

INSPECTION REPORT

Healing Comprehensive School
Healing, Grimsby

LEA area: North East Lincolnshire

Unique Reference Number: 118095

Headteacher: Mrs Denise Birrell

Reporting inspector: Dr Claude Scott
5274

Dates of inspection: 22 – 26 November 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708154

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

Type of control: County

Age range of pupils: 11 to 16 years

Gender of pupils: Boys and girls

School address: Low Road
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Appropriate authority: Governing body

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Date of previous inspection: 20-24 March 1995

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Subject responsibilities

Religious education

Art

English

Equal opportunities

Music

Physical education

Design and technology

Information technology

Science

Special educational needs

Modern foreign languages

History

Geography

Mathematics

Aspect responsibilities

Attainment and progress

Teaching

Leadership and management

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

Attendance

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

Partnership with parents and the community

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Assessment

Efficiency

Curriculum

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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

The school is very well led; there is a strong commitment to improvement; the school's analysis of its performance is very good as is the financial planning.

Teaching over the school as a whole is good and, in some subjects it is very good; this contributes to the good progress which pupils make leading to good and sometimes very good standards.

The curriculum is well planned and broad ranging; a range of extra-curricular activities enhances this provision.

Teachers provide very good support and guidance to pupils.

There are very good relationships in the school resulting in the pupils' good attitudes to work and very good behaviour.

Partnership with parents and the community is good; parents give good support and appreciate what the school is doing.

Provision for moral and social development of pupils is very good.

Pupils attend regularly and take on responsibility within the school.

Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.

Standards of literacy and numeracy are above average.

The school provides good value for money.

Where the school has weaknesses

Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are too low in both key stages.

Procedures for monitoring and evaluation throughout the school are not sufficiently targeted.

The allocation of time in both key stages limits pupils' progress in religious education, ICT and music; not all tutor periods are used effectively.

Annual reports to parents at Key Stage 3 do not all indicate clearly enough what pupils know, understand and can do in relation to National Curriculum standards.

The school does not comply with the requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship.

This is a good school. The school has many more strengths than weaknesses. The governors' action plan will set out how those weaknesses are to be tackled. The plan will be sent to all parents and guardians of pupils in the school.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has tackled all the key issues raised at the last inspection. It has made good progress in most of them. The school development plan and faculty plans are better and linked more productively to spending plans; teaching is substantially better; there has been improvement in the social development of pupils but there remains some scope to make pupils more aware of cultural diversity. However, there is still no provision for a daily collective act of worship for all pupils and some health and safety issues still require attention. Since the last inspection, standards in English, mathematics and science have been consistently above or well above national averages and have been improving, mostly keeping pace with national trends. There has been a significant improvement in the last year particularly at Key Stage 3 in English. Standards at Key Stage 4 have also been above the national average and have improved steadily, although at a slightly slower pace than national figures. The school has done well to maintain and improve on these above average standards. **The school is well placed to improve further by tackling the key issues raised by the inspection.**

Standards in subjects

The following table shows standards achieved by 14 and 16 year olds in national tests and examinations in 1999:

| Performance in: | Compared with all schools | Compared with similar schools | Key | |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|----------|
| | | | <i>well above average</i> | <i>A</i> |
| | | | <i>above average</i> | <i>B</i> |
| | | | <i>Average</i> | <i>C</i> |
| Key Stage 3 National Curriculum Tests All core subjects | A | A | <i>below average</i> | <i>D</i> |
| GCSE/GNVQ | A | B | <i>well below average</i> | <i>E</i> |
| Average points score per pupil | | | | |

At Key Stage 3, the attainment of pupils in English, mathematics and science is well above the national average for all pupils. When compared to pupils in similar schools nationally, attainment in Key Stage 3 English tests is very high and in mathematics and science, it is well above average. When the attainments of pupils taking tests in 1999 are compared to their Key Stage 2 results in 1996, the improvement in this school over that time is much greater than the improvement shown nationally by pupils of similar attainment. This represents very good progress in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Attainment in information technology is below expected levels at Key Stage 3 and well below them at Key Stage 4. In religious education, attainment is broadly in line with expected standards given in the Locally Agreed Syllabus.

By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment in art, geography and history is above the standards expected nationally for pupils of this age. In design and technology, modern foreign languages, physical education and music, standards are in line with those expected nationally. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is well above the national average in design and technology, and above average in art, geography, history, and physical education. Standards are in line with national averages in modern foreign languages and pupils' attainment here does not match their achievements in other subjects. Currently, pupils studying music at Key Stage 4 take their examinations at the local sixth form college.

Quality of teaching

| | Overall quality | Most effective in: |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| Years 7-9 | Good | English, mathematics, science |
| Years 10-11 | Good | English, mathematics, science |
| English | Very good | |
| Mathematics | Good | |
| Science | Very good | |

Teaching overall is good and contributes strongly to the standards being achieved. In 95 per cent of all lessons teaching is satisfactory or better; in almost two-thirds of all lessons, it is good or better; in a little over one-quarter of lessons, teaching is very good or excellent. In 4 lessons, teaching was excellent. There is unsatisfactory teaching in just 5 per cent of lessons. Teaching in Year 7 is better than in other years; in three-quarters of lessons teaching here is good and in over two-fifths it is very good. Compared to the standards elsewhere, teaching in Year 8 is proportionally less good, with just under half of lessons where teaching is good or better. In other years, the proportions are similar to the school as a whole.

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 | Very good. Pupils behave in an orderly manner about the school in often crowded conditions. |
| Attendance | Very good. Pupils arrive promptly to school and to lessons. |
| Ethos* | There is a very good atmosphere in the school. Pupils are expected to work hard and achieve their best. Relationships are very good. Pupils' good attitudes to work enhance their progress. |
| Leadership and management | Very good overall. The headteacher gives a very good lead. With governors and her senior staff, she focuses attention on raising standards. Target setting is effective. There are some weaknesses in the way the school monitors and evaluates its work. |
| Curriculum | Good, supported by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. With the exception of ICT, assessment procedures are good. At whole-school level the work of the deputy head is outstanding. The time given for religious education in Years 9-11, and for ICT and music over Key Stage 3 limits progress and attainment. |
| Pupils with special educational needs | Good provision overall. |
| Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development | Good. Very good provision for moral and social development; satisfactory for spiritual and for cultural development. |
| Staffing, resources and accommodation | Satisfactory in most subjects, but unsatisfactory accommodation in physical education has a negative impact on standards and reduces opportunities for GCSE work. |
| Value for money | Good. The school improves the attainment of pupils from average to above average standards at Key Stage 3 maintaining these during Key Stage 4. |

*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

The ethos of the school and the values it promotes.

Pupils' behaviour, involvement in the school and the standards of work achieved.

Information provided by the school.

Parents are welcome, the school is approachable and complaints are handled well.

Parents know what is being taught.

What some parents are not happy about

The number of parents strongly disagreeing with any of the statements on the questionnaire was very small.

Over 400 parents (over 50 per cent and well above the normal rate of response) returned the questionnaire with a minimum of 95 per cent supporting the school in each one of the categories listed. This level of support was reflected at the parents' meeting before the inspection. Parents are clearly very strong in their support of the school. Only very small minorities had concerns. Inspectors agree with nearly all of the views expressed. The exception is in the information given in reports at Key Stage 3, where the pupils' attainment and progress are not always linked to National Curriculum standards.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

In order further to improve standards, the governors, headteacher and staff should tackle the following key issue:

Raise standards in information communication technology by:

providing a more even allocation of time across Key Stage 3;

reviewing the programmes of study and the current schemes of work for both key stages so that the work pupils do systematically builds on what has been done before and is based on clear and achievable lesson targets;

improving assessment procedures in order to provide reliable information on what pupils know, understand and can do, which will inform the next stage of learning.

Ref. Par. 117-123

In addition to the key issue above, the following weaknesses highlighted in the report should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

Improve school development planning so that:

the progress being made towards targets is systematically monitored at all levels;

the areas of weakness identified in this process, such as those within the teaching of modern foreign languages, receive greater priority in the action taken to raise standards.

Ref. Par 71, 72

Review the allocation and use of curriculum time so that:

there is more flexibility to meet the requirements of music at Key Stage 3 and religious education in Years 9, 10 and 11;

the time given as tutor periods is used more productively across the school.

Ref. par 45

Spread the best practice in the writing of reports to parents, particularly at Key Stage 3, so that comments and the assessment grades given are related directly to National Curriculum levels of attainment.

Ref. par.51

Review and improve health and safety arrangements by:

increasing the frequency of risk assessment covering all of the school's activities;

ensure that pupils are regularly made aware of health and safety issues in lessons.

Ref. par.64

Take steps to fulfil the requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

Ref. par.54

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

Healing Comprehensive School is a mixed secondary school for pupils aged 11 to 16 years. There are 781 pupils on roll, 378 girls and 403 boys. The school is situated in the village of Healing 4 miles to the north of Grimsby. The school takes the majority of its pupils from five primary schools from the surrounding area.

These include the villages of Stallingborough, Laceby, Healing and Keelby. About 30 per cent of its pupils come from Grimsby itself through parental choice. The school is very oversubscribed and currently its intake exceeds its admission limit. Pupils come from a wide variety of backgrounds and attainment on entry is broadly the same as the national average. A significant minority of pupils eligible to join the school take up places in selective schools in an adjoining local authority. The proportion of pupils from the ethnic minorities (0.6 per cent) and also from homes where English is not the first language (0.5 per cent) are well below the national average. The number of pupils on the special educational needs register (11.5 per cent) is below the national average and the proportion of these pupils having statements of special educational need (1 per cent) is below the national average. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals (5.8 per cent) is well below the national average.

The headteacher has been in post for 3 months, having been a deputy headteacher in the school for 9 years previously.

The school has a comprehensive set of carefully written aims set out in its development plan. These are summarised in the prospectus as follows:

- to develop the full potential of all its pupils;
- to develop all facets of character and ability, intellectual, emotional and spiritual;
- to provide this in a caring environment which promotes equal opportunity for all.

The headteacher has identified the following priorities for the school:

- a thorough review of the curriculum;
- an audit of the accommodation in the school;
- further development of information and communication technology;
- high quality training for all staff leading to an Investors in People accreditation.

Key indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

| Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year: | | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|--|----------|---------|-------------|---------|-------|
| | | 1999 | 76 | 75 | 151 |
| National Curriculum Test Results | | English | Mathematics | Science | |
| Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above | Boys | 70 | 58 | 58 | |
| | Girls | 75 | 62 | 58 | |
| | Total | 145 | 120 | 116 | |
| Percentage at NC Level 5 or above | School | 95(88) | 79(80) | 78(80) | |
| | National | 63(65) | 62(60) | 55(56) | |
| Percentage at NC Level 6 or above | School | 47(47) | 61(58) | 47(43) | |
| | National | 28(35) | 38(36) | 23(27) | |
| Teacher Assessments | | English | Mathematics | Science | |
| Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above | Boys | 59 | 57 | 68 | |
| | Girls | 68 | 62 | 67 | |
| | Total | 127 | 119 | 135 | |
| Percentage at NC Level 5 or above | School | 85(84) | 78(80) | 90(82) | |
| | National | 64(62) | 64(64) | 60(62) | |
| Percentage at NC | School | 25(52) | 55(56) | 61(50) | |

| | | | | |
|------------------|----------|--------|--------|--------|
| Level 6 or above | National | 31(31) | 37(37) | 31(31) |
|------------------|----------|--------|--------|--------|

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

Attainment at Key Stage 4¹

| Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year: | | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|---|----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| | | 1999 | 69 | 75 | 144 |
| 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 | 39 | 68 | 68 | |
| | Girls | 49 | 74 | 75 | |
| | Total | 88 | 142 | 143 | |
| Percentage achieving standard specified | School | 61(62) | 99(99) | 99(99) | |
| | National | 46.3(46.3) | 90.7(87.5) | 95.7(93.4) | |

Attendance

| Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year: | | | % |
|---|--------------|---------------------------|-----|
| | Authorised | School | 4.7 |
| | Absence | National comparative data | 9.0 |
| | Unauthorised | School | 0.3 |
| | Absence | National comparative data | 1.1 |

Exclusions

| Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year: | | Number |
|--|--------------|--------|
| | Fixed period | 6 |
| | Permanent | 1 |

Quality of teaching

| Percentage of teaching observed which is: | | % |
|---|------------------------|----|
| | Very good or better | 26 |
| | Satisfactory or better | 95 |
| | Less than satisfactory | 5 |

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

Overall standards

Pupils enter the school with attainment that is broadly average compared to pupils of the same age nationally. The school is very successful in raising their attainment to levels which are well above national averages in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science by the end of Key Stage 3. These very good standards are maintained to the end of Key Stage 4. Overall attainment at the end of both key stages in a number of other subjects is also above average. As a result of good teaching, pupils make good progress over both key stages in the majority of subjects. They do particularly well in the core subjects.

At Key Stage 3, attainment in the National Curriculum tests in 1999 was well above the national average for English, mathematics and science. When compared to similar schools nationally, attainment in English was very high and in mathematics and science, it was well above average. In English, there was a marked increase in the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 and above. Over the last three years, results have been maintained at levels significantly above national averages for each of these subjects and have still improved at a slightly greater rate than the national trend. These levels of attainment are confirmed by inspection evidence.

In 1999, GCSE results in English, mathematics and science were well above national averages. When compared to similar schools nationally, attainment in English is above average, but in mathematics and science it is well above average. Results for pupils gaining 5 or more grades A* to C (61.1 per cent) are also well above national average (46.3 per cent) for all maintained schools, and above the average for similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more grades A* to G (98.6 per cent) and 1 or more grades A* to G (99.3 per cent) are well above average by both measures. On the basis of the average points scored per pupil, attainment is well above the national average for all schools and above the national average for schools with a similar intake. This shows that pupils throughout the school are achieving well and reflects the attainment of pupils across all subjects, which in the majority of cases, is above average. These above average results have been maintained over the last 5 years with an improving trend which is close to, but slightly below the national rate.

