

INSPECTION REPORT

**Humphrey Perkins High School and Community
Centre**

Loughborough

LEA: Leicestershire

Unique reference number: 120234

Headteacher: Mr J D L Edwards

Reporting inspector: Mr J W Ashton
4492

Dates of inspection: 27th-31st March 2000

Inspection number: 187397

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	County
Age range of pupils:	11 to 14
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Cotes Road Barrow-upon-Soar Loughborough Leicestershire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr M Neale
Date of previous inspection:	March 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr J W Ashton	<i>Registered inspector</i>		The school's results and achievements; How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
Mr R Love	<i>Lay inspector</i>	Equal opportunities.	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development; How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with its parents?
Ms M Sewell	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Drama; English as an additional language.	
Mr B Fletcher	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; Special educational needs.	
Ms M Foulds	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science.	
Mr G Preston	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology; Information technology.	
Dr J Cosgrove	<i>Team inspector</i>	History; Religious education.	Social, moral, spiritual and cultural development.
Ms H Feasey	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography.	
Ms J Goodman	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art.	
Mr J Radcliffe	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages.	
Mr J Morrell	<i>Team inspector</i>	Music.	Curriculum opportunities.
Ms G Salter-Smith	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical education.	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Humphrey Perkins High School is a mixed 11 to 14 comprehensive school and community centre, serving a number of rural and industrial villages in the north of Leicestershire. The school's roll of 918 has increased by more than one hundred pupils since its last inspection in March 1996, and is predicted to increase further in the near future. The planned admission number of 291 pupils was exceeded in each of the last two years. There were substantially more boys than girls in the Year 9 group that left in 1999, and also in the present Year 9. Fewer than one per cent of pupils are from an ethnic minority, and there are very few for whom English is an additional language. Just over 10 per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is lower than the national average, but a small increase since the last inspection. On the other hand, the number of pupils with statements of special educational needs has more than doubled to its present number of 28. The pupils represent the full range of ability normally found in a comprehensive school. Attainment on entry is average or above in each of the three core subjects, and is just above average overall

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Humphrey Perkins is an improving school, following a period of relative inertia after the last inspection. Most of this improvement is very recent, coinciding with the arrival of a new headteacher, who has a clear vision of where the school needs to go. The school has many strengths, but a number of significant weaknesses. It gives satisfactory value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 are above the national average in mathematics, science, humanities, music, and modern foreign languages.
- Numeracy standards are above average.
- Most aspects of the quality of teaching and learning are good, and are much improved since the last inspection.
- The school is being given a very clear lead by its new headteacher.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good and they are well taught.
- Links with partner primary schools are good.
- Financial planning is good.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Standards of attainment in English and in literacy are in line with the national average for all schools, but below average compared to those of schools with a similar intake.
- Higher attaining pupils are not challenged enough in some subjects (especially in some mixed ability groups in English and science, and in some music, art and physical education lessons).
- Aspects of the curriculum are weak.
- Some aspects of senior and middle management need strengthening.
- There are shortages of learning resources in some areas, and facilities for physical education and drama are unsatisfactory.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual development is weak.
- Links with parents are not strong enough.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in March 1996. Since then it has made satisfactory progress in many of the issues identified for improvement. It has made good progress in improving the quality of both teaching and learning. Most of this progress has taken place since the arrival of the new headteacher, 18 months ago. Teachers now have clear and higher expectations of what all pupils can achieve, and pupils are achieving higher than national expectations in a wider range of subjects. The reorganisation of some teaching groups, teaching strategies and materials in order to raise achievement, has taken place in some subjects, notably in science classes. Better assessment procedures have been developed in most subjects to give pupils a clearer indication of their attainment against national standards. Nevertheless, there is further work to do in this area in some subjects, including English and design and technology. A programme of training for all staff is providing a broader perspective of the standards that pupils of this age can achieve and the factors that contribute to high standards. A major focus of this programme has been the raising of the achievement of boys who have difficulties with extended written tasks. The new headteacher introduced a systematic monitoring procedure for ensuring the quality of teaching throughout the school. Further problems that need to be addressed include the quality of homework, for instance in English. Collective worship does not take place on a daily basis. Some higher attaining pupils are still not being fully stretched in some science and English classes, and even in the occasional mathematics group.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14 year olds based on National Curriculum test results.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
English	A	D	C	D	<i>well above average</i> A
Mathematics	B	B	B	B	<i>above average</i> B
Science	A	C	B	C	<i>average</i> C
					<i>below average</i> D
					<i>well below average</i> E

Standards in mathematics and science are above the national average at the end of Year 9. Standards in English are in line with the national average. When compared with the results of pupils attending similar schools, mathematics results in 1999 were above average and those for science were average, but results in English were below average. The trend in the school's average National Curriculum points score for all three core subjects taken together is very close to the national trend for the past four years. Pupils' attainments in 1999, by the end of Year 9, in other subjects exceed national expectations for this age group in humanities (history and geography), modern languages and music. They match national expectations in physical education and religious education. Standards of literacy across the school are not as good as they should be. Numeracy standards, on the other hand, are above average, as a result of the school's effective numeracy strategy. Pupils achieve well, in the sense of making progress that is better than might be expected across the key stage, in humanities and modern languages. Their achievement is satisfactory in all three core subjects, as well as in art, music, physical education and religious education. Their achievement is unsatisfactory in both design and technology and information technology.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes are generally good. Pupils across the age range are keen to come to school. They are attentive in lessons and maintain their concentration and interest. They enjoy their work and work well as individuals and as members of groups.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	In class, behaviour is sound and at times good. The few pupils who misbehave are in the main appropriately dealt with. Behaviour in the dining area and in and around the school buildings and grounds, is usually good. Behaviour on the school buses is a cause for concern.
Personal development and relationships	Opportunities for pupils to accept positions of responsibility and trust are satisfactory. These include, as library assistants, members of the school forum or as bus monitors. Pupils carry out their duties in a mature manner.
Attendance	Attendance is about the national average, as it was at the time of the last inspection. The level of unauthorised absence is low.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of the teaching and learning during the inspection week was generally good, and much improved since the last inspection. Fewer than three per cent of lessons seen were unsatisfactory. Forty six per cent were judged good and a further fourteen per cent very good. Thirty eight per cent of lessons were satisfactory.

The largest proportion of very good lessons was seen in science, but at least one other very good lesson was seen in each of drama, English, mathematics, design and technology, humanities, physical education and personal and social development. Single unsatisfactory lessons were seen in each of science, information technology and humanities. Other than in English lessons and the very good reading support sessions for pupils with special educational needs, the skills of literacy are not well taught throughout the school. The teaching of numeracy, on the other hand, is a strength, not just in mathematics, where it is taught well, but also in varying degrees within other subjects, including geography, history, English, science, and design and technology. The school is meeting satisfactorily the needs of most of its pupils. However, instances were observed in all three of the core subjects of some pupils not being sufficiently stretched at times. The quality of special educational needs teaching is good. Pupils learn well and make at least satisfactory progress throughout the key stage in every subject except information technology and design and technology.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Despite having some strengths, there are significant weaknesses in the curriculum. The strengths include a well integrated humanities course and good provision for pupils' personal and social development. Weaknesses include: the organisation of design and technology which hinders the continuity of pupils' learning and the development of design skills, and the general lack of cross-curricular use of information and communication technology. Drama is only taught in Years 7 and 8. Religious education is not given enough time for the required syllabus to be fully covered. Mixed ability teaching leads to some pupils not being sufficiently challenged. Double periods of 100 minutes are too long for some pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good, and allows pupils full access to the curriculum.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Pupils are well supported and are making good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' social, moral and cultural development is satisfactory. Provision for their spiritual development is weak. The personal and social development course is a good programme of personal, social and health education.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Health and safety policies and practices and procedures for child protection are satisfactory. There have been improvements in procedures for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress, but there is still room for further improvement.

The school uses a variety of strategies to work in partnership with parents'. It produces a good prospectus, an informative governors' report and a newsletter each term, in addition to the annual reports and parents meetings. A recent innovation is the termly parents' forum in which a variety of issues are discussed. There are also the opportunities for parents to communicate with the class teacher via the pupils' 'organiser' folder, but few parents make use of this opportunity.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Determined and focused leadership from the new headteacher, with a clear vision of how the school needs to improve. His senior management team and some aspects of subject and pastoral management need strengthening.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body fulfils its statutory obligations except for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. It supports the school appropriately, mainly through its termly meetings, the work of its committees, and attendance at school events.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school's capacity to evaluate its own performance is now satisfactory, following improvements in the last 18 months, since the arrival of the present headteacher.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are generally appropriately deployed and used, but the usefulness of computers in the library is limited by their not yet being linked to the internet.

There is an adequate number of teachers to match the needs of the National Curriculum, but insufficient technical support in science, design and technology and information technology, although the support given by the existing staff is good. Accommodation is at least adequate in the majority of subjects, but there are problems in information technology, physical education and drama. Learning resources across the departments are generally satisfactory except, for example, in information and communication technology. There are sufficient textbooks in most subject areas, though new books are needed in religious education, and those for German need updating.

The new headteacher gives clear leadership and takes effective action. He is supported by a senior management team that needs strengthening. The style of leadership of the pastoral divisions is not consistent. It is effective when it is child-centred. It is not effective when dealings with pupils place too much emphasis on the negative aspects of their work and behaviour. The co-ordination of the support for pupils' special educational needs is a strength. Most subject leadership is at least satisfactory, with significant recent improvement in the leadership of science. Aspects of the leadership of English need strengthening. The art and design and technology departments are weakly led, and co-ordination of information and communication technology across the curriculum is lacking.

The school has good financial management systems in place. Spending decisions are related to educational priorities as identified in the school improvement plan, but governors need to play a more active part in the process of designing the plan. The school's latest audit report was favourable and the few suggestions within it have been acted upon. Satisfactory account is taken of the principles of Best Value in the management of the school. For example, competitive tendering is well used for cleaning and building contracts.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
• The good teaching from most teachers. • The school's expectation that their children will work hard. • The leadership of the new headteacher.	• The amount and regularity of homework. • The amount of information they receive on their children's progress. • The partnership between school and parents. • The science schemes of work. • The negative approach to pupils from some middle managers. • The behaviour on the school buses.

