

INSPECTION REPORT

Sandringham School

St Albans
LEA area : Hertfordshire

Unique Reference Number : 117548
Inspection number: 184841

Headteacher : Mrs Janet Lewis

Reporting inspector : Mrs J M Brookes
21416

Dates of inspection : 6-10 December 1999

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school :	Comprehensive
Type of control :	County maintained
Age range of pupils :	11-19
Gender of pupils :	Mixed
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Appropriate authority :	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors :	Christine Campbell
Date of previous inspection :	March 1995

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		Leadership and management
	Equality of opportunity	
Mr D Binfield, Lay Inspector		Attendance
		Attitudes, behaviour and personal development
		Support, guidance and pupils' welfare
		Partnership with parents and the community
Mrs E Barratt	History	Attainment and progress
		Teaching
Mr D Jones	Mathematics	
Mrs P Draycott	Religious Education	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
		Staffing, accommodation and learning resources
		Sixth Form
Mr B Newton	English	
Mr C Elliott	Science	
Mr M Pennington	Modern Foreign Languages	
Mr M Merchant	Geography	
Mr P Evans	Design and Technology	
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Mr M Haynes	Art	Efficiency of the school
Mr D Walker	Special educational needs	
Mr E Needham	Physical Education	
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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

Students make good progress and the majority reach high standards. Students with special educational needs make good progress overall and all leave school with accredited qualifications.

Staff of high quality provide much very good teaching. Arrangements for their professional development are excellent.

Provision for students' spiritual development is good and that for moral and cultural development very good. Excellent provision is made for their social development.

The school's pastoral care of its students is outstanding.

The very good relationships between students and teachers provide a secure and happy environment for learning which contribute to students' very positive attitudes and their very good behaviour.

An innovative curriculum is complemented by outstanding provision for extra-curricular activities. Excellent leadership and management provide a strong framework in which the school flourishes and continues to develop.

The school gives very good value for money.

Where the school has weaknesses

The school has no significant weaknesses.

Sandringham is a very good school with many significant strengths and clear signs of continual growth and improvement. There are no key issues for the school to address.

The governors' action plan will set out how the following less important weaknesses should be considered: raising standards further in English, history and geography in Years 7 and 8; meeting statutory requirements for religious education at Key Stages 3 and 4; improving GCE Advanced level examination results in the sixth form and improving further the quality of assessment and reporting at Key Stage 3.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has made good progress since the last inspection. Attainment has been improved at both Key Stages 3 and 4. The GCE Advanced level average points score remains average. The issue of developing further the monitoring of examination results and relative differences in the performance of groups of students is now a constant focus. Much work has been done on improving assessment procedures and this years' written reports to parents will contain information on students' level of attainment in National Curriculum. The quality of teaching has improved significantly. Students with special educational needs are very well supported and special provision is made for the most able. Statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students are fully met. The development of information technology has been most impressive. The amount of religious education in the curriculum has improved but still does not meet statutory requirements. In almost all other aspects the school has improved or made significant developments. The school's capacity for further improvement is very good.

Standards in subjects

The following table shows standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds in national tests, GCSE and A/AS-level examinations in 1999:

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools <i>i.e. schools with a similar proportion of free school meals</i>	Key
Key Stage 3 tests	A	B	<i>well above average</i> A <i>above average</i> B <i>average</i> C <i>below average</i> D <i>well below average</i> E
GCSE examinations	A	B	
A/AS – levels	C	n/a	

Students make good progress at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form and very good progress at Key Stage 4. When students enter the school in Year 7 their attainment is in line with the national average. At the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 the test results in English, mathematics and science were well above the average for all schools and above those for similar schools. In other National Curriculum subjects the teacher assessment results were also well above national averages in most subjects. Inspection evidence shows attainment to be above and in some cases well above the national average in all National Curriculum subjects. Standards in religious education are below the expectations of the locally Agreed Syllabus.

The 1999 GCSE results were well above the national average for all schools and above that for similar schools. The results in English were well above the average both for all schools and similar schools. The results in mathematics and science were well above those of all schools and above those of similar schools. The results in most other subjects were well above the national averages and at least matched the average in all apart from German and religious education where the results were below average. Inspection evidence of the work of students in Year 11 shows attainment to be above or well above average in all subjects except religious education where standards are below the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus.

At the end of the sixth form attainment in the GCE Advanced level is broadly in line with the national average and standards in General National Vocational Qualification are above average. Inspection evidence shows that students in Year 13 are reaching standards which match the course average in most subjects and are above average in the rest.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	good	Art, information technology, music	
Years 10-11	very good	English, art, design and technology, information technology, history, physical education	
Sixth form	very good	English, mathematics, physics, biology, design and technology, geography, history	
English	very good		
Mathematics	good		

The quality of teaching is very good overall. In the lessons observed during the inspection, it was at least satisfactory in 99 per cent and in over 76 per cent it was good or better. Thirty-one per cent of the teaching seen was very good and eight per cent was excellent. Teaching was only unsatisfactory in one per cent of the 189 lessons observed. Teachers' good subject expertise is used effectively in planning lessons. The teachers' high expectations of students and good range of teaching methods promote very good learning. Very skilful management of students and good classroom organisation also contribute to the strong learning ethos in lessons. Good use is made of both time and a range of learning resources to support learning.

Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Students are very well behaved both in lessons and around the school. They are polite, friendly, helpful and considerate of others. The number of exclusions is average.
Attendance	Very good. Well above the national average. There is little unauthorised absence. Punctuality is good.
Ethos*	Highly supportive yet rigorous and purposeful learning environment which promotes high standards; very good relationships amongst students and between teachers and students.
Leadership and management	The headteacher provides very clear educational direction to the school, working closely with the governing body. Senior and middle managers holding curricular and pastoral responsibilities provide very effective leadership of strong teams.
Curriculum	Good overall. It is very good at Key Stage 4 with the exception that the statutory requirements for religious education are not fully met. The integrated learning course in Years 7 and 8 does not provide a sufficiently rigorous basis for learning in English, geography, history and religious education. The curriculum is complemented by excellent extra-curricular activities.
Pupils with special educational needs	Students with special educational needs make very good progress at Key Stage 3 and good progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. They are well supported throughout the school by good teaching and by the high quality of provision made by the learning support department.
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school makes very good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students. Their personal development is valued and taken seriously. Provision for spiritual development is good, for moral and cultural development very good and for social development excellent.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Good match of teaching and support staff to the needs of the curriculum. Teaching staff are well qualified. Levels of learning resources are good as is accommodation.
Value for money	The school makes very efficient use of the resources at its disposal. Given the very good quality of education and the high standards which students achieve, the school gives very good value for money.

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

The parents' views of the school

What most parents like about the School	What some parents are not happy about
<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Pupils achieve a good standard of work.● Very high quality pastoral support is provided.● The attitudes and values promoted have a very positive influence.● Behaviour standards are high.● Relationships with parents are very good.● Excellent extra-curricular activities are provided.● Leadership and the standard of most teaching is very good.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Some unsatisfactory teaching impairs● There is an inconsistent approach to

The judgements made during the inspection support the positive views of parents. During the inspection the teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory in only two out of over 189 lessons. Homework is generally well used although there is some inconsistency in the amount set.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

There are no key issues for the school to address:

In the context of its many strengths, the following minor points for improvement should also be considered as the basis for the governors' action plan:

I. Raising attainment by:

providing a more rigorous approach to the teaching of English, history and geography in Years 7 and 8; (paragraphs 44, 109, 171, 182)

developing strategies to improving the average points score in GCE Advanced level examination results in the sixth form; (paragraph 11)

II. Improving further the quality of assessment and reporting at Key Stage 3 by:

developing assessment tasks which will provide a reliable basis for assessing students' attainment in the National Curriculum; (paragraphs 13, 53, 166, 171)

providing more subject specific information in individual education plans and written reports to parents; (paragraphs 49, 69, 70, 158)

ensuring that all marking of students' work is accompanied by comments that inform students how they can improve their work (paragraphs 40, 53)

III. Meeting fully the statutory requirement of the Agreed Syllabus for religious education at Key Stages 3 and 4. (paragraphs 44, 45, 234, 235, 239)

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

1 Sandringham is a larger than average, oversubscribed maintained comprehensive secondary school on the edge of the Green Belt in the north east of St Albans. It opened in 1988 as a result of the amalgamation of two schools. Changes in the local education authority's admissions criteria have enabled the school to strengthen its role as a community school and increasingly to draw students from the immediate locality. As a result of its popularity, the school is expanding in numbers. Currently there are 1095 boys and girls students on roll, of whom 230 are in the sixth form. The school works in partnership with two neighbouring schools and a local college to provide a wide range of courses for sixth form students.

2 The school is located in an advantaged area of privately owned houses but also educates students from council estates. Though the social and economic circumstances of the students are mixed they are above average overall. This is reflected in the proportion of students who are entitled to free school meals which is below the national average. The majority of students are of white British heritage. Students represent the full range of ability but the overall spread of ability is in line with

the national average. The school has identified an average proportion of its students, 14.5 per cent, as having special educational needs. Of these, 16 (1.5 per cent) have statements of special educational need. This is below the national average.

3 The school's mission is to enable "everybody to be somebody" through recognising and developing students' individual abilities and personal motivation; developing students' confidence and belief in themselves as successful young people; providing an exciting environment in which students will develop a love of learning; setting and celebrating the achievement of high personal goals.

4 The school has not yet agreed its targets for 2000 for Key Stage 3 or the sixth form but is aiming to achieve 68 per cent grades A*-C in GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4.

Key Indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	90	81	171

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	56	71	77
	Girls	63	59	64
	Total	119	130	141
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	70(70)	78(76)	82(80)
	National	63(65)	62(60)	55(56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	39(35)	50(54)	46(42)
	National	28(35)	38(36)	23(27)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	64	67	84
	Girls	72	63	75
	Total	136	130	159
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	79 (72)	76 (65)	94 (78)
	National	64(62)	64(64)	60(62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	39 (39)	50 (39)	48 (47)
	National	31(31)	37(37)	28(31)

¹

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

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

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

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	89	74	163

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to C
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	54	84	86
	Girls	53	72	73
	Total	107	156	159
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	66(59.5)	96(100)	97(100)
	National	47.8(44.0)	88.4(87.5)	93.9(93.4)

Attainment in the Sixth Form³

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examinations in the latest reporting year:

Year	Male	Female	Total
1999	56	67	123

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	15.9(14.5)	17.0(19.5)	16.7 (17.6)	1.9(3.5)	2.7(2.7)	2.3(3.0)
National			(17.6)			(2.6)

Number in final year of approved vocational qualifications and percentage of *such students* who achieved these qualifications:

	Number	% Success Rate
School	32	84
National		

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

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

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year : 1998

		%
Authorised Absence	School	5.9
	National comparative data	7.9
Unauthorised Absence	School	0.7
	National comparative data	1.1

Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year : 1998

	Number
Fixed period	25
Permanent	1

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is :

	%
Very good or better	39.1
Satisfactory or better	98.9
Less than satisfactory	1.1

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

5 The attainment of students on entry to the school in Year 7 matches the national average. The 1999 Key Stage 2 National Curriculum assessment results in English, mathematics and science were above average at level 4 but in line with the average for level 5 or above. The scores of the Cognitive Ability Tests, administered to students on entry, show a normal distribution with an average score of 99. First hand inspection evidence shows the attainment of students to be above the national average in English, mathematics and science but to match the average in all other subjects.

6 By the time students reach the end of Key Stage 3, their attainment is above average overall. Averaged together, the 1999 National Curriculum test results in English, mathematics and science were well above the national average for all maintained schools and above the average for schools with a similar intake. However, the percentage of students at both levels 5 and 6 or above in English was significantly lower than in mathematics and science. Lesson observation and the scrutiny of the work of students currently in Year 9 shows attainment to be above the average in English, mathematics and science.

7 The 1999 results of the end of Key Stage 3 teachers' assessments in other National Curriculum subjects were well above average in most subjects. However, first hand inspection evidence shows attainment to be above, rather than well above, the national average in most subjects. The exceptions are information technology where standards are very high in relation to the national average and physical education where attainment matches the expectation. The levels reached in religious education are below the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. The difference between the standards shown in the teachers' assessment and those reflected in inspection evidence at the end of Key Stage 3 at the time of the teachers' assessments in 1999 is attributable in part to the inconsistencies in assessment procedures which are described fully in other sections of this report.

8 At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment at GCSE is well above the national average for all schools and above the average for similar schools. The 1999 GCSE average points score of 44.8 compared with the national average points score of 38.0 for all maintained schools, and with that of 42.0 for schools with a similar intake.

9 The 1999 GCSE results in English were well above the averages for both all maintained and similar schools. The results in mathematics and science were well above those of all schools and above those of similar schools. First hand inspection evidence of the work of students in Year 11 shows well above average standards in English and science, and above average attainment in mathematics. The results in most other subjects in 1999 were well above the national averages and at least matched the average in all apart from German where the results were below average. Inspection evidence shows attainment to be above average in most subjects. The

exceptions are design and technology, geography and information technology where standards are well above average, and religious education where attainment is below the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus.

10 There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 3. There is, however, a difference in the attainment of boys and girls at the end of Key Stage 4. In 1999 the GCSE average points score of girls was six points higher than that of boys. In 1998 the girls' average points score was five points higher than that of boys.

11 Students' attainment at the end of the sixth form overall is broadly in line with course averages. At GCE Advanced level attainment matches the course averages. In 1998 the average points score of 17.6 matched the national average points score exactly. In 1999 it dropped to 16.7 but remained within the median range of scores. Inspection evidence shows attainment to match course averages in most subjects. In English, art, geography and physical education, however, standards are above average, and in design and technology and information technology, they are well above average. Attainment at GNVQ is above average with all students gaining a qualification and the great majority doing so with distinction or merit. A high percentage of students are very successful in the examinations of the Royal Society of Arts, and there is also a very high level of success in the examination of the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.

12 Since the last inspection attainment at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 has improved. The average National Curriculum level at the end of Key Stage 3 has improved by 0.32 levels (equivalent to more than six months' progress), and at the end of Key Stage 4, the average total GCSE points score per student has risen from 41.4 in 1995 to 44.8 in 1999. Attainment at GCE Advanced level has also improved overall. The average points score has risen from 13.5 in 1995 to 16.7 in 1999. During that period the results have fluctuated reaching a high of 19.4 in 1997. However, the number of candidates entered for GCE Advanced level has increased very significantly since 1995 in line with the school's policy of admitting students with a fairly wide range of prior attainment at GCSE to study at this level.

13 The raising of attainment is a clear priority within school development planning and a range of well conceived and planned procedures are being successfully developed to raise standards. These are based upon the very detailed analysis and effective use of performance data to track students' progress and attainment systematically from the time they enter the school in Year 7. This data is also used exceptionally well to measure value added, identify any differences in attainment between groups of students and to set realistically ambitious targets for attainment at the end of Key Stage 4. Students are further helped to raise their standards through the well conceived and targeted mentoring procedures which are particularly effective in Year 11, and by the regular opportunities for them, together with their parents, to discuss their progress and attainment and to set targets for improvement throughout their time at the school. The inconsistencies in the teachers' assessment in some subjects at Key Stage 3 weaken the basis for target setting.

14 The appointment of a literacy co-ordinator, the development of a literacy policy and establishment of a literacy steering group involving all faculties has led to the development of effective strategies to promote and develop literacy across the curriculum. The influence of this work is evident in the displays of key words around the school and in the good practice in various subject areas - such as in a Year 9 mathematics lesson where students discussed appropriate language for the questionnaire which they were devising.

15 At all stages students' literacy skills develop very well and they reach a high standard of competence. Speaking and listening skills are well developed through the opportunities offered in many subjects. In geography in particular, students contribute very effectively and competently within class discussions and in making speeches and

presentations to the class. In science lessons students make extended responses to some questions and there are very good presentations by sixth form students at GCE Advanced level. In modern foreign languages students' spoken language is less well developed than other language skills because of students' reluctance to take risks. Students mostly listen attentively to each other and to the teacher and show good understanding in the responses they make.