English

Attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is well above the standards expected nationally. Pupils attaining Level 5 and above (95 per cent) in 1999 national tests was well above the national average (63 per cent) and those attaining Level 6 and above (47 per cent) was also well above the national average (28 per cent). In national tests, girls did better than boys particularly at the higher levels, but the difference is not significant. The evidence of standards given in the national tests is confirmed by the work seen during the inspection. Progress is very good and by the end of Key Stage 3, many high attaining pupils write imaginatively and express themselves confidently in front of an audience. The majority of pupils write accurately and read widely. Lower attaining pupils write in paragraphs and use appropriate vocabulary.

Attainment in the 1999 GCSE examination for English was well above the national average for all schools and above the national average for similar schools. Standards have risen over the last 3 years including the proportion at grades A* and A. In English literature, which is taken by all pupils, standards are similar to national averages. These levels of attainment are borne out by inspection evidence. The majority of pupils make good progress and by the end of this key stage they have a more developed appreciation of literature in the study of texts such as 'Macbeth' and 20th century poetry. They write accurately and can extend their ideas in speech. They are able to modify their views after listening to others. Lower attaining pupils are less accurate in spelling, but can sustain their writing when supported by good teaching.

Mathematics

In the 1999 tests, the proportion of pupils at Key Stage 3 achieving Levels 5 and above (79 per cent) and Level 6 and above (61 per cent) were well above national averages (62 per cent and 38 per cent respectively) and well above average for similar schools. Girls and boys achieved similar results. Results in mathematics were similar to those in English and science. The average levels have improved in line with national averages over the four years 1996 to 1999. Standards seen during the inspection confirmed that pupils are attaining very well. Pupils make very good progress over Key Stage 3 and, by the end, are confident with number skills. Higher attaining pupils have good mental skills. Most pupils solve problems effectively, identifying patterns and making predictions which they can test. Data handling skills are good.

In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C, and grades A*-G, was well above average. They were well above average for similar schools. There was no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys. In 1998, pupils in mathematics achieved significantly better than in most other subjects. Pupils' average points score in GCSE mathematics has remained well above average for the last five years. Good progress is made in all aspects of the subject. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' skills in number and algebra are good, for instance when higher attaining Year 10 pupils confidently drew graphs of cubic equations. Pupils have a good understanding of two- and three-dimensional shapes and use this well, for instance in design and technology. Problem solving skills are well-developed and pupils can use formulae, identify rules and test their predictions confidently.

Science

Attainment in the 1999 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 was well above the national average. The proportion reaching Level 5 and above (78 per cent) was well above the national average (55 per cent) and at Level 6 and above, the school's figure (47 per cent) was well above the national average (23 per cent). When compared with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds the pupils' performance is also well above average. In the three years to 1998 there has been a slight rising trend, but in 1999 there was a significant increase to the highest ever score. Over the last three years, the performance of both boys and girls was well above the national average. Pupils make very good progress in this key stage. By the end, they have a very good knowledge and understanding of each aspect of the subject. For example, they understand the difference between elements and compounds; they use the principle of fair testing well in investigations.

Attainment in the GCSE double award science course has been consistently well above the national average for the last four years. There has been a rising trend over this time, with a significant improvement in 1999. When compared with schools from similar backgrounds GCSE results are well above average. Observations from lessons confirm this high level of attainment. Pupils make good progress over Key Stage 4 building well on past success. Knowledge in all aspects of the subject is good. Thus, average attaining pupils can apply their knowledge about penetrating radiation to a new situation; higher attaining pupils are working at a level well beyond GCSE in applying their knowledge of bond energies.

Information communication technology (ICT)

Although there are many examples where pupils make good use of their ICT skills to support subject work, progress is unsatisfactory at both key stages and attainment is below the standards expected by the National Curriculum at both key stages. Teacher assessments at Key Stage 3 are not securely based and both over-rate and under-rate pupils' achievements. There is evidence at Key Stage 3 that pupils attain well in specific instances. For example some Year 7 pupils were confident in using a database and spreadsheet. Year 9 pupils accessed the Internet in a geography lesson on South American rain forests. However, there is insufficient evidence to show that these skills can be shown consistently by all pupils across all required skills. The same applies at Key Stage 4, where the intention of the school to develop ICT skills through different subjects is not ensuring that appropriate standards are being reached.

Religious education

Pupils make satisfactory progress in both key stages and attainment is in line with standards expected in the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Pupils' understanding of the religions studied at Key Stage 3 is sound, particularly in Christianity. Most pupils know what Christians believe and many of the practices within churches, for instance, in baptism. Higher attaining pupils can explain the significance of special occasions such as Easter. They know important facts about the state of Israel, but only a few can link this to the Jewish faith. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils have gained good skills in discussion and debate. They successfully explore issues such as abortion,

factory farming and capital punishment but do not have the time to look deeper into how such issues relate to religious belief.

Other subjects

At Key Stage 3, pupils make good progress in art, geography, and history and attainment is above the standard expected at the end of this key stage. Pupils have an appreciation of shade, tone and colour in art; geographical map skills are good and pupils can compare farming in different parts of the country; in history pupils can extract information from various sources for example on a study of health in nineteenth century Britain. In physical education, good progress is made and attainment matches expected national standards; skills in ball control, dance and gymnastics are appropriate. Progress is satisfactory in modern foreign languages and standards in line with those expected nationally which are lower than the school's own optimistic assessments. Pupils' listening skills are above average and writing skills about average, but there are weaknesses in speaking and reading. Satisfactory progress in music leads to attainment in composing and listening which is appropriate for pupils of this age. In design and technology, pupils have satisfactory skills in planning and making articles in wood and attainment is in line with expected standards.

At Key Stage 4, pupils maintain their good progress in art, geography and history and pupils' attainments are above average. GCSE A* to C rates in the 1999 examinations for all 3 subjects were significantly above national averages. Pupils studying art show a variety of skills and draw with accuracy; in geography, pupils analyse information well, for example, about the advantages and disadvantages of tourism in an area of outstanding beauty; in history, pupils show good research skills in their study of Healing. Very good progress is made in design and technology and standards in GCSE are well above average, an improvement from 1998. They make products with a high degree of accuracy and complex design. Progress is satisfactory in modern foreign languages and standards in both German and French are close to national averages. There has been a steady improvement in attainment over the last 4 years, but pupils achieve less well at GCSE in these subjects than they do in other subjects in the school. Whilst the higher attaining pupils write and speak well, others are less confident in working from memory. There is no work in music at Key Stage 4; and in physical education, pupils make good progress and attain standards above those expected for their age.

Special educational needs

Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress in Key Stage 3 and good progress in Key Stage 4.

By the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 all pupils on the register achieved at least Level 3 in mathematics and science, and almost all attained at least Level 4 in English. Pupils who follow the 'Corrective Reading' programme early in the key stage make significant progress in standards of reading and spelling, although spelling is still a weak area for many pupils. Most pupils read for meaning and can write in a range of styles. They listen carefully and complete comprehension exercises efficiently. Many have a well-rounded vocabulary and can express their views confidently. They have a good grasp of basic concepts in numeracy.

In the GCSE examinations in 1999 all pupils on the register achieved at least 5 A*-G grades, including accreditation in English and mathematics. One pupil was awarded 9 A*-C grades and 4 further pupils gained at least one of these higher grades. Pupils' use of punctuation is accurate and many can use a range of techniques such as alliteration to enhance their writing. They select and interpret key points in comprehension and discuss a range of issues confidently. Good progress in mathematics enables pupils to tackle numeracy problems systematically.

Literacy across the curriculum

Standards of literacy are well above average. Work is presented neatly and accurately and often displayed around the school, frequently word-processed. Pupils write in a variety of styles, often sustained, and are encouraged to consider different audiences. For example, in geography, they write letters to 'The Farmers' Weekly' from the point of view of a farmer or a conservationist. Key words are displayed around subject rooms. In mathematics, pupils having difficulties are helped to spell particular words accurately. Not all departments, however, teach pupils to be more accurate with their spelling.

Pupils are keen readers and use the library regularly. They can identify the main points in their reading and

read aloud with confidence and understanding, for example, in assemblies. They speak clearly and confidently. They ask questions for clarification and reply in detail. They listen to each other and the teachers carefully. There are frequent opportunities for pupils to develop their ideas through paired work, group discussion and role play. A comprehensive school policy encourages departments to consider the contributions they can make to developing pupils' competence in literacy.

Numeracy across the curriculum

The levels of numeracy are good for the majority of pupils. Number and algebraic skills are generally sound for most pupils. Measuring skills are good and these are reflected in science where pupils are able to use scales on thermometers accurately. The concepts of shape and space are well understood by most pupils; in design technology pupils handle three-dimensional design and perspective confidently. Data handling skills are good; pupils are making a positive contribution to investigational work in geography and science. The numeracy policy is raising the awareness of the use of mathematics in other subjects.

Summary

The school is making effective use of the data it has on pupils' attainments, understanding the trends and the patterns emerging. Good target setting is focusing attention on areas of weakness, such as in modern foreign languages where there is further scope for improvement. The local authority's targets have already been met in some subjects. The school is well placed to maintain and even improve on these standards.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

Pupils' attitudes, behaviour, personal development and relationships with each other and adults are significant strengths of the school, contributing strongly towards their attainment and progress. The positive findings of the previous inspection have been maintained. Parents state that their children enjoy school.

Throughout the school the attitudes to learning of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, are good. The vast majority of pupils concentrate well and show interest in what they are doing. They are eager to answer questions and to work hard. For example, pupils in a Year 11 business education lesson strove hard to meet deadlines for their projects. Listening skills are good and pupils are generally very attentive when the teacher or other pupils are talking. They have developed a capacity for personal study. For example, Year 7 pupils willingly carried out extensive independent research work in history. Pupils with special educational needs are well motivated and persevere in managing difficult work. They are usually enthusiastic in their lessons. They are good listeners, ask questions and are always prepared to contribute to whole-class discussions. Mutual respect is evident whenever a teacher or another pupil expresses a point of view.

Relationships between pupils and with adults are very good and contribute well to the quality of work in the majority of lessons. Pupils get on well with each other in and out of the classroom. They take turns, putting up their hands to answer teachers' questions. They collaborate well, for example, in team activities in physical education or also when developing skills in pairs exploring different gymnastics shapes and linking these into a routine in a Year 9 lesson. Pupils support each other well in class for instance, when working on individual projects in an expressive arts lesson, Year 11 pupils willingly stopped to help classmates as necessary. Pupils with special educational needs in a Year 8 English lesson showed a willingness to share ideas and to listen sympathetically to each other. Several pupils in Year 10 are supporting Year 7 pupils in a paired reading programme. There is a high degree of racial harmony with the few pupils from ethnic minorities integrating well.

Pupils' behaviour in the classroom and outside is very good. They move around the school in a very orderly manner, observing the one-way system and holding doors open for others. Though, on occasions, bunching occurs near entrances and on the stairs, there is no pushing or arguing. Pupils are courteous and particularly welcoming to visitors. They show considerable respect for property, for example, taking care when putting equipment away at the end of science and physical education lessons. Bullying is not a problem at the school but the school has recently improved its procedures to deal quickly and appropriately with any aggressive behaviour that may occur. There have been six fixed term exclusions and one permanent, in the last school

year, a similar number to the last inspection, but considerably lower than national figures.

The pupils' personal development is also very good. The ethos of the school contributes very effectively to their sense of community and respect for others and pupils respond well to this. They listen with interest to, and show respect for, the ideas of others. They are able to reconsider preconceived ideas as, for example, in a Year 9 history lesson, pupils considered the possible benefits of a cholera epidemic. Pupils contribute to the life of the school with year and school councils, the 'buddy' system and activities such as the gardening club. They are also contributing to the wider society with collections for various charities and work in the local area undertaking tasks such as clearing wasteland, working in a cattery and putting on performances for older people.

Attendance

Attendance is very good. At 95.3 per cent, it is well above the national average of 91 per cent and has improved since the previous inspection. The high attendance is consistent across all year groups. A number of absences are due to parents taking their children on holiday in term time. The computerised registers are kept up to date with the reasons for absence. Unauthorised absences (0.3 per cent) are below the national average (1.1 per cent).

Pupils are keen to come to school and, with few exceptions, all arrive in time for registration to take place promptly at the start of the day. This enables the tutor period or assembly to start without any delay. There are generally good reasons for lateness. Lessons during the day generally start and finish on time.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

The quality of teaching is good and is a strength of the school, making a significant contribution to the progress and attainment of all pupils. Overall, teaching is satisfactory or better in 95 per cent of lessons, good or better in nearly two-thirds of lessons, and very good or better in one quarter of lessons. In 4 lessons, teaching was excellent. Teaching is unsatisfactory in 5 per cent of all lessons. Overall, this is an improvement on the figures at the last inspection, when it was satisfactory in about 82 per cent of lessons and good in just over half of them. The only significant difference in the quality of teaching between year groups is in Key Stage 3. In Years 7 and 9, teaching is better than elsewhere, with good or very good teaching in nearly three-quarters of lessons. In comparison, teaching in Year 8 is less good, with just under half of lessons having good teaching.

There is very good teaching across both key stages in English and science and good teaching in mathematics, geography, history and physical education. In art, teaching is very good in Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. In religious education, teaching is good in Key Stage 3 and satisfactory in Key Stage 4. Teaching is satisfactory in music at Key Stage 3 and design and technology and modern foreign languages in both key stages.

