

# INSPECTION REPORT

**NEWNHAM MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Bedford

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109661

Headteacher: Mr M Plant

Reporting inspector: Mr G Job  
2755

Dates of inspection: 8 – 11 May 2000

Inspection number: 185561

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

© Crown copyright 2000

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

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

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle deemed secondary

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 9 to 13

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Polhill Avenue  
Bedford

Postcode: MK41 9DT

Telephone number: 01234 303403

Fax number: 01234 303404

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr S Ashton

Date of previous inspection: October 1995

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Giles Job	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>The school's results and pupils' achievements</p> <p>How well are pupils taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
Shirley Elomari	Lay inspector		<p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
Derek Williamson	Team inspector	Science	How good are the curriculum and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Linda Evans	Team inspector	English Equal opportunities Special educational needs English as an additional language	
Philip Clayton	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Anne Newton	Team inspector	Art Design and technology Information technology	
Keith Havercroft	Team inspector	Music	
Pat Fisher	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Robert Bissell	Team inspector	Geography History Religious education	
Robert Lambert	Team inspector	Physical education	

The inspection contractor was:

Staffordshire and Midlands Consortium

Mr I H Jones  
Kingston Centre  
Fairway  
Stafford  
ST16 3TW

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Registrar  
Inspection Quality Division  
The Office for Standards in Education  
Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>7</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?</b>	<b>13</b>
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
<b>HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>37</b>

## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Newnham Middle School is a larger than average middle school for pupils aged nine to thirteen. It is legally regarded as a secondary school. It is on the north-eastern outskirts of Bedford, close to several similar schools and some independent schools. Numbers of pupils have risen by about 50 per cent since the last inspection, and applications for entry at age nine are now over-subscribed. Nine per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals: this is below the national average. About ten per cent of pupils are from a variety of ethnic minority backgrounds – similar to the national average. A fairly high figure of about eight per cent of pupils have English as an additional language, although most of these are at least functionally fluent in English. 26 per cent of pupils are on the school's register of special educational needs; this is a high figure. Eleven pupils have a formal statement of need. Pupils' patterns of attainment on joining the school have varied somewhat from year to year, but are typically about average. There are higher than typical proportions of both high and low attaining pupils.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

The school is unusually effective in developing pupils' personal and social capabilities. It is a purposeful, happy and caring community in which many pupils are enabled by their teachers to explore new ideas and values and to gain considerable maturity as learners. The school provides a very good and pleasing environment for learning, following recent major improvements. Most pupils thrive in the very positive climate for learning. The school is also largely effective in developing pupils' academic achievements. Progress in learning is generally good for all pupils, and standards are somewhat above average, although capable of further improvement, particularly in national tests. Teaching is generally good with much very good practice, but also some weaker teaching. Leadership is effective, particularly in setting the direction and ethos of the school. The school is successful in moving pupils on from their work in lower schools and equipping them with the personal and learning skills to meet the challenge of work and life in upper schools. It provides good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Almost all pupils show high standards of maturity, creativity and interest in learning.
- Relationships in the school are excellent.
- Throughout the school, there is work of high quality in nearly all subjects, but particularly in English, French and art.
- Much work in Year 5 is of outstanding quality.
- Teachers make unusually effective use of poetry and imagery in their work.
- Extra-curricular activities are extensive, varied and well-supported.
- Attendance is good; most pupils want to come to school.
- Pupils are well cared for. Individuals are valued and their diversity is accepted and celebrated. Provision for pupils' personal development is very good.
- The school has a very good partnership with parents.

### **What could be improved**

- Standards are too low in design and technology, and in aspects of mathematics.
- The minority of teaching that is less than satisfactory needs reducing further.
- Teachers are often not precise enough in planning what pupils need to learn. Their planning does not make enough use of information about what pupils already know and can do.\*
- Procedures for monitoring teaching and learning are not clear and systematic enough. They are not having enough effect on spreading good practice and reducing weaknesses.\*
- Plans for improvements in subjects and year groups are not sufficiently focused on raising standards. They are not tied sufficiently to the school's priorities for improvement.\*

*The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. Those marked with an asterisk\* already feature in the school's improvement plan.*

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school has made overall improvement since the last inspection in 1995.

Standards in Year 6 national tests have improved broadly in line with national trends, but with some slowing in recent years. In 1999, targets for test results, based on the attainments of pupils when they started at the school, were met in English and science, but not in mathematics. Overall, standards of work throughout the school are now higher than at the time of the last inspection, and are generally above average, particularly in Year 5. The quality of teaching is also judged to have improved.

The school has made major improvements in the number of pupils on roll, in the quality of its accommodation and the environment for learning; and in the effective utilisation of its full budget.

Progress on specific issues identified in the last inspection has been variable; much of the action on some issues has effectively only begun in the last two years, and is still taking effect.

- Effective use of assessment information, although a current priority, remains under-developed.
- Procedures for planning improvements and for monitoring teaching and learning have been developed, but still lack rigour.
- The school now provides very well for pupils' spiritual development and multi-cultural education.
- Provision for, and standards in, gymnastics and dance have improved.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on the average results of their National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
English	B	C	D	D
Mathematics	B	C	C	D
Science	B	C	C	C

<i>Key</i>	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Standards in Year 6 national tests in 1999 in English and mathematics were rather below national averages, and below the average for all schools with a similar proportion of pupils taking free school meals. In science, they were close to national and similar school averages. Overall, results in recent years have improved rather more slowly than national figures, especially for boys. Targets for 1999, based on pupils' attainments when they joined the school, were met for English, not met for mathematics and exceeded for science.

Standards of work up to Year 6 seen during the inspection in these subjects were better than these past results suggest, and were generally above average. This reflects well-focused work based on the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, and other initiatives to improve standards. Pupils of all abilities are generally making good progress in these core subjects. Standards in other subjects up to Year 6 are also generally above average, with the great majority of pupils making good progress, particularly in Year 5. In design and technology, standards are low and progress unsatisfactory due to weak curriculum arrangements and current staffing changes.

In Years 7 and 8, pupils continue to make at least satisfactory and usually good progress in most subjects. Progress remains unsatisfactory in design and technology. By the end of Year 8, standards are typically somewhat above average in most other subjects, including English and science. Standards in English, French and art are often high, reflecting skilled, lively teaching. Standards in mathematics, although broadly average with some strong features, are lower than they should be, due to some ineffective teaching and some weak planning, particularly for lower-attaining groups. Many pupils have developed high capabilities in information technology, despite some weaknesses in the rapidly developing teaching programme.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and the work they do. They play an active part in lessons and in numerous activities outside the classroom.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The great majority of pupils behave very maturely in and out of classrooms. A small amount of poorer behaviour is usually managed very well.
Personal development and relationships	Very good: a strength of the school. Relationships are excellent. Many pupils show a high level of maturity, curiosity, and consideration for others.
Attendance	Good: better than the national average. Very good arrangements to monitor and encourage attendance.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 9-11 years	aged 11-13 years
Lessons seen overall	good	good

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

Teaching is predominantly good, with substantial very good and effective practice, particularly in Year 5. This good practice is partly offset by a small, but nevertheless undesirably high, minority of unsatisfactory and occasionally poor teaching. The good teaching is typified by trusting relationships, good humour, a love of learning and of children, and willingness to consider pupils' ideas. Some teaching is charismatic. There is some exceptional use of poetry and imagery in a number of subjects. The minority of less than satisfactory teaching occurs in several subjects and is mainly related to weak management of some pupils' behaviour, and inadequate knowledge of subject and National Curriculum expectations. Teaching outside teachers' main specialist areas is generally effective. At times, it is limited by inadequate curriculum planning and organisation, and by the lack of rigorous systems for monitoring and supporting teachers' work. In general, teaching could be further improved by a sharper focus on what pupils are to learn, based on what they have already shown they can do.

Lessons seen:	teaching very good or excellent	good	satisfactory	unsatisfactory or poor
overall (129)	22%	36%	33%	9%
Years 5&6 (64)	30%	34%	27%	9%
Years 7&8 (65)	14%	37%	40%	9%

Pupils respond unusually enthusiastically and maturely to good teaching. The positive attitudes to learning of many pupils enable them to make good progress, even at times when the teaching is less than good.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. Pupils receive a varied and stimulating curriculum that prepares them well for future learning. Weaknesses in design and technology. Excellent range of activities outside the classroom – extensive, challenging and well supported.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Generally good. Pupils with statements of special educational needs are well provided for and fully integrated. Very good personal support from teachers and classroom assistants. Some weaknesses in some work and teaching for low attaining sets.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good, tailored support for the small number who need particular help. Most pupils with English as an additional language are able to cope fully with normal classroom activity, and receive sensitive support from teachers as necessary.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good, and a strength of the school. Pupils are successfully helped by teaching and by the ethos of the school to develop mature and responsible attitudes to learning and relationships. Cultural and personal diversity are acknowledged and valued.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good care and personal support for pupils. Staff know pupils very well and treat them as individuals. Some weaknesses in assessment, and in monitoring and guiding overall academic performance, but some improved procedures being implemented.

The school provides a very good range of experiences for all its pupils, which enables them to make good academic and very good personal progress. Pupils are well cared for, and guidance of their academic progress is improving. Partnership with parents is very effective.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership is effective in setting the ethos, aims and strategic direction of the school. All staff are well involved in planning the school's development. The school is well managed. More rigour is needed in monitoring the impact of decisions.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. The governors know the school well, and work closely with the headteacher in planning its further development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good recent developments in analysing performance data and setting targets. Good informal sharing of practice, but more rigour is needed in monitoring teaching and learning.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Resources are fully and carefully used in line with carefully thought out priorities.

The school's leadership is particularly effective in setting and exemplifying the positive,

inclusive ethos of the school and in carrying through an ambitious programme of improvements. More rigour is needed in systematically monitoring the strengths and weaknesses of what goes on in classrooms. The school has ensured that pupils have access to suitably qualified and experienced staff, good and improving accommodation, and resources that are largely adequate and improving.

