

INSPECTION REPORT

TABOR HIGH SCHOOL

Braintree

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115231

Headteacher: Mr R Abo Hendriksen

Lead inspector: Mrs H Hutchings

Dates of inspection: 22nd - 25th September 2003

Inspection number: 258795

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

© Crown copyright 2003

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1,041
School address:	Panfield Lane Braintree
Postcode:	CM7 5XP
Telephone number:	(01376) 323701
Fax number:	(01376) 345834
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs P Fahy
Date of previous inspection:	5 th October 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Tabor High School is an average-sized, mixed 11-16 comprehensive school. The school shares a site with the local leisure centre and some of the facilities. The school has Beacon Status and other recent awards made to the school include the Essex Schools Award in 2002 and the Research Machines School of Excellence Award in 2001. The school mainly serves its local urban area but also takes pupils from a number of neighbouring villages. A significant proportion of pupils joins or leaves the school at times other than the normal age of entry at 11. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average although a proportion of pupils come from areas with significant levels of social deprivation. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is in line with national averages overall, but there are fewer highly achieving pupils than is normal for a comprehensive school. The number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and the proportion speaking English as an additional language are low. The number of pupils identified as having special educational needs, including those with statutory statements, is lower than average and is mainly related to pupils with social, emotional and behavioural needs.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
7541	Helen Hutchings	Lead inspector	
8919	John Kerr	Lay inspector	
22849	Ron Catlow	Team inspector	History and citizenship
31685	Val Girling	Team inspector	Art and design
31705	John Mason	Team inspector	Music
31332	John Marshall	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
32606	Verna Derwas	Team inspector	Geography
28199	Peter Lawley	Team inspector	English and drama English as an additional language
21825	Eileen Kelly	Team inspector	Design and technology and health and social care
15971	Michael Pye	Team inspector	Physical education
16227	Jim Phillips	Team inspector	Special educational needs
20715	Bob Smith	Team inspector	Mathematics
10448	Michael Elson	Team inspector	Religious education
10449	Rowland Hull	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
30597	Robina Howells	Team inspector	Science

The inspection contractor was:

Tribal PPI
Barley House
Oakfield Grove
Clifton
Bristol

BS8 2BN

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the inspection contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted Inspections*', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	4 - 5
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	6 - 10
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	10 - 16
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	16 - 18
OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES	
Community provision	18
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	19 - 36
AREAS OF LEARNING IN THE FOUNDATION STAGE	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	37

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school provides a good quality of education for its pupils and gives good value for money. Pupils enjoy school, have positive attitudes and they make good progress because of the good teaching. Overall, girls achieve better than boys. The headteacher and governing body lead the school very well.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Good teaching encourages enjoyment of school and good achievement.
- Pupils achieve well in almost all of their subjects and in English, achievement is very good.
- The curriculum is good and there is a very good range of extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils with special educational needs are given very good support.
- The school provides very good information for parents and listens well to their views and the views of pupils.
- Behaviour around the school is good and its management is a strength. A small proportion of pupils, mainly lower-attaining boys, can sometimes disrupt parts of the lesson for others.
- Congestion in some corridors is of concern to both staff and pupils and it sometimes takes time to settle pupils down after movement around the building.

The school has made good progress since the last inspection in bringing about further improvements and addressing the issues identified at that time. The school's systems for planning, marking and monitoring teaching and learning are now effective and statutory requirements are met, although the time allocated to religious education in Years 10 and 11 means that pupils do not always cover issues in sufficient depth.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002 ¹	2002
	C	C	C	B

Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average.

Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.

Pupils achieve well in almost all of their subjects. Standards are in line with national averages overall. Pupils achieve particularly well in English in Years 7, 8 and 9 and the results in 2002 placed the school in the top five per cent of similar schools nationally. In Years 10 and 11, standards are above the national average. In mathematics and science throughout the school, standards are in line with national averages. In GCSE, pupils are achieving above average results in art, history and information and communication technology (ICT). Girls achieve better than boys overall, in particular, in design and technology, drama, French, history and media studies while in mathematics and science they do equally well. Pupils who are identified as having special educational needs and those who have particular gifts and talents also make good progress.

Pupils' personal development is good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good and they are encouraged to become mature as they progress through the school. A few pupils sometimes lack maturity which can affect the learning of others. Attendance is satisfactory.

¹ Comparative data for 2003 is not yet available

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching is good. Teachers know pupils well and help pupils to understand the quality of their work and what they have to do to improve. Pupils learn well because teachers have high expectations of them and plan activities that interest and are of relevance to them. The encouraging and helpful manner of the teachers raises pupils' self-esteem so that they try harder.

The curriculum is planned well and programmes for pupils aged 14 to 16 provide very good routes to the next stage of their education, training or employment. The school takes advantage of opportunities to make programmes relevant to pupils and improve the curriculum where possible, such as the introduction of a pilot GCSE course in science and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Arrangements and support for pupils with special educational needs are very good. The facilities for specialist subjects are very good. Communications with parents are designed very well to keep parents informed about the work of the school and their children's progress.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are very good. The headteacher shares his views for the future of the school very successfully with school staff, who work as a cohesive and effective team. The governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities and its role as critical friend very well.

The school involves the community very well in aspects of curriculum provision and is good at seizing opportunities for pupils to learn about their role in it.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are positive about the school and are pleased with the education it provides and extra-curricular activities offered. Pupils enjoy the friendly atmosphere in the school and appreciate that the school makes every effort to ensure their safety and provide them with a wide variety of activities and good guidance about their work. Pupils are confident that there is someone to talk to if they had a problem.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- Find more ways to match the achievement of boys to that of girls in all subjects.
- Share strategies more widely to improve the behaviour and maturity of a small group of pupils.
- Seek further ways of relieving the overcrowding along some corridors so that movement is more comfortable.
- Find ways to improve the achievement of pupils in religious education in Years 10 and 11.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Pupils achieve well in almost all of their subjects and standards are in line with national averages overall. Pupils achieve particularly well in English in Years 7, 8 and 9. Generally, girls achieve higher levels than boys.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are well above average in English in Year 9 and achievement is good in English in Years 10 and 11 and in mathematics and science throughout the school.
- Standards are above expectations in Year 11 art, English, history, information and communication technology and media studies.
- All groups of pupils achieve well, but girls achieve better than boys in GCSE. Although the difference in performance is being reduced, it remains greater than the national difference.
- Standards in religious education in Years 10 and 11 are below expectations because of the lack of time to develop the curriculum in depth.

Commentary

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2002²

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.6 (32.7)	33.3 (33.0)
mathematics	34.0 (34.7)	34.7 (34.4)
science	33.2 (34.8)	33.3 (33.1)

There were 209 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

1. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is generally in line with national averages. The school has fewer very able pupils than might be expected in a typical comprehensive school. Attainment in mathematics is lower than in English and science by a greater amount than found nationally. Their attainment in many other subjects is lower than national expectations. Over the last few years the attainment profile on entry has been relatively static overall although for the last two years the standards of boys are higher than girls, contrary to the national picture.
2. The test results at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were in line with the national average in mathematics and science and well above in English. These results placed the school in the top five per cent of similar schools nationally³ and well above others in mathematics and science and show that pupils achieved very well in these subjects. In 2003, results remained at a similar level in English and improved in both mathematics and science. In 2003 girls did slightly better than boys and particularly in English, although they were achieving at similar levels overall when they joined the school. The school's improvement trend is higher than the national trend. The standards observed during the inspection in the current Year 9 are similar to those indicated by the test results.

² 2002 is the latest year for which full national comparative data is available. References are made in the commentary to any significant changes in performance levels in 2003.

³ Similar schools refers to schools with similar levels of attainment on entry as measured by the national tests at the end of Year 6.

3. In other subjects, standards observed during the inspection are generally in line with national expectations and have improved significantly from their starting point in Year 7. Pupils are working at above expected levels in history, information and communication technology (ICT) and physical education (PE). This represents good achievement overall. In French, German, geography and religious education (RE) achievement remains satisfactory. Throughout Key Stage 3⁴, pupils develop their learning skills well, particularly their literacy skills and this enables them to make good progress across many subjects.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2002⁵

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	45 (49)	50 (48)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	91 (94)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	95 (97)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	37.6 (n/a)	39.8 (n/a)

There were 180 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. In 2002, the proportion of pupils who gained five or more General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) grades A*-C or the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) equivalent was in line with the national average for all schools and above average for similar schools.⁶ Performance in 2003 was at a significantly higher level, with an increased seven per cent achieving five or more good GCSE grades over 2002. Performance from year to year has been a little erratic but generally in line with attainment levels on entry. The improvement trend has not been as high as the national trend but the school was very close to achieving its very ambitious targets set by the governing body for 2003.
5. In most subjects, GCSE results in 2002 were in line with national averages, but were below in design and technology, French and geography. Pupils' results were better in history, media studies and art than in other subjects. There were significant improvements in science, art, drama, ICT and RE. Results fell slightly in English. The attainment of pupils in the current Year 11 is similar to that in previous years, although pupils are reaching standards in English and ICT which are above expectations. Standards in RE are below expectations, mainly because the time given to their course is not enough to study topics in depth.
6. Overall, girls do better than boys in GCSE. The difference in performance levels was reduced in 2003, but remains greater than the national difference. In the last few years, the girls taking GCSE had reached higher levels of attainment on entry to the school than the boys in the year group. Differences are significant in design and technology, drama, media studies, history and modern foreign languages. By contrast, boys perform better than girls in music and PE and in mathematics and science, boys and girls do equally well. The main reasons for the differences are the choice of subjects for GCSE and the weaker motivation of a few boys who have fallen behind in their learning.
7. Across the school, standards in the basic skills of literacy and ICT are above expectations. Approaches to improving literacy skills have been developed well in most subjects and there is growing use of ICT in other subjects for research and presentation of work. Planning to improve numeracy skills has not been widespread across the school but pupils' numeracy skills are adequate to meet the needs of other subjects.

