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**INSPECTION UNDER SECTION 9 OF
THE EDUCATION [SCHOOLS] ACT 1992**

ST. BIRINUS SCHOOL

Mereland Road

Didcot

Oxon

OX11 8AZ

School Number: 931 4129
Dates of Inspection: 30th January - 3rd February 1995

By

**Robert S. Long
Registered Inspector T11212**

10th March 1995

Under OFSTED contract number: 931/S4/0001345

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Introduction

This inspection was carried out under Section 9 of the Education Act 1992 to report on the quality of education provided by the school, the educational standards achieved in the school, whether the financial resources made available to the school are managed efficiently, and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school. The findings of the inspection will contribute to the annual report to Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to the Secretary of State for Education.

Basic information about the school

- | | |
|--|---|
| Name of school: | St. Birinus School |
| Type of School: | Comprehensive all through |
| Status: | County |
| Age range of pupils: | 11 - 18 |
| Headteacher: | Mr C D Bryan |
| Address of school: | Mereland Road
Didcot
Oxon
OX11 8AZ |
| Telephone: | 01235 814444 |
| Name and address of appropriate authority: | The governing body
Address as above |
| Local authority area: | Oxfordshire |
| Department for Education School Number: | 931/4129 |
| Name of Registered Inspector: | Robert S. Long |
| Dates of inspection: | 30th January -
3rd February 1995 |

Intake of pupils and the area served by the school

2. This boys' comprehensive school serves Didcot and surrounding villages. Didcot is a south Oxfordshire market town with a strong industrial heritage. It is less affluent than many shire market towns. Considerable expansion of the town is planned and a range of scientific and technological companies have made Didcot their base.

There are 811 boys on roll which is expected to increase to about 940 by 1999. The school tests pupils on entry and states that performance in reading and spelling is below normal standards for a significant number of the 11 year olds. Twenty pupils have statements of special educational need (close to the national average), and a further 100 pupils receive additional support.

At 16 boys wishing to continue their education at school enter the sixth form which is jointly provided with Didcot Girls' school.

School data and indicators

3.

a] Pupils

Number of pupils in each year group

	Number of Boys	Total
Year 7	151	151
Year 8	153	153
Year 9	138	138
Year 10	139	139
Year 11	120	120
Year 12	69	69
Year 13	41	41
Totals	811	811

Special educational needs

Number of pupils having statements of special educational needs: 20

Free school meals

Percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals: 7.2%

b] Teachers and classes

Full-time equivalent teachers:	49.9
Pupil to teacher ratio:	16.25:1
Contact ratio:	79.49%
Average teaching group size in Years 7 - 11:	22.32

c] Teaching time per week

	Hours	Minutes
Key stage 3	24	10
Key stage 4	24	10
Sixth form	24	10

d] Pupil attendance [Percentages] for third week of the term before the inspection

Year	Actual attendance	Authorised absence	Unauthorised absence
Year 7	98.4	1.6	-
Year 8	94.9	5.1	-
Year 9	93.6	6.4	0.07
Year 10	90.6	9.4	-
Year 11	88.6	9.76	1.67
Year 12	96.1	3.9	-
Year 13	91.0	9.0	-
Totals	93.6	6.3	0.1

Reported by governors in their annual report:

Average attendance rate: 92.3%; unauthorised absence:0.3%

e] Number of exclusions in the last 12 months

	FIXED PERIOD	PERMANENT	MINORITIES
	Boys	Boys	Boys
Year 7	2		
Year 8			
Year 9	1		
Year 10	2		

Year 11	3	1
Year 12		
Year 13		
Overall		
totals	8	1

Total exclusions:-

Fixed period: 8
Permanent: 1

f] National Curriculum assessment and pupils examination results

Key stage four

Public examination results: General Certificate of Secondary Education

School results 1993	School results 1994			
% per pupils -	Boys	All	Boys	All
Entered for 5+ GCSEs	95%	95%	91%	91%
Achieving 5+ A-C grades	39%	39%	37%	37%
Achieving 5+ A-G grades	84%	84%	79%	79%
Entered for 1+ GCSEs	95%	95%	91%	91%
Achieving 1+ A-G grade	95%	95%	89%	89%
Achieving no passes [A-G]	5%		5%	2% 2%
Entered for all three subjects En, Ma, Sc.	85%	85%	84.2%	84.2%
Achieving A-C in all three subjects En, Ma, Sc	23%	23%	29.8%	29.8%
Achieving A-G in all three subjects En, Ma, Sc.	81%	81%	79%	79%
Achieving A-G in one or of the three subjects	95%	95%	88.6%	88.6%

	LEA Area 1994	England 1994
Percentage of pupils -	Boys	Boys
Entered for 5+ GCSEs	N/A	89.6%
Achieving 5+ A-C grades	41.1%	36%
Achieving 5+ A-G grades	84.7%	85.1%
Entered for 1+ GCSE	N/A	95.5%
Achieving 1+ A-C grade	66.5%	63.2%
Achieving 1+ A-G grade	N/A	9 3 . 2 %

Post-16 examination results

	School		LEA		England	
	1993	1994	1993	1994	1993	1994
Number of pupils entered for fewer than 2 A levels	3	4	-		-	
Average points score of pupils entered for fewer than 2 A levels	2.0	6.0	2.4	2.6	2.5	3.2
Number of pupils entered for 2 or more A levels	38	25	-		-	
Average points score of pupils entered for 2 or more A levels	13.7	15.8	14.3	13.9	14.4	15.1*

* all schools

Other qualifications taken by year 12 students

Type of award	Awarding body	Level	Vocational Area	Entries	Results
GNVQ	C & G	2	Business	17	Merit: 6 Pass: 9 Units: 1
GNVQ	C & G	2	Health & Social Care	14	Merit: 2 Pass: 8 Units: 3
GNVQ	C & G	2	Leisure & Tourism	15	Merit: 2 Pass: 3 Units: 5
GNVQ	C & G	2	Manufacturing	11	-

GNVQ - General National Vocational Qualification

C & G - City and Guilds

g] Pupils' routes on leaving the school

Year	Number	F.E/School	Employment	Training	Other
11	65		14	18	17
12	57		12	16	15
Year	Number	9	15		
13	%	38	62		
Year	Number	Further Educ.	Higher Educ.	Yth Training	Other
13	4	15	58	7	
	%	15	58	27	

h) Financial information

Income [£]	Last full financial year	Current year
Balance brought forward	110,676	112,623
Recurrent income; e.g. formula funding, annual maintenance grant fees	1,512,138	1,632,583
Other grants, allocations or special purpose grants	38,580	7,307
TVEI funding	20,487	8,902
Other income managed by the school, including lettings and funds raised	65,268	49,736
Total	1,747,149	1,811,151
Expenditure [£]	Last full financial year	Budget allocation for current year
Teaching staff	1,140,639	1,237,947
Other staff	168,167	173,965
Educational resources	77,000	76,646
Premises costs	170,551	187,666
Curriculum and staff development	25,177	17,112
Other costs	52,992	71,742
Total	1,634,526	1,765,078

Expenditure per pupil: £2,248

Expenditure per pupil on educational resources £105

Record of the evidence base of the inspection

4. The inspection was carried out by a team of fifteen inspectors over a week. Two hundred and four lessons were observed across the full age and ability range. In addition inspectors visited registrations, assemblies, tutorial sessions and extra-curricular activities. More than fifty planned discussions were held with teaching and non-teaching staff, governors, employers and the headteachers of two local primary schools. All the available work of three pupils from each year was reviewed by inspectors; structured interviews were held with these pupils and informal conversations took place with many more. A comprehensive range of documentation provided by the school was studied. Fifty nine parents attended a meeting with the Registered Inspector at which they shared their views on aspects of the school. In addition, 324 questionnaires were returned by parents. These potential views were borne in mind by inspectors.

Main findings

5. St. Birinus school is developing successfully and has many strong features. It is well led. Staff and governors work hard and effectively; the school enjoys the confidence of its community.