### **PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The values set by the school; they are helping pupils to become mature and responsible.</li> <li>• Pupils enjoy school.</li> <li>• Pupils are expected to work hard and achieve well.</li> <li>• Teaching is good.</li> <li>• Behaviour is good.</li> <li>• The school is approachable.</li> <li>• The wide variety of activities available to pupils.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some concerns about the amount, balance and consistency of homework.</li> <li>• Some concerns that progress is slower for older pupils, particularly in mathematics.</li> </ul>

The responses from the inspectors' questionnaires (200 returned) and meeting for parents (65 attended) were unusually positive. No major common concerns emerged. The inspectors' findings generally support all the parents' positive views. The homework seen during the inspection varied somewhat in quality, but was generally appropriate in quantity and demand and was not seen as a significant concern. Inspectors judge that most older pupils are making good progress in most subjects, with some weaknesses in mathematics and design and technology. Overall, progress is currently somewhat less for older than for the younger pupils. Occasionally, progress in some lessons, mainly for older pupils, is slowed by the unsatisfactory behaviour of a few pupils.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and achievements**

1. Standards of work throughout the school are higher than those typically found for pupils of this age range. Standards of pupils' work up to the age of 11 are somewhat higher for their age than those of older pupils. Some work in most subjects is of outstanding quality, particularly in Year 5. There are some weaknesses, particularly in mathematics and design and technology. Generally, pupils of all abilities are achieving well as a result of generally good teaching, excellent relationships and pupils' very mature and responsible attitudes to learning. Current standards, particularly up to the age of eleven, are higher than the results of recent national tests indicate. Results have been close to national averages, but rather below those of similar schools. The high standards of work reflect effective implementation of literacy and numeracy strategies, and some impact of the recent emphasis on setting targets for pupils' attainment.
2. As Newnham is a 9 to 13 middle school, statutory national tests only occur mid-way through the school when pupils are 11. There are no compulsory national tests measuring pupils' attainments when they start or finish at the school. The school bases its assessment of pupils' attainment on entry on a number of measures. These include a number of standardised tests, and records from their lower schools, which are increasingly using voluntary national tests in English, mathematics and science. Taken together, these indicate that recent intakes have been of broadly average ability, varying somewhat from year to year, but typically with rather above-average proportions of high attainers and of low attainers. This results in a high percentage of pupils (26 per cent) on the register for special educational needs; although the inspectors judged that the extent of serious special educational need was close to the average for this type of school.
3. In the most recent (1999) national tests in English, mathematics and science for 11 year olds, pupils' overall average performance was close to the national average. Science results were consistently rather higher than those for the other subjects. The percentages of pupils gaining the national benchmark Level 4 were close to national averages in English and science, but below in mathematics. For the higher Level 5, English and mathematics were close to national averages; science was above. Based on pupils' average performance in each subject, results were close to national averages in mathematics and science, and below average in English. Boys' results were noticeably lower than girls' were.
4. When compared to the results from all schools in a similar context (based on the percentage of pupils eligible for free meals), the 1999 results overall were average for science, but below average for English and mathematics. Benchmark Level 4 results were below these schools' averages in English and mathematics and above in science.
5. Over the last four years, results have fluctuated, but the overall trend has been one of improvement, broadly in line with the national trend. Science has shown better improvement than English and mathematics. In general, girls have performed better

than boys, compared with the national averages for boys and girls.

6. The teachers' own formal assessments of pupils' attainments in these three core subjects at age eleven broadly match the test results.
7. Taken together with the information available about pupils' earlier attainments, this analysis of results points to a relatively modest improvement over time, with some indications of recent relative under-performance in some aspects of English and mathematics, and among boys. This is reflected in how the 1999 results matched up to targets set by the school, which were suitably based on evidence of pupils' earlier attainments. The targets for percentages achieving at least Level 4 were not reached in mathematics, met in English and exceeded in science.
8. The school has taken a range of appropriate actions to improve national test performance, including:
  - 'booster' classes, particularly for pupils judged to be capable of Level 4 but performing below it;
  - systematic preparation for tests in classes and voluntary groups, including specific work for high attaining pupils;
  - reviewing schemes of work for Year 6 pupils;
  - introducing target-setting for all pupils in the core subjects.
9. Additionally, the targets set for 2000 are more challenging than those for 1999. Evidence from the inspection suggests that these measures are appropriate and having some positive impact on the expectations of teachers and pupils.
10. Standards of work seen during the inspection – in lessons, in pupils' work, and in discussion with them – also indicate an above-average standard overall, rather higher than shown by recent Year 6 test results. In particular, the effective implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies in Years 5 and 6 is showing itself in much above-average work.
11. At the end of Year 8, pupils transfer to nearby upper schools. A year later, they take the national tests for 14 year olds. By the end of Year 8, standards are generally above those typically found for pupils of this age in most subjects, including English and science. Standards are about average in mathematics, where some aspects are relatively weak, particularly for lower-attaining pupils; and in music where recent positive changes in the course and in teaching are not yet having full impact. Standards are below average in design and technology, where the course fails adequately to teach key aspects of the national programme for the subject, and some teaching is ineffective. Work of high standard is to be found from some pupils in all subjects, including those where there are weaknesses. Work of very high quality was seen in English, art and French. Pupils of all abilities generally make progress during Years 7 and 8 that is at least satisfactory and mostly good.
12. Standards of work done by younger pupils (Years 5 and 6) are generally rather higher for their age than those of older pupils. Standards are above average in most subjects, including mathematics and science. In English they are high. They are about average in art, and below average in design and technology. Much work is of a high standard,

particularly in Year 5, where some work of outstanding quality was seen, in response to very good, exciting teaching. Some of this work successfully integrated aspects of pupils' learning in a number of areas, particularly language, poetry and music. Pupils of all abilities make good progress during Years 5 and 6, with some notable progress in all Year 5 classes.

13. The school has identified about a quarter of its pupils as having some degree of special educational need. Most are listed as having relatively mild need, requiring some particular attention in normal classrooms. Eleven pupils receive additional support as specified by their statements of special educational needs. The school employs a range of support strategies for pupils who need help with learning. The mix of in-class support, individual tuition and spelling workshops is effective in meeting most children's needs. Most pupils with special educational needs make at least satisfactory progress, and achieve at levels in line with their capabilities. Some pupils demonstrate significant progress in a relatively short time as demonstrated by reading scores, spelling ages and a range of assessment data used by the special educational needs department. The progress of some low attaining sets in Years 7 and 8 is sometimes unsatisfactory in mathematics because of some ineffective teaching and weaknesses in the course.
14. There is no formalised system of identifying and providing for the most able pupils, but the high expectations of the majority of teachers ensure that they engage in tasks which are challenging and promote achievement at a high level.
15. Standards in literacy and numeracy throughout the school are generally above average. There is evidence of recent improvement particularly linked to thoughtful and effective implementation of the National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy. This is most marked in Years 5 and 6, but more recent work with older pupils is also having a positive impact. The effectiveness of work in English and mathematics lessons is enhanced by well-planned opportunities to practise skills of literacy and numeracy in most subjects.
16. Pupils are showing above-average standards in understanding and using information technology. This area of the curriculum is developing rapidly and many pupils are taking advantage of the facilities now available. The structured use of information technology in other subjects is patchy, but pupils' progress is aided by many teachers' positive attitudes to information technology, and by encouragement to use it at home and at school as a routine learning tool.
17. Throughout the school, pupils show unusually positive attitudes to most of their work and to their learning. Many teachers, in most subjects, successfully encourage them to think and talk about their work, to take ideas and images seriously and to express them verbally and on paper. These positive attitudes to learning and the successful development of pupils' skills as learners contribute significantly to pupils' achievements.
18. At times, progress is less positive. Most teachers teach a number of subjects successfully. In a few instances, a teacher's lack of specialist knowledge or confidence results in slow or inaccurate learning, for example, in some French and mathematics classes. In mathematics, the weakness is compounded by a lack of appropriate

guidance for non-specialists, particularly in Years 7 and 8. Some teaching also fails adequately to meet the special educational needs of some pupils, or to handle misbehaviour effectively. These factors, taken together, tend to limit the progress, particularly of some lower-attaining pupils. Some otherwise good teaching in most subjects lacks sufficient clarity about exactly what pupils are to learn. Some teaching has the pupils as passive listeners for too long. Overall, however, the strengths in teaching and relationships far outweigh the weaknesses for all classes and for the great majority of pupils in the school. Consequently, progress is generally good, and most pupils, particularly in Years 5 and 6, are achieving well.

19. These findings indicate some improvement since the last inspection, both in overall standards and in pupils' achievements. The improvements are greatest for the younger pupils. Improvements are too limited in mathematics and design and technology. The relatively modest improvements in national test results are, to some extent, offset by evidence of the quality of current work, reflecting purposeful action to improve this aspect of standards.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

20. Overall, pupils' attitudes, values and personal development are very good and a major strength of the school.
21. Almost all pupils are keen to come to school and participate enthusiastically in lessons and other activities. Large numbers of pupils are involved in the excellent programme of extra-curricular activities, and all have the opportunity to experience residential trips. Behaviour in lessons is good overall. In Year 5, behaviour was very good or exemplary in 57 per cent of lessons observed during the inspection and in Year 8, 45 per cent. These are high figures. In all years there was a high proportion of very good behaviour. However, a small but significant amount of unsatisfactory behaviour was observed. When this occurred it was mostly among boys and often related to a lack of appropriate interest and challenge in the lesson activities. For example, in some mathematics lessons observed, the teacher talked for over twenty minutes and pupils lost interest.
22. The level of fixed term exclusions is low and there were no permanent exclusions in the last year. Behaviour around the school and at breaks and lunchtimes is very good. Pupils move around the building with good awareness of the needs of others, particularly on the stairways. During the inspection, they were unable to use the playing fields during breaks and lunchtime because of bad weather. Behaviour and relationships in the crowded playground were very good – relaxed and good-humoured. Pupils are courteous and willing to help others. They engage confidently in conversation with teachers and other adults. Conversations with inspectors were respectful, but often probing, humorous and engaging. Pupils are respectful of property. There are a number of displays of artefacts around the school and all are kept in an immaculate condition. There is no evidence of vandalism or graffiti.
23. Pupils' relationships with staff are almost universally friendly, relaxed and show a high level of mutual respect. Relationships between pupils are almost always positive. They listen very well to their teachers and to their peers. Pupils are confident in

expressing their views and opinions in class discussions as, for example, in a Year 5 lesson when they were discussing attitudes to disability, and in a Year 8 discussion on abortion. They show an exceptionally mature awareness of the feelings, beliefs and values of others. Most also have a high level of awareness of the impact of their actions on others. There is very little bullying. Pupils are confident that there is always an adult to turn to in time of need.