⁴ Key Stage 3 refers to Years 7, 8 and 9. Key Stage 4 refers to Years 10 and 11.

⁵ 2002 is the latest year for which full national comparative data is available. References are made in the commentary to any significant changes in performance levels in 2003.

⁶ Similar schools refers to schools with similar levels of attainment in the tests taken at the end of Year 9.

8. Overall most pupils registered as needing special educational needs provision make at least good progress and many make very good progress to achieve standards high enough to be taken off specialist support and achieve GCSE level standards by the end of Year 11. A minority of pupils gain alternative qualifications through the Youth Award Scheme at bronze or silver level.
9. Very few pupils use English as an additional language but all are performing at levels similar to those of their peers. When required, well-managed and carefully directed support is given to individuals to enable them to acquire the full grasp of specialist language to reflect their understanding of subjects.
10. The school has identified pupils who are gifted and talented and makes additional opportunities available to them, mainly through Easter and summer holiday programmes run with other schools. The school is aware of the need to extend its provision and is currently upgrading its approach to extend the most able by planning special enrichment monthly lessons in all subjects. Analysis of individual performance indicates that this identified group achieves well and makes levels of progress in line with their peers.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. They are encouraged to become mature as they progress through the school. Attendance is satisfactory and the majority of pupils are punctual for lessons and at the start of the day. Pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils, mainly in the upper sets, have good attitudes to learning.
- There are very thorough procedures for ensuring high expectations of good behaviour and behaviour management is a strength in many areas of the school.
- Pupils are considerate towards each other and mentoring systems by staff, visitors and pupils are very successful.
- There is only limited encouragement through awards for good or improved attendance.
- Some pupils can be influenced by the poor behaviour of their peers.

Commentary

Attendance

11. The school monitors attendance carefully particularly in the case of those with poor past records. However, there are limited opportunities for promoting better attendance across the board, for example, through awards and competition for good and improved attendance. Heads of years work closely with the education welfare officer who gives valuable help and advice in matters of attendance, punctuality and the relationships with families.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	91.0	School data	1.0
National data ⁷	91.0	National data	1.2

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

12. Pupils show a pride in what they can do well and recognise good work when it is discussed or displayed. Pupils in the upper school recognise the improvements made in the last few years,

⁷ These figures refer to national data for 2001/2003. Comparative data for 2002/2003 is not yet available.

particularly the school's ethos and the attitude to learning. They appreciate the wide variety of activities provided by the school and are keen to take part.

13. As they mature, pupils become increasingly involved with their own work and the life of the school. By the time they reach Year 11, those with qualities of leadership are appointed as prefects. Pupils may volunteer to become anti-bullying mentors. They are trained in their responsibilities and have become very successful in reducing tension and potential bullying throughout the school. Older pupils are often involved in helping younger ones in their induction programme and with reading. There are good relationships between pupils and with staff. There is a friendly atmosphere where there is very little bullying, racism or other forms of harassment. The large majority grow in confidence and self-esteem. Where there are high standards of teaching, pupils thrive and are eager to take part. They answer questions intelligently and there are often high levels of collaborative discussion. However, there are also small groups of pupils, in all years, who find it hard to express themselves and lack confidence in putting forward their ideas and suggestions. Even if teaching is stimulating, these pupils are often ambivalent towards their learning, taking little part in the lesson and becoming bored.
14. Pupils receiving support for special educational needs respond well and form very good relationships with the supporting staff and make good progress both personally and socially. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are enabled to learn effective coping strategies. They value the provision made by the learning support unit and, through improved attitudes and social skills, are able to remain in school where previously they may have been at risk of exclusion. Pupils having a fear of being in school are enabled to develop the confidence to increasingly attend for individual sessions and achieve GCSE grades in the core subjects by the end of Year 11.
15. Personal and social education programmes provide well for pupils' personal development. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Although the design of the curriculum takes account of pupils' cultural backgrounds, beliefs and value systems, few subjects beyond personal and social education, English and art integrate these fully into their schemes of work. Currently, preparation for life in a multicultural society is not developed well. The school has undertaken an audit to review its provision over a number of years but has not yet used this to plan an entitlement programme of activities.
16. The school sets high expectations for pupils' conduct. In almost all classes, behaviour management is good. However, there are a few pupils with low social skills who, although not identified as in need of special support, are easily distracted and waste time, which can have an effect on the standard of achievement of the whole class.
17. There is considerable congestion in the narrow school corridors and the school has high levels of supervision at key times to ensure the safety of pupils. However, this is uncomfortable and of concern for both staff and pupils, particularly to smaller pupils, fearing that they may be pushed or jostled accidentally in the crowds. Generally pupils behave in a responsible way in these situations although a few boisterous incidents were observed.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	982	96	4
White – any other White background	17	3	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	8	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	5	1	0
Mixed – White and Asian	6	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	6	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	2	1	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	1	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	9	0	0

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

18. The school has had a strict exclusion policy in the last few years. Numbers are now falling as the school's revised behaviour policies take effect. Exclusions, which mainly involve boys, have in the last year been mostly fixed term exclusions for unacceptable behaviour.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is good overall. Teaching effectively encourages learning and there is good curriculum planning and resourcing. The school's support and guidance for pupils and its relationships with parents and the wider community are very good.

Teaching and learning

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good and has improved since the last inspection. Procedures to assess pupils' work and the use of assessment data are good.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 129 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
1 (1%)	29 (22%)	53 (41%)	41 (32%)	5 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils learn well because teachers have high expectations and set high standards.
- Teachers use very good question-and-answer techniques to reinforce pupils' learning and to deepen and extend their knowledge and understanding.
- Lesson planning and the schemes of work enable teachers to teach effectively and meet the needs of different groups of pupils.
- The encouraging and helpful manner of the teachers raises pupils' self-esteem so that they try harder and make good progress.
- The negative attitudes of a minority of pupils, mainly boys, hinder the learning of others, particularly in Years 9 and 11.

Commentary

19. The proportion of very good and excellent teaching has increased significantly to almost a quarter and the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has decreased to less than five per cent. Teaching and learning are very good in English and good in science and mathematics. A high degree of subject expertise enables teachers to probe and deepen pupils' understanding through skilful questioning. Planning is generally very good, though the work is not always sufficiently differentiated to meet the needs of all pupils. Most pupils work well in response to the high expectations and encouraging and helpful teaching they receive. Some teaching and learning are less satisfactory in Years 9 and 11 when they are affected by the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils, mainly boys, which challenges even the most experienced teachers.
20. Teachers generally have a very good command of the subjects they teach which they use to enthuse their pupils. Many combine the good subject knowledge with very good questioning techniques that allow them to reinforce and probe pupils' learning, challenging them to think more deeply. Lesson planning is generally very good. Lesson objectives are made clear to the pupils so that they focus on what is important. Teachers use a variety of activities and approaches to retain pupils' interest. The use of ICT, however, is not as widespread as it should be, particularly in mathematics. At the end of lessons teachers review what has been learned. Sometimes this process could be more rigorous and pupils are left with a less than clear view of the progress they have made. Schemes of work are detailed planning documents and enable teachers to meet the needs of all pupils.
21. Teachers make good use of the individual education plans of pupils with special educational needs to tailor teaching and learning to their needs, so that they make the same progress as their peers. Where they are available, learning assistants are deployed and used well. The school has begun to identify pupils who are gifted and talented but strategies for extending them in normal classes are not yet well developed. Other pupils with special educational needs supported in withdrawal groups by teaching assistants, taught in groups for alternative accredited courses in Key Stage 4, or tutored when attending school for individual sessions benefit from mainly very good teaching which effectively meets their learning needs.
22. Relations between teachers and pupils are generally very good. Teachers know their pupils well and are adept at creating a supportive and encouraging atmosphere in class. As a result, pupils have greater confidence and self-esteem; they try harder and learn more effectively. Class management is usually good. There are many examples of effective support for pupils registered as having emotional or behavioural difficulties and being at risk of exclusion. This results in sufficiently improved self-control and self-esteem for such pupils for them to continue to be included in lessons and achieve examination successes.
23. The school has a very good policy on assessment for learning but it is not yet fully implemented by all departments. In addition to nationally required assessments, intermediate assessments including end-of-unit tests and other teacher-assessments are used effectively to inform pupils and their parents of their attainment levels, to place them in appropriate teaching groups and to set them long-term learning targets. Students with special educational

needs are set particular tests, which help to identify their difficulties so that individual educational plans can be prepared for them.

24. Some departments such as art, English, mathematics and design and technology have well-established assessment routines, which are employed very effectively throughout the departments. Pupils are well aware of the procedures, are clear about their attainment levels and their targets and they know what they need to do in order to improve. Within other departments individual teachers apply procedures to a greater or lesser extent. In RE and citizenship, there are insufficient means of objective measurement of pupils' performance. The school is aware of the need to introduce more stringent monitoring procedures to ensure that the very good assessment processes become embedded in the practice of all teachers.

The curriculum

The provision for the curriculum is good and meets statutory requirements although the limited time available for religious education in Years 10 and 11 affects the quality of provision. In addition, pupils have very good opportunities for extra-curricular activities. Accommodation is very good and the curriculum is resourced well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- There are very good programmes that provide clear curriculum training and employment routes for pupils aged 14 to 16.
- Teachers regularly seek to develop the curriculum, drawing on innovative practice from within the school and elsewhere.
- Enrichment opportunities, both in learning and extra-curricular activities are very good.
- The facilities for specialist subjects are very good.

