the transport of resources through the school and makes it difficult to use the display of work effectively when teaching.

139. Progress has been satisfactory since the last inspection, although inadequacies in accommodation remain. Levels of attainment in GCSE examinations have been maintained, despite a decline in the attainment of pupils on entry to the school, and new schemes have been successfully introduced at both key stages. The department has maintained the good standard in teaching and organisation identified in the last report.

History

· 140. Examination results at GCSE have been well below the national average for the past four years, although there has been a slight upward trend since 1994. The department has experimented by offering a short course in GCSE in the past two years. Primarily lower attainers took this and they achieved results well below the national average, which in turn had an adverse effect upon the department's GCSE profile.

· 141. At Key Stage 3, attainment is below the level expected nationally of pupils aged 14. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, can identify change and continuity, and see and explain the causes and effects of past events, for example in work on Norman castles. At Key Stage 4, high and average attainers show good levels of understanding, read well for information, and select and use sources competently to build up evidence about people in the past. However many pupils at both key stages have difficulties with specific skills required in history, for example in making deductions about and interpreting past events, and this goes some way to accounting for the below average results at GCSE. The attainment of many pupils currently taking the GCSE option course is below that expected nationally of pupils aged 16, but the work seen in the classroom was of a higher standard than that reflected in past examination results. Most see and explain the motives for actions in the past, for example in work on the Berlin airlift, but the majority struggle with the complex underlying political issues covered in the course.

· 142. Pupils make satisfactory progress from their low base on entry to the school. They acquire knowledge and understanding about the past and extend their ability to work independently. The positive participation of boys in lessons enables many of them to make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall but a lack of specialist support in many lessons and the lack of appropriate textbooks for a demanding course at Key Stage 4 often limits progress to acquisition of basic knowledge. Pupils made good progress in lessons that were stimulating and challenging. For example when studying the movement west of white settlers in America, pupils in Key Stage 3 developed their understanding of other points of view as they came to understand the culture and beliefs of North American Indians. Lower attainers amongst older pupils made poor progress as they struggled to come to terms with the complex motives and relationships when studying the Russian invasion of Afghanistan.

· 143. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good overall, but their behaviour and commitment to work are better at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4. Most pupils have a very positive approach to their learning, participate willingly in lessons and listen well. Pupils concentrate well and when given the opportunity to work on their own either individually, or in groups, take the responsibility and persevere with their efforts. Pupils show respect for one another and for the views of others, including the views of people in past times whose lives they study.

. 144. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, although significantly better at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4, where some unsatisfactory and ineffective teaching takes place, for example in poor use of the board to enable pupils to record the key points of a topic. Teachers generally plan their lessons carefully, have good subject knowledge and expect pupils to work hard and behave well. Lessons are usually well organised and effectively managed. Relationships in lessons are pleasant, within a brisk and business like atmosphere. Teachers normally use a variety of approaches and resources to provide stimulus and interest for pupils at all levels of attainment, for example the use of information technology in work on Renaissance art. However, in a minority of lessons higher attaining pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to develop a good depth of understanding. Homework is set regularly and used effectively to support learning. Assessment is used well to ensure pupils' understanding of work done in lessons. The impact of these good teaching practices has not yet resulted in significantly better examination results. The work seen, however, was better than past results in GCSE would suggest.

. 145. An adequate range of resources is used effectively to provide a range of learning activities. At present information technology is limited in use because of the incompatibility of much departmental software with the new centrally available hardware. Accommodation, in a large number of rooms spread across the whole school is unsatisfactory, necessitating the transport of resources long distances, and making effective display of work for teaching use difficult. Leadership provides a clear commitment to a positive learning environment and there is sound planning for the future development of the department. The curriculum meets statutory requirements.

. 146. Since the last inspection the number of pupils achieving grades A*-C at GCSE has increased slightly but is still well below average. The lack of materials for pupils with special educational needs at Key Stage 4 remains a problem, as does the lack of support for these pupils in many lessons at both key stages. Teachers now provide clear guidance for group work. The use of a large number of rooms throughout the school for teaching history remains unsatisfactory.