24. A strength of the school is the manner in which pupils with all sorts of special educational needs are accepted and valued as individuals. Children are actively encouraged to be tolerant of personal differences. Teachers make opportunities to discuss the difficulties experienced by some people and suggest ways in which they can be helped and supported.
25. The school provides a good range of opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and their response is very positive. In all years, pupils are expected to take responsibility for organising resources and keeping their classroom tidy. In Year 8, pupils act as receptionists, monitors and prefects. They help staff to patrol the corridors; they run the tuck shop and monitor latecomers. Each class elects two representatives to the year council and, from these, two representatives from each year attend full school council meetings. The council offers pupils a real and meaningful voice in the school community. For example, staff consult the council to gain pupils' views about the "Choices" programme of rewards and sanctions; and some changes have taken place as a result. The design of the uniform is to be changed in September 2000 in response to issues raised at council. Pupils respond positively to the opportunities provided in many lessons for group work, discussion and collaborative projects. They relish the opportunities they have to undertake research-based tasks, and work well independently. Pupils have the opportunity to work in the science laboratory and other specialist rooms at break and lunchtime and a good number take advantage of it. Many subjects offer pupils the chance to work independently, including art, information technology, English and music.
26. Attendance is good and is consistently above the national average. Levels of unauthorised absence are consistently below the national average. These positive features reflect the efforts of the school to promote good attendance, and the willingness of the pupils to attend.

#### **HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

27. Overall, teaching in the school is good. It is particularly effective in setting a purposeful attitude to learning and in encouraging pupils to talk and think fluently about their learning. Teaching is rather better in Years 5 and 6 than in Years 7 and 8; some of the teaching in Year 5 is outstanding. In all years, there is too large a minority of teaching that is unsatisfactory. Some non-specialist teaching lacks sufficient expertise, partly because of lack of appropriate support. Some teaching is too tolerant of poor behaviour. Some of the teaching that is at least satisfactory lacks precision in deciding exactly what pupils need to learn, or in fully occupying pupils' time.
28. During the inspection, inspectors observed 129 lessons. They made the following judgements about the quality of teaching they saw.

	teaching very good or excellent	good	satisfactory	unsatisfactory or poor
overall (129)	22%	36%	33%	9%
Years 5&6 (64)	30%	34%	27%	9%
Years 7&8 (65)	14%	37%	40%	9%

29. From this table it can be seen that the proportions of less than satisfactory teaching were very similar for older and younger pupils (about 10 per cent); and also that about one third of teaching to each group was good. However, younger pupils experienced the highest quality teaching twice as often as older pupils. These figures indicate teaching of good overall quality for older pupils, but overall very good quality for younger pupils. Teaching in Year 5 was of particularly high quality. However, teaching in about one in eleven lessons seen was less than satisfactory, with a similar proportion in each year group. This is rather higher than typical or desirable for this age-range of pupils in a school where relationships are excellent and attitudes to learning are good.
30. Indirect evidence about the typical quality of teaching (from discussions with teachers and scrutiny of their planning records, and from discussions with pupils and scrutiny of their work) largely supports these judgements from observing a large sample of lessons.
31. These judgements suggest that there has been some improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection.
32. The overall quality of teaching is good in most subjects, both for older and younger pupils. However, teaching in design and technology is barely satisfactory overall, largely because it does not sufficiently emphasise important aspects of the subject, such as getting pupils to design and evaluate what they make. Moreover, during the inspection, temporary staff were still establishing adequate procedures and discipline. In mathematics, the overall quality of teaching to older pupils was satisfactory. However, it was limited by some ineffective teaching of lower attaining sets. This was partly offset by some powerful teaching of high attaining sets. A small amount of French teaching to older pupils suffered from lack of adequate accuracy, expertise and confidence of non-specialist staff. The effectiveness of some (small-group) teaching of pupils with special educational needs in all years is rather limited by teachers' lack of expertise in this area, and by the limited guidance for their work.
33. These occasional weaknesses in specialist expertise need to be set against the fact that most teachers teach a number of subjects well, some outside the range of their main qualifications and experience. This teaching is largely effective as a result of teachers' commitment, good classroom technique, very good knowledge of their pupils, and the generally good quality of support they receive from subject co-ordinators and the schemes of work. This support is particularly effective in English, science and humanities subjects.
34. However, there is considerable scope for further improvement in the effectiveness of

non-specialist teaching. Arrangements for deploying teachers to teach particular classes and subjects are fairly informal. They are not based on a sufficiently systematic assessment of each teacher's strengths, weaknesses and professional aspirations. Monitoring by subject co-ordinators of teachers' work in classrooms is now taking place, but is still largely informal and predominantly supportive. Consequently, neither teachers, co-ordinators nor senior managers have a clear and systematic picture of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching or of teachers' training needs. Finally, schemes of work vary considerably in specifying exactly what pupils are intended to learn from particular activities. This is reflected in the lack of precision with which many teachers, specialist or non-specialist, make clear to pupils what each lesson is intended to achieve, and check whether this learning has taken place.

35. Most teaching, other than in mathematics, French in Years 7 and 8 and some literacy groups, is to mixed-ability classes. This generally works effectively in providing a suitable level of demand and challenge to all pupils in the group. The same factors of commitment, good technique, very good knowledge of pupils and good support for teachers apply. There are some common weaknesses in setting precise targets for learning, based on what pupils have already learned; but these are not affecting the progress of any one group of pupils more than others.
36. Teaching of pupils with special educational needs is generally effective, and is marked by teachers' care to include them fully in the work of classes, and by the praise and encouragement they regularly receive. Classroom assistants are very diligent and provide effective classroom support, keeping pupils on task and enabling them to achieve. Liaison with class teachers is on an ad-hoc basis, however, and with more forward planning, assistants would be able to make a more considered and pro-active response to pupils' needs. Staff are sympathetic to children's learning difficulties and many are skilled in differentiating their input and the tasks which are set, to enable all pupils to achieve at their own level. The low attaining groups in mathematics and English, however, do not enjoy the same quality of experience as children in other groups.
37. Teaching of pupils with English as an additional language is similarly marked by a strong sense of inclusion and a sensitivity to individual needs. Most pupils so designated are, in practice, functionally fluent in English, and are enabled by their teachers to take a full part in lessons, and make at least satisfactory progress, both in English and other work. The few pupils with more urgent needs are well identified and are being given well-judged specific additional support to help their progress.
38. There were a number of common weaknesses in teaching observed in lessons throughout the school that limited their effectiveness, preventing satisfactory lessons from being good, and good lessons from being very good.
39. Although most lessons are planned conscientiously, and teachers know their pupils very well, there was only limited evidence that the work pupils are given to do is specifically tied to what they have shown their teachers they already know and can do. Teachers are gaining a lot of information about pupils' capabilities from a variety of assessments, but are not systematically using this information in planning the work they set. This shows up in the useful work on target-setting that is going on in several

subjects. Many targets set are still very general – ‘improve my use of punctuation’, for example. Pupils are not sure exactly what they have to do to meet the target, and teachers do not usually spell out, through marking, discussions or tasks set, useful steps towards meeting the target. Such generalised targets provide a useful focus for pupils in thinking about their work. They also appear to have a good motivating effect. They are, however, capable of considerable further refinement.

40. Lessons are generally busy and purposeful sessions, in which most pupils are very willing to participate and to work hard, individually or in groups. The lessons, most of one hour’s length, are generally varied and productive. However, in a substantial minority of lessons seen, the teacher took centre-stage for too long (at times more than twenty minutes), with too few opportunities for pupils to be actively involved other than through listening. This taxed their concentration, limited their active learning and, at times, contributed to some levels of inattention and misbehaviour.
41. These weaknesses in teaching are, however, outweighed by numerous strengths. These notably include many teachers’ ability to convey an enthusiasm for learning and the subject to pupils. Some lessons seen fizzed with energy as teachers swept pupils through a variety of activities, presenting them with new facts and ideas and challenging them to try out new skills. This was particularly notable in Year 5 where several lessons moved at great and uncompromising pace, to the satisfaction of all. Teachers make particularly powerful use of imagery from poetry, drama and art to get ideas across about, for example, something as mundane as patterns in rainfall in geography work on Kenya. A half-hour French lesson used fantasy, humour and song to rapidly develop pupils’ grasp of vocabulary and grammatical structure and their accuracy of intonation. In Year 8, a high attaining mathematics set was successfully challenged to explore challenging ideas about fractions in a lesson that grabbed their attention by its authority, pace, variety and the teacher’s ability to set successive challenges to move pupils’ thinking on. Many teachers enjoy, and are good at, presenting provocative ideas. A Year 7 lesson on recycling, that was not otherwise well planned or organised, got most pupils keenly engaged with the complex idea that recycling can be wasteful and polluting. Teachers’ enthusiasms, allied with their easy relationships with pupils, are enabling many pupils to become thoughtful and articulate learners who like knowledge, ideas and images; and are not afraid to try them out, sometimes creatively, verbally, in writing and through other media. Pupils are secure in the knowledge that their teachers and their fellow pupils will usually appreciate their efforts.