Commentary

25. The quality and breadth of the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 are good. Pupils have the opportunity to study a full range of subjects and the content of courses is updated and developed regularly. In Key Stage 4, the needs of all pupils are met through a programme that offers a good range of GCSE and vocational subjects. The time allowed, however, for RE is insufficient to study the course in sufficient depth. In addition, the daily act of collective worship is variable in quality. The school is right to review both of these areas in this year's improvement plan.
26. Pupils with special educational needs are very well integrated into the school. Most schemes of work detail provision for these pupils and there is particularly good practice in English and mathematics where targeted support in lessons, together with appropriate teaching materials and skilful planning from both teachers and support assistants, ensures that all are fully involved in the lessons. A suitable alternative accredited course for a group of pupils enables them to achieve a recognised qualification by the end of Year 11. Some pupils, who have become poor attenders and disaffected with school, are encouraged effectively through involvement in weekly work experience placements balanced by following GCSE courses in the core subjects. A well-considered programme of visits to places of interest, such as the Globe Theatre and the Tate Gallery, inspires pupils and enhances their curricular experience.
27. The school has welcomed the increased curriculum flexibility that is now available for pupils aged over 14 and provides a very good programme that it monitors well. As part of the options structure, some pupils in Year 10 choose courses in art and design, catering, applied business or motor vehicle maintenance at Braintree College and imaginative timetabling by the school and agreed 'flexitime' with the pupils have ensured that important subjects are not missed. Another strength is the project run in conjunction with other local schools that offers education and careers advice at the college for a few young people who are at risk of exclusion.

28. The curriculum is reviewed regularly and updated to improve its relevance to pupils. Involvement in the national pilot for 'Science in the 21st Century', the use of a distance learning ICT course at Key Stage 4 and collaboration with the Braintree Consortium over curriculum enrichment for gifted and talented pupils show that innovative practices have been embraced. In addition, for some pupils the involvement of a team from the local pupil referral unit has developed a 'raising esteem' programme that has brought positive benefits. The school has rightly identified the development of provision to meet the needs of pupils who are gifted or talented as a priority and a staff working party has begun to find ways to enhance the current range of strategies.
29. The school provides a very good programme of enrichment experiences for all pupils. A real strength is the opportunity that is offered for pupils to extend or consolidate their work through after school activities, whether in a club as in design and technology, history, geography, art or ICT, or a structured revision session, as in mathematics. There is a very extensive programme of PE activities that benefits from the school's joint use of the leisure centre. There are visits further afield to France and Germany and one planned to Vietnam. The extra-curricular provision does much to develop the social fabric of the school and parents regard it highly.

Accommodation

30. Since the last inspection the school, previously on two sites, has now merged, gaining access to the second phase of building. The current accommodation is very good. Classrooms and specialist rooms on the whole are very good, with teachers displaying pupils' work effectively. However, the popularity of the school, the very fast growth within the area and a succession of successful appeals has caused the school to become now overfull. Originally designed for 900 pupils, the school is currently operating over capacity with more than 1,000 pupils. There are difficulties that this overcapacity generates, the main one being the difficulty of moving the student population around the school in an efficient manner because of the narrow width of some corridors and the positioning of doorways along them, causing congestion. The school has constantly addressed this issue but narrow corridors remain very crowded at peak times. The acoustics of the building mean also that noise levels are high even though pupils are behaving in a normal and natural manner, but have to speak loudly to be heard across short distances in communal areas. The governing body is very clear about the position and a review of the design of some aspects of the school is scheduled by the local education authority in the near future, with a view to addressing these pressing concerns. The over-population of the building has a direct impact on some lessons, where pupils take time to settle down in class after the pressure encountered along the corridors.
31. The school has planned carefully for the inclusion and integration of computers into the curriculum with a dedicated series of computer suites and appropriate cabling to all areas. Science has excellent facilities, with technology having appropriate specialist areas.

Resources

32. Resources for the curriculum are good with sufficient materials and books to meet the demands of the curriculum. The learning resource centre has a satisfactory collection of books and a good number of computers for open access. The school has invested over a long period in computers and has, in the main, sufficient numbers to meet the needs of most pupils. However, there is a shortfall in the computer suites to meet the needs of some class sizes, where a number of pupils have to share during lessons. Again, this is not helpful to the learning of some pupils.

Care, guidance and support

The provision for the support, guidance and welfare of pupils is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are given good and careful advice about their work and personal development.
- Induction arrangements for pupils joining the school are very good.
- Procedures to ensure a safe environment are very good.
- The school council provides a good forum for pupils to express their views and opinions.

Commentary

33. Teachers know their pupils well and give them sound advice based on that knowledge. Tutors co-ordinate the overall guidance of pupils and this is monitored well by the heads of years. Pupils have regular times with their tutor in small groups or individually, where targets are discussed and work is planned. As a result, pupils who experience difficulties are identified quickly. After discussion, often with their parents present, guidance can lead to extra learning support. Very good procedures, in line with the special educational needs Code of Practice, are effectively implemented to enable registered pupils to make good educational and personal progress. Assessment is used very well to monitor pupils' progress in reading and spelling and determine appropriate steps to further support the pupils' learning.
34. The school maintains a policy of early communication with parents, usually by telephone, if there is any cause for concern. Parents of pupils in Year 11 are given advice as to how they can help their children plan their learning, how to structure homework and effective use of study time. Pupils confirm that they know who to go to if they have a concern. They say that teachers are very good listeners and have time to talk.
35. There are well-designed procedures for pupils joining the school. Almost all transferring from primary schools will have visited the school before their first day. They will have had taster lessons in laboratories and the classrooms and will have got to know the head of Year 7. Pupils say they made friends quickly when they first joined. In their early years in the school in particular, they find the 'contact book' useful to help organise their work. Pupils joining the school at times other than the normal time of entry receive individual help, including a 'buddy' within the class or year group to ensure that they receive a friendly welcome. The school makes every effort to ensure that they have continuity in their curriculum from their previous school and, in some cases, teachers make arrangements for them to continue to follow a different syllabus from the rest of the class. Parents appreciate the effectiveness of the arrangements made for their children to settle in.
36. Pupils are well provided for as they prepare to move into the world of work or to higher education. Work experience programmes are effective and careers advice leads to related subject options. Parents are involved in their children's forward plans if they wish to be included. Pupils speak warmly of the pastoral systems. Their major concern is the congestion in the corridors and around the lockers. These concerns have been brought to the attention of the school through the school council. As yet the school has not been able to resolve this issue.
37. The school management team ensures that all staff are well aware of their responsibilities for the protection of pupils. Accidents and injuries are treated promptly, records are kept and parents informed. Staff and governors carry out routine checks on premises and equipment and defects are dealt with swiftly.
38. The school involves pupils by regular questionnaires and research into their opinions and preferences. For example, they have interviewed Year 7 pupils to see how relevant the personal, social and health education programme is to their needs and to see what games pupils want to play at lunchtime. Research into pupils' behaviour resulted in the introduction of anti-bullying mentors and changes in the award system.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school maintains very good links with parents and there are strong links with adjacent schools and colleges and with members of the community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are positive about the school, they are pleased with the education it provides and extra-curricular activities offered.
- Communications with parents are designed very well to keep parents informed.
- Opportunities for consultation with parents about their children's progress are very good and there are well-planned initiatives to involve families in their children's learning.
- Local council links are well formed to promote the learning of social responsibility and decision making.

Commentary

39. The school's partnership with parents is very effective. Parents are supportive of the school and are appreciative of the dedication of the teaching staff. They say that staff expect hard work and encourage the pupils to become mature. There are very healthy links with the community and other schools and colleges including the local college to which the majority of pupils will go.
40. Parents are very well informed of events and school achievements by regular newsletters and the governors' annual report. The school prospectus is informative and there are very helpful publications on such subjects as Year 7 home study, help parents can give with revision and option choices at Year 9. The revised 'contact book' is a work planner for pupils but also is a useful means for parents to know what work is being done and what homework is expected. The annual reports to parents tell them what their children know and can do. Reports indicate at what level pupils are working and whether they are achieving to their potential. Attitudes are referred to, as is punctuality and attendance. Details of how well pupils are attaining in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science sometimes lack sufficient detail for parents to know precisely what their children are achieving. Review meetings with parents, held later in the year after the receipt of the annual reports, are well attended and are useful for parents to meet teachers.
41. Since the school has moved onto one site, parents' views have been sought as part of the headteacher's overall review practices. They have contributed ideas on such matters as behaviour management and codes of conduct. The school encourages staff to make early contact with parents, usually by telephone, if they have a concern. In turn, they expect parents to feel free to contact the school if they need to discuss their children's welfare, progress or if they have a complaint.
42. The three schools in the area have combined with the local college of further education to design courses specifically for pupils in Years 10 and 11 who are disenchanted with the normal school curriculum. These special programmes and work experience are providing valuable opportunities for this identified group of pupils and are making a worthwhile contribution to pupils' social skills, in addition to helping pupils to remain more positive about learning.
43. The school has very good links with external agencies and other professionals contribute significantly to meeting the special educational needs of the pupils. Visiting specialist teachers for visual and hearing impairment provide good advice and appropriate technical aids and resources. A visiting specialist teacher for speech and language difficulties effectively helps staff meet these needs by sharing her skills and providing training. Very good liaison with the Child and Family Support Service enables the school to work collaboratively with families to alleviate difficulties.

Example of outstanding practice

The school has formed a very good partnership with the local pupil referral unit to support general strategies for behaviour management and for individual pupils at risk of exclusion.

Staff from the local pupil referral unit provide effective regular support sessions for pupils and share expertise in the management of difficult and challenging behaviour with the teaching and support staff of the school. Most school staff, including the learning support assistants, have benefited from a full training day and many are implementing strategies effectively from their training on anger management and conflict resolution. As a result of these initiatives and the ongoing support, the school is becoming increasingly effective in enabling challenging pupils to maintain their school placement, improve their self-esteem and become more effective learners. Additionally, external staff have been involved in piloting initiatives to reduce bullying and conduct projects to raise pupils' self-esteem. Pupils in Year 11 have been trained as mentors for those younger pupils who feel that they are being bullied and this has had a significant impact on the general awareness of bullying issues amongst pupils, as well as effectively supporting individuals. The mentors also gain personally from the responsibility and insights they experience. A multi-media project with pupils in Year 7 has already had a positive effect on raising the self-esteem of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The project has formal evaluation built into the planning.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are very good overall. The leadership of the headteacher and governance are very good. The leadership by other staff in the school is good and management is very effective.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The governing body fulfils its statutory responsibilities and its role as critical friend very well.
- The headteacher has been very successful in sharing his enthusiasm and future vision for the school.
- All staff work as a cohesive and effective team.
- Performance management is used well to improve teaching and other monitoring systems successfully identify strengths and weaknesses.
- Financial management of the school is good.

