

INSPECTION REPORT

Sandon High School

Stoke on Trent

LEA area: Stoke-on-Trent

Unique Reference Number: 124389

Inspection Number: 183918

Headteacher: Miss B M Hall

Reporting inspector: Mrs S Bardwell

Dates of inspection: 27 September – 1 October 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708248

Inspection carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1999

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

Type of control: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 - 16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Sandon Road
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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr John Roden

Date of previous inspection: November 1994

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| Robert Jones, Lay Inspector | Equal opportunities | Leadership and management Attitudes, behaviour and personal development Attendance Partnership with parents and the community |
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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- The school's ethos is very positive and purposeful; pupils are expected and encouraged to aim high in their personal and academic achievements.
- The school is very well led and effectively managed, with a strong focus upon raising pupils' aspirations and their standards of attainment.
- Pupils' standards of attainment are improving.
- The teaching is good overall, with some very good features, especially in geography and Key Stage 3 modern foreign languages.
- There is particularly effective subject leadership in science and geography.
- The school provides very good support and guidance for pupils and takes very good care over their welfare.
- The quality of relationships is very good.
- Pupils have a positive attitude to their work and standards of behaviour are very good.
- Pupils' moral and social development is very good.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and enriched by the school's modular course at Key Stage 4, its links with industry and a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- The school's links with its local and the wider community are very strong and have a positive impact upon the quality of pupils' learning.
- The school gives good value for money.

Where the school has weaknesses

- I. The monitoring of teaching does not effectively promote further improvement in standards and quality across all subjects.
- II. Some subject leadership does not sufficiently focus upon improvement.
- III. Teachers in some subjects do not make enough use of their assessments of pupils' attainment to plan work.
- IV. Management of some special educational needs provision is inefficient; the provision not sufficiently closely monitored for its impact.
- V. Although there has been considerable improvement in the standards and adequacy of the school's accommodation, there are still some deficiencies, especially in music and design and technology. The Learning Resource Centre is not available for the majority of time for pupils to work independently.

The school has many strengths, far outweighing its weaknesses. It is held in high regard by parents, pupils and the community. It is a thriving and vibrant school with many exciting and innovative curriculum initiatives. Values of respect, honesty and fairness are fostered and individual pupils' needs are well met. The governors' action plan will set out how the weakness identified during the inspection is to be tackled. The plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has made good progress since the last inspection. The governors and senior managers have effectively and carefully planned to ensure the school has addressed the issues identified in the last inspection report. Standards of attainment have risen; the quality of teaching has much improved and the school building has been substantially enhanced. There has been steady progress in addressing collective worship, rates of pupils' attendance and some aspects of monitoring the work of the school, though some further improvement in these areas is required. Governors and senior managers have a

clear commitment to continual and sustained improvement in pupils' attainment and in the richness of the curriculum the school provides. This is evident in the school's comprehensive three-year development plan. There are procedures in place to support further development. A strong network of outside partners in the community and in industry helps the school continue its improvement. The school is well placed to sustain its continuing development.

• **Standards in subjects**

The following table shows standards achieved by 14 and 16 year olds in national tests and GCSE examinations in 1998:

| Performance in: | Compared with all schools | Compared with similar schools | Key | K |
|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| | | | <i>well above average</i> | <i>A</i> |
| | | | <i>above average</i> | <i>B</i> |
| | | | <i>average</i> | <i>C</i> |
| Key Stage 3 | D | A | <i>below average</i> | <i>D</i> |
| GCSE Examinations | D | B | <i>well below average</i> | <i>E</i> |

The 1998 results in the national tests at Key Stage 3 and at GCSE show an improvement on the previous year. The columns above show that, in comparison with similar schools, the 1998 Key Stage 3 test results, taking English, mathematics and science together, were well above the average, although below the national average for all schools. At GCSE, pupils' average point score was above that gained by pupils in similar schools, though below the national average in all schools. The percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades was well above that in similar schools, and above for 5 or more grades A*-G. Provisional results for 1999 show further improvement and are closer to the provisional national averages at Key Stage 3 and at GCSE.

During the inspection, standards of attainment overall were observed to be in line with those found nationally in most subjects. This reflects the improvement shown in national tests and GCSE. In science, geography, design and technology, information technology and religious education standards were above what might be expected; in music, standards were below.

• **Quality of teaching**

| | Overall quality | Most effective in: | Least effective in: |
|-------------|-----------------|---|---------------------|
| Years 7-9 | Good | English, geography, modern foreign languages, science | Music |
| Years 10-11 | Good | Geography, science | |
| English | Good | | |
| Mathematics | Satisfactory | | |

Teaching was at least satisfactory in 92% of the 191 lessons observed during the inspection. Teaching was very good or excellent in 29% of lessons and good in another 29%. These figures show a considerable improvement from the last inspection and the percentage of very good or excellent lessons

is high. Instances of weaker teaching were distributed across a number of subjects, with a higher proportion observed in music at Key Stage 3.

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

Other aspects of the school

| Aspect | Comment |
|---|---|
| Behaviour | Standards of behaviour are very good. Pupils have a positive attitude to learning. |
| Attendance | Levels of attendance are slightly below the national average, despite strenuous efforts by the school. |
| Ethos* | There is a very positive and purposeful learning environment in which pupils are encouraged and expected to attain highly, both in their academic and personal achievements. Relationships are very good and a strong community spirit prevails. |
| Leadership and management | The headteacher and governors provide a very clear educational direction, based upon a strong commitment to the raising of pupils' self-esteem and their standards of attainment. The quality of subject leadership is inconsistent. |
| Curriculum | Broad and balanced, enriched by its links with industry, the local and wider community, the modular course at Key Stage 4 and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. |
| Pupils with special educational needs | Pupils have equal access to the full range of the curriculum and generally make good progress. The management of some provision is not very efficient. |
| Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development | Very good moral and social provision; good cultural provision and satisfactory spiritual provision. |
| Staffing, resources and accommodation | Good use of staff expertise. Very good progress has been made in improving the accommodation and resources for learning, though there are still some deficiencies in music and design and technology. Pupils have limited access to the Learning Resource Centre. |
| Value for money | The school provides good value for money. Standards are improving; pupils are making good progress; their personal development is good; the quality of teaching is good overall; pastoral care is very good. |

**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

- VI. The school enables their children to achieve a good standard of work.
- VII. Their children are happy and safe at school. They enjoy school life.
- VIII. The number and range of extra-curricular activities.
- IX. The school is easy to approach with questions or problems.
- X. The values and attitudes the school promotes.

What some parents are not happy about

- XI. Homework is irregular and its quality is
- XII. The quality of some information they

The summary table above is based upon comments from the parents' evening (19 attended) and the responses from the parents' questionnaires (59 were received). It thus reflects the stated views of a fairly small minority of parents. The parents' positive views were reflected in the inspectors' observations during the week of the inspection. Pupils are happy and safe in the school and they make good progress. The school is welcoming and relationships are very good. There is a good uptake by pupils in the extra-curricular activities and the moral and social development of pupils is very good. Inspectors found that homework was regularly and consistently set but agreed with parents that its quality was not always sufficient to stretch all pupils. Inspectors judged that the information for parents about pupils' progress was generally comprehensive, but the homework diary could be used more effectively as a link with parents and the annual reports could contain better information about how pupils might improve.

· KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

In order to raise standards and improve the quality of educational provision further, governors and staff should:

- i) Increase the overall effectiveness of subject leadership by implementing more thoroughly the school's policy and procedures for monitoring and evaluation.
[115, 117, 119, 120, 122, 165, 214, 244, 247, 273, 283]
- ii) Disseminate the most effective teaching by more rigorous and systematic monitoring of classroom practice and its impact upon pupils' attainment.
[55, 115, 119, 157, 214, 255, 266, 273, 281, 291]
- iii) Improve the overall quality and consistency of assessment through:
 - marking which identifies pupils' specific strengths and weaknesses;
 - using a wider range of methods to assess pupils;
 - using findings from assessment to plan subsequent work;
 - using assessment to identify appropriate targets for pupils' learning.
[52, 53, 72, 73, 74, 75, 162, 184, 231, 245, 253, 265, 282]
- iv) Maximising the effectiveness of the provision for special educational needs by:
 - enabling the special educational needs co-ordinator to support and consult with more subject departments;
 - identifying and disseminating the most successful practice in supporting pupils with special educational needs;
 - closely monitoring and evaluating the impact of the school's provision for special educational needs on pupils' progress and the quality of education they receive.
[42, 76, 88, 121, 141]
- i) Address the deficiencies of teaching accommodation in design and technology and music and maximise the use of the Learning Resource Centre.
[26, 132, 137, 142, 166, 222, 224, 274]

In addition to the key issues above, a number of other points for improvement identified in the report should be considered for inclusion in the governors' action plan. These are indicated below.

- Continue the strenuous efforts to raise levels of attendance and seek further strategies for improvement. [32, 125]
- Ensure all of the statutory requirements are met in respect of collective worship, Key Stage 3 music and the use of information technology in art. [62, 108, 212]
- Ensure homework tasks are consistently of high quality and contain sufficient challenge for all pupils. [54, 69, 210, 243, 263, 291]
- Exploit the use of the homework diary more fully. [90, 98]
- Ensure that annual reports to parents on pupils' progress contain targets for pupils which are specific enough to be useful. [98]
- Address the deficiencies in the resources for music. [135, 274]
- Improve the level of technical support to help raise standards further. [124, 127, 202, 223]
- Instigate a more systematic evaluation of the impact of professional development of staff and curriculum initiatives. [128, 256]

The numbers in brackets refer to the main paragraph(s) in the full report where the issues are

discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

- 1 Sandon High School is a medium sized comprehensive school catering for boys and girls aged 11 to 16. It is situated in Meir, on the south eastern edge of the city of Stoke-on-Trent. In recent years the numbers of pupils attending the school have risen rapidly and there are now 749 pupils on roll. Five years ago, when the school was last inspected, there were 601 pupils attending the school. It is a popular school with parents and pupils, and was oversubscribed this year.
- 2 There are 59 pupils on the school's register of special educational needs which represents 8% of the school's pupils. This percentage is rising but is well below the national average of 15%. There are 13 pupils with statements of special educational need. This is 2.4% of the school's pupils and is broadly in line with the national average. 32% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average of 17.5 %. 0.3% of pupils speak English as an additional language which is low in comparison with the national average. Currently 49 more girls than boys attend the school. There are more girls in Years 8 and 11.
- 3 Most of the pupils come from four local primary schools, though the school receives pupils from a large number of other primary schools located in the catchment area of Rough Close, Lightwood, Meir Heath, Meir, Meir Park and Normacot. These areas contain a wide mix of housing consisting of council housing, rented accommodation and owner-occupied housing. Whilst the school's intake is fully comprehensive, serving the full range of the socio-economic spectrum, the large number of pupils eligible for free school meals indicates a high level of economic deprivation amongst the school population. Parts of the area have above-average levels of unemployment and have suffered considerable social and economic dislocation with the disappearance of the traditional industries of iron, steel and coal and the decline of the ceramic industry. The area also has one of the highest mortality rates in Stoke-on-Trent.
- 4 The full range of ability is represented by the pupils as they enter the school in Year 7. This September, pupils' standards of attainment on entry were broadly in line with national averages, though in previous years, pupils' attainment was below that typically achieved by the age of 11.
- 5 The aims of the school are comprehensive. They seek to establish an orderly, safe and friendly community in which pupils can attain the highest standards, acquiring the knowledge, understanding and skills to be able to make informed choices between possible courses of action. The school also aims to encourage pupils to take roles of responsibility and take care of other people. They stress the importance of providing a broad and balanced educational experience which extends pupils' understanding of cultures beyond the local to the wider world, and one which will prepare pupils for their future learning and adulthood. Additionally, the school aims to develop pupils' spiritual and moral sense so that they can appreciate and value the rich variety of human experience and learn to make reasoned, moral choices.
- 1 The school has identified a number of areas for development in its current school development plan, including:
 - the attainment of the national average for 5 or more GCSE passes;
 - improving methods of assessment and the use of assessment data;
 - increasing the quality of teaching;
 - improving further the levels of attendance;
 - the development of the core and enhanced curriculum;
 - the continued development of pupils' self esteem through a variety of mentoring schemes;

- further enhancement of accommodation and learning resources;
- health education programmes;
- increasing the provision for work related learning;
- pupil target setting and action planning through Record of Achievement and the pupil diary;
- new and improved monitoring and evaluation systems to support consistent and effective implementation of school policies;
- enhancement of existing links with European partner schools.

7 Key indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3²

| Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year: | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|
| | 1998 | 76 | 90 | 166 |

| National Curriculum Test | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|---------|-------------|---------|
| Results | | | | |
| Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or Above | Boys | 39 | 47 | 39 |
| | Girls | 48 | 41 | 38 |
| | Total | 87 | 88 | 77 |
| Percentage at NC Level 5 or above | School | 52(47) | 53(55) | 46(60) |
| | National | 65(56) | 60(60) | 56(60) |
| Percentage at NC Level 6 or above | School | 31(23) | 33(37) | 24(29) |
| | National | 35(23) | 36(37) | 27(29) |

| Teacher Assessments | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|---------|-------------|---------|
| Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or Above | Boys | 42 | 47 | 38 |
| | Girls | 51 | 44 | 49 |
| | Total | 93 | 91 | 87 |
| Percentage at NC Level 5 or above | School | 56(60) | 57(64) | 52(61) |
| | National | 62(59) | 64(63) | 62(61) |
| Percentage at NC Level 6 or above | School | 29(28) | 31(37) | 19(29) |
| | National | 31(28) | 37(37) | 31(29) |

Attainment at Key Stage 4³

| Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year: | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|---|------|------|-------|-------|
| | 1998 | 74 | 74 | 148 |

| GCSE Results | | 5 or more grades A* to C | 5 or more grades A* to G | 1 or more grades A* to G |
|---|----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Number of pupils achieving standard specified | Boys | 26 | 67 | 69 |
| | Girls | 32 | 66 | 68 |
| | Total | 58 | 133 | 137 |
| Percentage achieving standard specified | School | 39(30) | 90(78) | 93(90) |
| | National | 45(43) | 90(88) | 95(94) |

| Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and percentage of <i>such pupils</i> who achieved all those they studied: | Number | % Success rate |
|---|--------|----------------|
| School | 66 | 91% |
| National | | n/a |

Attendance

| Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year: | | | % |
|---|---------------------------|--|------|
| Authorised | School | | 9.3% |
| Absence | National comparative data | | 7.9% |
| Unauthorised | School | | 0.9% |
| Absence | National comparative data | | 1.1% |

Exclusions

| Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year: | Number |
|--|--------|
| Fixed period | 0 |
| Permanent | 4 |

Quality of teaching

| Percentage of teaching observed which is: | % |
|---|----|
| Very good or better | 29 |
| Satisfactory or better | 92 |
| Less than satisfactory | 8 |

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

- 8 Overall, standards of attainment in the school are currently in line with those found nationally.
- 9 In 1998, the results of national tests and assessments in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3 were below the national average. However, in comparison to schools with a similar socio-economic context, standards were well above the average in mathematics and science and broadly in line in English. The provisional Key Stage 3 results (for 1999) show an improvement on the 1998 figures in English and science, with mathematics results being similar to those of the previous year. In 1998, boys performed better than girls in mathematics and science, and in English boys and girls performed similarly. Collectively the performance of pupils over the years 1996-8 in the three core subjects was close to the national average. Boys' performance was below the national average and girls' was close to the national average during these years. The results in 1999 indicate an improvement in both boys' and girls' performance over all three subjects, with the difference between boys' and girls' results less marked.
- 10 GCSE results have improved considerably since the last inspection. The GCSE results in 1998 were broadly in line with national average for the number of pupils gaining 5 grades or more at A*-C and 5 grades or more at A*-G. In comparison with similar schools, these results are well above the average. Pupils' average point score, however, was below the national average, though above that for similar schools. The results over the years 1996-8, whilst below the national average, show a steady improvement in line with the national rising trend. Boys' results were below those achieved by girls'. Provisional GCSE results for 1999 show a further improvement on the 1998 figures and reflect the overall target set by the school. Boys' results remain below girls' results.
- 11 The evidence gained from the classwork and collections of pupils' work observed during this inspection shows that, overall, pupils' attainment matched those found on average nationally. This judgement is broadly in line with the school's recent national test and examination results, though little difference between boys' and girls' performance was observed in lessons and in pupils' written work. This does, however, reflect the closing gap in the most recent Key Stage 3 national tests and can also be attributed to the strategies being employed by the school to raise boys' performance. These include the seating of boys alongside girls; careful, controlled questioning to target boys and girls equally and a strong mentoring programme in to meet the range of pupils' needs in Years 10 and 11.
- 12 In English, pupils' standards of attainment are in line with those found nationally. Pupils speak articulately and with confidence. The use of drama and discussion in lessons has developed pupils' speaking and listening skills considerably since the last inspection. Pupils' standards of writing are sound; written work is well organised and often of extended length.
- 13 Standards in mathematics also match those found on average nationally. Pupils attain better standards in number, algebra and work on shape and space than in using and applying mathematics. Younger pupils have a sound recall of number facts but do not have efficient methods for calculating mentally, whereas older pupils show confidence in written calculations. Pupils generally can apply concepts such as Pythagorus' theorem to quite complex problems by the time they reach Key Stage 4.

- 14 In science, pupils' standards of attainment are generally above those found nationally. Teachers' expectations are high from the beginning of Year 7 and pupils are set challenging work in biology, chemistry and physics. As a result, pupils' standards in understanding concepts are high and their investigative skills are well developed.
- 15 In information technology, attainment exceeds national standards by the end of both key stages; GCSE results show a steady improvement, and the number of pupils recently gaining higher grades of A*-C is above the provisional national average, a significant improvement since the last inspection.
- 16 Pupils experience a wide range of information technology applications, particularly related to the real world. Information technology is used effectively by a number of subjects, though not all, to support pupils' learning, unlike at the time of the last inspection when the application of information technology was limited. The teaching of information technology through science at Key Stage 4 is a particular strength of the school's provision, and high standards in both curriculum areas are attained. Since the last inspection, there has been an improvement in the facilities for pupils to learn independently. Generally, pupils are skilled in using the Internet and are taking more responsibility for their own learning. Their presentation skills are good and their use of computer control programs is strong.
- 17 In religious education standards are above the expectations of the local Agreed Syllabus by the end of both key stages; results at GCSE have improved consistently and are well above the national average. In most other subjects, standards are in line with what is typically found nationally, though in geography, art and design and technology standards, as observed during the inspection and attained at GCSE, are higher. Standards are below what might be expected in music in both key stages.
- 18 Pupils make good progress throughout their time at the school. The current Year 7 pupils have entered the school with standards in the core subject which are broadly in line with national averages. However, assessment information about previous Year 7 cohorts indicates that their attainment on entry was typically below the national average. The GCSE results are now close to the national average, representing good progress for these pupils throughout both key stages.
- 19 Evidence from the inspection confirms this. Good progress is made by pupils in many subjects, particularly where the teachers demonstrate a high level of subject expertise and enthusiasm, providing pupils with challenging and accessible tasks. This in turn motivates the pupils who respond positively with a desire to attain well. There are no major variations in progress between boys and girls, or between groups of different ages or abilities. Differences in the ways that pupils are grouped in different subjects does not result in differences in their progress; more significant is the teachers' awareness of pupils' differing needs and their ability to provide appropriately pitched work.
- 20 In some lessons, progress was observed to be very good. In geography, pupils consistently make very good progress in both key stages because teachers have high expectations and carefully plan work which progressively develops pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding in a variety of different contexts. In science, pupils are required to apply their knowledge to solve problems in a number of lessons from Year 7 right through to GCSE. In some Key Stage 3 English lessons, pupils' make very good progress where teachers present them with stimulating materials in a lively and invigorating way that extends their existing knowledge to a very high level. Very good progress was observed in some modern foreign language lessons in Key Stage 3, particularly where teachers enabled pupils to understand structures and challenged them to explain differences about pronunciation and tenses. In religious education lessons at

Key Stage 4, pupils made very good progress when they were challenged to consider difficult concepts such as the authenticity of St. Luke's Gospel.