#### **HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?**

42. The curriculum provided by the school prepares pupils well for the next stage of education, and for future adult life. It is generally broad and balanced and complies with statutory requirements. In all years, all subjects of the National Curriculum are taught as timetabled subjects, except for information technology, which is taught through specific topics in other subjects in well-equipped facilities. Religious education fully implements the Local Agreed Syllabus. Pupils in all years have access to, and profit from, the extensive specialist facilities, for example, in science, art and technology. Timetabling makes generally good use of the expertise of teachers, so that

during their time in the school nearly all pupils experience effective teaching that blends subject expertise with a detailed knowledge of each pupil as a maturing individual. The extent of specialist teaching increases as pupils get older. The programme for pupils' personal and social development, which includes sex education and drug education, is well thought out and taught. Pupils with special educational needs have equal access to the full curriculum, and they receive appropriate support in each subject. There is little evidence of overtly careers related education, the science department's visit to Unilever, on a work related visit, being the only example cited during the inspection.

43. The school's extra-curricular provision is particularly extensive, and offers pupils a wide range of opportunities to enrich and broaden their experiences.
44. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good, with many opportunities being provided through the curriculum for these aspects to be effectively developed. Many and varied opportunities are provided for pupils to appreciate their cultural traditions, and to be introduced to the diversity of other cultures, both those represented in school, and those not so represented. The school's contribution to pupils' spiritual development is good, with good practice evident in English, history, geography, art and music. Assemblies are held every morning and include genuine acts of collective worship. These, together with work in religious education and several other subjects, provide the opportunity for pupils to develop their spiritual awareness.
45. The development of the school curriculum is the responsibility of senior staff, with important aspects devolved to year co-ordinators and curriculum co-ordinators. The current curriculum, based on a strong foundation of professional knowledge of child development between the ages of 9 and 13, was designed in response to the national 'Curriculum 2000'. Decisions are made at department level, year co-ordinator level, agreed by senior staff, and finally by the governing body. Emphasis is placed on consultation with staff at all levels, in an attempt to ensure real educational progress. Literacy and numeracy hours have been successfully introduced in Years 5 and 6. Pupils' work in these areas receives greater attention at this particular time. Most other curriculum areas have not obviously suffered as a result. However, the consequent lack of timetabled work in personal and social education in Year 6 limits the opportunities for class teachers to help pupils to make sense of this last year of their primary education. Elements of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, including a numeracy summer school, are being purposefully introduced for older pupils.
46. The curriculum in all years is designed to give equal opportunities to everyone, with the special aim of breaking down any traditional prejudice in the suitability of particular subjects for either girls or boys, or for pupils of particular aptitudes. The evidence from work observed and attitudes expressed by pupils indicates that this aim is being successfully achieved.
47. A strength of the school is the effectiveness of its personal, social and health education programmes. There is a one-hour period of tutorial time for Years 5, 7 and 8; where personal, social and health education, citizenship and other cross-curricular themes are taught. Personal, social and health education is also included in food technology in Years 6 and 8. The previous inspection report described personal, social and health

education as at a developmental stage. The programme is now fully developed, taught by teachers with appropriate specialist expertise, with support from class tutors. Sex education and drug education, which have parental approval, feature in the syllabus. As part of this work, the local schools' police liaison officer, discusses with pupils the consequences of being involved in drugs, the discussions being followed up by form tutors. The week prior to the inspection was devoted to a multi-agency approach to drugs, organised by the local education authority.

48. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good. The whole life of the school, including behaviour in the dining room, cloakroom use, movement along corridors, lack of litter and graffiti, and excellent displays throughout the school all promote an ethos in which high moral values are respected and practised. Pupils are entrusted with responsibility - for example, monitors, prefects, members of the school council - and encouraged to relate well to one another and to staff. Amongst the opportunities provided for pupils to appreciate their cultural traditions, topic work on the life of the Victorians was balanced by a Kenyan theme giving insight into the richness of another culture. The contribution of assemblies to the spiritual development is considerable. During the inspection week, assembly themes were on triumph over adversity; Kenyan culture and a prayer for rain; trust and responsibility; and individual achievement. Members of the local Baptist church led a well-pitched and thought-provoking assembly on 'trust'. The headteacher led each assembly in prayer. During each assembly, children willingly sang a popular hymn. These assemblies were notable for their atmosphere of corporate trust and seriousness; and for their mature use of imagery. Complex ideas were presented, most notably through the use of powerfully-presented story and poetry, without compromise or over-simplification, for example, in a complex fable on self-awareness backed up by an enigmatic Thomas Hardy poem. The ideas were allowed to resonate; and pupils responded with attention and reflection. Assemblies, together with lessons in English, history, art, music, religious education, tutorial time and registration periods, all contribute to the development of the pupils, and provide opportunities to enhance their awareness of life's spiritual dimension.
49. The school describes its curriculum as promoting all round development, stressing equal opportunities, and having a wide range of extra-curricular activities, particularly music, choirs, orchestra, band and sport. Extra-curricular activities also include subject clubs, using the Internet, gardening and lunchtime revision sessions; as well as a range of educational visits - over 40 clubs in all. All pupils have the opportunity to go on residential visits; most Year 8 pupils had been to France, prior to the inspection, with a visit to Dorset planned for Year 5 later in the term. During the inspection week, 16 of these clubs operated at lunchtime or after school. For example, on Monday lunchtime, tennis attracted 20 Year 7 and 8 pupils, junior dance attracted 28 boys and girls from Years 5 and 6, and athletics attracted 40 pupils from Years 5, 6, 7, and 8. The range of curricular opportunities is extensive, and the school has achieved notable successes in team games and other activities. 56 children from all years took part in a recent evening presentation of gymnastics and dance. These activities, which reflect the massive commitment of the staff, make a significant contribution to pupils' learning and personal development.
50. Links with lower and upper schools have improved since the last inspection. Open

days are arranged which allow Year 4 pupils and Year 8 pupils to visit their respective middle and upper schools. More information is changing hands than previously. At Year 4, optional national test results, and pupils' reading levels from contributory lower schools are now made available. Problems remain, however, for effective transfer of information between middle and upper schools. The local Bedfordshire Area 10 Subject panel meetings, where 12 lower, 5 middle and 3 upper schools, are involved, provide a valuable but complex forum for exchange of information about curriculum provision and pupils' achievements for each of 11 subjects.

51. The headteacher, governing body and a curriculum working group of staff and governors, review the curriculum annually. They receive subject co-ordinators' reports in the summer term, when the whole curriculum is analysed. Year and subject co-ordinators meet with the headteacher on a regular basis. Despite the systematic monitoring role of subject co-ordinators being considerably restricted by their low amount of non-contact time, the school is generally achieving the targets it has set itself through the energy and dedication of the staff.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

52. The school makes very good provision to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety. Personal development is very effectively fostered. Procedures for monitoring and promoting pupils' academic progress are satisfactory overall, but whilst improving, they still show some significant weaknesses.
53. Teachers know their pupils very well and use this knowledge sensitively to guide their pastoral care. The strong year teams pay good attention to pastoral concerns and information is shared very effectively between staff. Over recent years, the school has revised and significantly improved its attention to health and safety issues. Well-documented procedures are now in place and consistently followed. All staff are aware of the importance of health and safety issues and report any concerns appropriately. In lessons, teachers pay good attention to safe practice. The school has good arrangements for child protection and the provision of first aid.
54. The measures to promote the importance of regular attendance and good punctuality are very effective; attendance is consistently above the national average, not least because most pupils enjoy coming to school. Procedures for monitoring attendance and punctuality are very thorough. All unexplained absences are routinely and efficiently followed up but the large majority of parents comply with the school's requirements to report absence. The school makes appropriate use of the education welfare service. Registers are not routinely taken in all lessons, which leads to a situation where subject teachers may not always know which pupils are absent from the group. However, in practice, internal truancy is not a problem.
55. The procedures for promoting good behaviour are very good. Staff have high expectations of good behaviour and ensure that pupils understand what is expected of them. The recently introduced "Choices" system of rewards and sanctions provides a clear framework for both staff and pupils. Pupils very much appreciate the merit system and understand the referral system. "Choices" operates with a good degree of consistency between staff, although some teachers use the referral system more readily

than others. In a small number of lessons seen, teachers' uncertainty and inconsistency in managing some challenging behaviour, mainly of a small number of boys, hindered the progress of the class. The school has a very good programme of personal, social and health education and this incorporates work on bullying. For example, during the inspection, a Year 7 class was devising brief drama scenes to illustrate various aspects of bullying and to show strategies for dealing with it. Bullying is also addressed in assemblies and staff ensure that all pupils know that they should report any concerns to a teacher. The "Choices" system is a very effective tool for monitoring good behaviour and results in good records. Parents are kept well informed about the behaviour of their child and are involved appropriately if concerns arise. Little bullying occurs and, when it does arise, it is dealt with quickly and effectively. All pupils know that they should report any concerns to a teacher and are confident that action will be taken. Pupils feel safe in school.