Commentary

44. The governing body is very effective in providing a balance of support and challenge for the school. It is very well led by the chair of governors who has a strong view for the education of the pupils and this is shared by other governors. Governors fulfil their statutory duties well and they have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school on which to use their influence and as a basis for their decision making.
45. The headteacher has provided very good leadership to guide the school through its change to one site and to develop an ethos appropriate to the full age range where previously the school had operated as distinct lower and upper schools. He has been particularly successful in building effective teams of teachers who share a common purpose and commitment to providing the best possible opportunities for all groups of young people, whatever their talents or interests. He is ably supported by the leadership team who use their complementary skills very well, work as a cohesive team and are good role models for other staff. Their quiet, calm presence around the school provides support for colleagues. They engage pupils well in informal conversation to provide encouragement and ensure that the ethos and expectations are clear to all. The leadership of departments and year teams is good overall. Individuals

take considered advantage of new initiatives, such as piloting a new GCSE science course and the judicious use of external agencies including staff from the pupil referral unit.

46. The management systems in the school operate effectively and efficiently. The monitoring systems are supportive of staff but are sufficiently rigorous to recognise where remedial action is necessary. For example, the teaching of personal, social and health education has been changed because teaching in tutorials did not give a consistent experience and entitlement for all pupils. A review of the humanities faculty identified pupils' perceptions of history and geography as being difficult subjects and arrangements, including a residential trip overseas, were put in place to give the subjects a more positive profile and successfully increase recruitment onto GCSE courses. There is a clearly understood, whole-school ethos for learning although the school recognises the need to raise aspirations further. The analysis of pupil performance data is particularly strong and is used well by teachers and form tutors to identify potential underperformance and provides the basis for discussion with pupils and their parents to set clear targets for improvement.
47. The school analyses its performance for subjects and for specific groups of pupils, such as ethnic groups and lower-, middle- and higher-attaining pupils. The available value-added measures show that these groups make similar progress. The numbers within minority ethnic groups are not large enough to draw any reliable conclusions. However, the strengths of the analyses lie in the attention given to the performance of individuals and of the action taken to act on any possible underachievement. About eight per cent of pupils enter or leave the school at times other than the normal time of entry. The school addresses this challenge well and ensures that arrangements are effective to build on pupils' previous learning.
48. The management of special educational needs provision is very good. All procedures in relation to the special educational needs Code of Practice are effectively and strategically managed to ensure that the range of pupils' needs are met. The co-ordinator has very good procedures for evaluation, including the analysis of performance based on reliable assessment data and uses this information well to plan for further development. Trained learning support staff meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs. However, in some larger classes, there is no additional support available to support teachers with pupils who, albeit not formally identified, display challenging behaviour.
49. The school has had a reasonably high turnover of teachers (25 per cent) in the past few years, but thoughtful forward planning to employ talented teachers when they are available has ensured that the school is fully staffed at a time of recruitment difficulties and is now enjoying a relatively stable time. Teachers and support staff are clear about their roles and work together well. The school is fully involved in the initial training of teachers and the induction for newly qualified teachers and for others new to the school is very good. This has been a valuable dimension of the school's recruitment strategy. Performance management arrangements are in place to meet statutory requirements and are used positively to bring about improvements in teaching. The school has used its Beacon Status well to provide professional development for staff by giving them opportunities for reflection on their own practice as they support staff in other schools, for example, by providing some specialist teaching in local primary schools or by working alongside colleagues in another secondary school to develop curriculum planning and management. Other training and development for teachers has recently been focused on sharing effective practice within the school, with more limited opportunities for teachers to engage in external training. This has been effective in bringing about a shared understanding of expectations across a range of issues such as teaching and behaviour management and there is much good practice within the school for further dissemination. However, the current budget constraints placed on staff development are restricting opportunities to draw on practice from elsewhere.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,376,714	Balance from previous year	280,900
Total expenditure	3,559,236	Balance carried forward to the next	493,347
Expenditure per pupil	3,044		

50. The approach to the financial management of the school is good. Budgets are drawn up in accordance with the school development plan. The school has clear plans to provide for priorities. It claims all available grants and, mainly as a result of financial restraints, best value for money principles are well established. Discounts are sought and block-buying schemes are followed. In order to ensure financial regularity, the school pays for its own audit. No formal financial comparison is carried out with similar schools but local bursars meet regularly to share practice.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

What is the effectiveness of community provision?

The school involves the community very well in aspects of curriculum provision.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Local council links are used well to learn about decision making.
- The school promotes social responsibility well.
- A well-planned initiative involves families in their pupils' learning.

Commentary

51. The school reviews its role in the local community well and is good at seizing opportunities for pupils to learn about their role in it and for the community to contribute to the school curriculum. For example, it has developed a well-focused range of community links which have enabled pupils to understand, be consulted about and directly influence decisions in the local district council. The sharing of the site with the adjacent leisure centre promotes greater access to the school by the local people and also offers the school excellent PE, dance and drama facilities. Pupils use the public areas maturely and enjoy feeling an integral part of the wider community at break times. Some pupils visit a nearby hospice regularly and involvement in learning about and fund raising for a cancer relief organisation has promoted pupils' social responsibility well and has developed their understanding of the needs of particular groups in the community.
52. The school has identified the need to improve the involvement of families in pupils' learning and is now at the early stages of implementing a well thought through project to help parents and siblings to understand and support pupils' learning as well as to extend their own.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English and modern foreign languages were inspected in detail.

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average and have improved in all years since the last inspection.
- Achievement is very good, especially in the first three years.
- Very good teaching promotes learning well through a stimulating variety of resources and activities.
- The use of appropriate styles of writing and vocabulary is not focused on sufficiently for lower-attaining pupils.
- A minority of younger boys do not achieve as well as they should because teachers have not yet found ways to challenge and involve them fully in lessons.

Commentary

53. Standards in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 are above average overall and the proportion exceeding the expected standard is well above the national picture. Over three years, results rose from below the national average to above, with girls following national trends by doing better than boys. English results are better than those in mathematics and science. Achievement is outstanding when compared with schools where pupils start with similar levels.
54. In the latest year for which validated results are available, attainment in English in GCSE matches national averages overall, while the proportion of those reaching higher grades is above. Boys match national trends in overall results and for the proportion gaining higher grades. Again, girls do better than boys, above the national average for the proportion gaining higher grades. This demonstrates good achievement and confirms the school's view of the subject as high. English literature results are just below those found nationally. Although girls do better than boys overall, the difference is less than in the GCSE English course. Pupils' performance in English courses is similar to that of other subjects in the school overall. The school has exceeded its own targets for the subject and exceeded test and examination results at the time of the last inspection.
55. By the end of Year 9, standards of speaking and listening are good and pupils answer questions with precision and understanding in response to brisk and well-paced teacher questioning. Nevertheless, teachers do not always prompt pupils enough to develop ideas at length. Pupils enjoy a good range of fiction and read aloud clearly in class, conveying their meaning well to other listeners. They are taught well to identify and explain and respond to what they read analytically, for instance by producing a newspaper account with a deliberate editorial bias. Standards of written work are above average overall. Girls do better than boys in written work, but boys' speaking and listening skills match those of girls. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because teachers and additional staff give them additional explanations and prompts while keeping up positive expectations.
56. By Year 11, standards have continued to rise well. Pupils read difficult texts with interest and understanding, learning well from lively teacher questioning and prompting, based on very good

subject knowledge. They persevere with vocabulary they find difficult. They make links between their reading of historic texts and their own experience well, for example, by explaining the common conventions of the horror genre shared between Victorian fiction and the contemporary cinema. Pupils write well about a good range of books, plays and poems, making good use of computers to present their work logically. Creative writing is a strength, particularly from the gifted and talented. While higher attainers write logically and lay out their arguments well, lower attainers use grammar less securely and do not vary their style and choice of language enough in formal situations.

57. Pupils achieve very well throughout the age range, but the group entering school with average standards achieve particularly well. High teacher expectations in lessons, supplemented by well-directed homework, keep up a good work rate in class and make sure that many pupils exceed what would normally be expected of them over time. Nevertheless, a minority of younger boys do not achieve as well as they should because teaching does not yet find ways to challenge and involve them fully.
58. Teaching is very good overall. It is underpinned by a blend of very good professional judgement, used well to question and check pupils' learning as they work and detailed information from national tests and assessment in school to make sure that everyone is working to maximum capacity. Teachers adjust the content of lessons for particular classes so that they are both challenged and engaged by the work and ensure that pupils with special educational needs, be they slower learners or gifted and talented individuals, are provided with plenty of opportunities to challenge and extend them. Lessons are never conducted mechanically following a predetermined plan, regardless of what pupils know and do. Instead, pupils are helped well through questioning to understand the connections between initial activities such as vocabulary exercises and reading or writing later in the lesson. Teachers hold pupils' interest well by using a variety of activities and materials to keep their thought and attention engaged actively. They mark written work with particularly helpful individual comments, although pupils are not taught sufficiently to reflect on their own work in more depth so that they understand what they have to do to get better. Lower-attaining pupils are not given enough specific guidance and instruction by teachers to acquire a range of styles of writing for different situations.

Example of outstanding practice

English lessons are planned very well, building on the lessons of national initiatives by varying content and activity in order to stimulate pupils' interest and curiosity.