- 21 In a few subjects, such as mathematics and history, progress is slower, though satisfactory overall. Here, lessons tended to contain lengthy teacher presentations with insufficient opportunities for pupils to think about their learning, or had a sluggish pace, or lacked a clear structure to promote pupils' learning effectively. In modern foreign languages, some pupils in Key Stage 4 are not following courses which allow them to fulfil their potential; for example, too many pupils are taking the Certificate of Achievement rather than GCSE. Some examples of less than satisfactory progress were observed in a range of subjects, mostly in Key Stage 3, where pupils spent too much time on low-level tasks which did not challenge them or where teachers and pupils were not sufficiently clear about what was to be learnt.
- 22 Pupils with special educational needs generally make good progress. When available, learning support is almost always effective in providing additional help and in supporting the progress of pupils with special educational needs. In many subjects, teachers amend tasks and materials appropriately to ensure pupils' particular needs are met. Examples of effective use of pupils' individual education plans were observed in science. In modern foreign languages, lower attaining pupils make better progress than might be expected in speaking and listening, though their written standards are less secure. In geography, high expectations are evident, with difficult concepts being carefully explained and technical vocabulary introduced sensitively. During the inspection, the needs of the higher attaining pupils were generally well met. Work is mostly demanding and enables pupils to perform at an appropriately high level. There are, however, some lessons where teachers' expectations of pupils are too low and insufficient attention is paid to planning work which enables all pupils to make sufficient progress and attain highly.
- 23 Across the school, standards of literacy have improved since the last inspection and are now generally high. A number of subjects are making a conscious effort to support pupils' literacy skills. In science, word walls are used to consolidate the use of technical vocabulary; group discussions are used to precede writing, and writing frames are used to help pupils to structure extended response. Similar techniques are also used in history and geography where pupils are also required to write in a variety of styles and for different purposes. In religious education and design and technology, vocabulary extension work is used to help develop pupils' spoken and written responses. Less attention is generally given to the teaching of note-taking.
- 24 Pupils are also encouraged to develop their speaking and listening skills, and generally standards in these aspects are high. This represents an improvement since the last inspection. Pupils are given opportunities to discuss topical issues and reflect upon their learning in a variety of lessons. They are encouraged to express their views and listen to those of others. This is well supported by a range of extra-curricular activities such as the junior and senior drama clubs, the debating society and video conferencing with Ireland. The 'History through Film' modular course for Years 10 and 11 effectively helps to develop pupils' critical thinking.
- 25 Standards of numeracy across the school are satisfactory. A positive start has been made to implementing the school's numeracy policy and in geography, science, information technology and design and technology there are good examples of pupils effectively using mathematical data and graphs, measuring, recording and calculating. These examples show that there has been an improvement since the last inspection. However, opportunities are missed for consistently using and applying quantitative thinking in other subjects.
- 26 Pupils show good progress in developing and using their study skills of research and investigation when given the opportunity. Subjects such as geography and science provide

opportunities for pupils to adopt an enquiry approach to their learning. Through carefully constructed projects, pupils attain good standards, particularly when they are set problems to solve. The aspects of the modular course for Years 10 and 11 such as the Young Enterprise Scheme and Wedgwood Quality Circles, enable pupils to demonstrate high levels of attainment in the key skills of problem solving, collaboration, communication and independent learning. Such opportunities for pupils to show initiative and apply their knowledge need to be provided in more subjects in order to develop these aspects of attainment further. The lack of access for pupils to the Learning Resource Centre in lesson time inhibits its contribution to the development of pupils' independent learning.

• **Attitudes, behaviour and personal development**

- 27 Pupils have a good attitude to learning which makes a significant contribution to their attainment and progress. Many of the lessons are double periods, covering 70 minutes and pupils demonstrate that they can maintain good levels of concentration and interest in what is being taught. They are able to work collaboratively both in school and on project work arising from the many links the school has with local industries. Opportunities for individual investigative work are more limited, but when given the chance, for example, in setting up an enquiry in geography, they respond well. They also make good use of other opportunities to work on their own, for example, using information technology equipment available to them at lunchtimes.
- 28 The previous inspection report found that standards of behaviour were very good and this remains the case both in lessons and in communal activities such as assemblies. Pupils move around the school in an orderly manner and are polite, courteous and confident in their dealings with adults. Generally school property is respected and pupils use equipment and facilities sensibly without any need for supervision, although by the end of the day there is a good deal of litter on the school site.
- 29 Behaviour in the school is underpinned by well developed policies which provide positive recognition of pupils' achievements and sanctions, should they be needed. These policies are kept under review and are well understood by pupils. Incidents of bullying are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Parents know about and approve the school's expectations concerning behaviour, and the majority agree that standards are high.
- 30 The quality of relationships throughout the school is also very good, both between pupils and between pupils and staff. There is a great deal of mutual respect; pupils listen to each other and help those needing additional support through informal but effective mentoring arrangements.
- 31 The school effectively provides pupils with a good range of opportunities to take responsibility and develop as individuals. Year 11 pupils can become prefects and undertake a variety of duties around the school. Pupils from all year groups have been involved in working parties reviewing the operation of the behaviour and homework policies. The school also provides pupils with opportunities to take decisions and have real responsibility for their implementation. Several initiatives involving pupils to combat bullying are in place. The school has adopted a Bullywatch charter and is currently introducing a mentoring scheme for Year 7 pupils operated by Year 11 pupils. Pupils' personal development is also enhanced by residential trips and exchanges and the range of voluntary work undertaken in the community, including the creation of a sensory garden in a local hospital. Within the school, pupil working groups have been used to tackle the enhancement of toilet provision and the physical education courts. Extra-curricular activities such as the Eco committee also contribute to this process of personal development and a Year 11 pupil has effectively taken on the responsibility for running the Junior Drama Club.

· **Attendance**

- 32 Levels of attendance remain slightly below national averages, although the last published statistics show a marginal improvement since the previous inspection. There has been a further, more recent improvement and figures are above the local average. However, the pattern is variable across classes and a small group of poor attenders continue to have an adverse effect on the overall figures.
- 33 Both the school and the Education Welfare Services are making strenuous efforts to improve the situation through incentive awards for pupils, target setting for individual and groups and the introduction of more rigorous procedures for following up absences. These include spot checks on specific year groups, and attendance clinics for pupils and their parents. Parents are supportive of these efforts but poor attendance patterns clearly have a detrimental effect on some pupils' progress and attainment.
- 34 Most pupils arrive on time in the mornings, although there are a number who are regularly a few minutes late each day. However, the layout of the school and the amount of teacher and pupil movement necessitated by the registration arrangements mean that lessons often start late, particularly in the afternoons.

· **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED**

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· **Teaching**

- 35 The quality of teaching is good with some very good features. During the inspection, teaching was judged to be very good or excellent in 29% of the 191 lessons observed. It was good in a further 29%. Overall, it was never less than satisfactory in 92% of lessons. These figures show a considerable improvement from the last inspection and the percentage of very good or excellent lessons is high.
- 36 In the lessons observed, most subjects contained teaching of at least very good quality, but more than average was observed in English, geography, modern foreign languages and science.
- 37 Teaching seen in Key Stage 3 was good overall though it showed a greater variation in quality than in Key Stage 4. More very good and excellent teaching (32%) was observed in Key Stage 3, but 10% was unsatisfactory and 2% was poor. Instances of weaker teaching were observed in a number of subject areas but mainly in music at Key Stage 3. Teaching seen in Key Stage 4 was also good overall and 96% of the lessons observed contained teaching which was at least satisfactory. The quality of teaching in 25% of lessons had very good or excellent features.
- 38 Following the last inspection, a School Improvement Working Party was set up to address the key issue regarding the raising of teaching and learning quality. This working party has successfully promoted the use of a wider variety of teaching and learning styles in a number of subjects, though not all. This variety is particularly evident in English, modern foreign languages, geography and science, where pupils are frequently encouraged to become actively involved in their learning. For example, in geography, pupils carry out a number of decision-making activities and fieldwork plays a significant role in the courses of both key stages. Cognitive Acceleration in Science (CASE) strategies are being effectively used to develop pupils' thinking skills in their science lessons.

- 39 The working party also advocated the need for clear learning objectives for lessons which are shared with pupils. Many teachers do plan their lessons with a clarity of purpose and they do explain to the pupils what the lesson aims to achieve. In the most effective lessons, teachers use their subject expertise to plan very carefully the processes through which pupils will need to be taken in order to reach high standards.
- 40 Some excellent examples of such meticulous planning were observed most regularly in Key Stage 3 English and modern foreign languages, although a high level of planning was also evident in a number of other subjects. In science, teachers' secure subject knowledge enabled them to expertly clarify pupils' misconceptions, such as exploring the difference between breathing and respiration. In a Year 8 gymnastics lesson, teaching gradually built up pupils' confidence and skill level in balancing and sequencing so that pupils were able to produce very well co-ordinated and complex sequences containing skills of a high degree of difficulty.
- 41 Some lessons in a range of subjects, however, still lack a clarity of purpose and use activities which do not match the aims of the lesson. Planning does not sufficiently focus upon the process of learning. For example, in some music lessons, pupils were set poor quality written tasks or unchallenging composing and performing work, with insufficient differentiation to cater for the range of pupils' needs.
- 42 Generally, teachers effectively plan to meet the differing needs of pupils, though some subjects are better at this than others. Some excellent examples were observed in geography and modern foreign languages, where both pupils with special educational needs and higher attaining pupil were equally appropriately challenged. The learning support assistants provide effective support for a number of pupils with special educational needs. On occasion, however, the teachers' approach makes it difficult for learning support assistants to move around the classroom and make best use of their time.
- 43 Team teaching is skilfully deployed in some subjects to help pupils make progress, as was observed in physical education and religious education. The effective use of industrialists as tutors on the Key Stage 4 modular course provides pupils with a good insight into the world of work.
- 44 Several departments are following recommendations of the school's equal opportunities working party and are consciously addressing the need to improve the motivation and raise the attainment of boys. For example, boys and girls are required to sit next to each other; pupils are required to work collaboratively in mixed gender groups; and teachers ask questions to boys and girls in sequence. However, there is scope for targeting more specific areas where boys traditionally underachieve, such as projects and coursework.
- 45 Inspectors observed many examples of teachers' enthusiasm for their subject encouraging and motivating pupils to learn effectively. In such instances, teacher presentations are stimulating and capture the pupils' interest. Questioning is skilfully used to challenge pupils' thinking and enhance their understanding. In history, for example, Key Stage 4 pupils were inspired by the teacher's measured explanation of medieval torture and were able to use this knowledge to judge the bias in the film 'Braveheart'. In a Key Stage 3 religious education lesson, the teacher created a secure environment through sensitive questioning so that pupils' perceptions and stereotypical views could be explored and challenged.
- 46 Teachers' expectations of pupils are generally high. The very best teaching and learning occurred where teachers expected pupils to show initiative and to take responsibility for their learning. In a Year 9 geography lesson, pupils were required to prepare their own oral presentations on the impact of a new development in the Peak Park. In some Year 11 English

lessons, teachers skilfully managed learning so that pupils debated racial prejudice and physical disability with great maturity.

- 47 In some lessons, however, teachers spend too much time telling pupils information rather than encouraging them find out for themselves. In some history lessons, for example, pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their skills in using historical sources to pursue a line of enquiry. In mathematics, some teaching focuses on explaining and reassuring rather than challenging pupils.
- 48 Teachers generally manage pupils very well and achieve high standards of discipline, with pupils remaining on task throughout most lessons. Occasionally, pupils' concentration wanes when lessons lack pace or when they do not see the purpose of the tasks they are required to do. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good overall. Pupils clearly trust and value their teachers and teachers show pupils respect.
- 49 Overall, resources are well used in the classroom. Teachers select appropriate resources to stimulate learning and sustain interest. In modern foreign languages, for example, a variety of resources are used to motivate pupils such as an attractive cartoon poster to aid lower attaining pupils to volunteer descriptions, and overhead transparency cut-outs to engage average attaining pupils in conjugating the perfect tense. In English, stories which are relevant to pupils' experiences such as when urban myths are used to help them understand structure and plot.
- 50 Information technology resources are more widely and better used in some subjects than at the time of the last inspection, though some subjects such as art and history do not make sufficient use of the new technology. The Learning Resource Centre is yet to play a significant role in most teaching as access to the centre in lessons outside English is limited. There are deficiencies in resources for music which have some negative impact upon the quality of teaching.
- 51 Most departments are using examination data to evaluate pupils' performance and set improvement targets. Some teachers are using their judgements of pupils' attainment to help them plan their lessons effectively. In mathematics, for example, test data is used to plan and set targets for pupils and the department. Teachers also use questioning well to assess pupils' understanding, and some teachers use the information gained to vary the content and structure of their lesson. In science, pupils' performance is closely monitored and planning adjusted according to the strengths and weaknesses identified.
- 52 However, overall, teaching is not yet sufficiently influenced by the assessment of pupils' attainment and progress. Some departments' assessment methods are not yet precise enough to produce sound evidence of pupils' attainment. This is particularly evident in marking, much of which is cursory, offering little advice to pupils about their attainment and how they might improve. Exceptionally, there is some effective marking giving pupils clear guidance about their strengths, weaknesses and setting targets for improvement. This was most consistently seen in science, and in some aspects of geography. Some good examples of diagnostic marking by individual teachers of English and history were also observed. Some teachers also take time to give individual oral feedback to pupils in lessons. However, in most departments, there has not been sufficient discussion about how to award grades and what they represent, and so most marking does not provide enough evidence on which to base teaching plans.
- 53 A few teachers involve pupils in assessing their own work and that of their peers. In art, for example, pupils assess their own work and negotiate their judgements with their teachers. In information technology, pupils value the opportunity to assess their own competencies, though

these assessments are not sufficiently explicitly validated by teachers. There is scope for further use of this kind of assessment in all subjects, to complement the school's effective use of a Record of Achievement for raising pupils' self esteem.

- 54 Homework is set regularly and mostly consistently across subjects. Most departments have policies which they follow, the exception being art. Diaries are used to by pupils to record homework. Parents expressed concern about the regularity and consistency of homework, particularly in science and mathematics. Inspectors' findings did not bear out these concerns. However, parents were also concerned by the quality of some homework and the challenge it contained. Inspectors found some evidence that not all homework was of the highest quality. Occasionally, some tasks lacked rigour. Overall, however, most homework was well planned and varied in its nature. Most teachers value homework as an integral part of pupils' learning and take it into account in their planning.
- 55 Teaching quality is generally of a high standard and there is some very good teaching in a number of subjects. Closer monitoring of teaching and more discussion at departmental level about effective teaching are needed to raise standards of teaching still further and particularly to addresses the weaknesses which exist in some areas.

• **The curriculum and assessment**

- 56 The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum for its pupils. It is effective in promoting pupils' intellectual, physical and personal development and in preparing them for the next stage of education, training or employment.
- 57 Curriculum provision at Key Stage 3 is good overall. All the National Curriculum subjects are included together with religious education and personal and social development. Within and in addition to these subjects a range of strategies are employed across the key stage to further raise standards of achievement and enrich the curriculum. The use in science of a course designed to promote pupils' thinking skills is being used to good effect. Pupils' motivation is increased and their aspirations are raised through opportunities for Year 8 pupils to be taught at Keele University and for pupils in all years to participate in the local education authority's Aiming High Project. Some pupils also benefit from a Year 9 literacy project whereby pupils work with children in a feeder primary school. A small number of pupils voluntarily benefit from further support in the evening through a Fun Learning Project at Sandon High School (FLASH) which contributes to the overall achievement of those involved. The science curriculum is further enriched by visits to interactive learning centres such as Jodrell Bank. However, the provision in art is limited in its breadth to painting and drawing: textiles, printmaking, photography and working in three dimensions are underdeveloped. In music at Key Stage 3, there is an over-emphasis on history and theoretical written work at the expense of developing pupils' practical skills.
- 58 Curriculum provision at Key Stage 4 overall is very good. All pupils follow a core study of English, mathematics, double award science, religious education (short course), design and technology, a modern foreign language, physical education and personal, social and health education. An options system then allows pupils to take GCSE courses in art and design, business studies, geography, history, information technology and music. Pupils also have access to one or two of four foreign languages, though the accreditation available in modern foreign languages is limited in some aspects and only a small number of pupils take GCSE in a foreign language.
- 59 A strength of the Key Stage 4 provision is the modular curriculum through which pupils can gain a further GCSE subject in child development, physical education, religious education or statistics in one year, as well as studying a range of optional units, some of which lead to

external accreditation such as Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT) or National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ). These units include computer studies, environmental geography, history through film, Italian, keyboarding, leisure activities, performing arts, problem solving with industry, screen printing and the Young Enterprise Scheme. These modular courses successfully enable a vocational dimension to be introduced into the curriculum. An input from industrialists into several of the units ensures that there is a good relationship between the content of these units and the methods of delivery. These are based on teamwork, action planning and problem solving and the employability skills needed in the workplace. In the lessons observed, the management of learning was never less than satisfactory, and often it was good. Pupils were well motivated, engaged in sensible discussion, showed real interest in their work and worked well together in small groups. Progress was seen across a range of skills including the designing of questionnaires, developing research skills, responding well to challenging situations, working co-operatively with others, and improving their information technology and foreign language skills.