The inspectors agree with parents' positive comments, particularly that the new headteacher is steering the school in the right direction. As to parents' concerns, inspectors' findings are that: there is evidence of poor behaviour on some school buses, and of a dampening approach from some middle managers. Science schemes of work are much improved this year and they are being further improved. Arrangements for the quantity and quality of homework do indeed need improving. The format of the end-of-year reports to parents has been improved recently, but there is room for improvement in the arrangements for informing parents of their children's progress at other times during each year. The partnership between school and parents is being improved by initiatives such as the 'parents' forum'.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. At the end of Year 9 in 1999, the proportions of pupils attaining the expected Levels 5 and above in mathematics and science in the National Curriculum tests were above the national average for all schools. The proportion attaining the expected levels in English was in line with the national average.
2. When compared with the results of pupils in schools whose pupils are from similar backgrounds, mathematics results in 1999 were above average, those in science were average, and those in English were below average.
3. When these same pupils arrived in the school in Year 7 in 1996, an above average proportion had already achieved the expected attainment levels (Levels 4 and above) in mathematics and science, but only an average proportion were at these levels in English. The degree to which pupils' achievement has been improved or sustained has, therefore, been about the same for all three of the core subjects across the key stage: satisfactory in each case.
4. The trend in the school's average National Curriculum points score for all three-core subjects of English, mathematics and science, taken together, has been broadly in line with the national trend over the past four years.
5. Pupils' attainment in 1999, by the end of Year 9, in other subjects exceeds national expectations for this age group in humanities (history and geography), modern languages and music. It matches national expectations in physical education and religious education.
6. Pupils achieve well, in the sense of making better than might be expected progress across the key stage, in humanities and modern languages. Achievement (or relative progress) is satisfactory in all three of the core subjects, as well as in art, music, physical education and religious education. Achievement is unsatisfactory in both design and technology and information technology. The main reasons for this less than satisfactory achievement are weak co-ordination of the design aspects of design and technology, and of the cross curricular aspects of information technology, along with a lack of sufficient planned opportunities for pupils to use computers in other lessons.
7. Standards are above average in speaking and listening and average in reading and writing. However, standards of literacy across the school are not as good as they should be. There are, however, pockets of strength and examples of recent improvement elsewhere. Pupils use the library regularly, and are able to read and comprehend, extract information and use referencing skills well. Pupils with special educational needs achieve better than might be expected, due to well co-ordinated support both within lessons and during the reading support sessions at the start of most school days. The half-hour silent reading sessions in

tutor groups are less successful in raising standards, largely due to a lack of monitoring and intervention, when necessary, by classroom teachers. The shortage of opportunities for extended writing in most subjects is another reason for writing standards being only average. There are too many worksheets, with just gaps to complete. Some departments, such as humanities and science, are becoming more aware of this, and are providing scope for writing at greater length, in addition to their use of more focused worksheets.

8. Numeracy standards, on the other hand, are above average, as a result of the school's effective numeracy strategy. Most pupils are well-practised in mental arithmetic and in the daily recall of number facts. This facilitates good access to all areas of the curriculum and prepares pupils well for the next stage in their education. By the end of the key stage, at the age of 14, the majority of pupils have well-developed number skills that they apply to problem solving. Pupils are confident in their use of number, and move easily between fractions, percentages and decimals. They apply their knowledge and skills well in other subjects. In geography, for example, pupils read maps using six-figure grid references and use bar charts to illustrate the recreational facilities in the local village. In history, they place historical events on a time line, and in English they demonstrate that they can interpret graphs. In science, pupils measure temperature, mass and volume, and calculate speed. They also plot 'lines of best fit' when graphically recording the results of experiments.

9. Only two of the six pupils for whom English is an additional language have experienced difficulty in using English for learning and communication. These pupils have been effectively identified, and extra provision has enabled them to achieve relatively well and to make good progress. Their standards in reading, writing and oral work are all satisfactory, and they are now reintegrated into the mainstream.

10. Pupils of all abilities achieve at least satisfactorily throughout their time at the school in those subjects where they are grouped according to their ability. In some subjects, however, especially where the groups are mixed ability, there are instances where some higher attaining pupils are not challenged as well as they ought to be. Examples of this were seen in all year groups in English, in Years 7 and 8 in science, and in some music and physical education lessons.

11. Both boys and girls attain equally well and make similar progress in English, due to the extra strategies recently introduced to raise boys' standards in literacy. In art also there is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls. However, girls have achieved significantly better results in mathematics than boys over the last three years. In science, with the exception of 1997, the girls have performed significantly better than the boys. The attainment of girls exceeds that of boys by a considerable margin in humanities, but, in physical education, more boys than girls achieve the expected standard and fewer girls than boys achieve above average standards. The school is well aware of the discrepancies in the relative achievements of boys and girls, and has set a target in its most recent development plan to raise the proportion of boys reaching National Curriculum Level 5 from 69 per cent to 75 per cent this year.

12. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, especially in literacy and numeracy. General targets are well written and ways of achieving them closely defined. The practice of setting individual subject targets is developing well, although presently they are filed separately from the individual education plans. The quality of individual education plans is good, even though the targets are general.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

13. Pupils' attitudes are generally good. Pupils across the age range are keen to come to school. They are attentive in lessons and maintain their concentration and interest. They enjoy their work and work well as individuals and as members of groups. Many examples were seen in classrooms of boys and girls working well together. Pupils generally show respect for each other and for adults, and relationships in the school are mainly sound, both between pupils themselves and between pupils and adults.

14. In the classrooms, behaviour is sound and at times good. The few pupils who misbehave are in the main appropriately dealt with. Behaviour in the dining area, and in and around the school buildings and grounds, is usually good. No examples of oppressive behaviour were observed.

15. Some parents and pupils expressed concerns about the behaviour of some pupils on the buses taking pupils to and from school. Behaviour is acceptable whilst the pupils are boarding the buses and while the buses are still on site. Enquires of some of the bus drivers revealed that a few pupils smoke and some are very noisy.

16. The level of exclusions in 1998/1999 is lower than the level reported at the time of the last inspection and is close to average for similar sized schools. However, the figures for the autumn term prior to the inspection in March 2000 show a worrying increase. The new 'remove' system of a short cooling-off time out of lessons is having a good effect in reducing the need for excluding pupils from school.

17. Opportunities for pupils to accept positions of responsibility and trust (for instance, as library assistants, bus monitors and as members of the school focus group) are satisfactory. Pupils carry out their duties in a mature manner.

18. Attendance is about the national average, as it was at the time of the last inspection. The level of unauthorised absence is low.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

19. The quality of the teaching and learning during the inspection week was generally good, and much improved since the last inspection. Fewer than three per cent of the 126 lessons seen were unsatisfactory. Forty six per cent were judged good, and a further fourteen per cent very good. Thirty eight per cent of lessons were satisfactory.

20. The largest proportion of very good lessons were seen in science, but at least one very good lesson was seen in each of drama, English, mathematics, design and technology, humanities, physical education and personal and social development. Single unsatisfactory lessons were seen in each of science, information technology and humanities.

21. Good lessons were seen in every subject, but especially in humanities, modern foreign languages and music. The main teaching strengths include teachers' secure subject knowledge, clearly apparent in every subject area; their methods of teaching and of organising pupils' learning; the skill with which they manage their pupils and insist upon good standards of behaviour.

22. One of the weaknesses in teaching noted in the last inspection report was the use of assessment to give an accurate picture of pupils' achievements. There have been improvements in most subjects in this aspect. There remain weaknesses in the accuracy and consistency of marking procedures in, for instance, English and design and technology. The other identified weakness was the use of homework to extend pupils' learning outside the classroom. This also remains a problem to be resolved, particularly in English.

23. The dramatic improvement in the quality of science teaching since the last report is due in part to energetic new leadership. It is also due to effective use of a new and more suitable scheme of work, improved teacher questioning, and lesson planning that builds a wide range of different activities into the lessons. Even in science, however, there was the occasional unsatisfactory or barely satisfactory lesson. This was due to a mistaken use of too many mundane worksheets from the older, less suitable scheme of work, or to a lack of challenge for some pupils in some mixed ability groups. For example, a Year 8 class was given a cutting and pasting activity at the end of an over-long double period.

24. The unsatisfactory lesson in information technology occurred when the teacher over-estimated the level of some pupils' attainment in a Year 9 class and gave them insufficient initial guidance, with the result that they were unable to cope with the work set. In the one unsatisfactory lesson seen in humanities, the teacher's inability to control the behaviour of some pupils disrupted the learning of the whole group.

25. The skills of literacy are not well taught throughout the school. There are silent reading sessions at the beginning of most days for mainstream pupils, but their effect in raising standards of literacy is patchy. Some girls read avidly whereas boys read only a few pages each week. This strategy needs much more teacher input and regular monitoring to be effective. The teaching of numeracy, on the other hand, is a strength, not just in mathematics, where it is taught well, but also in varying degrees in each of geography, history, English, science, and design and technology.

26. The school is meeting satisfactorily the needs of most of its pupils. Grouping into ability sets enables the work to be pitched at the right level in many classes, and some teachers have extension work available to challenge higher attaining pupils in mixed ability groups. A good example of this was seen in a Year 8 science class studying the difficult topic of density. The progress of a small group of able boys was constantly monitored, and they were provided with more demanding work and more searching questions at regular intervals throughout a long double period. This was not a universal occurrence, however. Instances were observed in all three-core subjects of some pupils not being sufficiently

stretched. The provision of `differentiated` work of varying levels of difficulty was a rare event in the mixed ability English lessons. Even in the mathematics sets, some higher attainers were not always given sufficiently demanding work. Teaching strategies observed were generally working equally well with both boys and girls, and teachers are very aware of the need to involve both sexes in lessons. This was the focus earlier this year of a whole school in-service training session.

27. The quality of special educational needs teaching is good, and a strength of the school. Planning is detailed, thorough and relevant to the needs of the individual pupil. Nothing is left to chance. The co-ordinator and her support assistants have great faith in their pupils, who consequently gain greatly in self-esteem and confidence. Progress towards the achievement of pupils' individual targets is very good. Records are meticulously kept. All learning support assistants work effectively. They work closely with the teaching staff and maintain their own records of work completed and of pupil progress. Pupils therefore have good quality support in the classroom and in small, highly organised withdrawal groups in English and mathematics, where the work set parallels the work of mainstream classes.

28. The personal and social development curriculum is well taught by class tutors. The teaching was good in two thirds of the lessons seen, and in some lessons it was very good. Teaching was satisfactory in the other lessons. Lessons are well planned around the helpful scheme of work and there is good use of resources and visiting specialists, such as teachers from the Travellers Education Service. Learning was judged to be good or better in over three-quarters of the lessons, and in the remainder it was judged satisfactory. Pupils made significant gains in knowledge about the perils of smoking, the dangers involved in drug taking and the lifestyles of people lumped together under the umbrella term 'Travellers'.

29. Pupils at Humphrey Perkins High School learn well and make at least satisfactory progress throughout the key stage in every subject except information technology and design and technology. Pupils are learning at least well and often very well in science because of very well structured teaching and energetic and competent leadership. Their learning is unsatisfactory in some aspects of design and technology because of weaknesses in shared perception of the common threads of design. In the case of information technology, learning is hindered to some extent both by the shortage of computers and by weaknesses in the co-ordination of their use.

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

30. The quality and range of learning opportunities provided for pupils are unsatisfactory overall, although the school's curriculum has a number of strengths, including a well integrated humanities course and good provision for pupils' personal and social development. Provision for pupils' special educational needs and for travellers' children are also good.

31. The previous report raised a number of issues. There were concerns that the National Curriculum programmes of study for art and design and technology were not being fully covered, nor was the agreed syllabus in religious education being fully implemented. Mixed ability grouping was leading to a lack of challenge and time wasting for some pupils, and homework was not routinely set, or involved merely finishing off, or involved trivial

activities. Boys were allowed to dominate some lessons and to adopt a stereotypical role in others. There was a lack of a structured reading programme for the poorest readers and pupils' individual education plans lacked a common format. Much of this has been improved by the school: art and design and technology now meet statutory requirements, and a well structured reading recovery programme is in place for the weaker readers. There are now no issues concerning equal opportunities or equal access to the curriculum. The relative performances of boys and girls do not always mirror the national picture, so the school has started some single sex classes, in Year 9 science, for instance, to try to improve achievement. Girls are expected to take part in all sports including rugby and football, but they do not always get their fair share of the play.