Information technology

. 147. In both Key Stages 3 and 4 attainment is below the levels expected of pupils aged 14 and 16 respectively. Teacher assessments for information technology at the end of Key Stage 3 show a significant majority of pupils to be achieving at Levels 3 and 4 which is below national expectations. GCSE results in 1997 for the Information Systems course were well below the national averages for the higher grades A*-C. The results were in line with the average for grades A*-G. In 1998 the school did not enter pupils for external examinations in information technology.

148. Information technology is taught in a number of subjects across the curriculum in all years, including English, mathematics, science, geography and design and technology. There is also increasing use made of information technology by the special educational needs department using the System Integrated Research (SIR) program for developing literacy and numeracy skills. In Key Stage 3, levels of attainment are highest in word processing, graphics and control. Other aspects of the subject are less secure for the majority of pupils. This also applies at Key Stage 4. The ability of pupils to use both hardware and software varies at both key stages and many pupils still need support to undertake basic-level, information technology procedures. Higher attainers in both key stages can import information from a range of sources and merge text, graphics and data, as well as using information technology to present their work attractively. Pupils who have access to their own computer or make use of the school facilities outside the formal curriculum, attain higher levels and are more autonomous and independent users of information technology.

149. The progress of pupils in both key stages is unsatisfactory. It is inhibited by a lack of continuity in their information technology experiences. The majority of pupils grow in confidence when they have a series of lessons involving the use of information technology and their ability to undertake basic procedures shows greater independence. Staff who teach information technology through their subject do not challenge and extend pupils' capability sufficiently to ensure significant progress, although the consolidation it does give is valuable. Most progress is made with word processing. Satisfactory progress is made by a minority of pupils in using graphics, including charts and graphs, and in control activities. The progress made by pupils with special educational needs and lower attaining pupils is too slow and is hampered by poor keyboard skills. As well as having more limited manual dexterity they also retain information and routines less well. In Key Stage 4, pupils taking GNVQ courses where information technology is taught as a core skill make satisfactory progress.

150. In lessons pupils have positive attitudes to using computers. They are interested in the tasks presented to them and concentrate well. Behaviour is good and pupils show respect for the resources and equipment provided for their use. Relationships are good and where computers have to be shared pupils support each other well.

151. The use made of information technology by teachers across the curriculum is inconsistent and the teaching of information technology is unsatisfactory. Where teachers are confident and they plan to deepen pupils' experience and capability as in some mathematics, geography, and design and technology lessons, the teaching of information technology skills is at least satisfactory and often good. However, the depth of planning for information technology in subject lessons rarely extends and challenges the pupils. In lessons the teachers give good individual support to the pupils. The management of learning activities is good and they have high expectations in respect of pupil behaviour. Supporting materials and resources are helpful to pupils and well presented. Where planned teaching takes place it is usually effective. However the provision is poorly managed and pupils do not receive enough experience taught in a planned and systematic manner and the impact is generally lost.

· 152. There is no whole-school management structure in place and the delivery of information technology is not monitored formally or systematically. This was identified in the last inspection report and the situation is largely unchanged. Facilities and resources have been improved since the last inspection and are very good following the recent investment in new computers. However, this has not yet resulted in improved attainment by pupils. The use of information technology by subjects across the curriculum has increased since the last inspection. However, the lack of continuity of experience for the pupils still contributes to under achievement. Procedures for assessment do not take in the full range of information technology experiences that the pupils receive and are therefore unsatisfactory.

· 153. The three computer rooms and the resource centre are well used by pupils at lunchtime and after school and provide an additional opportunity for them to develop their information technology skills. The range of software and equipment held in the central and departmental areas is good and pupils have access to CD-ROM and the Internet. Technician support for information technology is good, both in terms of maintaining the computers and the network, and for supporting and advising the teachers on hardware and software.