16 Reading develops well. In English and in science students read aloud fluently and with expression. In most subjects students read and interpret information effectively in researching their work. In design and technology students use reference books and information technology sources readily and effectively, especially when researching their projects in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

17 Students use writing effectively for a wide range of purposes - notes, annotations, diaries, letters, essays, stories - and they often make good use of word processing to improve presentation.

18 In modern foreign languages writing is unusually good with many students writing confidently and higher attaining students producing a rich variety of texts. In geography from Year 9 there are many examples of extended writing, of effective drafting and re-drafting and of competent note-making. Similarly in art students' notes and annotations are well done and show that students are thinking about and evaluating their work. Writing is generally well presented and writing development across the key stages is good.

19 The level of competence of students in dealing with the everyday demands of numeracy is good overall and very good in design and technology, information technology and mathematics. Numeracy skills are very good in geography at Key Stage 3 and excellent at Key Stage 4. Students handle number and measurement, mentally, orally and in writing satisfactorily in art, physical education and science. They do well in mathematics and very well in design and technology and information technology. In geography their skill is excellent, such as when using scales to calculate distance on maps and making evaluative judgements based on numerical and geographical data. Calculators are used extensively and accurately. Spatial development is excellent in art and very good in design and technology where very good use is made of isometric and perspective drawings in Key Stage 4. It is also very good in information technology and physical education. In making sense of information presented numerically and graphically and handling statistical information, students are excellent in geography, very good in information technology and mathematics and good in history and science.

20 Students make good progress at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form and very good progress at Key Stage 4. Progress is well supported in all subjects by the teachers' good and at best very good subject expertise, clear and shared learning objectives, enthusiastic, clear and well-targeted teaching, high expectations and the very good learning ethos in lessons. In the great majority of cases progress is also very strongly promoted by very good behaviour and the strong motivation of students to succeed. There are also a number of other important factors which support progress across the curriculum but which are particularly evident in certain subjects. For example, the good match of work to students' learning requirements features strongly in most lessons and is particularly well exemplified in English, science, history and geography. Highly skilled use is made of group work for instance, in English and history to provide appropriate levels of challenge and to ensure that students progress well through well targeted support and guidance. This practice is exceptionally good. Progress is also well supported in most subjects by a vigorous pace of work and good progression in the learning. This is evident for example, in geography where most lessons are characterised by a brisk and challenging pace, in design and technology where learning is well planned to provide consistent approaches to enable students to develop a good understanding of the design, make and evaluation process, and in art where well organised studies ensure good progression and continuity in the learning. Good procedures for assessment are another important factor. For instance, the good progress made in science is strongly promoted by the very good use of assessment to monitor progress and to gauge the effectiveness of teaching and curriculum provision.

21 There are some instances when progress is not as well supported. For instance, it is often slower in mathematics at Key Stages 3 and 4 because of the slow pace of lessons with students spending too long on one task and at times, too long

on copying notes. In modern languages too, whilst progress in many lessons is good, there are occasions when learning is slower because there is a lack of pace and challenge in the teaching. There are also lessons in modern languages when progress is hindered because too little use is made of the language being taught, and at Key Stage 4, by the work not being sufficiently well matched to the learning requirements of students in mixed ability classes. Progress in English, history and geography is impeded during the early part of Key Stage 3 by insufficient challenge and rigour in the teaching and a lack of skills development in Years 7 and 8. In religious education the progress of the majority of students at Key Stages 3 and 4 is unsatisfactory as a result of a lack of continuity in their learning which in turn arises from the curriculum arrangements for the teaching of religious education.

22 Overall, pupils with special educational needs make good progress. They make very good progress at Key Stage 3 and good progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. This is an improvement on the last inspection. Good progress is facilitated by the commitment and skills of teachers in ensuring that they are well supported in their learning across the curriculum. Practice is especially effective in English, design and technology, information technology, history, geography and modern languages with very close attention being given to ensuring that work is well matched to students' learning requirements and that students are well supported in their learning. The assistance provided by the learning support department through withdrawal for additional help with literacy skills, teaching in small groups and the provision of in-class support also makes a significant contribution to the pupils' progress especially at Key Stage 3. Learning is inhibited in a few lessons by the lack of in-class support.

23 The good progress made at Key Stage 4 is reflected in the attainment of students with special educational needs at GCSE where in 1999 all entered gained a grade in the A*-G range. Good progress is also made in the improvement of reading ages, the development of literacy and numeracy skills and in the attainment of targets on individual education plans. Many students move down the stages of assessment resulting in their successful removal from the special educational needs register and many continue their education into the sixth form.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

24 Students' attitudes to learning are very good. There has been an improvement since the last inspection when attitudes were good. During lessons, students respond attentively and join in discussions with interest. They undertake written work with determination. Students at all ability levels, including those with special educational needs, take pride in their written work and join in group activities with enthusiasm. Students, including those with special educational needs, are generally confident, well motivated and keen to make progress. As they move up through the school, students develop an increasing capacity for independent study in all subjects. Particularly good examples of investigative and research work were observed in science, information technology, art and in much of the sixth form work.

25 The very good standards of behaviour identified in the previous report have been sustained. Students respond well to the school's strong commitment to high standards. This contributes significantly to successful lessons and the smooth running of other activities throughout the school day. Students are polite to others and help keep the school environment tidy. The incidence of misbehaviour and bullying is low. Firm action is taken to deal with any problems which arise. Last year there was one permanent and 25 fixed term exclusions. This is about average for secondary schools of a similar size.

26 Relationships throughout the school are very good. Students respond very well to the excellent example set by teachers and other staff. They are successful in securing a friendly and purposeful working environment throughout the school. Students show helpful attitudes to teachers and to fellow students of all ages. A strong feature is collaborative working in groups or teams in all subject areas. Particularly good examples were observed in information technology and in physical education lessons. The very small number of students from ethnic minority groups integrate fully

into the life of the school. Students demonstrate respect for the values, feelings and beliefs of others.

27 Students' personal development is very good. Students are very responsive to the many opportunities they have to show initiative and help others during lessons across all areas of the curriculum. Particularly good examples were seen in history, design and technology and drama. They show maturity when carrying out research activities and investigative work using the library and computer facilities. They make very good use of the extensive range of school clubs, of residential and other visits, including several in Europe, to widen their knowledge and experience.

28 Students undertake a range of responsibilities such as supporting younger colleagues, helping in the library and undertaking monitoring duties. Those who participate do so with commitment and enthusiasm in year and school council meetings and in the peer counselling service. Students in the sixth form undertake a wide range of duties in supporting work in faculties and working with younger students. Substantial help is given to charities and students are currently organising a major fund raising effort in support of the Millennium Charity Appeal. Through the many opportunities provided to take part in music, drama and sporting activities they develop a wide range of skills and a good level of self-confidence.

29 Virtually all parents are delighted with the high behaviour standards and with the attitudes and values which the school promotes. There is only a relatively small incidence of misbehaviour. Overall students' response to teaching is highly commendable and makes a significant contribution to learning.

Attendance

30 Attendance is very good. A drive to raise the already good standards has been very successful. Attendance levels in the autumn term increased to 95 per cent. Unauthorised absence has been reduced to 0.7 per cent. Such achievements are much better than the national average for secondary schools. Students arrive punctually. During the day they move quickly round the school so that maximum use is made of time for lessons. The school's overall performance on attendance is having a positive impact in raising attainment.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

31 The quality of teaching is very good overall. In the lessons observed during the inspection, it was at least satisfactory in 99 per cent and in over 76 per cent it was good or better. Thirty-one per cent of the teaching seen was very good and eight per cent was excellent. Teaching was only unsatisfactory in two of the 189 lessons observed. Teaching is very good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and it is good at Key Stage 3. The amount of good and better teaching has increased since the last inspection.

32 There is a very high proportion of good or better teaching in all subjects amounting to well over 70 per cent in the great majority. Practice is of exceptionally high quality in information technology, art and GCE Advanced level physics where all of the teaching seen was good, and a high proportion was very good. Teaching is also very good in English, drama, design and technology, geography, history, music, physical education and GCE Advanced level biology. The one unsatisfactory lesson in geography was untypical of the teaching of the department which was very good and at times excellent. The unsatisfactory lesson observed in psychology should be set against another good lesson observed in which very effective use was made of information technology to present information in an interesting way.

33 Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding is good and skilfully shared

with the students along with their enthusiasm for their subject. Good subject expertise is a major reason for the good progress made by students especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. There are instances when a lack of subject expertise restricts progress at Key Stage 3. For example, in English the lack of subject expertise results in important teaching points being missed in some lessons and in subject specific skills not being taught to a sufficiently high level in history and geography in Years 7 and 8.

34 Lesson planning is very good. In most subjects it establishes clear and appropriate expected outcomes, logical steps in learning, varied activities and assessment opportunities. Such planning is well exemplified in design and technology, information technology and music, and at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, in English, history and geography. There are, however, instances where planning is not as detailed. For instance, in religious education there is insufficient focus on subject specific learning outcomes particularly where the subject is being delivered in a cross-curricular way. Similarly in both English and history the planning for some lessons in Years 7 and 8 does not establish clear learning objectives and is insufficiently focused on offering challenging work to all students.

35 The teachers' expectations are consistently and realistically high in the great majority of subjects. Much is expected of students, especially in taking responsibility and initiative in their learning. This is exemplified particularly well in history where students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are expected to think deeply and work independently at a mature level, in art where much is expected in terms of students having their own ideas and setting themselves high standards and in information technology where they are expected to use the Internet for research. Expectations in mathematics, however, vary and are sometimes too low. For example, students are often not sufficiently challenged through searching and open ended questioning. When such questioning occurs the benefit to students' progress is noticeable. Expectations also vary in design and technology with the appropriately high levels expected at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form contrasting with sometimes too little being expected at Key Stage 3.

36 Teaching methods and organisational strategies are very successful in promoting progress in the great majority of lessons. Most are characterised by clear teaching and well structured learning which involves a good range of interesting and challenging activities. The exceptionally good use which is often made of pair and group work is a particularly strong feature across many subjects in providing appropriate challenge and a good match of work to students' learning requirements. Subject specific skills are fostered well, for example, through research in science, the strong emphasis on the use of historical sources from Year 9 onwards in history and the continuous focus on the development of skills in physical education. In modern languages students are given a secure base on which to develop their reading and writing skills. However, they are not always as well supported in the development of speaking skills. The overall range of teaching methods is good in mathematics, but in a number of lessons there is insufficient challenge as result of the lack of variety in activities and often through too little opportunity to learn through discussion.

37 The teaching of students with special educational needs is good, with teachers very aware of students' difficulties and the work well planned to meet their learning needs. Teachers use a range of appropriate activities and techniques which match the strategies in the individual education plans. Students with special educational needs are also enabled to progress well because of the skilled teaching of the special educational needs co-ordinator and the very effective support of the learning support assistants who work with individuals or small groups in collaboration with the teacher. The good knowledge of special educational needs staff is reflected in the thorough lesson planning and expectations of students that are consistently and realistically high. Short individual sessions are used to good effect, enabling students to understand and

complete their assignments as well as encouraging the formation of good work habits. Teachers make lessons interesting through good use of a range of well chosen resources. Student management is very skilled and the assessment of their progress thorough and systematic. The learning support staff provide effective links between all staff for students on the register of special needs.

38 The learning of all students is very well supported by very good classroom relationships and very high standards of behaviour. Teachers' management of students is highly skilled and well founded on the high level of a concern for the individual students' progress and well-being. Any deviation in lessons is dealt with quickly and unobtrusively.

39 In the great majority of lessons activities are well timed to sustain an appropriate momentum in the learning. Time is used particularly well to support practical work. For instance, in science and design and technology it is monitored closely to ensure the completion of tasks within the one hour lesson period. In most cases, resources are used very well especially to stimulate interest and promote subject specific skills. The very good use made of information technology across the curriculum to support the development of a range of learning skills is a particular strength.

40 The use of day to day assessment and monitoring of students' progress is good overall. However, the quality of marking varies both within and between subjects. At best it is well done with helpful formative comments and targets set for improvement. But this is not always the case resulting in students not being given sufficient guidance on how to improve their work. Records of assessment are clear and used systematically to track progress and to set realistic targets for attainment. Assessment outcomes are also used well to adapt teaching and the curriculum to meet learning needs. Practice in science is exceptionally strong in this respect. The procedures for the assessment of the progress of students with special educational needs are systematic and thorough.

41 Good use is made of homework to complement work in lessons and to assist the development of individual study skills. In the great majority of subjects much importance is attached to homework as an integral part of learning. For example, it is used well at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form in English to support work in class or to prepare for work to come, and in geography and history to develop students' skills in research, problem solving and extended writing. Much good use is made of information technology in homework across the curriculum both in research and in the presentation of work. Only occasionally are there inconsistencies in the quality of the work set and these usually occur in Years 7 and 8. For example, in both English and history the homework set in these years is often to finish work begun in class rather than being carefully planned to extend learning.

The curriculum and assessment

42 The school provides a good, innovative curriculum which meets the needs and aspirations of its students well by providing them with a broad range and choice of

subjects and experiences. As architects of their own learning, students of different abilities and interests begin to shape their future development from an early stage by choosing courses which they find interesting, relevant and motivating. Underpinning the construction of the curriculum is the strong desire to enable students to achieve both the highest academic standards of which they are capable and to develop a feeling of personal worth and success. It succeeds in so doing through both the taught curriculum and also through other aspects of school life such as the pastoral work of form tutors and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The excellent provision for information technology also enriches students' learning significantly. This is a major achievement since the last inspection when the school's arrangements for this subject were unsatisfactory.

43 The governing body has approved a full range of policies that support the effective delivery of the curriculum. Governors review these, and monitor the curriculum, through an active curriculum and student welfare group. They work well with members of the school staff, for example, receiving presentations from heads of faculty or leaders of working groups, and consulting widely where appropriate. They have overseen the implementation of improvements identified at the time of the last inspection.

44 The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is good overall. All students follow a compulsory core of all the subjects of the National Curriculum and personal and social education. The increased time for art and music since the last inspection enables students to reach above expectations by the end of the key stage. In Years 7 and 8, the subjects of English, history, geography (and in Year 7, religious education) are combined into an integrated learning course which occupies about a quarter of the timetable. The nature of this part of the curriculum and the teaching of all subjects mainly by one teacher eases the transition from primary schools. However, the school recognises that the planning and teaching of the constituent parts is not as effective in Years 7 and 8 as in Year 9 when subjects are taught separately and is in the process of investigating ways of raising standards further in these areas of the curriculum. Arrangements for the provision of German have improved since the last inspection. All students now study two languages in Year 8 which gives them choice thereafter. In Year 9 students decide how much time they will spend on different subjects by adding short modules to their basic curriculum either to broaden and extend or provide opportunities for consolidation of prior learning. This caters well both for higher attainers and students with special educational needs. Because the length of time spent on each module is short, students have a chance to rethink continually the direction in which they want their education to go, without significant detrimental impact. As a result of this system of organisation the time allocated to subjects is variable, but most students make choices which enable them at least to achieve the standards expected for their age by the end of the key stage, and often above. The way in which religious education is integrated into the curriculum does not, however, enable students to reach the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus.

45 The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is very good, offering much more flexibility than is usual. All students study a compulsory curriculum which includes English, mathematics, science, humanities, religious education, personal and social education, physical education, technological education, expressive, creative and performing arts and a modern language. By following additional specialist modules students can put together a course which will lead to entry into between 7-12 GCSE subjects or GNVQ examinations. Evidence of the success of this curriculum is reflected in the improved examination results since its introduction. As at Key Stage 3, however, most students do not meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus in religious education and few choose to take it as a GCSE subject.

46 Sixth form students are provided with a good curriculum from the school's own resources and those of other neighbouring institutions. Students of a wider ability range than is normally found in a sixth form are well catered for. Appropriate time is given for academic and vocational subjects to enable students to meet the requirements of the courses. Most students take three subjects at GCE Advanced level; a few take four or more. A good range of traditional academic and vocational subjects enables most students to get the choice of course they want. The consortium arrangements broaden and extend choice although there is some reluctance from some students to join courses in the consortium as they prefer to stay at Sandringham. Consortium arrangements do lead to a small amount of disruption and occasional lateness but overall they are well managed. Personal, social and health education lessons provide good guidance on study skills, time and money management and general issues relating to life after school. Religious education days are an appropriate way of meeting their entitlement in this aspect and generally these are appreciated by

the students. Extensive extra-curricular activities help to deliver key skills of communication, numeracy, information technology, problem solving and team work. The community leadership scheme contributes to developing qualities needed for employment and further study and is an important contributory factor to the very good careers guidance.