Teachers bring many strengths to lessons in the school as a whole. In most areas of the curriculum, subject knowledge is good, and in English, science and geography at both key stages, and in history at Key Stage 4, it is very good. In subjects such as religious education, geography and history teachers emphasise the use of correct technical language for the subject. The lack of specialist knowledge was an area of weakness in the last inspection; however now, when non-specialists are used, as in religious education, teachers make sure they know what needs to be done in lessons and plan well for them. Overall lesson planning is good and teachers set appropriate lesson objectives in most subjects. In the course of a week, pupils meet a range of teaching methods. In one Year 9 English lesson, for example, pupils wrote a leaflet about health, after examining the techniques used in a leaflet against bull fighting, using role play on aspects of health, and then conducting their own research on health issues. During the inspection week as a whole, a formal debate was held in religious

education; an extract from the film 'A Man called Horse' was used in history; higher attaining pupils in geography searched the Internet; in many other lessons, teachers used questioning to good effect; in practical subjects such as science and design and technology, pupils applied their investigational and planning skills to solve problems; in some lessons, such as business studies in Year 10, pupils supported their learning by the use of ICT in word-processing, spreadsheet work and graphics. This represents a wide range of experiences for the pupils through which they can learn. In most lessons, time is used well. In some of the best lessons, for example in English, mathematics and history, the brisk pace and clarity of purpose motivate the pupils to work hard. Teachers often make the work relevant to pupils' everyday life and experience. For example, in religious education, Year 10 pupils consider issues such as abortion; Year 11 pupils research the local history of Healing Church and village.

In nearly all lessons, class management is good. Generally, teachers pitch their work to match the levels of attainment in the defined groups or sets. However, it is unusual to find work which is prepared specifically to match the range of experiences and attainment within these teaching groups. Appropriate homework is set in most subjects and is particularly effective in the core subjects at both key stages and in history at Key Stage 3. Homework is not set in music. The use of ICT varies considerably between subjects. There is some good use as indicated above, but in religious education, modern foreign languages and music, for example, ICT is little used at present. Teachers mark work regularly although they do not always comment on how pupils can improve. However, there are some good examples such as in English, where each piece of work has specific targets and strengths and weaknesses are clearly stated.

When pupils with special educational needs are taught by specialist support teachers, teaching is always at least good and often very good. Lessons have clear goals and explanations are crisp and clear. In a very good comprehension lesson about the novel 'Stig of the Dump', the teacher continually insisted on interpretation of the text, not just on factual recall. In their mathematics lessons, perceptive questioning techniques ensure that pupils have to think about their answers. When pupils are withdrawn for individual or group support, work is matched precisely to their individual needs. In mainstream classes, support assistants often have a positive influence on lesson planning, and their interventions are carefully targeted. In art, for example, teachers prepare different levels of work for use within the set where most pupils with special educational needs are taught, but this degree of refinement is rarely achieved in other subjects.

There are just a few subjects where the attainments of pupils are not as high as those found in the majority. In the case of design and technology and modern foreign languages, the reasons for this are predominantly to do with teaching. In design and technology at Key Stage 3, there is insufficient support for temporary and part-time staff. In modern foreign languages, teachers do not offer challenging enough work to pupils other than those in the very highest groups. English is often used in place of the target foreign language and tasks are not structured well enough to give pupils appropriate routines for practising their skills.

This is a school where teaching makes a very strong contribution to the standards pupils achieve, particularly in the core subjects. Pupils are accustomed to good teaching and respond well to it.

The curriculum and assessment

Curriculum

The provision for pupils' intellectual, physical and personal development through the curriculum is good. One of the school's aim is to develop pupils' potential and this is being supported through the design of the curriculum.

The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. It includes all subjects of the National Curriculum as well as religious education, personal development and life skills. The length of the teaching week, and the amount given to individual subjects are mostly in line with national recommendations. However, in religious education, the time allowed in Years 9, 10, and 11 is insufficient for all the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus to be met. The time given to drama and music in Key Stage 3 is uneven, inhibits progress, and does not provide a sufficient platform on which Key Stage 4 work can be confidently built. No

time is given to ICT in Year 8, which reduces the pupils' opportunities to develop cross-curricular skills at this point. Teachers do not always make effective use of tutorial periods when pupils are not attending assembly. The curriculum meets the needs of all pupils except the requirement for lower attaining pupils to take two modern foreign languages in Years 8 and 9 which results in pupils with special educational needs having less time to concentrate on the crucial skills of reading, writing and spelling.

Equality of opportunity and access to the curriculum are good. Pupils are arranged into two distinct bands and work is planned to take account of the levels of attainment in each of the groups or sets. No pupils are disappplied from the National Curriculum. The curriculum is planned to provide a smooth transition between key stages. There are effective links with primary schools both to promote the school and to ensure that the work pupils do builds effectively on their past experience. There is a core curriculum for all pupils at Key Stage 4, with an option structure that provides for two further GCSE subjects. Business studies, child development and expressive arts are introduced as additional subjects, which pupils can follow to GCSE level. There are currently no GCSE classes in music, physical education and religious education. Pupils are, however, able to take a GCSE in music at the local sixth form college in the evenings.

A well-planned personal and social education programme (PSE) at both key stages promotes the personal, social and moral development of all pupils throughout the school and prepares them for both further education and adult life. Health education, sex education, bullying and issues of drug misuse are covered well in the scheme, which builds progressively through the pupils' school career. The programme is generally taught well except in a small minority of lessons. The provision for careers education and guidance is good. At Key Stage 4, this includes the opportunity for two weeks' work experience at the end of Year 10 or the beginning of Year 11. The programme is extremely well supported by the careers service.

The school's provision for extra-curricular activities is good. A good range of sports activities is available and these are well supported by pupils and teachers. The school makes available a wide range of extra-curricular activities at lunchtimes and after school which enrich the curriculum. There are opportunities for pupils to participate in music, visits and exchanges with pupils in other countries. Pupils make good use of the library at lunchtimes, broadening the range of their educational experiences.

The curriculum broadly matches the requirements of pupils with special educational needs. Most of these pupils have specific needs in literacy. The support assistants organise an impressive range of extra-curricular clubs to enhance the curriculum. These cover important areas such as reading, spelling, mathematics, computing and handwriting. The identification of pupils with special educational needs is thoroughly planned. After detailed liaison with contributory primary schools, learning support staff conduct a range of appropriate tests, and class teachers contribute to reviews of performance. All statutory reviews are carried out appropriately. The standards achieved by all pupils on the register are monitored regularly.

Assessment

Assessment arrangements are good overall. At a senior level, the school gives much attention to assessment, both in considering the purposes of assessment and in its day to day practice. The work of the deputy headteacher in analysing assessment data is outstanding. Few schools are as well equipped to use assessment data in such a positive way. Information is shared and discussed with heads of subject areas, and, increasingly, with other teachers for monitoring pupils' progress. Both at subject and individual pupil level, underachievement can be identified, leading to strategies and targets for improvement. The potential benefits of the information are not yet being consistently used. However, the assessment group actively considers assessment issues, including the need to update the whole school-policy, and to tackle some remaining weaker areas of practice.

The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment are very good overall, although there are some weaknesses. Most subjects assess regularly and accurately, and keep full records. Systems for assessment and routine marking vary, but they are generally well understood by pupils and evenly carried out by teachers. Many exercise books have an explanation of the system pasted in them, and these are often displayed in classrooms. Examples of particularly good practice are found in science and geography where links between assessments and National Curriculum levels are regularly made throughout Key Stage 3. The target setting approach of the Certificate of Achievement in Key Stage 4 science, based on attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, is excellent

and a model of good practice. Although procedures are generally very good in most subjects and enable pupils' progress to be tracked, teachers do not regularly link grading systems with National Curriculum levels. Therefore, in many subjects, neither pupils nor parents are aware of actual attainment in relation to the standards expected nationally until the end of Key Stage 3. The information given in reports at Key Stage 3 is unhelpful because pupils' attainments are compared only to those of other pupils in this school. In a high attaining school, this can mean that achievement is not rated as high as it could be. The school's own system at Key Stage 4 is very much better in this respect. Assessment of ICT is also a weakness at Key Stage 3 because the information provided by subjects is based on tasks that are not always at an appropriate level to test pupils' capabilities properly. This can result in reporting inaccurate information to parents. In all other respects, statutory reporting of assessment results to parents is correctly undertaken.

The annual record of achievement is providing an increasingly useful way of reporting attainment and progress to parents, but the quality of useful information varies considerably from subject to subject, and, sometimes, from teacher to teacher within a subject. The best individual subject comments are excellent. These give, in considerable detail, a very clear assessment of what pupils can do, what their attainment is, and what they need to do to improve. Some others are very good or good, but there are some whose judgements on the year's work focus on pupils' attitudes, with little on subject specific attainment.

The use of assessment information to guide curriculum planning is good overall. At whole-school level, its use is excellent. On a day to day basis, it is less consistent. Although teachers know pupils well, few subjects cross-moderate work or keep samples of moderated work. In some subjects, such as science, very good target setting procedures are in place for individual pupils. However, although targets are an increasing feature of many lessons and units of work, they are not yet embedded into the individual work of all pupils in all subjects. The school has made good progress in assessment and recording in recent years. Its best practices are excellent. The school has the capacity to tackle the remaining known weaknesses and make even better use of assessment to raise standards further.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

The school makes good provision for the pupils' personal development. Provision for moral and social development is very good. Pupils gain positive values and self-confidence in a school community which promotes a sense of personal responsibility and attitudes of tolerance and respect for others. Since the last inspection a working group has produced an effective school policy for this area of school provision. Each subject area is required to identify in its planning how it can make a contribution. The policy is not yet monitored effectively, however, and some areas have still to make these opportunities explicit. As at the time of the last inspection, the school does not fully comply with the statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. Many assemblies are of high quality, but some do not contain an element of worship. On the days when pupils do not have an assembly, the time they spend with tutors is not always used productively.

Provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. In religious education (RE) pupils deepen their knowledge and understanding of the beliefs people hold and how these affect their lives. Art provides many opportunities to respond to the work of artists and contemplate and record the natural environment. In music pupils were observed listening with eyes closed to Indian meditational music. In English some pupils write sensitively in poetry about significant life experiences. Elsewhere in the curriculum, however, opportunities are missed. Most assemblies contain moments for reflection and prayer, to which pupils respond reverently.

The school has established a very strong moral code which is upheld consistently well. Expectations of staff as role models are very high. Staff deal with pupils fairly and respectfully and pupils respond well. In the personal and social education programme (PSE) in Key Stage 3 and the relationships and careers programme in Key Stage 4, pupils have many opportunities to examine ethical principles, express their feelings and learn to value themselves and others. Assemblies contain strong messages such as caring for others, and moral issues are examined effectively in many areas of the curriculum. In RE, for example, pupils examine issues concerned with lying, animal rights and land rights in the Middle East. Physical education teaches principles of fair play and accepting decisions. Science considers issues related to genetic engineering and drugs. In modern

languages pupils mark each other's work fairly and produce displays illustrating environmental concerns.

The school provides a rich variety of social experiences and many opportunities for pupils to exercise responsibility and develop an understanding of citizenship. These help promote the very good relationships between everyone, young and adult, throughout the school. The school council is conducted well and enables all pupils, through their representatives, to learn democratic principles. Pupils in Year 10 learn to take responsibility, both for themselves in the work experience programme, and for others in the very successful paired "buddy" scheme in which they help those in Year 7 with their reading. There is a Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and Year 11 pupils assist staff as prefects. The religious education department organises major fund-raising events for charity each year, recently for Guide Dogs for the Blind, Leukaemia Research and Macmillan Nurses. Links with local senior citizens are strong. In the curriculum, pupils discuss social issues such as healthy living in English, and infant mortality and population growth in geography. In physical education they judge each other's work, and in religious education at Key Stage 4 they discuss values affecting relationships. The PSE programme is taught more consistently well than at the last inspection although still ineffectively by some tutors. Essential areas of responsibility such as sex, health and drugs education and personal safety are covered. The school is right to plan to monitor this area more closely. Pupils' personal efforts are encouraged by the use of merit incentives and their achievements recognised in annual awards ceremonies for each year group. There are exchanges with schools in both France and Germany and field work visits in Britain. The programme of after-school activities is good, many involving members of the locality in sport, music, drama and dance. Assemblies, concerts and drama productions provide all pupils with opportunities to perform to wider audiences and they respond well.

Provision for cultural development is satisfactory. Both within and outside the curriculum, music, art, drama and dance provide good opportunities for aesthetic enrichment. Museum and theatre visits help pupils to become more aware of their own cultural heritage. The Internet provides access to a whole range of information on, for example, art and history. There has been some progress in providing more opportunities for pupils to appreciate other cultural traditions. In design technology, pupils study food from across the world and, in mathematics, different number systems. In English some texts deal with multicultural issues such as racism. Music and art draw from a broad range of ethnic culture, and extra-curricular modern dance includes participation in the local Global Rock project. However, the cultural diversity of Britain is not recognised or promoted sufficiently. In religious education pupils neither hear at first-hand from leaders of world faiths nor visit their places of worship. Little is done to foster pupils' awareness of the integration of other cultures into the British way of life or experiencing more directly the richness of cultural diversity or the issues arising from it. As at the last inspection, this is an area to which the school needs to give attention.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

The support and care provided by the school make a positive contribution towards effective learning. The school is maintaining the good support and guidance for all its pupils recognised in the last inspection. Both the faculty system and the tutorial system make a positive contribution. The school has addressed the health and safety key issue in the previous report. Parents are pleased with the level of care in the school, seeing it as a caring community where staff are approachable.

The procedures for monitoring pupils' progress and personal development are good. Regular and appropriate assessments are made of progress in all subjects except for ICT. These take place either every half term or at the end of each unit or series of units with appropriate records kept. Tutors regularly receive information on pupils' progress throughout the year based on these formal assessments or arising from teachers' or parental concerns at other times. Those giving serious concern are reviewed by senior pastoral staff. For pupils with special educational needs the monitoring of progress and the records kept are good. The procedures for monitoring personal development are less formal but the tutors and other staff have a good understanding of the needs of their pupils. Pupils know from their journals the core skills they require and are encouraged to work towards them. The merits/credits system rewards improvements in attitudes to work.