Modern foreign languages

· 154. In 1997 the proportion of pupils attaining Grade A*-C at GCSE and those gaining grades A*-G were below national averages in French. In German the percentage of pupils gaining A*-C grades was in line with national averages. The percentage of pupils gaining A*-G grades in German in 1997 was below national averages, with girls achieving significantly better grades than boys. The numbers entered for French, as a proportion of the cohort was smaller than nationally, whereas for German it was much higher than the national figure. Since the last inspection the trends in results have remained constant in both languages. Pupils' performance in French in 1997 was well below their performance in other subjects while in German it compared favourably with that in other subjects. In 1998 the results in French improved to bring them near to the 1997 national average. In German the proportion of pupils gaining A*-G increased to above the 1997 national average but those gaining A*-C decreased slightly, but stayed in line with the average.

· 155. At Key Stage 3 pupils now attain levels in line with those expected at the age of 14 in both French and German. They are able to understand and respond appropriately to the use of French and German for most routine tasks, identify the main points from extracts of speech at near normal speed with the help of some repetition. The higher attainers can deduce the meaning of some unfamiliar language in context in speech at normal speed with little repetition. They are able to read with understanding and participate in simple dialogues exchanging information, using set phrases and substituting words to change meaning. Higher attainers can do this from memory while lower attainers need prompts. Most pupils are able to describe events in the present and past tenses using set phrases, the higher attainers being able to recognise patterns and apply them fairly accurately. All pupils are able to copy fairly accurately and match print with meaning. The higher attainers write short paragraphs from memory and are beginning to adapt the language to suit their own needs using bilingual dictionaries to find and check meaning.

· 156. At the end of Key Stage 4 in French the majority of the present cohort of pupils achieve below national averages. In German they achieve in line with national averages. In French, pupils have a limited range of vocabulary and structure and lack confidence in speaking and listening. Higher attainers are able to express opinions and describe events in the past, present and future but the majority of pupils achieve standards consistent with grades D-E in GCSE. In German, pupils are confident speakers and are able to identify detail from extracts of speech containing vocabulary from a variety of topic areas and a fair range of structures. They write accurately and at some length and are able to adapt the language to suit their own needs. They deal competently with authentic texts containing some unfamiliar language and are able to use reference materials effectively to check meaning.

157. During Key Stages 3 and 4 the majority of pupils make satisfactory progress, consolidating vocabulary and structures and increasing in confidence and accuracy in all four skill areas. Progress improves when pupils are given frequent opportunities to put their skills into practice in informal situations and where they are required to communicate for real purposes. Pupils make good progress in listening because of the effective and often exclusive use of the languages being learned in lessons. However progress is unsatisfactory in some lessons in both key stages. Lower attaining pupils make unsatisfactory progress particularly where their needs are not always adequately addressed and where there is inappropriate over-emphasis on reading and writing. During Key Stage 4, while progress is satisfactory overall, and sometimes good amongst the higher attainers, many of the present cohort are lower attaining pupils and they make unsatisfactory progress. Starting as they have from a low point in terms of attainment at the start of the Key Stage, these pupils are attaining lower than average levels.

158. Pupils are well behaved and cooperative but there is little evidence of enjoyment in lessons. They are concerned to do well, listen attentively, concentrate on tasks set and when given the opportunity pupils work well in pairs and small groups. Most are able to use reference materials and bilingual dictionaries effectively to find and check meaning but there is little evidence of pupils being given the opportunity to develop their skills through independent learning. In a minority of lessons where the needs of lower attaining pupils are not adequately met, where pupils are not given sufficient opportunity to participate, or the variety of activities is limited, pupils lose concentration and become restless.

159. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and occasionally good, but the teaching of French to the lower attainers is not effective in raising their levels of attainment sufficiently. In German the teaching staff are effective in ensuring pupils' progress and raising standards, particularly at Key Stage 4. Teachers have a good command of the languages they teach and use them effectively and often exclusively to conduct lessons. Control and discipline are effective and there are good relationships between staff and pupils. Lessons are well planned for continuity and progression but with insufficient regard to the achievement of groups of differing attainment within classes. For example, while activities and resources are usually appropriate, there are occasions when they are not well enough adapted to meet the needs of the highest and lowest attainers. In the best lessons objectives are clear and shared with pupils, a good variety of activities ensures a brisk pace, progress is closely monitored with frequent formative and encouraging feedback and teachers employ effective question and answer techniques to elicit contributions from pupils. However in most lessons the pace is slowed by lengthy teacher-led activities decreasing pupils' opportunities to practise informally and opportunities are missed for pupils to put their skills to the test in real situations.