6. Standards of achievement in lessons are in line with national standards for 11 to 16 year olds and above national standards in some sixth form subjects. Examination results at 16 are close to national averages and are above those at advanced level. Standards in writing range from competent to good; standards in speaking and listening are sound, but opportunities for using these skills are limited; standards in reading range from average to poor. Standards in information technology are not entirely satisfactory.

7. The pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum, enhanced by useful links with industry and commerce, and a good range of extra-curricular provision. Joint arrangements with Didcot Girls' School ensure a good range of sixth form courses. Teachers create a stable context within which pupils generally learn well and make progress. Pupils' initiative and sense of enquiry are insufficiently used to take learning forward in some lessons.

8. Pupils respond well to the good provision the school makes for their personal development. Standards of behaviour are good. Social and moral development is strong; pupils have a growing awareness of rights and responsibilities and a sense of their own and other communities. Pupils' spiritual growth and understanding is well developed in a range of subjects as well as in assembly, tutorial and religious education, even though the school does not fully comply with statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. Pupils' achievements of all kinds are recognised.

9. The school manages its resources efficiently, giving priority to teaching and learning. However, there is already a strain on resources in some subject areas and at the time of the inspection governors faced significant cuts for the next financial year.

Key issues for action

10. To raise further the standards of work and the quality of learning the governors and staff should:-

- develop pupils' learning so that they
 - have more opportunities to investigate and to use and apply knowledge;
 - take more initiative and responsibility;
 - work more independently;
- introduce more strategies in all subjects to build on pupils' achievements in talking and reading;
- extend pupils' learning in information technology;
- ensure a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and extend access to religious education for students on vocational courses;
- maintain the strengths of the school identified in this report.

Standards and quality

Standards of achievement

11. Standards of achievement reflect the full range of the intake and are in line with national expectations. Examination results in General Certificate of Secondary Education [GCSE] at 16 are close to national averages for boys' comprehensive schools. Performance is good in English, mathematics and art, average in most other subjects and weaker in music and modern foreign languages. Advanced level [A level] G C E results are good: in 1994 the average points score for students entered for two or more subjects was 15.8, better than the national average for boys' schools and mixed comprehensives. Performance is good in mathematics, art, history, modern foreign languages and government and politics. In other subjects it is in line with national averages. Overall, students who complete a one year course in year 12 achieve less satisfactory grades when they repeat GCSE subjects; they do better when they study new GCSE subjects. The first year's results in the new General National Vocational Qualification [GNVQ] assessment were in line with local and national performance and weaker than current achievement on the courses.

12. The majority of pupils achieve the national age-related expectations, and some achieve beyond, in 70% of the lessons in key stages three and four and in virtually all of the lessons in the sixth form. Pupils achieve appropriate levels for their ability and some achieve high levels in 80% of lessons in key stages three and four and in the great majority in the sixth form.

13. Pupils generally show satisfactory levels of competence in speaking and listening. In English lessons and many tutorial periods there is good use of these skills so that pupils learn to explore ideas and tease out difficult concepts. Standards are often depressed elsewhere in the curriculum where they have few such opportunities.

14. Standards in reading, as tested by the school, are low on entry. Standards across the years are variable and in a number of subjects the pupils have difficulty coping with the level of reading necessary. Pupils write confidently and produce a substantial volume of work; they are able to write imaginatively, descriptively and to argue a point of view. Presentation is good in the majority of subjects; the spelling of some pupils is weak.

15. Standards of numeracy are satisfactory or better for abler and middle ability pupils. Standards are less than satisfactory for some lower ability pupils. While pupils apply numeracy well in science and design and technology, these skills are underused in other areas. Achievement in information technology ranges from satisfactory to poor.

Quality of learning

16. The quality of pupils' learning is sound or better in 84% of lessons across years 7 to 11; the quality in 35% is good. In the sixth form, the quality of learning is sound in 41% of lessons and good or very good in a further 54%. There are some indications that the quality of learning is better in classes of more able pupils than in others. There is a consistent and direct relationship between the quality of learning and the quality of teaching.

17. In the good lessons, pupils are attentive and well-motivated. They have the capacity to learn and they respond well to good opportunities. They build on the skills they have already gained; they carry out research and investigations effectively and use and apply their knowledge and understanding. They learn effectively through talk in groups and across the whole class, developing their own thinking through the interchange with others. They are capable of sustained and purposeful work. In the majority of lessons where learning is satisfactory there is some, though not extensive, evidence of these features; however, the range of learning skills pupils bring to lessons is underused.

18. Where learning is unsatisfactory this is generally the result of poor teaching. Pupils show little initiative and seldom ask questions. Talk is restricted to one word or single sentence answers. Pupils do not work together effectively, attention wanes and behaviour on occasions is poor. Progress is limited.

Efficiency of the school

19. The school manages its resources efficiently.

20. The governing body, well supported by the headteacher and senior management team, appropriately engages in planning to achieve medium-term educational objectives, and then takes advice from the finance sub-committee about the budgetary constraints and implications. It relates decision to the school development plan, but there is a need to incorporate costings in the plan. For 1992 - 3 and 1993 - 4 the school was able to carry forward c£100,000 - a prudent 6% of its budget. For 1994-5 balances are being used to finance recurrent expenditure, leaving only a small margin for contingency and medium term planning. At the time of the inspection, governors were aware of likely substantial reductions in budget for 1995 - 6.

21. The school shares an effective and efficient joint sixth form with Didcot Girls' School, which ensures a good range of advanced level subjects, GCSE, and the development of new vocational courses. The joint sixth form is a good example of investment for the present and the future. Some courses are expensive; but the projected increase in numbers over the next five years means it is prudent to sustain the provision, so ensuring continued teaching expertise and breadth of curriculum to meet the needs of Didcot and the surrounding villages over the next five years.

22. Teaching and non-teaching staff are deployed effectively. The site and buildings are well managed and teaching areas suitably used. Resources for learning in classrooms are generally satisfactory, but there are shortages in some areas, for example in science and geography, and in books to support advanced level work in the library.

23. The school carefully encourages financial support from parents and industry and commerce, and benefits from lettings. In 1993 - 4 income from external sources was c£65,000 and at least c£45,000 is expected for the current year.

24. Financial administration is good. The most recent auditor's report recognised sound procedures and identified a number of minor matters to which the school has attended. The school evaluates its cost-effectiveness through sound purchasing policies and regular reviews of the quality of education it provides. The school subscribes to a range of cost effective LEA services. Overall, the school provides sound value for money.

Pupils' personal development and behaviour

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

25. The school has clearly documented its aims to promote the moral, social and cultural development of pupils and thereby to create an orderly, responsible and tolerant community. It is generally successful in evoking positive responses from pupils in these respects.

26. Although the spiritual dimensions of life are not specifically referred to in school documents, there is evidence that spiritual understanding is present in the planned and the unplanned curriculum of the school. In art, the pupils are encouraged to bring

contemplation of abstract ideas and imagination to their work; in music lessons and in concerts, items for study or performance deliberately include works with religious or spiritual inspiration, and some literary texts in English often give rise to sensitive discussion of spiritual undertones. Religious education and design and technology also make strong contributions to the spiritual aspect of life. Pupils usually give a positive and sensitive response to these opportunities.

27. The school takes its role as a moral educator seriously, and there are numerous instances where curriculum content explores moral issues: for example, in history, science and topics from the personal and social education programme. Pupils' social development is actively promoted within the curriculum. For example, science, design and technology, English and physical education teach or explore good social behaviour. In assemblies and tutorial sessions, pupils are frequently given responsibilities and they usually respond well. The school uses its links with industry and commerce to widen pupils' opportunities to meet adults from a variety of walks of life.

28. Extra-curricular social opportunities such as residential visits (some abroad), projects in aid of charities, work as prefects, monitors and ushers, house events and the running of the school tuck shop, and a large programme of sporting and other social activities and clubs are generally strongly supported by pupils. Senior management and other staff have worked hard and successfully towards creating a good ethos in the school.