- 60 The Key Stage 4 curriculum is enriched further in a variety of ways. For example: the delivery of information technology through science lessons, where the planning of both the information technology and the science is of high quality; European trips, particularly to France, which have tightly structured, cross-curricular learning experiences; curriculum visits to the theatre, art galleries, clothes shows and field trips; and the development of Anglo-Irish video-conferencing , which has helped to widen pupils' horizons considerably and has the potential use in subjects, such as history, to help pupils gain a first-hand experience of the current political situation.
- 61 The school also provides an extensive mentoring programme for its Year 10 and 11 pupils. This is carried out by teachers and, for those pupils at risk of becoming disaffected by secondary education, by industrialists. These industrialists are in their early twenties and can ably empathise with the challenges facing young people. They give the pupils valuable insights into the demands of life-long learning and play an important role in supporting their mentees through elements of the work-related curriculum such as work experience, work shadowing and practice interviews. School records show that industrial mentoring has helped disaffected pupils successfully complete their GCSE studies, sometimes gaining GCSE grades at levels A* to C.
- 62 Statutory requirements for the National Curriculum are mostly met in full, except in music at Key Stage 3, and in the failure to meet the information technology requirements of the programmes of study in art. There is appropriate provision for health education, including sex education and the attention to drug misuse.
- 63 There are satisfactory arrangements for ensuring that all pupils have equal opportunities to profit from the full range of curricular activity. Following criticism in the last report, staff have worked hard to improve their planning to meet the needs of the differing abilities of pupils in mixed ability situations, and some progress has been made in this area. The needs of the most able, middle and low ability pupils are well and equally provided for in design and technology, geography, modern foreign languages at Key Stage 3, science and in swimming. In mathematics the most able are often moved on to the next section or chapter rather than developing the present work in more demanding contexts. In history, considerable work has been devoted to producing materials for pupils with special educational needs but these are not yet being used to good effect in lessons. A shortage of specialist staff and accommodation in design and technology means that, in Year 8 particularly, not all pupils have equal access to specialist provision.
- 64 The use of setting and banding is generally well used across the school. Teachers focus their teaching to match pupils' needs although pupils with special educational needs are not always

challenged sufficiently in some lower sets. The setting arrangements are well used in mathematics where pupils are often re-setted during the year, and in science where pupils are re-setted at the end of Year 10 examinations and following the trial examinations in Year 11.

- 65 The provision for pupils with special educational needs is broad and balanced at both key stages. Targets are set for pupils on the register of special educational needs and most teachers use these to ensure that pupils are offered an appropriate range of curriculum experiences. Reading support is offered to a small number of pupils who leave one of their lessons for this support for a short period each day. Currently there is no consistent approach to ensuring that pupils do not miss important parts of lessons and no guidance is given to teachers about how to compensate for lost time. Extra-curricular activities, including the Fun Learning at Sandon High project (FLASH) provide good support for some pupils with special educational needs, enhancing motivation and access to the taught curriculum. Where possible the school accommodates pupils' individual Key Stage 4 choices when they move from another school; for example, one pupil is taught GCSE German in her lunchtime in order for her to continue her studies of two languages.
- 66 Planning to ensure that the work given to pupils builds steadily and thoroughly on previous learning is satisfactory overall, but there are variations. Schemes of work are planned progressively in geography, modern foreign languages at Key Stage 3, mathematics, science, information technology, and religious education, but not all subject schemes are planned so effectively. The continuity of pupils' learning in Key Stage 3 design and technology is hampered by the operation of a two week timetable as too little time can be devoted to particular areas of study. In modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4, there is a break in continuity when pupils change their main language of study, or when the new language does not challenge them because it leads to the Certificate of Achievement rather than the higher accreditation of GCSE.
- 67 The mathematics, science, design and technology, geography and history departments make good links with primary schools to enable lessons that build on, and do not repeat work done in the primary school. In mathematics, specific bridging units are used to good effect. There are joint training days for primary and secondary staff in design and technology; and in geography and history teachers from the local pyramid meet regularly to share their approaches to teaching. Several departments are exploring links with post-16 providers to further develop continuity and progression in their subjects.
- 68 Year 11 pupils and their parents have found that a residential experience for pupils at Keele University earlier this term gave a valuable insight into the requirements of higher education and has raised pupils' personal aspirations. The leisure module has links with local sports clubs, and this is also a good preparation for adult life.
- 69 The school homework policy recognises the link between what is planned in lessons and how homework can be used to consolidate or extend learning. Effective homework was set in design and technology, geography, English, mathematics and science. History homework was effective when pupils were required to undertake extended writing on slavery, but not when they were asked to copy diagrams into books. Homework in modern foreign languages and religious education does not always extend or develop classroom work.
- 70 The school makes very good provision for extra-curricular activities and this is a significant strength of the school. There is a breadth of musical activities such as mixed choir, large orchestra, recorder, wind and percussion ensembles; a wide variety of sporting activities including aerobics, athletics, badminton, basket ball, cricket, cross-country, dance, gymnastics, hockey, netball, table tennis, tennis and soccer; numerous clubs such as art, chess, computers,

dance, drama, debating, gardening, environmental issues and science; and a range of residential activities, for example, Duke of Edinburgh Award, activity weeks at an outdoor centre, skiing tips, annual tour of Italy and French exchange.

- 71 All pupils in Key Stage 4 have work experience, and the provision for careers education is very good. Pupils and parents value the careers guidance provided by the school. Careers education and work experience are planned carefully and are significant aspects of the personal, social and health education programme. Clear and comprehensive documentation relating to all aspects of careers guidance and work experience is available to both pupils and parents. The careers programme is supported by a range of resources and makes effective use of computer materials, links with local industry, visits to careers conferences and residential courses at local universities. Specialist advice is regularly available to pupils from the Careers Service whose officers are also usefully available for consultation on parents' evenings. Time for delivering the programme is at a premium and relies greatly on the support of the form tutors. Work experience in Years 10 and 11 is well organised and monitored effectively with opportunities for placements abroad .
- 72 The arrangements for assessing pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 are satisfactory overall, though these do vary between departments. Assessment procedures are generally well developed in geography, mathematics and science. The school has a wealth of information on pupils including: results from the national tests for 11 and 14 year old pupils; outcomes of standardised testing programmes for pupils in Years 7 (CATS) and Year 10 (Yellis) which give clear predictions for attainment at the end of Years 9 and 11 respectively; and reading tests. These departments make good use of this information for predicting and monitoring pupils' progress. In history, good use is made of Year 9 test results and Yellis tests to set GCSE targets. These are then monitored through trial examinations in Years 10 and 11 but they are not used systematically to monitor progress throughout Years 10 and 11. In modern foreign languages, good use is made of assessment throughout Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 for GCSE, but not as much use is made to inform the planning of work in the relatively undemanding non-GCSE courses. Other subjects are generally not making enough use of the assessment data available.
- 73 There are a number of good examples of teachers ensuring their judgements are consistent. In science, for example, regular moderation of pupils' work and a portfolio of standards in investigative work are used effectively to help teachers assess pupils' attainment consistently. However, in some subjects, there is a lack of consistency in teachers' judgement of pupils' work. For example, in information technology, pupils' attainment across the curriculum is not being effectively assessed. In physical education, the department is reviewing its procedures to relate assessment more closely to what the pupils actually learn; in religious education, assessment is not yet linked to the new assessment framework of the Agreed Syllabus; in Key Stage 3 history, judgements do not sufficiently relate to the level descriptions of the National Curriculum; and in art, music and English, there are no strategies in place for ensuring all teachers are assessing in a consistent way.
- 74 The use of assessment to inform planning is also satisfactory overall, but a number of teachers are not yet making enough use of their judgements about pupils' attainment to help them develop pupils' strengths and weaknesses. Good use is made of assessment to inform planning in mathematics and science. Everyday assessment of work in previous lessons or homework was seen to lead to alterations in some lessons during the inspection. The use of assessment to inform planning is unsatisfactory in art, music and in Key Stage 3 history. Some improvement in the effective use of assessment has been achieved since the last inspection report, but further action is needed: the recent in-service training sessions and the associated documentation provide a sound base from which to continue moving forward.

- 75 The use of assessment to set pupils specific targets to meet is, as yet, at an early stage of development. Pupils assess their own achievements in design and technology each term and this is helping pupils to identify their strengths and weaknesses. In geography, pupils are set targets following termly reviews of their progress, though these targets could be more profitable if they were designed to be achieved over a shorter timescale than is the current practice. Self-assessment in information technology is motivating pupils and some are setting their own lesson targets as a trial project. In mathematics and science, the marking of pupils' work often includes targets for individual improvement, but generally marking does not give pupils enough guidance about how to improve.
- 76 The statements of pupils with special educational needs are annually reviewed appropriately and annual objectives are drawn up. However, although all pupils are assessed when they enter the school, not all who have learning difficulties are placed on the school's register of special educational needs. There is no formal and consistent whole-school system for the early identification of pupils' learning difficulties across the curriculum, and so the special educational needs of some pupils are not sufficiently systematically assessed. Those pupils who have individual education plans are set targets, but these are not sufficiently detailed to help teachers monitor pupils' progress.

• **Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

- 77 Overall the school's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils is good, with some very good features. Standards have been maintained in the areas of moral and social development. The school's emphasis on values and good relationships supports a positive learning atmosphere, promoting progress and attainment. There has been some improvement in the provision of opportunities for spiritual and cultural development since the last inspection, but opportunities to consolidate and extend pupils' experiences in these areas through the curriculum are still being missed. The need for systematic co-ordination and monitoring, particularly of collective worship, remains an issue from the last inspection and is pertinent in all four areas. The school is well-placed to develop and implement appropriate processes.
- 78 The school provides the opportunity for all pupils to be involved daily in an act of collective worship. Formal assemblies for year groups, upper and lower schools, are well-ordered and offer some opportunity for reflection, awe and wonder, making links with pupils' own experiences. The quality of assemblies in tutor groups is not consistent and the atmosphere created is not always conducive to spiritual development. Where pupils were involved in the presentation this enhanced the atmosphere and was received with respect.
- 79 Provision for pupils' spiritual development across the curriculum is satisfactory. There is an explicit commitment in the school's aims to develop pupils' sense of the spiritual. The school is actively involved in promoting projects which tackle spiritual issues and raise self-awareness, such as 'JC2000' and the Aiming High Project. There are also close working links with local churches. Parents value the debating society as a positive opportunity for pupils to explore their own beliefs and values and to listen to the views of others. The spiritual ethos is supported by experiences in some tutor time and some curriculum areas, for example, in art, history, religious education and English. It is also developed in some tutor time, for example, where the teacher encouraged pupils to consider and reflect upon the amazing structure of a sunflower. In general, however, subject plans and individual teacher's lesson planning do not systematically identify and develop opportunities for eliciting awe, wonder and spiritual development.

- 80 Provision for pupils' moral development is very good and is underpinned by its policy for moral enhancement. The school continues to provide a well-ordered, secure and safe environment with strong moral values. Discipline is firm but not intimidating, and supports positive moral attitudes and a good working atmosphere. A majority of the parents feel that the school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on the students. Pupils are aware of the school's vigilant policy on bullying and feel confident that any problems are resolved immediately. Pupils are clear about the procedures for rewards and sanctions. Moral issues are highlighted, for example, in the personal, social and health curriculum, formal assemblies, the debating society and the Senior Drama Club. During the week of the inspection, for example, fifty pupils attended a lunchtime debate on East Timor exploring the moral and social issues at stake. Opportunities are identified within the curriculum to explore moral issues, particularly in English, where this is a strength of the department, and in history, geography, maths, science and religious education. Planning for such opportunities is not systematic nor monitored across the curriculum
- 81 Provision for pupils' social development is very good. The school has high expectations expressed through its Code of Conduct and the home/school contract. Teachers work hard to develop good relationships with pupils, particularly through the tutor system, and pupils respond positively. Pupils have opportunities to take responsibility, for example, through the prefect system, as mentors, as librarians and as part of the Eco school committee. There are opportunities to explore social issues and develop skills in personal, social and health education, English, Geography and in extra-curricular music. Pupils generally work co-operatively in lessons, but in some areas there are fewer planned opportunities for collaboration. Work on Records of Achievement helps pupils to identify their strengths and set targets. Pupils communicate well and make confident presentations in their work with local industries. Parents feel that the pupils show social skills both in and out of school, for example, they are keen to act as guides and hosts at school functions - a role they fulfil with competency and maturity. The Meir in Action project involves pupils positively in the life of the local community. Charity work is undertaken in year groups and many pupils are involved in school working parties to tackle school issues such as homework.
- 82 Pupils are able to complete work experience in Years 10 or 11, taking the initiative to find their own placements. Environmental issues are considered in geography and by the Eco committee. A large number of pupils participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided, including theatre trips, visits abroad, sporting activities and juggling.
- 83 Provision for pupils' cultural development is good and in some respects very good. The school works hard to broaden pupils' horizons. There are good links with local industry which support projects such as the pupil mentoring scheme and video-conferencing. There is an explicit commitment by the school to develop pupils' awareness of European and global citizenship. There are links with schools in Ireland, France and India. Pupils' knowledge and understanding are extended through the curriculum by educational visits, particularly in history. Cultural heritage and diversity are explored in science, art, and modern foreign languages. A multi-cultural festival is held annually. However, curriculum opportunities to enrich understanding of other cultures are missed in some areas, such as design and technology and religious education.

• **Support, guidance and pupils' welfare**

- 84 Provision for pupils' support, guidance and welfare is very good and a significant strength of the school. The school creates a responsive and supportive community for all pupils and encourages high standards of personal behaviour. A home/school contract, signed by the headteacher, parents and pupil, clarifies the roles within the partnership and defines the commitment of all parties to ensure that pupils achieve their full potential in all aspects of

school life. The pastoral system effectively supports the school's aim to encourage pupils' personal growth and development, a feeling of self-confidence, a sense of poise and the ability to co-operate and work with others. Many pupils and parents express considerable confidence in the school's pastoral organisation and praise its thoroughness and effectiveness.

- 85 Form tutors, ably supported by heads of year, are justifiably seen to be the key members of the pastoral team. Pupils generally stay with the same tutor group throughout their time at school. This leads to a close relationship between tutors, pupils and parents. Overall, tutors are successful in caring for pupils, ensuring their well-being and monitoring their progress. The roles of the tutors and heads of year and other staff responsible for different aspects of pupils' support, guidance and welfare are well defined, well co-ordinated and mutually supportive. Regular meetings of different combinations of these groups ensure a regular exchange of information and enable problems to be identified and dealt with at an early stage. Heads of year meet with the headteacher to discuss issues relating to pastoral care and regular meetings are also held with the education welfare officer, educational psychologist and other supporting agencies. There is good communication between the pastoral and academic staff, resulting in effective monitoring of all aspects of pupils' progress. Pupils are confident that both pastoral and subject staff are ready to listen and respond to matters which concern them
- 86 The pastoral system is sufficiently flexible to allow tutors develop their own systems and practices. Mostly, this flexibility enhances the quality guidance in individual tutor groups but does, in some areas, lead to inconsistency in provision, for example, in the varying quality of the use of assembly time in tutor groups, including arrangements for collective worship and the support given to pupils in personal target setting.
- 87 Pupils' progress is monitored on a regular basis and parents are informed and consulted as appropriate. Year 11 pupils are further supported for the GCSE examination by a mentoring scheme. Each pupil meets with a member of staff on a regular basis to discuss coursework deadlines, homework commitments, time management and other more general problems. A parents' meeting is also held to explain the importance of coursework and how parents can support their son or daughter. There are also effective support mechanisms for vulnerable pupils in Key Stage 3 through the FLASH project and for pupils at risk of underachieving in Years 10 and 11 through an industrial mentoring scheme. Credit is given for a wide range of achievements, beyond the academic and sporting. Pupils who are underachieving are, in the main, identified and appropriate steps to provide support and guidance. However, within subjects, the quality of individual target setting for pupils on a regular basis, and strategies for supporting progress towards targets are generally not well developed. In addition, target identification is not currently a feature of most reports to parents. These are areas for improvement.
- 88 Pupils who are identified on the register of special educational needs are well known to the special educational needs co-ordinator. Those pupils who have individual education plans are set targets which are known to teachers. Many teachers plan work to address the pupils' targets, but generally the targets are not sufficiently detailed to help teachers monitor pupils' progress effectively. The newly introduced group education plan for some pupils is helping to address this issue, as is the small-scale pilot linking individual education plans to the national Record of Achievement. This latter scheme has the potential to secure a more whole-school approach to setting targets for pupils with special educational needs and monitoring their progress towards reaching them.
- 89 All pupils are involved with the production of Records of Achievement which operate within the framework of the national policy. Good support structures are in place to assist pupils produce documents of good quality, emphasising the school's commitment to the activity. The student

diary is intended to support the completion of the record. In practice, the diary is regarded by most pupils and parents as a homework diary, its wider functions and potential being less well appreciated. Overall, however, it provides a good communication system between school and parents. Parents are very supportive of the diary as it enables them to monitor pupils' homework, together with attendance and punctuality and provides an easy means of contact with the form tutor.

- 90 The diary's potential as a vehicle for general communication between school and home is not sufficiently exploited, for example, to inform parents of school events and letters to be expected. The diary is also perceived to be a useful recording system by many pupils, particularly in Key Stage 3. There is less enthusiasm in Key Stage 4. A number of pupils use the diary less effectively for recording homework assignments and their parents cannot always be sure the diary gives a true reflection of the work that has been set or the date by which it must be completed. The diary is also used by pupils to set themselves personal targets and pupils are encouraged to monitor their own progress towards these targets. There is scope for the addition of individual pupil targets set by subject and pastoral tutors. This would inform both form tutors and parents and also help pupils focus their weekly personal targets more effectively.
- 91 Requirements for recording and reporting attendance are met. The school has made rigorous efforts to improve levels of attendance. These are supported by effective procedures for following up absences and for controlling the number of pupils out of classrooms during the day. There is a particularly close working relationship with the education welfare officers to address the problem of regular or long term absenteeism.
- 92 The personal, social and health education programme is formally taught in tutor groups, for one period each week. In the most effective tutor groups some aspects of personal, social and health education are further developed during form assembly time. The programmes are designed by heads of year, supported by work sheets and guidance materials and are well co-ordinated to ensure there is appropriate development in each topic as pupils become capable of greater insight and understanding. A number of visiting speakers effectively support the programme. Tutors are rightly given some flexibility in deciding the most appropriate way to deliver the material to their group. This enables them to respond more directly to the needs of the group or address current issues. Sex education is also incorporated into the programme, taught within a context of family values and supported by work within science education. The school nurse has supported the development of the materials and makes a significant contribution to the delivery of the programme. She also holds a weekly drop-in clinic to help any pupils with health difficulties. The new drugs education policy is currently being introduced as an aspect of Key Stage 4 personal, social and health education lessons but has yet to be implemented throughout Key Stage 3. There are also other support structures used by the school to raise the level of drugs-awareness and to combat drugs abuse, including the school nurse and a trained member of staff from the Meir in Action project. The careers education and guidance are very good with pupils receiving well informed and targeted support from school staff and those of the Careers Service.
- 93 There are effective introductory and induction systems in place to ensure pupils in Year 7 are well supported both before and after they join the school. Pupils in Year 7 welcome the extra support given by the Year 11 mentors attached to their tutor group. A new mentoring scheme, in association with the Beth Johnson Foundation, aims to provide opportunities for additional guidance for this age group, outside the school day. The school invests considerable time in preparing pupils thoroughly for the next stages in their education and life beyond school. There is a focus of activity at transition points, for example, when pupils are selecting options in Year 9 and further education courses in Years 10 and 11. There are many opportunities for pupils

to gain confidence, take on responsibility and develop leadership skills such as acting as form representative, team captain or as a member of the school Eco committee. Pupils are consulted on a range of issues and contribute their ideas to the development of school policy, for example, the arrangements for rewards and punishment such opportunities help to prepare pupils for adult life.