47 The very good programme of careers education and guidance prepares students well for curricular choices from Year 9 and for future job and career decisions. Work shadowing in Years 7 and 8 provides early opportunities for students to gain experience of a workplace and work experience in Year 11 is an opportunity for students to gain a further insight into the challenges and opportunities they might face in the future. Thorough and useful careers education in the sixth form includes previous sixth formers coming back to talk about their experience at university and in work.

48 The provision for personal and social education is excellent throughout the school. Students find the programme, which includes very good provision for health and sex education, helpful. Since the last inspection improvements have been introduced to the drugs education scheme. A variety of methods, including contributions from the school nurse, police liaison officer and other specialists, make lessons interesting and enjoyable.

49 Students with special educational needs are given good access to the same curriculum provision as other students as a result of high quality support from the learning support department and much good teaching across the curriculum. The school meets the requirements of the special educational needs Code of Practice with good provision made for its students on the register of special educational needs. It is very good and particularly successful for those students in Years 7 and 8 who have difficulty in transferring to the different ethos and demands of a secondary school. The provision stipulated in statements of special education needs is met effectively. Individual education plans are in place, though many targets are insufficiently subject specific to be used effectively in lesson planning, or to be measurable thereby facilitating accurate monitoring of progress. However, all staff are well informed of these targets and, generally, they are used well by teachers.

50 The equality of opportunity and of students' access to the curriculum is very good throughout the school. Students of all abilities are well provided for. Students with learning difficulties have extra support through "catch up" groups whilst the more able have opportunities for accelerated learning in particular modules of the curriculum and in the "flying high" club at lunchtimes. The school's grouping arrangements support good progress. Setting by ability occurs in mathematics from Year 7, in modern languages from Year 8 and science from Year 10. In other subjects the range of ability is well catered for through planning and resourcing lessons to match students' prior attainment. The school is active in addressing relative differences in the performance of boys and girls. The English department has been successful in raising the attainment of boys and the geography department, for example, provides learning resources which are equally motivating and appealing to boys and girls.

51 Planning for continuity and progression of learning is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Departmental schemes of work ensure coverage of the National Curriculum and enable students to build steadily or broaden their prior learning. Good knowledge of sixth form course and examination requirements provides an effective framework for progression. Continuity and progression in religious education is not well developed at Key Stages 3 and 4. Progression between Key Stages 3, 4 and the sixth form is good but the underdeveloped curricular links with primary schools sometimes lead to repetition or lack of challenge in the work. Continuity and progression at Key Stage 3 is weakened by the gaps which occur in the continuous delivery of the constituent components of the integrated learning programme.

52 The majority of students take advantage of the excellent extra-curricular provision made by almost all staff. Students and their parents value the opportunities of enrichment provided by numerous opportunities in a very good range of sports, art, music and drama. Letters of commendation to the registered inspector from professional artists recount the enthusiasm and receptiveness of students to the programme of musical masterclasses held annually during the Sandringham Festival. An annual "activities week" offers students a wide range of special opportunities. Information technology awareness weeks are organised for each year group and Year 10 students have the opportunity to participate in an information technology residential trip. In support of language development the school organises trips to France and Germany. Residential "bonding" trips to the Peak District support students' personal development as does a sixth form outdoor pursuits weekend in Wales.

53 Two key issues in assessment were identified at the time of the last inspection. The first was to develop further the monitoring of examination performance, intake ability profiles and the relative differences in performance of groups of students so that appropriate teaching and learning strategies can be provided. The second was to ensure the development of an assessment system which relates progress to the National Curriculum. The school has made very good progress and its procedures for the assessment of students' work and progress are good overall. The school has a suitably broad range of strategies for collecting information on students' attainment through the use of standardised tests, examinations and end of unit or key stage tests. Students also contribute to the evaluation of their attainment and progress through self assessment of their work. The recently revised policy provides a good structure for assessment and good guidance to departments on marking and correcting of students' work, and recording their attainment. There is, however, some inconsistency in the quality and helpfulness of marking. The new system of recording prior attainment data in mark books gives teachers an instant indication of whether progress is being sustained. Individual students' records, for example, in design and technology, art and science provide further useful information. An outstanding feature of the procedures for the assessment of information technology is the contribution that all teachers make to the judgement of students' capability. This is rare. A weaker feature of the systems of assessment is the lack of rigour in procedures in the integrated learning course in Years 7 and 8. Though teachers' assessments are based on the levels of attainment in the National Curriculum which will be reported to parents for the first time this year, the tests and tasks which are used do not always provide a sound basis on which to judge the range and level of attainment.

54 The school now makes good use of assessment information to raise attainment and improve the quality of teaching and curriculum planning. Information is used to set targets for students though some of these targets are not yet very subject specific. At Key Stage 4 an analysis of GCSE science results led to the adoption of an alternative examination course in which students could attain better results. Similarly, scrutiny of assessment data in design and technology revealed weaknesses in curriculum planning which did not enable students to attain equally high standards in all aspects of design and technological capability.

55 The statutory requirements for the assessment and review of the progress made by students with statements of special educational need are fully met. Regular assessments are made of those students who have particular difficulty with literacy and these are monitored effectively by the head of learning support to ensure that progress is promoted.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

56 The school makes very good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students. Adults in the school provide very good role models for pupils and succeed in promoting a purposeful learning environment where students' personal development is taken seriously and valued. Provision for spiritual development is good, for moral and cultural development it is very good and for social development it is excellent. Issues in the previous inspection report have been addressed. Excellent progress has been made in firmly establishing a two minute silence at the beginning of each school day as part of the daily collective worship

programme to encourage a reflective approach in students' learning. The school now meets statutory requirements for collective worship. Very good progress has been made recently with regard to developing the school's policy for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and in incorporating this into the documentation of pastoral and extra-curricular planning and within the majority of subject areas. The recently produced, exceptionally strong and clear guidance and exemplification for the support of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the consequent staff training has significantly raised whole-school awareness.

57 Opportunities for spiritual development are well supported within subjects. For example, in geography students of all ages are challenged to reflect on the role of religious and spiritual factors with regard to the way in which people live and students have opportunities to consider the beauty of the natural world and humankind's responsibility especially when studying physical geography. In English, teachers are aware of the way in which their subject content, particularly in literature, raises issues of spiritual significance. In history, students are given opportunities to think and employ empathy in the consideration of the views of others. However, there are a few missed opportunities in some subject areas. For example in science although opportunities to discuss spiritual issues have been identified this was not evident in the lessons seen.

58 The collective worship programme, based around a weekly year group assembly and a "thought for the day", includes a daily two minute silence. This enables students to pray or think seriously about the particular focus and makes a significant contribution to the quality of provision. The majority of this programme is of a broadly Christian character but other faiths and life stances are also taken seriously. The termly religious education days for all year groups make a very positive contribution to the opportunities that the school provides to address issues of spiritual and moral concern and to consider religious responses to them.

59 Students' moral development is very well supported throughout the school and especially through the high standards of moral values and expectations of behaviour which are consistently promoted. Teachers help students to understand the difference between right and wrong and to consider the consequences of their actions on other people. The Sandringham code displayed around the school enables students to understand what is expected of them within the school. The school is effective in fostering such values as honesty, tolerance and respect for self and others. Religious education and the personal, health and social education programme provide a range of opportunities for students to address issues of moral and ethical concern. Other subjects also support moral development through aspects of their curriculum content, such as in design and technology where, particularly in Key Stage 4, students discuss the moral dilemmas which arise from the use of various solutions or materials in project work. In information technology, students consider possible inappropriate use in areas such as e-mail and access to websites and address the impact of information technology on individuals and society.

60 There is excellent support for students' social development. The very positive ethos gives students a strong sense of belonging to the school and very positive feelings about the school and about each other. Very good relationships are reflected in the ways in which students are respectful, confident and polite. They are encouraged to work co-operatively and older students are encouraged to support the learning of younger ones both in lessons and around the school. The existence of the "team spirit" is evident in many aspects of school life and effective collaborative group work was seen in a wide range of other lessons. Opportunities to participate in the school and year councils nurture this sense of belonging and a recognition of rights and responsibilities within the school. The sixth form community leadership programme provides a wide range of opportunities for service in the school and local communities. For example, some help in the library or resources areas, others provide classroom support for younger students or visit local primary schools to work with children. These opportunities are taken very seriously by the vast majority of sixth form students. The

peer counselling service is much appreciated and enables students to show care and concern for one another. Fund raising opportunities for local, national and international charities often involve students across the school in organising and working together to achieve a positive outcome. The religious education days enable students to meet a range of people and to make visits to a number of places of worship and they contribute well to developing students' social skills as they meet and relate to each other and a wide range of people.

61 The provision for students to appreciate their own culture remains very good and there has been an improvement since the previous inspection in opportunities to explore a wider range of cultural experiences through more detailed planning and mapping of opportunities across the whole curriculum. The music curriculum and extra-curricular provision is strong in supporting the development of skills, understanding and enjoyment of a wide range of musical styles. Art offers insights into the minds of artists and develops understanding of different artistic styles. Food technology plans into its programme a number of multi-cultural meals and addresses religious and dietary concerns linked to different cultures. Religious education days provide very good opportunities to deepen students' understanding of their own and other people's cultures by, for example, addressing different religious festivals and visiting places of worship. In geography when studying less economically developed countries opportunities are taken to help them gain insights into the cultural background of these countries. The school library has a wider range of books from different cultures than it had previously. A recent addition to the library has been a sixth form fiction section to encourage older students to read widely, for enjoyment and increase their knowledge of their own and other cultures through fiction. The school's regular involvement in the Edinburgh Festival provides a very special opportunity for cultural enrichment.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

62 Procedures for monitoring students' progress and personal development are good. The continuous assessment arrangements provide much helpful information. An increasing emphasis placed on target setting is proving to be very effective. There are efficient monitoring systems in place in nearly all faculty areas. However, recording of progress in religious education is unsystematic.

63 Very good advice is given to students when making choices for curriculum modules, GCSE options and sixth form studies. The guidance given about careers and higher education is of a high quality. Visitors from universities and employers provide specialist help in support of such work.

64 Very good arrangements are in place for promoting high standards of behaviour. The discipline policy has recently been updated following consultation with students, parents and staff. Strong emphasis is placed on the importance of the code of conduct. The school's high expectations are made clear and students understand and respect the rewards and sanction arrangements.

65 The procedures for monitoring attendance and punctuality are very good. This year's school development plan includes proposals aimed at raising attendance to 95 per cent which have already been met. Parents and students are well advised about the importance of high attendance levels. Registration and follow-up procedures are very effective. There is excellent liaison with the education welfare officer who visits fortnightly.

66 The provision for students' well-being, health and safety is excellent. High priority is given to safety issues and students are taught to exercise due care when handling materials and equipment. Effective systems are in place to deal with child protection issues. An outstanding feature of the school is the high quality of pastoral support to all students. The comprehensive personal and social education programme

includes effective advice on sex and drugs education. Arrangements for induction of Year 7 students and for supporting students with special educational needs are very good. Impressive arrangements are in place for student welfare, including the peer counselling system, and the work of year group councils and of the school council. This is supplemented by advice from visiting specialists, including the school nurse, the police liaison officer and the link advisor for special needs.

67 Students and parents value greatly the high standard of support and guidance provided. Students with special educational needs are well supported and encouraged to participate in all school activities. There are good links through the liaison officer with the primary schools and with the educational psychologist and social services department. The quality of pastoral support has been further enhanced since the last inspection. Such features are very influential in helping to raise educational standards.

Partnership with parents and the community

68 There is a very high level of parental satisfaction with the school. Communications have been further improved since the last inspection. The very good relationships between parents and the school have a beneficial impact on learning. Parents of students with statements of special educational needs attend the annual review meeting and are involved in the setting of new annual targets for individual education plans.

69 The school has a welcoming atmosphere and staff are readily available for informal discussions. Very good information is given to parents. The prospectus and governors' annual report are of a high quality and give extensive information about the work of the school. Regular newsletters contain details about forthcoming events. The annual written reports include details of curriculum areas covered during the year and detailed information about students' progress and attitudes to learning. Information on students' knowledge and skills in some subjects is less precise, for example, in religious education. The Parent Teacher Association organises a full programme of fund raising and social events. This enables students to benefit from additional equipment and other resources.

70 The involvement of parents in students' learning is very good. Parent/teacher consultation meetings, school productions and other events are well attended. Parents are well appraised about the induction of Year 7 students. They are consulted about students' subject choices as they move up through the school. Parents of students with special educational needs provide valuable support and encouragement. The homework aspects of the home-school agreement were implemented from September. Most parents are pleased with the arrangements but some are concerned that the amount set is too much or inconsistent. Inspection evidence indicates that homework is generally well used as an integral part of the learning programme. The school recognises that there are still some inconsistencies in the amounts set and is examining ways for improvement.

71 Good links with the community make a helpful contribution to learning and personal development. The school has many excellent contacts with universities, colleges and other schools. Contacts with commercial organisations are very helpful in supporting curriculum work, for example, information technology and design and technology. Some musical events are sponsored by local companies. The swimming pool is let to the St Albans Leisure Services and volunteers help with some team sports. Lifelong learning is encouraged by successful classes for local residents attending courses in Spanish and information technology. A number of organisations provide invaluable support for the school's work experience and careers advice programmes. Visitors include local clergy and representatives of other faiths. Very good support is given to charitable organisations.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

72 Most effective leadership and management is a key factor in making

Sandringham a very good school, sustaining high standards of academic achievement and pastoral care and constantly seeking to make further improvements. The school adds value beyond learning. The appropriate framework of aims and policies, combined with a system of open policy making helps everyone to be clear about the school's values and enables all staff to make a full contribution to the school's development. The aims and values strongly permeate the documentation and influence policy formation and decision making. The very strong team spirit creates an atmosphere of shared expectation that teachers will provide stimulating challenging activities and that students will work hard to achieve the highest standard of which they are capable. The school's very strong commitment to equality of opportunity is reflected in its policy and practices, especially in the way in which every child is treated as a special individual. Very good relationships, based on mutual respect, enable staff and students to help each other to make learning an enjoyable and valuable experience which many students remember long after they have left school.

73 Since the last inspection a new headteacher has established herself as a strong presence in the school, providing a very clear sense of purpose and obvious concern for individuals. Her fervent desire to perpetuate the Sandringham vision to make individuals feel that "everybody can be somebody" is evident, for example, in the way in which she has undertaken a timetabled commitment to supporting students with special educational needs in the classroom. The headteacher knows students and staff very well and provides for them academic and pastoral leadership of very high quality. In so doing she secures the respect and full support of governors, staff, parents and students which sustains the development of the school.

74 The headteacher is fully supported by a management team consisting of two deputy heads, three senior teachers and four management consultants. This has addressed the issue of the overload of responsibilities experienced by a smaller management team at the time of the last inspection. This hardworking management team is very effective in providing guidance and support through the line management structure and in generating teamwork of a high professional standard. At middle management level the enthusiasm and strong commitment of staff have contributed significantly to the very good progress the school has made since the last inspection. For example, the excellent steer given to the development of information technology in the curriculum is manifest in the high standards that students attain as a result of this subject being such a well developed constituent across the curriculum. The very high quality of pastoral leadership results in excellent support for students.

75 The head of learning support is enthusiastic and committed to this aspect of the school's work. She manages the department well and is ably supported by the learning support teachers and assistants. The policy, procedures and provision that are now in place, together with the progress made by the students, demonstrate that the school has made good improvement in the provision for students with special educational needs since the last inspection and that, overall, provision for this aspect is good. Improved provision is a continuing objective in the school development plan. All statutory requirements are met in this aspect of the school, as are those of the Code of Practice. The governing body fulfils its role in respect of special needs and the school prospectus gives satisfactory details of its arrangements for students with special educational needs.