29. A number of curriculum subjects, for example modern foreign languages, art, music, English and history, develop pupils' knowledge of culture and provide opportunities to gain familiarity with cultures other than those of their own upbringing. During the inspection, assemblies (which pupils attend on one day each week) usually involved a thought-provoking address, prayer, and an invitation to join in silent contemplation to which pupils almost invariably responded respectfully. Tutorial sessions, which are also relied upon to fulfil requirements for the daily act of collective worship for all pupils, do not do so consistently. The assembly and tutorial programme as a whole makes a strong and positive contribution to the spiritual and moral development of pupils. Governors consider the school has taken reasonable steps to conform to legal requirements and the school intends to continue to provide further training for teachers to enable them to carry out their responsibilities more effectively.

Behaviour and discipline

30. The overall standard of behaviour in the school is high. In most lessons, pupils are attentive and involved. They have the ability to work independently and in groups. Learning is seldom disrupted by poor behaviour. Relationships between staff and pupils are generally good and are conducive to learning.

31. The school is orderly. Pupils are usually polite to each other, to staff and to visitors. Pupils in some year groups have the opportunity to participate in democratic debate through participation in year councils. They have been able to develop rules to

supplement those in the code of conduct. Many year eleven pupils are prefects and help to maintain order during breaks and at lunchtime. Movement around the school site is orderly, though there is crowding and jostling on narrow stairs and in other bottlenecks.

32. The school prospectus expresses clear expectations of sensible and mature behaviour. These are promoted through suitable policies and procedures. A hierarchy of sanctions, including exclusion, is used when appropriate. Pupils and parents are satisfied with the school's actions to discourage and respond to undesirable behaviour. Bullying is not a significant problem and is dealt with appropriately by the school when it arises.

Attendance

33. The overall rate of attendance is sound - the level of unauthorised absence is below local and national averages for comparable schools. Pupils' attendance is recorded at the beginning of each session, using computerised forms, and during most lessons. Teachers make enquiries when pupils are missing. Suitable procedures for investigating and monitoring absences are followed. The educational social worker surveys the attendance data weekly and meets staff regularly to discuss absences that cause concern. A good range of strategies has been developed to encourage the attendance of habitual absentees. Punctuality is encouraged in the pastoral booklet and through the school rules; most lessons start and finish on time. There is no evidence of truancy during the school day. Publication of attendance data in the school's prospectus and annual report does not fully comply with statutory requirements.

Subjects of the curriculum and other curricular provision

English

34. Achievement at key stage three ranges from below to well above the level expected nationally, and reflects pupils' ability. At key stage four the achievement related to pupils' ability is satisfactory or better for most pupils. GCSE English results in 1994, slightly lower than in previous years, were still above the national average for all pupils, and well above the achievement of boys nationally. English literature results were a little below national averages for all pupils, although again better than comparable figures for boys. Advanced level achievement has been steady, with at least 75% of the entry attaining the higher grades in each of the last two years. Achievement of advanced level students in relation to ability ranges from satisfactory to very good. Students resitting GCSE are underachieving.

35. Standards of speaking and listening are good in English lessons and pupils enjoy a good range of activities. Lower sixth form students readily take part in discussion and skilfully probe their ideas with each other and with their teachers. Significant numbers of pupils, particularly at key stage three, lack confidence in reading. The department teaches a range of strategies for reading, including ensuring that all pupils use the library regularly. Writing is generally purposeful and pupils of all ages encounter work demanding different styles. The most able pupils in key stage four are able to write in complex and mature ways. Younger pupils write large quantities of verse successfully and

are competent script writers. Although presentation is good, many pupils encounter difficulties with spelling.

36. The quality of learning is satisfactory to good in virtually all English lessons. Pupils are mostly attentive listeners, show a readiness to work and enjoy the subject. They mostly support each other's learning in pair, group and whole class work. The quality of teaching is also satisfactory to good. English staff are committed, professional, well prepared and enjoy good relations with their pupils, through mostly interesting lessons. Assessment is thorough and the feedback to pupils through extensive marking is positive and warmly encouraging. A number of the least able pupils would benefit from work more appropriately matched to their capabilities. Some pupils withdrawn for special needs help in key stage three have a more limited range of kinds of English work than is desirable.

37. The department is very ably led and much support is given by experienced staff. Over half the teachers in English have been successfully inducted during the last two years and a departmental ethos is already established. Excellent planning and development have ensured rapid, beneficial change, which is being continually evaluated. Good resources and attractive accommodation, with good display of pupils' work, help to provide an effective learning environment.

Mathematics

38. The 1994 GCSE mathematics results are in line with local averages but above national figures for boys gaining an A - C grade in mathematics. The mathematics A-level results for 1994 were good, being above both local and national norms. The standards achieved in key stage three and key stage four are broadly appropriate to the age and abilities of the pupils. They are generally secure in tackling routine work but some are less confident when asked to apply and recall their mathematical skills to solve more difficult problems. Much of the written work is satisfactory but in some classes the standards of presentation are not very high. Homework is regularly set and generally carried out conscientiously.

39. The quality of teaching and learning across both key stages is generally sound and occasionally good. Lessons range from those that have good pace, rigour and excitement to those that lack structure and take no account of the differing needs and abilities of the pupils. At sixth form level, the quality of teaching is good. In all lessons, students are given challenging work and good use is made of discussion and graphical calculators. However, throughout the school, discussion could be exploited more fully and open-ended questions used more frequently.

40. Calculators are well used and numerical work is well practised and understood. Work with graphical calculators is being introduced not only in year 12 and 13 but also in years 9, 10 and 11.

41. The mathematics department has a clear assessment policy and is developing a range of assessment and recording procedures to meet national curriculum requirements. However, it needs to develop assessment techniques that widen the range of evidence and

include the use of observation techniques and targeted discussion to provide evidence of achievement in using and applying mathematics. More use of diagnostic assessment and an increase in the level of the pupils' involvement in setting targets and recognising their own progress should be incorporated.

42. The department is well led both administratively and for curriculum development. It operates together as a team and there is good communication between the mathematics staff. However, practice varies from class to class despite the quality of the supportive documentation. The whole department needs to agree approaches that guarantee pupils comparable experiences.

43. The department has six temporary classrooms sited close together and a small team room. Four of the rooms are of a satisfactory standard while the other two are much poorer. The rooms become crowded when classes of thirty or more pupils are present and it is then difficult for practical work to be undertaken.

44. The major task for the mathematics department now is to ensure that all pupils develop their mathematical skills to their full potential. The planning of work for individual pupils needs to build on an accurate knowledge of their stage of mathematical development and the use of appropriate material. Pupils need to be encouraged to make links between the mathematical skills that they learn and to have more opportunities to use them purposefully.

Science

45. At both key stages three and four standards are sound as most pupils achieve the levels of knowledge, understanding and skills that are appropriate for their ages and abilities. Practical skills are good and the standards of investigative work are often above average, though pupils are less confident in applying and using ideas in unfamiliar contexts. Standards of pupils with special educational needs are generally satisfactory and some achieve levels above expectation. Standards at post 16 are sound in all the A-level subjects and students develop good independent study skills, including note making and research. Standards are more variable in the GNVQ intermediate level course and the entry requirement should be reviewed. At GCSE the most recent results for grades A* - C [39%] are slightly below national averages [44%]. The GCE A-level results for biology and chemistry appear satisfactory but physics results are less good.

46. Written work, in both key stages three and four, is generally well presented and contains a reasonable balance of pupils' own writing and teachers' notes. Oracy is underdeveloped in most lessons, though numeracy is sound and good graph plotting and calculation were seen in several lessons.

47. In key stages three and four, pupils' learning is sound or better in all but a few lessons. Where learning is good pupils show interest and enthusiasm, and respond well to challenging tasks. The quality of teaching is sound or better in 90% of lessons, where there is appropriate planning, clearly set tasks and sound classroom management. The good lessons [40%] feature activities which challenge most pupils in the class and effective teacher intervention and questioning. Generally work is set which matches the

ability band being taught. However, within the upper groups there is a need to provide tasks which extend the more able pupils.