The procedures for promoting discipline and good behaviour are very good. The code of conduct in the pupil handbook encourages pupils to act with care and consideration for others. This is reinforced with displays in

the classrooms, presentations in assemblies and discussions in tutor periods. The pupils have a very good understanding of how to behave and this was confirmed by the comments of parents and from the observations of the team during the inspection. Pupils who have any sustained difficulties with behaviour are supported well through the school's pastoral system. Form tutors and heads of year have regular meetings to decide on the best way of providing support to particular pupils and receive excellent, though limited, support from the local education authority's pupil referral unit. Though bullying is not a problem, the school has introduced various initiatives to support Year 7 pupils. They had an anti-bullying workshop early in the year and the 'buddy' system ensures that they are able to obtain the support of pupils in Year 10 to deal with that and any other problems they may encounter.

Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are excellent. The tutors are responsible for checking the registers, with the senior teacher for pastoral matters having an overview of what is happening throughout the school. Parents generally notify the school of any absences and the school telephones home on the first day of absence if there is any concern. Parents who wish to take their child out of school to go on holiday complete a form and tutors will often discuss with the parents the effect on the child's education. Pupils are required to make up any work missed through their absence. Good attendance is encouraged by awarding certificates and the 'aiming higher' scheme. The education welfare officer is less actively involved than in the past. Registration takes place very promptly in all classes ensuring consistent punctuality.

There are appropriate contacts between the school and the feeder primary schools. A liaison group meets three times a year to discuss assessment, curriculum content and the transfer process. There are good induction arrangements for pupils when they start in Year 7. In Year 11, there is good preparation for the transfer to the next stage of education or when pupils start work. Very good careers advice is provided in Years 9, 10 and 11 with additional support from the PSE programme and from local colleges. Business people are due to hold practice interviews for Year 11 pupils later in the year.

Overall the school provides a safe and caring environment. The special needs co-ordinator is the designated person for child protection and has received appropriate training. She is currently redrafting the school's policy to follow the latest procedures of the local child protection committee and will ensure in the near future that all staff are provided with appropriate guidance. The school's matron is employed full time and the provision for first aid is generally satisfactory. The teachers generally ensure that pupils are made aware of health and safety issues during lessons such as science and physical education. The health and safety policy is satisfactory and there are procedures for hazards to be reported by staff and for governors to monitor the school regularly. However, the school does not carry out full risk assessments frequently enough.

The school has good links with external agencies for supporting pupils with special educational needs. These provide extra guidance for pupils with visual or hearing impairment for example. The input from the special needs support services provides very precise help using a 'Corrective Reading' programme. Pupils who are withdrawn from lessons onto this scheme are generally making substantial progress. The school does not benefit from the services of a designated educational psychologist, and this creates problems of continuity, when problems are passed from one psychologist to another. Two separate individual educational plans (IEP's) are created for pupils who have both behavioural problems and learning difficulties. This can lead to a lack of coherence in how teachers plan to meet the needs of these pupils.

Partnership with parents and the community

Parents say that they find it easy to approach the school. The quality of information provided by the school is satisfactory with attractive monthly newsletters about general matters such as a diary of events, sporting achievements and reminders about attendance and car parking. A large proportion of the parents take the opportunity to meet the subject teachers once a year and, on a separate occasion, receive the written report on progress. Year 7 parents have additional meetings both before their children start and a few weeks after, when they meet the tutors to discuss how they are settling in. The homework journal is an effective means of communication between teachers and parents. Other letters congratulate the pupils on receiving merits or credits and invite parents to the end of year award ceremonies. The quality of annual reports to parents varies

considerably. In some subjects there are clear comments on what the pupils have learnt and the skills they have acquired, but for other subjects, teachers' comments focus mainly on pupils' attitudes to work. Not all reports provide information on ICT as is legally required.

A large number parents (over 50 per cent) responded to the questionnaire with over 95 per cent supporting the school in each one of the categories listed. Parents are clearly very supportive of the school. Meetings with staff are well attended and a few parents help in school in the library, with food technology and hearing pupils read. The work of those parents is valued and appreciated by the school. The special needs co-ordinator holds meetings with parents of pupils with special educational needs to explain how they can help at home. Parents are appropriately involved in the setting and review of the individual education plans. Many parents support their own children through the school's 'paired reading' programme. The Friends of the School successfully hold both fund-raising and social activities and also help with meetings taking place in the school. Parents stated that they have a clear understanding of what is being taught and are generally satisfied with what their children are expected to do at home.

The school has good links with the community and has maintained the good relationships with outside agencies as featured in the previous inspection report. The pupils have many opportunities to meet with and work alongside people in the local area. These include building access ramps in the shopping area, working in a children's nursery and entertaining older people at productions and with the choir. Visits to theatres, museums and field trips together with exchanges abroad help to enhance the curriculum. Contacts with industry are good. The work experience programme for the older pupils is well organised; Year 9 pupils have an industry day; local companies supported the refurbishment of the technology area; business people give talks and will be holding mock interviews for Year 11 pupils. The various links established by the school, including sports matches with other schools, have a positive effect on raising standards and help pupils to gain an understanding of society at large.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

Leadership and management in the school are very good. A culture of high attainment and good social development has been engendered through the school, and this results in the good and very good standards being achieved by the pupils. The headteacher, though new to the post, is building successfully on the experience she has gained as the deputy headteacher for 9 years. She is bringing her own style of leadership and strategic thinking into play with positive effect. Whilst keeping standards high on the agenda, she is looking for ways to improve the management, the teaching and the curriculum of the school. The headteacher has recently reshaped the senior management team, re-allocating responsibilities so that she and the deputy headteacher have a more strategic role and the important but non-professional tasks, such as examinations officer and premises management, are in the hands of the newly appointed business manager. This is making the whole team a more efficient unit with whole-school issues very clearly delegated among them. There is an emphasis on improvement in all aspects of the school. Target setting is a well-established process throughout the school. All the issues raised at the last inspection have been addressed and in nearly every case there has been improvement. Management is aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and has procedures to review its work regularly. The school is particularly successful in building on pupils' attainment in the core subjects at Key Stage 2, which is about average, and raising this to well-above average levels at Key Stage 3. This has been done without sacrificing the personal development of pupils. This is due in no small measure to leadership at the top. Over the school as a whole, there is a positive working atmosphere, where all pupils are expected to aim high in work and behaviour. There are very good relationships between all pupils and between pupils and staff.

Improvement since the last inspection

Key Issue 1. *'Extend good teaching ¼ ¼ to those areas where there are weaknesses'*. Teaching is much improved and weaknesses are limited to very specific areas.

Key Issue 2. *'Broaden the curriculum by developing greater awareness of social and cultural diversity'*.

There has been considerable progress in social development but still some work to be done in extending pupils' awareness of cultural diversity.

Key Issue 3. *'Establish priorities within the school development plan ¼ with timescales and costings ¼.'* This has mostly been achieved although other aspects of planning now require improvement.

Key Issue 4. *'Evaluate the cost-effectiveness of implementing faculty and school plans ¼.'* This has been substantially achieved.

Key Issue 5. *'Address the health and safety issues raised during the inspection'.* Although the specific issues raised were addressed, there remain concerns about risk assessment.

Key Issue 6. *'Endeavour to meet the requirement for a daily act of collective worship for every pupil'.* This has yet to be fully realised.

Planning for improvement. The school development plan has many good features. The overall school priorities are clearly set out and the senior team has worked closely with all staff to identify them. There is a good focus on raising standards and it is clear, for example, that the school has ICT high on its agenda. These key priorities are properly reflected in the subject departmental plans. However, the whole-school attainment targets are not always reflected in clear departmental ones. Only the science department has specified its own aims for 68 per cent of pupils to reach GCSE grades A*-C as a way of helping the school to reach its target of 63 per cent of 5 grades A*-C. Whilst it is clear who will lead each initiative, it is not so clear how the progress made towards targets will be monitored and evaluated, either for the whole-school plan by governors or for departmental ones by senior managers. There are no obvious lines of accountability either to the senior team or to governors. However, in all other respects, the plan is good, having a direct link with the budget and aligning spending closely to educational priorities. There is good forward planning over three years allowing the school to consider options and alternatives, as well as targeting funds for specific planned developments.

Monitoring of teaching and the curriculum. There are good processes in the school by which the work of departments is reviewed thoroughly by senior staff working with heads of faculty. Meetings are held with them, lessons are seen and there is a process by which feedback is given to subject teams and to individual teachers. Plans for improvement are set out which heads of faculty are expected to implement and monitor. These reviews take place systematically in rotation but quite infrequently. Improvement to a large extent depends on the quality of leadership within the faculty as regular monitoring from the senior team is not rigorous enough. Thus, two full reviews of the modern languages faculty took place in 1992/3 and 1995/6, either side of the last inspection, but none have taken place since, although some weaknesses remain unresolved. The disparity in how attainment in ICT is assessed and reported is another example where external monitoring was not as effective as it could be. At present, monitoring at whole-school level is not always effective in ensuring that energy is focused on specific aspects where quality needs to be improved. Where faculty leadership is strong, however, as in the core subjects, monitoring is effective, and is directly related to the good progress being made.

Implementation of school aims. There are 15 overarching aims which are clearly expressed in the school prospectus and in the school development plan. These cover all the major aspects of school life, linking pupils' personal and academic development to how they relate to people, to the school and to the adult world of work and leisure. They are substantially reflected in the life of the school. Thus the aim *'to be able to view information critically, form reasoned views and express them orally or via the written word ¼'* is manifest in all work which pupils do. The school expresses another aim as *'achieve a positive attitude to life and develop self-discipline'*. There are many ways in which this report shows pupils to have such attitudes. Much the same can be said of all the aims. The school clearly lives out its values and to a great extent achieves its goals.

The role of governors. The governing body is very supportive. Governors are actively involved in the life of the school in a number of ways which provide them with a good overview of where the school stands. The chair of governors is very well informed on school and national issues, and has a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Many governors contribute specific skills to the governing body. These include financial and personnel management, health and safety and curriculum knowledge brought in from another school. Governors have themselves, on occasion, initiated discussion and action, and challenged the school's approaches, for example, on the matter of school dress. Currently the governors do not have a formal mechanism by which they are actively involved in preparing the school plan and monitoring the progress being made towards its targets. However, their role in supporting long-term financial and strategic planning is a

strength of the school.

Pupils with special educational needs. The learning support department is managed very effectively by an enlightened co-ordinator, with oversight by the deputy headteacher. She is well supported by a knowledgeable link governor, who reviews the work of the department regularly. A new structure for individual educational plans has been introduced but as yet, the aim to provide attainable, measurable targets in all curriculum areas has not been fully realised because many subject contributions have not been precise enough. Pupils with special educational needs are supported by a very strong team of support assistants who provide a secure but challenging environment for these pupils. Currently, the co-ordinator does not monitor teaching or resource provision throughout the school. This is holding up progress towards a coherent, whole-school framework.

Meeting statutory requirements. The school meets statutory requirements in nearly all areas, but not in the provision of daily collective act of worship.

The school benefits from very good leadership and is well placed to act on the key issues raised in this report.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

The school is well served by a sufficient number of qualified and experienced teachers to meet the needs of the curriculum in most subjects. The school has a large number of experienced teachers, over half of whom have over 20 years' experience and 70 per cent over 15 years' experience. There is now a good balance of age and experience. In science and physical education, there is a good blend of specific expertise in different aspects of each subject. The skills of the temporary and part-time teachers in design and technology, however, do not always meet the demands of the curriculum. Many teachers are following courses in their own time to make them competent to teach the aspects of ICT required by the school in their subject. The use of non-specialist teachers, for example, in mathematics, religious education and geography does not adversely affect the quality of teaching as it did at the last inspection. Some qualified teachers are used to support pupils with special educational needs, but some of their work could be done by competent classroom assistants.

There is a satisfactory match between the number, qualifications and experience of support staff to meet the needs of the curriculum. Pupils with special educational needs are served well by the specialist teachers in the learning support area and by classroom support staff. These influential assistants have undertaken an impressive range of courses to upgrade their already considerable expertise. Support from outside agencies is generally weak. The school makes very good use of the pupil referral unit to help pupils with behavioural difficulties. Support from the educational welfare officer and the educational psychologist is now very limited. Technical support in science, design technology, and art is satisfactory contributing to the quality of education provided in these subjects. Since the last inspection, the technical support provided for ICT has improved greatly. The librarian and the office and administrative staff all make strong contributions to their areas of the school. The newly appointed business manager is already making a positive impact enabling other senior staff to concentrate on the academic and pastoral work whilst she manages equally important tasks, such as examinations officer.

Arrangements for the professional development of all staff are satisfactory. The formal appraisal system is on hold while the school awaits national developments. However, most teachers are systematically observed teaching by their heads of faculty, although the demands may be so heavy that some seen by other senior staff not in their specialism. The professional needs of staff are identified through departmental development plans, which are linked appropriately to the school development plan. A staff development group manages this process but its work is not well established. It has still to devise an effective means of evaluating the usefulness of courses which teachers attend. Many staff claim not to know what training courses have been available. Clearly there is more to be done if the school is to be successful in its application for the Investors in People award. The school has a sound policy for the induction of newly qualified teachers and new staff. Newly qualified teachers are well supported at whole-school level and through the monitoring by heads of department.