76 The governing body has sustained a high level of interest and involvement in the work of the school, developing policies and taking its role as a critical friend very seriously. Individual governors are well placed to make policy decisions as a result of their good knowledge of the work of the school gained through school visits, attendance at the annual staff conference and receiving presentations at governing body meetings. In line with changing priorities and patterns of organization the governing body has modified its committee structure to enable it to fulfil its responsibilities more effectively. All required policies are in place and it meets statutory requirements with the exception of the requirement for religious education at Key Stages 3 and 4.

77 Sandringham is a self-evaluating school with very good systems for monitoring and development planning. Close informal daily contact enables managers to have a good knowledge of the quality of work in their teams. In recognition of the importance of assuring the quality of teaching, learning and pastoral care, the school provides protected time every week for managers to monitor and support the work of their team members. Classroom monitoring has proved to be very valuable in improving consistency of practice, raising standards of teaching and learning and contributing to the professional development of staff. This has been achieved by identifying weaknesses in teaching or inconsistent implementation of policies and in celebrating and sharing successful teaching strategies and expertise. Regular monitoring of the curriculum has also led to the identification, for example, of weaknesses in the development of numeracy which have been addressed in subsequent planning. A systematic analysis of information, for example, from test and examination results, is helping to sharpen the focus for setting targets and providing support for individual students. Parents and students value the opportunity they are given to participate in the review process by giving their views on how successfully the school is meeting its intentions. Students make a further contribution to school development by sharing their perceptions on the quality of teaching through the completion of quick questionnaires, as seen in a GCE Advanced level psychology lesson.

78 The involvement of all staff and governors in the good development process ensure they are clear about the direction in which the school is heading. Since the last inspection the school has improved its school development plan which now contains information on resource implications. Departmental plans which are very closely linked to the school development plan contain appropriate targets and are generally helpful documents which can be used for mapping and monitoring improvements. Staff development issues and spending priorities are not yet included in the development plan of the physical education department.

79 The school has made good progress overall in addressing the key issues for improvement identified during the previous inspection. The issue of developing further the monitoring of examination results and relative differences in the performance of groups of students is now a constant focus. Much work has been done on improving assessment procedures and this year's written reports to parents will contain information on students' level of attainment in National Curriculum. Students with special educational needs are very well supported and special provision is made for the most able. Statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students are fully met. The development of information technology has been most

impressive. The amount of religious education in the curriculum has improved but still does not meet statutory requirements. In almost all other aspects the school has improved or made significant developments. The school's capacity for further improvement is very good.

80 The school benefits from the loyalty and hard work of its excellent administrative, clerical, technical, welfare and maintenance staff who contribute cheerfully and very effectively to the smooth running of the school and the high quality of education it provides.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

81 The match of the number, qualifications and experience of teachers to the demands of the curriculum is good. The overwhelming majority of teachers are graduates, well qualified and experienced, with a very good spread of specialist qualifications. There are 61 full-time teachers with an additional 14 part-time whose hours add up to the equivalent of 6.52 full-time staff. Over a third have more than 20 years teaching experience whilst two-fifths have taught for five years or less. There has been a recent increase in the changeover of staff, due to such factors as promotions and retirements. The balance of experience, expertise and length of service within the teaching body provides a good level of renewal and stability for students. The stability helps to provide continuity and the renewal provides fresh ideas and recent experience of other schools.

82 The level of support and administrative staff is high. Staff are deployed well in providing learning and administrative support and continue to make an excellent contribution to the life and work of the school. However, in science the time allocation for the two part-time technicians is low for a department with eight laboratories. The special educational needs learning support assistants are qualified and experienced. All staff are enthusiastic and highly committed to their students and to the school. Morale of the staff continues to be high and their professionalism is evident in all aspects of school life.

83 The school makes excellent provision for the professional development of all staff, with appropriate training courses and in-service training offered to teaching and non-teaching staff alike. It is prioritised and linked to whole school, departmental and personal needs. The attendance at and balance of courses is monitored and opportunities to share the good practice gained given. Systems are developing to improve this further. The annual staff residential conference makes a significant contribution to provision and impacts successfully on management and classroom experience. For example, the effect of a recent conference which focused on teaching and learning styles is clearly evident in the range of strategies planned within the curriculum. The appraisal process is detailed and valued. Consideration has been given to recent national developments and the school is well placed to incorporate these building on present excellent practice. Very good systems support newly qualified teachers and students undergoing teacher training in the school. The Investors in People award has been gained and successfully renewed.

84 The school site and buildings are well maintained. There is adequate, if cramped, accommodation for all subjects except science where the shortage of

laboratories limits practical work. The design and technology area and the food technology block are in need of refurbishment and upgrading. The tennis courts need resurfacing and some electrical work and re-wiring has been identified as needing attention in a recent local education authority survey. Plans for a new building to improve facilities for art, music, drama, physical education and to address dining needs have been agreed and financed. The library and information technology facilities are strengths of the accommodation. The areas are very attractive, appealing centres of learning. There is a well implemented health and safety policy and a rolling programme of decoration and repair which is effectively administered and monitored. Displays around the school and in classrooms contribute to an effective learning environment.

85 There is a higher than average ratio of computers to students, arranged in clusters and networked in two systems. These make a significant contribution to the learning experience of students. There are adequate relevant books and other resources for students to use across most of the curriculum but in science and history at Key Stage 3 there is a shortage of textbooks. Learning for students with special educational needs is well supported by a wide range of resources including the use of information technology.

86 Since the last inspection there has been good progress in adding a sixth form centre, building a new classroom, providing a new laboratory for science and two mobile classrooms. All issues from the previous inspection have been addressed. An unsuccessful lottery bid for building sports facilities has taken time and effort but has reaped a greater range of community contacts and involvement.

The efficiency of the school

87 Financial planning is good with long term targets and their budget implications in place. The governing body's finance committee works closely with the senior management and faculty heads to plan and monitor expenditure. There is appropriately prudent forward planning with priorities identified to improve the curriculum and accommodation. This sustains the overall good quality of financial planning and management identified in the school's previous inspection.

88 A thorough system of financial planning and monitoring of costs has set right an issue from the school's previous inspection. Very properly the school's management considers priorities to judge where money is most needed. At faculty and school level, good plans include reference to costs and indicate how their effect is to be checked. This strength means that money is spent on the priorities in the school development plan and is evaluated for its impact on provision.

89 The school's budget is tight. This is due mainly to a standstill local education authority budget share and actions to address a negative retrospective adjustment from the previous year. However, very careful planning has led to a modest contingency surplus this year. This is adequate in the light of recent expenditure patterns and the thorough consideration of likely changes to circumstances. Additionally, the school generates considerable income, for example, from premises lettings and successful bids for additional funds from the local education authority to improve the accommodation.

90 The income and expenditure per student are slightly above the national average for schools with sixth forms. Within this budget, priorities are rightly decided after close consultation between the headteacher, staff and governors. Prudent management ensures that account is taken of the needs arising from the school's expansion and continual improvement to its provision of staff and resources. A slightly above average proportion of the budget is spent on teaching and support staff. This appropriately takes account of the experienced teachers, favourable student teacher ratios and, for example, recent provision for heads of faculty and years to monitor the curriculum. Rightly the headteacher and governors see the provision of staff as one of most important factors to provide the best education within the available resources.

91 The proportions of funding spent on learning resources is broadly similar to that in other schools. It is spent prudently and leads to good provision. Funds the school receives from the local education authority for spending on students with special educational needs are supplemented by additional resources. This is well spent, on good provision, for example, to reduce the students requiring extra learning support at Key Stage 3.

92 Good deployment of teaching and support staff ensures that specialist teaching and support are available in all faculties. The proportion of the taught week teachers spend with students is in line with the national average. Combined with a favourable student teacher ratio this gives students the support they need to make good progress.

93 Despite the cramped space and consequent constraints in many parts of the school, very good use is made of accommodation. Learning resources are used very well indeed because teachers and students make the most of what is available. A particular strength is the use made of the library and of information and communications technology across the school.

94 Financial controls and school administration are very good. The bursar and administrative staff have made a prompt and thorough response to the school's most recent financial audit. They keep detailed and thorough checks on expenditure, providing regular and detailed information to the governors' finance committee, the senior management team and faculty budget managers. The school's very efficient administrative staff contribute much to the school's smooth day to day running.

95 Taking into account the average income into the school, the context in which the school works, students' good progress and their achievement of above average standards, the very good quality of the teaching and very efficient use of resources, the school provides very good value for money. This has been sustained since the school's previous inspection.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English and Drama

96 The national tests for English at the end of Key Stage 2 for 1999 indicate that the attainment of students on entry to the school is above the national average for students of similar age.

97 During Key Stage 3 English is taught as part of the integrated learning faculty in Year 7 and Year 8 and by the English faculty in Year 9. All students make satisfactory progress across the key stage and those with special educational needs make good progress. By the end of the key stage students attain above average standards. Students' language skills develop well. Most students are confident in speaking and many are fluent in their use of language in a variety of contexts and groupings. In group and pair work students discuss and negotiate thoughtfully, generally express themselves clearly and most are able to advance and defend a point of view effectively. Contributions to class discussion in are mostly well judged and show awareness of appropriate language. Most Year 9 students discussing the purpose and effects of logos, including the school logo, were able to formulate persuasive and imaginative hypotheses and express them lucidly. Students listen attentively and responsively to each other and to the teacher, showing very good understanding.

98 Reading skills develop well with all students showing increasing competence and improving awareness of implied as well as literal meanings. Reading aloud is well done: expressive, clear and accurate. Students' written work is very good and shows increasing control and accuracy in a range of different kinds of writing. Students make effective notes, drafts and annotations especially in Year 9. The presentation of students' work is good and there is some excellent use of word processing and desktop publishing to enhance the effect of the work.

99 The attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 3 in the national tests in 1998 was close to the national average at both levels 5 and above and 6 and above. Results for 1999 were similar. At level 5, these results were below the average for schools with students from similar backgrounds but above at the higher level 6 and above. These results are in line with standards observed during the inspection.

100 Progress through Key Stage 4 is very good for all students, including those with special educational needs. All aspects of students' language skills continue to develop very well. Students attain standards well above average by the end of the key stage. Speaking and listening skills are displayed in the confident, pertinent and sometimes extended contributions which many students make to class and group work and in the responses that they make. This was seen in a Year 11 group analysing the persuasive techniques used by newspapers and in a Year 10 group discussing prejudice in the story *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

101 Reading develops well and students read and respond to a range of

increasingly demanding texts with understanding and appreciation. Written work demonstrates increasing accuracy, subtlety and length in a variety of forms for a range of audiences. Annotating skills develop particularly well and are a strong feature of the department's practice which contributes to the very good progress which students make. Much work is very effectively word processed and attractively presented.

102 The department's policy is to enter all students for English and most students for English literature at GCSE. All students have opportunity through the modular arrangements to enter for English literature if they wish. In both examinations the percentage of students gaining the higher A*-C grades in 1998 was well above the national average for all maintained and similar schools. In 1999 results in English showed a significant increase with 81 per cent of students attaining a higher grade. In English literature the existing very high attainment was sustained.

103 In the sixth form students make good progress in the GCE Advanced level English literature course and achieve standards above the course expectation. They produce a mature spoken and written response to their work. Written work shows good development with evidence of detailed research and there are some very accomplished pieces of writing. There are well organised notes, annotations, analytical writing and critical responses. Lively seminar discussion between the teacher and students about characterisation and language in *King Lear* in a Year 13 class showed students' mature debating skills, their good understanding and knowledge of their text and their ability to use textual evidence to support their arguments.

104 In the 1998 GCE Advanced level the percentage of students entered for the English literature examinations who attained a high grade A or B grade was well above the national average and almost all students who entered achieved a pass. In 1999 results were close to the national average.

105 At both key stages and in the sixth form students have very positive attitudes to their work, nearly always showing keen interest, responding enthusiastically to the tasks set for them and maintaining very good concentration and focus. Relationships with teachers are very good. Students work well together when asked to do so and show respect for each others' ideas. They are supportive of each other and show appreciation for each others' efforts. They respond very well to their teachers and are orderly and considerate. When opportunities arise students are keen to take initiative or accept responsibility such as in feeding back from a group discussion to the class or in taking a leading role in group activities.

106 In more than 50 per cent of lessons teaching is very good or excellent. In almost 75 per cent of lessons teaching is good, very good or excellent. Teaching is strongest at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. The very good relationships which teachers maintain with students and the high quality of most of the teaching contribute significantly to students' progress, their enthusiastic response to most lessons and their very good behaviour.

107 Most teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and are effective in presenting information and ideas to students. Lesson planning is well supported by the department's schemes of work and resource materials and at Key

Stage 4 and in the sixth form all lessons have clearly defined learning outcomes and there is some very effective joint planning and team teaching. Expectations of what students can achieve are almost always appropriately high and students respond very well to the demands made upon them and to the praise and encouragement with which teachers support their efforts. Teachers use an appropriate range of teaching methods and usually offer students a wide range of stimulating learning activities. There is very good use of pair and group work and also very good whole class teaching. Students are managed very well: the interesting, varied and demanding work and the very good relationships with teachers contribute to the consistently good behaviour. Learning resources, particularly materials produced by the department, are effectively deployed. In nearly all lessons time is well used: students keep working right to the end of lessons at a brisk pace of learning.

108 Written work is marked carefully and teachers' comments suggest ways for students to improve their work. In lessons teachers are good at assessing what students are doing and suggesting directions for improvement. The involvement of students in defining and evaluating their own learning is a very important and effective feature of the department's practice and reflects the inclusiveness of the department's ethos. Homework is used very effectively at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form to support work in class or to prepare for work to come.

109 The English curriculum is well planned to meet the needs of all students. In Years 7 and 8, however, it is not as broad and well-focused as in other years. The organisation of groups is effective in providing appropriate learning environments for students of different levels of prior attainment. Many lessons give rise to opportunities for students to consider wider moral, social, spiritual and cultural issues - often to do with relationships and behaviour represented in the texts which students are reading. Teachers are good at discussing these issues, which are often identified in the lesson planning. The faculty enhances the curriculum through opportunities for all students to take part in extra-curricular activities such as theatre visits, visits to the school from authors and poets and National Year of Reading activities.

110 The head of faculty provides very good leadership and clear direction for the faculty and he is very well supported by his colleagues, who share responsibilities with him. Teachers work very well together and they work hard to maintain a supportive and effective learning environment to help all students reach their full potential. The ethos of the department is to ensure that all students are as fully involved as possible in their own learning and are continually trying to improve their work. Development planning is good: well directed and regularly evaluated. The department's strong emphasis on high achievement for students of all attainment levels contributes to the high standards which students reach at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

111 The faculty has made good progress since the last inspection in addressing the issues raised: strategies to raise the achievement of boys are bearing fruit and at GCSE boys are achieving well above the national average for boys; teaching has improved and all lessons are at least satisfactory and a high proportion are good, very good or excellent.

112 Drama is part of the English and drama faculty. There are four specialist staff - including the part-time 'actor-in-residence' who makes a valuable contribution to the continuing development of the subject. Drama is taught for one lesson a week to all students at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 drama is a very popular GCSE option for students. In the sixth form theatre studies is offered as a GCE Advanced level course.

113 The percentage of students attaining GCSE higher grades of A*-C in drama in both 1998 and 1999 was well above average in comparison with the 1998 results for all maintained schools. A high proportion of students entered for advanced level theatre studies achieved higher grades A/B.

114 Drama is well managed and the teaching is always good and often very good. There is very effective joint planning and team teaching at Key Stage 4. Relationships between teachers and students are very good. Students respond very positively to work in drama, bringing enthusiasm, concentration, self-discipline and determination to do well. Their abilities to adopt and sustain a role with increasing sensitivity and awareness, to use space and movement effectively, to work creatively with each other in groups and to explore ideas and issues through drama all develop very well. The quality of writing, designing and presentation in notebooks of Year 11 and sixth form students is very high and provides evidence of well developed research skills and perceptive analysis and evaluation.

115 Drama makes an important and planned contribution to students' spiritual,

social, moral and cultural development through the opportunities it presents for students to reflect upon themselves and their relationships as well as to put themselves imaginatively in other people's places. Additionally, drama actively supports the personal and social education programme and other cross-curricular work and contributes to primary school liaison through the Year 7 Christmas performance which tours local primary schools. Drama also makes an important contribution to the speaking and listening skills of students.