48. At key stages three and four the national curriculum is securely in place though the information technology entitlement is not being fully implemented. Assessment of pupils' progress is accurate, standardised and meets statutory requirements. Pupils' work is regularly checked, commented upon, and often corrected, and good records are kept. At key stage three pupils are well informed about their progress: self assessment sheets make a positive contribution. The key stage four pupils following the combined science course are less informed about their progress.

49. The department is well managed and both teaching and non teaching staff are working well as a team to implement a range of new courses. However, other than the head of department there are no permanent posts of responsibility within the department and this should be reviewed. Documentation is good and thorough and the department has made extensive links with industry both to enrich the curriculum and to improve funding. Health and safety matters are generally in good order, but there is a need to rectify the lack of spillage kits, to provide appropriate eyewash facilities, and to arrange for the fume cupboard in the preparation room to be usable. The development plan is sound and appropriate targets are set and costed.

50. The levels of appropriate resources are unsatisfactory and a serious shortage of basic equipment limits practical activities in the GCSE, A-level and GNVQ courses. Laboratories are in reasonable condition. However, two are small and cannot adequately cope with large groups for practical work. One laboratory featured an informative display on plotting graphs and performing investigations and this type of display should be extended to other laboratories.

Technology

a] Design and technology

51. Generally, the majority of pupils achieve the national expectation or better in design and technology. A majority of pupils are achieving in accordance with their abilities and some achieve very well indeed. The GCSE results in design and technology for 1994 are broadly in line with county and national averages. A number of students obtained A and A* grades. The five students entered for GCE A-level in design and technology in 1994 achieved broadly satisfactory results. Pupils with special educational needs are achieving in line with their capabilities.

52. In both key stages three and four the programme of study and the requirement to cover the attainment targets has been adequately met. The range of pupils' work shows breadth and depth of design and technology activities and includes appropriate materials and components. The knowledge and understanding gained in mathematics, science and art is being applied to good effect. At key stages three and four, and in the sixth forms there is a good level of awareness and understanding of the place of design and technology in the community and in industry and business in particular.

53. The pupils' projects are interesting and most varied and embrace a wide range of design and make activities. Graphic communication skills are very well developed in all areas. The pupils experience a wide range of information technology activities to enhance designing and making products. They include the use of photography, video, and computers. The good graphical work, where textiles and food are used as contexts for designing, needs to be enhanced and extended to some examples of finished products.

54. The sixth form students studying GCE A-level design and technology are well motivated and their chosen projects are varied and interesting. This is assisting them in meeting the criteria for the examination's major projects. This more advanced work needs to be enhanced and extended in the school. The pupils and students enjoy their work in design and technology and work safely. The exhibition of finished work in design and technology is very good and inspires pupils at all levels in the subject.

55. The quality of teaching ranges from sound to very good. In a year 8 lesson where the pupils were designing a mobile seat the teaching was vibrant and purposeful. In a year 10 lesson in the electronics area, the quality of teaching was very good. The teachers are well prepared and lessons well organised, allowing all pupils to realise their capability. All lessons are supported by well qualified and resourceful technicians.

56. The level of resourcing for design and technology is good, witnessing the considerable investment into this area of the curriculum. Tools, machines and other equipment are well maintained and the work areas are safe. Redundant chemicals located in an external store should be removed from the site. The level of housekeeping throughout all teaching areas is excellent. Staff need to keep up to date in the use of potentially dangerous machinery by attending refresher courses.

b] Information technology [I.T.]

57. In key stage three pupils are beginning to use data handling and control with some confidence. However, in graphics, word processing and use of spreadsheets the majority of pupils achieve below the national expectation. In key stage four standards are in line with the national expectation and appropriate for their abilities particularly in communicating and control. Opportunities are not available for all pupils to consolidate this achievement through work in other subjects. In the sixth form, students taking vocational courses which incorporate I.T. skills are in line with the national average or above.

58. In key stage three the use of the computer, together with well-targeted discussion and group work, is enabling learning. There are shortcomings when the I.T. task is not linked to subjects, does not build on previous skills and where the accommodation restricts whole class discussion. In key stage four pupils readily explore the capacity of the software to achieve the required goal. Post 16 learning is at least sound for all students taking I.T. courses.

59. In key stage three teaching exhibited some shortcomings in a number of lessons and is affected by lack of planning in relation to pupils' capabilities. Teaching is predominantly good or sound at key stage four. The teaching of post-16 students has many good features which allow students to develop individually and with clear targets. Unfortunately teething trouble with the new computer network adversely affected some lessons seen. Curriculum planning is developing at key stage three, but coherent schemes

for all pupils are not yet in place. In key stage four the I.T. department delivers the full range of curriculum but there is little application of this work within subject departments.

60. Work in discrete I.T. lessons is assessed but there is no system to involve subject departments at key stages three and four. Only in year eight are reporting requirements in place. The procedure for other years is under review.

61. The range of software in the special needs department is used in a limited way to support writing and language development. Recommendations for I.T. use expressed in pupil statements are not always implemented.

62. The number of computers is slightly below the national average. The equipment is well-maintained and old equipment effectively used. The layout of the two new network rooms and the current unreliability of the system inhibits the full use of the facilities. The new equipment has created training needs which are generally being effectively addressed but require extending to include strategies to manage teaching in the new rooms. Continuous access at lunchtime and after school aids the development of work and the practice of information technology skills. The site benefits from a range of specialist I.T. areas in the library, design and technology and art departments.

63. The school should implement an assessment and recording system for IT and ensure that a consistent quality of experience is provided for all pupils. Strategies to manage teaching in the two new network rooms should be developed.

History

64. Achievement in history equals or exceeds national expectations. At GCSE level this is reflected in A - C grades that usually match national averages, and in A - G achievement for the great majority of year eleven pupils. A-level results are above national average. Both examination courses enable the majority of pupils to achieve their potential, with many doing so at a level high for their ability. This picture is also true for key stage three history though a small but significant minority are not achieving their potential in years 8 and 9.

65. At key stage three, pupils' learning is good or very good in two-thirds of lessons, with evidence of confident and well-focused approaches to tasks and the capacity to build on and extend existing learning. Effective use of written and oral communication to present interpretations or explanations backed by evidence are a feature of learning in the best lessons. Where weaknesses in learning are evident, they often arise from poor concentration or from too few opportunities for pupils to work on their own and use their initiative. A real interest in the subject is evident in many pupils at all stages. At key stage four, where quality of learning is always sound, and good in a quarter of lessons, pupils can at times harness this interest in genuine enquiry, well supported by access to a range of resources. Pupils should be encouraged to be more original in their approach to tasks. Teaching is predominantly good and, at key stage three in particular, can be very good, communicating enthusiasm for the subject. However, some lessons with less able learners at key stage three curtail that interest through a limited variety of activity or too slow a pace. At its best in all key stages, teaching makes effective links between learning objectives and activities used in lessons and homework. This includes a focus on

developing important general skills such as reading, as well as history-specific ones. A strong range of teaching styles and strengths exists in the department and more opportunities could be taken to share these across the team.

66. Assessment and marking is undertaken frequently, fully, and in a variety of formats. At key stage three, there could be more clarity within the department and for pupils about what constitutes achievement in history. This needs to be set alongside the clear messages about achievement in terms of effort and attitude, and to support more targeted commentary in key stage three reports. Assessment feedback at GCSE and A-level is well focused, and for sixth form students is particularly useful, being full and analytical.

67. The history curriculum meets national curriculum requirements at key stage three, and provides good continuity from key stage three to four. More liaison with primary schools will be needed to build continuity between key stages two and three. Homework is used well to contribute to the curriculum. Visits to historical sites have long been a positive feature of history learning for many pupils. Key stage three experience includes non-European perspectives, which are less evident beyond year nine. More opportunities should be taken to reflect the role of women in history.