The accommodation in most subject areas is satisfactory. Accommodation in mathematics, music, geography,

and ICT is good. Design and technology benefits from an expensive refurbishment for resistant materials but the room used for food is too small for the size of classes using it. Standards in design technology have risen recently but the reasons are not all to do with these refurbishments. The accommodation for physical education is still unsatisfactory and shows no improvement since the last inspection. This is the principal reason for the lack of a GCSE option in the subject. Whilst there are good grass playing areas, the all-weather surfaces are too small and the poorly maintained gymnasium continues to have a leaking roof. The outside and mobile classrooms are better maintained than at the time of the last inspection. The art accommodation is now satisfactory, although it still lacks storage space. The problems of storage identified in mathematics, science, and religious education have been dealt with.

Learning resources are at least satisfactory in all subjects. The system by which departments receive finances is good and allows them to substantiate bids for money for new developments, which a formula-based one alone did not. The ratio of pupils to computers has improved since the last inspection and is now in line with the national average. Presently the distribution of computers is uneven across the school and does not allow all subject areas to meet their specific commitment to ICT across the school as well as they might. Other improvements have been made since the last inspection and resources in music, design and technology and modern foreign languages are now sufficient for curriculum needs.

There is good overall provision of non-fiction books in the library although there are insufficient books to support the curriculum in history and geography. The English department makes good use of the library's books and computers. The school provides a good range of fiction and resource materials for pupils with special educational needs. Recent purchases have enhanced provision by extending the range of reading texts and computer software.

The efficiency of the school

The overall efficiency of the school is very good. The school receives an income per pupil that is broadly the same as the average of similar schools nationally. Whilst there are some variations from the average national patterns of expenditure, there are no marked differences, and there is a very clear link between the priorities of the school development plan, financial planning and each year's budget.

The quality of financial planning is very good. The senior management of the school has a view of the finances that go beyond the current year, and does not regard successive budgets as mere continuations of previous ones. Hence, the budget reflects educational priorities identified in the development plan, and, as far as possible, is led by curriculum needs. Governors take an informed view of budget monitoring, and discuss financial priorities within budget headings such as maintenance and repairs. However, they do not yet take a broad strategic view of the overall budget at the planning stage, relying mainly on advice from the headteacher and senior staff. The introduction of a bidding system for desirable expenditure within subject areas is adding more rigour to financial planning, especially the requirement to evaluate the effectiveness of the spending to determine its value for money.

The deployment of teaching and other staff is good. The proportion of the budget spent on teachers is below average, but is in line with the income designated for this by the local authority's formula. Proportionally more staffing is used at Key Stage 3 and less at Key Stage 4 than might be expected; however, the good progress made by pupils throughout the school suggests that spending patterns on teachers are entirely appropriate. The recent appointment of a business manager is beginning to make an important impact on overall efficiency by concentrating key non-teaching functions, including financial management and the leadership of non-teaching staff, into one post. The potential of this post in generating income and managing changes in funding arrangements as a result of government initiatives is considerable.

The school makes good use of its resources and accommodation, and, for example, its investment in computers reflects its priorities. Accommodation is also well used, though some tensions between the school and the local authority over responsibility for some aspects of the building is lowering the quality of the accommodation in some areas such as the gymnasium.

Financial control and routine administration are very good. Regular reports on spending are provided to governors, and suggestions for changes are explained and discussed. Funds allocated for specific purposes, such as special educational needs or staff development, are used appropriately.

Funding for pupils with special educational needs is managed prudently. Details of all costs are fully documented and deployment of resources is sound. The efficient use of classroom support is an appropriate priority in the current development plan and was an issue at the last inspection. When used purposefully by subject teachers, support assistants are extremely cost-effective, but this is not always the case.

The key issues in the previous report concerning efficient budgeting and evaluating cost-effectiveness have been successfully tackled. Overall, the school admits pupils with average attainments who go on to leave school with results that are above average at the end of Key Stage 4. The progress made by pupils of all abilities over time is good. The school has continued to raise expectations and achievements in both academic and personal fields. Behaviour and attendance are very good. The gains made in these many ways from an average income mean that the school gives good value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

In the national tests in 1999, 95 per cent of pupils reached Level 5 or above and 47 per cent gained a Level 6 or above. This is well above average compared nationally and very high compared to similar schools. Results are similar to those gained in mathematics and science. Over the last three years results have risen steadily with a significant rise in 1999. Inspection evidence confirms that attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is well above that found nationally.

High attaining pupils in Key Stage 3, of which there are many, write complex, imaginative narratives with excellent imagery, using a wide vocabulary. They express themselves confidently in front of an audience. They read widely and with independence. Average pupils write accurately. They are able to develop ideas in detail and to sustain their writing. They read widely with understanding and regularly read whole texts independently. They talk about their preferences with interest and in some detail. Pupils take on roles in drama very quickly with good awareness of tone and facial expression. Low attaining pupils spell reasonably well and write in paragraphs using appropriate vocabulary. Their expression is simple but communicates clearly. In drama, they can take on roles and sustain them, showing good control. They are competent readers and most pupils enjoy reading.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above average. In the GCSE English examinations in 1999, results are well above average, with 65 per cent of pupils gaining A to C and 100 per cent of pupils gaining A* to G grades. These results are well above average compared nationally and above those gained by similar schools. They are slightly below the standards gained in mathematics and science. Standards have risen over the last three years, including the proportion of grades A* and A. In the GCSE English literature examinations, which are taken by all pupils, standards are in line with those found nationally.*

High attaining pupils analyse 'Macbeth' in depth, using aptly chosen detail from the text to support their ideas. They make perceptive comparisons of 'The Red Room' and 'Farthing House', well rooted in the text and written in a mature, sophisticated style. They can use a declamatory style effectively in speeches against racism. They are articulate, thoughtful speakers. Average attaining pupils appreciate the content of Hughes' poem 'Hawk Roosting' and also the way the poet uses language for effect. They discuss sensibly the reasons for the behaviour of the characters in Taylor's novel 'Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry'. Their writing is accurately expressed using paragraphs appropriately and apt vocabulary. They extend their ideas successfully in speech and listen positively to teachers and each other. They moderate their own views after considering the opinions of others. Lower attaining pupils read with understanding and respond clearly to the differences between itinerant life and life in the city in, for example, a study of Steinbeck's 'Of Mice and Men'. However, they have weaknesses in spelling and their work lacks detail. They construct appropriate role plays, but their performances lack spontaneity. They can sustain their writing, especially given help.

At both key stages girls perform better than boys, but the difference is less than that found nationally. Pupils at both key stages draft and redraft work to improve it and regularly use computers to improve their presentation, and to research information.

Pupils make very good progress from their average attainment on entry to their final year at the school. They make very good progress at Key Stage 3. Their interest in reading develops and their ability to sustain independent reading improves. They gain confidence in speaking and listen more carefully. Writing becomes more complex and much more accurate and vocabulary improves. Pupils develop a keen awareness of how to write for a variety of audiences and purposes and adapt their style accordingly. At Key Stage 4, this improvement is sustained and good progress is made. The writing of lower attaining pupils develops in length. Spelling improves, as does their clarity of expression. Higher attaining pupils' independence of thought improves and they consciously craft their writing to create effect. All read progressively more challenging material.

There is no difference in the rate of progress of high, medium and low attaining pupils nor in that of boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs also make very good progress towards the targets set for them. There are many strategies in place which help to develop literacy. Paired reading, reading recovery and successmaker greatly enhance the progress of those pupils with literacy problems. In Year 9 drama lessons progress is hindered by shortness of time. Though teachers manage the time well, it is not possible to develop ideas sufficiently.

Pupils' response is a major contributor to their success. It is very good at Key Stage 3. It falls away slightly at Key Stage 4 when some pupils lose their enthusiasm, but is still good. Behaviour is very good. Pupils are pleasant, courteous and friendly. They show an interest in their work and are keen to improve their standards. They enjoy the lessons and volunteer their answers and ideas freely. They are supportive of each other and work very well together, exchanging opinions and developing ideas. The very full folders of work exemplify the commitment pupils put into their work. Pupils work independently and are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, for example in personal reading lessons, where Key Stage 3 pupils have a list of tasks to complete over the year, and in expressive arts where pupils are good at setting their own agenda for work and for homework, completing topics within a given time-scale.

Teaching is a strength of the department. It is very good. Teachers are committed and enthusiastic with very good subject knowledge. Where it is least effective, lessons have not been adapted sufficiently to meet the needs of lower attaining pupils. Where it is most effective the pace is brisk and challenging, stimulating work is set. For instance, Year 9 pupils made excellent progress in preparing to write a leaflet about health. They began by examining and reporting back on the techniques used in a leaflet against bull fighting, used role play on issues about health, and then conducted research to aid the development of their own leaflets. Assessment is very thorough, based on specific targets for each piece of work, with strengths and weaknesses clearly highlighted.

The department works well as a team and is supported by very good management. It is committed to raising standards. Good progress has been made since the previous report, and future developments are well planned.

Mathematics

In the 1999 National Curriculum tests, the proportion of pupils at the age of 14 achieving Levels 5 and above and Level 6 and above are well above national averages and well above average for schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. Girls and boys achieved similar results. Results in mathematics were similar to those in English and science. The average levels have improved in line with national averages over the three years 1996 to 1998.

In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C, and grades A*-G, is well above the national average as well as the average for similar schools. There is no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys. In 1998, pupils in mathematics achieved significantly better than in most other subjects. Pupils' average points score in GCSE mathematics has remained well above average for the last five years.

Attainment in the work seen by the end of Key Stage 3 is well above that expected for pupils of this age. Number skills are generally satisfactory and most pupils are able to handle numbers with confidence. Higher attaining pupils are able to apply mental processes confidently and understand the concepts of inequalities in algebra. Algebraic skills in Year 7 are weak but by the end of the key stage most pupils can write down and solve equations. Measuring skills are good and these are reflected in science where pupils use scales on thermometers accurately. Work in books shows the concepts of shape and space being developed well. Data handling skills are good; most pupils can identify a range of measures for discrete data. Problem solving skills are good; pupils in Year 9 are able to investigate problems, identify patterns, establish rules and predict, and test results.

The attainment of the majority of pupils by the end of Key Stage 4 is well above average. Number and algebraic skills are good for most pupils. Higher and average attaining pupils can demonstrate a range of algebraic skills in their work. For example, pupils in Year 10 confidently drew graphs of cubic equations. Lower attaining pupils are still having difficulty with fractions of quantities. Pupils' understanding of shape and space is good; higher attaining pupils can use vector notation and trigonometry and average attaining pupils have a good understanding of the ideas of similarity. In design and technology pupils demonstrate good understanding of three-dimensional shapes and perspective. Data handling skills are good and are making a positive contribution to investigational work in science and geography. Problem solving skills continue to be developed well with good work seen from pupils in GCSE coursework; pupils can now identify rules, use formulae, make predictions and test results. The highest attaining pupils can extend their investigations appropriately.

Progress is very good in Key Stage 3 with attainment rising from average levels on entry to the school to well above average levels by the end of Year 9. Good teaching, good programmes of study and very good assessment procedures have a significant impact on pupils' progress. Higher attaining pupils make very good progress with algebraic skills. Average attaining pupils make very good progress with number skills. Lower attaining pupils, are making very good progress; Year 8 pupils, for example, make very good progress with estimation skills and Year 7 pupils with the concepts of angles. Pupils with special educational needs are making very good progress as a result of the good in-class support that they receive and appropriate programmes of study.

Progress at Key Stage 4 is good. Well above average levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 are maintained at Key Stage 4. Good teaching by all teachers is having a significant impact on the standards achieved. Higher attaining pupils make very good progress with all aspects of the subject. They demonstrate confidence in handling numbers and algebra and they use trigonometry confidently. Average attaining pupils are making good progress with concepts of similar triangles in Year 10 and proportion in Year 11. In science pupils are able to recognise proportional changes. Lower attaining pupils make good progress during this key stage with all pupils gaining appropriate grades in GCSE examinations.

Pupils show very good attitudes to their learning. They behave very well in lessons and are interested in what they are doing. Concentration levels are good and they work productively on their tasks. Work in books is well presented with charts, diagrams and tables well drawn. Listening skills are good; pupils listen attentively when teachers are talking and when asked to answer, they speak clearly and are able to use appropriate mathematical language. Relationships in the classroom are good and these are helping to motivate the pupils. When required to work collaboratively, pupils share ideas well.

The quality of teaching is good overall and sometimes very good. The majority of teaching in individual lessons is good in both key stages. All teachers have good subject knowledge; they are able to explain concepts clearly. Lesson planning is effective with appropriate activities provided for practice and there are good links with previous and future lessons. Methods and organisation are very good in most lessons and meet the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs. In-class support is used well. Though some good teaching of spreadsheet skills was seen in lessons, the use of computers to support learning is not yet fully developed. Non-calculator activities are a regular feature of many lessons with a clear emphasis given to pupils on mental processes and using calculators appropriately. The management of pupils is very good. The pace of lessons is usually good and the time is used effectively. Teachers assess pupils work thoroughly, and mark pupils work well. Very good use is made of homework to consolidate and extend pupils' learning.

The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department is providing a clear direction for the subject and is committed to maintaining, and improving the high standards that already exist. Schemes of work are good and very good assessment procedures have been developed to monitor the progress of pupils. Development planning is good and the monitoring of teaching is effective. The budget has been effectively managed to provide good levels of resources. The subject is providing very good value for money. The high standards of attainment have been maintained since the last inspection. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is now good.

Science

Attainment in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 over the last three years has been well above the national average. When compared with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds the pupils' performance is also well above average. In the three years to 1998 there has been a slight rising trend, but in 1999 there was a significant increase to the highest ever score. Over the last three years the performance of both boys and girls was well above the national average. Attainment at GCSE in double award science has been consistently well above the national average for the last four years. When compared with schools from similar backgrounds GCSE results are well above average. Observations of lessons and the scrutiny of pupils' work confirm this high level of attainment in both key stages.