116 There are many extra-curricular opportunities for students, including junior drama workshops for students in Year 7 and Year 8, the annual school production, visits from touring companies and the very successful visits in the last three years to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe by Year 13 students.

Mathematics

117 The scrutiny of students' work and the National Curriculum test results for students achieving level 4 or above at Key Stage 2 show that the attainment of students on entry to the school in 1999 was above the national average. This is supported by lesson observation and discussions with students.

118 Students, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3. Some students make good progress, as in a Year 7 lesson where the teachers' strategy maintained students' concentration and challenged the higher attainers appropriately through interesting mathematical puzzles. Good progress was also made by students in Year 9 when a good discussion over the size of class intervals in statistics consolidated previous work well. Students do not always progress as well as they can when they spend too long on one extended exercise, for example. The repetitive nature of some set exercises is not challenging many students and some lessons lack pace.

119 The results of the end of the 1999 Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests for students achieving level 5 or above are well above the national average for all maintained schools and above the average for similar schools. The results for students achieving level 6 or above are above the national average for all maintained schools and in line with similar schools. Lesson observation, discussions with students and scrutiny of students' work indicate that attainment is above the national average. There has been little change in attainment over the last three years and there is no significant difference between boys and girls. High attainers understand the nature of the function $y = mx + c$ and produce accurate sketches for different gradients and intercepts. They transform shapes accurately. Average attainers draw good, neat graphs in algebra and accurate straight line graphs for the solution of problems involving constant speed. Low attainers have an understanding of axis and scale, though not all choose the best scale in their work.

120 Students, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 4. The appropriate use of mathematical language and the progressive development of curve sketching by average attaining students shows that some students are progressing as well as they can. There is a lack of rigour in some aspects of students' work, as in the setting out of solutions to problems in trigonometry

and in the definition of the laws of probability in statistics.

121 At the end of Key Stage 4 the number of students earning grades A* - C in 1999 in the GCSE is well above the national average for all maintained schools and above that of similar schools. The results over the last three years have been constant and there is no significant difference between boys and girls. First hand inspection evidence shows that attainment is above average by the end of the key stage. Standards of numeracy are good throughout work seen in most subjects at this key stage; they are excellent in geography. High attainers follow the higher level of entry course in mathematics. They solve problems of proportion correctly. Curve sketching is well developed. Appropriate geometrical theorems are used well in the solution of problems. Average attainers draw accurate cumulative frequency curves. They can define a median, but are less secure in the definition of the inter-quartile range. Low attainers are dependent on their calculators or written down multiplication tables to solve problems such as 26×9 and 36×6 . In 1999 all students gained a grade and the lowest grade awarded was grade F. This is a result above the national average.

122 Progress through the sixth form is good. Entry to the Advanced level course is not restricted to students who have completed the higher course at GCSE. In the 1999 GCE Advanced level results the students who earned the lower grade N, or who were unclassified, started with a GCSE grade at the intermediate level of entry. Students selected for this course need a higher level of algebraic skill than is currently the case. Progress is good in mechanics, such as that seen in the appropriate use of resources at the start of a lesson which impacted very well on students' understanding, giving them opportunities for insight learning. Progress is good in the lower sixth pure mathematics course, where students rapidly assimilate the new ideas of maxima and minima, for example. Students from an intermediate level of entry to this course are still coming to terms with the differentiation of functions such as $(x)^{-\frac{1}{2}}$. In the upper sixth students are well into the second pure mathematics module and differentiate exponential functions with confidence. Good progress is made in numeracy by students on the GNVQ courses, in the use of VAT for example.

123 At the end of the sixth form in 1999 the number of students earning grades A-E in the GCE Advanced level was below the national average for all maintained schools. In 1998 the number of students earning these grades was in line with the national average, as was the number earning the higher grades A and B. Lesson observation, discussions with students and scrutiny of students' work indicate that attainment is in line with the course average.

124 Students' attitudes to work are very good in all key stages. They are ready for work at the start of lessons and attend very well to the teaching. Concentration is good but decreases towards the end of the one hour lessons unless the teaching or activity changes to refocus students' interest. Their ability to work on their own is good, and well developed in the older, higher attaining students. Behaviour and relationships are very good, fostered at times by good collaborative working in pairs. Students listen well to the contributions of others. Students take responsibility for marking their own work at times, and use their initiative satisfactorily in asking questions.

125 Teaching is satisfactory in both key stages and good in the sixth form. Nearly 60 per cent of the teaching is good or better. There is no unsatisfactory teaching and a small minority of very good teaching. Teaching has maintained standards of attainment at above average levels at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 over the last three years. There is a capacity for further improvement in attainment levels as the quality of the satisfactory teaching rises. The good teaching in the sixth form is producing satisfactory results, sometimes from a low base.

126 Teachers' knowledge and understanding is good overall and very good in the sixth form. Planning is good. Lessons have clear aims and students know what is expected of them. Teachers' expectations are very good in terms of behaviour and standards of written work. There are few open ended questions used in lessons. When they occur they impact positively on learning. Methods and organisational strategies are generally good but lacking in variety within some lessons. The management of students and standards of discipline are uniformly good, and responsible for the very good behaviour of students and the very good relationships observed. The use of time and resources is not always satisfactory. Greater impact could be made on learning in some lessons, in the use of an overhead projector in the teaching of straight line graphs, for example. The length of time on one task could be

reduced through better use of oral work. Routine tasks could be reduced to increase the pace of progress in some lessons. Assessment of students' work is generally good and the use of homework is satisfactory.

127 The leadership of the department is good. The head of faculty, new to the school in September, is well supported by the senior management team and by the faculty as a whole. The curriculum is satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4, meeting statutory requirements. Some curriculum initiatives have already been started in numeracy and investigations. It is good in the sixth form. The range of modules for students to choose for the GCE Advanced level course is broad and includes decision mathematics. Students are able to progress to further mathematics at Advanced Supplementary level. Overall the faculty delivers good value for money.

128 Since the last inspection the faculty has improved overall attainment and standards of numeracy. Other improvements noted are in assessment and recording, and the leadership of the department.

Science

129 On entry to the school students' attainment in science is above national levels. By the end of Key Stage 3 students' attainment is above average and that of higher attaining students is well above average. Most students are able to describe life processes using appropriate terminology; they understand the particulate nature of matter and are able to describe the process of diffusion; they have good practical skills. In Standard Assessment Tests students attained well above the average for maintained schools and above average for similar schools. Eighty-two per cent of students achieved level 5 or above compared to 56 per cent nationally, while 46 per cent achieved level 6 compared to 27 per cent nationally. Students with all levels of attainment sustain good progress through the key stage. They carry out very good investigations, into, for instance, the effect of mineral deficiencies on plants. They gain very good understanding of the working of the eye, and its similarity to the camera. Through mini-research projects, small groups of students gain good understanding of, for instance, how microbes cause diseases. The introduction of lessons based on Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education (CASE), which is designed to improve students' thinking skills, has contributed to this high attainment and good progress.

130 At the end of Key Stage 4 students' attainment is well above national norms. For instance, a Year 11 class demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the solar system. A lower attaining group showed a clear understanding of the various forms of energy, while another group showed very secure knowledge of the structure and function of the heart through the use of models, a sheep's heart and clear diagrams. In GCSE, students achieve results that are well above the average for all maintained schools and above that of similar schools. In 1998 51 per cent of students achieved a grade in the range A*-C compared to 48 per cent nationally. In 1999 achievement was even better at 62 per cent A*-C. Good progress is sustained through Key Stage 4 with students with all levels of attainment in all aspects of science. Students made good progress in understanding the reactivity series for metals through well planned practical work following confident demonstration. Another group made good progress in learning

about alternating current and direct current through good demonstration and perceptive questioning.

131 In the sixth form standards of attainment in physics, chemistry and biology are generally in line with the course average. In biology the attainment of some students has been below average, but the department has taken effective measures to raise standards, such as careful target setting and monitoring, and the inclusion of more independent learning. One biology group achieved good standards through carrying out research using the Internet, working in small groups on various aspects of genetically modified organisms. At Advanced level in 1999 attainment in physics and chemistry was in line with the national average for maintained comprehensive schools, while that in biology was below. Progress in all three sciences is at least good in nearly all lessons and most often very good. Progress is very good for some students who start GCE Advanced level courses with limited attainment at GCSE. A Year 13 group studying metabolic pathways made very good progress through well planned relevant practical work on the rate of fermentation of yeast. A Year 13 physics group also made very good progress while practising short practical exercises against the clock. In general, progress is good when students take some responsibility for their own learning as when, for instance, they prepare presentations to be delivered to the whole class.

132 Overall students' response in lessons is good in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and generally very good in the sixth form. Students are well motivated. They show interest and enjoyment and behave well. They show due respect for apparatus and materials. Relationships between students are good and they demonstrate very good co-operation when doing practical work or when preparing presentations. Students have confidence in their teachers.

133 Overall more than 30 per cent of teaching is very good, more than 30 per cent is good and the remainder is satisfactory. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. The proportion of very good lessons is highest in the sixth form. Teachers maintain a very good atmosphere for learning at all times in which students listen well and this enables them to promote good progress. Teachers are confident in the material that they teach. They plan lessons well, often to include a variety of activities to maintain interest and sustain concentration. Planning is based on schemes of work which are detailed for Key Stage 3 but less consistently developed for Key Stage 4. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace, sometimes in order to complete a practical task in the hour. Teachers have appropriately high expectations of students' behaviour and of their rate of progress. They use appropriate methods in lessons, in particular they use a number of strategies developed by CASE including frequent research exercises and small group work. There is some inconsistency of procedures within laboratories for the handling of bags, coats and stools which sometimes confuses students. Assessment and recording of assessment data is good and is well used to modify schemes of work, sequences of lessons and sometimes to alter approaches within lessons. Data is also used to set targets for individual students. Relevant homework is regularly set, and in general is well marked with helpful comments.

134 The faculty is very well led and managed. There is a good ethos in the faculty, good monitoring of teaching and sound development plans.

135 There are not enough laboratories to accommodate all science teaching, and this limits opportunity for practical work. Technician time available to the faculty is limited and well below recommended levels. Although there is technician cover for all lessons, teachers have to collect apparatus and materials from the preparation room which limits the amount of practical work and means that they sometimes have to leave the laboratory unattended. The budget for the faculty is low, and does not allow effective financial planning since funding can only meet immediate needs.

136 The faculty is delivering very good results with limited resources, and it is therefore providing very good value for money. Since the time of the previous inspection standards of attainment have risen in both key stages and in the sixth form. There is now no unsatisfactory teaching. Records of homework set and marked are kept, but there is still occasional inaccuracy in checking students' work. Documentation has improved and there is now effective monitoring.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Art

137 Students begin Key Stage 3 with average attainment. They have satisfactory practical skills, but the idea of research, planning and evaluating their work systematically is new to them. Students of all abilities make good progress and by the end of Key Stage 3 their attainment in National Curriculum assessments is above the national expectations. First hand inspection evidence confirmed these high standards. Students show particular skills in three dimensional and research work. Students learn very well the importance of thinking about their work and improving it to make sure it is of a good standard. They use drawing and literacy skills well to develop different

solutions to express their ideas. Students use information gained from research and investigation to guide their work in two and three dimensions and complete their work using a good range of materials. Basic visual elements such as line, shape and colour are explored through imaginative projects that help students to build well on the work they have done before. Their drawing skills and appreciation of the work of artists and designers from different styles and periods develops to good standards.

138 At Key Stage 4 students of all abilities make very good progress in lessons to extend their research, design and practical skills. First hand inspection evidence revealed above average standards by the end of the key stage with some students attaining well above. A particular strength is their use of sketch books to research and develop ideas. Various, students work with graphic materials, textiles, paint and three dimensional materials. They often have good skills to explain and evaluate their work as it progresses. Students work to larger scales, with their detailed first-hand research about world-wide artists and designers a particular strength. They make very good use of visits to art galleries and the local environment to glean ideas and provide reference information for personal projects. This means that overall results in GCSE courses are well above the national average and are better than at the time of the school's previous inspection. Similar to national results, girls often attain higher standards in examination than boys.

139 In the sixth form all students make very good progress within GCE Advanced level or GNVQ art, design and photography courses. Results at GCE Advanced level are close to the national averages in art and photography. Art and design GNVQ advanced results are above the course average standards. Over time, results are improving. This is found in the good standards of students' work seen during the inspection that is above the national course average standards. There is a particular strength in their research supporting original ideas in textiles, photography and in three dimensions.

140 Over each key stage and in the sixth form standards are improving because overall the students' progress is very good. The key factors that underpin this are very good teaching, curriculum planning and frequent checks on what students know and do. Students have a broad grounding in art and design skills because teachers are enthusiastic and expect a lot of them. Setting right a shortfall identified in the last inspection, projects challenge students and give them the opportunity to work at a pace and complexity that is right for them. That said, there is still potential to improve standards, for example, by narrowing the performance difference between boys and girls.

141 Across the key stages, students' attitudes to learning are invariably very good. In all lessons, they work hard, are enthusiastic and keen to participate. Students make good use of the opportunity to find information and use it consistently to guide their work. Students usually work at a good, brisk pace and respond very quickly to teachers' instructions. They are keen to help one another, sharing materials and tools sensibly and follow consistently their teachers' expectations for safe practice. Particular strengths arise in examination courses when students respond very maturely to the teachers' expectation that they will work independently on their own projects. This leads to a highly motivating and creative mood in lessons which is often more akin to a working artists' studio than a school! Relationships and behaviour are very good. Across the faculty there is usually a high level buzz of activity as students have a thoroughly enjoyable time expressing their ideas.

142 Teaching is very good. It is particularly good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In lessons inspected, it was good and very good in almost equal measure. There were no lessons seen of less than good quality. The teaching quality is similar across the faculty and key stages. This arises from teachers' very good subject knowledge

and confidence. Very good lesson plans explain what is to be covered year on year and are particularly strong in terms of giving each teacher the chance to use their particular strength to benefit students. In turn teachers are clear about the skills they want to teach and how attainment will be assessed. This makes lessons very purposeful, ensures that the expected National Curriculum and examination syllabus requirements are covered, leading to good overall curriculum provision at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good sixth form provision. A particularly good feature is the modular organisation which allows students some choice of craft skills and examination courses.

A very good feature is the team teaching of some classes and the excellent level of established integration of the GCE Advanced level and GNVQ courses which benefits teachers and students alike because they learn to appreciate a wide variety of approach to the subject. Teachers consistently use correct technical language and refer to artists and designers. This rubs off on students and leads to very good progress because students learn to talk about their work and know that whoever teaches them they are required to work in similar ways.

143 Teachers have high expectations of their students which leads to their very good response in lessons. Teachers give clear explanations to the whole class and to individual students. Most lessons have a very good structure, so that teachers have chance to help individual students and demonstrate points to the whole class. Very good use is made by teachers of the opportunity in lessons to talk to students to check progress, so that they are clear about what they do well and where they need to improve. This balance of activity and critical commentary very effectively maintains students' interest. It makes sure they work quickly and complete work in good time. Teachers regularly make good use of homework, for instance, to ask students to research an idea or extend what was done in a lesson. This helps students improve their self study skills.

144 Very good systems are in place to judge students' attainment because teachers use a regular assessment to check progress and standards. A well established year on year record of achievement uses national criteria to show what students know and do. This tracks consistently their progress from Year 7 through to GCSE courses and helps teachers track improvement over a key stage. The outcomes of this guide teachers in planning students' next stage of work and identifying where they need extra help. This is invaluable in helping teachers to make sure work challenges students to improve their standards. This sets right a criticism made at the time of the previous inspection.

145 Good leadership and guidance from the head of faculty, means that teachers know what is expected. They work well as an experienced team to make sure the planned curriculum is in place. A good feature is their commitment to improve standards by continually strengthening, for instance, their curriculum planning or the structure of courses. This makes good use of their specialist skills, for instance, in photography, or sculpture. Regular checks are made to check the quality of teaching and focus attention on aspects for improvement. The teachers' consistent application of the clear school policies emphasise the strong faculty-wide commitment to make certain every student has good equal opportunities to progress and ensures that statutory curriculum requirements are met.