56. Procedures for the assessment and monitoring of pupils' academic performance are satisfactory overall, with evidence of initiatives of recent years having a positive effect on teaching and learning. There are areas of weakness and inconsistency, particularly in the effective use of the information gained from assessments. The school collects and analyses substantial amounts of useful data about pupils' attainments when they start at the school and their subsequent performance in a variety of tests and tasks. These analyses are providing useful insights into the potential of individual pupils and year groups and have been effectively used in setting realistically challenging overall targets for results in national tests at age 11. They have also been used in setting test targets for individual pupils and in identifying pupils showing signs of under-achievement. These data are not yet held in a form that is readily accessible to all members of staff, although plans are well advanced for implementation of a computerised information system to tackle this. Although senior managers are making good use of the analyses they undertake, the key messages, (for example, about the attainment profiles of particular year groups, or about the subsequent performance of pupils in upper schools), are not being communicated with sufficient precision and clarity to other staff and governors and, where appropriate, parents.
57. The quality of assessment within subjects shows considerable variation in quality and precision. The main strength in all subjects is the good knowledge that nearly all teachers have of their individual pupils and the readiness of pupils and teachers to talk to each other about strengths, difficulties and realistic challenges. In some subjects, this informal assessment and dialogue are being backed up by regular, systematic assessment of pupils' attainments against clear criteria and by setting pupils explicit targets based on these assessments. Formal target-setting is now taking place in English, mathematics and science; and is being tried out in other subjects. Some particularly effective activity was seen in English and science, with pupils clear about their targets and what they needed to do to achieve them. Some targets are very generalised (for example, "improve my punctuation"); although clearly useful as motivating devices, such targets do not tie in effectively with teaching and learning for specific improvements.
58. Between teachers and subjects, the main variation in the quality of assessment is in spelling out clearly what is being assessed, and relating this to national standards for each subject. Too much assessment of specific pieces of work does not make clear what has been achieved and what needs to be done for further improvement. There is

a tendency to confuse achievement with effort. These features were particularly noticeable in much of the marking in pupils' books in most subjects. Sometimes, as in check-lists for information technology, there is some confusion between completing a task and mastering the skill needed to do the task well. There is clear evidence of improvement in teachers relating their assessments to national standards of work. Assessments in mathematics and science are clearly and appropriately related to the levels of the National Curriculum, and pupils are developing clear ideas of how their work relates to these levels. Teachers of history and geography have usefully spent time agreeing their judgements about pupils' work against national standards. This is an urgent priority in design and technology. These overall improvements are clearly reflected in the revised descriptions in pupils' reports of their achievements, being implemented during the inspection.

59. The blend of formal and informal assessment is generally effective in most subjects in giving pupils a general view of their strengths and weaknesses and in motivating them to further success. Despite some weaknesses, assessment is being used to help pupils to improve their standards, particularly through informal discussions between each pupil and the subject teacher. Arrangements for monitoring each pupil's overall performance are relatively under-developed. Form teachers know their pupils well and co-ordinate their half-year profile reports and annual full reports to parents. However, for most pupils, there are no structured opportunities for them to review their overall progress and, for example, discuss why they are doing better in some subjects than others, or how they can make best sense of the targets they have been set in different subjects. Given the maturity of most pupils and the good relationships between them and teachers, the lack of such opportunities is limiting the potential impact of improving practice in assessment and target-setting.

## HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

60. The overwhelming majority of parents and carers are extremely supportive of the school. There was a high percentage return of the inspectors' questionnaire to parents, and good attendance at their meeting with parents. The views expressed by parents were predominantly positive. In particular, parents feel that their children are making good progress, that teaching is good and that the school has high expectations. They speak highly of the pastoral care and believe that their children are helped to become responsible and mature. Almost all parents would feel comfortable about approaching the school with any question or concern; and consider that the school is well led and managed. Parents have no major concerns about the school although a small minority feel that children do not get the right amount of homework. Inspection evidence shows that the amount of homework is adequate in most subjects with good opportunities for research based work, particularly in history and geography, but that it is less effective in design and technology, where it is set intermittently and in music, where no homework is provided.
61. A wide range of good-quality information is provided for parents. The prospectus and annual report of governors are clearly written and informative; but the annual report of governors does not provide details of financial provision for special educational needs nor does it report on progress in relation to the previous inspection action plan. Newsletters are regular and informative. A positive feature of these is the useful overview of the curriculum provided for every subject for each year group, every term.
62. The school has developed a very effective partnership with parents. Opportunities for parents to meet with teachers to discuss their child's progress are good, with three, well-attended, formal opportunities to consult with teachers each year. In addition, parents are welcome to discuss their child at any other time and almost all parents feel that staff are approachable and helpful. One strong feature of the school's partnership with parents is the establishment of working parties of staff, governors and parents. As the school was aware of some parental dissatisfaction with the format of annual reports, a working party has looked at the reporting of progress. The school now issues an interim profile report, half way through the school year, followed by three consultation evenings. Parents appreciate these interim reports and the timing of the consultation, which enables potential problems to be addressed at a half-way point in the academic year.
63. The format of the full annual report on each pupil has been changed as part of the school's planned programme to improve its assessment procedures. In previous years, although the form teachers' comments were often of a very high standard, the reporting of pupils' attainments and progress was unsatisfactory. Progress was poorly defined and descriptions of pupils' attainments were often negative. They focused on what pupils found difficult and failed to do. Moreover, they sometimes confused effort with attainment and gave parents and pupils no clear idea of the overall standard that the pupil had attained. Plans are very well advanced to move to a comment bank system by July 2000, which will allow teachers to report each pupil's progress more effectively and positively. The comment banks for use this year have been tailored by subject co-ordinators. The draft comments indicate that there has been considerable movement in defining progress in terms of clearly defined steps in learning towards

clearly defined standards. This reflects the work taking place in several subjects to set each pupil achievable short-term targets for improvement. It is indicative of some success in the school's current plans to improve the effective use of assessment information and to improve the quality of reporting. The new system is to be evaluated and modified in the light of parents' and teachers' responses.

64. All pupils have a homework diary. These are signed regularly by parents and form teachers. In some instances they are used well as a channel of communication between home and school but this is not uniformly well developed throughout the school. The school has an active parent-teacher association; and a number of parents provide support, for example, to enable the conservation area to be maintained and function effectively. Parental support for school events is very strong.

### **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

65. The headteacher is providing effective leadership in setting the ethos, aims and strategic direction for the school. Since his appointment two years ago, he has led staff and governors in the development of a clear strategic plan for the school's further development. This identifies eight main priorities, each with a realistic but challenging programme for action. Taken together, these programmes constitute a purposeful agenda for continued improvement of the school in line with its main aims.
66. The school's aims are stated in various ways but each version stresses enabling all pupils to reach their full potential through teaching of high quality, and enabling them to become 'independent, confident learners who learn how to learn for themselves'. The quality of much teaching and of pupils' responses during the inspection indicates that the school is successfully addressing these aims. The headteacher and senior staff also take a clear lead in setting the tone of the excellent relationships which are a notable feature of the school. It is a harmonious society in which each individual – staff or pupil – is valued, and his or her contribution is encouraged and recognised.
67. The headteacher is very conscious of the school's bridging role between lower and upper schools. He has ensured that the school takes an active role in local area forums. This is providing useful professional development for several staff and is resulting in improving links in pupils' work and experience as they move from school to school. He and the chair of governors have also been active in developing a local area trust for making effective use of devolved funds for professional services as a consequence of "Fair Funding" arrangements.
68. The headteacher has endeavoured to involve staff fully in planning the school's development. There is an emphasis on teamwork. Year co-ordinators belong to the senior management team. Subject co-ordinators have had their role redefined; they now have responsibility for developing action plans for their own subject areas and for monitoring the quality of work and teaching in their areas. There is a working party for each priority in the school's improvement plan, most involving staff and governors and some, also, parents. These structures are effective in giving staff ownership of the numerous developments and in setting a good level of communication in this hard-working, large middle school. These features have helped to make the large number of changes in staff and responsibilities in the last few years go smoothly.

69. The current strategic plan has given renewed impetus to action on key issues identified in the last inspection, on which initial improvement had been modest. Improvement of the effective use of assessment is a current priority. There is now very positive action in this area, although more still needs to be done (See paragraphs 56-59.)
70. Improvement of the role of curriculum (subject) co-ordinators is also a current priority, following through a key issue from the last inspection. Curriculum co-ordinators have recently been given specific responsibilities for the quality of teaching and learning in their areas, as well as for managing the curriculum and resources and advising other teachers. Their success in handling this range of responsibility is currently varied. The numbers of teachers teaching a subject vary widely (from one for music to twelve for English), and all teachers have a heavy teaching load. Co-ordinators' support for teachers is generally good and effective. So is their planning and management of what is to be taught. There are some weaknesses in schemes of work, particularly in mathematics and design and technology; and in support for some teachers teaching well outside their area of expertise, for example, in mathematics and French. Monitoring the quality of learning and teaching in a subject is still generally under-developed. Most co-ordinators are fairly regularly reviewing samples of pupils' work. Most have undertaken some supportive visits to other teachers' classes. (The headteacher often teaches their own classes while they do this.) This has led to some useful insights and discussions. However, both forms of monitoring are not presently systematic. There are general guidelines but no set timetables, nor criteria, for what is to be observed, nor for what is to be fed back to the observed teacher or senior managers. This limits the opportunity to identify key strengths and weaknesses in each subject and to act on them. It is an area for further development already identified by the school.
71. Curriculum co-ordinators now provide an annual report for the headteacher and have at least an annual meeting with him at which the subject's performance and its plans for development are discussed. This is good practice, which could be further developed by use of more systematic information gathered from monitoring and from assessments. The quality of plans for subjects' development also varies. Typically, they do not give sufficiently detailed attention to aspects of standards that need improving. Nor do they systematically reflect how the subject's development is to contribute to the identified whole-school priorities for development.
72. There are no comparable formal procedures for year co-ordinators to monitor teaching and learning in their year-group, to report on progress or to plan developments. This is also an area for possible development, particularly as current plans take effect to assess and monitor more thoroughly each pupil's progress through the school.
73. Generally, the school's procedures for monitoring its performance and diagnosing its strengths and weaknesses, although broadly satisfactory, are still evolving. The headteacher and senior staff have access to substantial data about pupils' performance and capabilities, and analyse these against county and national data. Key data and patterns (for example, about annual trends in the capabilities of pupils, or about relative performance of boys and girls) are not yet easily accessible in an understandable form by all staff and governors. Introduction of a better, clearer management system for

such information is, however, imminent. Information about standards of work and teaching and learning in classrooms comes mainly from the co-ordinators' monitoring programme and from informal sharing of practice in this very open school. However, the current abeyance of formal appraisals of staff results in teachers having no guarantee of regular feedback on their performance, except through the headteacher's weekly monitoring of their lesson plans and mark books.