The highest attaining pupils in Year 9 have very good knowledge and understanding of reflection and refraction of light. Lower attaining pupils in Year 9 have a good understanding of the difference between elements and compounds, and about the three states of matter. Pupils' laboratory skills at end of Key Stage 3 are very good with pupils having a well above expected understanding of the principles of fair testing. Pupils from Year 11 irrespective of prior attainment apply their recently acquired knowledge well. For example middle attaining pupils were able to apply their knowledge about the penetrating power of the types of radiation to find out which type was given off by an unknown source. Highest attaining pupils in Year 11 are working well beyond GCSE levels and, for example, can apply their knowledge of bond energies to explain exothermic and endothermic changes. In their investigations at Key Stage 4, pupils show a good understanding of fair testing but are unsure how they can achieve the highest grades in investigation work. Pupils in both key stages have good factual recall and understanding of recent work.

Pupils make very good progress at Key Stage 3 and good progress at Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3 pupils enter the school with average attainment but reach well above national average levels by the end of Year 9. The number of pupils who obtain the highest GCSE grades is increasing each year. The department predicts further increases from the Year 11 cohort this year. The highest attaining pupils in Year 9 make very good progress when learning about how sound travels and how it is detected. Year 8 pupils make very good progress when carrying out chromatography investigations, and when finding out about the properties of acids. Pupils with special educational needs make as good progress as other lower attaining pupils. Teachers are aware of those pupils with individual education plans but their progress cannot be monitored fully because the subject specific targets are not clear enough.

Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. They show genuine interest in their work. Many pupils go to the local college to study the 'A' Level sciences and there obtain the highest grades. Behaviour is very good so that all pupils have every opportunity to learn. It is a significant reason why pupils achieve such high results. Pupils work well together when carrying out experiments, following instructions, and working safely. When moving around the laboratory to collect materials, and equipment pupils act responsibly. Pupils are given some opportunities to show initiative but overall, these are limited because of the directed approach to teaching.

The quality of teaching is a strength of this successful department. In just over half the lessons teaching is very good, with two-tenths good and nearly all the rest satisfactory. However, not all teachers are able to match the high standards achieved by the majority. In the small minority of lessons teaching is unsatisfactory because the work planned is not based securely enough on what the pupils know and understand; time is lost and progress is slow. There is no significant difference between the key stages in the quality of teaching. Teachers set high standards for discipline, which are achieved. Teachers have thorough subject knowledge and understanding as teachers mostly teach their specialist subject from Year 9 onwards. Expectations of pupils and students are appropriate. Lessons are carefully planned, often using a range of resources and methods. Teachers provide work suitable for different attaining pupils in their different groups but not for all pupils in the same group. The setting arrangements for the different groups are accurate but teachers do not always recognise that attainment of pupils in the same group varies and different tasks may be required. Regular topic tests take place, which help to raise the levels of pupils' recall and understanding. There is some inconsistency among the teachers with regard to the quality of marking and methods of assessment. Generally scientific supportive comments are not used sufficiently. The use of homework to support pupils' learning is very good. The teachers give up their time freely at lunchtimes and after school. On a rotating basis they supervise a laboratory at lunchtime so that pupils can work, receive help, and work on the computers. Teachers care about the attainment of all its pupils and are rewarded by the very good results.

Schemes of work are good ensuring that work builds systematically on what has been done before. These schemes include lesson plans but plans for biology lack the detail of others. Assessment procedures are very effective shown by the good agreement between teacher assessments and tests results. The excellent target setting approach used for Year 10 pupils is a good model for all departments in the school, as well as for other year groups in science. There is a good team spirit in this very well managed department. The department is well supported by a qualified, efficient technician team. Accommodation is just satisfactory with some laboratories in need of refurbishment. The unsatisfactory layout causes pupils to carry out experiments in restricted spaces. There are currently five fully-used laboratories for six teachers which means that one teacher has no permanent base and there is little time for technicians to service the rooms. The recent conversion of a preparation room for ICT is very positive. However, the department urgently requires more computers and data logging equipment if it is to carry out the measurement aspects of ICT efficiently. The department gives due attention to health and safety and currently no problems exist.

The department made many improvements since the last inspection. Attainment is now better at the end of both key stages; all health and safety regulations are now met; and lack of storage space is no longer a problem.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Information and communication technology (ICT)

By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is below average in relation to standards expected nationally. Although good standards of work were seen in individual lessons, there is no evidence of a consistency of such attainment for all pupils. Thus, high standards of attainment were seen in a Year 7 ICT lesson and well-above average standards in a Year 7 mathematics lesson. When standards are high, the planning meets the individual needs of pupils. The pupils are combining and organising information at a sophisticated level. During discussion they are able to interpret their findings and question whether they made sense. More able pupils are able to explain the changing variables within database and spreadsheet designs. Pupils use ICT to achieve their learning objectives in various subjects. For example, in a Year 9 geography lesson, pupils used the Internet to interpret the physical and human activities from satellite pictures about the rain forests of South America. A special educational needs group in Year 9 presented an article as the front page of a newspaper. With help and support from their teacher, they were able to set out the columns, import pictures and enter text. However, these examples of good practice come from isolated lessons and such work is not consistently available to all pupils through the key stage.

Although all pupils can receive non-GCSE accreditation in ICT, their attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is well below average in relation to national standards. There is no clear evidence for all pupils that expected levels are being achieved. No provision is made for pupils to follow a course of study towards GCSE.

Pupils' progress in Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory due to the lack of clear structures. Pupils in Year 7 and Year 9 have a limited time allocated for this subject but no time is allowed in Year 8. Further access to the programmes of study is gained through activities within other subjects, but such access is insufficient to ensure that all pupils make the appropriate progress. Assessments carried out by departments, which provide the evidence in relation to standards and the progress made throughout the key stage, vary so much that their validity is unreliable. The school's end of key stage assessment in 1999 shows pupils to be average in relation to national standards and whilst there is evidence in Year 7 of very high attainment, departmental assessments vary from very high to very low standards.

Progress in Key Stage 4 is poor. Pupils are unaware of what is expected of them in relation to their programmes of study. Many pupils are not aware that accreditation units exist and that certificates in ICT could be achieved through cross-curricular studies. Examples of assessed projects in Year 10 show low and very low standards. Whilst pupils in a Year 11 business studies lesson used ICT effectively for word-processing, spreadsheets and graphics, most pupils used computers mainly to make neat copies of their work and attainment is low in relation to national standards.

Pupils clearly enjoy their ICT lessons in Key Stage 3. Response is always good and pupils remain focused on their work. Pupils using ICT equipment do so with respect. They recognise the value of equipment and treat it accordingly. The lunchtime ICT club is oversubscribed and Key Stage 3 pupils locate and use information from electronic sources including CD Roms and the Internet or continue with their lesson. No Key Stage 4 pupils, however, were seen using the facility.

No teaching was seen at Key Stage 4. Teaching in 5 lessons at Key Stage 3 was never less than satisfactory and in one instance, was excellent. In this lesson, pupils were well taught and effectively managed. As a result, they made excellent progress during the lesson becoming increasingly autonomous and solving problems independently. When teachers are using ICT at Key Stage 3 to support their teaching, pupils learning productively and at a fast rate.

The school has an emerging and positive attitude in relation to the development of ICT and prospects for the future are good. However, the current schemes of work for Key Stage 3 do not provide sufficient planned progress across the key stage. Targets and assessment strategies are too broad and as a result assessment the full range of the curriculum is insufficiently focused to provide a true picture of pupils' capabilities. Opportunities are lost to determine what pupils know, understand and can do and in their abilities to apply ICT skills in other subjects.

Religious education

By the end of both key stages, the attainment of pupils is broadly in line with standards expected in the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Pupils have a sound understanding of the religions studied, with an appropriate emphasis on Christianity. They understand ways in which religious beliefs impact on people's lives and, at Key Stage 4 in particular, are good at discussing social and moral issues. However, in Years 9, 10 and 11 there is insufficient time for pupils to explore fully where and how religious influences and beliefs relate to the topics they discuss.

All pupils, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress through both key stages. In all lessons, knowledge is consolidated and built on. Pupils develop skills in research and in discussion.

By the end of Key Stage 3, the majority of pupils have a sound knowledge of Christianity and what Christians believe. They understand the meaning of symbols such as the cross. Higher attaining pupils give good explanations for the importance of Easter and know why Jesus' death and resurrection are important to believers. Other pupils know the basic facts without this deeper understanding. Pupils know the functions of different parts of a church, and can relate these, for example, to rites such as infant and adult baptism. Most Year 9 pupils know about the recent history of the Jews including the holocaust and the establishment of the state of Israel. Higher attaining pupils recognise why Jews are passionate about their own land, being able to relate this to promises made by God to their forefathers. Others do not see this connection without prompting. Pupils understand what life in a Kibbutz can be like and compare this to their own lifestyles. Some written work about this, and other Jewish topics, show good expression and, in a few cases, imaginative uses of ICT images to make an impact.

By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils have made satisfactory progress overall but good progress in their ability to explore issues by discussion and debate. In one Year 11 lesson, pupils made some sensitive comments when discussing abortion; in another, pupils working in groups, explored the idea of the existence of God with rational arguments as well as personal conviction. In a Year 10 lesson of higher attaining pupils, a vigorous formal debate was conducted on capital punishment. Many strongly held views were expressed with emotional force, both for and against it. In the majority of cases, the religious dimension was not explored fully enough.

Pupils have good attitudes to the subject. They behave well and respond positively to teachers' questions, particularly at Key Stage 3. Sometimes, pupils ask their own questions for clarification or put their own ideas forward. They work well in groups and participate actively in discussion when this stimulates their interest. In

most lessons, there is a purposeful atmosphere. The quality of much of the homework is good, showing that pupils take a pride in their work.

Overall, teaching is satisfactory. Teaching is good in about half the lessons seen, the majority of these at Key Stage 3, and satisfactory in the rest. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. In the best lessons, teachers use questioning to good effect, assessing pupils' past knowledge as a basis for moving on. Although there is only one specialist in the department, teachers usually have sufficient knowledge to meet the needs of the curriculum. Many non-specialists make good use of their other specialist knowledge to enliven their teaching. Most lessons have learning targets which are clearly explained to the pupils. Teachers insist on pupils using the correct religious language when writing or speaking. Lessons are well planned and managed. Homework is often interesting, requiring research or reading. At the start of one Year 9 lesson, the teacher gave pupils a very good evaluation of their homework so that they knew what was expected and how they could improve. The principal weakness in teaching is that not enough time is given, or is available in Years 9 to 11, for the religious dimensions of social and moral issues to be explored fully.

The subject leader has made a number of improvements since she joined the school. Resources are now satisfactory and include a good range of artefacts. There is now a scheme of work, absent at the last inspection. The subject is well-thought of and is a focus of effective charitable fund-raising in the school. However, the range of book resources is limited and there is too much reliance on one or two texts. Also, the scheme of work is not sufficiently linked to the attainment targets of the Agreed Syllabus, particularly at Key Stage 3. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. At present, there is not enough time given to the subject in Years 9, 10 and 11 to provide fully for the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus.

Art

Pupils make very good progress in Key Stage 3, and attainment by the end of the key stage is above the standard expected nationally. This does not correlate with the school's own end of key stage statements of attainment in 1999 which indicate that the pupils achieve below the national expectation. There is no evidence to support this low grading.

In all lessons in Key Stage 3, the pupils use the appropriate artistic vocabulary with understanding and can recall important facts about the artists they have studied, such as Klimt and Kandinsky. By the end of the key stage they have quite sophisticated paint handling skills and an appreciation of shade, tone, and colour mixing. They have built up good drawing skills with accurate observation of texture, shape and proportion. Year 9 pupils use these well in drawing portraits based, for example, on the Cubist style of Picasso. Pupils can look at the work of other portrait painters from Rembrandt to modern artists, and date them according to the style used. They have also worked in a variety of media and some craft skills.

GCSE results in 1999, with 75 per cent gaining grades A*-C's, were well above the national average of 66 per cent and are also higher than the school's target for this year. Inspection evidence shows attainment to be above the national average. There is a lot of competition at the option choice stage and art, although a successful and popular subject, does not have a huge take-up and is to an extent in competition with expressive arts for candidate numbers.

Progress is good at Key Stage 4. The pupils use their own research skills and a quite sophisticated level of presentation which incorporates ICT word-processing. They can draw with accuracy, proportion, an appreciation of tone, light and shade and apply these skills in a variety of media, including lino printing, sculpture and silk painting. They search critical studies of the work of other artists such as William Morris and Georgia O'Keefe, and their findings become part of the course work for GCSE studies. They learn to evaluate and modify their own work and constantly strive for more originality.

The quality of teaching is very good at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4, and never less than satisfactory. Teachers have a secure knowledge of their subject and the pupils are guided to independent and creative work.

The atmosphere in the classrooms is enthusiastic, positive and workman-like and the students are encouraged to explore their full potential with well-planned tasks, varied media, stimulating resources and a facility open to them well beyond minimum lesson time. Teachers encourage pupils to write or speak about their work using the correct vocabulary. They look at the work of other artists and cultures and can talk about these with confidence. These skills are reinforced by the effective use made of ICT by incorporating suitable tasks such as presentation and research skills into the curriculum.

This is a well led department with thoroughly planned work and a vitality which extends well beyond the art rooms to the excellent corridor displays around this large school. Both classrooms have had some improvements to them since the last inspection but one still does not have adequate provision for the subject or for the size of classes.

Design and technology

By the end of Key Stage 3, the attainment of pupils is in line with expected national standards. A group of lower attaining pupils in Year 7 is able to demonstrate skill at presenting a plan drawing, and in labelling the plan with key words. However, a similar group in Year 9 is not able to demonstrate such attainment, work being very superficial due to a lack of monitoring by the teacher. A Year 8 group show average attainment in their ability to measure, mark out and cut material in order to joint accurately two pieces of wood.