32. The remaining weaknesses include the lack of continuity in pupils' learning caused by design and technology being taught on a rotation system with other subjects. This leads to a gap in time, usually one year, between revisiting subjects. Pupils receive only one lesson of information technology every two weeks, and there is a general lack of cross-curricular teaching in information and communication technology. Drama is only taught in Years 7 and 8. As the college that many pupils choose for their GCSE and A Level work specialises in the expressive arts, this lack of opportunity in Year 9 puts pupils from this school at a disadvantage. Religious education is still not given enough time for the required syllabus to be effectively covered. There is no coherent policy across the school for spiritual development. Mixed ability teaching still leads in some classes to some pupils not being sufficiently challenged. Double periods of 100 minutes are too long for some pupils, and teachers have difficulty maintaining pupils' enthusiasm for that length of time.

33. The school still delivers a good programme of personal, social and health education through its personal and social development course. This is well taught by class tutors who are ably supported by effective personal and social development and Outdoor Education Co-ordinators. The curriculum has wide coverage and includes good quality sex education, careers education, drug awareness, environmental education, citizenship and aspects of equal opportunities education. Good use is made of visiting specialists such as school nurses, teachers from the Travellers' Education Service, the Youth and Community Education Service and the Police to increase pupils' knowledge and understanding.

34. The provision for special educational needs is good, and allows pupils full access to the curriculum. The school has experienced a large increase in the total number of pupils on the special educational needs register. At the last inspection, it had 13 pupils with statements, and it now has 28. The quality of pupils' individual education plans is good, although there are too few targets for behaviour, but it is recognised that the school is addressing this issue.

35. There is a satisfactory range of extra-curricular provision. The range of activities beyond the classroom is good in science, humanities, modern foreign languages, and music, but unsatisfactory in religious education and art where there is very little. There is a growing number of drama and music productions. Pupil recitals take place every month, and there are joint concerts with primary and post 14 partner schools. In humanities and science, there is a good range of visits and fieldwork, with a strong emphasis on pupils entering competitions. A wide range of interesting visits is arranged for pupils by the humanities and modern foreign languages departments.

36. The school has good links with the partner primary schools from which its pupils transfer. The links make possible a well-organised induction process that allows the primary school pupils, about to transfer, to spend two days at Humphrey Perkins High School in the summer term. Teachers from local primary schools, working in conjunction with colleagues from the school, plan to pilot a scheme in the summer term whereby pupils start a project in the primary school and finish it in the high school. There are sound links with the Community College to which most of the pupils' transfer, which assist in the process of transfer and curriculum development. There are plans to further strengthen these links through a teacher exchange scheme with this college.

37. The school is a centre for a substantial programme for community education that receives some financial support from the county council. The head teacher is the warden of the centre, and there is a full-time youth and community education co-ordinator. The sharing of facilities with the Adult Education programme, which is mostly delivered out of school hours, makes a useful contribution to the school's finances. The involvement of the Youth and Community Education Service in the life of the school has improved since the last inspection. One good example of this is the pivotal role of the provision of an alternative curriculum on two afternoons a week for a group of Year 9 pupils, who are having problems with either their behaviour and self-esteem or their attendance.

38. Overall, the provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is satisfactory, but there is no general school policy to guide it and no single person responsible for co-ordinating it. The weakest of the four elements is the spiritual. Although some subject areas and the personal and social development programme make a positive contribution, it is generally unplanned and not found in departmental documentation.

39. Spiritual provision is weak, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. The school does not meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of worship, and not enough time is allocated to religious education for the requirements of the agreed syllabus to be met. Consequently, there are limited opportunities to develop an insight into values and beliefs, self-knowledge and spiritual awareness. Although a small positive contribution is made in some subjects, such as English and drama, religious education and science, overall provision throughout the wider curriculum is variable and is not found in departmental documentation. Religious education conveys some useful knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other world religions, and offers a limited insight into spiritual values. An example of this was a video description and enlightening discussion of a conversion experience. Science lessons include some experience of awe and wonder on contemplating the solar system.

40. Provision for moral education is satisfactory. Opportunities are taken in English, history, religious education, and geography to explore the moral dimension of some topics such as the Holocaust. Personal and social development and religious education lessons deal with responsible action and moral choices. Pupils know the difference between right and wrong and teachers have clear expectations of them. Behaviour and relationships in lessons are generally good. In English, drama, religious education and personal and social development, opportunities are taken to study personal relationships and moral issues. The

personal and social development programme includes a most useful talk by a local policeman on drugs awareness and abuse, a topic also covered in some science lessons. Geography lessons sometimes focus on the moral dimensions implicit in environmental protection and the destruction of rain forests. There are some good lessons in religious education on values and moral choices in Year 9.

41. Provision of social development is satisfactory. Pupils generally respond well to the expectations of them. In some subjects, they successfully work in groups and help each other. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in lessons. Fieldwork, trips, clubs and visits help to develop social confidence. There are some opportunities to take on responsibility within the school. In some subjects, such as history, pupils are guided towards more independent learning. Personal and social development is designed to promote key aspects of pupils' development and to explore social and moral issues, such as drug abuse, and raises questions of personal relationships and social issues. In history, geography and other subjects, pupils can learn about society and develop notions of citizenship. There are opportunities to work together, and in some subjects, such as music and information and communication technology, group work fosters mutual help and collaboration. Examples of this can also be seen in the practical work in science and in physical education, which also has a good extra-curricular programme. Pupils benefit from cross-curricular trips and visits to places of historical interest, from residential visits and trips abroad, and a variety of sports. Social concern can be seen in the 'Granny Project' in English, which focuses on the problems of elderly people and promotes empathy with old age.

42. Provision for cultural development is satisfactory, with some strengths in the exchange visits abroad related to modern foreign languages, and provision in English, drama and music. Cultural provision is helped by lunchtime musical concerts, successful dramatic productions, the study of Chinese music and Aztec art, and the study of the work of other artists. Multicultural awareness could be more apparent, but pupils study different cultures in geography and history, such as those of Japan and Brazil as well as those of Western Europe. Pupils become acquainted with multicultural aspects of world religions in religious education, for instance when they study Hinduism in Year 8, and there are points in the curriculum when they become aware of the problems of less developed nations and of racism in society.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

43. The school provides a safe environment during lesson time, where pupils are appropriately cared for and enabled to learn. Health and safety policies and practices are satisfactory. Child protection policy and procedures are also satisfactory. They are based on the local authority recommended model and staff received awareness training in the autumn of 1998. Pupils are well supervised as they queue for their lunches, when they eat in the dining area. The leaving of school and boarding the school buses is an efficient and carefully timed procedure. On the other hand, with the notable exception of one of two areas, such as humanities, pupils not in the dining hall are expected to remain outside, even in cold weather. Pupils, and some parents, say this leads to instances of inappropriate behaviour that might not otherwise occur. Parents and children also commented on how good it was to have lockers to store their belongings during the school day, but that some of these lockers were damaged and then not repaired.

44. The school has good policies and practices for encouraging and monitoring attendance, which consequently remains at about the national average. Unauthorised absence is low, and the main cause for authorised absence remains ill health and family holidays in term time.

45. Pupils' behaviour is generally sound, but the behaviour policy introduced since the last inspection is not always consistently implemented. There are occasional instances of a more confrontational approach to discipline being used for less serious cases of bad behaviour. The success of the recently introduced alternative curriculum for certain Year 9 pupils, who were having problems with their attendance or behaviour, has demonstrated the value of alternative approaches.

46. Assessment procedures and their use were criticised in the last inspection report for their lack of validity, for assessing to motivate pupils rather than to diagnose what they could do well and what they needed to do to improve. Some progress has been made in this respect and procedures are now satisfactory overall, but much remains to be done to achieve consistency of good practice across and within some subject areas, including setting achievable targets for pupils and monitoring their progress more effectively against these targets. Procedures and their use to inform curriculum planning are good in some subject areas, such as science, modern foreign languages, humanities and drama. However, they are weaker in others, notably English and design and technology. The school is at a relatively early stage in devising a systematic means of monitoring pupils' personal development, except in the case of pupils with special educational needs, where procedures are good.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

47. Links with parents need strengthening. There are promising signs of progress in the last 12 months with the setting up of a parents' forum for consultation, but the inspection questionnaire returns point to three issues about which a significant number of parents feel dissatisfied. More than one quarter of the large number of parents who responded have concerns about homework provision, the information they get about their children's progress and way the school works with parents.

48. There is inconsistency, across the school and within individual departments, in the approach to setting homework. There are some examples of good practice, for example, the weather diary homework in humanities. In such cases, parents have noticed and pupils commented on a pleasing improvement in its quality. Nevertheless, pupils sometimes have no homework set throughout an entire week, whereas in other weeks they have been set a variable number of pieces of work. Even some of the pupils said that they did not get enough homework, while others complained of too little during the week and too much at weekends. Frequently the set task is to complete or continue work being done in class, sometimes when many pupils have already finished it. There is little evidence of work being set that would, for example, require pupils to develop their investigative or research skills. Homework is not always marked in a helpful manner.

49. The main ways in which parents are informed of their children's progress are through the end-of-year report they receive and at the annual parents' meeting. The end-of-year reports contain appropriate details of pupils' attainment and a very useful element of self-evaluation by pupils. National Curriculum Levels of attainment are given in all subjects, but no indication is provided as to how well the child is progressing compared with others in the class or with national expectations for the age group.

50. The school uses a variety of strategies to work in partnership with parents. It produces a good prospectus, an informative governors' report and a newsletter each term, in addition to the annual reports and parents meetings. A recent innovation is the termly parents' forum in which a variety of issues are discussed. There are also the opportunities for parents to communicate with the class teacher via the pupils' 'organiser' folder, but few parents make use of this opportunity. On the other hand, the large number of comments about homework, for instance, on the back of the inspection questionnaires, shows how seriously parents try to get involved in their children's progress.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

51. The school is soundly led and managed overall. The leadership of the headteacher, half way through his second year in post, is good. Shortly after his arrival, he made a detailed and accurate diagnosis of where the school was and where it needed to go in the near future. His clear lead caused staff to re-examine their priorities and to re-assess their working practices. Not all teachers agreed with his diagnosis that until recently the school was under-achieving in many respects, but inspection findings confirm that diagnosis. Meanwhile, he continues to deliver what the last inspection report said the school needed: more focused leadership, a faster pace of development towards longer term goals of raising achievement, together with a system of monitoring and evaluation.

52. He is supported by a senior management team, which needs strengthening, and by co-equal pairs of pastoral year leaders, not all of whom follow the positive, child-centred lead of the head teacher. Too much routine day-to-day troubleshooting lands at the door of the headteacher. Too large a share of routine administrative tasks falls to the deputy headteachers, including many matters which in other schools would be dealt with at middle management level.