- 94 Behaviour is generally good around the school and in lessons and this reflects the school's effective procedures. Expectations of good behaviour are high. Most pupils accept this responsibility and behave well without direct supervision. A range of initiatives is used to combat bullying in school. These include a Bullywatch scheme supported by a Bullywatch Charter, support through the personal, social and health programme and a focus, where appropriate, in school assemblies. Pupils and most parents report that the few instances of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively and that the pupils feel safe and well protected in school.
- 95 Child protection procedures are clearly and fully defined. Staff are aware of procedures for dealing with suspected abuse and appropriate links are established with agencies concerned.
- 96 Sound measures are taken to promote the health and safety of pupils. A School Health and Safety Committee with an executive group reports directly to the governing body whose members take a keen and active interest in this area. Risk assessment audits are conducted regularly and heads of departments are required to update their procedures annually. Risk assessments are required for all off-site visits. Spot checks on specific aspects of health and safety are conducted annually, for example, the checking of contents of first aid boxes. Records are kept of accidents and site inspections. Clear guidance is provided on first aid. All staff have basic first aid training and three staff have advanced awards. Accident procedures are in place and systematically implemented.
- 97 Since the last inspection the school has addressed many of the issues raised. The responsibility for overseeing pastoral care has been transferred to heads of year and the role of the house system is currently being redefined. The sex education policy has been successfully implemented. The quality of the toilet areas has been improved and although access is still by key, pupils did not consider this restrictive as an increase in key holders means that keys are readily available.

• **Partnership with parents and the community**

- 98 The great majority of parents are very supportive of the school as they were at the time of the last inspection. They believe that the school is approachable and keeps them well informed. There are a variety of mechanisms for doing this, including recently introduced newsletters and open evenings on a range of issues, including information technology and the options available to pupils when they leave at the end of Year 11. Student diaries provide a potentially useful channel of communication between school and home, though there is scope for improving the links the diary provides. The homework policy, when it is applied consistently, also creates an opportunity for parents to become involved in their children's learning. The annual reports on pupils are detailed and personalised but do not always contain targets on progress that are specific enough to be useful.
- 99 Parents are appropriately involved in the annual reviews of pupils with statements of special educational needs and other agencies are involved when required. The parents of pupils, at stage 3 and above on the school's register of special educational needs, are involved in formal reviews of their child's progress. Below stage 3, although the co-ordinator knows the pupils well and consults informally with many parents, there is no formal system to ensure their

involvement. All parents do receive a copy of their child's individual educational plan. The very effective involvement of a range of outside agencies with pupils experiencing difficulty helps to ensure their continued motivation and determination to succeed.

- 100 An active Parents Association organises a variety of fundraising events. Pupils benefit directly from these as they fund such items as the school minibus and the purchase of additional learning resources. For a variety of reasons only a few parents are able to help in school or with extra-curricular activities and, although the majority feel that the school encourages them, some are not aware of ways they could get involved. However, the work that the school is doing in making its facilities available to parents through the College in the Community programme has the potential to increase many parents' skills and capacity to help their children with their work.
- 101 Links with commerce, industry, community associations and local churches continue to be developed and extended and represent a major strength of the school. The school works effectively with local companies such as Wedgwood and Johnson Matthey on a number of projects. These increase the range of learning experiences, for example, through work on pollution and industrial processes. They also provide pupils with additional opportunities for personal development, such as problem solving and improving communication skills in making presentations. The school also benefits as pupils bring back their skills gained in visits to places such as the Midlands Electricity Board's Halesown centre. Such visits are followed up by allowing pupils to apply their skills to projects such as improving the school environment. A number of pupils also receive support from mentors provided by local organisations as a way of improving their academic performance at GCSE level.
- 102 The school also works closely with youth schemes and voluntary groups, including the Meir in Action Project, to ensure that pupils receive appropriate out-of-school advice and support and that preventative action is taken on problems which could impede their educational progress. Additionally, there are substantial links with the community involving physical education.
- 103 The previous inspection report noted the mutual benefits of partnership. The school's work in developing these further has been excellent.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

- 104 The headteacher and governing body provide a very clear educational direction for the school. This is based upon a strong, shared and explicit commitment to raising pupils' self esteem and their standards of attainment. As a result, the school has established a very positive and purposeful ethos. There is an effective learning environment in which pupils are encouraged and expected to aim high in both their academic and personal achievements. Relationships in the school are warm and supportive; the atmosphere is calm and there is equal access for pupils to the full range of the school's educational provision. A strong community spirit prevails where mutual respect is evident and all members of the school feel and are valued. Such an ethos is successfully enabling the pupils to attain standards which are high in comparison to pupils from similar schools.
- 105 The leadership of the headteacher inspires and enables pupils and staff to have confidence in their own talents and capabilities. Her leadership is rooted in a belief that a school and its staff must provide for the needs of all its pupils by placing the school at the heart of the local and international community. Equally important is her belief in the need to provide a curriculum

which focuses upon developing pupils' life skills and their social responsibilities.

- 106 As a result, the school's curriculum is enriched by a strong partnership with industry, the local area and Europe - notably France and, more recently Ireland. Staff are positively encouraged to initiate and develop these links. The benefits for pupils are evident. Their problem solving skills are enhanced through such activities as the Young Enterprise and Wedgwood Quality Circles modules in Years 10 and 11. Their social responsibilities are fostered, for example, through the Eco School Committee and the local Meir in Action project. Their standards of literacy and oracy are effectively developed by a variety of strategies, from the use of drama, both in lessons and in extra-curricular time, to the lunchtime debating society. During the week of the inspection, for example, fifty pupils were observed debating the crisis in East Timor. Such developments and the positive outcomes for pupils are valued highly by parents and members of the local and industrial communities - the school is recognised as one which is playing a key role in enhancing the life-chances of the community's future citizens.
- 107 The school's aims are currently being revised, as, typical of the school's approach, there is a desire to ensure the aims fully reflect the changing needs of society. Governors and staff are still discussing the finer points of these aims, but as they exist in draft, they appropriately aim to enable pupils to make reasoned and informed choices between possible courses of action; to fulfil their potential, reaching high standards and acquiring relevant skills; and to meet their responsibilities toward other people. These aims are embodied in the work and life of the school and are the corner stone of its ethos. They are used by staff and governors as principles to underpin their decision making and planning the future direction of the school.
- 108 The governing body successfully and conscientiously carries out its roles and responsibilities. It is effectively organised into committees so that work loads can be shared and the expertise of the many and varied specialisms of governors fully used. Governors ensure that the school has an appropriate range of policies to guide its work and the majority of their statutory duties are fulfilled. The school provides a daily opportunity for collective worship and has improved its provision since the last inspection. However, some of the opportunities in tutor time do not, in practice, encompass an act of worship and the school is not monitoring its provision.
- 109 Governors have established a strong bond with staff and pupils through their willingness to become actively involved in the life and work of the school. This is exemplified by governors collaborating with staff on curriculum working parties, providing and participating in staff training, using their outside work to establish curriculum links and visiting classrooms. Several governors are linked to departments, taking a special interest in these areas, and monitoring developments on behalf of the full governing body. The governing body is very well informed by the headteacher and other staff about the work of the school. However, governors are also able to make informed decisions and to question the school from a position of strength based on their own first hand knowledge of the school.
- 110 In the last inspection report, the governing body was judged to be effectively acting as a critical friend of the school. It is still successfully carrying out this role but is now additionally holding the school to account in a number of areas. Each year, the headteacher and subject departments are required to produce for governors a detailed analysis of the school's and subjects' GCSE and Key Stage 3 assessment results. These are examined and compared with national, local and other assessment information in order to evaluate the pupils' performance in the light of the governors' policies. Teaching staff are asked to produce reports on outcomes of initiatives such as the joint teaching of science and information technology (the SC-IT project). On such occasions, governors question staff carefully, drawing upon their own extensive curriculum expertise and their own knowledge of what is happening in the school.

- 111 Governors are also effectively monitoring and evaluating the impact of their policies and decisions. Policies are vetted by governors' committees and their implementation examined by governors when they are visiting the school or spending time in classrooms. For example, the information technology link-governor has examined the impact of the cross-curricular information technology policy on pupils' standards of attainment and has recognised the significance of the limited access for pupils to the Learning Resources Centre during lesson time.
- 112 In other instances, governors use external evaluators to assess the success of their policies, as occurred with Keele University's evaluation of the school's industrial mentoring processes. As a result of this evaluation, governors supported an extension of the mentoring schemes to include a larger number of pupils. In other areas, governors have set in train monitoring procedures to gather information. A good example can be found in governors' plans for monitoring the effect of the recently installed security cameras for the school grounds, using data provided by the security firm and pupils and parents' views.
- 113 The senior management team has the full confidence of the governors, staff, parents and pupils. It is a small team consisting of the headteacher and two deputy headteachers. They work closely and well as a team and their respective skills and expertise complement each other very successfully. They are held in high regard by all who work with them and have steered the school along the road of continual improvement, both in terms of academic success and curriculum development.
- 114 Much of this sustained improvement is the result of the senior management's careful planning based upon thorough research and wide consultation with staff, pupils and governors. Working parties are used effectively to develop policies. These are open to all staff to attend so that ideas can be generated from teachers' expertise and experience as well as from the senior management team. This is exemplified well by the School Improvement Working Party, set up to address raising of pupils' achievement - a key issue identified in the last inspection. This working party has developed a range of strategies to raise pupils' attainment such as the promotion of pupils' self-assessment and adopting a problem solving approach to learning. Another good example is the Health Education Working Party whose efforts in developing the school's personal, social and health programme were recognised by the receipt of the Health Promoting Schools' Award from the Health Education Unit.
- 115 The close working relationship of the senior management team has brought many benefits to the school, not the least a common sense of purpose in meeting the needs of pupils and raising standards. However, the team has realised that many of their current roles and specific duties now overlap, especially as the relationship between pupils' personal and academic progress is recognised as being critical to achievement. The team is rightly re-examining their responsibilities and exploring ways in which they can operate more efficiently through greater sharing of roles, particularly with regard to monitoring the work of individual departments and teaching and learning.
- 116 Following the last inspection, meticulous research produced some excellent procedures to monitor the work of the school - both at school and departmental level. These include the use of a wide range of strategies covering observing, teaching, scrutinising, examining teaching plans, pupils' work and talking to pupils. More recently, these procedures were appropriately expanded to include the use of assessment data to help inform departmental development. Teachers received in-service training about the procedures and were given detailed documentation to guide implementation.
- 117 At the time of this inspection, the monitoring procedures had been applied successfully by

senior managers at whole-school level where development planning and target setting are rooted in a thorough analysis of assessment data and the evaluation of the outcomes of curriculum development. However, at departmental level, monitoring is, as yet, inconsistently applied. In general, it is insufficiently rigorous and systematic to have the optimum impact upon quality and standards.

- 118 A few departments such as science, geography and design and technology have utilised the school's monitoring procedures very effectively. Senior staff have worked collaboratively with heads of department in implementing the procedures to identify strengths and weaknesses of departmental performance and to devise appropriate strategies to tackle any weaknesses. In such cases, much of the resulting action has focused upon improving the quality and consistency of teaching standards. Heads of department have introduced clear teaching schemes which are carefully planned to help all pupils progress by utilising a variety of teaching and learning styles.
- 119 However, other departments have not responded so positively, and there has been insufficient appropriate intervention by senior staff to promote monitoring as an effective strategy for improvement. As a result, some departments are not making sufficient progress, for example music and art, where some unsatisfactory teaching exists and departmental teaching plans are inadequate. In other departments, such as English and physical education where the quality of teaching observed was variable, ranging from excellent to unsatisfactory, there are as yet few monitoring strategies in place to identify and disseminate the most successful practice.
- 120 Heads of department have clear job descriptions but they do not all fulfil their roles and responsibilities with equal effect. There is very strong leadership in science and geography. In these departments, there is a determined focus on providing effective support for teaching and a desire to continually improve. These departments have useful curriculum documentation to underpin teaching and learning; development plans which take into account relevant expansion of curriculum provision to enhance pupils' learning; and clear assessment policies which inform the future work of the department. Elsewhere, departmental heads' understanding of their key role and their appreciation of the relevant strategies to be used in school improvement is variable. Overall, the quality of departmental leadership needs to be developed to the high standard of the most effective departments.
- 121 The school's provision for special needs is not sufficiently well managed to enable the most effective provision to be identified and disseminated across the school. The learning support assistants provide good support for pupils in lessons. Several teachers are successfully addressing pupils' special educational needs by matching work, resources and their teaching styles to pupils' differing needs. However, the special educational needs co-ordinator only teaches lower-attaining English groups. This hinders the monitoring and dissemination of effective practice and limits the flexibility of support required by the Code of Practice. There are also limited opportunities for the special educational needs co-ordinator to consult with staff about effective teaching techniques and materials. Some departments have identified link teachers for special educational needs, but not all departments have done so, and this limits the usefulness of this initiative. Overall the school's monitoring of its provision for special educational needs is not sufficiently developed to promote further improvement.
- 122 The school's development plan is very comprehensive and appropriately takes account of both whole-school and departmental needs. In contrast to the last time the school was inspected, the plan now effectively translates governors' and staff's commitment and high aspirations. The planning schedule effectively involves the senior management team, teachers and governors and follows a rigorous evaluation of the previous year's progress to identify desired outcomes and targets. Plans are drawn up within a national, local and school context and are designed to meet

targets, both academic and social, identified by staff and governors. As a result, it is an effective tool for promoting the development of the school. However, some departments do not have sufficient regard to the impact of the school's plan on their own development and so progress is not as consistent as it might be.

- 123 The last inspection report identified the need for the school's development planning to focus more on the long term planning of the total resources available to the school. The current plan successfully addresses this issue with a three year strategic plan for the development of learning resources, accommodation and staffing, most of which is costed and has clear criteria for evaluation purposes.
- 124 The school is effectively managed and administered on a daily basis. All the support staff are committed to the school and its pupils, and, as far as possible, provide effective and efficient service. There are some pressure points where staffing is in short supply such as the technician support for science and design and technology and, at certain times, in the main school office. However, generally, communications are good and there is a regular exchange of information through an appropriate range of formal staff meetings. The staff handbook is comprehensive and detailed. It gives clear guidance for staff about policies and procedures and contributes to the smooth running of the school.
- 125 Since the last inspection, the governors and senior management team have successfully ensured that the school has made good progress. Standards of attainment have risen; the school building has been substantially enhanced and the quality of teaching has much improved. Further improvements are still necessary in collective worship, rates of pupils' attendance and in some aspects of monitoring the work of the school. However, procedures are in place to support further development and there is a clear commitment by governors and the headteacher to continual improvement. Both remain ambitious for the school and articulate their ambitions clearly. Moreover, strong networks of support for the school have been established on the basis of a genuine partnership in which the school's aims and values are shared by its many partners. The school is, therefore, well placed to sustain its continuing improvement.

• **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

- 126 The school has a teaching staff that is well qualified and appropriately experienced to teach the curriculum provided. Generally there have been few staff changes but those that have occurred have introduced new ideas and experiences. Timetabling generally matches teachers' experience and expertise appropriately to classes. In design and technology and religious education, some pupils are taught by teachers working outside their area of specialism and this dilutes the overall quality of provision in these subjects. However, overall, teachers' subject competence and enthusiasm are making a positive contribution to teaching and learning. Teachers' average teaching loads are broadly in line with those for similar schools.
- 127 The availability of non-teaching staff for curriculum support is variable. Where support is available it makes a positive contribution to effectiveness of teaching and learning. In information technology the appointment of a technician/network manager has proved a valuable asset to the department; and the availability of a team of learning support assistants for pupils with special educational needs has had a positive impact across the curriculum. Support from the technician supporting design and technology is excellent and the department receives audio-visual support from the local education authority. However, there is not enough time available for all necessary work to be completed by the technician. Similarly, in science, there is insufficient technical support. Other administrative and caretaking staff, including lunchtime supervisors, provide good support in the day to day running and maintenance of the school.

- 128 Arrangements for the induction of new staff are generally good, although there are variations in the quality of support given by individual departments. The school invests a significant proportion of its budget on professional development for staff, which may take a variety of forms, including visits to observe work in other schools and working alongside specialists, for example visiting dance artists in the Aiming High Project and the school nurse in sex education. The professional development of individual teachers is well organised and based on identified needs. The quality of provision is formally evaluated in order to assess value for money. Staff are required to feedback new information and ideas to their department, quite often to other members of staff and occasionally to the governing body. They are also asked to identify the expected impact of staff development on the work of the department, but the actual impact on teaching and learning is not yet systematically evaluated. Whole-school training has been well-focused on clearly defined whole-school priorities. For example, it has addressed the needs of form tutors to ensure they feel confident to fulfil their role effectively. Opportunities for staff development are also available to non-teaching staff.
- 129 Appraisal of the headteacher and deputies has taken place, together with that of senior managers and heads of department. The school intends to resume systematic appraisal of other staff as soon as the uncertainties related to the proposed new system have been resolved.
- 130 In the past four years the school has made major progress in improving the accommodation. The governing body's enthusiastic and determined Sites Committee has taken a very pro-active role, lobbying support and finance for a range of building projects. Money from New Deals for Schools has enabled the school to complete a substantial external refurbishment programme and governors have dedicated money from the school budget to improve facilities, funding a new mobile classroom and part-funding two further mathematics classrooms in partnership with a local developer. The new security camera adjacent to the school gates has resulted in a significant decrease in trespass on school premises. Internally, the building has recently been attractively redecorated throughout. Very good use is made of display throughout the school to enhance the school environment, support the curriculum and celebrate pupils' achievement in many aspects of school life. In general, the school accommodation does not afford easy access to pupils with severe physical disabilities. However portable ramps are available for the mobile classrooms and where the floor of the main building changes level.
- 131 The school has a well developed and nationally acclaimed environmental policy and an Eco school committee that has been responsible for a number of projects that have enhanced the school premises. These range from a pond and wildlife area in the school grounds to an effective display of plants in the school reception area.
- 132 Despite new classroom accommodation, the increase in the number of pupils on the school roll means that teaching accommodation is still at a premium and some rooms are cramped when used by the largest classes. With the exception of music and design and technology, the quality of the teaching areas is considered adequate overall and good for mathematics, modern languages and information technology. In physical education, the lack of a sports hall makes it difficult for some activities to be introduced or developed beyond an introductory level. This has been identified for attention both in the department's and the school's development plan. In design and technology there is a shortfall of specialist rooms, particularly in Year 8. This adversely affects the quality of teaching and learning. Similarly, in music there are insufficient specialist teaching rooms when two classes are working simultaneously. There is also a shortage of small practice rooms for music and this causes particular problems when instrumental teachers are present.
- 133 Along with all other schools in the City of Stoke on Trent local education authority, the school has provisionally agreed to take part in a unique private finance initiative. Through this project,

the school anticipates that a range of repair and maintenance problems will be addressed.