68. The department makes considerable provision for meeting the range of learning needs across the ability range. This is reflected in the achievement and effort of many pupils with special educational needs. Planning and resourcing decisions in this department are thorough and well-managed. Greater use of information technology as a learning resource for all pupils is recognised as a priority.

Geography

69. There has been a considerable improvement in the A-level results with an increased number of students gaining passes at high grades. The current standards of achievement reach at least the national expectation and some students, particularly in year 12, achieve beyond it. They have good knowledge of the subject although the rigour of explanations can be variable. Written, oral and graphical work is broadly good. In key stage four the percentage of pupils gaining A - C grades is just below the national norm, yet a majority of the present year ten and eleven pupils are achieving at least the national expectation and some are achieving beyond it. However, there is evidence of underachievement by lower ability pupils. The quality of written and oral work varies. Though the standards vary across key stage three a substantial number are achieving the national expectation. The quality of written work is variable and when opportunities are provided oral work is good. Graphical competence is weak because pupils have too little practice of handling numerical data.

70. A-level students display many good features in their learning. Although the quality of learning is dominantly sound in key stage four it is sometimes affected by poor behaviour in lower ability groups. Pupils in key stage three are generally enthusiastic towards their learning and the quality is dominantly sound and occasionally good. However, in both key stages pupils across the ability range have difficulty in sustaining purposeful learning for the full double period. A wider range of learning skills is used in

key stage three than in key stage four. Most learning is teacher-directed and no independent or enquiry-based learning was observed. The department is already reviewing this.

71. The quality of teaching at all levels is dominantly sound and occasionally good. Staff have a good command of the subject at the level at which they teach it. Lessons are clearly structured although they do not contain a variety of teaching approaches. Much support is offered to individuals. Teachers' expectations of pupils is variable; where it is high, achievement is raised.

72. The subject complies with the current statutory requirements in key stage three but there is some overlap with key stage two. The assessment procedure is under review but complies with the statutory requirements in respect of assessment and recording. The reporting process does not provide sufficient information on pupils' progress in the subject.

73. Learning resources are rather narrow and there are too few textbooks available to set a range of homeworks.

Modern foreign languages

74. Year 7 pupils achieve in line with national expectations, and many show high achievement for their abilities. They can understand and remember the French they have learnt, and have a sound grasp of the grammar. Many pupils speak confidently, though some lack accuracy. Pupils in later key stage three years, and in key stage four, achieve below expected levels, both in terms of the national picture and their abilities. Although they normally handle simple language well, able pupils do not deal well with more complex language, and key aspects of grammar have often not been mastered. Some able pupils understand meaning and language forms quite well, but lack fluency in speaking. Standards of achievement by A-level students are higher than average national expectations, and recent examination results, although based on low entries, have been very good.

75. GCSE results in recent years have fluctuated. In 1994 the number of A - C grades improved markedly on 1993, but were nevertheless lower than national and local averages. Entry numbers are commendably high.

76. The quality of pupils' learning varies, but is generally better than their standards of achievement. Although many pupils have ground to make up to reach their potential, the good levels of behaviour and participation found in most lessons are enabling them to progress well. Some pupils are occasionally distracted, often in lessons where work is repetitive or insufficiently demanding, but the majority use lesson time and homework well, and can put recent and current work into active use in speech and writing. However, pupils do not, in general, know where their work is leading; objectives need to be shared with them. Learning is good in the sixth form.

77. Teaching quality is mostly sound or good in key stages three and four, and consistently good in sixth form classes. Staff prepare lessons conscientiously and usually provide a range of appropriate activities. In the best lessons there was also full use of the

foreign language by teachers, with high expectations on pupils to use it also. In those lessons judged unsatisfactory, there was a range of causes; sometimes the work, either by its nature or its lack of variety was not matched to pupils' needs, and this led to lost motivation.

78. Pupils' attainment is assessed and accurately recorded in key stage three mostly by formal tests. In extending the types of assessment activities used, the department should involve pupils more actively, especially in key stage four.

79. Leadership of the well-qualified team is firm, determined and, in many respects, effective. Staff turnover in recent years has been high. Development planning is sound, but could usefully be more detailed. While the professional commitment of staff is a strength of the department, the team could increase overall effectiveness by further sharing techniques, especially those for teaching slow learners. Resources generally meet needs, and recently-increased funding will boost stock to adequate levels, though lack of sufficient audio-cassette players restricts listening work. Accommodation is good, well-used and cared for, and made attractive by display of pupils' work.

Art

80. Standards of achievement are high in all key stages and many pupils achieve well above the national expectation. At key stage three pupils' painting is strong with a sensitive awareness of colour and pattern and a confident handling of tone. Three-dimensional work is lively, with some exceptionally good practice in research and investigation into the work of artists. The standards of achievement of pupils with special educational needs are good. Examination results at GCSE and A-level are significantly above national averages. The quality of pupils' drawing is very good: tone and form are used expressively and other artists' ideas are exploited with flair and imagination. Pupils display a rich and varied approach to art and express strong ideas in experimental and challenging ways. Three-dimensional and ceramic work is excellent and students display a very high standard of craftsmanship.

81. The quality of learning is good in all key stages. Progress in lessons is consistently good across the ability range and key stages. Pupils are attentive and enthusiastic, and handle tools and equipment safely and responsibly. The sketchbook is used as a powerful tool for learning, planning and expressing feelings and ideas. Opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively at key stage three either as a group or a class are infrequent and pupils' oral responses and skills are insufficiently developed. The quality of teaching in all key stages is good and at GCSE and sixth form level is outstanding. Objectives are clear and learning is well structured and matched to the requirements of the national curriculum and the demands of examination syllabuses. Expectations are very high and are balanced by warm and relaxed relationships. Large scale displays of pupils' work fill the studios and form an exciting and stimulating environment for learning.

82. The department's attempts to create their own levels for assessment of year nine is not necessary. Annual reports vary in quality: some reports comment on achievement and others concentrate on effort and attitude alone. The department needs to develop more

effective strategies for the development of pupils' oral response to works of art. This is tied into the need for appropriate resources and the greater use of collaborative groupwork in key stage three. The staff need to review resources and include works of art from a range of cultures beyond those of the West, both in the department and the library. The high quality of pupils' work seen in the studios could be making a greater impact on the whole school environment.

Music

83. In those areas that are covered by the music curriculum, the majority of pupils achieve standards that are appropriate for their ability and in line with the national expectation. However, insufficient time is allocated to the subject at key stage three. The result is a music curriculum that lacks sufficient breadth and depth. This has an effect on both standards and quality. It is mainly those pupils who receive extra tuition on an instrument or who participate in the extremely fine extra-curricular singing who achieve satisfactory standards overall. However, work achieved by statemented pupils was also observed to be particularly successful.

84. The number of pupils who are entered for GCSE has increased over the past three years and is considerably above the county and national averages. At key stage four there is a 100% pass rate, but the numbers who achieve grades A - C are below average. Nevertheless, pupils generally achieve in line with their abilities. Students at sixth form level also achieve in line with their abilities. Most pupils generally achieve good results within the highly structured compositional tasks they are set. Many can read staff notation and apply it to keyboards; those who are less able, however, struggle with the lack of skill to apply their knowledge.

85. Teaching is mainly sound to good. Successful lessons are marked by clear expectations of behaviour and application to work. Pupils continue to compose when working alone. It is the lack of these conditions that is evident in the less successful lessons. Assessment of work is generally used well to promote higher standards and the pupils are involved in their own evaluations. The department is aware of the need to ensure a consistent approach to standards and expectations, and is taking steps to achieve this.

86. The quality of instruments is generally good, although some keyboards are beginning to show signs of wear. The range of instruments is limited and there is insufficient quantity available when two classes are timetabled together. This affects the curriculum on offer. Accommodation is generally satisfactory and facilitates learning.

Physical education

87. Standards achieved in key stage three and four range from below to above national expectations. The majority of pupils are achieving appropriate levels for their ability. Their performance in a range of games and endurance activities is good, though gymnastic skills are less well developed. Pupils have a sound knowledge and awareness of health and fitness principles and are developing strategies to plan and evaluate their performance. In key stage four most pupils are achieving their potential. Many perform basic games techniques successfully, and can apply these skills confidently in different situations. The ability to analyse and correct their own performance is less evident. Pupils with special educational needs are making good progress in physical education.