53. School development planning has improved since the last inspection. It is now rooted more firmly in what the previous report said was needed, 'a long term vision of what the school needs to do in order to provide the highest standards of education for all its pupils'. Departmental plans are improving, but their quality and usefulness is variable. The best relate well to the whole school plan, and set realistic targets, both long and short-term, for improving pupils' achievement in their particular areas.

54. The governing body fulfils its statutory obligations except for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. It contains a good mixture of experience and expertise, which complements that found in the school, and supports the school well, mainly through its termly meetings, the work of its committees, and attendance at school events. The chairs of the committees make regular and frequent visits to school, but individual governors as a whole do not visit sufficiently to become involved in its day-to-day life, in ways that would ensure that they are fully in touch with its work on a first hand basis.

55. Pastoral leadership has been doubled in the last year. There are now two division heads for each year group, which is an improvement on the previous system. However, the style of leadership of the divisions is not consistent. It is effective when it is child-centred. It is not effective when dealings with pupils place too much emphasis on the negative aspects of their work and behaviour.

56. The co-ordination of support for pupils' special educational needs is a strength, especially the reading support groups and in-class support. The special educational needs co-ordinator is an effective administrator, is very knowledgeable about special needs and leads a committed team well. The school policy follows closely the special educational needs Code of Practice. Pupils' annual reviews are carefully organised, and parents are invited to be present.

57. Most subject leadership is at least satisfactory, with areas of recent improvement, though there are other areas of relative weakness. Significant improvements have taken place this year in science, leading for example to the implementation of a more effective work scheme, and other improvements are planned. Aspects of the leadership of English are sound but other aspects need strengthening. These include the monitoring and evaluation of pupil performance so as to secure improvement, and the consistency of the departmental policy for marking. The art, design and technology group of subjects is weakly led. There is a lack of a common approach to the various aspects of design across, for instance, resistant materials and food technology. There is a need for more effective co-ordination of information and communication technology across the curriculum.

58. The school has an adequate number of teachers to match the needs of the National Curriculum. However, there is a shortage of technical support in science, design and technology and information technology, though the support given by the existing staff is good. The school has carried out comprehensive staff development sessions for teachers on a number of key topics on training days throughout the academic year, for instance on behaviour management and strategies for raising the achievement of boys who have difficulties with extended written tasks. Staff also value in-service training in their specialist subject, but not a great deal of this has taken place in recent years. No formal teacher appraisal takes place as the school awaits the new threshold system of judging teacher performance. Nevertheless, the monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching is satisfactory. For the past 18 months, there has been regular classroom observation by the headteacher and a deputy head, and more recently by heads of department. Support for newly qualified teachers is satisfactory.

59. Accommodation is at least adequate in the majority of subjects. It is good in science, humanities, modern foreign languages and music. It is unsatisfactory in information technology, and poor in physical education and drama. There are insufficient rooms in information technology. In physical education, the lack of indoor space is affecting pupils' progress. Drama lessons, which are held in the dining room, are curtailed twenty minutes every day by the need to set out and clear the tables for lunch. There is also continuous noise from the kitchen next door. The condition of the accommodation is generally satisfactory. It is good in design and technology, history, geography, and music. The quality of displays is satisfactory, except in art where it is poor, and few examples of pupils' work are to be found around the school. Dining facilities are inadequate for the increasingly large numbers of pupils who stay for lunch.

60. The school site is well maintained to ensure that it is a safe environment for pupils. Repairs are carried out promptly, and health and safety risks are quickly eliminated. The premises officers keep a vigilant eye on the state of the buildings, and have been responsible for a number of improvements and refurbishment of particular parts of the school, notably the area around the well maintained swimming pool and the new and improved provision for music.

61. Learning resources across the departments are generally satisfactory. As at the time of the last report, they are unsatisfactory in information and communication technology, where a single suite of fifteen computers is inadequate for the class sizes. The suite of computers is rarely available for other subject use. In science, there is a shortage of a wide range of laboratory equipment. Resources for English and humanities are good. The flexibility of the humanities accommodation renders it a useful teaching resource. There are sufficient textbooks in most subject areas, although there is a need for some new books in religious education and some updating of books in German.

62. The number of computers available for pupil use across the school is broadly in line with the national average, but their distribution is uneven. Information and communication technology resources are good in humanities and in science, but limited in music and art, and unsatisfactory in maths. They are not easily accessible to pupils with special needs. The school has a very good reprographics and resource centre, with excellent facilities for the production of high quality learning resources. Centrally-controlled videos can be transmitted throughout the school, although, as departments acquire their own video recorders, less use is being made of this facility. In the lecture theatre, a giant screen provides good projection facilities for larger groups of pupils.

63. The library has a good supply of books and provides a good research resource for classes in English, science, humanities and design and technology. There is an up-to-date careers section that is being well supported by the careers service, but the usefulness of the four computers in the library is limited by their not yet being linked to the internet. Pupils make good use of all the facilities at break and lunch times.

64. The school has good financial management systems in place, which enable income and expenditure to be correctly accounted for. Spending decisions are related to educational priorities as identified in the school improvement plan, but governors need to play a more active part in the process of designing the plan. The school's latest audit report was favourable and the few suggestions within it have been acted upon.

65. Satisfactory account is taken of the principles of Best Value in the management of the school. For example, competitive tendering is well used for cleaning and building contracts, the school compares the performance of its pupils with those of other schools and the performances of its boy and girl pupils. The termly meetings of the parents` forum are increasingly used as a method for consulting parents.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

66. The school's staff and governors are in a strong position to remedy the weaknesses identified in the inspection. They should maintain the focus on raising standards, and in particular:

- Improve pupils' achievement in English compared to that of pupils in similar schools by:
 - * continuing to provide all pupils (but particularly boys) with more experience of extended writing, both in English and in other subjects;
 - * reviewing the reading improvement programme with a view to increasing tutor interaction with pupils;
 - * making better use of homework to extend the work begun in class;
 - * ensuring that all teachers in the department make consistent use of the department's assessment procedures.
- Raise the level of challenge for all pupils, but especially those with high attainment by:
 - * reviewing the philosophy of mixed ability teaching in some areas of the curriculum;
 - * adapting teaching approaches that meet the needs of pupils at different levels of attainment in every class;
 - * providing them with more demanding work, both in class and at home;
 - * setting them achievable targets and monitoring their progress more effectively against these targets.
- Improve curricular provision by:
 - * reviewing lesson length with a view to avoiding excessively long double lessons;
 - * increasing pupils' use of information and communication technology in other subject areas;
 - * strengthening the 'design' aspects of the design and technology curriculum;
 - * reviewing the 'carousel' arrangements for design and technology and art;
 - * Providing regular opportunities for drama in Year 9.

- Strengthen leadership and management by:
 - * widening the expertise in the senior management team;
 - * improving the co-ordination of design and technology, and of information and communication technology across the curriculum;
 - * develop a policy to ensure that all pastoral managers take a consistently positive and child-centred approach to pastoral care.
 - Improve spiritual provision by:
 - * providing sufficient time on the timetable to meet fully the Agreed Syllabus for religious education;
 - * improving provision for collective worship;
 - * finding ways of identifying and celebrating spirituality in other curriculum areas.
 - Improve learning resources and accommodation, when funds permit, especially by:
 - * increasing the number of modern computers, deploying the present ones more effectively and developing links to the Internet;
 - * improving facilities for drama and physical education;
67. Other weaknesses that the governors should take account of in their development plans:
- * Good assessment practices developed in some curriculum areas, particularly science, modern languages and humanities, should be introduced across the school;
 - * Further strategies are needed to strengthen links with parents;
 - * The level of care offered to pupils needs improvement so that they are not kept outdoors in bad weather and lockers for their use are kept in good repair;
 - * The scheme of work for art should be improved so that it is less prescriptive for teachers and more challenging to pupils.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	126
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	37

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
	13.7	46.4	37.6	2.4	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7-Y9
Number of pupils on the school's roll	918
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	92

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y9
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	28
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	188

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	6

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	13
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	21

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.4
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	155	117	272

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	81	107	84
	Girls	97	92	80
	Total	178	199	164
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	65	73	60
	National	63	62	55
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	26	41	27
	National	28	38	23

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	99	104	80
	Girls	107	91	89
	Total	206	195	169
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	76	72	62
	National	64	64	60
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	33	37	25
	National	31	37	28

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	3
Indian	3
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	3
White	892
Any other minority ethnic group	5

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	19	2
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes:

Y7 – Y9

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	50.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff:

Y7 – Y9

Total number of education support staff	13
Total aggregate hours worked per week	130

Deployment of teachers:

Y7 – Y9

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.0
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Average teaching group size:

Y7 – Y9

Key Stage 3	23.8
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Financial information

Financial year	1998-1999
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	£
Total income	1752422.00
Total expenditure	18 8073.00
Expenditure per pupil	2178.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	88610.00
Balance carried forward to next year	22989.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	920
Number of questionnaires returned	425

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	28	59	8	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	32	57	7	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	19	58	12	5	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	14	59	20	6	1
The teaching is good.	20	67	6	0	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	17	53	22	6	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	35	54	7	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	41	53	3	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	15	52	25	5	4
The school is well led and managed.	21	54	7	2	15
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	26	59	9	2	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	19	48	13	3	17

Other issues raised by parents

- * The science schemes of work.
- * The negative approach to pupils from one or two middle managers.
- * The behaviour on the school buses.

PART D:

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

ENGLISH

68. In 1999, overall standards of attainment in English, at the end of Year 9, matched the national average. This was an improvement on the previous year when standards were below the national average. The standards of attainment in English of the same pupils when they entered the school in 1996 were close to the national average, with 55 per cent achieving the expected level (Level 4) or above in the end of Key Stage 2 tests. Their progress was therefore relatively satisfactory in Key Stage 3. Nevertheless, when their attainment at the end of this key stage in 1999 is compared with that of pupils in similar schools, their standards were below the national average in English, though they were above average in mathematics and average in science.

69. The findings of the inspection are that pupils' attainment in English at the end of Key Stage 3 reflects their performance in the 1999 national tests, with pupils achieving the expected standards for their age. Both boys and girls attain equally well and make similar progress; this is due to the extra strategies recently introduced to raise boys' standards in literacy. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in all three year groups because of the extra provision made for them. Pupils with low to average attainment achieve reasonably well. However, there are small numbers of pupils with the potential to attain highly who are currently underachieving.

70. Pupils make good progress in speaking and listening from Year 7 through to Year 9, as a result of which standards in speaking and listening are above average at the end of the key stage. For example, pupils observed in a Year 7 lesson on 'Adrian Mole's Diary' were keen to respond to questions. In a Year 8 group working on producing leaflets, pupils listened to each other, negotiated and were able to collaborate on the appropriate features. In a Year 9 lesson on 'Romeo and Juliet', some lower attaining pupils confidently expressed their opinions on how the characters related to each other and their importance in the story. Pupils are more fluent and articulate speakers by the end of the key stage than the present pupils in Year 7, confidently able to express themselves clearly, using a wide vocabulary in a variety of situations.