· 160. The department is generally well led in the day to day organisation and management of provision and has a clear vision of the way forward. However, there are a number of weaknesses in the department that have not been addressed. Schemes of work ensure continuity and progression but there is insufficient detail as to how materials and content are to be addressed for groups of differing levels of attainment. Activities are limited in variety and do not fully meet all the recommendations of the National Curriculum, for example in the use of information technology, in communication for real purposes, in reading for pleasure and in the creative and imaginative use of language. There is no opportunity to take a second language and this can disadvantage able linguists at the next stage of learning. The school has addressed this issue and plans are well advanced to offer the opportunity for high attaining pupils to study a second language from 1998. Some pupils with special needs are withdrawn from some of their language lessons and so are at a disadvantage when rejoining their class. At present there is insufficient constructive liaison with the special needs unit for their needs to be met. Assessment systems are at present inadequate to track pupils' progress or to involve pupils in setting their own targets but such a system is under development. There is no access to information technology within the department. The department makes effective use of specialist support staff in lessons to develop teamwork and raise standards.

· 161. Since the last inspection, attainment at GCSE has remained constant in French, but attainment is now better and reaches average levels at both key stages. Better results have been obtained in German compared to Spanish in the last report. Boys' attainment in particular has been improved through this change of provision. The inefficient use of accommodation and subsequent dispersal of classes around the school continues to have an adverse effect upon the range and variety of learning experiences provided for pupils. The department is now well staffed by specialist linguists, an improvement since the last report. All pupils now have their own textbooks although equipment and materials for student use and for independent learning are still inadequate.

Music

· 162. The GCSE results have generally been in line with the national average since the last inspection. In 1998 the results improved and were higher than the 1997 national average. At Key Stage 3 attainment is in line with levels expected at age 14. Pupils use keyboards effectively in order to develop their musical skills and literacy awareness. They can play melodies fluently from the treble clef and can add major and minor chords in the correct places. Most use their powers of aural awareness very well when listening to, and learning, new music. Individual performances are often very confident and assured. Pupils know how to appreciate music; for example they have a clear understanding of the style, history and instrumentation of blues music.

· 163. At Key Stage 4 attainment is in line with levels expected at age 16 and standards of practical performance are generally middle of the range. A few perform music well, and among the others, some are competent performers although they read music with difficulty. A pupil with reading difficulties performs quite outstandingly, and should achieve creditably in his examination.

· 164. Pupils progress well in lessons at both key stages. At Key Stage 3, continuity and progression are hampered by the system used to timetable music and the proportion of time allocated to the subject. However, lessons are tightly structured so that the progress of pupils is satisfactory and is closely monitored. Pupils remember what they have covered in previous lessons, and can quickly move on from that point. Concentration in lessons is notably good, and this ensures that all develop well. Most pupils are able to assimilate new concepts quickly and develop from there. For example, having learnt how to form an A minor chord, most pupils can immediately form their own D and E minor chords on keyboards. At Key Stage 4, many pupils start their GCSE course from a relatively low level, but clearly make good progress through the course in order for satisfactory results to be obtained.

· 165. Pupils' attitudes to music are good, and often very good across both key stages. They enter the music room in a business-like way, are attentive in lessons and listen closely to instructions. They have good self-control when keyboards are given out and collected, and they take care of the instruments when using them. They are comfortable asking questions when they are unsure, and most are confident playing solos in front of the rest of the class. They concentrate well when doing individual or paired work. In these situations especially, the higher attainers give help and guidance to others. At Key Stage 4, pupils work independently most successfully and have a responsible attitude to the work they have to get through.