88. GCSE physical education is a popular option where pupils demonstrate an appropriate understanding of theoretical principles. There are some skilful and versatile games players with a sound knowledge of tactical play. Recent GCSE physical education results A - C are below local and national averages, though on a par or above for grades A - G. Some sixth form students participate with interest and enthusiasm during their general studies session. A few students also commit themselves to the community sports leader award. Those studying A-level physical education have a sound knowledge of scientific principles related to exercise and are achieving appropriate levels for their abilities.

89. There are good participation rates in physical education, pupils demonstrate positive attitudes and good cooperative skills. The majority of pupils are responsive and are willing to practise and discuss their work in order to improve.

90. The curriculum is extended through a wide range of additional activities actively supported by staff and valued by pupils. There are good team standards with a few pupils gaining national recognition in their chosen activities.

91. The majority of teachers provide a progressive range of tasks and resources. These are mostly matched to pupils of all abilities. These teachers have a good subject knowledge and use it to provide appropriate and encouraging comments to pupils. Selective use of relevant teaching strategies to promote the learning of specific technical, aesthetic and analytical skills should be developed.

92. The team focus within the department on introducing and developing curriculum and assessment resources has ensured successful implementation of the national curriculum in key stage three. A review of curriculum time allocated to physical education in key stage four is required to allow for continuity and progression to be developed and to ensure coverage of the new national curriculum orders.

93. Attention should be given to the removal of the jagged metal surrounding the outdoor pole vault pit, and all department members made aware of gymnastic equipment not to be used until repaired. The shower area needs redecoration.

Religious education

94. In key stages three and four standards of achievement are generally in line with national expectations, occasionally rising above or falling below them. All pupils,

including those with special educational needs, perform satisfactorily in relation to their abilities. At post 16, students' performance is appropriate. Achievement is in line with age and ability.

95. Across key stages three and four, pupils are developing in their knowledge and understanding of three religions and are becoming familiar with relevant terms and concepts. Some pupils articulate ideas well and contribute thoughtfully to discussion. Many students in years 12 and 13 make perceptive speculation and well informed comment.

96. The quality of learning is variable. Where it is sound or better, classes are well motivated and work with interest and enjoyment. Pupils can see the practical application of religion and are learning to be analytical both in approaching textual material and in reflecting on their own beliefs. Occasionally the quality of learning is unsatisfactory owing to pupils' lack of concentration and indifference to lesson material.

97. Teachers have good relationships with their classes. There is a need for a greater range of teaching styles and more varied activities within lessons so that all pupils are challenged. Greater attention should be paid to the attainment targets and statements within the agreed syllabus as a focus for teaching, learning and assessment. Overall, the quality of teaching is sound or better and only very occasionally unsatisfactory.

98. Religious education provision is good with the exception of year 9 where there is a shortfall of time. The school is to be commended for introducing GCSE for all pupils, but further capitation is needed to secure resources for this course. Religious education modules form part of the general studies programme in years 12 and 13, though not all students are involved. Course content does not totally comply with the agreed syllabus and ought to be reviewed.

99. Religious education has benefited from the recent head of department appointment. The status of religious education has been raised by several factors, including a recently refurbished teaching room. The religious education staff need to meet regularly for planning; developing schemes of work should now be the key priority.

Vocational studies

100. Standards of achievement in the four courses for the GNVQ [science, leisure and tourism, business and health and social care] are satisfactory or good. They are in line with national expectations and are above the national expectation for a few students in each of the four areas. The majority of student portfolios of evidence are satisfactory, and some are of merit standard. Work in information technology, numeracy and communication is being integrated within all four areas but in leisure and tourism access to information technology has been limited. Competence in core skills is still at an early stage for some students. Responsibility for planning, evaluating and handling information is developing at a higher level for a minority of boys especially on the business course. Standards this year are significantly higher than students achieved in the first year of the qualification [1994].

101. The quality of learning is good for the majority of students. Information seeking and organising resources is a developing strength. Science students require some support to extend research skills. Independent learning and action planning is developing slowly for the majority. Using the experience of work placements to enhance learning needs to be extended; coupled with more work with the willing providers for science and tourism about the nature and level of the courses.

102. Teaching is good in the majority of lessons. Occasional over-direction limits achievement for some students. An extensive training programme is being undertaken by all staff to support the new methodology and assessment methods. Teachers appropriately use expertise from industry and the community.

103. Learning support assistants are used effectively in some vocational areas when available. The style of the course and its teaching is supportive to all students. Access to information technology to support communication and presentation skills is variable and limits some opportunities.

104. The excellent assessment and recording procedures are linked to guiding students in their work. Guidance documentation to support student assessment arrived late - due to national delays - and caused both the teachers and students some problems in supporting the learning process.

105. The management of the four areas is very effective. Monitoring of student work and cross moderation procedures are in place. The accommodation for all four vocational areas provides an excellent learning environment. Book resources have been purchased wisely, though in science there is insufficient equipment to work in small groups.

Factors contributing to these findings

Quality of teaching

106. The quality of teaching is satisfactory in 41% and good or very good in a further 40% of lessons in years 7 to 11. In the sixth form it is at least satisfactory in virtually all the lessons and good or very good in 63% of them. The quality of teaching is directly reflected in the quality of learning and the standards achieved.

107. In the better lessons, teachers create a firm and clear atmosphere for learning, supported by the school's behaviour policy which provides a sound baseline. They have good knowledge of their subjects and are confident in exposition. Lessons are well-planned, and teachers expect pupils to learn. There is variety of activity and good use of the time available. Work is planned so that pupils build on their skills and make progress. Pupils' work is well marked and teachers give helpful feedback. In the best lessons pupils are suitably challenged and given considerable scope to contribute, though there is a need for further demands on and extension work for the most able.

108. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, pupils are given few opportunities to make an active contribution. There is a narrow range of teaching styles, and too much direct instruction. There is a low level of challenge and pupils demonstrate their lack of interest.

Work is not adapted to the learning needs of individuals. Reading texts are too complex and there are few planned opportunities for pupils to contribute, in particular to learn through talking through ideas and applying the skills and knowledge they have.

Assessment, recording and reporting

109. Pupils' work is regularly monitored by teachers, through a good range of formal and informal assessment methods. Expectations and practical advice on marking are clarified in school and departmental handbooks. Pupils adapt to a variety of notation across, and sometimes within departments. The school has a useful statement of the aims and principles that underpin good and accurate assessment and this is reflected to a degree in consistent practice across different subjects. However, there is considerable variation in the extent to which pupils are involved directly in assessing their progress, and in how far they can use assessment feedback to improve their learning.

110. In those departments where practice most closely reflects school aims, pupils are aware of the particular focus of assessment and are helped to use results in making improvements and setting targets. This process is evident in key stages three and four in English, physical education and art, and more variably in mathematics and design and technology, both in assessment of class/homework and in subject review sheets. In some other subject areas, particularly in key stage three, there is a stronger emphasis on marking effort and attitude rather than on achievement, though teachers' records are sometimes more specific. At sixth form level, assessment is thorough and helps students to make progress.

111. Subject reviews are combined with tutor reviews at least once in every year to form the report to parents. This process is well managed to give tutors an overview of individual pupils' experience. At its best, reviewing provides a focused dialogue between learner and teacher about progress, but some reports about pupils do not contain enough information about progress. The school is reporting additional information specified in reporting regulations. Good opportunities are provided for parents, pupils and students to discuss reviews with teachers. The useful National Record of Achievement is compiled during year 11. For sixth formers, reporting opportunities are part of a good, comprehensive process of action-planning and review. Procedures for annual reviews of statements of special educational need are satisfactory.