146 Accommodation is just satisfactory, but is somewhat cramped. Learning

materials and equipment are just sufficient. However, there is limited provision of information and communication technology, tools such as sewing machines, paint palettes and ink rollers. Overall this means students have what they need for the work they are expected to do. However, whilst this does not have a negative effect on the planned curriculum, it does mean that larger scale work in printing, pottery and textiles is held back. However, plans are in hand to extend the accommodation in the near future which should address this shortcoming. Balancing this, there is good provision of specialist teaching staff and technical support. There is good, efficient use of human and material resources which has a positive impact on the above average standards of attainment. In turn, the faculty provides very good value for money.

147 This is a very good faculty that has improved standards of teaching, assessment, homework and students' attainment since the previous inspection. The time for art has been increased and the curriculum broadened.

Design and Technology

148 Students enter the school with levels of design and technology capability which are in line with national average standards. All students make good progress in Key Stage 3. They develop their general design and technology capability in a range of materials, tools and equipment to good effect. They become increasingly confident and accurate in their skills and develop a good understanding of the various aspects of the design and make process. Higher attainers refine the quality of their products and artefacts to a very good level and carry out insightful evaluations of what they have done. Lower attainers improve their work but with extra levels of support and with a lower quality of finish. Their written and graphical work also lacks detail and quality.

149 End of Key Stage 3 assessment results have improved significantly over the last two years. In 1999, the results of teacher assessments were well above national figures. From the evidence of students' work seen during the inspection, this overall improvement in standards is valid and continuing. By the end of the key stage, students' attainment is above average for the subject.

150 At Key Stage 4, all students make very good progress. The quality and depth of research increases for all attainers, as does their capacity to generate a range of ideas to solve a problem. All students become increasingly autonomous learners. The quality of students' planning is significantly enhanced by the emphasis placed on this aspect during Key Stage 3.

151 Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are well above the national average. In 1999, for all design and technology subjects at GCSE, 73 per cent of the cohort achieved A*-C which significantly exceeded the national average of 50 per cent. These results were a significant improvement on the previous year's results in the subject, which also exceeded national averages. Ninety-nine per cent of students achieved grades A*-G (100 per cent of girls).

152 At both key stages, girls perform significantly better than boys at the higher levels of attainment. These figures are in excess of national differences. The faculty should seek ways of narrowing this gap.

153 Progress in the sixth form is very good. Students' research skills and their

capacity to become more independent in the development of ideas improve. Higher attainers, in particular, demonstrate well developed capability in the analysis of problems, the derivation of suitable specifications for a brief and the quality of research carried out.

154 In 1999, standards for the Advanced level design and technology course were well above average with 88 per cent obtaining A-E grades and 50 per cent achieving A/B. This was, however, a small cohort of students. Evidence from current work shows that this very good performance continues to be demonstrated, with examples from both Advanced level courses indicating that well above average standards are being maintained. Higher attainers, in particular, are achieving at levels that are commensurate with the highest grades for the courses concerned. The standards in the subject are improving overall.

155 Students show very good attitudes and behaviour. In most lessons, students show high levels of interest and concentrate very well. As they move through the school, students increasingly engage in significant levels of personal study in the completion of their practical projects – particularly in the research aspects and in the task of producing a comprehensive portfolio for GCSE coursework. When required to do so, students collaborate well. Typically, in one instance in a Year 10 food technology lesson, students were seen negotiating their roles and deciding what each would say in a presentation of their dishes to the whole class in a subsequent lesson. In a sixth form lesson, the level of collaboration shown by students in preparing, sharing and evaluating their research on a topic was exemplary. The sixth form community leadership programme is very effective in providing opportunities for a number of students to act as classroom assistants in design and technology lessons.

156 All teaching in the subject is satisfactory or better. Over 80 per cent is good or better with some examples of excellent teaching. Teachers have a high level of skills which they model well for students. Some staff are versatile in being able to teach across the range of components in the subject with no loss of rigour in the teaching. Planning is always of a very high quality. Learning objectives are usually clearly and explicitly stated but where coverage of another subject is included within design and technology lessons, for example, religious education, objectives for this subject are not sufficiently stated in the planning. In most lessons, teachers' expectations are good or very good but in a small number they are too low. In such instances, the progress of students is constrained because either non-focused behaviour is insufficiently challenged or students are allowed to be too inattentive and therefore fail to concentrate on the teachers' input.

157 The consistent approach within the faculty to develop the understanding of the design, make and evaluation process is a key beneficial feature. Workshop procedures are well established and consistently followed. Students' progress is particularly helped when the aims of a lesson are clear and shared with students, targets are openly discussed, and good quality feedback through assessment and evaluation is given.

158 Assessment is of a very good quality and teachers have suitable records of students' progress. Students contribute to the assessment process by setting targets

for their progress and general attainment. This good practice could be further improved if the targets were more focused on specific subject attainment. Work is marked regularly and in a consistent manner. Homework is well targeted and used very effectively to reinforce classwork, as a research tool or to prepare for subsequent learning.

159 The design and technology curriculum is broad and balanced and a wide range of materials is used in all key stages. There is also a good choice of subjects at GCSE and Advanced level. Statutory requirements in the subject are fully met.

160 The amount of time given to core design and technology lessons in Key Stage 3 is limited and constrains opportunities to engage in activities such as whole class student presentations and in-depth and detailed evaluations of projects. Despite this standards are being maintained. The modular arrangements in Year 9 and in Key Stage 4 offer valuable opportunities for enrichment to the core curriculum or for further consolidation of skills and capability developed in the core. There is also a good range of extra-curricular activities provided by the subject.

161 Despite cramped workshop conditions and some equipment which needs upgrading, the subject makes every effort possible to promote health and safety and is successful in doing so within these constraints. Detailed risk assessments are carried out on all aspects that require them. The current location of the circular saw is unsatisfactory and the capacity to maintain hygienic conditions in food technology is limited.

162 The subject is very effectively led. There are clear procedures for the day-to-day running of all aspects of the subject and strategic direction is provided for longer term developments. The effect of this is to provide coherence between different components of the subject and a strong feeling of commitment to commonly shared goals.

163 The food rooms are too small for the size of groups, as are some teaching rooms in the resistant materials block. This leads to constrained progress and attainment in some lessons when students have insufficient personal space to set out an adequate learning environment for themselves. Some rooms used to teach resistant materials courses also require significant refurbishment.

164 Given the constraints of the accommodation and the diversity of the curriculum on offer, the standards achieved are very good. Since the last inspection, design and technology has improved and makes a significant contribution to students' learning.

Geography

165 Interviews with Year 7 students and a scrutiny of their work, shows that their prior knowledge and understanding of geography is in line with national averages. More than half have good map skills and a good knowledge of place, but few are able to describe and explain geographic processes and many have a poor understanding of environmental issues.

166 However, all students, including those with special educational needs, make

good progress through Key Stage 3, with the result that attainment at the age of 14 is above the national average. Progress is most rapid in Year 9, where geography is taught as a discrete subject and where the pace of work and demand on students is greater. Students in Year 7 are able to use map skills to plan routes on Ordnance Survey maps and many of those in Year 8 show a good awareness of urban problems.

Most students in Year 9 are able to describe patterns of population movement in a wide range of places. The 1999 Statutory Teacher Assessment of 91 per cent of students attaining National Curriculum level 5 or above is unreliable and classroom evidence suggests that 75 per cent of all students are at this level.

167 At age 16, attainment is well above national averages for all schools. In 1999, 75 per cent of all students attained grades A*-C at GCSE compared to 56 per cent nationally, an improvement over 1998, when 61 per cent attained these grades, whilst 52 per cent did so nationally. The department has succeeded in eliminating the difference in attainment between boys and girls. In 1999, 76 per cent of boys attained grades A*-C whilst 53 per cent did so across the country and all boys have attained at least a grade G in the last three years. Students who study geography attain, on average one third of a grade higher than in their other subjects. Students in Years 10 and 11 have acquired a good knowledge and understanding of processes, such as coastal erosion and most are able to formulate hypotheses on the origin of coastal landforms. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of the management of the environment, have very well developed geographic skills of evaluating information and making reasoned judgements, for instance, when studying the impact of proposed coastal defences.

168 The progress of all students, and especially those with special education needs, is very good across the key stage and in individual lessons. This is due to very carefully planned lessons and highly effective teaching that uses an exceptionally wide range of imaginative and stimulating learning activities to motivate students and develop their ability to think about geographic issues.

169 Geography is a popular subject at GCE Advanced level. Despite the fact that the department frequently admits students with modest GCSE attainment, in 1999, at grades A-E it is above the national average and has been for the last three years. In 1999, 94 per cent attained these grades, whilst 91 per cent did so nationally, a slight decline over 1998 when all students attained grades A-E compared to 90 per cent nationally. However, attainment of grades A-B is below the national average in 1999, 25 per cent attaining these grades compared to 34 per cent nationally, a fall from 54 per cent in 1998 when the national average was 33 per cent. Classroom observation of the present Year 13 indicates attainment at grades A-B that is close to course expectations. Sixth form students have very well developed geographic skills of interpreting and evaluating information and of using this to reach reasoned conclusions, for instance, when studying atmospheric processes. Students behave well in the geography rooms and are eager and enthusiastic learners at all key stages. They listen attentively to the teacher and to each other and are ready to ask and answer questions and take part in class discussions and role-play. However, in some classes, girls are reluctant to contribute and, in these lessons, boys dominate discussion. Most students have well-developed skills of working with others to share information and to solve problems. Well-managed group work has inculcated a very positive attitude towards working with others.

170 The department is characterised by imaginative and innovative teaching. Teaching was satisfactory or better in 11 out of 12 lessons seen and in over 50 per cent of all lessons, teaching was very good or excellent. The subject knowledge of most teachers is very good and for the specialist geographers it is excellent. This is conveyed to students through enthusiastic teaching that makes much use of contemporary geographic issues. Lesson planning is very good. Learning outcomes are clearly identified, and teachers make explicit which activities and strategies they are going to use to ensure students meet these outcomes. Most lessons, and all from Year 9 onwards, are characterised by high teacher expectation of the student. The pace of

work is brisk and dictated by the teacher, who, through skilful management of student groupings, extends and stretches the highest attaining students and provides support and encouragement for those who learn at a slower pace. Geography teachers make use of an exceptionally wide range of methods in the classroom, most of which are highly effective at developing in students an understanding of geographic issues and encouraging them to think critically. Simulation exercises, role-play and group work are common in most lessons and students make use of topical classroom resources to help them search for information and to solve problems.

171 The geography curriculum at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is broadened by the inclusion of field work, good use of information and computer technology and by additional, topical material to add relevance to the work being studied. However, at Key Stage 3, the National Curriculum Programme of study is only just being delivered and there is insufficient emphasis on the development of skills and of relationships in the subject. Earthquakes and volcanoes, for instance, are studied with insufficient reference to plate tectonics and the contrast in response to earthquakes in less and more economically developed countries. The schemes of work for Years 7 and 8 do not make clear how geographic knowledge and understanding and skills are to be progressively developed. Day to day assessment is very good, but teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 is unreliable. Although the department has begun to develop assessments through the key stage, many of these are too narrow and are insufficiently related to the National Curriculum level descriptors. The department does not, as yet, moderate teacher assessment at the end of the key stage.

172 The department is very well managed. The head of department has a clear sense of vision for the subject, which is shared by her colleagues in the faculty. Relationships within the department are mutually supportive and staff work effectively as a team. However, the head of department has insufficient influence over geography taught by the teachers of integrated learning in Years 7 and 8 and this is reflected in the standards of students' attainment in these years.

173 The department has made very good progress since the last inspection at further raising attainment in geography and is well placed to move even further.

History

174 Students' attainment on entry to the school is in line with the national average. By the end of Key Stage 3 standards are above average. This is shown in the results of the end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum teachers' assessments and also in first hand inspection evidence of students currently in Year 9. The majority of students at this stage have good historical knowledge and understanding and historical skills are well developed. They have a good awareness of chronology and good levels of empathy, and most are confident in the analysis of historical sources to gain information but have less understanding of their nature and reliability. Written work is satisfactory. It is factually detailed, mostly accurate but mainly descriptive. The ability to write analytically and logically and to form conclusions is developing well in the case of higher attaining students.

175 GCSE results have been well above the national average over the last three years. The levels attained by students in the current Year 11 however, are above, rather than well above average. Knowledge and understanding are good and historical skills are generally well developed. The majority have a good ability to analyse and explain different historical interpretations, to judge their reliability and to use them critically in investigative work. Oral work reflects a sound grasp of key issues, ability to make links and to identify causes and effects. Higher attaining students argue and present substantiated conclusions well. However, in many instances, and especially in the case of boys, oral work is stronger than written work. In the case of most higher attaining students essays are usually well structured, detailed and well explained. Most

students makes good use of source material as evidence but in many cases there is a lack of sustained argument. In the case of a number of boys especially, some written work is careless and poorly presented.

176 Attainment at GCE Advanced level is above the national course averages and a small number of students also achieve high standards at Scholarship level. The attainment of the students currently in Year 13 is in line with course averages. The majority have good knowledge and understanding and a sound grasp of key issues, concepts and trends. They use historical sources critically. Higher attainers especially demonstrate an impressive ability to use evidence cogently in argument. Many display good independent thinking, an ability to challenge; and to present well integrated argument orally. Higher attaining students especially work at a mature level and demonstrate wide reading. In many cases, however, oral work is stronger than written work. At best, written work is detailed and factually accurate and reflects sound conceptual awareness, well supported argument and clearly drawn conclusions. But overall essays are competent rather than reflecting confident reasoning and argument. Some lack structure and a clarity of focus.

177 At Key Stage 3 progress is unsatisfactory in Years 7 and 8, but very good in Year 9. In Years 7 and 8 students develop an interest in the subject and cover a reasonable amount of the National Curriculum content planned for those years, but their development of historical skills is inconsistent. Many students are producing work which is largely descriptive in nature, copied from books in their own words and drawing and colouring in pictures. Most are not making the progress to be expected in working accurately as historians. The restricted progress in Years 7 and 8 means that students enter Year 9 at a disadvantage. During Year 9 they make very rapid progress in skills development and in gaining good knowledge and understanding, but some aspects of the lack of thorough grounding in Years 7 and 8 remain through to the sixth form, especially the insufficient progress made in producing well structured extended writing. Students with special educational needs make good progress as a result of teaching being well targeted to their learning requirements. Occasionally their progress is hindered by lack of classroom support.

178 Progress at Key Stage 4 is good. They make very good gains in knowledge, understanding and empathy and in grasping complicated issues. Progress is very well supported by clear exposition, a good range of learning activities focusing on historical skills development. Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs progress better than expected.

179 In the sixth form students make rapid progress in becoming mature and responsible students of history, and in gaining wide ranging historical skills and good knowledge and understanding. Oral work develops especially well but progress in written work is slower. Progress is strongly promoted by highly skilled teaching, very high expectations and in particular through the many excellent opportunities to learn through discussion and debate.

180 Most students have very high levels of interest and motivation which have a very positive influence upon their progress and attainment. In lessons most students are very attentive, work conscientiously and sustain very good levels of concentration. They respond very well to the high expectations of the teachers and their capacity for personal study develops well. The very good behaviour and relationships in lessons create a very positive learning ethos.

181 Teaching overall is very good from Year 9 onwards. In the lessons observed

during the inspection teaching was excellent in 25 per cent of lessons, very good in a further 25 per cent and never less than satisfactory. Teaching is much stronger in Year 9, Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form than in Years 7 and 8.

182 Teachers' specialist expertise is very good and is used very effectively to help students to learn and to understand complex topics and issues. The teachers' enthusiasm for their subject is often infectious. Lesson planning is mostly very detailed and provides for a good sequence of activities and a clear structure for learning. At best it ensures clear learning targets and opportunities for these to be shared with students and their achievement checked. Lesson planning is less rigorous in Years 7 and 8 especially in its focus on ensuring consistency of practice especially in the development of historical skills.