- 134 As with accommodation, the school has made major steps forward in improving its resources for learning since the last inspection. Expenditure per pupil on books and other resources has been well above average in the past two years. Sources of funding have been identified and clear criteria for expenditure introduced. Departments have been given the opportunity to bid for money, extra to their standard capitation, to improve resources. Some have taken advantage of this, for example, history, mathematics and information technology. However, the impact of the extra expenditure on teaching and learning has yet to be systematically evaluated.
- 135 In subject areas, with the exception of music, learning resources are at least adequate for the school's curriculum and range of pupils' needs. Resources are good in religious education, art and modern languages and very good in mathematics, information technology and geography. In music learning resources are unsatisfactory. There are severe shortages of musical instruments for classroom use, including working keyboards and percussion instruments. Information technology provision for music is also very poor.
- 136 There has been significant expenditure on information technology. All old computers have been written off and replaced by new Windows-based computers, which are all fully serviceable. Groups of stand-alone computers have been situated in key areas around the school. All pupils have easy access to these, and particularly good use is made of the areas by pupils outside curriculum time. Internet, e-mail and video-conferencing are widely available and all pupils have their own e-mail address. The current ratio of computers to pupils is 1:9, which is an improvement from the previous inspection. Access to information technology for all pupils is of key importance to the governing body and plans to further increase the number and availability of computers are identified in the school development plan. The use of information technology across the curriculum is progressing well in several areas of the curriculum but needs to be consistently addressed by all subjects, particularly in art.
- 137 Considerable finance has supported the recent refurbishment of the library as a Learning Resource Centre. It utilises the latest computer technology in management and security systems. The book stock has been updated; a new reference section developed, a bank of computers installed and a large selection of CD-ROMs are available for all users to access. Careers information and supporting computer software is also part of the provision. However, pressure on school accommodation for timetabled lessons has resulted in the new centre being used as a classroom throughout the week and it is only available for pupil to use during three lunchtimes. The school does not employ a librarian and currently the centre is not accessible before or after school. The governors are fully aware of the severe under use of the Learning Resource Centre and are determined to resolve the access problem as soon as possible. The school development plan already recognises the need for librarian support.

The efficiency of the school

- 138 Financial planning is good. Judicious forward planning over the last few years has allowed the governing body to make significant improvements to the buildings and resources at Sandon High School. This has involved the carrying forward of substantial sums of money from one financial year to the next to finance such improvements. The appearance of the fabric of the building, criticised in the last inspection report, has been improved considerably. Two mobile classrooms now form a base for religious education teaching and funding from a local building development project have provided two further classrooms. A Learning Resource Centre and enhanced information technology facilities throughout the school have also been carefully planned for and these are significant additions to the school.

- 139 Governors have a clear view of the future improvements at their school. They are aware that the buildings are still unsatisfactory overall and they have identified improvements which are desirable which could be funded from national schemes or from the locally agreed private finance initiative. Such plans address deficiencies which governors have identified in the creative arts, design and technology, humanities and sport.
- 140 Annual financial planning is linked to a cycle of meetings of the governing body. The process is well understood by all governors and staff. Budgets are set in March, the development plan finalised in May and reviewed in the autumn term. When subject leaders give their reports to the governing body, the use of GCSE or other performance is central to the presentation as is an evaluation of the departmental judgement of its value for money.
- 141 The use of the teaching and support staff is satisfactory. The pupil-teacher ratio is broadly average in comparison with similar schools. Staffing is generally used efficiently and effectively to support the quality of learning and to enhance standards. Special educational needs assistants are well deployed, although the use of the special educational needs co-ordinator to teach predominantly English lessons rather than have a wider ranging whole school brief is an inefficient use of targeted funding for special educational needs.
- 142 The use of teaching resources and accommodation is satisfactory overall, although there are short-comings in the provision for design and technology, music and physical education, and the current use of the learning resource centre as a class teaching base is presently an inefficient use of central resources.
- 143 The efficiency of financial control and school administration is good. All of the recommendations contained in the last auditors report have been implemented. The headteacher and chair of governors have a very good overview of the school budget. All members of the Finance and General Purposes Committee receive monthly monitoring statements from the local education authority. There are efficient computer-based systems in place to allow monitoring of the school's expenditure against budget, and well defined procedures for obtaining quotations and tenders before placing orders.
- 144 There are good communications systems and the good administrative systems allow the school to run efficiently on a day to day basis.
- 145 The unit cost per pupil is above the average national figure overall. The school is, however, giving good value for money which is an improvement since the last inspection report. The socio-economic circumstances of the overall student population are well below average. Standards are improving and pupils are making good progress. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are good, though attendance remains below average. The school provides good teaching, an enriched curriculum, good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, very good welfare and guidance and has strong links with parents and the community. The school generally makes good use of its staff, learning resources and accommodation, although there are inefficiencies in the use of the Learning Resource Centre and the use of the special educational needs co-ordinator. The accommodation still has some shortcoming but considerable refurbishment has taken place and new facilities have been provided. The school has made good progress in improving its efficiency since the last inspection.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

- 146 Overall, attainment in English is in line with national standards. The department has improved on the standards observed in the last inspection.
- 147 At the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998, when pupils were assessed by their teachers, attainment was close to the national average. In the National Curriculum tests, the percentage of pupils gaining Level 5 or above was below the national average but in line with the average for schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. The percentage of pupils gaining Level 6 or above was close to the national average. Provisional results for 1999 indicate a 6% increase in the number of pupils attaining Level 5 or above, which matched the target set by the department. Over the years 1996 to 1998, pupils' performance in the Key Stage 3 tests has been close to the national average.
- 148 In 1998, the number of pupils gaining grades A*-C in GCSE English was above the national average and above the average for the school. Provisional results for 1999 indicate that there has been a 4% increase in line with the provisional national average. In 1998, the percentage of pupils gaining A*-G was close to the national average and provisional results for 1999 indicate a similar performance. In 1998, the majority of Year 11 pupils took English Literature at GCSE. Results at A*-C were well below the national average though above the average for the school. All pupils who took the examination gained a grade ranging from A*-G. These results were above the national average.
- 149 At GCSE, girls perform significantly better than boys both in English and English Literature. However, in the Key Stage 3 tests there is little variation between boys' and girls' attainment. This reflects the good work being undertaken by the department to raise boys' attainment.
- 150 The results of recent national examinations and assessments generally reflect the standards of work currently seen in the school. In both key stages, overall, standards observed during the inspection were in line with national expectations.
- 151 Pupils generally read confidently and accurately. Many read with dramatic expression and understanding. By Year 9 they understand plot and characterisation in literacy texts and can use literacy terms such as imagery with understanding. By Year 11 nearly all pupils can skim and scan to find information and the more able understand stereotypical language, as exemplified in a Year 11 lesson on 'Animal Farm'.
- 152 Attainment in speaking and listening was high in the lessons seen. Pupils were given many opportunities to extend and practise their oral skills as when a Year 8 girl gave a presentation to the class and answered pupils' questions for clarification with supreme confidence. Since the last inspection, the use of drama techniques has improved and pupils are now able to speak confidently in role often with dramatic expression.
- 153 Observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work during the inspection showed that in both key stages the sound standards of writing, identified in the last inspection, have been maintained. Written work is organised well and is often of extended length. Standards of spelling, grammar and presentation are sound overall, though variable. Pupils are able to write in a range of forms using the appropriate style. Year 9 pupils demonstrated a clear understanding of the nature of

narrative and plot. By Year 11, pupils are able to use quotations to support arguments competently.

- 154 Overall, pupils are making good progress in their work. In some Key Stage 3 lessons, pupils' progress is very good. The wide variety of activities and the challenging stimulus materials that are presented to them enable pupils to consolidate previous learning and to acquire new knowledge. Many teachers are skilled in motivation techniques and their infectious enthusiasm for their subject is a contributory factor in ensuring progress.
- 155 The progress of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. Learning support assistants provide effective in-class support and the differentiated work sheets observed in one mixed ability Year 7 class were a model of best practice enabling pupils of all abilities to interact with an enjoyable literary text. However, some work for the lower groups was not as well planned. For example, much of the written work in the lowest set in Year 8 required pupils to copy texts and fill in missing words.
- 156 Pupils continue to show good attitudes in English lessons at both key stages. They are very willing to co-operate, listening attentively, settling quickly to tasks and showing sustained concentration. A wide variety of learning opportunities (whole class, paired and small group) encourages collaboration. There were observed examples of pupils supporting each other's learning as when a Year 10 boy was acting as the information technology expert, assisting others who were having problems with the technology.
- 157 During the inspection, the quality of observed teaching was good overall. It was satisfactory or better in all but one of the 21 lessons observed, with the quality ranging from excellent to, on this one occasion, unsatisfactory. The excellent teaching was characterised by meticulous planning, high expectations and brisk pace; discipline was very good, maintained by the positive quality of relationships and the judicious use of humour.
- 158 Teachers' subject knowledge is generally high and most use this very effectively to enhance pupils' understanding. For example, a Year 9 top ability set were encouraged to consider Umberto Eco's views about the construction of stories. The quality of teachers' planning was variable, though in many cases it was very precise and carefully designed to promote pupils' progress. Occasionally, planning did not sufficiently focus on what needed to be learnt and time was wasted on unproductive activities. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, pupils spent too long copying definitions off the board. In a Year 11 lesson, the teacher spent too long talking to the class, allowing pupils' attention to wander. In a Year 7 class, pupils were not given enough guidance about how to take notes, even though this was an objective of the lesson.
- 159 Most teachers used questioning very skilfully to elicit thoughtful responses from pupils. The very best questioning was open-ended and asked within a secure learning environment. This allowed pupils to explore their views and ideas in an imaginative and creative way, and also enabled them to attain higher standards. In many cases teachers followed up pupils' answers with supplementary questions to extend their thinking as occurred in a Year 8 lesson where pupils were encouraged to consider how 'character' is created.
- 160 Teaching methods are generally varied and well chosen to suit pupils' differing needs. In many cases pupils are encouraged to become actively engaged in their learning through the use of drama, oral presentation and quizzes. They are also provided with opportunities to work collaboratively in pairs and groups, as well as individually. Occasionally lessons do not encourage pupils to take initiative and this adversely affects pupils' motivation and concentration.

- 161 The selection and use of resources is generally very good. Pupils are provided with some stimulating materials, including information technology software, enticing stories and poems and video and audio material. In a Year 9 lessons, the teacher enhanced pupils' understanding of 'Romeo and Juliet' by playing and studying carefully chosen popular music.
- 162 Marking of pupils' work varies in quality. Some is excellent, giving detailed comments about pupils' strengths and weaknesses and setting precise targets to help them improve. However, other marking is cursory, giving pupils little information about their attainment and progress. Additionally, the department's assessment and recording strategies are inconsistent across the department and do not provide the department with enough evidence about pupils' achievements to help with planning future work. Such variations in marking and assessment, and in the quality of teaching, reflects the lack of effective monitoring of the work of the department. There are too few procedures in place to disseminate the very effective practice existing in the department.
- 163 The department's provision is meeting the requirements of the National Curriculum in both key stages and for pupils with special educational needs. Drama methodologies are now used in many lessons and the drama clubs are helping to develop the learning and social skills of those pupils involved. However, some work planned for Year 7 does not sufficiently build upon pupils' attainment in Key Stage 2. In particular, curriculum planning does not sufficiently take account of the National Literacy Strategy. The writing project undertaken in the local primary schools has helped to establish greater teacher confidence in the standards attained by pupils in Key Stage 2. More collaboration of this type is needed to provide greater continuity of learning.
- 164 Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the department. Many opportunities for pupils' development in these aspects were observed in both key stages. Year 9 pupils, who were studying 'Romeo and Juliet', were discussing the values and meaning of chastity; Year 11 pupils were debating racial prejudice as a result of a challenging short story; another Year 11 group were involved in an extremely sensitive discussion regarding disability after studying a newspaper article about family life with a severely physically disabled child. These lessons were managed with great skill by the teachers and all pupils responded with exemplary maturity.
- 165 There is a good team spirit among the English teachers but the distance between some of the rooms does not aid collegiality and ethos. Individual teachers have created an excellent learning environment in their own rooms. The teaching schemes are better planned at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4. The department development plan lacks success criteria, financial implications and a precise time scale. It does not provide a clear enough direction for the department's development; nor does it contain any rigorous, systematic methods of evaluating the work and progress of the department. This is restricting the overall improvement of the department.
- 166 The department is staffed by subject specialists. Accommodation and book resources are adequate, although capitation is less than for other core subjects. There are no overhead projectors and the Learning Resource Centre has limited access for pupils as it is used as a teaching room for most of the week. Existing resources are carefully and effectively managed and detailed records are kept of all expenditure. Taking account of the external examination results, the department does, overall, provide good value for money.
- 167 Since the last inspection, the provision for drama and opportunities for the use of information technology have improved. GCSE results in English are much better but attainment in English literature needs further improvement. The department is reviewing the current chosen syllabus to see if it is the most appropriate.

168 Standards of literacy are improving and are generally good. Other subjects of the curriculum make useful contributions to the development of skills in reading, writing, and speaking and listening. In science lessons, for example, there is good use of word-walls that contain the essential technical vocabulary, group discussions precede a writing activity and extended written responses are encouraged by a well-structured writing frame. Similar methodologies are employed in geography and history lessons where writing for a real audience and the encouragement of empathetic writing, as well as the emphasis on key words, are all helping to enhance pupils' literacy skills. In religious education and design technology there is vocabulary extension work which assists pupils in their spoken and written responses. However, across many subjects, the attention given to the teaching of notemaking is inadequate. The learning support assistants make a valuable contribution to the development of literacy.

• **Mathematics**

169 Standards of achievement in mathematics are in line with national standards overall and at both Key Stages 3 and 4.

170 When compared with similar schools nationally pupils' Key Stage 3 mathematics results are well above average. In Key Stage 3 tests in 1998, although the percentage of pupils gaining Level 5 or above was below the national average for all schools, those gaining Level 6 or above was close to the national average. Teachers' assessments closely mirror these figures. Provisional figures for 1999 show a similar picture but with more pupils gaining the highest level. Taking the three years 1996 to 1998 together pupils' performance in mathematics was close to the national average. During the inspection, pupils' attainment reflected these recent results in the national assessments.

171 Although a higher percentage of boys than girls gained Level 5 or above, the girl's results were closer to their national average than boys whose national figure is higher. Girls and boys performed equally well in the classroom during the inspection.

172 In GCSE the percentage of pupils achieving grades A* to C in 1998 was slightly above the national average for maintained schools. The percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-G was above the national average. Three pupils gained the highest A* grade. This standard has been maintained in the provisional 1999 figures. After underperformance of boys in the 1998 GCSEs, the figures for 1999 indicate a closer match between boys and girls.

173 Both Key Stage 3 and GCSE results show a significant improvement since the last inspection.

174 Overall, pupils' standards in their written work are in line with what is typically found nationally, though with some variation across the range of aspects in the National Curriculum. Pupils' attainment in number, algebra, shape and space is generally good. Pupils' development in algebra is particularly strong. They confidently use formulae and simplify expressions from Year 7 onwards. Standards in using and applying mathematics are not as high, but are satisfactory overall.

175 Generally, pupil's knowledge and skills are better developed than their understanding. They can use number concepts in a range of applications. In Key Stage 3, pupils' mental skills are satisfactory overall, but some pupils still find simple multiplication tables a challenge whereas others can explain confidently how they can carry out a calculation. Overall, pupils have a sound recall of number facts but often have inefficient methods for calculating mentally. Older pupils have a good sense of place value in whole numbers and decimals and are confident when doing written calculations. Pupils exhibit sound work on skills in shape and space overall.

They use and understand a good range of vocabulary. Concepts are developed well so that, for example, Pythagoras' theorem is introduced early and pupils apply it to quite complex problems in Key Stage 4.

- 176 Whereas the skills of handling data are carefully developed, pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply them to real data in mathematics. The exception to this is the work seen in coursework in GCSE mathematics and statistics where they choose appropriate projects and reach high standards. Other subject areas are rich sources of data which are beginning to be exploited. A positive start has been made in the school numeracy policy to develop a whole school approach. Evidence from science, geography, information technology and design and technology shows that this is having a positive effect. The initiative to develop the use of mathematical vocabulary and data handling skills across the curriculum is working well but pupils are not yet confident in applying calculations.
- 177 Most pupils' experience of using and applying their mathematics is limited to the major pieces of coursework attempted each year. Whereas these are carefully chosen to develop strategies for tackling coursework, it does mean that applications and investigations are not a integral part of the teaching programme in other aspects of mathematics. However, the standard seen in GCSE coursework is good.
- 178 From an average level of attainment on entry, pupils' progress is sound overall but it is better at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. This is because of some repetition of Key Stage 2 work and some low teacher expectations in Key Stage 3. Knowledge and skills are consolidated in all lessons. Most rapid progress takes place where teachers have a clear idea of the learning outcomes they intend, and move the pupils along towards them. Girls and boys generally make equal progress in the subject.
- 179 Progress of pupils with special educational needs is good. As well as providing support for these pupils, teachers on occasions also change the tasks so as to make them more accessible. These pupils are supported in some lessons by assistants who are often a positive help to more than just the statemented pupil.
- 180 Pupil's attitudes are positive and their behaviour is good. Lessons typically show children working purposefully, concentrating and being attentive to the teacher. They listen carefully and support each other in the work that they do. Work is generally neatly presented, headed and dated. Pupils work co-operatively but opportunities to work collaboratively are rare.
- 181 Teaching is sound overall and in both key stages. It was at least satisfactory in 90% of the lessons observed and at least good in 29% of the 21 lessons seen. There was very little unsatisfactory teaching in either key stage. This shows an improvement since the last inspection, when only 75% of lessons were at least satisfactory.
- 182 In the better lessons teachers plan their work carefully in terms of clear learning objectives to be achieved and they share these with the pupils. Introductions to lessons relate the work to previous experiences and make the purpose of the lesson clear. Teachers question pupils well and use their responses in the development of the lesson. There are high expectations and a good pace to these lessons. In more typical lessons the emphasis is on explaining and reassuring rather than challenging the pupils. The stages that children need to go through to acquire a skill are not always recognised. In some lessons pupils feel that achievement is progress through the pages, not the depth of understanding of an idea. Some teachers plan for a plenary session or a different, stimulating activity for the last few minutes but in others the full seventy minutes are not as well used.
- 183 Teachers manage pupils well and maintain high standards of discipline. Appropriate homework

tasks are set regularly and used effectively in subsequent lessons. Occasionally, less effective tasks involving an element of finishing off classwork are set.