· 166. Standards of teaching are very good across the key stages. The teaching is now very effective and makes a positive impact upon the standards being achieved. Since taking up position in May of this year, the head of music has worked hard to establish firm codes of conduct in the classroom and there is a strong work ethos developing in the department. Lessons start briskly and revision of previous work covered is thorough. Clear aims and objectives are given and lessons are well planned in the minutest detail. The organisation, management and pacing of lessons are good. The teaching of new concepts is exceptionally carefully done. At Key Stage 4, the teacher knows the capability and potential of each of her pupils, and helps each one at a very personal level, giving them detailed advice to take them forward. Provision is made for both the higher and the lower attainers by carefully prepared tasks that meet their individual needs.

· 167. Insufficient time allocation to music at Key Stage 3 continues to be a problem, as it was at the last inspection. This impedes continuity and progression over the key stage, does not allow the National Curriculum to be delivered in sufficient depth, and it means that some pupils start their GCSE course from a low base. Considerable effort has been made to brighten up the music teaching rooms, but the lack of adjacent practice rooms adversely affects delivery of the subject. Similarly, the lack of adequate classroom percussion instruments limits creative and expressive work. There have been significant improvements in the department in general recently including the extension of extracurricular activities of wider appeal that enhance and extend the curriculum and have more appeal to boys than was previously the case.

Physical education

· 168. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades in the GCSE examination results over the last three years shows a steady improvement and the results of 1997 are in line with the national average. Boys outscore the girls by a considerable margin. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-G grades is in line with the national average. The 1998 results are particularly good and show a significant improvement on the previous year. Levels of attainment in the work seen at both key stages are in line with those expected of pupils aged 14 and 16 respectively. In most lessons pupils achieve at least satisfactory and more often better standards in all aspects of the curriculum. Boys achieve better results than the girls do. At both key stages the planning and performing aspects of the curriculum are executed well, but pupils are not as good at evaluating their own work or that of others, as required in the National Curriculum. While pupils show higher than average attainment in much of their work, the weakness in their abilities to evaluate performance reduces their overall attainment to a level that is average for their age.

· 169. Progress in both key stages is generally good and never less than satisfactory, with more obvious progress in planning and performing. In Years 8 and 9 soccer lessons pupils build on their prior attainment and make significant improvements in their understanding of basic tactics and in their performances of the skills of the game. In Year 8 gymnastics considerable progress is made in the performance of front somersaults through the development of sound routines and good teacher and pupil demonstrations. In a Year 10 class the good progress made in terms of development in pupils' knowledge and understanding of netball was demonstrated as pupils took on the different roles of players, coaches and referees, all to good effect. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in lessons in line with their peers.

· 170. In games, gymnastics and dance pupils work well in pairs and small groups and often work to good effect independently of the teacher. They show good attitudes to their work. Pupils are interested in the subject, are enthusiastic about physical activity and respond well to tasks set by the teacher. They work cooperatively and sensitively helping each other to make progress in their performances and they sustain their efforts throughout the lessons.

· 171. The overall quality of teaching is good. Lessons are planned and in line with the department's scheme of work at Key Stage 3. The best lessons are challenging and dynamic as seen in a Year 8 netball lesson where clear objectives were set and shared with the pupils. Good use of demonstrations gave a clear idea of purpose and made a positive impact upon the lesson. The teachers have a considerable depth of subject knowledge leading to the setting of appropriate tasks and a confidence in their approach that gained the respect of pupils and helped to make a positive working atmosphere. Working relationships between pupils and the teacher and between themselves are generally good. Too much input from the teachers did, on occasions, lead to a lack of activity and a lowering of the physical challenge in some lessons.

· 172. The curriculum is broad and balanced, meets National Curriculum requirements and allows pupils to make sensible choices of activity for GCSE full and short courses and the Certificate of Achievement. The department is well led and the documentation and schemes of work for GCSE pupils are well advanced. Assessment procedures at Key Stage 3 are well documented and rigorously pursued. Assessment informs planning but takes insufficient account of the full requirements of the end of key stage description. Indoor accommodation is good and well maintained but the outdoor accommodation is unsatisfactory. The surface of the all weather pitch is particularly hazardous and the grassed areas are badly drained. The tennis courts are uneven and part of the boundary fencing is dangerous.