By the end of Key Stage 4 attainment in design and technology is well above the national average. The number of pupils who achieved A* - C grades in the 1998 examination was 51% against a national average of 48%. In 1999 this rose significantly to 66%. These levels of attainment are confirmed by evidence from lessons and from pupils' work.

Higher attaining pupils at Key Stage 4 working with resistant materials, use a full range of tools and processes for the manufacture of their chosen design. They design products, which demonstrate a spatial awareness of complex shapes and designs and require a very high degree of accuracy in construction. A lower attaining group in Year 11, working hard and following clear guidelines, can develop a range of ideas. They use mathematics to calculate ingredients and ICT skills to display their work through text, pictures and charts. They are able to discuss the reasons for their choice of ingredients for a recipe.

The progress of pupils in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. A Year 8 class used their knowledge of nets in order to design a model. They demonstrate knowledge of three-dimensional drawing and the use of colour to enhance their design ideas. However where progress in lessons is unsatisfactory, for example in a Year 9 group, there was a lack of information to help the pupils understand what was required of them. Progress by the end of Key Stage 4 is very good. A group of higher attaining pupils have made very good progress in the development of their chosen design for their GCSE major project. Very good guidance by the teacher ensures that they are provided with information, which fully extends them. A lower attaining group have made good progress in the development of their portfolios. The contents show a clear understanding of the design process with the results from investigation and analysis clearly documented through graphs and spider charts.

At both key stages pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to the subject. They enjoy the practical activities and respond to the challenges of designing and then making. In a minority of lessons, some pupils lose interest through a lack of challenge, with insufficient feedback coming from the teacher.

Teaching overall is satisfactory but the quality ranged from unsatisfactory to very good. When teaching is good or very good, learning targets are clearly stated. Planning for the lesson identifies the key points and these are carefully taught to the pupils either through practical activities, teacher demonstration or evaluation and discussion groups. Activities are varied, expectations are high and time is used to maximum effect. When teaching is unsatisfactory it is either because the tasks set lack challenge and rigour, or there unsatisfactory planning to match the needs of the pupils based on an assessment of their knowledge and progress to date. This is mainly due to a lack of monitoring and induction of the work of temporary or part-time teachers. This means that pupils have insufficient feedback for them to work towards higher levels of attainment. Whilst this is a short-term measure due to staff illness, it is effecting the current attainment and progress of a significant number of pupils.

The previous inspection identified an over emphasis on writing and designing. This has been resolved and pupils are now making good and very good progress in their practical skills. Behaviour is no longer impeding progress and the pupils' response to their learning is now good. Expectations are now high and most tasks, with the exception of those mentioned above, provide sufficient challenge to enable pupils to achieve high levels of attainment. The internal fabric of the rooms have been improved, but not enough time is given to risk assessment on a day to day basis in the light of the large groups working in the rooms and the tasks they are to perform.

Geography

Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1998 and 1999 show results well above the national average for both boys and girls. GCSE results in 1998 were significantly above the national average for all pupils, especially for boys. 1999 results are lower overall and are in line with the national average; however, pupils' relative performance in geography is similar to their other subjects. Although in the 1999 GCSE results, girls did better than boys, there are no marked differences between the attainment of boys and girls either in examinations and assessments or in work seen during the inspection.

In work seen by the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is above the standard expected nationally. Basic map skills are generally secure so that, for example, Year 7 pupils can describe features that would be seen on a journey between places from Ordnance Survey maps. Higher attaining pupils have a good understanding of how different weathering processes can break up rocks, whilst pupils with special educational needs show some understanding of key words and manage to put them correctly into a number of categories. Literacy standards are high from most pupils across a wide range of styles. Good examples include essays comparing farming on a transect from the west of the British Isles to the east coast, letters to an imaginary farming publication from a farmer and a conservationist about hedgerows, leaflets about volcanoes, and posters of various sorts. Most pupils cope with the mathematical requirements of the subject for graphs, measurements and statistical data. Pupils in one higher ability group were able to log on and search the Internet for satellite images, and most were able to understand the nature of forest clearances in the Amazon Rain Forest, and to offer explanations for the patterns they observed.

In work seen by the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is also above expected standards. Again, write in a range of styles, including, for example, writing from the perspectives of different people in the Netherlands about land reclamation. Whilst the quality varies, most pupils are able to recognise the different reactions of different people. Most pupils can also summarise key points through clear diagrams. Higher attaining pupils show detailed understanding of population trends worldwide. Coursework, based on fieldwork at Malham and a case study of the Holderness coast, shows good understanding by most pupils of the advantages and disadvantages of tourism in areas of outstanding beauty, and clear analysis of possible management strategies on the coast. Sketches and annotated photographs are particular strengths from higher attaining pupils, though the methods used, and the content and interpretation showed, by lower attaining pupils are much weaker.

Progress at both key stages is good. It is never less than satisfactory, and, occasionally at Key Stage 4, can be very good. Pupils systematically develop and build on their skills and knowledge. The development of mapping skills and the interpretation of maps continue throughout Key Stage 3 for most pupils. There was good progress in one lesson about rain forests because the high quality task sheet had contrasting and progressively more challenging tasks. In another lesson on the same topic, good progress in the use of satellite images on computer screens enabled pupils to recognise land clearance areas in the rain forest and increase their geographical understanding of what was happening. In a class in which most pupils had special educational needs, there was particularly good progress as the very good teaching reinforced the key ideas of the lesson in three different and interesting ways. However, in another lesson, an overlong introduction from the teacher did not involve all pupils actively; this, and a lack of challenge, meant that some higher attaining pupils coasted, and others found the work easy. In one class at Key Stage 4, the good pace of the lesson, and thorough methodical teaching over time, enabled very good progress to take place. Lower attaining pupils are showing a developing level of understanding, especially through maps and diagrams. With another class, the intrinsic interest of the topic and the logical progression of the lesson led to good progress in understanding tourism issues in Kenya.

The pupils' responses to teaching are good at both key stages. In some lessons they are satisfactory, and in some they are very good. Although overall behaviour is good, in some lessons pupils do not always give full attention to the teacher or the reading. At Key Stage 4, there is sometimes a lack of urgency as pupils drift through the tasks; whilst there is a pleasant atmosphere, there is not a strong work ethic. Generally, Key Stage 4 pupils are relatively passive, though most are interested and want to do well. By contrast, in some Key Stage 3 lessons, there is much enthusiasm as pupils have opportunities to show what they know and can do, and to experience success.

Teaching is good overall. None is unsatisfactory, and teaching is occasionally very good at both key stages.

Very good teacher knowledge of the subject is a feature of all lessons, and the insistence on using correct geographical terms is an indication of the generally high expectations of teachers. Marking is variable, but, where it is thorough, it is helping pupils to improve their work. In some lessons, very good use is made of resources, including high quality maps. In one Key Stage 3 lesson, the teacher made good use of computers to achieve the lesson's objectives, successfully explaining many technical details, including the differences between the orbits of two satellites. One very good Key Stage 3 lesson featured lively, imaginative teaching with fast pace and very high expectations; it involved pupils in a variety of practical activities, leading to much enjoyment as well as learning. The very good use of key words was emphasised through an initial brainstorming exercise, a word game, and then a matching exercise using a specially prepared sheet which gave nearly all pupils opportunities for success. A very good Key Stage 4 lesson was well planned and was challenging. Aims and targets were shared with pupils, and successfully linked with previous work in a skilful recap involving high quality questioning. The lesson was carefully broken up into units which maintained pace as one activity led smoothly to the next. Sometimes, less successful teaching lacks crispness because of imprecise timing, which leads to a lack of urgency by some pupils. Where there are insufficient checks to ensure that pupils are participating and learning as expected, the impact of the teaching is reduced. At times, though there is sound pace with a range of activities and resources, teaching is less successful because it does not progressively build up pupils' knowledge and understanding, and lacks sparkle and imagination.

Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The scheme of work and assessment arrangements are now very good; fieldwork and the use of computers to promote geographical understanding are now considerable strengths. The head of subject provides good clear direction for the subject, enthusiastically keeping up to date with recent developments in the subject to enhance teaching. With attention to strategies to ensure greater consistencies in the quality of teaching and to enhancing the range of activities that better match the needs of pupils of differing abilities, there is potential for further development.

History

Since the last inspection pupils' attainment at both key stages has remained consistently above the standard expected nationally. In the 1999 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3, 78 per cent of pupils achieved Level 5 and above compared to 60 per cent nationally. In the present Year 9 cohort, inspection evidence shows pupils attain above, rather than well above, standards expected nationally. In Year 9, a majority of pupils can select and organise information to produce structured work and about a third of pupils analyse causation in comparing parallel developments in the Industrial Revolution. Level 7 is rightly awarded to a small minority of pupils who explain how and why different historical interpretations have been produced, using their own knowledge to evaluate extracts for example, from Mrs Gaskell and Friedrich Engels. In 1999 at GCSE 68 per cent of pupils achieved A-C grades, compared with the national average of 61 per cent. Over the last four years girls have performed slightly better than boys. Work of this standard was seen during the inspection. By Year 11 pupils can categorise factors on the society and culture of the Plains Indians and produce thorough research on the local history of Healing church and village.*

Pupils make good progress in both key stages. Those pupils with special educational needs make comparable progress. In Year 7 pupils develop investigative and recording skills in a series of problem solving tasks. During Key Stage 3 they extend both their historical vocabulary and their written explanations, for example, on life in the Iron Age or on canal building. They become more adept at extracting information from different sources and in making comparisons. This was seen in a Year 9 lesson on public health in nineteenth century British cities. During Key Stage 4 pupils develop their ability to analyse, or even challenge hypotheses; for instance a Year 10 class compared Greek and Roman attitudes to medicine in terms of aesthetic versus practical factors, while another argued the extent to which wealth might provide better health in Roman times. In Year 11 pupils learn and practise examination techniques.

Pupils are very well behaved and attentive in lessons. They both answer and ask questions. Higher attaining pupils often do more homework than is requested. Pupils collaborate well in groups. Pupils in a Year 7 lesson confidently enacted a Roman testudo and Year 10 pupils showed friendly co-operation in a game on Roman medicine.

Teaching overall is good. In all lessons seen teaching is satisfactory or better and in nearly three-quarters of lessons it is good and occasionally very good. Teachers' knowledge is usually thorough and wide ranging enough to include relevant analogies and anecdotes. Teachers challenge pupils by a brisk pace, an elaborated vocabulary such as 'monopoly' and 'prerogative' in a Year 8 lesson, and penetrating questions. A Year 9 class studying nineteenth century public health was asked 'What was good about cholera?' in order to stimulate pupils' recognition of government intervention. The last inspection noted that more varied work was needed for pupils of different abilities. This has in part been addressed by provision of both simpler and more demanding materials, but these are not yet appropriately deployed. Teachers use a wide variety of teaching methods including lively exposition, games, role play and the examination of artefacts. Videos were well integrated into several lessons seen; an extract from the film 'A Man called Horse' effectively illustrated the initiation ceremony to the Sioux tribe. The excellent schemes of work for the use of ICT, including a task in which pupils compare three different web site interpretations of Henry VIII, are impaired by problems of access to computers. Class management comes naturally from the bold and varied teaching which hold pupils' attention. All pupils in Years 7 to 10 benefit from external visits, such as that of Year 7 to Helmsley Castle and Rievaulx Abbey. Although teachers regularly mark pupils' work, they rarely comment on factual omissions or faulty argument. Spelling is only occasionally corrected so that errors recur. Teachers do not use National Curriculum levels during Key Stage 3, nor are pupils sufficiently aware of them. Homework usually complements and extends class work as in an analytical exercise on the Armada for Year 8.

The last inspection commented that forms of assessment lacked sophistication. Although assessment records are now more thorough, the lack of an exemplar portfolio of pupils' work for each of the National Curriculum key elements means that there is inconsistency in end of Year 9 assessments.

The department is well led and achieves a clear identity within the humanities faculty. The accommodation is not adjacent which constrains the sharing of equipment. Partly as a result of this, the television screen is too small for effective class use.

Modern foreign languages

Attainment at Key Stage 3 is in line with standards expected nationally. This is well below the level at which Year 9 pupils have been assessed by teachers over the last three years. Standards are above average in listening. Most pupils at least understand instructions and requests promptly. High attaining pupils deduce broad meaning from detail in recorded dialogues. Standards of writing are average, with both strengths and weaknesses. Pupils overall are competent in a range of simple structures. Many know basic rules of grammar and can identify patterns. The highest attaining pupils are good at applying these in French, using a range of tenses and other simple structures independently, and are of above average standard, on course for National Curriculum Level 5 and above by the end of the key stage. In German, they show similar flair, writing very well, although not with a wide enough range of structure for standards to be above average. They use word-processing to present extended and illustrated accounts of their daily routine. This work is to be displayed in the Millennium Dome. In French not enough pupils of higher and average attainment from Years 8 and 9 can create simple paragraphs for themselves. Reading and speaking are below average. Pupils understand words when they are part of the current topic, but in general are not good at seeing the broader meaning. Speaking is undeveloped. Many pupils can perform simple dialogues, usually with the support of text, but do not memorise or recall easily. Few pupils are confident speakers without text. Lower attaining pupils respond to questions using simple sentences or phrases. Girls' standards are higher than boys', although the gap is narrower in German.