Teachers plan very well to maximise pupils' achievement because they know how to guide and support pupils in tasks they find difficult, such as learning the meaning of complex Elizabethan vocabulary in Shakespeare. Here, the teacher built considerable trust and confidence in pupils so that they went on to enjoy the fresh challenges involved in understanding the language and milieu of a Victorian novel. The teacher consolidated this well by showing an excerpt from a modern comedy horror film, adding a sense of fun as well as a moment of vivid realisation about the central role of mystery and suspense in storytelling.

59. Very good leadership and management have enabled the department to work well together as a team, share good teaching methods and materials and take constructive action wherever test results demonstrate weaknesses. It follows that standards and achievement have improved considerably since the last inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

60. Standards of literacy across the curriculum are good. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are developed well in most subjects. In science, mathematics, information and communication technology, music and geography, for instance, specialist terms are displayed in the

classroom and used effectively to help pupils' understanding and accuracy of spelling. In RE, pupils write well to explore their thoughts and experience, but opportunities are missed to develop their ideas in discussion. Pupils learn well to read aloud with expression and clarity in English, science and information technology because teachers have high expectations of what they can do. In languages, by contrast, opportunities are missed to help pupils gain confidence in speaking aloud in class. In history, pupils are taught well to structure and organise their writing. In science, while key words are explained helpfully and pupils learn well through discussion, opportunities are often missed to help pupils understand how to organise and lay out a scientific piece of writing using an appropriate style and logical order of what they want to record. The school has managed the teaching of literacy across the curriculum well, although more remains to be done to ensure that teaching of these skills is at a consistently high level.

Modern Foreign Languages

The provision in modern foreign languages is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The department has experienced considerable turbulence since the last inspection from which it is only just beginning to recover.
- Lesson planning is sound but medium- and long-term planning is weaker. Targets for what is to be covered and in what detail are not precise enough and pupils make less progress than they should, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- Not enough French and German are used in the classroom and oral standards are well below average.
- Expectations, particularly of the most competent pupils are not high enough and they do not achieve as well as they might.

Commentary

61. French and German alternate as the main language. Standards in Years 7 to 9 over the last three years have been slightly above the national average. Girls have performed better than boys by a greater margin than found nationally. At GCSE level, French results (when French is the principal language) have declined and are now significantly below the national average. In German, results have been consistently a little above average, representing good achievement. In both languages, the proportion of pupils gaining the highest grades A*/A is well below average. An explanation of the discrepancy between French and German is that boys have more positive attitudes to German and perform much better in that language than in French. Classroom observation confirms that view.
62. Throughout the school, oral standards are well below average. Teachers are not consistent in their use of French or German in the classroom and their expectations that pupils will understand and react to the foreign language are not high enough. They do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to speak to each other in realistic situations so that pupils gain confidence and improve. Standards in other aspects of the work are satisfactory, though writing skills, particularly extended writing, need to be practised more regularly and systematically.
63. For the most part, achievement is satisfactory overall at the end of Years 9 and 11, but for some boys and higher attaining pupils, particularly in French, it is unsatisfactory.
64. Teaching is satisfactory overall and is better in German than in French. Teachers are conscientious and committed. Individual lessons are generally well planned, with a variety of activities and pupils, particularly in the earlier years, take part actively. However, longer-term planning is weaker and the lack of clearly defined objectives about what is to be taught and by when reduces the pace of learning and results in pupils making less progress than they might, particularly in Years 7 to 9. For the most part, expectations of what pupils can do are not high

enough and work provided is the same for all. Whilst lower-attaining pupils receive support, higher-attaining pupils are not stretched and, consequently, do not achieve as well as they might. Nevertheless, in a Year 10 German class of average but challenging pupils, the teacher's high expectations and insistence that pupils respond to the consistent use of German resulted in good learning. Pupils were able to talk fluently at their own level about a holiday taken in the past and they spoke at length and varied the different elements.

65. Relations between teachers and pupils are generally good and teachers' encouraging manner enables most pupils to learn well. However the challenging behaviour of a number of boys in Years 8, 9 and 11 tested the class management of even experienced teachers and disrupted the learning of other pupils.
66. Pupils' work is marked regularly but comments are not often analytical and the assessment is not usually related to National Curriculum or GCSE criteria, so that pupils do not know how well they are doing. A new recording system, linked to moderated assessments should provide more information.
67. The head of department has only just taken up her post and is leading the department satisfactorily. Areas for development have been identified and new policies are being formulated appropriately and implemented, but these have not yet had time to bring about the necessary improvement in standards since the last inspection.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good in all year groups and, as a result, pupils' achievement is good.
- The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is a strength and, with the effective use of the learning support assistants, teachers ensure that these pupils make very good progress.
- The comprehensive scheme of work is well resourced and good quality materials are produced to extend all learners.
- Classroom displays are excellent and these are actively used to enhance learning.
- Insufficient use is made of ICT as a teaching aid and to vary the learning experience for pupils.

Commentary

68. Test results at the end of Year 9 have been consistently in line with the national average for a number of years and the latest results for 2003 show further improvement over previous years. This represents good achievement by both boys and girls who have below average standards in mathematics when they enter the school. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 show a good understanding of shape, space and measures although their skills in graphical representation are less well developed. Higher-attaining pupils in Years 9 to 11 are able to solve complex problems involving trigonometry, standard form and circle geometry. All pupils are encouraged to respond accurately to questions by using the correct mathematical terminology.
69. Pupils achieve well in relation to their earlier achievements because teaching is stimulating and challenging. A particular strength in teaching in Years 7 to 9 is the way in which lessons are started with a wide variety of mental exercises relevant to the day's theme. These immediately engage pupils' attention and interest. In some lessons, the effective use of small whiteboards for pupils to write their answers on and display these for the teacher quickly ensures that all are fully involved.
70. Results in GCSE have also been at the national average, with both boys and girls performing equally well. The latest results for 2003 again show an improving trend. The good quality of teaching in Years 10 and 11 stems from teachers' comprehensive understanding of

examination requirements, together with the clear boundaries that they give to pupils about acceptable behaviour in lessons. Collaborative work is encouraged at appropriate times, with the result that many pupils are able to assist each other in solving complex problems. Teaching too is often adaptable. On one occasion a pupil was finding difficulty in expressing 0.06 in the standard form of 6×10^{-2} . The teacher found a number of different ways to explain this in order for the pupil to understand it clearly. However, for some less able pupils in Year 11, approaches to teaching are less varied. For these and others, insufficient use is made of the potential for ICT to transform the learning experience.

71. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress. Learning support assistants give targeted and effective support to pupils who need it. This provision includes working with gifted and talented pupils in Year 7 who spend their first half term in mixed ability groups. Both teachers and support assistants plan very effectively to ensure that needs are identified and individual education plans for pupils are up to date and relevant.
72. Teaching is complemented by excellent displays in all mathematics rooms, often of pupils' work, which give examples of good practice in presentation skills. The extensive use by teachers of appropriate mathematics vocabulary is aided by key words on the walls of the classrooms that are regularly referred to in question and answer sessions.
73. The head of department provides very good leadership and support. He has ensured that lesson observation, a weakness from the last inspection, helps to show teachers examples of good practice from which to improve their skills. He has developed an effective scheme of work based on commercial schemes. This planning ensures that the mathematics curriculum meets statutory requirements. The scheme pays attention to the needs of different attainment groups and good quality materials are produced to extend learning for all. The department has developed well since the last inspection and standards have improved considerably since that time.

Mathematics across the curriculum

74. Few departments other than mathematics have systematically planned the development of numeracy in their subjects. There is good practice in science where teachers in mathematics and science link over the timing of the lessons in key skills, such as graph work and energy equations. In ICT, automated applications of formulae assist in investigations and in geography and history pupils use graphical analyses of important data. Art makes a valuable contribution to numeracy through its use of measurement, proportion, pattern making and symmetry. There is further scope for this good practice to be refined and extended to other subjects across the curriculum.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good and in Years 10 and 11 are mostly very good.
- Leadership and management are very good, focusing on raising standards.
- Laboratories and resources for learning are very good.
- Marking is sometimes not rigorous enough to help pupils to make greater progress.

Commentary

75. On entry to the school, pupils' standards are slightly below average. Results at the end of Year 9 have generally matched the national average and in 2002, were well above average when compared to similar schools, indicating that pupils had achieved well. GCSE results in 2002 were in line with national averages but were not as good as they were at the time of the last inspection. However, this does not take account of the lower attainment on entry of that cohort. The most recent Year 9 test and GCSE results, 2003, are higher than in 2002 and show that standards are rising and pupils continuing to achieve well.
76. In Years 7 to 9 pupils gain confidence in their learning and develop their knowledge, understanding and skills across the broad range of National Curriculum topics. They do much practical work and acquire scientific methods of working such as predicting and fair testing. In practical lessons, pupils work sensibly, confidently and safely. Year 7 pupils learn laboratory rules and during an investigation of the effect of heat on materials, they handled the apparatus with great care. Year 9 pupils displayed their developing experimental skills when studying chemical reactions. Pupils are encouraged to collaborate and frequently work in pairs or groups. A Year 8 class of lower-attaining pupils, beginning their study of electricity, worked in pairs very well to investigate the best way to wire a doll's house. A higher-attaining group shared their ideas about density and applied their numeracy skills well to complete the necessary calculations.
77. Year 10 pupils are embarking on a new course of study for GCSE. Computers are used extensively and one group extended their study of earth science by carrying out independent research using the Internet, followed by presentations of their work to the rest of the class. Work in the books of Year 11 pupils shows that they have covered the necessary units of work leading to double award GCSE. There is a good balance of theory and practical work and a variety of recording methods including written work, word processing, spreadsheets and graph work. Pupils' investigation work is good and in one class where they worked in groups to investigate the effect of concentration of reactants on energy production in chemical reactions, the standard was exceptionally high in terms of their knowledge, understanding and mature attitude to study.
78. The teaching and learning of science are good overall with some being very good or excellent. Teachers plan well, set clear learning objectives and have established good relationships with pupils. Pupils who experience the greatest difficulties are supported well by their teachers or skilled teaching assistants and make good progress. Where teaching is best, teachers have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour and through stringent continuous assessment, they ensure that each pupil achieves the learning objectives and is suitably challenged. A characteristic feature of lessons is the rewarding of good effort and conduct through praise. In response, pupils' behaviour is very good and they are keen to learn. Where teaching is less than good, teachers do not always insist on pupils' undivided attention when this is necessary. Nor do they assess the extent of pupils' achievement of the learning objectives, either during the course of each lesson or in the plenary so that there is limited awareness of pupils who either need more attention or further challenge. All teachers mark pupils' books regularly but only some teachers include comments to encourage or to advise pupils on how to improve.
79. Teachers pay due attention to the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. The units of study include references to past and recent scientific developments and to the impact of science in society and so contribute well to the pupils' moral, social and cultural development. There are, however, also occasions when pupils' spiritual development might be addressed more positively, such as the recent study of the variety of life in Year 9. The science department does much to further enrich the pupils' experiences such as planned visits to zoos and museums. There is a science club and catch-up lessons after school. The laboratories and resources, including ICT, are very good, are well maintained by efficient technicians and enlivened by displays of interesting posters, key words and examples of pupils' work to celebrate their efforts.

80. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The improvement plan is a useful working document and focuses on the continued improvement of standards. The Key Stage 3 strategy is in place, a new GCSE course has been introduced and plans have been prepared to establish the school as a specialist science school. Schemes of work are comprehensive and are evaluated and revised regularly. The head of faculty has studied test data carefully and is addressing the need for the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment procedures to become more rigorous. Improvement in teaching and learning and the overall impact on standards since the last inspection are good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Curriculum design and assessment are good.
- Teaching is good and encourages good attitudes to work.
- Resources and accommodation are very good.
- ICT is managed well across the school.
- Some lower-attaining pupils have insufficient support to enable them to concentrate throughout the whole lesson.

Commentary

81. Standards of ICT are above national averages in both key stages. There has been a marked improvement in GCSE results since the last inspection. This is due to good teaching, good resources and a clear understanding of the curriculum requirements.
82. In Years 7 to 9, higher-attaining pupils, who are working above the national expectation, have a good understanding of file management and Internet use. They have good skills in word processing and graphic presentation. Some lower-attaining pupils, particularly in Year 9, lack concentration and there are not sufficient support staff to assist with immediate difficulties. This has a direct impact in some lessons, where despite teachers' good behaviour management, learning is affected for other pupils.
83. In Years 10 to 11, pupils can opt for a GCSE course, which uses innovative on-line lessons and they are motivated by this approach. All other pupils are offered a core ICT course which is sensitively designed to promote the necessary skills for their next stage of learning. These lessons are also relevant and motivating.
84. Achievement in lessons is good, with most pupils managing to achieve the stated learning objective. This is due to the clear structure of lessons and teachers remaining focused whilst teaching. Where pupils are not achieving in a satisfactory manner, teachers make good efforts to ensure that they can catch up, for example, through the good opportunities offered in clubs.
85. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers plan lessons well and there are many examples of very detailed planning to assist pupils with additional learning needs to make good progress. There are good working and personal relationships between pupils and teachers and lessons are motivating and fun. Most pupils enjoy using computers and find their lessons relevant and interesting. Teachers use appropriate language and promote literacy opportunities, targeting key words to extend knowledge and understanding. Assessment is good, ongoing and helpful. A recently introduced individual profiling system has had a very good response from pupils, who are able to identify areas for development. They know how they are doing in this subject.
86. The school has very good computer resources with dedicated computer suites. However, some classes are too large for each pupil to have an individual computer to work on, which is

unhelpful for teachers, who struggle at times to maintain appropriate behaviour. There is a full school network, very ably supported, for all subjects to access and there is a very good growing resource of prepared lessons. Some teachers use good quality software for presentation purposes, which is motivating for pupils. However, in some cases where projectors are used, the screen projection size is too small and unhelpful in enabling the detail to be observed by all.

87. The subject is managed well by an appropriately qualified teacher and a network manager who work closely together in the development of the subject. This good partnership enables the curriculum and technical aspects of this subject to be clearly defined. Improvements within the subject since the last inspection are good, promoting effectively the increasing standards of learning and achievement displayed in lessons.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

88. Since the last inspection, ICT in other subjects is developing in a satisfactory manner with more departments using computers as part of their lessons. The good use of the school's computer suites and portable notebook equipment by other departments indicates that computers are beginning to be used in a focused and effective manner.
89. Progress varies across the school, with the science department leading the way. Here, there has been good investment in a new computer-based lesson structure and in projection equipment. This is enabling lessons to be taught using a multi-media presentation format, which is motivating for pupils and stimulates good learning. However, this very good picture is not reflected across the rest of the school. In mathematics, the department is only at an early stage of development and is still struggling to resolve issues of software compatibility. In other subjects, such as RE, there is no mention of the use of computers in planning or in department plans. In art, English, design and technology and geography, pupils have valuable opportunities to undertake research using the Internet.

HUMANITIES

Pupils follow a humanities programme in Years 7 to 9 consisting of distinct modules of geography, history and religious education. These are reported on within the individual subject reports. Overall, the leadership of the humanities faculty is good and provides an effective line of communication and support for teachers within the faculty.

Geography

Provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are providing a clear vision for future developments.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge.
- Teachers identify clear objectives which they share well with pupils.
- New resources are being used effectively and a range of field visits enhances learning.
- Marking and target-setting are insufficiently targeted at developing pupils' understanding of the level of their work.

Commentary

90. Standards attained in Years 7 to 9 are in line with national expectations and are similar to those noted at the last inspection. This represents good achievement because many pupils enter the school with levels of attainment lower than expectations. For example, some Year 7 pupils were unsure how to use an atlas effectively and did not know that the United Kingdom is made up of four distinct countries. Results in GCSE have been variable since the last inspection but have been generally below national averages. In 2003, pupils achieved at a higher level than previously, with higher-attaining pupils achieving well and the standards of pupils currently in Year 11 are in line with expectations. This reflects recent improvements in identifying higher-attaining pupils and implementing other strategies to improve all pupils' results.
91. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with some good teaching. Teachers have good subject knowledge, plan well using a common format and share objectives with pupils. All teachers are aware of pupils with special educational needs and work hard by using appropriate questions to involve all pupils. In the good lessons observed, pupils were involved and interested because of the brisk pace and good questioning techniques sustained by the teacher. Pupils were confident about expressing ideas and posing questions. In some lessons, however, the final session was rushed and did not give pupils time to reflect on or to consolidate new knowledge or to fully grasp home study tasks. Teaching leads to good learning, for example, where Year 11 pupils producing GCSE coursework on coastal erosion were encouraged to moderate their own and their peers' work using the given mark scheme. In these classes, pupils were highly motivated to produce good quality work using a variety of ICT skills. Teachers carefully planned each stage of the task to support pupils and to enable them to assess their own work, judge their own attainment and make decisions about improving their own work.
92. In the work seen in pupils' books, marking was limited to a few guidance comments with no opportunities for pupils to set targets for improvement with teachers. New assessment procedures introduced this academic year are appropriate and designed to enable pupils to be clearer about their achievements and progress. For example, in Year 8, pupils had completed an assessment task about the River Tees. They understood that the level given for the work would enable them to gauge their own progress against National Curriculum expectations.
93. Working within the humanities faculty development plan, the recently appointed head of department has clear strategies to improve pupils' performance. These include improvements in assessment procedures and using the baseline assessment of Year 7 pupils to enable teachers to plan appropriate work. New schemes of work are in place for Years 7 to 9 and are evolving in Years 10 and 11, with a clear intention to plan for a more coherent development of pupils' skills to raise achievement. New resources are being used effectively and field trips enhance pupils' learning. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory, although many developments are recent and have not yet had a full impact on improving standards.

History

Provision in history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Specialist teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- The good quality teaching is reflected in pupils' achievement.
- Relationships between staff and their pupils are positive and professional.
- Visits to historical sites greatly extend what pupils learn in the classroom.
- Marking sometimes does not include enough comments to help pupils to improve their work in future.

Commentary

94. Standards in the current Year 9 are just above national expectations. Overall, this represents good achievement in relation to pupils' attainment on entry. Pupils have a good factual knowledge and understanding of history and events over time. This was particularly demonstrated by Year 9 pupils when they explained in letters what conditions were like in the trenches during the First World War. Pupils show an increasing skill in handling sources and interpreting what sources mean.
95. Although there has been some variation in GCSE results since the last inspection, they are consistently above the national average. This represents good achievement, particularly as a larger proportion of the year group follow the course than when the school was last inspected. Girls have generally performed better than boys overall but in 2003 this was particularly pronounced. Standards in the current Year 11 are just above national expectations. This represents good achievement over their final two years for most pupils. Pupils of all levels of attainment, with the aid of good resources, were able to analyse and explain what were for them complex historical issues. They did this well and were able to explain issues, such as the relative merits of the new frontier in America and whether the country was a better place to live. Pupils discussed the material they had previously analysed well in pairs and in groups.
96. The quality of teaching and learning in history is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, plan their lessons well and draw effectively on a varied range of resources and activities, including field visits to historical sites. Sometimes marking does not include enough comments to help pupils to improve their work in future. The work set challenges all pupils and they are given high targets to aim for. Pupils with special educational needs meet many of their targets but have limited levels of individual support in lessons. Pupils write well both in short answers and in extended writing. They also complete maps successfully and draw graphs accurately from source material. The positive relationships between staff and their pupils are a major factor in ensuring that learning is productive.
97. The leadership of the history department is good. A new head of department has a clear vision about the direction for the department and a strong commitment to improving standards. Improvement since the last inspection is good with all of the key issues now having been dealt with. The department is now using data effectively to help teachers plan the learning for pupils.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan lessons well, with clear learning objectives and activities that engage pupils' interest.
- Teachers insist on high standards of behaviour and pupils use their time in lessons well.
- Religious education makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development.
- In some lessons, teacher's knowledge of the religion studied is insufficient to enable pupils to make good progress.
- Teachers do not use levels of attainment to tell pupils how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
- The shortage of time in Years 10 and 11 leads to GCSE results that are well below the achievement of which pupils are capable.