71. Attainment in reading throughout the key stage is variable but satisfactory overall. All pupils are encouraged to read on a daily basis, but the effect of this on raising attainment is not as yet discernible. The majority read fluently and recognise most common words at sight. Pupils read well for meaning in both literary and non-literary texts. Lower attaining pupils have extra reading time, which is effective in that these pupils have gained confidence and read aloud with expression. Pupils in Year 8 read persuasive texts, such as advertisements, analytically and demonstrate a sound understanding of how language is used to influence our opinions. Higher attaining pupils distinguish literary features such as 'genre,' as in a Year 7 lesson preparing a script. In Year 9 lessons on 'Romeo and Juliet,' pupils identify not only characterisation, theme and plot, but also dramatic irony and tension. Higher attaining pupils also understand stylistic effects, analyse poetry critically, and talk about poetical devices with confidence.

72. Standards of written work are sound overall, but pupils in each year group do not attain the higher levels because of technical weaknesses, some of which have remained uncorrected. A significant number of pupils continue to make the same technical errors throughout the three years. One such error is the failure to distinguish between dialogue and narrative by using quotation marks appropriately. Pupils of low attainment make better progress in writing, frequently writing more extended pieces than other pupils. However, some higher attaining pupils finish their tasks early and then await instructions; these pupils need more appropriate work. Many high attaining pupils in Year 9 are capable of a higher level paper in the national tests but they are not entered for it. Overall achievement in writing is slightly slower than expected.

73. There is considerable evidence in pupils' folders of the redrafting of pieces of work. There is a wide range of activities, for instance, newspaper reports, diaries, letters and scripts, all of which are well presented and clearly demonstrate pupils' pride in their work. There is some evidence of word-processed work, but little emphasis is placed on the use of information technology in English on a regular basis as a tool and learning resource.

74. Teaching and learning are satisfactory or better in all lessons observed. Just over half the lessons are good and one sixth are very good. There are strengths in all lessons. Where teaching is more interactive, as in a Year 8 lesson on 'The Signalman,' a short ghost story, pupils are able to participate and share ideas so that real learning takes place. In lessons where pupils are passive participants, the engagement with the subject is less effective. This was seen in a lesson on 'Bonnie Pit Laddie', when pupils' concentration lapsed after a few minutes because they were asked only to respond to simple questions. Some lessons lack pace. An example of this was the annotation of a picture; most pupils completed the task after a few minutes, and sat around waiting for others to catch up. Teaching is good in more than half the lessons observed. In these lessons, teachers have a good command of their subject knowledge and of effective teaching techniques. The best lessons were where teachers use interactive teaching and learning styles and set clear lesson objectives for pupils to share. The best examples of this were seen in drama. Teachers generally manage their classes well, so that pupils understand clearly what is expected of them. The provision of homework is inconsistent between groups, and is insufficient to maintain the progress made in the lessons; this needs reviewing if sustained progress is to be made. Insufficient attention is paid in some English lessons to providing more challenging work for higher attaining pupils.

75. The quality of teacher assessment is inconsistent. Day-to-day assessment varies considerably from class to class and, whereas all marking is positive and encouraging, not all is linked to National Curriculum criteria and only a few pieces of work are standardised against work from other classes. There is little evidence that these assessments are used consistently throughout the department, either to set targets for pupils or to inform future planning. Pupils are all well aware of the National Curriculum levels and are able to identify which level they operated on for writing, but not for reading or speaking and listening.

76. Learning skills are generally good, as is behaviour. Pupils show interest in their work and sustain concentration well, except where the work is inappropriate. Pupils understand what they are doing, but are frequently unsure of what to do in order to improve. Generally, they are well

motivated and want to present their work to the best of their ability. Pupils' attitudes are good in English. Good relationships are observed in almost all lessons. Pupils are co-operative and collaborate well in both paired and small group work. Generally, they listen to the opinions of others and treat each other with respect.

77. Aspects of the leadership of the department are sound, but there are also areas for development. The department's development plan, schemes of work and policy statements are good. A varied, broad and balanced programme of work has been produced, which provides a good range of structured and progressive tasks based on literary texts of quality. The improvement of reading has a higher profile in the department than at the time of the last inspection. Strategies to improve the written standards, particularly of boys, are being put into operation, with evidence of some success. The head of department is dedicated to raising standards. Much has recently been done to review the department's practices. However, there are still weaknesses in the monitoring, evaluation and improvement of pupil performance. The most able pupils are still not always challenged sufficiently, either in class or through the effective use of homework. The departmental policy for marking is still not consistently followed and needs further monitoring. There is significant assessment data in Year 7, but the impact on teaching or its use to inform planning is not in evidence. The data needs to be interpreted into targets for individual pupils.

Drama

78. All pupils make very good progress in drama, so that standards in drama by the end of Year 8 are on track to be above the national expectation by the end of Key Stage 3. However, there is no timetabled provision for drama in Year 9. Pupils make confident and effective use of a range of drama techniques. For instance, they understand the terms 'freeze frame' and 'improvisation.' In the best lessons, some pupils are working to GCSE standards. Good examples were seen in a Year 7 lesson on bullying and a Year 8 class on a 'haunted manor', where all pupils, especially those with special educational needs, responded well and produced work to a high standard.

79. Pupils respond well, not only in drama lessons but also in the excellent school production of 'Across the Barricades.' Pupils are able to explore ideas and create performance through cameos, freeze frames and improvisations. Pupils gain understanding of the dramatic process through participation, which was well evidenced in a lesson with Year 7 where the pupils were allowed freedom to explore and improvise upon the theme of Time.

80. The quality of teaching and learning in drama lessons seen was at least good, and two thirds was very good. The high expectations implicit in the teaching and the high level of classroom management lead to a positive response from the pupils. Pupils were observed confidently evaluating their own work using specialist language. Teacher feedback is excellent, which enables pupils to further develop their skills.

81. Accommodation for drama is inadequate, and time is lost from lessons as the space doubles as a dining hall. Pupils are able to experience 'forum theatre,' but the limitations of the accommodation prevent them from acquiring a fuller range of theatrical skills.

Literacy across the curriculum

82. There are not as yet either whole school or departmental policies for raising standards in literacy across the curriculum, although classroom observations indicate some strengths.

83. Pupils are aware of audience and appropriateness of style in their writing, and there is generally a good standard of accuracy and presentation, although much work is undated. The excessive use of workbooks inhibits pupils' ability to write more extended pieces. This is evidenced in geography, history and religious education. In art, many opportunities for pupils to write about artists' work are missed. However, there is some evidence of extended writing in science. Evidence of redrafting and the manipulation of text was observed only in English. Specialist vocabulary is identified in drama and history. More work needs to be done in all subjects to introduce pupils to subject-specific vocabulary, in order to reduce common spelling errors.

84. Pupils use the library regularly and are able to read and comprehend, extract information and use referencing skills well. The effect of silent reading time in raising standards of literacy is patchy. Some girls read avidly whereas boys read only a few pages each week. This needs much more teacher input and regular monitoring to be effective.

85. Embryonic strategies are in place for raising standards in literacy, but these are only evidenced in English. More work needs to be done to develop literacy systematically through other subjects.

MATHEMATICS

86. Standards of attainment in mathematics at the end of Year 9 are above the national average. In the 1999 national tests, the proportions of pupils attaining the national standard of Level 5 and the higher levels of 6 and 7 were above the national average. Pupils' attainment has been consistently above the national average for the previous three years. The present trend is upward and likely to be maintained. Over the same period, girls have achieved significantly better results than boys. The results are also above average when compared to those of schools with a similar intake.

87. The inspection findings confirm the upward trend. By the end of the key stage, pupils' attainment is above that which is expected nationally, and the proportion of pupils who attain the higher grades will be similar to that of previous years. The school is tackling the issue of differing achievement of boys and girls, and the available data indicates that mathematics results this year will bring the two groups more closely together. The school has set realistic targets for future attainment, whose achievement will confirm the progress made in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection.

88. Standards in numeracy are good and the direct result of the school's effective numeracy strategy. Most pupils are well practised in mental arithmetic and in the daily recall of number facts. This facilitates good access to all areas of the curriculum and prepares pupils well for the next stage in their education. By the end of the key stage, at the age of 14, the majority of pupils have well-developed number skills that they apply to problem solving. Pupils are confident in their use of number, and move easily between fractions, percentages and decimals. They apply their knowledge and skills well in other subjects. For example, in geography, pupils read maps using six-figure grid references and use bar charts to illustrate the recreational facilities in the local village. In history, pupils place historical events on a time line, and in English they demonstrate that they can interpret graphs. In science, pupils measure temperature, mass and volume, and they calculate speed. They are also able to plot 'lines of best fit' when graphically recording the results of experiments.

89. Pupils are arranged in teaching groups according to prior attainment, which allows them to work at their own pace and to develop confidence in their own abilities. Work set is carefully graded, so that pupils progressively develop a sound grasp of the principles and applications of mathematics. All lessons include references to mathematics as a problem-solver in an everyday context. For example, pupils in Year 7 draw and measure angles. They learn about compass points and how they are used in navigation and map reading. Pupils in Year 8 know how statistics are illustrated and the uses to which they can be put. They use a pie chart to illustrate their preferences for the colour of the school uniform and their modes of travel to the school. Pupils in Year 9 investigate the best route for travelling at sea in the middle of a storm, and this provides a practical introduction to the measurement of sides and angles in a triangle. Pupils with special educational needs find out more about positive and negative numbers by using a sliding scale. They know that negative numbers can be applied to freezing temperatures and digging holes at sea level.

90. The scrutiny of pupils' workbooks shows that they steadily improve the presentation of their work and develop a logical sequence in the setting out of problems. This helps their understanding of mathematical method and increases their ability to get things right. Pupils in Year 7 know about symmetry, as it appears in the letters of the alphabet and in the structure of a snowflake. They know that two numbers can be used to fix a point on a flat surface and that this is the basis of reading maps. Pupils in Year 8 look for the rule that governs number sequences, and find the next terms. They enlarge shapes by scale drawing. Pupils in Year 9 know the difference between 'congruence' and 'similarity' and illustrate it clearly. They also trace the path of a moving point and use their knowledge to work out where a donkey should be tethered if it is to gain maximum benefit from a field of grass!

91. Pupils achieve as expected and make at least satisfactory progress in mathematics, which is considerably enhanced by the practical approach to the subject. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported by a specialist teacher, whose commitment to their needs contributes very significantly to their feelings of self-esteem and confidence. They become numerate and they learn how to apply what they know to everyday events. Many pupils make good progress, although high attaining pupils sometimes repeat work in which they are already

competent. Little mathematical equipment – such as number rods – is used to support progress, and valuable opportunities to confirm learning are lost as a result. A significant number of pupils do not bring the correct equipment to the class, for example, ruler, compass and protractor, and this detracts from teaching time. At present, organisational difficulties mean that the department has no regular access to information technology, which means that pupils have little opportunity to confirm and check their learning on the computer.