173. Since the last report, the attainment of pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 remain at levels expected for their age groups. The issue of the allocation of time for non-GCSE Key Stage 4 pupils has been rectified. GCSE results have improved and the GCSE short course and Certificate of Achievement have been introduced. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs now ensures that appropriate learning takes place. Good schemes of work have been developed at Key Stage 3. The department continues to offer a varied and rich extracurricular programme with good support from other staff.

Religious education

174. Examination results at GCSE have shown an impressive improvement within the past two years, and the attainment of pupils at Key Stage 4 is above the standards expected for 16 year olds. It is not possible to make a valid comparison of results in recent years because of the changes in the examination syllabus and the profile of the candidates. In 1997 the majority of the small group of pupils entered for the new short course in religious education achieved grades A*-C. However, only higher attaining pupils were prepared for the examination. In 1998, there were 124 pupils in Year 11 who took the examination. Of these, 63 per cent gained grades A*-C, with 16 pupils attaining grade A* and 19 pupils gaining grade A and these figures represent high attainment.

175. Pupils' attainment at age 14 is in line with the standards expected for pupils at Key Stage 3 as defined in the Local Agreed Syllabus. By the end of Year 9, most pupils have a sound knowledge and understanding of the main beliefs, concepts and religious practices of Christianity and other major world religions. Higher attaining pupils put across their own viewpoints effectively in class discussions, as for instance, in a lesson on the meaning of Old Testament creation stories. Lower attainers use religious language accurately, for example, in describing the symbolism of food used in the Seder Meal in Judaism. The standard of written work is generally satisfactory, although lower attaining pupils sometimes do not complete their tasks. By the end of Year 11, the great majority of pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of contemporary attitudes towards the fundamental questions of life, and of moral issues, such as the stewardship of the environment, which they discuss in a mature way. They support their opinions with evidence from their knowledge of the ethical standpoints taken by different faith communities. The standard of written work is good.

176. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, make at least satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 the majority of pupils make good progress, although some lower attainers do not progress as well as expected, because they lack motivation. Pupils come into school with a basic knowledge of Christianity, and some appreciation of different world religions. As they move through Key Stage 3 they develop their knowledge and understanding of different religious concepts to a satisfactory level. At Key Stage 4, pupils are making good progress in coping with the demands of the programmes of study in the recently introduced syllabus.

177. At both key stages the attitudes of pupils are generally good. Most pupils are well motivated and show enthusiasm for their work. They are attentive listeners and are keen to take part in group and class discussions. At Key Stage 4, pupils take the initiative in planning and researching their own projects, often using information technology resources. Occasionally, the negative attitudes of a minority of pupils have a detrimental effect on learning, but, in the main, behaviour is almost always good.

178. The quality of teaching is good and sometimes very good, particularly at Key Stage 4, where teachers have a positive impact and are effective in raising standards. In the most effective lessons teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject, and show enthusiasm for it. Planning is good, and teaching styles and learning resources are well adapted to the different needs of pupils. Expectations of work and behaviour are high, and pupils are stimulated to make a high quality contribution to class discussions and to think creatively. There is a good range of activities that promote pupils' communication skills as well as their knowledge and understanding. Resources, including artefacts, are well chosen, and homework is used effectively either to consolidate learning or to introduce a new topic. In these lessons pupils enjoy their work and make good progress. Where teaching is less than satisfactory this is because the negative attitudes of a few pupils have a detrimental effect on learning and the style of teaching was not well adapted to the needs of lower attaining pupils.

179. The school has responded positively to the concerns raised in the previous report about the quality of the provision for the subject and good progress has been made. The Lancashire Agreed Syllabus of religious education has been fully implemented at Key Stage 3. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 now take an accredited course at GCSE and alternative forms of accreditation are being considered for those who have difficulty in meeting the requirements of the short course. Time allocations at both key stages are adequate. The issue of non-specialist teaching staff has been addressed. There are now two specialist teachers who take the majority of the lessons, and members of the humanities department teach all other lessons. Resources are now adequate and appropriate at both key stages. The subject is well managed and makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Vocational education

180. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is enhanced by a number of vocational courses which aim to cater for the differing needs and aptitudes of pupils and prepare them for adult life. Courses are available at Burnley College in both Years 10 and 11 for the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in construction and for units of the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in engineering. The school provides an RSA accredited course in business applications. In Year 11, the school provides units for GNVQ at intermediate level in business, leisure and tourism, with the support of Nelson and Colne College. About a quarter of pupils in each year, but twice as many boys as girls, take a vocational course. Only the school based courses were inspected.