112. Considerable analysis is undertaken of GCSE and 'A' level performance at both subject and school level. Departments use this to varying degrees in making changes to policy, practice and resourcing. Analysis carried out in year 7 to identify very able pupils is not currently followed up by any coordinated monitoring or action, though the school is addressing the issue.

113. The school works hard and effectively to recognise publicly achievement and merit by pupils of all abilities. This is much valued by the school community.

The curriculum

Quality and range of the curriculum

114. The school is making significant progress in meeting its aims for a broad, balanced and accessible curriculum pre-16, and for a wide choice in an open sixth form offer. The quality of curriculum planning is good, results are monitored and evaluated and inform future developments. Overall there is evidence of efforts to improve the education offered to individuals, in terms both of quality and content. The governing body plays an active and positive part in curriculum direction and development. Teaching time over the week is close to the DFE recommended minimum.

115. At key stage three, curriculum time is carefully balanced overall to enable departments to meet national curriculum requirements. However, time for religious education in year 9 and for music is low, and access to information technology is inadequate for many pupils. Continuity with key stage two is strong in science, and the school recognises the need to build on this success across the curriculum. In design and technology, continuity would be strengthened by the addition of textiles and food to the materials used at key stage three. Groupings according to broad bands of ability do provide a means of improving access to the curriculum for some pupils, but also limit flexibility in responding to individual pupil or subject needs at key stage three. They create some issues of class management that can detract from achievement and quality of learning. The school is right to keep these arrangements under review, and should include in this process the role of the learning support department in collaborating with subject departments to support pupils of average and below average ability.

116. A broad common curriculum is followed by all pupils at key stage four, reflecting the school's aim to continue access to all areas of experience up to 16. It covers national curriculum subjects. There are difficulties in providing course places for the minority of pupils who want to take music and art, [though an extra-curricular art class is provided] and there is insufficient time for physical education. These issues are being addressed in planning for the next school year and beyond. Access to GCSE qualifications for the great majority is satisfactory overall. The school has introduced routes to alternative qualifications to extend the range and choice for all pupils.

117. Homework is recognised as an important part of the curriculum. Expectations are set out clearly in the staff handbook and communicated to parents and pupils. However, practice is variable across subjects and this is noted by parents. Monitoring and follow-up needs to identify the reason for inconsistency. Guidance about GCSE coursework is given by individual departments, but the school's guidance on overall requirements is insufficiently used by pupils.

118. Learning beyond the national curriculum is managed through a thorough programme of personal and social education which includes good careers guidance. Pupils can also extend their interests and experiences voluntarily through the wide and varied

programme of extra-curricular activities and opportunities for service made available by the school. Many take advantage of these, and in the inspection week a range of activities was observed, offering worthwhile experiences to pupils and students. The school monitors and encourages participation.

119. The sixth form curriculum is undoubtedly enhanced by the collaboration with Didcot Girls' School. There is an offer of well over 20 A-level courses, alongside GNVQ Intermediate and Advanced, and a range of GCSE, both retake and new subjects. Guidance supporting access to these courses is thorough. Some A-level groups are small, but the provision is consistent with the school's commitment to the longer term development of post-16 provision.

120. The school promotes and values the wider personal and social education that is part of the post 16 curriculum. Students select from a wide choice of sporting, community service and extension activities; a range of speakers are invited in, and the great majority of A-level students sit the general studies A-level. Some provision for religious education is made within the general studies programme, but this does not fully reflect the requirements of the agreed syllabus. In this respect provision does not entirely satisfy legal requirements.

Equality of opportunity

121. The school's equal opportunities policy statement provides a clear and relevant set of principles and aims for good practice. These are actively reflected in the courteous climate. They are linked to a declaration, which all pupils sign, that nothing in their behaviour will detract from the opportunities of others. Relationships in the sixth form are excellent and open discussion of equal opportunity issues is sensitively approached in tutorial sessions.

122. The majority of departments implement the policy in practice by a range of opportunities to explore multi-cultural issues - for example, discussion about behaviour, non-European history units, women in history, the music of the Indian raga and a general sensitivity to choice of resources and display materials. In some departments good practice is not fully implemented by all teachers and there is a need for monitoring to ensure implementation.

123. Overall pupils have access to a broad and balanced curriculum. However, more able pupils take a second modern foreign language in year 9 but at the expense of information technology lessons. In design and technology pupils incorporate food and textiles in their planning but do not put the plans into practice; physical education does not include dance.

124. The school produces extensive analyses to identify more able pupils using a wide range of criteria for identification. Follow-up from this identification is undertaken by individual departments but not monitored at a school level.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs

125. Twenty pupils have statements of special educational needs which are satisfactorily met. About a further twenty per year have been identified as needing particular support. Some pupils with special educational needs are withdrawn for English support mainly in key stage three. Elsewhere support which varies in quality and extent is given in mainstream classes, and additional staffing is used across the curriculum to create small classes for pupils of average to below average ability.

126. The majority of pupils who are withdrawn, including those who have statements of special educational needs are achieving well in relation to their abilities. They are developing speaking and listening skills and most are making good progress in reading and writing. They respond to support, apply themselves to tasks and are gaining in confidence. However, withdrawal means that they have a rather restricted experience of English.

127. Across the subjects provision for pupils with special educational needs ensures good progress in design and technology, art, music and physical education. In mathematics effective support in key stage three and a special course in key stage four enable pupils to develop and apply basic skills satisfactorily. Provision in some other subject areas is sometimes less satisfactory.

128. The sound policy statement for special educational needs is modelled on the new code of practice. The policy has yet to be approved by the governing body. Its adoption will require the provision for pupils with special educational needs to be extended more widely.

129. The school creates a good profile of identified needs. Relevant advice and information is appropriately shared with subject teachers. All subject areas need to work more closely with the learning support coordinator and within their departments to act on this advice and continually assess and monitor individual needs. The format of individual education plans as identified in the code of practice is not yet fully in place, and the staged approach is only just being developed. Over time individual education plans should be drawn up where appropriate.

130. Effective links are maintained with relevant external support services. However, these resources are stretched and their involvement is limited to the transitional review of statements. Annual reviews are well managed by the learning support coordinator, involving teachers, parents and pupils. External agencies need to be involved if there are significant changes to be made to the statements. The intention to extend, record and monitor current parental links should be carried out.

131. The school should improve access to information technology for pupils with special educational needs.

132. Links between special educational needs specialists and departments need to be extended to ensure that support and expertise are used effectively and that the use of funding delegated to departments is monitored.

Management and administration

133. Pupils' achievements and the work of teachers are underpinned by good management and administration. There is a large measure of agreement among governors, staff and parents about the school's purposes and values. The school is well on the way to meeting the detailed aims in the staff handbook; these aims are reflected in the prospectus but are not formally stated there or in the development plan. The aims cover a range of good purposes; it is odd that they do not include specific reference to spiritual development, given that this is a strength of the school in practice.

134. The school benefits from firm and consistent leadership at all levels. A key feature is the high quality of the headteacher's leadership, recognised by governors, staff, pupils and parents. The well organised governing body works effectively. Middle managers generally lead their teams well and have a good working relationship with the senior management team.

135. Planning is thorough and well informed. Good use is made of detailed management information, for example in relation to the impact of rising rolls, changes in the curriculum, and budgetary variation. A new five year school development plan, succeeding the previous five year plan has been introduced during the current year. This is understood by staff and is proving a helpful instrument for departments, governors and school managers in identifying targets and priorities. Plans are generally implemented, and though progress is monitored, as the new development plan takes effect there is scope for closer monitoring.

136. Routine administration is effective. Communication within the school, and with parents and governors is good. Parents praise the accessibility of staff and the quick response to queries. Overall, good systems are in place to ensure smooth day to day running of the school.

137. The governing body fulfils its legal responsibilities, except that arrangements for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils are not fully carried out and the policy for sex education is at draft stage.

Resources and their management

Teaching and non-teaching staff

138. The pupil teacher ratio [PTR] is 16.25:1 which is the national average for comprehensive schools and is better than the average PTR for Oxfordshire secondary schools of 16.5:1. The time teachers spend in contact with classes [79.5%] is above the national average.