Commentary

98. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 is at the standard expected. Most pupils show sound understanding of the central features of the religions they study. They do not yet, however, explain the variations of belief and practice within religions. Pupils' ability to reflect on experience and religion is also at the standard expected. Results in the GCSE courses have been erratic. In the short course followed in 2002, results were well below the national average. In 2003 they were substantially better but still below the national average. When pupils leave school their attainment is below expectation.
99. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Progress is good in Year 7 where pupils acquire a good foundation for the study of religion. In Year 9 pupils' show a reluctance to ask or answer questions. Despite this lack of confidence in themselves as learners, pupils achieve a secure foundation for Years 10 and 11. In Year 10 pupils begin by making very good progress but by the end of the course most pupils and boys particularly, fail to do themselves justice so that achievement overall is unsatisfactory. Only one boy in four achieves grades A*-C which is lower than in most other subjects.
100. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but assessment is unsatisfactory. Teachers plan lessons well with clear learning objectives and they make good use of activities that engage pupils' interest. Teachers insist on high standards of behaviour and, in lessons, pupils make effective use of their time. Pupils lack specialist teaching however. In some lessons, the teacher does not have the depth of knowledge to challenge pupils' thinking sufficiently for them to make good progress. Also there is little use of group work for pupils to develop their speaking and writing skills to a higher level. Assessment is unsatisfactory because teachers do not use levels of attainment to tell pupils how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
101. Leadership and management are sound. Despite recent staffing difficulties, the acting co-ordinator has not only revised schemes of work for Years 7 to 9 but also ensured that teachers have good lesson plans. As a result pupils have continued to receive teaching that is generally at least satisfactory and often better. The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is good with the right balance between learning about religions and learning from both religion and experience. For pupils in Years 10 and 11, the amount of time provided is unsatisfactory. The content and approach of the GCSE short course is good but one lesson every two weeks is well below the minimum time needed for pupils to be successful. As a consequence, results are much worse than in other subjects.
102. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Pupils' attainment remains as it was then. Religious education makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. The department still lacks the artefacts it needs to support the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 however. The school no longer provides the GCSE full course but the adoption of the GCSE short course for all pupils in Years 10 and 11 is a substantial improvement for the majority.

TECHNOLOGY

The provision in design and technology was inspected in detail.

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good and motivates pupils so that they are enthusiastic about their learning.
- Assessment and monitoring is well developed; pupils understand exactly what they need to do to progress.

- Standards are improving in most areas, albeit slowly.
- Leadership and management are good.
- The profile of technology does not provide sufficient encouragement for higher-attaining pupils to study design and technology in Years 10 and 11 and examination results in resistant materials are poor because there is a tendency for lower-attaining pupils to opt for the subject.

Commentary

103. The test results and current standards in Year 9 are in line with national averages. Improvement over the past two years indicates an upward trend. Considering that the overall levels of attainment when pupils enter the school are below expectations, most pupils do well. Girls achieve higher levels than boys and by an amount greater than the difference nationally. In Years 10 and 11, standards are generally below the national averages for the higher grades but in line for the full grade range. Over the past three years standards of attainment show an upward trend in most areas, with girls achieving higher grades than boys. Attainment in the subject of resistant materials, however, has made little progress. One of the reasons is that more lower-attaining boys opt for this area and find the workload difficult to cope with. The profile of the subject has not provided sufficient encouragement for higher-attaining pupils to opt for design and technology in Years 10 and 11. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory and they cope well alongside others.
104. Standards are improving throughout the school as a result of the introduction of a well-developed assessment and monitoring programme. All pupils are aware of what they must do to progress. Pupils' practical skills are average in most areas. Their technical vocabulary is average which represents good progress given their lack of technical language when they join the school. In Years 10 and 11, the majority of pupils have confidence and well-developed skills in using a selection of materials and equipment. Their research techniques are good and well recorded. The standards in textiles are exceptionally good. All coursework is creative and practical skills are developed well.
105. The quality of teaching is good overall. All lessons are well planned and organised with clear objectives. Resources used are chosen well to suit the tasks set and ensure that all pupils make good progress. Teaching has a positive impact on pupils' learning by keeping pupils motivated and enthusiastic. There is good recapitulation of previous work, supported by effective question and answer techniques, which aid the reinforcement of their knowledge. All homework set is relevant and used as part of the lessons. The teaching of resistant materials in Years 10 and 11 is good. Due to the level of attainment on entry to the course, some pupils are consequently working at a slower pace with less progression. For example, a very enthusiastic group of lower-attaining Year 10 pupils making buggies were motivated to do well. Their designs were basic but effective simple examples of control technology.
106. The head of department manages the department well and provides strong curriculum leadership. The majority of the staff have changed since the last inspection. The department is now a very strong, fully committed team. Overall improvement since the last inspection is good, reflected in the improving standards, growing industrial links and extra-curricular activities.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and music were inspected in detail. Lessons were sampled in drama and media studies. Extra-curricular activities were seen.

Art

Provision in art is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching motivates pupils so that they are enthusiastic learners.
- Assessment is used effectively to identify GCSE pupils in need of support.
- Many displays of artwork around the school greatly enhance the environment.
- Some topics are not expanded enough to challenge pupils' thinking and to relate to broader issues of pupils' personal development.
- Work does not always meet the different needs of pupils who find art difficult.

Commentary

107. Pupils arrive at the school with ability in art generally below that expected nationally. By the end of Year 9, pupils reach a standard in line with expectations, confirmed by work seen during the inspection. Pupils' achievement is good between Years 7 and 9. Those with special educational needs achieve similarly to their classmates. Pupils gain an understanding in the basic skills of drawing, using colour and pattern in a variety of materials and learn about the work of artists and craftspeople in Europe and abroad. Some higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 demonstrate their sensitive use of pencil tone in carefully observed drawings of a teapot, whilst others show their delicate use of watercolour technique when reproducing pictures painted by Dali.
108. By the end of Year 11, pupils are working at a level above the national average. GCSE results in art are the best in the school and both boys and girls achieve their highest grade in art. In 2002, results were above the national average, rising again in 2003 and continuing the upward trend of the last two years. Attainment at the higher grades A*/A is also above national averages. Pupils of all abilities achieve well through Years 10 and 11 due to high quality individual care from teachers. All pupils show a good range of experimental work in sketchbooks using a variety of media. This is supported well by references to the work of famous artists. Standards of presentation are high for all pupils. Higher-attaining pupils write perceptive notes about their work, documenting the development of their ideas well.
109. The quality of teaching and learning is good. The quality of relationships between pupils and teachers is good. Teachers care for their pupils and know them well. Lessons are structured well and feature topics that enthuse and motivate pupils. Teachers are knowledgeable and confident and use practical demonstrations effectively to show techniques. They have produced some materials to help pupils, particularly in Years 7 to 9, who have difficulty with some aspects of art. However, these need to be explained clearly and often for them to be effective. The quality of ideas produced by pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good but sometimes topics are not expanded to challenge pupils' thinking sufficiently and relate it to broader issues of pupils' personal development, such as, inspiring work through discussion about local and global issues of poverty, pollution, endangered species and other social problems.
110. The department is very well led and managed. An effective team has been created and systems have been put in place which have raised standards. Assessment is used very well in Years 10 and 11 to identify those pupils on the grade C/D borderline with a view to supporting them to gain the better grade and ICT is now far more integrated into courses than previously. Good opportunities are provided for the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, mainly the application of measurement and proportion and through learning

specialist vocabulary. However, this is not planned for systematically. Schemes of work are appropriate for the key stages, but could be enriched, especially in Years 10 and 11, by more creative interpretation of multicultural themes, for example, by studying the work of female artists and by broaching more controversial issues. Progress since the last inspection is very good.

Drama

111. Drama results at GCSE match the national picture overall and the proportion gaining the higher grades A*-C exceeds it. The latest results in 2003 rose from the previous year. In work seen in Years 7 to 9, pupils show great enthusiasm, independence and commitment to their work because teachers are both demanding and encouraging through the questions they ask and the exercises they set. Pupils respond by working well together in groups and share their ideas willingly as they support others' efforts. They achieve well within short periods of time, but girls achieve better than boys. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well, particularly where acting exercises are concerned. In Years 10 and 11, standards match those found in examinations. The subject has been led and organised well during a time of disruption to staffing. Here, pupils' achievement is very good as they utilise space confidently and know how to communicate character using body language thoughtfully, applying well what they learn about play texts. This is a result of very good, well-planned teaching underpinned by good specialist knowledge of dramatic texts and improvised acting techniques.

Media Studies

112. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades A*-C in GCSE has been consistently above the national average for the subject over three years. In the work seen, standards match national trends for the subject and the proportion gaining higher grades is similar to previous results. Teaching is good because it builds on pupils' experience and enthusiasm. Good subject knowledge is used well to prompt and interrogate pupils, so that they develop a good theoretical understanding of the ways in which different media types exploit and entertain people.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well because teachers are very supportive of them, especially on GCSE courses.
- Lessons are planned and presented well, giving structure to learning.
- Music benefits from opportunities arising from work undertaken with trainees.
- Pupils' achievement, especially that of boys, suffers from the unsatisfactory behaviour of small groups in some lessons.
- Infrequency of lessons within a fortnightly timetable results in a lack of continuity in learning.
- The lack of support staff for pupils with special educational needs in music is unhelpful.
- The department does not enlist the support of external agencies to extend provision.