183 Teachers' expectations of students are always very high and a major reason for the good progress made in Year 9, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. At all stages students are expected to work hard and responsibly, and from Year 9 onwards to think and develop historical skills, undertake individual research and to take the initiative in their learning. The high, realistic expectations of lower attaining students and those with special educational needs enables them to make better than expected progress.

184 Teaching methods and organisational strategies are very good in promoting learning and progress from Year 9 onwards. All lessons are characterised by clear teaching and the majority strongly promote the development of historical skills. In Years 7 and 8 there is insufficient rigour in this respect. All lessons are well managed and organised. Exceptionally good use is made of group work to provide appropriate levels of challenge and to encourage students to learn through discussion and collaboration. Good questioning which is successful in both testing and extending knowledge and understanding and in challenging students to think deeply is a feature of many lessons. In all there are very good standards of discipline and high expectations for good behaviour to which most students respond positively.

185 In most lessons activities are well timed and paced to provide a good pace and to sustain momentum in the learning. Only very rarely is too long allowed for the completion of tasks with a resulting loss of momentum. Learning resources are appropriate and well matched to students' learning requirements. However, the lack of books for use at home at Key Stage 3 restricts opportunities for wider reading. Very good use is made of information technology to support the development of drafting and research skills.

186 Students' progress is assessed regularly both during lessons, and through marking and testing. However, marking is sometimes too superficial to be helpful. Written comments at best offer constructive guidance to help students to improve their work but they vary in quality. Assessment outcomes are used mainly informally on an on-going basis to modify teaching and the curriculum. Homework is set regularly usually as an integral part of learning. Tasks are useful in extending and consolidating learning in lessons. Homework is used exceptionally well in the sixth form to support development of research and writing skills.

187 The curriculum is appropriately broad, balanced and relevant overall. The

leadership of the department is very effective in generating close professional team work, setting and achieving high standards and providing a very good ethos for the learning of history. The management of the history department is very good but liaison with the work in history within the integrated learning department is insufficiently systematic especially in terms of the guiding and monitoring of practice, and ensuring progression and continuity with the work from Year 9 onwards. The separate staffing of the teaching of history in Years 7 and 8 is not supportive of progression and continuity in the subject. Nonetheless, in the light of the average level of funding, the high quality of education provided and the very high results achieved, the department provides good value for money.

188 Since the last inspection high standards have been maintained. The need to focus marking at Key Stage 3 on National Curriculum requirements and to ensure that students are informed of their progress in relation to the National Curriculum has been fully addressed.

Information Technology

189 Students join the school with a diverse history of information and communications technology experiences. Their attainment on entry is in line with national average standards in information technology. In Key Stage 3, all students make very good progress in lessons. They rapidly acquire new skills and apply them to a given problem. They refine and improve their work which results in products of high quality. Higher attainers develop the presentation of their work to a very high level. All students also show increasing levels of accuracy and confidence in their work. They become increasingly autonomous in their use of the technology. Overall through these years, students make excellent progress in their development of information technology capability as measured by National Curriculum levels.

190 By the end of Key Stage 3, students are able to use information technology in a wide range of contexts with very high levels of information technology capability to communicate ideas, process data, control and monitor events, and use information technology software to model real and imaginary scenarios. In Year 9, many students also achieve passes in externally accredited skills-based information technology modules. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is well above average in comparison with national standards.

191 During Key Stage 4, all students again make very good progress and build on their capability from earlier years. They demonstrate high levels of independence in the appropriate choice of information technology applications. Through accredited OCR modules, within the GNVQ information technology course, and in cross-curricular applications, students attain at very good levels. The percentage pass rate in skills-based information technology modules is very high, as is the proportion who obtain a distinction. By the end of the key stage their attainment is well above average.

192 In the sixth form, students continue to make very good progress in the way they use information technology autonomously in support of their learning. Overall, the subject is sustaining high standards and in Key Stage 4 has significantly improved both provision in the subject and the level of students' attainment since the last inspection. By the time they leave school the attainment of the majority of students is well above

average.

193 In all years, students with special educational needs make very good progress in information technology. They develop their information technology capability to very good levels and, in some instances, attain at the higher levels within a class and act as supporters of their peers in their learning.

194 Throughout the school, students are highly motivated by information technology and concentrate well when using it. Students make much valuable use of information technology, both at home and in sessions outside of lesson time, to develop and present their work. This has a very positive impact on their attainment. They behave very well in information technology lessons and are always polite and courteous. They treat all information technology resources with respect. Students act as 'buddies' for each other in information technology lessons. They are paired off and act as a first point of reference for their peers when help is needed. This is a particularly strong feature of learning in the subject and enhances the self esteem of all concerned. This system is replicated in the sixth form where, through the community support programme, 'buddies' help younger students to very good effect. In information technology lessons, students are often asked to act as tutors to groups of other students in order to disseminate skills or knowledge.

195 All teaching in the faculty is good or better with no marked difference in quality at any key stage. Over 80 per cent is very good or better with some examples of excellent teaching. The level of skills and knowledge is very high within the information technology faculty. When gaps in these are identified, there is a readiness to engage in professional development to address it. Across the staff as a whole, there is a substantial level of capability that contributes to the quality of information technology provision across subjects.

196 Lesson planning is very good. Teachers' plans provide a clear framework for learning and worksheets and prompts for students are of a very high quality and always appropriate. Teachers' expectations are very high. Teaching methods, in particular, are excellent with a broad range of resources and stimuli drawn on. No time is wasted in lessons and resources are always optimised to ensure students reap the maximum benefit from their facilities. The design and content of the school's Internet is an excellent example of a high quality resource. The access students have to it, and the use they make of it, result in good quality learning. Students can call up a wide range of course notes and support materials and use them to plan their work, enhance their learning and assess their progress in their work. When on line to the Internet, access by students is carefully monitored and is always focused with little opportunity for students to waste time by inefficient browsing.

197 Assessment of students' work is consistent and carried out against clear criteria drawn directly from National Curriculum references. Homework is always appropriate and is used well as a research tool or as a means of preparing for future classwork. This wide range of high quality characteristics in the teaching contributes to the very good progress students make in information technology.

198 Information technology core skills lessons in Key Stage 3 offer a broad range of contexts within which students develop their information technology capability.

Information technology is also used in many subjects as a genuine support to learning in the host subject and as a means of promoting information technology capability itself.

The modules offered in Year 9 offer a good enrichment to students' learning in information technology. Curriculum breadth is provided very well in Key Stage 4 through the GNVQ course, a good range of skills based modules, and a wide range of usage in other subjects as a support to learning. In the sixth form, information technology is used extensively in support of students' learning. There is a very good balance of information technology coverage as all strands of information technology are effectively included in the curriculum. Statutory requirements in the subject are fully met. This constitutes a very significant improvement since the last inspection. The school has therefore fully addressed the key issue for information technology development identified at that time.

199 The school provides excellent opportunities for students to use information technology facilities outside lessons. This includes a homework club; a computer club; an early bird keyboarding club; an information technology activity week and an information technology awareness week. All make a genuine contribution to the profile of information technology, encourage staff commitment to and understanding of information technology, and most significantly contribute to the achievement of students.

200 The information technology faculty has comprehensive recording systems for tracking the development of each student's information technology capability. This is further enhanced by agreed systems with subject departments that use information technology in their teaching. A number of these subjects assess the information technology capability developed in the activities being undertaken by them and feed this back for inclusion in the overall profile of a student's information technology capability. This is particularly good practice as it ensures that teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 are reliable and based on a broad range of evidence.

201 The strategic management of the subject is excellent. The information technology strategy group provides a high quality steer for the development of the subject. This manifests itself in the way in which information technology is such a rich constituent in the curriculum, in students' learning, and in the contribution it makes to their achievement both in information technology and in other subjects. Development planning in the subject is very good. The information technology steering group is effective in providing an opportunity for staff across the curriculum to contribute to the development of the subject. The day to day management of the faculty is also excellent. Within the faculty, relationships are very good with highly professional interactions. Members have high expectations of each other's approach to teaching and all professional discussions are rigorous and focused on promoting high achievement.

202 There is a very good range of professional development opportunities for all staff. There are very effective 'buddy' arrangements within the staff that mirror the arrangements for students and which ensure that all staff can call on a peer for information technology support. The Open Learning Centre is an example of particularly good practice in links with the community and for promoting life long

learning.

203 The student: computer ratio is better than the national average and the school has a very good range of generic and subject specific software and CD ROMs. Within ever increasing demands, the school has been innovative in refurbishing certain areas to enable the expansion of facilities.

204 Although there has been, and continues to be, a high investment in information technology, both the results in information technology itself and in the contribution it makes to learning and standards in other subjects are very good. This constitutes good value for money. Since the last inspection there have been considerable improvements in a range of areas of the subject. Information technology is now a very significant strength of the school for all year groups and in most aspects of the curriculum.

Modern Languages (French and German)

205 Students make good progress through both Key Stages 3 and 4, primarily because their study skills are well developed. During Key Stage 3 the highest attainers, both boys and girls, progress very well because they enjoy using words creatively and remember what they learn. Lower attainers do not consolidate or recall prior learning easily but their progress is satisfactory. Some average and lower-attaining students, who in Year 9 choose German as their one foreign language, do not reach expected levels by the end of the key stage. In lessons, in most classes, good teaching promotes good progress, very good in top sets in both languages. In Year 8, for example, students in their first term of German can already describe their timetable, stating accurately which subjects they have on a given day and the time of the lessons. Often, however, insufficient time is given to practising speaking. Students with special needs progress well in class, supported by differentiated materials and tasks. They participate very well in speaking and listening activities.

206 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average. Girls attain higher than boys, although many boys perform well in all skills. Many top set students in French in Year 9 are well above average, on course for National Curriculum level 6 by the end of the key stage in all skills except speaking. They deduce meaning confidently and see links between previous and new learning. The most able can write freely in the past tenses. They can describe the physical features of celebrities and of their friends. Overall standards of listening and reading are above average. Most students understand instructions and requests promptly and can extract necessary detail from recorded conversations and short texts. Speaking and writing are average. Higher attaining students can talk about themselves and their interests and use past tense and negative forms appropriately. At all levels of attainment, however, pronunciation is affected by reading text and few students speak confidently at length from memory. Students of average attainment can reply appropriately to questions about themselves and take part in short role-plays, usually supported by text. They can write short personal descriptions and spell simple phrases accurately. These standards reflect those of the 1999 Key Stage 3 National Curriculum assessments, in which teachers accurately assessed attainment at above the national average, with three-quarters of students at or above the national average of level 4.

207 In Key Stage 4, progress is good overall. The very highest attainers continue to progress well, and many others accelerate, especially in German as a second

language, although speaking is not as developed as other skills. The structure of GCSE and Certificate of Achievement courses helps lower attaining students to recall and remember simple statements and questions, and to use them in writing short paragraphs and in role-play. Those with special needs persevere with written work and progress well. Some average and lower attainers following German as their foreign language have an insecure basis on which to build new learning. In lessons, as in Key Stage 3, progress is good because of good teaching. There are clear signs in Year 10, for example, that the standards produced last year in Year 9 are being sustained and improved further.

208 By the end of Key Stage 4 overall standards are above average. Judgement on attainment in class in Year 11 is based on the very few lessons which it was possible to observe during inspection, and on a sample of written work. These show that, as at Key Stage 3, the very highest attainers are well above average in all skills except in speaking, clearly on course for the higher GCSE grades. Their writing is very good, rich in expression, and solid in structure, as, for example, in pieces about votes for women, a journey to India, and a horoscope in magazine format. The most able challenge themselves to write at length, and personally. Average attaining students are nearer the average grades of C-D levels and below. Their writing is erratic, but they have some, if sometimes insecure, understanding and application of grammar rules. Understanding of speech and text is typically at average or above average levels. As at Key Stage 3 speaking is a relative weakness. Higher attainers do not speak spontaneously or improvise confidently. Too many average attainers at GCSE Foundation level rely on the coursebook and on what they have written when they speak, and pronunciation standards are below average. Current standards reflect the most recent results at GCSE which were above average overall both for similar and for all maintained schools, and have improved over four years faster than the national improvement. Standards in French are high and have improved very rapidly to well above average, with three-quarters of students in the upper (A*-C) range of grades. Prior to 1999 when standards fell to below average, standards in German were equally high for two years. In 1998, for example, three-quarters of students were similarly at A*-C. Standards in German fluctuate principally because to date only a small proportion of the year group has opted to study the language as either first or second language and their prior attainment has varied considerably from year to year. The A*-G success rate in both languages is consistently above the national average for all schools. Girls outperform boys in both languages, but in French by a lesser margin than nationally. In 1998 the boys' performance in French in relation to their other subjects was better than boys in other schools, and students performed better in German than in their other subjects.

209 Students in the sixth form make good progress. Those in Year 12 take time to adjust to the increased conceptual and grammatical demands of Advanced level, but by Year 13 the highest attainers progress well in making personal responses to literature and writing in a range of styles. Students usually meet average Advanced level course requirements in French. Currently, standards are at similar levels in Year 12, but higher in Year 13. There were no entries in German in 1999 and currently no student is following Advanced level German in either year.

210 In summary, standards at the end of the sixth form meet course expectations. While standards in French at GCSE have improved significantly over recent years, they are not consistently high in German. Students progress well and often very well over time, but students' attitudes towards German, and their success in it, is less positive. It is chosen by few higher attaining students. Speaking is less well developed than other skills.

211 Students respond well throughout the school, and very well in French in Year 7 and the sixth form. They have a most responsible attitude to learning, approach tasks conscientiously, and sustain concentration well. Their response helps create suitable conditions for language learning. Their behaviour is very good, often exemplary. They listen properly to each other and to the teacher and collaborate well in paired and group tasks. Group work in the activity room in Year 7 is especially good. In these weekly lessons, students learn to read and listen both independently and in groups, and work with real enthusiasm. They enjoy using computers frequently in both key stages, developing word processing and desk top publishing skills which enhance their writing. Most higher attainers develop very well, using an increasingly secure command of grammar to support their writing as early as Year 9, and responding inventively in open-ended written tasks. Students take a pride in their written work and word processing. However, both higher and average attaining students do not acquire a similar liking for speaking without the support of text. Most are reluctant to communicate when uncertain of the correct form, preferring the security of reading aloud. The number of students currently studying both languages in Year 9 is encouragingly the highest ever, but still less than a quarter of the year group, well below the proportion in other schools. Take-up of the second language option in Key Stage 4 is very low. At Key Stage 4 some average attaining students are not used to being challenged through the use of the target language. Most students with special educational needs persevere well. They particularly enjoy acting in role-plays. Sixth form students gradually develop some autonomy in their use of the language. Some regularly support younger students' learning in the computer suite, and do it very well.

212 Teaching is good and sometimes very good in over 60 cent of lessons. It is satisfactory in the rest. The pattern is broadly similar in both Key Stage 3 and 4, and in each language. Teaching in the sixth form is good. Progress is good in lessons because teaching is lively, and learning enjoyable. Teachers set and maintain a challenging pace and maximise class time. These features were seen at their best in a Year 8 German lesson in which students practised the vocabulary of different homes and their location at pace, and within minutes were requesting and giving similar information in pairs. Teachers' management of students' learning and behaviour is good, and they develop students' strengths well. They teach grammar, vocabulary and patterns effectively and ensure that students have a secure base on which to develop their reading and writing skills. In addition, most teachers conduct most lessons through the foreign language. Significantly, however, some teachers do not use their command of language as effectively. The use of unnecessary English in translation, in Year 7 and Key Stage 4 especially, both reduces challenge and conveys the wrong messages. Teachers need to develop strategies which will encourage students to enjoy speaking as much as other skills.

213 The most significant of many common strengths is the quality of planning, for example, the planning of tasks at different levels to match the range of learning needs in the class, as in the lower sets in French in Year 9. Organisation of activities, such as the integration of sessions in the computer suite, is very good. Teachers use a stimulating range of visual aids very well, such as overhead transparencies, and caption and cue cards for speaking. They assess their students regularly and have a clear picture of their strengths and weaknesses. The quality of marking, however, is inconsistent. The grading scheme is followed, but helpful, diagnostic comment is usually given only for higher attainers. Some use of targets is good, but otherwise

students are not always given sufficient guidance on how to improve. Homework practice is satisfactory. It consolidates and extends appropriately.