74. The current blend of formal and informal evaluation of the school's performance is largely effective in setting appropriate, agreed priorities and in enabling most staff to take effective action. The process is helped by the professional commitment to their work of a hard-working staff. However, the lack of procedures for ensuring that plans are implemented to agreed timetables, in accordance with agreed criteria, is limiting the impact of some developments, particularly within subject areas.
75. The school has generally good procedures for getting feedback and suggestions on its performance from parents and from pupils. The school council is a forum for real discussions about school priorities as seen by pupils. Parents have been consulted about, for example, reporting arrangements, the Home/School Agreement and changes in uniform. Parents' unusually positive endorsement of the school in the inspectors' questionnaire and meeting for parents indicates effective communication and feedback between school and parents. These features reflect a strength in the school's practical application of the best value principles of management.
76. The governing body provides strong and suitably critical support for the school. Governors are well aware of their statutory responsibilities. They are sufficiently well-informed about the school to know that they are fulfilling these responsibilities, through reports from the headteacher and other staff and through numerous personal contacts with the school. There are nominated governors who take responsibility for monitoring developments in areas including special educational needs, numeracy and literacy. Governors have given the headteacher their constructive backing in his numerous initiatives.
77. They have been particularly supportive and helpful in major, well-planned initiatives to improve the school's building, environment and resources. This has required the headteacher and governors to take hard decisions about budgetary priorities, particularly over staffing levels. Planning has been unswerving, with a keen eye on best value principles and on full utilisation of all available funds. Governors now see their decisions beginning to bear fruit, particularly in the growing numbers of pupils coming to the school, in the attractive, well-resourced environment it offers, and in the high levels of parental satisfaction. With these developments now well established, there is scope for them to give closer critical attention to the school's academic performance, drawing on the more detailed analyses of performance scheduled in the next stage of the school's improvement plan.
78. The school's annual budget allows it to spend slightly more per pupil than the national average for middle schools. Budgetary planning and control are very thorough. Relatively low spending on teaching staff results in teachers having heavy teaching commitments with average-sized classes. This puts considerable pressure on teachers, several of whom have multiple responsibilities. They have a relatively loose framework of systems and criteria to work to. This results in them having to make numerous

personal judgements in setting their priorities, resulting in some gaps and inefficiencies.

79. The staff shows a good blend of expertise and teaching experience. Teachers are generally well deployed, with a few exceptions noted above. Arrangements for professional development are generally satisfactory, although in the absence of systems for appraisal and review, a lot of development currently depends on the individual initiative of teachers.
80. Classroom support staff give good and valued support in some classes. Non-teaching staff also provide effective and efficient support, for example, in the library and resources area; and in the calm, orderly and friendly running of the school. It is a notably clean, pleasing and attractive place to be in.
81. This pleasantness results, in great measure, from recent major initiatives to improve the fabric, environment and learning facilities. All subjects have at least adequate space and facilities, although some teaching spaces are rather cramped. An ambitious programme for using information technology is well in hand, and beginning to have a major impact on some teaching and learning. The library is an attractive, well-resourced – and used – area. The quality of display throughout the school is high, blending striking examples of pupils' work, particularly art-work, with powerful photographs celebrating pupils' enjoyment in learning. The quality and purposefulness of some display, particularly in Year 5, is outstanding. Resources for learning are generally at least adequate, although there is an unacceptably high level of sharing textbooks, for example, in mathematics and science.
82. Overall there is effective and purposeful leadership of the school's strategic development and the school's routine management is calm and effective. These strong features of management now need to be complemented by more systematic processes for ensuring that key policies and procedures are fully implemented and acted on.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

83. To ensure the continued improvement of standards and pupils' learning, the headteacher and governors should address the following key issues.
84. Improve the quality of pupils' experiences in design and technology, and the standards they achieve, by ensuring that:
- schemes of work for all years cover the full range of learning experiences stipulated by the National Curriculum;
  - teachers have sufficient guidance and support to implement these schemes fully and to provide challenging work for all pupils.
- (11, 32, 58, 137-147)
85. Improve the overall standards in mathematics by ensuring that:
- schemes of work give sufficient detail to enable all teachers of mathematics to set appropriate and challenging work to all pupils, particularly in Years 7 and 8, in lower-attaining sets;
  - non-specialist teachers of mathematics receive systematic monitoring, feedback and support for their work.
- (18, 34, 106-114)
86. Improve the overall quality of teaching by ensuring that:
- teachers' lesson planning systematically includes an explicit intention of what pupils should learn from activities set;
  - teachers' lesson planning systematically takes account of what pupils already know and can do;
  - teachers' advance planning of topics systematically takes account of how pupils have achieved in earlier topics;
  - information gained from assessments of pupils' knowledge and understanding is readily accessible by all teachers, in a form that is easily understandable;
  - all teachers manage pupils' behaviour effectively through:
    - consistent and assertive implementation of the school's code of classroom practice,  
and
    - provision of varied and challenging activities for all pupils.
- (27-41)
87. Improve the overall quality of learning and teaching, in all subjects and years, through a more systematic programme of monitoring that:
- has an agreed framework and timetable for what is to be monitored and criteria to be used in making judgements;
  - provides clear feedback to teachers on strengths and weaknesses observed;
  - makes provision for strengths to be disseminated and weaknesses eliminated.
- (70-73)

88. Improve the overall quality of planning for further improvement of the school by ensuring that:
- subject plans specify aspects of standards that are to be improved;
  - all plans specify how their success is to be evaluated;
  - subject plans take explicit account of priorities identified in the whole-school plan;
  - the planning process takes full account of plans for improvement within particular year-groups and their teaching teams.
- (71, 72)
89. In addition to these key issues for improvement, the headteacher and governors should also consider their action in response to the following areas for improvement identified in this report.
- systematic identification and provision for pupils of high ability and capability; (14)
  - the systematic use of information technology in all subjects on the curriculum; (16, 162-171)
  - accessibility of information about the performance of individuals and groups of pupils; (56, 73)
  - monitoring and reviewing pupils' overall academic performance; (59)
  - the role and accountability of year co-ordinators; (59, 72)
  - the procedures for identifying and reviewing teachers' deployment, priorities and professional development. (73)

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

## 90. PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### *Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection*

Number of lessons observed	129
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	35

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2.3%	19.4%	35.7%	33.3%	7.8%	1.6%	0

*The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.*

### *Information about the school's pupils*

#### **Pupils on the school's roll**

	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils on the school's roll	544
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	50

#### **Special educational needs**

	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	11
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	148

#### **English as an additional language**

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	43

#### **Pupil mobility in the last school year**

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	17
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	24

### *Attendance*

#### **Authorised absence**

	%
School data	5.2
National comparative data	6.0

#### **Unauthorised absence**

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	0.4

*Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.*

***Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2***

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	58	62	120

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	35	35	43
	Girls	48	41	52
	Total	83	76	95
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	69 (68)	64 (64)	79 (71)
	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	33	36	40
	Girls	46	39	49
	Total	79	75	89
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	66 (68)	63 (62)	74 (71)
	National	68 (65)	69 (59)	75 (69)

*Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.*

**Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	10
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	8
Indian	23
Pakistani	9
Bangladeshi	4
Chinese	1
White	433
Any other minority ethnic group	53

**Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	3	0
Other minority ethnic groups	1	0

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

**Teachers and classes****Qualified teachers and classes: Y5 – Y8**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	25.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.6

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

**Education support staff: Y5 – Y8**

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	120

**Deployment of teachers: Y5 – Y8**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	85.7
---	------

**Average teaching group size: Y5 – Y8**

Key Stage 2	25.7
Key Stage 3	23.7

**Financial information**

Financial year	1999
----------------	------

	£
Total income	896,244
Total expenditure	989,716
Expenditure per pupil	1,879
Balance brought forward from previous year	119,553
Balance carried forward to next year	26,081

## *Results of the survey of parents and carers*

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	544
Number of questionnaires returned	199

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	48	45	6	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	50	47	3	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	37	58	4	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	57	14	1	1
The teaching is good.	50	46	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	49	42	7	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	66	30	2	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	68	29	3	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	41	48	9	1	1
The school is well led and managed.	53	43	2	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	51	42	4	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	46	45	6	1	3