181. In 1997 attainment in examinations for vocational studies was in line with the national average. Attainment of pupils in 1998 is in line with expectations for the courses. In leisure and tourism, most pupils work effectively in groups, demonstrate appropriate presentation skills and have sound knowledge and understanding of leisure centre provision. In business applications, pupils are competent in basic word processing skills. In both courses most pupils of all levels of attainment make good progress in their work. For example a group of pupils showed good progress over a period of time as they researched a topic relating to the provision of a leisure centre. From the initial plans of action they went on to construct a questionnaire, apply it and analyse the results. The final lesson in this short unit saw the pupils using computers to aid their presentation of their findings. Pupils were able to reflect upon the whole process and identify for themselves the progress they had made in following an idea through to testing it and presenting the results.

· 182. Pupils respond well. They show interest in the work and apply themselves conscientiously to tasks. They get on well together and behave well. In leisure and tourism most are positive about the course and the opportunities it provides for them to show responsibility and initiative.

· 183. Teaching is at least satisfactory and is mostly good. Teachers have good knowledge and skills for the subjects. They have appropriate expectations and they monitor and support pupils' work well. Planning of lessons, use of resources and management of pupils are satisfactory and relationships between pupils and teachers are good. The supporting college lecturer makes a positive contribution to the work in leisure and tourism.

· 184. Apart from the Year 11 course in leisure and tourism, vocational courses cater mainly for average and lower attaining pupils. The construction and engineering courses are taught entirely by the college, but there are satisfactory arrangements for the school to monitor pupils' progress. Nelson and Colne College support the school staff in teaching business, leisure and tourism and verify assessments of pupils' attainment. The school has established satisfactory procedures and has clear plans for further curriculum and staff development.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

· 185. A total of 13 inspectors spent 51 inspector days in the school, gathering first-hand evidence. Some 186 lessons or significant parts of lessons were seen. A total of 29 observations of registration/tutor periods were made and three assemblies were reported upon. A variety of extracurricular activities were visited throughout the week. Inspectors also analysed all the available work of a representative sample of three pupils from each of years 7 to 11, the work of pupils with special educational needs was examined, as well as the written work of other pupils during lesson observations.

· 186. Discussions were held formally with an extended sample of pupils and informally with many others during breaks from lessons. Formal meetings were held with the Headteacher, senior staff, other staff carrying managerial responsibilities, and a cross-section of subject teachers and support teachers, including a newly qualified teacher. Discussions took place with members of the governing body and support staff as well as with other adults who work in or visit the school regularly, such as the education welfare officer.

· 187. A wide range of documentation concerning management, teaching, policies and administration was analysed. Before the inspection eight parents attended a meeting and members of the inspection team considered a total of 79 responses from parents to a questionnaire relating to their opinions about the school.

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	936	50	157	250

TEACHERS AND CLASSES

Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y11)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	58.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.25

Education support staff (Y7 - Y11)

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked each week	167

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	76
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Average teaching group size	KS3	21.8
	KS4	22.1

FINANCIAL DATA

Financial year:	1997/98
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	£
Total income	2,011,206
Total expenditure	2,001,919
Expenditure per pupil	2,161.90
Balance brought forward from previous year	101,563
Balance carried forward to next year	110,850

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:

850

Number of questionnaires returned:

79

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	10	80	10	0	0
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do	29	60	6	5	0
The school handles complaints from parents well	20	53	16	11	0
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	14	67	13	6	0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	30	65	2	3	0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	33	57	1	8	1
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily	20	58	14	8	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	23	61	8	7	1
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	21	61	10	8	0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	15	55	15	11	4
My child(ren) like(s) school	20	58	13	8	1

* Please note that these figures are rounded to the nearest whole number.