- 184 Most teachers spend the first part of a lesson asking questions to remind pupils of previous work and to assess their understanding. This is used by some teachers to vary the content or structure of the lesson. They spend a lot of time on assessing individual pupils in the classroom, giving diagnostic help during the course of a lesson. Marking of pupils' books follows the school policy requirements. However, the comment accompanying the grade varies from those that are merely encouraging to those that give helpful diagnostic comments.
- 185 Very good use is made of test data to plan and set targets in mathematics. Year 7 teachers are aware of Key Stage 2 results for each pupil and use them to provide appropriate work. Regular tests are used to monitor performance of groups and individuals. Various analyses are made in order to monitor pupils' progress.
- 186 The mathematics curriculum meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. Based on commercial material, the scheme of work provides continuity and progression in content. Although they set clear learning objectives for lessons, teachers tend to be over-directed by the textbook content when planning lessons. The numeracy activities planned for the start of lessons are working well but they do not by themselves yet provide for a structured development in numeracy.
- 187 A start has been made on systematically using the computers in one mathematics room but this has yet to impact on the whole department. A set of graphic calculators is available and is used across Years 7 to 11. However there are training implications to be resolved before these can be fully utilised in the department. Pupils are taught to use conventional calculators appropriately.
- 188 The improvement in accommodation since the last inspection has led to less movement by teachers between lessons and hence they are better prepared for their classes. Display of pupils' material in mathematics rooms enhanced their appearance during the inspection but not all rooms had material that both celebrated achievement and provided informative and stimulating displays.
- 189 Teachers are committed and hardworking in the classroom and are well prepared for their classes. The department is well led and managed. The head of department and colleagues are working hard to develop the curriculum and support each other though as yet there is little monitoring of the quality of teaching. Members of the department have clear developmental or organisational responsibilities. There are good relationships and a sound team ethos. There is overall a realisation of the importance on focusing efforts on raising standards. This is most evident in the department development plan. Together, these features have a significant impact upon the improving standards attained by pupils.

• Science

- 190 Overall, standards are above national expectations.
- 191 In the 1998 national tests for fourteen year old pupils, the number of pupils reaching Level 5 was below the national average, whilst the number reaching the more demanding Level 6 was close to the national average. Boys performed better than girls reflecting the national pattern, though boys attainment was below the national average, whereas girls' was in line. In 1999 there has been an improvement of 4% in the number of pupils reaching Level 5. Compared to similar schools, these results are well above average although they are lower than those for

English and mathematics at the school.

- 192 Standards have improved considerably in the GCSE examinations over the last three years. In 1997 the percentage of pupils gaining grades A* to C was well below the national average and in 1998 it was just below. In 1999 the proportion of pupils gaining these grades has risen by a further 7%. Moreover, there has been an increase in the number of pupils gaining A*, A and B grades over the last three years. Compared to similar schools these results are also well above average although they are slightly lower than those for English and slightly higher than for mathematics at the school. The percentage of pupils gaining A*-C grades in 1998 was above the national average, with the vast majority of the cohort taking the examinations.
- 193 These improving standards were reflected in the inspection evidence of pupils' work, discussions with pupils and observations made in lessons. Teachers are pitching the work at a challenging level and lessons have clear learning objectives. They have high expectations of their pupils' ability to absorb demanding concepts, such as the structure and function of cells at the start of Year 7. The most able pupils in Year 9 are studying aspects of the exchange of gases in the lungs at a level normally associated with high-level GCSE work, and the top sets in Year 10 start the year by learning how to balance chemical equations. Standards are now consistent across biology, chemistry and physics. In their investigative work at Key Stage 3 pupils are taught the importance of beginning to plan their investigations by stating their knowledge base about the topic, and by Year 9, the significance of repeating measurements. This ensures that pupils have developed the basic skills associated with GCSE investigations before they enter Year 10.
- 194 At GCSE, girls do better than boys in gaining the higher grades, but at Key Stage 3 boys do better than girls, although the gap is narrowing. No difference between boys' and girls' achievement was detected in lessons - teachers seat boys and girls alternatively in lessons and they are also asking questions sequentially.
- 195 Throughout the school, pupils make good progress in developing and using their knowledge base. By Year 8, many can explain the difference in gravity on different planets; by Year 10, many can identify the difference between solids, liquids and gases, using the theory of particles and reversible energy processes. There is also good progress in the development of investigative skills throughout the school. Pupils can explore the movement of sand, salt and soil by wind and water by Year 8. Pupils can analyse secondary data regarding the effect of osmosis on potato chips in their GCSE course - some pupils gained the highest marks available at GCSE for their analysis of this data and their evaluation of the way the experiment might be improved. Pupils make good progress when their work is presented in everyday contexts and it is applied to meaningful problems. This begins in Year 7 when pupils who have learned the characteristics of living things are asked to use this knowledge to design a space suit for an astronaut. By Year 10, pupils use the school computing facilities to relate their science knowledge to cystic fibrosis and Huntingdon's disease. Progress in the understanding of the nature of science is also good with well chosen examples incorporated into the scheme of work. During the inspection, Year 7 pupils saw a video about the historical discovery of cells and Year 8 pupils considered the changing ideas about the solar system from the time of the Greeks to today.
- 196 Pupils make good progress in their skills in literacy, numeracy and, particularly during Key Stage 4, information technology. Throughout the school, emphasis is given to developing technical vocabulary, supporting reading and explaining things clearly both orally and in written form. Small group discussion is now used effectively; and the good use of writing frames enabled Year 11 pupils to clearly explain the difference between mitosis and meiosis. In Year 8 pupils are able to justify different points of view regarding the proposed opening of a

quarry, whilst in Year 9 they develop their skills to consider the advantages and disadvantages of siting a factory in two different locations. Numeracy skills are regularly used in measuring, recording and presenting information in graphs and for drawing conclusions from graphs. At GCSE pupils preparing for higher tier examinations rearrange equations and perform calculations involving frequency and wavelength when studying waves and radiation.

- 197 Developing information technology skills through the medium of science is a strength of the department. Spreadsheets are frequently used, for example, to explore dietary requirements, and pupils regularly use a software package to publish information about science, for example, through posters or by annotating drawings.
- 198 Pupils with special education needs make good progress. They are well supported by lesson planning which makes good use of pupils' individual education plans and through the good joint planning when a specialist classroom assistant is available. In Year 7, these pupils were given specially pitched work to help them access the ideas about the characteristics of living things, and in Year 8 lesson a prompt-sheet helped them record key ideas from a video sequence before it was discussed further in class. In a Year 10 lesson the specialist support assistant ably supported pupils as they investigated how to reduce the cooling of a cup of tea.
- 199 Pupils' response to their science lessons is good in both key stages. They respond well to the interesting contexts in which their lessons are presented. They quickly concentrated in the Year 7 lesson when a model rat was used to explore their understanding of the characteristics of living things. As they move up the school, they develop their ability to think critically about their work. For example, Year 10 pupils confidently considered if the bubbles seen in an experiment were due to a chemical reaction or simply to the liquid boiling. Pupils have a good attitude to lessons and the overwhelming majority come ready to learn. They are well behaved and this enables all the class to make progress. In their written work on environmental matters, they show an increasing awareness and concern for moral and social matters. When doing practical work they apply their practical skills with confidence, always considering their own safety and that of others. They use equipment such as glassware and thermometers with care. They respond well to the problems they are set and persevere as they apply familiar principles to new situations. Pupils are now working more independently than when the last report was written. Developments such as CASE (a project to develop scientific thinking), using small discussion group work, using active teaching and learning approaches and the use of the departmental information technology facilities have made a considerable impact in this area.
- 200 Overall, the teaching of science is good. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject, the requirements of the syllabuses they teach and also areas where pupil's misconceptions such as the difference between breathing and respiration need to be explored and clarified. They have high expectations of both behaviour and the conceptual level at which pupils will work. During the inspection a range of teaching approaches was used. Elicitation of pupils' prior knowledge is at the heart of all teaching, and video sequences, text books and other resource materials, illustrative experiments, demonstrations and clear explanations are all used effectively. Good use is made of sharing learning objectives with pupils at the start of lessons; and these are well used during the lesson and when the lesson is consolidated. Science is taught in contexts which interest and motivate pupils. Some lessons were enhanced by using overhead transparencies and support sheets for pupils containing diagrams taken from computer based sources. The principles of assertive discipline are used to good effect. Homework was criticised at the inspector's meeting with parents. Looking at pupils' books, homework has been set regularly but not on every occasion. During the inspection it was set on all occasions identified in the homework programme. Homework was always relevant and set to consolidate or extend learning; examples during inspection week included creative writing ('Imagine there was no gravity'), use of past examination questions, working with secondary data on inheritance, and

using the revision and question guides which some pupils are able to keep at home.

- 201 Pupils' work is regularly marked in line with school policy. Often comments are used to help pupils understand their work better or to help them improve their work. A Year 10 pupil was reminded in marking that freckles are inherited but their appearance is influenced by sunlight which is an environmental factor. Skilful use is made of question and answer sessions to check, probe and extend pupils' understanding and progress. Several examples were noted during the inspection of lessons which were modified in the light of assessment made during the previous lesson.
- 202 This is a very well managed science department. It has many strengths. Curriculum provision, the use of analysed data on pupils' performance, monitoring of both the progress of pupils and the work of the department, and planning for improvement are all good; and are making a significant contribution to the quality of science education and the levels of achievement. Improvements have been made since the last report in the following areas: standards, teaching physics, the independence of pupils, under-performance of boys, monitoring and evaluation, using information technology, and introducing new initiatives such as CASE. The department is well supported by the laboratory technician but the school has recognised that there is an urgent need to increase the level of technical support to service the needs of the six science teachers and their five teaching laboratories.

· **OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES**

·
Art

- 203 Attainment in art overall is above national expectations. Standards have been maintained since the last inspection. In 1998, the percentage of pupils gaining GCSE A*-C grades and A*-G grades was above that achieved nationally and boys' attainment is substantially higher than the national average. At Key Stage 3 pupils' attainment is typically higher than the national average and pupils are good at drawing and painting, particularly from direct observation. Pupils in both key stages are less confident when working in three dimensions or with less familiar materials and processes.
- 204 Pupils are increasingly familiar with the work of a range of artists, and utilise a rich source of reference material with confidence. However, their selection of other artists' work often lacks an understanding of its artistic or historical context. Pupils enjoy talking about their art, and express a sound art vocabulary, but they are less confident in dealing with the written word. There is little evidence of written evaluation of their work and the work of others.
- 205 Less able pupils are doing particularly well, and their efforts are valued and supported. The more able, however, are sometimes not sufficiently challenged or provided with opportunities to change direction and modify their work. Teachers sometimes do not provide enough open activities for these pupils to develop their own creations.
- 206 Overall pupils' progress in art is good in all years, and most lessons consolidate previous learning. This reflects the generally high levels of motivation amongst many pupils. The most rapid progress occurs where pupils are challenged to extend their previous work. Slower progress is made when pupils are required to continue with their work, learning little that is new.

- 207 Pupils enjoy this subject and behave very well, although sometimes concentration lapses towards the end of the lesson, particularly when the teaching lacks change of pace and direction. The popularity of the subject is evident in the much increased take up for GCSE, the enthusiasm for Art club and other extra-curricular activities, and the success of community projects such as the Aiming High Project.
- 208 Pupils pay considerable attention to the presentation of their work and even the most modest preparatory sketch is constructed with intensity and care, often, however, at the expense of more expressive, gestural or impulsive work. Pupils are occasionally too compliant and dependent on aspiring to teachers' predetermined outcomes. Overall, they lack opportunities to explore their own cultural and emotional experiences.
- 209 Teaching overall is satisfactory. During the inspection, it was rarely less than satisfactory, and sometimes good. Where good, the lessons seen were lively, challenging and reflected a rich variety of teaching styles. Where teaching is satisfactory or less, there is at times a lack of challenge, rigour and change of pace. In these lessons there is often an over-dependence on reacting to pupils' individual needs and an avoidance of whole-class, didactic teaching. Pupils lack opportunities to take risks and develop personal ideas and responses. In general too great an emphasis is placed on painting and drawing, especially now that the department is teaching the GCSE unendorsed syllabus. Greater attention needs to be given to printmaking, working with textiles, collage and mixed media, and working in three dimensions.
- 210 All lessons are well managed and the learning environment is very well organised. Planning is good for Key Stage 3, but less thorough for GCSE, where too much emphasis is placed on the repetition of familiar, tried and tested projects. Homework activities are appropriate and relevant, although they often lack the scope for pupils to be more experimental. Tasks set do not reflect a coherent homework policy.
- 211 Assessment procedures as described in the department handbook are potentially workable, but there is very little evidence to suggest that these procedures are actually being developed to record pupils' attainment and inform planning of the work they are set.
- 212 A lack of information technology provision was noted at the last inspection, and very little improvement has been made since. The art department is currently providing insufficient art that makes structured use of information technology activities to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum, particularly within the fields of image retrieval and manipulation and of computer-aided design.
- 213 Since the last inspection, the quality and range of resources to support pupils' knowledge and understanding of art have been significantly augmented. Display is used effectively throughout the department and around the school, not only as a celebration of pupils' work but also as an invaluable tool for learning. Teaching areas are efficiently managed, clean and tidy, but space and facilities for central administration and the storage of departmental paper work are inadequate. Storage is adequate for two-dimensional artwork but inadequate for large scale and three-dimensional work.
- 214 The department staff are experienced and well qualified, working effectively as a team, although future planning is limited by the lack of regular formal management meetings. There is little evidence of systematic monitoring of pupils' performance and the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning. Opportunities for collaborative and cross-curricular work, particularly within the field of the creative arts, are limited.

- 215 Resources are currently efficiently deployed, but if a broader range of practical activities are to be developed - particularly in information technology and mixed media - then more has to be invested in appropriate equipment and materials.

• **Design and technology**

- 216 Overall, the attainment of pupils in design and technology is above national expectations. At Key Stage 3, the pupils' standard of achievement is generally commensurate with national expectations. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils are achieving results at GCSE which are better than the national average. The percentage of pupils gaining higher grades of A*-C has been steadily increasing over the past few years and shows an improvement since the time of the last inspection.
- 217 Pupils' attainment, demonstrated in lessons and written work in Key Stage 3, broadly matches that found nationally. Most pupils demonstrate good practical skills. Pupils can engage in a variety of tasks covering the national programme of study and they show a suitably developed awareness of concepts and processes in designing, making and understanding. Higher attaining pupils can generate a number of ideas and use a range of presentational skills together with an appreciation of the constraints of the materials used. Lower attaining pupils sometimes have difficulty in recalling previous work and do not always understand the principles involved. There is, in general, good use of colour and shading techniques and some use of information technology to enhance the presentation in design folders. Some folders, however, lack depth and are sometimes incomplete. In practical lessons pupils use tools and equipment safely and confidently.
- 218 At Key Stage 4, work in pupils' design folder work shows a broad range of experience with the best having good research, analytical and presentational skills. Use of colour, information technology, photographs and commercial material is evident in most subject areas. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of graphical work since the last inspection.
- 219 Overall, pupils make good progress; however, progress is better at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. Pupils with special educational needs mostly make satisfactory progress. There is generally good progress in lessons that are well paced and are supported with appropriate materials for the range of abilities present. When working at practical tasks with clear objectives, pupils consolidate their skills well, using tools and equipment with increasing accuracy. At Key Stage 4, progress is generally good across the department because, in most lessons observed, teachers set clear expectations and intervened when appropriate to guide and give advice. This was evident, for example, in food technology lessons where a variety of teaching strategies helped to keep pupils on task. Pupils develop good practical skills and often use appropriate technical language when explaining the work in which they are involved.
- 220 Pupils' attitudes to the subject are good overall, and sometimes very good. They work with a sense of purpose and enjoy their lessons. They work co-operatively when taught in groups and are rarely off task. Behaviour was satisfactory in all lessons seen and pupils are generally polite and helpful. Relationships are generally good.
- 221 The quality of teaching is good overall. Of the lessons observed 23% were judged to be very good or better. Teaching was generally of a higher quality at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. Lessons are generally well planned and appropriate to the National Curriculum and GCSE courses being followed. There is generally a narrow range of teaching styles. There is little systematic sharing of teaching methods and styles across the department. On occasions the pace of learning was slow. The best lessons observed offered challenge and choice, provided highly motivating tasks and encouraged pupils to develop independent learning skills. Teachers

appreciate the needs of pupils with special educational needs and often provide a range of work to suit pupils' prior attainments. Teachers set homework regularly: this is used effectively to extend classwork or to engage pupils in a research task.

- 222 The department follows the National Curriculum programmes of study at Key Stage 3 and all pupils take a design and technology subject at Key Stage 4. However, shortage of specialist staff and accommodation for design and technology means that there is not equality of access for all pupils. This is particularly so in Year 8 where only half of the pupils are taught by specialist design and technology staff in specialist rooms. Furthermore, the operation of a two-week timetable, within design and technology, throughout Key Stage 3, inhibits progression and continuity. Overall, the progress and attainment of pupils is inhibited by these restrictions.
- 223 The head of department provides effective leadership. There is a good spirit of co-operation amongst staff. However, there are insufficient full-time specialist teachers to meet the needs of the curriculum. The technician provides valuable support to the teaching staff but his time is insufficient to meet the demands of the department. Curriculum planning is good. Development plans show short and long term objectives and teachers are committed to raising standards.
- 224 Since the time of the last report, there have been improvements. Attention has been given to the design process and the quality of graphics work has improved significantly. Aspects of risk-assessment still need further work even though there is sound day-to-day safety in the working areas. The accommodation that exists is generally satisfactory, but there is a need for additional accommodation if all pupils are to have appropriate access to specialist rooms. Furthermore, the food technology room remains in need of refurbishment and is particularly cramped when large Key Stage 4 classes are being taught. Information technology resources within the department remain limited. However, joint modules of work undertaken in conjunction with the information technology department are proving successful.
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Geography

- 225 Attainment at Key Stage 4 is above the national average and has improved since the last inspection. In 1998, GCSE results in geography were well above the school's results for those grade A*-C and above national averages. In 1999, unconfirmed results show a further improvement and results are well above provisional national figures. The difference in performance between boys and girls in 1998 was in line with the national average in geography. Unconfirmed results for 1999 show that this difference has reduced further and that there is now little difference in the performance of boys and girls. Analysis of data shows that a majority of pupils across all abilities are obtaining better GCSE grades than has been predicted by data obtained from standard tests taken in Year 10. There is significant evidence that many pupils with special educational needs are obtaining higher grades than predicted.
- 226 These performance data are confirmed by standards attained in lessons and in pupils' work. Standards are above national expectations in Key Stage 4. Pupils have a clear idea of what is expected from their GCSE course. The standard of recently completed coursework for GCSE seen was good, illustrating that pupils were capable of completing a geographical enquiry into urban areas, collecting data, and representing that data on maps and in graphical form. Pupils early in Year 10, by interpreting graphs, could explain clearly how the populations of different countries were structured and how and why they were changing. Pupils in Year 11 could describe clearly the relationship between weather and river flow, understood how to draw a hydrograph and could suggest reasons for the varied response of rivers to rainfall events. Pupils' sense of the places of the case studies they are studying is relatively underdeveloped. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on flooding, pupils could explain why the river had flooded but found it difficult to describe the river and its landscape.