At Key Stage 4 standards in GCSE have been similar to the national averages in 1998 and 1999. However, standards in French have been well below average for a number of years. Although standards have improved faster than the national rate in the last four years to just below the national average in 1999, they are still not high enough in comparison with other subjects in the school. Standards in German have improved over time to just above average levels, having been high in some years. This improvement is significant because pupils of a much broader range of prior attainment now study German. Girls attain better than boys to a greater extent than they do nationally, although the difference is less marked in German. In lessons, standards by the end of Key Stage 4 remain at average levels overall. In the sample of work in both languages, including coursework,

the very highest attaining pupils are secure and confident, on course for grades A*/A. They adapt prior learning and write independently using a range of often complex structures and tenses, as, for example, in colourful, detailed accounts of their home town. Below the top teaching sets, particularly in French, there is still a significant number of average and higher attaining pupils with undeveloped skills. Some can draw little on memorised language structures. However, GCSE coursework is helping to build their competence. Many pupils can talk about themselves in prepared presentations, and lower attaining pupils can use simple sentences to respond to questions in role play.

Pupils make satisfactory progress in both languages through both key stages. In Key Stage 3, the very highest attaining pupils, along with a few pupils with special educational needs and other lower attaining pupils, progress well. Some of these, for example, progress from writing words to sentences during Year 8. The very best pupils progress well in German on fewer lessons than in French, but do not progress beyond the average of Level 4. Some progress is made during individual lessons with average and lower attaining pupils because their short-term recall is enough to consolidate current learning in listening and speaking. They are not, however, able to reproduce their skills and knowledge regularly thereafter. Higher attaining pupils make appropriate progress in all skills when they are provided with tasks which really challenge their creative skills. Pupils with special educational needs do not progress well over Key Stage 3 because they are required to study both languages. Some teaching is ineffective because tasks are not structured in manageable steps for these pupils.

Progress accelerates a little in Key Stage 4 and is satisfactory overall. Standards in Year 10 French and German upper sets improve in writing and speaking at higher levels. There is improved progress across all abilities in both languages because GCSE coursework requires preparation and redrafting. However, progress overall is not good enough. Whilst the very highest attaining pupils make good progress, other upper band pupils in general do not make the progress they should in either language at either key stage because not enough is expected of them. There is insufficient development of free reading skills. As in Key Stage 3, pupils' recall over a period of time is not as good as it should be because there is ineffective consolidation of skills and knowledge.

Attitudes are satisfactory. The highest attaining pupils and many others, including some with special educational needs, are really enthusiastic. In the middle and lower ranges of attainment, however, the level of interest is not so high, although pupils conform. In most classes they listen and respond according to agreed rules, concentrating well in practice drills. They usually present their work with pride and care. Behaviour is good or very good, sometimes even when teaching is unsatisfactory. Pupils respond well when given opportunities to work in pairs. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 are beginning to use dictionaries independently, and occasionally use the spoken language spontaneously. The highest attaining pupils in top sets in Key Stage 4 develop well as independent linguists, but below these groups, standards are not higher because too many pupils expect to work from prompts. There are too few pupils who understand that successful learning of languages depends on an enjoyment of speaking. Where attitudes are unsatisfactory, poor attitudes from earlier years affect the interest and response of a minority of boys in Key Stage 4. Many pupils, including some of the higher attaining ones, do not take seriously enough the demands of speaking accurately and from memory.

Teaching has improved since the last inspection. However, although satisfactory overall, and sometimes good, in a fifth of lessons teaching is unsatisfactory. Broadly, teaching is more consistently sound in German and better in the highest sets than in others. Where it is good, for example, in Key Stage 3 German and sometimes in support groups, tasks are matched very well to pupils' attainment enabling pupils to learn in achievable steps. Some open-ended tasks challenge higher attaining pupils appropriately to work from memory or to write extensively. Expectations of response and behaviour are high in most classes, and discipline is almost always good. Lessons are generally prepared well, and organised efficiently, but objectives are too often expressed in terms of what pupils will do rather than what they will learn. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory when appropriate questioning and activities are supplemented by additional classroom support. Resources are used well. The overhead projector is used very well when it promotes learning without any reference to text. There is good practice in raising pupils' awareness of National Curriculum levels and developing self-assessment early in Key Stage 3.

The main reason why teaching is not better is that expectations of most pupils are not high enough, especially in Key Stage 3. Teachers do not use their command of language effectively enough and, on occasion,

uncertainty in the foreign language slows the pace of lessons and reduces the challenge to pupils. Often, English is used too much. Even when teaching has good features, tasks are not structured well enough to give pupils appropriate models which they can use for practising their skills. Sometimes, the degree of challenge is not appropriate for the class in question. For example, higher attaining pupils in both languages in Key Stage 4 are told unnecessarily that exercises are difficult, or alternatively are allowed to use books rather than work from memory. Text is often introduced too early, which inhibits the consolidation of oral skills. Marking is inconsistent. Letter grades sometimes indicate effort rather than the expected level of attainment, and pupils do not generally know from the comments made what they should do to improve.

Leadership is satisfactory. Since the last report successful steps have been taken to raise standards in French. Data from assessments and examinations are being used to improve teaching and learning. There are, however, weaknesses which still need attention. Monitoring of teaching both within the faculty and by senior management is inadequate, lacking both rigour and frequency. Schemes of work are now in place, but with limitations. Extension activities in French are unchallenging and, at Key Stage 3, planning for higher attaining pupils in German does not allow them to progress beyond average levels. Judgement of National Curriculum levels in Key Stage 3 has been inaccurate and has overestimated pupils' attainment. The work required of pupils with special educational needs in two modern languages in Key Stage 3 is too demanding and inappropriate.

The faculty has identified other appropriate areas for improvement. Amongst these the most important are to continue to raise standards in French at Key Stage 4 to appropriate levels and to monitor more effectively the progress of pupils below the highest levels of attainment. Plans to extend and develop both the use of ICT and independent reading are integral to future progress.

Music

Although a number of pupils have opted for GCSE in recent years, this has been insufficient to make teaching groups viable. Some Key Stage 4 pupils receive music lessons leading to GCSE at the local sixth form college.

The attainment of pupils by the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with the standards expected nationally. The majority of pupils are able to compose melodies, using electronic keyboards, and some are able to perform these with a simple chordal accompaniment. Pupils are able to listen critically to their own performances as well as those of their peers. No singing activities were observed in Year 9 lessons.

The progress of the majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, is generally satisfactory both in lessons and over the key stage, even though in some lessons there were isolated examples of a very few pupils making unsatisfactory progress. However, many pupils are able to refine and improve their compositions in lessons. Pupils sing and perform in both Year 7 and 8 lessons and Year 8 pupils compose short melodies in different styles such as Indian Raga.

Pupils have very positive attitudes to music and many become involved in a range of extra-curricular activities. Between 5 and 6 per cent of pupils have weekly instrumental music lessons given by visiting teachers. All pupils, who are well-behaved in lessons, work collaboratively when in groups and take a pride in their composing and performing. Relationships are very good and pupils respect each other's views and ideas. They use instruments sensibly and with respect. They listen attentively and concentrate on the various musical activities in which they are involved.

The quality of teaching is satisfactory with some good features. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of music are secure. The scheme of work follows a commercially produced manual and some units are not always appropriate to the needs of all pupils resulting in more able pupils not always being fully stretched and less able pupils not always able to complete the tasks. Pupils are well-managed and relationships are good. Lessons contain a variety of activities and effective use is made of both time and resources which marks an improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils' work is continually assessed in lessons and more formally

at the end of a unit. Pupils are not given homework tasks. Little attention is given in singing activities to voice production.

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The accommodation and resources, which are good, are used very efficiently. The balance of curriculum time is unequally divided between the 3 years, resulting in insufficient time in Year 9 for pupils satisfactorily to develop their various musical skills. The opportunities for pupils to use ICT, especially for composition, are very limited. The choir and band meet on a weekly basis and are well attended. The quality of the singing improved during the rehearsal observed and many pupils were making a significant contribution to the overall sound although a small minority made little or no contribution. These groups perform throughout the year both in school and further afield.

Physical education

By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with standards expected nationally but standards rise during Key Stage 4 so that attainment by the end of the key stage is above that expected by pupils of this age. Pupils demonstrate all round competence in planning, performing and evaluation of their work by Year 8. This shows through well in dance and gymnastics which, together with athletics, are performed to a high standard. Overall there is little difference between the attainment of girls and boys. Pupils in Year 7 understand the rules for hockey that relate to safe play; they control the ball satisfactorily in skills practices and tackle correctly. Only the very highest attaining pupils have developed strategic awareness on the field of play. A mixed class of Year 9 pupils, completing a circuit of timed activities, recorded their results systematically and accurately and worked hard throughout the lesson demonstrating good levels of personal fitness. Year 10 girls know the rules of hockey and have good positional sense. Year 11 boys practise good ball control skills. The skills and technical understanding of the most able pupils are very well developed.

Pupils make good progress through all years. Their positive attitudes, make a significant contribution as does their involvement in extra-curricular activities which are enjoyed by pupils of all abilities. Many less gifted pupils, particularly in Key Stage 3, work really hard and their progress overall is at least as good as that of more able pupils. In a mixed dance lesson, Year 7 pupils modelling cameos of different sporting activities, significantly improved both the technical and dramatic quality of their work. A mixed gymnastics class of Year 9 pupils, working in pairs, improved the quality and variety of their balance. With practice all pupils defined the entry, balance and exit phases more clearly and the work of the more able was both imaginative and technically demanding. A class of lower attaining Year 10 boys improved their success rates in their practice of basketball lay ups from twenty per cent to fifty per cent, following ten minutes of intensive practice.

The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are very good in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4. In some lessons attitudes are excellent, for example in a lower band Year 8 girls gymnastics class. The great majority of pupils displayed very good concentration and were keen to make progress. There are a very small number of pupils, particularly in Years 10 and 11, who do not apply themselves satisfactorily at all times. Pupils work very well in pairs and small groups and the collaboration within much of the pair and small group work of girls in Key Stage 3 is excellent. Pupils are invariably polite and considerate of each other's feelings. Extra-curricular activities are making a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development.

Teaching is good overall in both key stages and never less than satisfactory. Particular strengths are the structure of lessons to aid progress and the management of pupils. All teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the activities taught. Many lessons are characterized by very effective pupil motivation, high expectations, good pace and the skilful use of group work where pupils manage their own learning. Where teaching is just satisfactory, lessons lack an appropriate balance in the time provided for different activities and some learning objectives are unclear.

The curriculum is well balanced and supported by detailed and comprehensive schemes of work. These include very good opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and understanding of aesthetic activities. By taking advantage of good quality off-site facilities, pupils in Key Stage 4 have a good range of choice. Despite the limited facilities within the school, there is a good range of extra-curricular opportunities, enhanced by a

number of community links. Activities are well promoted and participation rates are good, with a third of all pupils taking part. Procedures for pupil assessment are satisfactory. Although attainment is judged against a comprehensive bank of descriptors and practice is consistent between teachers, judgments are not linked well enough to National Curriculum levels at the end of Key Stage 3. The long-term development plan is satisfactory but the department's priorities are not clearly set out in it. The department is well managed and has done much to counter the handicap of poor indoor accommodation, which continues to affect pupils' progress as it limits choice and prevents the introduction of a GCSE course. Lunch arrangements shorten some lessons and the gymnasium is unavailable between May and July. The floor in the gymnasium is unsuitable for any activity undertaken at speed. This deters pupils and puts them at risk.

Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The quality of teaching has improved. The blocks of time for activities have been increased and this has enhanced progress. All strengths identified in the last report remain.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

Time taken in observing lessons, scrutinising pupils' work and interviewing pupils.

| Key | U5s | KS1 | KS2 | KS3 | KS4 | Post-16 | Total |
|-------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|---------|-------|
| Total | | | | 33.2 | 87.8 | | 121.0 |

there were 13 inspectors in the team who worked for a combined total of 48 days;

a total of 156 lessons or part lessons were observed;

inspectors scrutinised the work of 6 pupils from each year group, and also the work on display around the school;

inspectors read and evaluated a range of documentation sent by the school;

interviews were held with heads of department, the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, members of the senior management team, the chair of governors, the chair of the finance committee, the governor for special educational needs, the special educational needs co-ordinator, the careers co-ordinator, the caretaker, staff assistants, school office staff;

inspectors interviewed 6 pupils in each year group;

27 parents attended the parents' meeting, and 401 questionnaires (51%) were returned.

DATA AND INDICATORS

Pupil data

| | Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent) | Number of pupils with statements of SEN | Number of pupils on school's register of SEN | Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals |
|----------|---|---|--|---|
| Y7 – Y11 | 781 | 8 | 120 | 45 |

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y11)

| | |
|--|------|
| Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent): | 42.1 |
| Number of pupils per qualified teacher: | 18.6 |

Education support staff (Y7 – Y11)

| | |
|--|-----|
| Total number of education support staff: | 6 |
| Total aggregate hours worked each week: | 155 |

| | |
|--|------|
| Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes: | 76.9 |
|--|------|

| | | |
|------------------------------|-----|----|
| Average teaching group size: | KS3 | 25 |
| | KS4 | 24 |

Financial data

| | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Financial year: | 1998/9 |
| Total Income | £ 1719726 |

| | |
|--|---------|
| Total Expenditure | 1705243 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 2220 |
| Balance brought forward from previous year | 0 |
| Balance carried forward to next year | 14483 |

PARENTAL SURVEY

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Number of questionnaires sent out: | 781 |
| Number of questionnaires returned: | 401 |

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school | 20 | 68 | 11 | 2 | 0 |
| I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren) | 42 | 52 | 4 | 3 | 0 |
| The school handles complaints from parents well | 18 | 57 | 20 | 5 | 0 |
| The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught | 28 | 58 | 11 | 3 | 1 |
| The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress | 33 | 55 | 8 | 4 | 1 |
| The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work | 46 | 51 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons | 33 | 55 | 9 | 2 | 0 |
| I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home | 31 | 58 | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren) | 44 | 45 | 7 | 3 | 0 |
| The school achieves high standards of good behaviour | 48 | 46 | 5 | 2 | 0 |
| My child(ren) like(s) school | 37 | 53 | 6 | 4 | 1 |