139. Teaching staff are well qualified, and most are effectively matched to the teaching they undertake. The combination of staff with long experience and those more recently appointed has enabled the school to come to terms with changes required by the national curriculum and subsequent developments.

140. All the senior management team are male as are thirteen of the fifteen heads of department though there is good gender balance on the pastoral team. Incentive allowances are appropriately distributed between administrative, curricular and pastoral

responsibilities. The allocation of non-teaching time is reasonable, is protected by the careful use of supply staff and is consistent with teachers' responsibilities. This time has been well used by some staff, either to invest in curriculum development or to manage their subject and teams.

141. The school appraisal scheme is good and meets national and local guidance. All staff will have been appraised by the end of this school year. There is a need to provide individual staff with specific job descriptions. Staff development is well managed through a staff development programme. In-service training (INSET) needs are identified well, though the needs of some staff have not been met for example in the use of information technology in their subjects. INSET activities are generally linked to the priorities identified in the school development planning documentation. There is good monitoring of INSET and detailed records are kept. A number of staff have benefited professionally from the INSET service the school provides in the region.

142. There is an effective and comprehensive induction programme for staff new to the school. Newly qualified teachers are closely monitored within their subject area and well supported within the school. The school makes good use of the Oxford University Department of Educational Studies Internship Scheme for staff development.

143. The school has sufficient administrative, clerical and technical support staff. They are well deployed and generally effective though there is a need to provide all non-teaching staff with specific job descriptions.

Resources for learning

144. The variety and range of resources in a number of departments are adequate to support learning for national curriculum and examination requirements. This situation is not true, however, of science and music, and there are insufficient texts in religious education and geography. The parent teacher association plans to target the shortage of textbooks in its current fund raising drive.

145. Spending on resources per pupil is comparable to similar schools nationally. A new formula for ensuring equitable departmental funding has recently been introduced. The school has been considerably helped by its involvement with locally based industries through their generous sponsorship of many projects, particularly in science and technology.

146. The library is very efficiently managed and its daily supervision by a full-time committed librarian is excellent. The fiction stock is good and suited to the interests of the pupils. There are insufficient non-fiction books, particularly for older pupils and to support sixth form work. The library is light and attractive but not spacious, causing difficulties for sixth form private study when classes have library periods. It houses an impressive careers library.

147. Information technology resources have been improved during recent months, through the equipping of the new suite. The number of computers is slightly below the national average. The reprographic and publishing area is very effectively managed,

producing a considerable range of learning and teaching resources. English, humanities and science lessons, especially, benefit from taped broadcasts. Audio-visual facilities are good and well used.

148. The school offers a considerable range of trips, locally and abroad, exchanges in Europe, theatre visits and residential experiences, many contributing to pupils' involvement in the curriculum. Industry links are well used for work-experience and vocational learning.

Accommodation

149. The school provides good accommodation for most subject departments. Rooms are grouped together into departmental areas, allowing good communication and efficient sharing of resources. The facilities for art and design and technology are particularly good. Many of the rooms and corridors contain collections of pupils' work, displayed to produce a stimulating environment for learning. Displays by the English, design and technology and art departments for example are excellent. However, some of the rooms for science are rather cramped and the science stairway provides a bottleneck that has to be supervised by staff at change over times to avoid danger to pupils. The mathematics department is housed in temporary classrooms away from the main buildings.. Two of these six rooms are in a poor condition. The newly converted IT network room, which was a lecture theatre, is an attractive space, but owing to its split level nature makes considerable demands on class management and consequently the facility is underused.

150. Outdoor sports facilities are generally satisfactory. The field areas are good but the second field area, with a recently built pavilion and changing rooms is situated 500 metres away from the school, so going there reduces lesson time significantly. Hard play areas have been reduced because of building and this causes problems for the teaching of some aspects of physical education.

151. There is a site manager who oversees the cleaning and maintenance of the building. The site manager works closely with the governors' sites and buildings sub-committee and together they have improved both the standard of maintenance and of security on the site. There is little vandalism, and care is taken on health and safety issues. The school has a rolling programme built into the budget and development plan to take care of repairs and decoration.

152. In general, the cleaning and maintenance of the building is good, although there is litter in various places. The vending machines situated in the school appear to add to the problem. The school is trying ways to improve the situation.

153. The building is well used both at lunchtime and after school by pupils attending activities and clubs. The school generates extra income by letting its facilities during evenings, weekends, and school holidays.

Pupils' welfare and guidance

154. The school has recently reorganised its pastoral system to emphasise a focus on year groups. Pupils are assigned to heterogeneous groups which remain with the same form tutor from year seven to year eleven, allowing form tutors to develop a good knowledge of pupils in their group and their needs. Pupils readily approach their tutors or senior staff to discuss any academic or pastoral problems. There is a house system through which a wide variety of sporting and other competitions are organised. Parents value the tutoring arrangements and the house system.

155. With the support of heads of year and senior staff, form tutors select appropriate resources for the personal and social education of their groups. These resources are subject to frequent audit and in addition tutors are able to get support or advice on teaching from their year heads. Parents and pupils are particularly pleased with the guidance that the school offers about courses and careers post-16. The extensive programme starts in year seven and intensifies as pupils rise through the school. A new draft policy for sex education has been developed with the governors. Effective health education and sex education take place in several curriculum areas but mostly during personal and social education. Appropriate procedures for child protection and medical incidents are in place. The school has comprehensive health and safety documentation and procedures.

156. There are similar arrangements for the pastoral care and personal and social education of the sixth form. The mixed tutor groups in the joint sixth form work well. Sixth form students cover a wide range of topics during general studies and all are involved in some community service. All pupils have available two weeks of work experience at the beginning of year eleven. Sixth form students receive helpful advice about university entrance. Good use is made of advice from outside the school, and up to date computer software is accessible. This is suited to each pupil using the personal information collected during the careers programme.

Links with parents, agencies and other institutions

157. Parents believe they are kept fully informed by the weekly newsletter, which they appreciate, and the well attended meetings held each year to discuss pupils' progress. The quality of information received before a pupil starts school is regarded by parents as first class. Similar quality is a feature of support for students who transfer into the sixth form from other schools. An active parent and teacher association supports the school by successful fund-raising events and also through the School Trust, a covenant scheme that has just provided £5,000 towards science equipment.

158. The school is extensively used by the community both during the evenings and at weekends with adults attending a good range of different leisure and vocational courses. The local business community supports the school effectively by sponsorship of school publications such as calendars and work experience diaries. Professional and business people usefully assist staff with preparing students for job and higher education interviews. The police liaison officer makes a valued contribution to the personal and social

development programme. Both school and community benefit from the joint use of the leisure centre on the site.

159. Liaison with partner primary schools is very good at a pastoral level through regular meetings with headteachers. There have been some effective partnership projects such as the development of a behaviour policy. Transfer information is very thorough, building on close links between schools and year 6 pupils visit the school for a day programme that is effective in ensuring a smooth transition. Whilst there is productive curricular liaison in science, there is scope for more linking in other subjects. Good links exist with Didcot Girl's School through the jointly taught sixth form provision and through joint activities, such as public speaking, across years 7 to 11. There are good links with other secondary schools in the local education authority which enable senior and middle managers to pool experience. An in-service training centre has been established and provides a good range of useful courses for teaching and non-teaching staff in the local area and further afield.

160. Relationships with the various LEA agencies are good; the education welfare officer visits the school on a weekly basis and is effectively used on attendance matters.

161. A strong feature of the school is the extent of the links forged with local business and industry, through an effective Education Business Partnership. These links have broadened the curriculum experienced by pupils through a range of projects in art, design and technology, and science; provided extra funding for resources and created a positive image of the school in the local business community. Employers have been very helpful in providing suitable work experience opportunities for year 11 pupils and appropriate work placements for the expanding GNVQ courses. Careers education activities are enhanced by direct involvement of employers. A Compact scheme is developing well with sufficient mentors in local businesses to provide support for fifty year 10 pupils.