- 227 Attainment in Key Stage 3 is above national expectations. The majority of pupils can explain key geographical terms and use them accurately in their writing. For example, in one Year 8 lesson on farming, pupils could explain diversification and explain why farmers needed to diversify. They can apply knowledge and understanding to make reasoned decisions about the location of human activities. In Year 7, pupils could reason and decide where to locate a settlement on a map of Stafford. Pupils can describe and explain the way geographical patterns change over time. In Year 8, pupils were able to describe patterns in the pottery industry and how and why they had changed over time. Pupils can plan and carry out geographical enquiries independently. In Year 9 they were able to set up a geographical enquiry into the Peak District National Park, and decided how they would collect data and use their fieldwork observations as evidence.
- 228 Progress through Key Stage 3 is very good because the teaching is very good. At the start of Key Stage 3, pupils enter the school with a wide range of experiences in geography. For the majority of pupils, standards are below those expected at the end of Key Stage 2. Through Years 8 and 9 standards reached are above national expectations for the majority of pupils because the teachers expect high standards, and make complex ideas accessible to pupils of all abilities by using a variety of excellent teaching strategies. For example, in a Year 8 lesson on the pottery industry, pupils were asked to interrogate three maps and to reason why factories were located where they were. They were also then asked to explain the changing pattern of industrial change in The Potteries.
- 229 Progress through the GCSE course is very good because there are challenging learning activities for pupils of all abilities, as well as sensitive support from the teacher for all pupils. All pupils are expected to be on task and to contribute to lessons. In one Year 11 lesson on rivers the pupils were studying an ordnance survey map to develop an understanding of river features on maps. The teacher deliberately allowed time for all pupils to examine the map and then requested answers from pupils in turn. The activities in the lesson are developed through setting homework questions of high quality for pupils to apply the knowledge learned in lessons. The progress made by pupils is rapid because they clearly understand what the expectations of examinations are. In a Year 11 lesson, their knowledge and understanding of floods was developed using a stimulating video, using a non-fiction text which had to be summarized, and was followed by an explanation of a case study and how it should be deployed in an examination question.
- 230 Pupils respond very well in geography because the teaching is very good. Pupils respond with confidence and enthusiasm, and concentrate on their work. They like the range of lesson activities and especially the field-work opportunities on offer throughout the course. Pupils express pride in the outcomes of their fieldwork. Pupils with special educational needs will join in demonstrations without embarrassment and feel confident to make mistakes in front of their peers. For example, in a Year 9 class using maps to work out routes to the Peak Park, pupils were very involved in the teacher's demonstration about grid references. Pupils show initiative in the wide range of decision-making exercises that are introduced from Year 7 onwards; a wide range of research tasks are given as homework. Pupils are expected to prepare oral discussions in class, for example, in a Year 9 lesson on the impact of a new development in the Peak Park. Pupils are, therefore, well prepared and confident to tackle coursework at GCSE and their work shows good initiative when, for example, pupils must independently research an aspect of urban geography. Pupils in Year 10 had independently written to many different institutions, for example, Stoke City Council planning department, to obtain reports, data and maps.
- 231 The teaching is very good with some excellent features, which is an improvement since the last inspection. In the sixteen lessons observed the majority were very good and some were

excellent in both key stages. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives, showing very good subject knowledge by the teacher with well-crafted explanations using slides and the overhead projector. Teachers involve all pupils in thinking activities through question and answers, and deploy a range of resources, including textbooks, striking visual aids such as videos and slides, and a range of maps. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils and especially of pupils with special educational needs. Teachers are very good at making complex ideas accessible to pupils with special educational needs as well as at extending the most able through challenging writing tasks. Homework is regularly set and is effective in extending the learning that takes place in lessons. Teachers mark Key Stage 3 assessments and GCSE exam questions very effectively, identifying clearly pupils' strengths and weaknesses. This good practice does not always extend to the marking of homework and classwork. Marking is regular, positive and encouraging, but needs to be more consistent. Subject-specific strengths and targets are not usually clearly identified on pupils' work. Pupils are only occasionally involved in assessing and setting their own short term targets.

- 232 Standards are good because the department is very well led and managed. The head of department ensures that there are regular, effective meetings where pupils' performance is analysed and the curriculum is monitored for its effectiveness. Good practice is shared and there are regular discussions about professional development. There is an effective, well-planned curriculum that addresses continuity with Key Stage 2. There are regular meetings with the local primary schools and the sixth-form college. The curriculum is regularly reviewed to take into account new events and changes in the world. The department is developing the curriculum to include a variety of other educational objectives, including literacy and numeracy. Pupils are not at present made explicitly aware of these other objectives in lessons. The use of information technology is encouraged but both pupils and staff would benefit from further development of more consistent approaches to the use of information technology in the department. The department contributes informally to the moral and social education of pupils through excellent links with industry and environmental organisations. There is some good cultural education with an excellent link with Japan and India, but this needs to be more consistently planned into the schemes of work. Accommodation has improved since the last inspection but large classes remain cramped in one teaching room, which makes the use of ordnance survey maps difficult to manage.

• History

- 233 Overall standards of attainment are slightly below national expectations but are improving.
- 234 At Key Stage 4 the percentage of pupils gaining A*-C grades at GCSE in 1998 was well below the national average. Provisional results for 1999 reveal an increase in the percentage of pupils achieving these grades and, taken in conjunction with results over the past four years, reveal an upward trend in the standards of pupils' attainment. The percentage of pupils gaining an A*-G grade has steadily increased over the past few years. It has risen from well below the national average to slightly below the national average in 1998. Unconfirmed results for 1999 indicate that the percentage of pupils attaining these grades has risen above the provisional national average. In 1998, girls' performance was significantly higher than boys'; the gap between boys' and girls' results was wider than the national figure. Standards of attainment observed in Key Stage 4 lessons, although variable, are generally in line with national expectations. An example of high attainment was seen when the most able pupils in a Year 11 GCSE class were

well supported by a clear explanation by the teacher of the knowledge, understanding and skills required to complete coursework assignments. Where teaching lacked this clarity, or where appropriate support for lower attaining pupils was not sufficiently provided then pupil attainment was less satisfactory. The gender difference in attainment, evident in recent examination results, was not evident in the lessons observed.

- 235 At Key Stage 3, in 1998, the percentage of pupils attaining Level 5 or above in the National Curriculum teacher assessments was below that achieved by schools nationally and lower than those attained by other subjects in the school. However, pupils' levels of attainment are now rising by the end of Key Stage 3. This trend is reflected in the improved provisional results for 1999. In lessons, observed standards of attainment, whilst variable, were overall in line with national expectations.
- 236 Evidence from pupils' work in their books and that observed in lessons suggests that in all years the majority acquire a sound knowledge and understanding of historical events and people. Equally, they use historical vocabulary accurately and with understanding. An example of this was seen in a top Year 9 class where pupils were able to define Industrial Revolution and were able to explain whether the events were a revolution or an evolution.
- 237 Pupils' confidence in the use of historical skills is more variable. Confidence was lacking where the teaching focused too much lesson time on transmitting historical knowledge, leaving little time to draw out such skills as causation or how to pursue a line of historical enquiry. This was evident in a Year 9 class studying the growth of factories and the textile revolution where the pupils described the changes from domestic to a factory system of production, but were unable to analyse why these changes were taking place.
- 238 The progress of pupils, including those with special educational needs, in the majority of lessons seen was satisfactory at both Key Stages 3 and 4. However, there are occasions when pupils make good progress. Where progress is good, teachers have high expectations of pupils, manage the classroom effectively to create an orderly learning environment, give clear explanations to promote pupils' knowledge and understanding and use questions well to examine pupils ability to apply their knowledge. These features were evident in a mixed Year 10/11 class examining how aspects of the past have been portrayed in the film 'Braveheart' where the teacher used clear exposition to develop the pupils' knowledge and understanding, and skilful questioning to get the pupils to examine the motives behind the making of the film. Where progress is less satisfactory, as observed in a low ability Year 9 lesson in which pupils were studying the textile industry, the teacher's explanations were too drawn out and questioning did not make pupils think enough about what they were learning.
- 239 In both key stages pupils' attitudes to learning are generally good and, on occasions, excellent. Excellent pupil-teacher relationships and pupils listening very attentively to teachers' exposition and explanations were aspects of lessons where attitudes were of the highest standards. In addition, teachers effectively managed their classrooms to generate a climate conducive to positive learning. A Year 8 class studying the living and working conditions of the villein in medieval society exemplified some of these features. Here, pupils were behaving very well and were keen to volunteer responses to the teacher's questions. They listened to both the teacher and their fellow pupils reading aloud from the printed information sheets. There was no evidence of bad behaviour in any of the lessons observed. However, on the odd occasion, pupils' concentration began to falter when the teacher's exposition went on too long or when pupils were given too long to complete an individual piece of work. This was evident in some Year 9 lessons.
- 240 In the fourteen lessons observed, the quality of teaching was never less than satisfactory. The

majority of teaching was satisfactory at both key stages but ranged from good to satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and from very good to satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Effective teaching was exemplified in a Year 10 lesson studying Germany between the wars. The teacher provided very clear explanations, well illustrated on the blackboard, to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of the distinctions between the German people as a nation and those who actively supported the Nazi regime. The quality of the teaching was also enhanced by the use of an appropriate resource, the film 'Schindler's List', and by the use of a range of questioning skills which enabled the teacher to challenge the pupils' own thinking, morals and attitudes. Similar qualities were seen in a Year 9 class studying child labour in the textile industry. In this lesson the teacher was using the blackboard to significant effect in assisting the pupils' understanding of how to select, organise and structure information when producing a piece of extended writing.

- 241 Other strengths of teaching seen included good subject knowledge, the setting of high expectations both in pupils' behaviour and in their presentation of work and, on one occasion, good use of praising pupils to motivate and sustain both their interest and progress - a teaching skill seen in a class of lower attaining Year 9 pupils studying the growth of the textile industry.
- 242 Where the observed teaching was not so effective, the teacher's own lesson planning, based upon the departmental scheme of work, lacked clear learning objectives to identify what the children should know, understand and be able to do. In many classes, learning was very heavily led by the teacher and provided no opportunities for the pupils to develop independent learning skills or to show initiative. The lack of opportunity for pupils to show initiative was an issue for the teaching of history at the time of the last inspection and little progress has been made since then. Other factors that limited the quality of teaching and therefore the progress of pupils include occasions when the teacher's explanation took too long and excessively focuses upon pupils acquiring factual knowledge. Little time was afforded to the explicit teaching of historical skills. Some Year 7 classes studying the Roman Republic as a form of government exemplified these aspects. As yet, there is too little use of information technology as an aid for learning.
- 243 Pupils are set homework regularly by the department. This is helping to raise standards where the homework tasks are well linked to classroom activities. This is particularly noticeable in Years 10 and 11 where homework is used to prepare pupils for their GCSE coursework assignments. However, not all homework is of a similar quality. For example, in a Year 9 lower ability class, the homework task was to copy a diagram from a printed sheet into exercise books. The department does not regularly monitor the quality of the homework given to pupils in order to ensure it continues to enhance learning and raise the standards of attainment for all pupils.
- 244 Since the appointment of a new head of department there has been improvement in the leadership and management of the department. There now exists a scheme of work which is supporting teaching and raising teachers' expectations. However, the scheme is yet to be fully assimilated by all teachers so that learning objectives for all lessons are clear and the teaching of historical skills more evident.
- 245 Under the guidance of the head of department an assessment procedure that is systematic and consistently applied by all teachers is being developed. Pupils' books are marked regularly and, on most occasions, accompanied by positive teacher comments outlining the strengths of the work. Some marking is particularly helpful in correcting pupils' misconceptions. However, as yet, marking does not provide pupils with targets to help them improve and raise their levels of attainment. There is too little opportunity for pupils to assess their own progress.
- 246 The depleted state of the learning resources is rightly identified in the departmental development

plan as a major obstacle to enhancing pupils' learning. Over the past year there has been significant improvement in the range and quality of textbooks, especially at Key Stage 4 where all pupils have individual textbooks for each study unit of their examination course. The department has also sought the assistance of an local education authority adviser to produce resources more appropriate to meet the needs of all pupils, especially pupils with special educational needs - an issue identified for development in the last inspection report.

- 247 At present it is too early to evaluate the impact of these new resources on the standards achieved by the pupils. However, there are no formal strategies in place through which the department can monitor and evaluate their impact. In order to sustain and build upon the rising standards of achievement, effective monitoring and evaluating strategies need further development – another issue previously identified in the last school inspection. This should enable teachers to monitor both class and individual pupil progress, identify areas for improvement and target both resources and staff development more closely with the needs of the pupils.

· **Information technology**

- 248 Overall the school is offering a good quality of education in information technology. The attainment of pupils exceeds national standards at the end of both key stages. There is little difference in attainment of pupils of different gender, ethnicity or background.
- 249 By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils have experienced a range of software applications, using them in the context of a number of curriculum areas. Their presentation skills are good and they are particularly strong in the use of computer control programs. Pupils also consider real-world applications of information technology and the implications of this technology. The provision of the Internet on most curriculum computers has opened opportunities and many pupils are skilled in the use of this communication technology. Recent links with a school in Ireland have been supported by Wedgwood and the use of their of video-conferencing technology. At the end of Key Stage 3, a greater percentage of pupils than the national average achieved Level 5 or above in the National Curriculum teacher assessments.
- 250 In Key Stage 4, all pupils experience information technology through SCI-IT work, linking the use of information technology to their work in science. Additionally pupils use information technology in other areas of the curriculum to enhance their learning. Since the last inspection, the more able pupils have been given more opportunities in lessons and more facilities for independent learning. This has had a positive result on attainment and examination results. Their attainment matches and is often better than national expectations. Typically, each year between 20 and 30 pupils take the full GCSE in information technology. Provisional results in GCSE information technology examinations in 1999 showed a continuation of the trend over the last four years of a steady increase in examination successes. More pupils are now getting the higher grades in the subject than achieved nationally. This is a great improvement on the situation that was seen at the time of the last inspection.
- 251 Overall, pupils make good progress, though it is more rapid in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. Generally, the quality of teaching was more consistently good at Key Stage 4 and this had a direct impact on pupils' progress. However, in some cases, the lessons observed in Key Stage 3 were the first of the school year and gave less opportunities for pupils to demonstrate progress. Lower attaining pupils, including those with statements of special educational needs, are generally achieving well. This is largely due to the small size of groups, which allows pupils to work individually on computers and there is effective individual support by all classroom teachers.

- 252 Pupils' attitude to information technology is generally good in lessons. In the last inspection report the school was criticised for constraining pupils' learning. Pupils are now given more opportunities to develop their independent learning through the style of lessons, extra-curricular provision and open-access around school. GCSE pupils now have a clearer structure for their submission of coursework, which is well monitored and chased up by the teachers. The open-access provision has required pupils to be more independent and responsible for their own learning.
- 253 Overall, teaching is good, although at Key Stage 3 the majority of the teaching seen was satisfactory. Lessons are generally effectively taught, using sound and well planned schemes of work, much improved since the last inspection. Key Stage 4 teaching contained high expectations of pupils by teachers and lessons were well structured to aid progress. In Key Stage 3, not all teachers considered pupils' prior attainment and their experiences sufficiently to promote consistently good progress. Marking, and the ongoing assessment of pupils' work, were criticised at the last inspection and still need some attention. There is not enough in-class assessment of pupils' work giving pupils direct feedback on their attainment. Marking of work generally does not help pupils understand how to improve. The practice of pupils assessing their own work is helping pupils understand their strengths and weaknesses, but this practice is not sufficiently substantiated by the teachers' comments.
- 254 The management of the subject is generally good. Schemes of work are clear and carefully planned to promote pupils' progress and ensure they attain highly. The department's development plan provides a clear direction for the subject's future and the department is appropriately concentrating on raising standards. However, the variation in the quality of teaching between Key Stages 3 and 4 is not currently being addressed through rigorous monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice. For example, Key Stage 4 teachers regularly evaluate their teaching schemes for improvement; this is not so for Key Stage 3.
- 255 The development of the use of information technology across the curriculum has been a focus for a number of departments. A scheme for assessing pupils' attainment in information technology across subjects exists, but this is currently not yet being effectively used to monitor pupils' progress. However, the SC-IT work in Key Stage 4 has proved to be an effective way of delivering information technology for these pupils and the science teachers are sufficiently competent to no longer need the support from information technology specialist teachers.
- 256 Other projects, such as the recent addition of a video server system have yet to prove their worth. The school now needs to co-ordinate, evaluate and rationalise the many information technology projects being undertaken.

• **Modern Foreign Languages**

- 257 Overall, standards are in line with national expectations, but with some variation especially at Key Stage 4.
- 258 Standards attained by all pupils in French throughout Key Stage 3 are rising and now are above national expectations. Provisional 1999 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate that 60% of pupils attained at least the nationally expected level and 40% attained higher. Boys have performed better than boys nationally and, unusually, a higher percentage of boys than girls attained the national average level in 1998 and 1999. However, more girls attained the higher levels.
- 259 Results at GCSE gained by the very few candidates, mostly girls, following a full course have improved in recent years from just below average to well above average in 1999, according to

provisional figures. However, results of pupils following a range of short courses have been variable and some show underachievement.