Commentary

113. Current standards in Year 9 are in line with expectations. Pupils arrive with below average attainment in music and achieve well during Years 7 to 9, making good progress. By Year 11, average standards prevail and this is reflected in GCSE results. Given that few GCSE pupils have any supplementary tuition on instruments, the pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is also good. In Years 7 to 9, boys' achievement is significantly worse than girls' and a minority of boys show poor attitudes to the subject, hindering the best progress of some classes. By

Year 9, pupils perform from simple graphic and staff notation, sensitive to dynamics; sing with enthusiasm; play percussion instruments and keyboards; use musical vocabulary well; and compose simple blues pieces. By Year 11, they sing and play instruments with a wide range of standards, co-ordinating well together in ensembles.

114. Teaching is satisfactory and pupils' learning is variable, but overall satisfactory. Teachers have good subject skills which mostly motivate the pupils to high levels of concentration and participation. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, the class was captivated by discussion and illustration of material, researched for homework, based on the HMV logo, linking to a range of other disciplines and creating a very focused introduction to their 'music in film and media' topic. Methodical preparation and presentation of materials, resources and key vocabulary create a good environment for learning. The management of pupils' behaviour follows the departmental and school procedures, but this is not always successful. Strategies to engage pupils' attention in listening and writing activities are often ineffective and this is compounded by the lack of support for pupils with special educational needs in many lessons. GCSE pupils are set clear goals from the beginning of the course and pupils have very good relations with staff. Being valued plays a significant role in their achievement. Staff readily give help in their free time.
115. The subject is well led and managed. Pupils' work folders for the year are carefully planned and link in well with the schemes of work. Assessment procedures to help improve pupils' progress are revised regularly. However, there are no departmental targets to address boys' underachievement in Years 7 to 9 and teachers' assessments for Year 9 are too generous. Trainee teachers participate widely in the work of the department. University contacts ensure that the department is well informed on developments in music education. While teachers are aware of the role music plays in citizenship and spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, these are not formalised in the schemes of work. Liaison to improve music provision in feeder primaries is being developed. Since the last inspection the subject has made satisfactory improvement.
116. Except for a band and a large-scale musical production every second year, there is little regular extra-curricular music. While the school hosts a music school out of hours, this has little contact with the music department and the department has not made sufficient use of external agencies to develop the interests and aptitudes of gifted and talented pupils. Accommodation and resources for the subject are very good, but ventilation and soundproofing of practice rooms are unsatisfactory. Provision in the learning resource centre is also unsatisfactory and books are dated, providing little on music from other cultures and pupils cannot hear music from reputable websites to complement research.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good overall.
- Provision for extra-curricular activities is very good and there are good productive links with external school and community organisations.
- GCSE results are in line with national averages.
- Accommodation is excellent.
- Schemes of work require further development.
- Opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own and others' performances in lessons are too limited.

Commentary

117. The majority of pupils enter the school with average standards, although in dance they are below expectations. Pupils achieve well and standards are above average by the end of Year 9 and in line with expectations at the end of Year 11. This includes those pupils with special educational needs. Pupils of all abilities increasingly acquire and develop skills and knowledge of a range of sports. This is demonstrated by pupils in Year 9 badminton, where pupils learn the rules and develop good standards when they attempt the high clear shot.
118. The results for those pupils who follow the GCSE course consistently match national averages. Pupils achieve well, with evidence of improvement in the percentage of pupils gaining A* to C grades in recent years. In the last two years, girls have not done as well as boys but the numbers following the course are small which makes statistical comparisons unreliable. More problem-solving in theory work would present more challenge to pupils.
119. The quality of teaching and learning is good, with examples of very good teaching. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan increasingly challenging activities. In one very effective lesson, pupils were encouraged to evaluate their own and others' performances. Learning objectives were constantly referred to and learning points reinforced in a good plenary. Very good pupil management skills keep pupils working hard. However, there are inconsistencies in the extent to which teachers plan work for pupils of differing abilities, reinforce subject specific vocabulary, use challenging questioning and give pupils opportunities to evaluate, in lessons.
120. Leadership and management are good and there has been good improvement since the last inspection. A new scheme of work has contributed to the rise in standards by Year 9. The department is currently developing a similar scheme that will help focus teaching and make clear progression for pupils in Years 10 and 11. In all schemes there is a need for more direction regarding exactly where aspects of citizenship, numeracy and key vocabulary are to be delivered. Other good developments since the last inspection include improved assessment procedures linked to National Curriculum and curriculum developments such as the introduction, from Year 10, of optional courses, including a Sport Leadership Award. Pupils undoubtedly benefit from the excellent accommodation and a very good extra-curricular programme, including the use of professional coaches. In Years 7 to 9, one group learning a second language is withdrawn from a sports lesson and consequently these pupils have insufficient time to fully develop their skills and knowledge. However, the department has revised the curriculum to ensure that these pupils have a balanced programme and encourages and monitors pupils' participation in school clubs. Pupils benefit from effective links with external bodies such as the local college and local sports club. Very good monitoring of the teaching and standards in the subject takes place and this has included a moderation evening working alongside staff from other schools.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

In Years 10 and 11, pupils are given the opportunity to study health and social care and leisure and tourism. Health and social care was inspected in detail and lessons in leisure and tourism were sampled.

Health and social care

Provision in health and social care is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is satisfactory, well planned and delivered.
- Pupils achieve in line with their capabilities.
- Assessment is carried out in line with the examination board requirements.
- Work is not always matched well to pupils' prior understanding and therefore lower-attaining pupils struggle with lengthy text.

Commentary

121. Health and social care, foundation and intermediate levels, are taught together. The school has recently changed examination boards to allow pupils a double qualification. As only a small group follow the course, comparisons with national averages are unreliable. The achievement of pupils currently taking the course is satisfactory. However, some pupils struggle with the demands of the course due to case study work being confined to hard text only. Pupils found this difficult to absorb and consequently their concentration waned.
122. Teaching is sound and presents a variety of opportunities to learn. Lessons are planned well, with clear aims and objectives. The relationships between pupils and teachers are good, with timely intervention to assist learning. Pupils have good access to computers to enhance their coursework. Coursework assignments vary in quality in relation to pupils' ability. The assessment of pupils work is adequate.
123. The course is managed well by the curriculum leader and one other teacher. Both are fully qualified, work well together and are committed to the subject. The course has strong links with external agencies and pupils are encouraged to choose subject related work experience placements.

Leisure and tourism

124. More pupils follow this vocational subject than others within the group as it offers a variety of opportunities of working within the community. External links are sound. In the lesson observed, teaching was planned well. Pupils were well motivated and enthusiastic about the topic. All pupils worked at a steady pace and made progress.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

The school has an effective programme for personal, social and health education. It is delivered in discrete topics and the improvements in this provision address concerns in the last inspection report. Further developments this year include a revision of the scheme of work to include citizenship and the creation of a smaller team to enable better professional development and to improve learning for pupils. Only citizenship was inspected but some lessons seen involved aspects of both programmes.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- After an audit of the work for citizenship, the school has developed a very good scheme of work to help pupils to become responsible citizens.
- The means of assessment, involving pupils, their peers and teachers, are very good.
- In the short time he has been in post, the co-ordinator has made a very significant contribution to the introduction of the subject.
- The school is beginning to provide a variety of stimulating events and opportunities to involve

community partners.

- Monitoring arrangements are not sufficiently developed to ensure that planned aspects are taking place and that pupils record their experiences in their profiles.

Commentary

125. The school has an effective programme for developing pupils' experiences and understanding of citizenship. As this is a new subject, there are no available national comparative measures for standards. The small amount of written work seen showed that pupils have made satisfactory progress and are at the expected level for the subject.
126. An interview of a small number of pupils from three year groups showed that pupils were not always clear when they had studied aspects of citizenship. However, they did agree that they had made some contribution to their local community and had recorded it on their 'Active Citizenship Profile'. The school is providing a variety of stimulating events and opportunities to involve community partners, such as visitors representing the Inland Revenue, local health provision and the advancement of Arab British Understanding. The development of pupils' understanding of citizenship is further enhanced by the emphasis the school places on personal responsibility and the opportunities that pupils have to take responsibility in the school, for example, through the school council and as prefects or mentors for younger pupils.
127. The teaching that was observed was good. Teachers develop good relationships with their pupils and this creates a positive climate where controversial and sensitive issues can be discussed meaningfully. Teachers plan lessons well and provide a good and interesting range of work so that most pupils respond well and are motivated by the tasks set for them. In one lesson, Year 8 pupils developed a clear understanding of the causes of crime and were able to complete the written tasks well, while in another lesson pupils had good opportunities to strengthen their skills in buying insurance and their rights and protection as consumers by working on focused tasks in pairs. The teacher's understanding of pupils' levels of understanding was used well to match pairs so that they worked productively together and the examples used were practical and relevant to pupils' experiences.
128. Senior managers led the initial introduction of citizenship and, since his appointment, the co-ordinator has made a positive start in the development of the subject. After an audit of the work already taking place for citizenship, the school has developed a very good scheme of work to help pupils to become responsible citizens and meet statutory requirements. An assessment system, which includes pupils and their peers well in their own evaluation as well as teacher assessment, has been devised to track pupils' experiences and to enable pupils to reflect on their own achievements. Resources for the subject rely much on existing materials within the school but they are steadily being built up to match new aspects of the programme. Although the co-ordinator has a clear vision for the future this has not yet been shared widely across the school and there is no rigorous programme in place to monitor implementation.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Inspection judgement

Grade

The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	3

Overall standards achieved	4
Pupils' achievement	3

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	3
Attendance	4
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	4

The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2

The leadership and management of the school	2
The governance of the school	2
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	2

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).