92. The quality of both teaching and learning in mathematics are sound, with good features. Teaching in all lessons is satisfactory and around half is good with the occasional very good lesson. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Teachers' knowledge of mathematics is sound, and their understanding of how pupils learn is good. Many lessons are bright and stimulating, especially those which begin with mental arithmetic and the recall of essential number facts. Pupils are well managed, and relationships are generally friendly and laced with good humour. Teachers expect pupils to work, behave and contribute. They intervene well to emphasise key teaching points, and this ensures that the majority of pupils learn well the essential building blocks of mathematics. Teachers set clear lesson objectives and share them with the pupils. In this way, pupils are involved in their own learning. Questioning techniques are good and well spread across the class. Occasionally, the pace of the lesson is too slow, and the content and the teaching style do not sustain interest. Pupils become restless, for example when the exposition is too long or when they have understood and would prefer to be getting on with practising their skills. Some lessons are too prescriptive, and there is too little opportunity for pupils to find out for themselves. Most, but not all, high attaining pupils are identified and given more challenging work to do. Homework is satisfactorily used to support learning.

93. The mathematics department is well led and managed. The quality of the documentation that underpins teaching and learning is very good. The department works as a strong team in which each member has a clearly defined responsibility. There is a shared commitment to the improvement of standards in the subject and a strong will to succeed. The head of department has begun to monitor the work of his colleagues, and this will provide an opportunity to share good practice and to remedy any weaknesses. Nevertheless, a co-ordinated pattern for assessing pupils' work, which could have a positive impact upon progress, is not yet in place.

94. The department has maintained a good standard of teaching and learning since the previous inspection, and has successfully met all challenges. All teaching is now at least satisfactory and there are many examples of good practice. The department caters equally for the needs of all pupils. There is considerably less underachievement than at the time of the previous report. The environment in which mathematics is taught is highly conducive to the maintenance of the present standards and to their enhancement.

SCIENCE

95. Standards of attainment in science at the end of Year 9 are above the national average. Higher than average proportions of pupils reached the expected level (Level 5) and above in the end of key stage National Curriculum tests in 1999. The results are average when compared to those of schools with a similar intake. Over the past four years, the trend has fallen slightly more than the falling national trend. With the exception of 1997, girls have performed significantly better than the boys. Teachers' assessments are close to those indicated in the national tests.

96. By the end of Year 9, pupils of higher attainment reason well and show a good understanding of scientific concepts. They work at a level beyond that expected, for example, when applying their knowledge to questions on electrical protection devices. They use technical terminology when describing the fine structure of the ear, and do calculations on sound and echoing. Most middle attaining pupils show secure but lower levels of understanding. They know, for instance, the symbols for the better-known elements, understand how salts can be produced, and describe some simple chemical reactions using correct formulae. Pupils in Year 9 with lower prior attainment work in single sex classes. In lessons seen, standards of attainment amongst the girls are higher than amongst the boys. For example, the girls show a good grasp of the process of food manufacture in plants, accurately naming the requirements and the waste products. They recall that in some chemical reactions there is a change in mass and can explain why. Boys on the other hand show less accurate recall and less secure knowledge, for instance of simple chemical tests.

97. Achievement across the key stage is variable, but pupils make satisfactory progress overall. In Year 7, where a new scheme of work has recently been introduced, pupils are developing good levels of investigative skills. In Years 8 and 9, however, practical work is often more prescriptive and these skills are under-developed. In Years 7 and 8, where classes are of mixed ability, a number of lessons lack challenge for the more able, who consequently do less well than they might. In the highest set of Year 9, however, some demanding work is promoting good progress. Throughout all year groups, pupils with special educational needs achieve well. There are good worksheets matched to their needs, and some very good extra classroom support in Years 7 and 8 enables these pupils to keep up with the rest of the class.

98. The quality of teaching and learning are both good. Almost one half of lessons seen were very good and only one lesson was less than satisfactory. This is a considerable improvement upon the last report. Teachers have good command of the subject. In the better lessons, they plan well to include a variety of activities that promote good learning, and question pupils imaginatively, encouraging them to think and reason for themselves. In a Year 8 class, for instance, the teacher introduced the topic of electricity by involving pupils in careful, step-by-step problem-solving that extended into practical work. Resources are used effectively, as in a Year 9 class where computer-aided measurement of temperature change helped lower attaining pupils to understand the energy content of food. A good pace is maintained, as in a Year 8 class where the pupils clearly enjoyed carrying out a series of experiments on combustion, interspersed with lively teacher-led discussion; pupils were having fun but learning securely. In less successful lessons, tasks were prescriptive and demanded little thought by pupils. The pace of learning

lapsed, ending in the worst cases with mundane cutting and pasting activities near the end of over-long double periods. In almost all lessons, classes are managed well and good discipline is maintained. Expectations are often high. For example, pupils in one Year 7 class were learning good skills of microscopy, and pupils in a Year 8 class were applying their understanding of food webs to a GCSE Level question. In a few mixed ability classes, however, the highest attainers are not being given sufficient opportunity to extend their learning.

99. Some good basic skills of numeracy, and to a less extent literacy, are being taught and developed. Pupils do a range of calculations, and the standard of graphical work in Year 8 is particularly good. There are some good examples of extended writing, and new words are emphasised in lessons. Important spelling mistakes, however, are not always corrected in exercise books. Homework is given regularly but varies in quality. The best is graded to ensure that all pupils are challenged, but the poorest is trivial and fails to promote learning.

100. In most science classes, pupils' positive attitudes and good behaviour contribute significantly to their progress. They listen well and are eager to ask questions and contribute their own ideas. Poorer attitudes were seen occasionally, however, amongst some groups of pupils in Years 8 and 9, although behaviour was never allowed to become disruptive. Double lessons of 100 minutes are too long for many pupils to retain their interest and concentration, and this sometimes leads to ineffective use of time.

101. Leadership of the department is good, showing very clear and positive educational direction. Very thorough systems of assessment are used well to monitor pupils' progress and identify any underachievement. This good practice needs to be extended to improve the ongoing assessment and monitoring of investigative skills. Effective curriculum development is taking place that should make it easier for teachers to ensure that all pupils are appropriately challenged. Teachers are working well together to raise standards. Accommodation is good, but there is a shortage of general scientific equipment. The department is well supplied with textbooks and makes good use of the library. Some very good computing resources were acquired within weeks of the inspection, and a start has already been made in using them to enhance the science curriculum. The much-valued technical support is of high quality, but insufficient to cope effectively with the number of laboratories and the amount of practical work required, especially in the revised curriculum.

102. There have been improvements on many fronts since the last inspection. Teaching methods are more varied and there is better use of textbooks. The monitoring of pupils' progress has been developed to include the setting of targets for pupils to aspire to, and their achievements are compared with their previous achievements in order to calculate any added value. Pupils are aware of the standards they are achieving, which is an improvement on the last inspection). Ability grouping has been introduced in Year 9 with a specially adapted curriculum for the lower sets. A new scheme of work, interwoven with the development of investigative skills, has been introduced into Year 7, with a view to it working its way throughout the curriculum of all three year groups.

ART

103. By the end of Year 9, at age 14, pupils' standards of attainment overall in drawing, painting and ceramics are in line with national expectations. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their drawing and painting skills in Year 9 are limited by prescriptive schemes of work that lack challenge. Pupils throughout the key stage learn basic skills in colour mixing and the use of paint and pencil. They develop a variety of techniques for making ceramics pieces and become familiar with the specialist terms related to these areas of work. Pupils study the work of a number of artists, which they discuss with sensitivity and perception. In Year 8, standards achieved in ceramics are above national expectations. Pupils have little experience of the use of information technology in art for creative purposes, although computers are used for information retrieval.

104. Pupils make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 3. They make good progress in Year 8 in ceramics, because the schemes of work encourage pupils to link their making activities with an investigation of Aztec and African masks. A secure knowledge of technique, together with freedom to create shape and pattern, produces sophisticated and individual outcomes. However, although pupils are provided with basic skills and knowledge in Years 7 and 8, the scheme of work does not always encourage them to extend these independently in Year 9. Opportunities for pupils to look at and discuss the work of artists often occur in isolation, rather than as an integral part of practical work. Therefore the impact on their practical work of pupils' knowledge of artistic and cultural development is reduced.

105. Pupils show enthusiasm and involvement in their work. They respond willingly to questions and behave well in lessons. The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers manage pupils well, organise equipment efficiently, and provide a range of useful visual resources. Tasks are explained clearly. The pace of teaching is sometimes too slow in drawing and painting lessons, and planning does not always enable pupils to make progress with sufficient speed. Tasks are not sufficiently matched to pupils' differing abilities to challenge higher achieving pupils and ensure that those with special needs are supported, especially in lessons that involve written work. Since the previous inspection, schemes of work have been revised to include work in the knowledge and understanding of art. However, further revision is needed to ensure effective step-by-step progress, to include opportunities for pupils to work with a wider range of materials and to use information technology in art. Although homework is used sometimes to support class work, it needs to be planned more thoroughly to encourage pupils to develop skills in independent learning.

106. Pupils' opportunities for a broad and consistent experience of art are severely limited by the current carousel or roundabout system, whereby different subjects are taught within the design and technology faculty, with long gaps before returning to a particular subject. The time allocated to art is below the national average for this age group. Pupils' learning is fragmented, which has a negative effect on their continuity of experience and hence on their progress. There are few opportunities for pupils to extend their experience of art by gallery visits or by working with artists, and there are no regular extra-curricular activities. This restricts the contribution of the department to the social and cultural life of the school. Lack of displayed work around the school limits the art department's profile for pupils and visitors.

107. Monitoring of pupils within the art and design and technology area identifies and supports those pupils who give cause for concern. However, assessment procedures lack co-ordination and need to be linked clearly to National Curriculum criteria. The department is currently working on a new system for assessment. Art department targets for pupils, especially for those with special needs, are not always sufficiently clear and specific. Although some issues raised in the last inspection report have been dealt with, the department needs a stronger lead, particularly in reviewing assessment procedures, curriculum planning, and the progressive development of pupils' learning opportunities.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

108. By the end of Year 9, overall standards are in line with national expectations, largely because of pupils' greater strengths in their making skills. In some aspects of designing, pupils make insufficient progress and achieve less well than might be expected. In resistant materials, such as timber, metal and plastic, pupils use tools competently and cut and shape materials with some accuracy. In textiles, pupils establish sound skills in joining materials, including machining. In food technology, pupils prepare and combine materials and achieve successful results. In these practical areas, pupils with special educational needs make good progress, evident for example, in a food technology lesson where a pupil with special educational needs worked largely unaided in a pizza-making activity. More recently, the modules on structures and mechanisms have strengthened most pupils' background knowledge and enabled higher attaining pupils particularly to demonstrate higher levels of understanding in model-making activities. However, the discrete nature of those modules has meant that they have yet to have a noticeable impact on design skills. In food, textiles and resistant materials, the constrained design and make activities result in pupils having limited skills in research and product evaluation, and a limited understanding of how design specifications meet particular needs. In generating design proposals, pupils show only a limited transfer of graphical skills from another separately taught module. They rarely produce detailed making plans. There is some use of information and communication technology in the systems modules, but these skills are under-developed in other areas.

109. Pupils enjoy the practical activities, including making models as well as different products in food, textiles and resistant materials. Most pupils behave well and stay on task throughout the long double lessons.