- 260 Overall, pupils make very good progress throughout Key Stage 3 . Pupils at Key Stage 4 following the full GCSE course make good progress. Some pupils in Key Stage 4 make good progress on vocational short courses but many average attainers have underperformed. In contrast, some pupils have done particularly well, for example, on pre-GCSE courses in a second foreign language.
- 261 Pupils generally speak with good pronunciation and an increasingly wide range of vocabulary. They respond easily to questions; some speak spontaneously to the teacher in French, although pupils seldom initiate or sustain conversations longer than a couple of phrases. Written work is fluent and comprehensible but lacks accuracy when produced without prompt materials. In listening and reading, pupils develop sound skills of extracting information from the normal range of texts. In Key Stage 3, lower attainers with special educational needs often make better progress than might have been expected in listening and speaking although their confidence in working with written language is less sure.
- 262 Since the last inspection three main trends are discernible in attainment in modern foreign languages; standards are rising at Key Stage 3, boys perform better than boys nationally at Key Stage 3 and standards are rising on the full GCSE course.
- 263 The quality of relationships in lessons is high. Pupils work very well together in mixed gender groups, they concentrate and remain on task. They listen attentively and are particularly focused when listening in the language laboratory where they show maturity and respect when using the equipment. Older pupils enjoy using the Internet for independent reading tasks. All pupils participate enthusiastically in vocabulary learning games. Work in exercise books is neatly presented. Homework is not always done; during the inspection four Year 9 higher attainers had not done a set task. The teacher applied appropriate school sanctions that the pupils accepted as fair. Very few higher attainers, particularly boys, opt for the full GCSE course, thereby reducing their opportunities for higher level study post-16.
- 264 The quality of teaching is good overall. In Key Stage 3 it is consistently very good. Teachers are very proficient linguists and conduct most lessons effectively in the foreign language. In those lessons where the teacher speaks the foreign language extensively, pupils use it to communicate spontaneously. Two particularly good features of lessons are imparting a strong sense of purpose and enabling pupils to understand structures. English is used appropriately at those times for brief clarifications or discussions. For example, Year 7 pupils were encouraged to explain differences between French and English pronunciation and Year 9 pupils were challenged to talk about the perfect tense. Lesson planning is well established at Key Stage 3 and GCSE. The range of visual aids and variety of vocabulary reinforcement activities are very good, an improvement since the last inspection. For example, an attractive poster of a cartoon character stimulated lower attainers in Year 9 to volunteer descriptions; using overhead transparency cut-outs engaged average attainers in Year 9 in explaining how to conjugate the perfect tense. Teachers are skilled at challenging the most able. For example, Year 10 pupils were tackling basic GCSE tasks from the outset. Similarly, teachers involve pupils with special educational needs in attaining lesson objectives; a Year 7 pupil sang a short song in French from memory as a solo, a Year 9 pupil enthusiastically contributed descriptive phrases, Year 8 pupils enjoyed ordering individual cue cards to show their understanding of directions given. However, written feedback does not sufficiently advise pupils about how to improve their work. Factors leading to the rise in standards at Key Stage 3 and at GCSE include good tuition, established and collaborative planning, an improved variety of activities, good use of a range of resources and well attended lunch time booster classes for Year 11.

- 265 The school offers a solid grounding in French during Key Stage 3 and a rich range of opportunities for pupils at Key Stage 4 to study one or two foreign languages from a provision of four: French, German, Spanish and Italian. It is working hard to increase the interest of pupils and the uptake at GCSE. For example, visits abroad and international school partnerships are helping to enhance the relevance of foreign language learning for some pupils; Year 11 GCSE pupils have vivid memories of working on cross-curricular projects with their French counterparts. A lunch time cinema club appeals to some younger learners and the potential of the school's e-mail club to increase contact between pupils and their peers abroad is recognised.
- 266 However, in Key Stage 4, short courses need more careful planning and courses with more appropriate challenge need to be selected. The school's decision to streamline the range of accredited syllabuses followed to GCSE short course and Certificate of Achievement for the current Year 10 has the potential to focus the time available for development more effectively. There is scope for more fostering of pupils' skills in speaking and writing at greater length and from memory. The department is well placed to extend current improvements. The new head of department has a clear vision for the future and is supported by a team of skilled and enthusiastic teachers, some appointed in recent years, who work well together.

Music

- 267 Overall, standards are below national expectations.

268 those in their other subjects. The 1999 provisional results show that over half of the pupils gained a higher grade and their results are much closer to their other subjects. There are significantly larger numbers opting for music than in the past. In lessons, pupils in Years 10 and 11 show a wide range of abilities and skills. Some are confident and fluent performers on a range of instruments, whilst others have underdeveloped skills. Pupils' composing is competent although it only rarely shows signs of creativity or originality.

269 example, were able to improvise 12-bar-blues pieces and confidently perform them to the class. Pupils in middle and lower sets often achieve much less. For example, a middle set Year 8 group composing accompaniments to a song produced little more than simple patterns to fit the pulse. Many pupils' practical skills in music are not sufficiently developed. They are too often required to write about music instead of doing it.

270 tasks. Pupils in some middle and lower ability sets are given too limited exposure to practical work. This results in many pupils failing to make sense of the musical theory and history that is taught. Pupils with special education needs often make unsatisfactory progress because work is not sufficiently planned to meet pupils' differing needs.

271 responsive and collaborate effectively in group composing and performing work. When pupils are set slow-moving and undemanding work, they frequently chatter, are off-task, and fail to concentrate. Some pupils become overly boisterous in these lessons.

272 enjoy a purposeful working atmosphere. In composing, pupils are not introduced to a wider harmonic palate early enough. At Key Stage 3 the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory overall - just over half of

the music lessons observed were judged to be satisfactory or good. In these, teachers set musical work, managed and organised their pupils well and used limited resources effectively. Where the teaching was unsatisfactory or poor, expectations for pupils' work were set far too low. In these lessons, poor quality written tasks or unchallenging performing and composing work demotivated pupils. Pace in some lessons was very slow and there was insufficient attention paid to planning different work, particularly for those pupils with lower reading ages.

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quality of teaching, and especially at Key Stage 3. Subject planning is weak. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 has not yet fully taken into account the 1995 revisions of the National Curriculum. Learning objectives are vague and progression is not clearly laid out. There is an over-emphasis on history and theoretical written work, some of it mundane and low-level. Too much of it is divorced from a practical music-making context. The curriculum offers reasonable breadth, with the inclusion of music from a range of ethnic origins. The Aiming High project, which involves a whole range of agencies including the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, is a valuable inclusion for Year 9 pupils. The curriculum is enhanced by a number of extra-curricular opportunities including a choir, wind band, orchestra and a number of smaller ensembles. The quality and standards in these extra-curricular activities are high and they make a significant contribution to the overall richness of the school's curriculum provision. The school also offers a good provision for instrumental teaching, provided mainly by the Stoke-on-Trent Music Service, which is well organised and well-used.

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music lessons in small general teaching rooms. In addition there is a shortage of smaller, sound-separate spaces for pupils to work in groups on composing and performing tasks. The deficiencies are all having a negative impact on pupils' standards.

Physical education

275 Overall, pupils' standards of attainment by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are in line with national expectations. A number of pupils identified as having special educational needs achieve well in physical education, this proving to be a subject in which they gain success and in which they feel on more equal terms with other pupils. Standards in extra-curricular sports are high. Both boys and girls achieve success in a range of local tournaments and leagues, including netball, football, athletics and cross country events. Over the past year a significant number of pupils have gained representative honours in several different sports at city, county and sometimes national level. These successes reflect the department's commitment to the support of pupils' development in sport and physical education.

276 In Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with national expectations. The majority of pupils produce a satisfactory quality of movement in relation to their chronological age. In boys' basketball and football and girls' netball, many pupils use a range of skills effectively, demonstrate a satisfactory knowledge of the rules and apply basic tactics within a game situation. The most able pupils in clubs and teams demonstrate effective planning in their positioning and anticipation during play, and are able to apply skills effectively within the context of the game. In swimming, most pupils in a mixed ability class were able to perform three different strokes with fluency, good rhythm and style. Attainment in gymnastics was observed to be very good by Year 8. Sequences performed were imaginative, fluid and demonstrated with control, skill and poise. Attainment in Year 9 girls' gymnastics was observed to be unsatisfactory, however, in comparison with the expected standard, the choice of task making it difficult for the pupils to effectively demonstrate the range and quality of their gymnastic knowledge and skill

277 Overall, attainment in Key Stage 4 is in line with national expectations. In games such as netball, football and basketball many pupils have improved from Key Stage 3 in their skill and

understanding of a game and play with more consistency and precision. Others struggle to think strategically and experience a breakdown of skill and confidence in the game situation. The most able pupils have the ability to appreciate strengths and limitations in their own and others' performances and use this information appropriately to co-operate as a team and outwit their opponents.

- 278 In 1998 the department entered pupils for GCSE for the first time. The first results were slightly above national averages, with 52% of the 27 pupils gaining A*-C grades and all gaining a grade A*-G. Provisional results for 1999 indicate an impressive improvement evidenced in 66% A* – C grades. The percentage of girls gaining A* – C grades is higher than that of boys.
- 279 With the exception of a minority of lessons, pupils' progress in lessons is at least satisfactory in both key stages, quite often good and occasionally excellent. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated into the work of the department, have access to its curriculum and most are making satisfactory progress. During Key Stage 3 many pupils apply skills with increasing consistency and control and develop the ability to adapt previously learned skills to new situations. During Key Stage 4 most pupils continue to improve their level of skills and knowledge of rules and show sound improvement in their anticipation and response in game situations. Throughout both key stages, pupils develop their understanding of the effects of exercise and how to prepare for participation in different activities.
- 280 Attitudes to learning are good and the majority of pupils are well motivated. In most lessons pupils' show good sporting behaviour and fair play. High standards of behaviour, dress and participation are features of most lessons. The majority of pupils are co-operative, attentive, and responsible. For example, most are able to stay on task for significant periods without the direct supervision of the teacher. In general, pupils are enthusiastic and show a willingness to use feedback from the teacher and other pupils to improve their level of knowledge, skill and understanding. In class they demonstrate the ability to pose questions and evaluate different outcomes by observing and analysing their own and others performance. However, not enough opportunities are provided for pupils to show initiative and solve problems in lessons, so that they can apply their skills and knowledge of physical education more creatively and at increasingly higher levels of understanding as they progress through the school. The majority of pupils show the ability to work in different ways, for example, independently, with a partner, in a small group and as part of a whole class. Good social and co-operative skills are demonstrated, both in team games and other activities
- 281 Physical education staff are well qualified and express a strong enthusiasm which is relayed positively to all pupils. Their relationship with the pupils is very good and contributes considerably to effective learning. Teaching is good overall though variable. The majority of teaching seen was at least satisfactory, often good or very good and occasionally excellent. Most lessons are well planned and efficiently organised and managed, consolidating and building on previous learning. Teaching for pupils with special educational needs is sensitive and supportive. Most lessons are conducted at a brisk pace though not all lessons contained a high percentage of physical activity. Intended learning outcomes are usually shared with pupils, and the degree to which they are achieved evaluated by the teacher and the class during a lesson summary. This contributes significantly to raising standards and is a constant feature of the best lessons. Acute observation skills by the staff and good judgement of when to intervene in the learning process together with clear feedback on performance help pupils to understand what they need to do to make progress. Staff use questioning effectively to assess, challenge and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. This is a significant strength of teaching throughout the department. In a few lessons, teachers divide pupils into ability groups or differentiate tasks within a class to ensure that all pupils are always appropriately challenged. These effective strategies are not, however, used widely throughout the department. To date

there are no formal structures in place for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning to improve practices further.

- 282 Physical education is well led and organised and there is a strong ethos of mutual respect and support within the department. The department is appropriately in the process of reviewing its systems for assessment and recording and proposes to link them more directly with the learning outcomes identified for individual units of work. This is very positive and will help staff to identify relative strengths and weaknesses of pupils more systematically focus individual and group target setting, at an early stage. The new system is planned to be computerised and should therefore help to ensure that reports to parents are more diagnostic.
- 283 Overall the physical education curriculum is not currently constructed in a way that promotes the most effective progression and continuity in a number of activities, for example, in athletics and a range of games where pupils only have six lessons a year in Key Stage 3. Consequently the content and construction of the physical education curriculum is not sufficiently balanced between the breadth and depth of the different elements of the physical education programme. As a result there is insufficient time available for all pupils to acquire, apply and consolidate skills and understanding to allow them to make effective progress towards the expected levels of attainment.
- 284 In response to the previous inspection, the department has successfully provided more opportunities for pupils to observe, plan and evaluate. This is now an aspect of all lessons and in evidence throughout the inspection. Similarly there is now a greater focus on the quality of movement in gymnastics and this is particularly apparent in Years 7 and 8 and in both boys and girls lessons.

Religious education

- 285 Overall, standards of attainment at both key stages in religious education are above expectations in the local Agreed Syllabus and have improved since the last inspection. Results in Religious Studies at GCSE have improved annually since the last inspection. The 1998 results are well above both the national average and the average for pupils in the school and provisional 1999 results show a further improvement. Entry numbers are small, and most are girls. However, the difficulties experienced in attracting boys to this course have been averted by making provision for all pupils in Key Stage 4 to work towards GCSE Religious Education (short course) from September 1999.
- 286 At Key Stage 3, pupils show understanding of concepts such as symbolism and community. They are able to apply these concepts to a variety of situations and relate them to their own experience. They develop skills of listening to the views of others and keeping an open mind, for example when working with an unfamiliar partner during a lesson on 'Seeing Things Differently'. Lower ability pupils were supported effectively in a discussion about attitudes, values and moral choices in a lesson about the global community. Pupils show skill when working on aspects related to learning from religion. There is evidence in pupils' work that the focus at other times offers a balance with learning about religion. However, pupils' understanding of the relevance of these two aspects of the subject, to each other and to their own lives, is not as it might be if the course was more focused upon the framework for planning outlined in the Agreed Syllabus. Opportunities are missed to build on and extend pupils' experience of faiths other than Christianity.
- 287 At Key Stage 4 pupils demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the background material for GCSE, for example they are able to talk about religious and political groups such as Pharisees and Zealots. They can apply their learning, for example, to suggest how the disciples

might have felt after the death of Jesus. Pupils are encouraged to challenge ideas and ask questions seeking clarification of concepts. They develop research skills, for example using source material to answer questions about the authorship of St. Luke's Gospel. In the school's own certificated course taught in Year 11, pupils explored arguments for the existence of God and questioned complex theories with confidence.

- 288 Overall pupils make good progress. At Key Stage 3, progress is good where pupils are challenged to question and discuss, for example, in a session designed to raise awareness of stereotypes and perceptions. Progress is less effective where pupils spend time consolidating earlier learning through undemanding tasks. Progress is unsatisfactory where tasks are pitched too low and where the pace of the lessons offers little challenge. Pupils understand the grading system used to mark their work but often see improvement in terms of neatness or quantity, since marking does not relate directly to an improvement in religious education. Pupils with special educational needs generally make satisfactory progress.
- 289 At Key Stage 4 progress is very good where pupils are challenged by difficult concepts and where they are supported by the positive classroom ethos to respond and question, for example in a discussion on the authenticity of St. Luke's Gospel. Pupils develop appropriate skills through purposeful tasks which are clearly linked to the aims of the lesson. Progress is less satisfactory where pupils spend time on low level tasks such as copying out texts. There is scope for use of a wider range of strategies including collaborative work to support further progress.
- 290 Overall pupils have positive attitudes to their learning in religious education. At Key Stage 3 pupils settle quickly, work willingly and respond with respect to staff and other pupils. They work well independently or in groups, showing high levels of concentration where the task and pace are focused. They sometimes take the initiative to complete personal research for homework using parents or the Internet, but other opportunities to develop pupils' initiative are missed. At Key Stage 4 pupils respond positively, particularly to question and answer sessions. They focus quickly when tasks are set and are eager to complete assignments. They appreciate opportunities to explore their own beliefs and values. Pupils become restless when the pace of the lesson slackens or when they are not clear about the purpose of a task in relation to the lesson.
- 291 Overall the quality of teaching is good, with some very good features and some unsatisfactory aspects. In all, ten lessons were seen, five at each key stage. Teaching is good where subject knowledge is sure, expectations are high and tasks are challenging. Religious education teaching makes a positive contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teaching is unsatisfactory where expectations are low, the pace is slow and tasks do not extend the learning. Planning overall is careful and appropriate. However, objectives are not always sufficiently sharp and are not shared with the pupils. As a result the use of time and teaching strategies are not always effective in promoting progress and achievement. Homework is generally pertinent, but does not always consolidate or enhance learning. Work is marked regularly. Written and oral comments are much appreciated by the pupils. Discipline is often very good. Pupils are not intimidated by the firm approach but use it as a framework within which to develop their knowledge and understanding with confidence. This caring ethos is enhanced by the positive and supportive relationships which exist within the department. Professional development of non-specialist staff is largely supported internally.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 293 A total of 15 inspectors spent a total of 49 days at the school. During this time they observed 191 lessons or parts of lessons.
- 294 Formal discussions were held with a sample of pupils from each year. This sample covered the attainment range within each year group. Most inspectors took part. Discussion centred on the life and work of the school. Pupils talked about their work and achievements. This gave an indication of the standards achieved by the pupils, their views about the school and their understanding of school's philosophy and policies. Evidence from these discussions was used to inform the appropriate aspects and subjects. Many other informal discussions were held with pupils.
- 295 Most teaching staff were involved in informal discussions with the inspectors. Each member of staff holding a post of responsibility was interviewed by an inspector about their role. These discussions covered their particular areas of responsibility and the general work of the school. Some non-teacher staff were involved in formal and informal discussions about their particular roles and responsibilities.
- 296 The full range of work from a sample of pupils in each year group was systematically examined by the inspectors. The sample covered the full range of ability. Pupils also discussed their work with the inspectors and further samples of work were scrutinised in lessons. An examination of pupils' art and three dimensional work on view, the books in the school and of the available resources was made.
- 297 Discussions were held with members of the governing body, parents, representatives of the local community and industry and other partners of the school. A meeting for parents was held before the inspection with 19 attending. The 59 questionnaires returned by parents were analysed. Inspectors observed assemblies, collective worship, tutor time and a wide variety of extra curricular activities. A complete range of curriculum planning and school documentation was scrutinised. Financial information was taken from the computer to assist in the examination of the school's expenditure and budgetary situation.

• **Pupil data**

| | Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent) | Number of pupils with statements of SEN | Number of pupils on school's register of SEN | Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals |
|----------|---|--|--|---|
| Y7 – Y11 | 749 | 13 | 59 | 243 |

• **Teachers and classes**

• **Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y11)**

| | |
|--|------|
| Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent): | 44.6 |
| Number of pupils per qualified teacher: | 16.8 |

• **Education support staff (Y7 – Y11)**

| | |
|--|-----|
| Total number of education support staff: | 7 |
| Total aggregate hours worked each week: | 200 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes: | 76 |
|--|----|

| | | |
|------------------------------|-----|------|
| Average teaching group size: | KS3 | 22.8 |
| | KS4 | 21.2 |

· **Financial data**

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Financial year: | 1998/99 |
| | £ |
| Total Income | 1,694,323 |
| Total Expenditure | 1,670,468 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 2,228 |
| Balance brought forward from previous year | 209,449 |
| Balance carried forward to next year | 233,284 |

PARENTAL SURVEY

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Number of questionnaires sent out: | 749 |
| Number of questionnaires returned: | 59 |

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 | 33.9 | 54.2 | 5.1 | 6.8 | 0 |
| I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren) | 51.7 | 46.6 | 0 | 1.7 | 0 |
| The school handles complaints from parents well | 29.1 | 47.3 | 18.2 | 5.5 | 0 |
| The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught | 22.8 | 66.7 | 8.8 | 1.8 | 0 |
| The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress | 28.8 | 52.5 | 10.2 | 5.1 | 3.4 |
| The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work | 42.4 | 55.9 | 1.7 | 0 | 0 |
| The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons | 39.0 | 55.9 | 5.1 | 0 | 0 |
| I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home | 27.1 | 54.2 | 10.2 | 8.5 | 0 |
| The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren) | 32.8 | 56.9 | 3.4 | 6.9 | 0 |
| The school achieves high standards of good behaviour | 27.1 | 52.5 | 15.3 | 5.1 | 0 |
| My child(ren) like(s) school | 38.6 | 45.6 | 14.0 | 1.8 | 0 |