214 Leadership is good. Resource-based learning is organised very successfully. The faculty creates a positive learning ethos which promotes rising standards. However, there are issues still to address. Monitoring of teaching by the head of faculty lacks both frequency and rigour. The balance between the necessary development of speaking skills and the use of computers as a support for writing and comprehension is in need of review. The department provides good value for money. Issues identified at the time of the last inspection have now been addressed successfully. The Certificate of Achievement now provides alternative accreditation at Key Stage 4. Continuity of learning is now assured for all students in Key Stage 3, and lower attainers in Year 8 have access to both languages. The curriculum and assessment procedures now comply fully and assessments are matched accurately to National Curriculum levels. A satisfactory start has been made on monitoring student progress in Key Stage 3 through the use of individual record cards. It is right that amongst current targets for improvement is further development of this system.

Music

215 In recent years GCSE music results have been near or above comparable national averages. In 1998 results were well above comparable averages with three-quarters of candidates gaining A*– C grades. In 1999 GCSE results were near average in relation to A*-C grades. This was due to more variable attainment in composition and appraisal. Standards in performing remained mainly near or above average. The overall percentage of students gaining grades within the A* – G range was above comparable averages.

216 Attainment in music on entry to the school is average but by the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is above average. At the end of Key Stage 3 students use electronic keyboards with competence, for both performance and composition. Students build on their keyboard skills and develop an appropriate harmonic vocabulary. In Year 7 they select and manipulate electronic keyboard sounds to enhance group compositions. In Year 9, students develop keyboard idioms in blues-derived composition and performance. Little singing was observed in lessons but very good use is made of vocal work in extra-curricular activity. Students are able to develop and use a musical vocabulary with which to describe and appraise the music they hear.

217 At Key Stage 4 standards of attainment are above average in performing, and nearer average in appraising and composing. Students are conversant with a range of music and musical techniques. In Year 11, students' compositions display competence in a range of styles. Good use is made of information and communication technology to enhance composition and performance. Students at Key Stage 4 successfully use computers for a variety of musical and writing tasks. Individual vocal and instrumental skills are often strong. In the sixth form, students display sound attainment in performing and written skills. Composition and appraising are less developed. In composition there is often insufficient consideration of the developmental aspects within structures. Music technology students display a sound knowledge and thorough consideration of appropriate nomenclature. Levels of electronic editing, together with

standards of finish and presentation, are mainly sound.

218 Standards of attainment in the sixth form match course expectations. At GCE Advanced level students are able to take music or music technology. The very small number of GCE Advanced level examination candidates invalidates statistical comparisons but, broadly speaking, results have been near average over recent years.

219 Many students make good progress in levels of achievement across Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. In the sixth form progress is satisfactory. Overall, students achieve good progress in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. Progress for students with special educational needs is good. Music teachers respond by supporting special needs students with especially designed work and this has a positive effect on their progress. At both key stages students have opportunities to develop all necessary musical skills. There is no significant imbalance in levels of attainment and progress between boys and girls.

220 Students' attitudes in music lessons are good. In all observed lessons students' response was attentive, with good levels of interest, co-operation and behaviour. They take pride in their work. Students work well individually and with enthusiasm in instrumental groups. At Key Stage 3 they co-operate in group composition and are often enthusiastic in performing tasks. Students enjoy playing their compositions to their peers who respond by listening attentively. Independent learning skills are well developed at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The number of students opting for GCSE music at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average; however, take up in the sixth form is low.

221 Teaching at Key Stage 3 and 4 is good and in sixth form lessons sound, with elements of very good practice. Expertise and skills are used to good advantage in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities. Teaching embodies very strong commitment, energy, a range of interesting work and a supportive approach. There are excellent standards of planning, assessment and organisation. Students have opportunities to explore their own culture and value the opportunity to explore world cultures. In a project on Chinese music, for example, Year 8 students were able to explore and develop suitable music as accompaniment to a short Chinese play. Such work helps students to broaden their understanding of other cultures. Students are also helped to consolidate their word skills; teachers routinely refer to spelling and technical terms. Regular homework is set which supplements and extends the work done in the classroom and this has a positive effect on students' progress. Instrumental teaching is sound. The 16 visiting instrumental teachers extend the music curriculum considerably and their work is thoroughly managed and fully integrated into the work of the department. Students have the opportunity to take instrumental grade examinations and have a record of success.

222 The department is very well organised, with suitable administrative processes in place. The long-term monitoring, assessing and recording of students' work is excellent, and day to day assessment is effectively used to develop the work offered to students. Accommodation has some good features, the main music room providing a stimulating and lofty environment. The temporary use of a mobile classroom for some music lessons causes some logistic difficulties but new accommodation is planned. On the whole, the department has good instrumental stocks and satisfactory information technology resources. The department is aware of the need to update computers and to develop and enrich further computer work at Key Stage 3, so that all students are able to receive a full entitlement to information and communication technology in music lessons.

223 The department provides a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. Annual musical productions attract large numbers of enthusiastic students and standards of dance, drama and music are good. Such activities, together with the large choir (called *Bel Canto*) and many instrumental and vocal groups, considerably broaden the delivery of the music curriculum within the school. Standards in extra-curricular vocal work are high. Music groups from the school have visited Prague and Vienna; a trip to Russia is planned. Such opportunities have a strong impact on the cultural development of students. The performance and composing work of students is appropriately celebrated in the school and in the community, within a regular and extensive calendar of musical events. Such opportunities for students to perform have a strong impact on the prevailing ethos and do much for the kudos of the department and the school.

224 Good progress has been made in relation to the previous report, with no significant matters outstanding.

Physical Education

225 Most students meet national expectations in physical education on entry into Year 7. This is shown from observation and early assessment, there being no statistical information from previous years. Through Key Stage 3, most, including those

with special educational needs, make good progress. Year 7 netball lessons show students making excellent progress. Higher attainers develop complex strategies for marking. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards of attainment in physical education are above expectation. Year 8 fitness lessons show students generally exceeding national expectations in sequences. End of unit assessments and lesson observation show boys and girls equally meeting the nationally expected standards.

226 Through Key Stage 4, lessons and written work show better than expected progress. This applies to development of basic skills in basketball and sequences in aerobics. Over time progress is better than expected for the full range of students. Year 11 basketball and a range of extra-curricular activities show highly motivated students exceeding national standards. Recent GCSE results show better than national standards. In 1999, there were 65 per cent grades A to C, with 100 per cent grades A to G. In 1998, there were 70 per cent A to C with 100 per cent A to G, compared with 49 per cent and 91 per cent found nationally. In 1997, the school's figures were 75 per cent and 100 per cent against 44 per cent and 97 per cent. Present GCSE written work is in line with this.

227 Sixth form students' progress is very much better than expected. Written work for GCE Advanced level over time shows gains in expressing more complex ideas. Dance groups seen had made much previous progress in order to achieve present complex, graceful movements. Present Year 13 attainment in lessons and written work is above course averages, as is student led testing and coaching in hockey. GCE Advanced level examinations, not sat at the time of the previous inspection, show results at about average levels or above. In 1998, Sandringham students scored 18.5 per cent grades A and B, with 100 per cent grades A to E, compared with national figures of 22 per cent and 90 per cent. In 1999, Sandringham students scored 27 per cent grades A and B with 91 per cent grades A to E. Throughout, physical education maintains high standards. Its own assessments are in line with inspection observations. Students' progress is better than expected.

228 Strongly supporting these standards are the concentration and co-operation of students. This applies in all lessons seen throughout the school. There are no differences between attitudes to study of boys and girls nor amongst students of differing attainment levels. Year 8 hockey skills develop through concentration over the whole lesson. Open and friendly learning relationships are a strong feature throughout. Year 7 netball students show excellent expectation of reaching the highest standards. Year 11 swimming fitness work has very good qualities of calmness and sense supporting improvement. Sixth form basketball students have very high concentration levels.

229 Teaching is good overall with very good teaching seen in Key Stage 4 and examples of excellent teaching seen at all key stages. Over 30 per cent of teaching seen was very good or better. This strongly supports progress over time, including that in extra-curricular activities. Strengths are in planning for learning outcomes in all lessons and building a friendly partnership of learning with all. Teachers' expectations of concentration and motivation are very high. Fully qualified enthusiasts manage learning very well, including the setting of homework and organising resources. Assessment of students has developed strongly since the last inspection and student self-evaluation in most lessons strongly assists improvement and involves students more.

230 The physical education faculty is very well led. The head of faculty has the strong support of a co-operative team. Much successful work has been put into the development of curriculum planning, of professional development, appraisal and the setting of spending priorities. This is now beginning to be fully integrated against the chief priority of the faculty to raise standards further. Statutory requirements are met.

The curriculum is satisfactory in all key stages. There are strong curricular links for continuity of learning between all years with the exception of a lack of continuity between Year 6 in other schools and Year 7 at Sandringham.

231 The faculty offers a very good range of extra-curricular activities throughout. The quality of these activities very strongly supports learning and progress for well over half the school's students. This is a very strong aspect of the faculty's emphasis on the best of relationships. Sixth formers make effective contributions in lessons and activities, so assisting improvement for younger students. Health, safety and child protection issues are fully covered. Accommodation is sufficient but with problem areas.

232 The determination of students and teachers to maintain their standards in activities and in examinations, plus the very positive ethos, means that physical education gives very good value for money.

233 Almost all matters referred to in the last inspection have been attended to successfully, but physical education still has some way to go in linking multi-cultural aspects into its work.

Religious Education

234 On entry students' levels of attainment are in line with the average expected in Hertfordshire's Agreed Syllabus for religious education. By the end of Key Stage 3 students achieve levels that are below the expected range. Students do not develop a systematic and detailed knowledge of the beliefs and practices of Christianity and the other faiths encountered through their study. This means that over the key stage the majority, including those with special educational needs, make unsatisfactory progress. This is due mainly to the discontinuity in learning which occurs through the way in which the religious education curriculum has been organized. There is some indication that the recent introduction of more regular religious education lessons in Year 7 through the integrated learning programme is having an early positive impact on standards. They make some gains in knowledge but opportunities to extend learning and to develop skills in religious education are fragmented by the way in which the majority of students over the key stage receive their religious education.

235 Progress made in Key Stage 4 by the small number following a GCSE short course in religious education is good. Although results were below national course averages in 1999, individual's results exceed the average gained in their other GCSE subjects. Students deepen their knowledge and understanding of the religions studied and the impact that religious faith has on attitudes to social and moral issues through the course as well as developing skills of interpretation, analysis and empathy. Progress made by students not following the GCSE course is unsatisfactory due to the fragmented nature of the organization of the curriculum. By the end of the key stage students are attaining standards below those expected by the Agreed Syllabus.

236 Progress made by students in the sixth form is satisfactory. They are beginning to be able to analyse religious and moral ideas and to see that for some people religious faith affects the way in which they live. The factual accuracy of their

knowledge is less well developed than their confidence in sharing ideas and opinions. Standards achieved are average in relation to the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus.

237 Students' attitudes to learning in religious education are very good throughout the school. They display enthusiasm about the religious education days, enjoy religious education in Year 7 and those choosing the option modules and GCSE are committed to their learning. They show interest and are attentive. They work well individually and in a variety of groupings. They are prepared to put forward their own viewpoints and listen very respectfully to those of others. They are polite and courteous.

238 The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. In the religious education lessons seen teaching was satisfactory or better with three-quarters being good and one quarter satisfactory. Tasks set are basically satisfactory but some do lack sufficient challenge for all students. Although it was not possible during the inspection to attend a religious education day or to visit many lessons in other subject areas where some religious education content is identified, the quality of the planning is indicative of a higher than usual knowledge of some religious education across the whole staff. Positive relationships, good discipline and high expectations contribute to good quality teaching. Lesson planning is satisfactory but there is insufficient focus on the religious education learning outcomes to be achieved during individual lessons or units particularly where religious education is being delivered in a cross-curricular way. A range of teaching strategies, including visits and visitors, the use of text books, video and internally produced information and worksheets, discussion, research and presentations, is planned into the overall programme. The assessment of students' work is satisfactory when related to external examination criteria at GCSE but unsatisfactory across the rest of the religious education curriculum. Teachers mark work regularly with some helpful comments about how to improve work generally but assessment is not linked sufficiently to learning outcomes for individual lessons or units of work. There has been some recent improvement in assessment practice with the introduction of some student self assessment and the subject area is well placed to incorporate into its assessment procedures proposed developments to the revised Agreed Syllabus in order to improve practice further. Homework makes a satisfactory contribution to learning across all years.

239 Curriculum organization means that a wide range of teachers are involved in the delivery of religious education, very few of whom have any formal religious education qualification or experience. At present four teachers have some formally recognized religious education element to their teaching qualifications but a larger number of staff have received school based in-service training in religious education recently. This has improved opportunities for the enrichment of the religious education curriculum but the regularity of explicit religious education provision for the majority of students continues to hinder progress. The termly religious education days do make a positive contribution to students' experience and enjoyment of religious education but the lack of opportunity for students to consolidate and extend the knowledge and understanding gained through them limits their impact on standards of attainment. Although resources for religious education have been improved within the last two years and are adequate, there remain few religious artefacts, posters and pictures to enhance teaching and learning opportunities. The management of the subject is shared between integrated learning, those responsible for the religious education days and heads of faculty. A deputy headteacher has general oversight. The shared management of the subject has in the past dissipated its effectiveness but recently there has been a greater clarity to the vision for religious education within the curriculum. The subject area makes a good contribution to the school's ethos for learning and also provides satisfactory value for money.

240 Unsatisfactory progress has been made since the previous inspection with regard to meeting statutory requirements for religious education in Key Stages 3 and 4. However, very good progress has been made over this academic year in mapping cross-curricular opportunities for the enrichment of religious education provision, introducing specific religious education lessons into Year 7, providing in-service training

for staff and in prioritising developments for the future.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

241 A team of 14 inspectors, including a lay inspector, visited the school for a total of 52 days. During the inspection 189 lessons were observed in whole or part and registrations, tutor periods and assemblies were visited. A range of extra-curricular activities was also inspected. Planned discussions were held with many teaching and non teaching staff and many informal discussions took place. Meetings were held with the chair and other members of the governing body both before and during the inspection, the education welfare officer, school nurse, representatives of the Parent Teacher Association, the LEA link adviser and the LEA careers service. Part of a meeting of the senior management team was observed.

242 Inspectors looked at the written work of many students. Interviews were held with a group of students selected by the school to represent different levels of attainment, and inspectors selected many for informal discussions. Documentation provided by the school was analysed before the inspection and used to inform the inspection team about the school's aims, policies and procedures. Further information was scrutinised during the inspection including 23 letters and comments sent to the registered inspector from parents, former students, local institutions and businesses, contributors to extra-curricular activities, contract bus company, educational institutions and support services.

243 The registered inspector met 35 parents of students registered at the school shortly before the inspection and made an analysis of the 185 questionnaires completed by parents.

DATA AND INDICATORS

Pupil data

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7- Y13	1095	36	159	57

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers (Y7- Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	67.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.22

Education support staff (Y7- Y13)

Total number of education support staff	13
Total aggregate hours worked each week	229

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	76
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Average teaching group size:	KS3	24.2
	KS4	15.0

Financial data

Financial year:

1998/9

	£
Total Income	2574741
Total Expenditure	2589835
Expenditure per pupil	2436.35
Balance brought forward from previous year	40220
Balance carried forward to next year	25126

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:
Number of questionnaires returned:

1095
185

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school	20.8	66.7	9.8	2.7	0.0
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	40.9	51.9	5.5	1.7	0.0
The school handles complaints from parents well	23.8	48.8	19.0	7.7	0.6
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	23.6	54.9	15.4	6.0	0.0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	29.8	54.1	9.9	5.0	1.1
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	38.3	54.4	5.6	1.1	0.6
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	45.4	45.9	4.4	3.8	0.5
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	23.1	60.4	5.5	8.2	2.7
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	44.6	44.6	8.2	2.7	0.0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	41.0	48.6	7.7	2.7	0.0
My child(ren) like(s) school	43.2	47.0	6.5	2.2	1.1