110. Teaching and learning are significantly better than at the last inspection. All teaching is at least satisfactory, and over a third is good, on occasion very good. All staff are well informed specialists and good class managers. The less effective teaching is where the focus is more narrowly on demonstrating and supporting the development of practical skills. Even so, this ensures that pupils are increasingly able to use a range of tools safely and competently so that they achieve worthwhile outcomes. The better teaching has greater challenge and variety in approach, including the use of group work and information and communication technology. In these lessons, pupils develop a better understanding of structures and systems, and learn to co-operate in project work.

111. Accommodation and restricted access to information and communication technology resources are constraints on the quality of teaching and learning. A more serious constraint is the carousel arrangement that results in pupils moving round a loose collection of modules, under the generic heading of 'design', that includes: resistant materials, art, graphics, food, textiles and systems. These modules are often too short to address design aspects sufficiently, and make it more difficult for pupils to develop some practical skills progressively. Nonetheless, the provision does sufficiently cover the National Curriculum programme of study, though the discrete modules inhibit the development of design and technology as a coherent subject.

112. The assessment concerns, raised in the last report, have been partially dealt with, but staff have yet to share a common approach to assessment. The result, therefore, is that pupils do not have a clear view of how they are achieving in terms of their National Curriculum Levels, although there are efforts to provide an annual assessment.

113. Accommodation for food technology has much improved since the previous inspection. There is now a modern workroom, and the newly developing information and communication technology room is enhancing provision. The quality of teaching is better and some aspects of the curriculum and resources have improved. However, there is still not enough monitoring of the different aspects of the subject within a loosely related 'design' faculty. There is a lack of the specific design and technology leadership needed to develop a coherent and cohesive team, in which staff can share good practice and develop a more integrated approach to the subject.

HUMANITIES

114. Standards of attainment in both history and geography by the end of Year 9 are higher than national expectations, as they were at the time of the last inspection. The attainment of girls exceeds that of boys by a considerable margin. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactory standards with the help of support staff in lessons and appropriately modified resources. The arrangement of the timetable for humanities lessons enabled direct observation of geography in Year 7 only, but evidence of the standards achieved was obtained by analysis of written work and from information supplied by teachers and pupils.

115. Pupils achieve well in lessons and in homework, particularly when given the opportunity to write without time constraints. In history, pupils make good gains in knowledge and understanding of important people, events and movements. They are able to understand and explain historical concepts, such as change and consequence when studying Britain's industrial past. With guidance, they organise material and present reasoned arguments for and against seemingly obvious historical judgements. They appreciate, for instance, that Dunkirk could be considered to be a triumph or a disaster, depending upon one's point of view, and the care with which sources are chosen and examined. In geography, pupils use geographical and number skills in, for example, the completion of individual weather diaries in Year 8. They develop their ability to investigate environmental conflicts and to appreciate different points of view. This was seen in a very good lesson in Year 7, where pupils used high quality resources to extend their understanding of the impact of the enlargement of a local quarry. When presented with opportunities to investigate regions such as tropical rain forests, pupils are keen to acquire new knowledge for themselves. They occasionally use information technology in their research and in their final presentations.

116. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Although their quality ranged from very good to unsatisfactory, almost two thirds of the lessons observed were judged to be good or better. In the one unsatisfactory lesson seen, the teacher's inability to control the behaviour of some pupils disrupted the learning of the whole group. Generally, pupils are courteous and co-operative, so that lessons proceed without interruption and at a good pace. The teachers act as an efficient team to create a good learning environment. Although members of the team are non-specialists in some parts of the humanities curriculum, they exhibit good individual subject competence and a command of a range of appropriate teaching strategies. On a few occasions, non-specialist teachers, who are otherwise competent, do not place the same emphasis on an aspect of a subject as would a specialist teacher. They are helped by the use of course booklets prepared by the department to ensure effective and consistent teaching across year groups. Thus, where a topic on textiles in the Industrial Revolution is taught to pupils in Year 8, all pupils receive a similar course. The use of course booklets has many advantages, though it contains some risk of the teaching style becoming predictable and group work or discussions becoming less prominent.

117. The head of department is an effective leader, fostering a spirit of co-operation and efficiency amongst all the teachers. Good use of historical visits contributes to pupils' enjoyment and understanding of their humanities lessons. The local environment is well used in Year 7, when pupils use geographical and historical techniques to investigate changes in local villages. At present there are no opportunities for studies outside school in Year 9. A good system of assessment, using targets shared with pupils, encourages their individual progress. The accommodation is adequate and well used in a flexible style, so that different teaching and learning strategies can be employed.

118. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. The strengths identified then have been maintained. Some weaknesses have been improved, such as the need for effective assessment procedures and the lack of opportunity for higher attaining pupils to develop their ideas. The performance of boys relative to girls is still an area of concern. Reports on pupils' progress are not directly linked to National Curriculum statements of attainment. The contribution of humanities to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is not yet formally identified. At present, the use of information and communication technology in the teaching of humanities is underdeveloped. The head of department is aware of these issues and has included most of them in the latest development plan.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

119. Standards in information and communications technology by the end of Year 9 have improved since the last inspection and are close to the national expectation, with nearly two thirds of pupils acquiring a sufficient repertoire of skills to reach National Curriculum Level 5. Within the taught programme, almost all pupils can combine text and graphics to produce a newspaper front page, calculate formulae in a simple work sheet, and use logo and simulation software for control activities. Higher attaining pupils are able to use spreadsheets for modelling, and worked independently in a Year 9 lesson to develop and refine instructions in a more complex traffic light control simulation. However, the lack of time in the taught programme and the few cross-curricular opportunities limit the extent to which pupils can practise and apply those skills with greater independence and complexity. Because of these constraints, progress is less than satisfactory and pupils are not achieving as well as they should.

120. Most pupils like using computers and are absorbed in their learning activities, despite having to share workstations in the rather cramped computer suite. The sharing of machines occasionally results in some inattention, but most pupils work well together and help each other.

121. Teaching and learning are almost all at least satisfactory and in one half of lessons seen they are good. This represents a considerable improvement since the last inspection, and is largely the result of the introduction of a separate programme taught by a small team. The staff share a secure understanding of the main computer applications, and their informed and constructive support enable pupils to make steady gains in their skills. With one exception, the lessons seen were soundly planned, and good class management ensured that pupils behaved appropriately and stayed on task. The unsatisfactory teaching occurred when the teacher over-estimated the level that pupils in a Year 9 class were working at and so gave them insufficient initial guidance, with the result that they were less able to cope with the work set. Assessment procedures are well planned, but with large numbers of pupils sharing computers and limited time for pupils to apply their new learning, it is very difficult for staff to make accurate judgements, and these are often over-optimistic.

122. Curriculum provision for information and communication technology is modest. Pupils receive about 15 hours a year of taught lessons, and these are just sufficient to cover the main areas of the National Curriculum programme of study. The lack of planned opportunities for pupils to use computers in other lessons continues to be a serious concern, with few subjects making a significant contribution to the development of pupils' information and communication technology knowledge and skills. The school has fewer computers than average, and most of these are thinly spread through the school. There is only one suite of 15 networked computers, mostly used for the taught programme, though the school has plans to reorganise and expand resources to provide for more computer suites. Technician support, an issue raised in the last inspection, continues to be very limited.

123. The information and communication technology subject leadership has been effective in establishing the taught programme, and this has directly contributed to improvements since the last inspection in both the quality of teaching and standards of achievement. However, the issue of whole school development of the subject has only recently been tackled, with a focus on resources and staff development. It is not accompanied by the appropriate management systems needed to monitor and support the curriculum, nor are there effective systems in place for assessing pupils' progress. The usefulness of some computers in the school is limited by their not yet being linked to the internet.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

124. Although standards seen in many lessons broadly match national expectations, attainment in French by the end of Year 9 exceeds expectations. This is because pupils become increasingly confident and self-reliant, achieving well as they move through the school in response to a key strength of the teaching. Teacher assessments for 1999 show that a greater percentage of pupils than the national average reached Level 4 or above of the National Curriculum. This is an improvement since the last inspection. These results were from a year group in which there were more boys than girls. Inspection findings from analysis of assessment records and of the current work of Year 9 pupils, as well as from lesson observations, support the assessments carried out by teachers.

125. Pupils benefit from high quality work sheets that offer examples of good French on which they can model their own writing, and consequently some pupils in Year 9 already write passages which would be acceptable at GCSE. Their reading and listening are also good, within their range of vocabulary, though there are fewer examples of good speaking than might be expected. All pupils get some opportunity to use their word processing skills in French, and the school hopes in the near future to establish a link by e-mail with a partner school in France. Pupils with special educational needs make better progress than in many schools, because, in Years 8 and 9, all classes in which they are in the majority benefit from the support of an additional languages teacher.

126. All pupils have the choice of Spanish or German, begun in Year 9 in addition to French. Although this provision was not seen during the inspection, it is clear from pupils' written work that satisfactory progress is achieved in the very limited time available. This includes a valuable extra cultural dimension, for example, the study of differences between English and Spanish schools.

127. Teaching and learning in all lessons observed were at least satisfactory. In two thirds of lessons seen they were good. All teachers speak French competently and use it in lessons. Both strategic and detailed planning are good, down to timings in five minute slots, which is a characteristic of the department. Teachers organise their pupils well, and relationships are good, which ensures a good learning atmosphere in lessons. Pupils know what is expected of them, work purposefully and enjoy their learning. Most function well with a partner and are supportive to one another. A key strength of the teaching is that teachers train pupils well to become self-reliant through looking things up for themselves; they have their own text books as reference materials and dictionaries are always to hand. Provision for pupils with special needs is also a strength. There are good opportunities to visit France with school groups, Year 8 going to Normandy and Paris, Year 9 to Marans (twinned with Barrow) and La Rochelle.

128. Management of the department is sound because it ensures that teachers function as a team with consistent objectives and standards. Both the curriculum and assessment practices of the department are good. Pupils' work is rigorously monitored through regular assessments, which include some published materials but are mainly designed by teachers in the department. This process begins before pupils enter Year 7, so that they can be placed in appropriate groups where tasks can be matched to potential. Such groupings are kept under constant review. Departmental meetings are not minuted, however, and the link between the department and the senior management team needs further development.

129. Since the inspection of April 1996 the department has been successful in raising standards of both higher and lower attaining pupils (specifically mentioned as underachieving, in the last report). The high quality of teaching and good relationships with pupils have been maintained

MUSIC

130. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 in 1999 were above the national expectation. The results were an improvement on the previous year, when they were in line with national expectations for this age group.

131. Inspection evidence indicates that the present pupils are achieving in line with national expectations. Pupils require more challenge, however, and greater emphasis needs to be placed on matching work to pupils' differing capabilities. Pupils in Year 7 compose mood music using keyboards and learn to play a Chinese melody on pitched percussion. They sing the Chinese melody accurately. Pupils in Year 8 have just completed a topic on rhythm work, in which they have used the names of London underground stations as a basis for a piece constructed on rhythmic patterns. Pupils in Year 9 have recently learnt about twelve bar blues and improvisation, and are preparing for an assessment based on these techniques. Some are also preparing to write their own protest songs.

132. Teaching and learning are always at least satisfactory. In five sixths of lessons seen they are good. Both teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject. Pupils experience new concepts through appropriate choice of questions from the teachers and through focused listening. In a Year 8 class, examples were drawn from mathematics to explain the logical movement of notes on the staff. Instructions regarding the tackling of a task are given clearly, so that the pupils know not only what is expected of them but also how they are to approach the task. Teachers plan their lessons well, ensuring that all of the 50 minutes is used in gaining worthwhile musical experiences. Lessons generally move at a good pace, except on occasions when explanations are insufficiently concise. Although a class for more musically able pupils who are considering studying music at GCSE is held on Friday lunchtimes, further thought needs to be given to matching tasks to pupils' capabilities overall. This will enable teachers to be aware of what is expected of both the less and more musically able pupils and to adopt appropriate teaching strategies. Two lessons were observed in which learning support teachers were actively involved. They had discussed the lessons in advance with the teacher so that they were aware of what tasks were due to be set.

133. Teachers have a good relationship with the pupils, who know what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and effort. Resources are prepared in advance, and teachers change classroom arrangements if they feel that a change will increase pupils' participation in a particular activity. Teachers assess pupils during practical lessons by circulating to offer advice and encouragement. Formal assessment takes place at the end of modules when the pupils often perform to the remainder of the class. This is recorded on video and marked, with the results contributing towards the end-of-year statements. These results are also used for curriculum evaluation. Work begun in class is occasionally set for homework.

134. The result is that attitudes and behaviour are good, and on occasions very good. Pupils settle quickly to their set tasks, obviously enjoying their work and eager to succeed. They work well in groups, listening to other pupils' suggestions, negotiating, and finally agreeing the final outcome. If a partner is away, pupils work on their own, developing their individual study skills. All pupils listen attentively to the performances of others, often giving applause and making constructive comments. Pupil-to-pupil relationships are positive. Pupils raise their hands to answer questions and wait to be addressed before speaking. When appropriate, pupils mark the work of those sitting next to them, doing so carefully and in a responsible manner. They look after the instruments and put them away carefully at the end of the lesson.

135. Pupils with special educational needs work alongside the other members of their class, and generally tend to achieve as well as, if not better, than some of their contemporaries. Teachers have yet to review the individual educational plans of these pupils to include musical targets for them to attempt.

136. A new head of department has been appointed since the last inspection. Assisted by a part-time teacher, he developed the scheme of work currently in operation, and this is being revised in the light of changes in the National Curriculum. More thought needs to be given to organising tasks of differing challenge for pupils of varying capabilities, and to means of enabling pupils to experience a wider range of world music. The use of computers plays an important part in the new National Curriculum, and the scheme of work needs to be revised to include more computer-based activities for all years.

137. The two classroom teachers are joined by ten instrumental teachers who give lessons, mostly after school. A large number of pupils participate in extra-curricular activities. There are regular concerts, at strategic times in the academic year for parents and every month at lunchtime for pupils and staff. The department also makes a good contribution to plays and other productions.

138. The issues raised in the last inspection have been successfully tackled. Use of information technology has improved, but only through the use of computers within the keyboards. Unfortunately, it is not possible to store more than one melody on each keyboard, so that attempts to record a new piece result in the original work being deleted. There are insufficient proper computers, which prevents access to the full range of National Curriculum activities. The department has moved into a new area within the school that comprises two classrooms, four practice rooms, a store and an office. The head of department is encouraging links with outside agencies, local primary feeder schools and the colleges to which the pupils will go at the end of Year 9. A joint concert is planned for the summer term. Assessment procedures have been carefully developed, with video recordings made of sessions so that there are visual records of the pupil and his/her contribution to the performance.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

139. The majority of pupils attain standards that match national expectations by the end of Year 9, as they did at the time of the last inspection. More boys than girls achieve the expected standard, and fewer girls than boys achieve above average standards. This matches the most recent teachers' assessments. In Year 9, boys and girls know the basic rules and strategies and use a reasonable range of skills when playing adapted games of basketball. A small number of boys have benefited from taking part in extra-curricular activities and are highly skilled performers. Pupils' performance in badminton is below the expected standard. They know the rules and how to score, but the range of shots and strategies they can use effectively is severely restricted by the limited playing area in the school hall. Students know how to warm up, but rarely take responsibility for this part of the lesson.

140. As pupils move through the key stage, they achieve satisfactory standards overall. Pupils' performances in dance and gymnastics are strong. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 improve the control and presentation of their dance and gymnastic actions. They plan complex, imaginative dances and perform them well. They analyse and constructively criticise each other's performances, suggesting improvements. A small number of talented girls, who attend the extra-curricular dance group, achieve a very high standard of performance. Pupils make good progress in most

games lessons, but the poor accommodation, and the decision to teach a breadth of different games rather than a smaller number in depth, restricts the overall standards achieved. Generally, the good range of extra-curricular team practices and club activities helps more than one quarter of pupils to achieve higher standards.

141. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and has improved since the last inspection. Two thirds of the teaching is good or better. It is occasionally very good. There was no unsatisfactory teaching during the inspection. Consequently pupils learn at a good rate in the majority of lessons. They make significant gains in their performance of gymnastics, dance and games. All teachers have a specialist knowledge of the subject, which ensures that pupils learn the correct techniques, skills, rules and strategies. Teachers manage pupils well. They have good relationships with pupils, based on mutual respect and a calm, firm but friendly manner. Teachers establish clear expectations of behaviour. Pupils respond well as a result so that behaviour in lessons is good. Teachers' planning is good. They identify clear objectives, which are shared with pupils, and use a good range of methods. They give clear demonstrations and explanations and generally question pupils effectively. This ensures that pupils are attentive, ready to answer questions and become more familiar with the technical language of the subject. Teachers ensure that pupils have the opportunity to analyse and give critical evaluation of each other's performance, which gives them further opportunities to use the language of the subject. Teachers ensure that pupils have plenty of creative opportunities in dance and gymnastics. In dance lessons, for example, teachers carefully structure each part of the lesson to enable pupils to choreograph different sections of a whole class performance. Lessons start promptly and move at a good pace, and consequently pupils sustain good levels of activity. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Although there is no unsatisfactory teaching, there are features in the teaching that can be improved. Teachers miss opportunities to give pupils responsibility for their own learning, and there is plan setting out how pupils might take increasing responsibility for their learning as they move through the school. Teachers do not always ensure that the higher attaining pupils they have identified are fully challenged. Non-participant pupils sometimes do not learn as much as they could because they do not take part in class discussions. Teachers do not make enough use of visual aids such as pictures and video in lessons to confirm the technical language of the subject.

142. Pupils have positive attitudes, behave well and enjoy physical education lessons. They concentrate, listen carefully and carry out tasks well. Boys and girls work very well together on planning and performing gymnastics and dance. Over one quarter of pupils take part in extra-curricular activities regularly, though this involves more boys than girls. Behaviour in lessons is good overall, although occasionally some girls have difficulty sharing a court amicably. In some lessons, boys dominate the games so that girls have fewer opportunities to learn. The lack of a standard kit leads to some inappropriate and unsafe dress in some lessons.

143. The subject is well managed overall, although there are areas for improvement. The head of department leads an enthusiastic team that is committed to raising standards. Teachers continually reflect on their own practice and look for ways to improve the quality of the provision. The department's development plan helps to focus this process clearly. Since the last inspection, the department has improved aspects of the teaching and has improved the use made of assessment information. Higher and lower attaining pupils are now clearly identified. Nevertheless, procedures for assessment are unsatisfactory. The criteria for assessment for each unit of work are not clear to teachers or pupils, and there is no common agreement among staff on the standards expected. The accommodation is poor overall, despite having good grassed areas

and a swimming pool. The indoor space is very limited for games, especially for large classes. Consequently, pupils' progress is restricted in games such as basketball and badminton. The outdoor hard area is small and restricts progress in hockey, though there are plans in hand to extend and improve this area.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

144. Religious Education is provided within an effective humanities department and benefits from some of the strengths to be found there. Progress has been made since the last inspection and, overall, standards are in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. However, not enough time is given to the subject for the requirements of the agreed syllabus to be evenly covered.

145. By the end of Year 9, standards of attainment match the national expectation as they did at the time of the last inspection, and achievement through the key stage is satisfactory overall. Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of some of the beliefs and practices of Christianity and other world religions, and an insight into how religious beliefs and values can affect ways of living. This makes for a positive contribution to their general spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils in Year 9 can profitably discuss the virtues of honesty and the exercising of moral choices. Less fully developed are those attainment targets of the agreed syllabus that relate to spirituality and to pupils' awareness of their own inner values. Those with special educational needs show satisfactory standards of achievement as they make good progress with the help of suitably adapted materials and effective support in class. In those areas related to feelings and values, expressed orally, at least one such pupil was seen to express himself very well.

146. No unsatisfactory teaching or learning was seen. Three quarters of the teaching seen was good. Although much of it is carried out by non-specialist teachers, teaching benefits from the good teamwork established in the department. The teachers have satisfactory subject competence and the necessary classroom skills to deliver effective lessons at the level of basic knowledge and understanding. For example, pupils in Year 8 make good gains in knowledge and understanding of the idea of re-incarnation, due to good questioning from the teachers and their skilful use of a simple board game. Pupils are well behaved in lessons. The style of teaching adopted by the humanities department makes for consistent teaching, and the use of common resources is a help to non-specialists. On occasion, this consistency leads to some predictability so that group work and the discussion of deeper religious issues becomes less prominent, and there are missed opportunities to reinforce specifically religious concepts. There is insufficient discussion in class of how some of the knowledge acquired relates to pupils' own lives. In the more effective lessons teachers employ a good blend of exposition, questions and prompts, worksheets, and group work on topics related to the lives of the pupils. Thus pupils in year 9 contribute their own anecdotes about the usefulness of telling lies, distinguish between 'white lies' and more serious matters, and gradually grasp the idea of some exterior moral code by which such questions could be judged. In less effective lessons there is less personal involvement, fewer pupil to pupil interchanges and more teacher to pupil question and answer techniques without the prompts to uncover a deeper religious dimension.

147. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory but some areas of the provision are not as well developed as those of other subjects within the humanities. There is insufficient specialist religious education input into the planning and delivery of the courses. The documentation does not present a deep enough explanation of the aims and objectives. The contribution that the subject makes to the wider spiritual development of the pupils is not sufficiently spelled out. The use of the mobile classroom means that the accommodation is not as good for some of the teaching as it is in other subjects, nor is the use of information technology and of visits developed to the same degree. Religious education does not have the same status as other subjects in the curriculum.

148. At the time of the previous inspection, it was pointed out that there were some sound features, including the teaching, but that the time allocation was insufficient to meet fully the requirements of the religious education agreed syllabus. It was noted that assessment was an underdeveloped area and that there was a need for a specialist teacher. Pupils had some knowledge and understanding, but lacked the vocabulary and concepts needed to develop deeper understanding. Most of these weaknesses have been addressed in the development plans; for instance assessment procedures and the schemes of work have been improved, but some of the deficiencies remain. There are enough strengths in the humanities department to make the present position satisfactory, but there is an obvious need for one of the teachers qualified in religious education to assist the head of humanities with its planning and delivery.