## **PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES**

### **ENGLISH**

91. A generous amount of time is allocated for the teaching of English and this allows for a broad and varied curriculum which includes all aspects of the National Curriculum. The National Literacy Strategy has been successfully implemented in Years 5 and 6, with some extension of the strategy for older pupils. The literacy hour is intelligently interpreted to give structure to children's learning without imposing constraints. Most pupils are taught in mixed-ability groups; Year 5 and Year 6 classes are taught by their class teachers who know them very well and are able to get the best out of them. The small number of low-achieving pupils in Years 5 and 6 who have been grouped together for literacy hour, do not, however, enjoy the same quality of experience as their classmates and these arrangements need to be reviewed. Children of all ages study a Shakespeare play and this part of the curriculum is delivered particularly well, giving even the youngest a feeling for the story and a taste of the richness of language used.
92. Pupils achieve high standards in English throughout the school; and this impacts on their performance in other subjects of the curriculum. The school met its 1999 targets for pupils' achievements in national test results for 11 year olds, with 69 per cent of pupils achieving the benchmark Level 4 – very close to the national average. The overall results for 1999 were slightly below the national and local education authority averages, reflecting relatively modest improvements in test results since the last inspection. However, the work seen in lessons and that completed for homework was of higher than average standard, with some of very high quality. This reflects the impact of recent well-focused work on developing standards in English in all years. There has also been much work done this year specifically to raise the overall results in tests for the 11 year olds. The department has taken steps to prepare pupils for these tests, with a greater focus on the use of information and on writing skills. Booster classes have provided extra support for selected pupils. Levels of attainment for girls were higher than those for boys in the national tests in 1999; but there was no evidence of a general disparity in the work done in school.
93. Speaking and listening are a strength across the age and ability range. Pupils use standard English very competently and are mature in expressing their ideas, feelings and opinions. They like to participate in classroom discussion and engage confidently on an individual basis with adults. Drama is used very effectively to support and further develop these skills. Children listen attentively to the teacher and to each other, and are able to internalise quite large amounts of information.
94. Most pupils read accurately, fluently and with good expression; they understand what they read and those in Years 5 and 6, particularly, demonstrate a real enjoyment in books. At the lower end of the school, pupils can talk about authors' intent and particular styles of writing; in library lessons they are encouraged to read for pleasure, but also to move on from favourite authors to try new writers and different genres. Higher up the school, pupils respond to challenging texts in a reasoned and sensitive manner, demonstrating understanding of quite complex language. Reading for

information is well-practised; and children can skim and scan the text quickly and efficiently. Where children are progressing more slowly, they are taught the full range of strategies for working out unfamiliar words and are well supported by staff and fellow pupils. There is a good range of books in school for slower readers and a paired reading scheme is effective in offering extra help to youngsters in Year 5.

95. There are opportunities to engage in a wide range of writing including regular extended pieces. Pupils are able to write well-structured description, explanation, persuasion and argument, and demonstrate real creativity in story writing and poetry.
96. Presentation of work is often of a very high standard, with many examples attractively displayed around the school. Spelling ability varies, however, and the whole-school approach to teaching and learning spellings, using the 'Look-Cover-Write-Check' method would benefit from a renewed focus. A well-organised spelling workshop is run by special educational needs staff and this is helping most pupils who attend to make good progress.
97. Attitudes to learning are generally good and pupils make the most of opportunities provided; concentration levels are often high. Pupils show interest in the tasks presented to them and are able to work independently and responsibly, either on their own or collaboratively in pairs or groups. Relationships between staff and pupils are usually mutually respectful and conducive to creating a pleasant and productive working environment. There is a small amount of off-task behaviour, however, which is not always well-managed. Staff would benefit from in-service training on behaviour management and from opportunities to reflect on how they group pupils within the class. In the younger year groups particularly, a shared sense of responsibility for helping the most needy members of the school ensures that pupils with special educational needs are treated fairly and sympathetically.
98. Overall, the quality of teaching is good, with a significant amount very good and some examples of charismatic teaching by teachers who are very knowledgeable and have a love of their subject which they impart to others. There was no significant difference between the quality of teaching of teachers who have English as their specialist subject and that of others. This reflects both the quality of support given to non-specialist teachers, and the generally high level of general professional expertise. Teachers work hard to produce interesting, stimulating lessons and use an imaginative range of materials to provide intellectual and creative challenge for pupils. For example, in a Year 5 lesson where pupils were introduced to *Hamlet*; puppets were used to represent the main characters and the teacher skilfully intertwined the narrative with snippets of the Shakespearean verse, holding the children's attention and fuelling their curiosity. By the end of the lesson, pupils had a good grasp of the story, knew something about the main characters and were able to read and understand a few lines of blank verse.
99. Teachers employ a range of teaching skills, including whole-class teaching, skilful questioning and classroom discussion, to good effect. Classroom drama and performance poetry are also positive features of English lessons. Basic skills are taught well. Many lessons have a good pace and involve a variety of activities which are well-matched to pupils' abilities. In most lessons, teachers' expectations are appropriately high but in some sessions, with children of lower ability, this is not the

case; these lessons lack pace and children are seen to achieve very little in terms of work output or progress in knowledge and understanding. In one lesson, pupils were presented with a sentence-making activity which lacked context. They quickly lost interest and became bored, so that by the end of the lesson they had little or nothing to show in terms of work produced or knowledge gained. A more creative approach to supporting children with special educational needs, in terms of giving them more opportunities to succeed, might be achieved with greater use of information technology. The in-class support provided by classroom assistants is helpful but directed primarily to pupils with statements of special educational needs. At the other end of the ability range, the most able pupils are not always sufficiently challenged; teachers need to be sure that appropriate enrichment and extension work are included in their planning.

100. Staff have worked hard to prepare for the literacy hour in Years 5 and 6 and there is evidence of very effective co-operation between teachers of English throughout the school; less experienced members of staff are well supported. Elements of the literacy strategy are being effectively introduced with older pupils. There was considerable evidence of pupils' skills in literacy being effectively used and developed in their work in other subjects throughout the school, but particularly in Years 5 and 6. Pupils are regularly expected to undertake varied reading and research activities, and to write in a variety of styles and formats.
101. Regular meetings bring a cohesion to the English department and facilitate the sharing of good practice. Marking is satisfactory and often very helpful in identifying what pupils need to do to improve. The individual target-setting system is still in the early stages of development but is proving useful with older pupils in particular.
102. Resources are satisfactory, with a good stock of new books, though insufficient for pupils to have one copy each. The library and resource centre is an important asset: well-stocked, well-managed, well-used. Accommodation is good except for one room used for a Year 5 group in the literacy hour, which is too small. The standard of display in classrooms is excellent.
103. The co-ordinator provides good leadership for a large team of dedicated teachers and fulfils her role well within the constraints of the timetable. Policies and guidelines are well thought out and under-pinned by detailed schemes of work. The departmental development plan would be more manageable with more clearly defined success criteria, directly related to raising standards. Some monitoring of teaching has been carried out but this needs to be developed into a more systematic approach. Monitoring of standards of children's work and attainments also lacks rigour.
104. Since the last inspection, the school has successfully implemented the literacy hour in Years 5 and 6 and has continued to develop teaching of a high standard in English lessons throughout the school. Book stocks have been built up, with particular attention to sets for guided reading, information texts and books to interest boys. The key points for action in the 1995 report, concerning individual target-setting and monitoring and evaluation, have been addressed to some extent but remain areas for further development.

105. **Key points for action.**

- A more systematic approach to monitoring teaching and learning, with particular focus on using assessment data and samples of moderated work to build up an evidence base for demonstrating the value-added impact of the department's work.
- Consideration of pupil groupings and how best to meet the needs of children with special educational needs.

## MATHEMATICS

106. Mathematics is taught in all years to groups setted by their mathematical ability. Several teachers teach the subject. Most have some qualifications or extended experience in teaching mathematics to this age group. The National Numeracy Strategy has been introduced in Years 5 and 6.
107. Standards in mathematics are, overall, somewhat above the national average, similar to the findings of the last inspection. From the work seen during the inspection, they are generally higher than recent national test results suggest. Standards by the end of Year 6 are currently above national averages; they are high in Year 5. Standards in Years 7 and 8 are more varied. By the end of Year 8, the average standard is about typical for this age but with some very high level attainment offset by some of low standard. Most pupils make good progress in mathematics, supported by generally good teaching. However, there is a substantial degree of underachievement, particularly among older lower attaining pupils, with some weakness in their teaching and in the curriculum support for teachers.
108. In the most recent (1999) national tests for 11 year olds, overall mathematics results were close to the national average but below the average for similar schools. The percentage achieving the benchmark Level 4 (64 per cent) was below the national average (69 per cent); but the percentage reaching higher levels was slightly higher than that found nationally. Results fell below the targets set by the school that were well based on evidence of pupils' aptitudes and prior attainment in mathematics. Test results have shown overall but rather modest improvement since the last inspection.
109. The results reflect a lower standard of work than that seen from younger pupils during the inspection. Many Year 6 pupils are already secure in work at Level 4 standard, with a good number confident in higher level work across a range of mathematical topics. Standards in Year 5 are generally high, with several pupils already confident in Level 5 standards in several topics. Most younger pupils are making good, some very good, progress, particularly in Year 5. High ability pupils are generally well challenged. This reflects generally good teaching that is making effective use of the National Numeracy Strategy, and most pupils' very good attitudes. Progress in lower-attaining sets is more varied, although mainly at least satisfactory, it is sometimes less so.
110. In Years 7 and 8, most pupils continue to make at least satisfactory progress in all aspects of the subject, including mathematical investigation. Pupils were seen to make very good progress in some lessons, responding with enthusiasm to the challenge of enjoyable activities and provocative teaching. The long-term progress of pupils in higher attaining sets, both boys and girls, seen through their books and records, is at

least satisfactory and predominantly good, particularly in Year 8. Some talented pupils are well provided for. Progress of lower attaining sets, in which boys are in the majority, is more erratic and is, in some respects, unsatisfactory. Their rate of working is variable and teaching does not always enable them to build steadily on previous work. Consequently the range of attainment by the end of Year 8 is considerable. Although on average similar to that typically found at this age, the overall standard could clearly be higher.

111. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with substantial good practice, but with some weaknesses, particularly with lower attaining sets. Teaching is good overall in Years 5 and 6, satisfactory overall in Years 7 and 8. The best teaching engages pupils' interest through activities that are successfully planned to capture their interest and build on what has gone before. Good class management and some excellent questioning enable the teacher to keep all pupils active, thinking and developing their ideas. In a lesson on probability, the investigational approach helped pupils to relate difficult ideas to their concrete experience; to think, make predictions and check their answers. They developed both their investigational skills as well as new mathematical ideas. Most teaching makes effective use of the generally very good relationships and most pupils' positive and mature attitudes to learning.
112. A substantial minority of mathematics teaching is by teachers who have no formal qualifications in teaching the subject, although most have substantial relevant experience. Non-specialist teaching is generally conscientious, accurate, well-paced and frequently good. In Years 5 and 6 particularly, teachers receive good support from the school's scheme for implementing the National Numeracy Strategy. The strategies, structures and materials are well interpreted and teachers have ready access to advice for their work. This is reflected in the quality of most teaching and in the clear recent improvement in younger pupils' numeracy skills and general mathematical standards.
113. The specialist support for teachers in Years 7 and 8 is less structured, although the mathematics co-ordinator is readily available to give guidance and advice. The schemes of work for Years 7 and 8 provide inadequate structure and detail for the course. While some teachers overcome this weakness through their own expertise, some teaching, particularly of lower attaining sets, suffers. (This was a weakness identified in the last inspection.) The teaching subsequently does not develop pupils' ideas and skills with sufficient clarity in systematic steps that build on pupils' interests and what they can already do. There are insufficient structured resources to support some of the work. Consequently, the pace of some lessons falls off, and some pupils lose interest. In a small number of lessons seen, these weaknesses were compounded by some weakness in teachers' management of inattentive and occasionally mischievous behaviour.
114. Pupils' skills in numeracy are predominantly developed through their mathematics teaching. The numeracy strategy has been well implemented in Years 5 and 6, and there are plans, including for a summer school, to further extend it, including work for older pupils. Numeracy is also, however, well developed in other subjects and occasionally in class time. Pupils have good opportunities to practise and develop their numeracy skills in many contexts. This is helped by many teachers' knowledge of the

numeracy strategy through their involvement in teaching mathematics.

115. Mathematics also makes good use of the school's new facilities for information technology. Teachers use information technology techniques very effectively in developing pupils' mathematical skills. The use of spreadsheets is particularly good. As mathematics lessons are the main means for teaching some key aspects of information technology, there is a need for more systematic assessment of individual pupils' information technology skills in these aspects, as well as just ensuring that all pupils use these skills.
116. The routine management of the department is largely effective in providing teachers with a framework and resources for their teaching. Monitoring of results and pupils' work has identified some weaknesses and led to appropriate action, including setting individual targets for pupils to work towards. Expert advice is available to teachers who ask for it. Monitoring of the quality of learning and teaching is, however, largely unsystematic at the moment. This contributes to unsatisfactorily large variations in standards and in teaching, particularly in Years 7 and 8. It also contributes to weaknesses in the plans for development of mathematics. These do not identify precisely enough where and how standards most need to be improved and how improvement is to be evaluated.
117. **Key points for action.**
- Improving overall standards, but particularly for lower attaining sets.
  - More consistently good teaching.
  - More detailed, effective schemes of work and resources, particularly for Years 7 and 8.
  - More consistent marking and assessment.
  - More systematic monitoring of learning and teaching.
  - Plans for development to be more precise and focused on raising standards.

## SCIENCE

118. Science provision and accommodation within the school are generous. Two full sized laboratories, a well resourced preparation room and an extensive environmental studies area with potting sheds, a pond and woodland areas, form a strong base for the teaching. Pupils are taught in mixed ability classes for three separate one-hour periods during the week. Ten teachers teach some science. All have some qualification in science teaching for this age range.
119. The overall inspection evidence, based on lesson observation, analysis of class records, and the scrutiny of pupils' work, indicates that standards at the age of 11 and 13 are above national expectations, generally reflecting the standards shown in recent national tests. Contributing factors include the efficiency of the departmental organisation, particularly the well-defined schemes of work, the lesson planning and the positive inter-pupil, and pupil-staff relationships that exist.
120. Results of the National Curriculum tests for 11 year olds in 1999 indicate that:
- the percentage of pupils reaching the benchmark Level 4 or above was 79 per cent,

close to the national average;

- the percentage of pupils reaching the higher Level 5 or above was 32 per cent, this was above the national average.

On the basis of teachers' assessments:

- the percentage of pupils reaching Level 4 or above was 74 per cent, this was below the national average;
- the percentage of pupils reaching Level 5 or above was 28 per cent, this was above the national average.

When compared with schools in similar contexts:

- results of pupils reaching Level 4 or above were below average for similar schools;
- results of pupils reaching Level 5 or better were above the average for similar schools.

121. Using a base of average National Curriculum points scored, pupils' performance at the age of 11 in science was close to the national average. It exceeded the national average for their age group by the equivalent of 0.5 points. This is a position that has been maintained since the previous inspection, from 1996 to 1999.
122. During this time, the performance of girls in science was above the national average. It exceeded the national average for their age group by the equivalent of 0.9 points, almost a term's advantage. The boys' performance over this period exceeded the national average by the equivalent of 0.3 points. That girls do better than boys in science could relate to the very positive role model set by the female subject co-ordinator. In work seen during the inspection, there was no major difference between the quality of that done by boys and that done by girls.
123. Pupils' good progress over the periods 9 to 11, and 11 to 13, is evident from the classroom observation, scrutiny of work, and pupils' individual records of achievement. Progress in Year 5, where pupils' enthusiasm is most positive, is very good. Pupils in all years continue to show enthusiasm and co-operative behaviour in their science work. These factors make a significant contribution to their good, steady progress in science throughout the school and hence, to the above-average standards they attain. Pupils on the special educational needs register and high attainers make good progress in science. The schemes of work for the subject, and teacher's individual lesson plans, successfully provide work to match pupils' differing levels of attainment, including challenging extension tasks for those who grasp the basic ideas rapidly. Pupils are well known to staff; they are treated with respect as individuals and respond accordingly.
124. Teaching in science is good overall. In lessons seen, it was rather better in Years 5 and 6 than in Years 7 and 8. The strengths of the schemes of work, lesson planning, teachers' subject knowledge, positive relationships with pupils, together with the constructive marking of class work, all contribute to pupils' learning. Practical work is well organised, with pupils working in small groups. Apparatus is handled efficiently and with care. Health and safety requirements are followed in detail. Throughout the majority of lessons, a system of key words were used, these became reference points for the pupils. Homework is a regular feature and homework records are maintained within the department.

125. Since the last inspection (October 1995), the subject has shown improvement. The scientific concepts introduced in Years 5 and 6 have been revised and now provide a good basis for later work. The teaching relating to Years 5 and 6, described then as sound, is now good. Since the last inspection, there have been effective developments in how work is assessed, and the use made of assessments. The tests of modules of work have been modified, the recording of results has also been simplified. These formal assessments are well-related to the standards defined by the National Curriculum and are being effectively used in setting specific targets for each pupil. These targets are generally well understood by pupils and are helping them to make progress, particularly in developing their skills of scientific investigation.
126. The high degree of organisation within the department is undoubtedly a contributing factor to the subject's success. Curriculum planning, differentiation and support for teachers within the laboratory and classroom are positive. Children's enthusiasm and co-operation play a large part in contributing to their individual development within the subject. Monitoring of pupils' work is a variable feature within the department; monitoring of lessons has taken place, but there are no systematic procedures for what is to be observed or how information is to be fed back to teachers and the senior management of the school. There is a strong framework of tests, assessments, record-keeping and target-setting. On the whole, this framework is being effectively used by teachers, with some excellent practice seen in the clear and helpful targets for developing older pupils' investigation skills. However, some practice is barely satisfactory; for example, in marking that is supportive and encouraging but gives pupils no idea of what standard they are achieving or what they should be doing to improve. Overall, strategies for assessment and target-setting require further development.
127. There is insufficient systematic monitoring of teaching and learning which identifies good practice and shares strategies; thus promoting teachers' professional development and enabling pupil performance to improve. The large number of teachers involved in the teaching of science provides a considerable challenge in ensuring consistency of practice in implementing some ambitious procedures, particularly in target-setting.
128. The subject has a sound development plan that is being conscientiously implemented, although the criteria for success are not explicitly focused on how standards across the school are to be further raised. A more systematic approach would help to maximise the impact of improvements in teaching and learning that have been evident throughout the current inspection.

## **ART**

129. Art and design is taught to pupils by a combination of class and subject specialist teachers. Pupils are taught in mixed ability groups. Less time is allocated to the subject in Year 6 than in Years 5, 7 and 8.
130. Standards of attainment in Years 5 and 6 are at least in line with national expectations and with pupils' abilities and for many pupils are above those expected. Pupils in most classes produce work of high quality across a range of media. They are developing a good understanding of colour, shape, line, texture and the working characteristics of materials. Pupils use an increasing range of words when talking about art and

effectively express their opinions about the work of artists and crafts people. Both boys and girls of all abilities make good progress in lessons and over time.

131. The attainment reached by pupils by the age of 11 is effectively built upon and further extended in Years 7 and 8, where attainment is above average when compared with that expected nationally. Many 11 to 13 year olds attain levels that are high. Achievement reflects pupils' abilities.
132. Pupils develop their ideas well using their prior learning and experiences, their imagination and the influences of other artists, crafts, people and cultures. Boys and girls are beginning to modify and refine their work and demonstrate a growing confidence to experiment with an increased range of materials. Progress in lessons and over time is good for all pupils. The high quality of work produced by pupils in art contributes significantly to the excellent displays seen throughout the school, which provide a stimulating learning environment. The work done by Years 5 and 6 exploring Egyptian art and ceramic animals, wire structures exploring proportion and movement in Year 7 and the in-depth critical studies of a range of artists by Year 8 pupils are but a few examples that illustrate good practice.
133. Boys and girls of all ages display good attitudes to learning which contribute positively to the standards attained by pupils. They work hard, co-operate well and demonstrate the capacity to work independently when asked by their teachers. Pupils talk with confidence and understanding about what they are doing.
134. The overall quality of teaching is good. During the inspection, it was never less than satisfactory and was frequently good, particularly when the lessons were taught by subject specialists. The majority of lessons seen displayed good features. Questioning is used skilfully to probe understanding and to encourage boys and girls to express their ideas and appreciation of art. The pace in most lessons is brisk and classroom organisation and management are good. However, greater clarity in respect of what teachers want pupils to learn is needed. The inclusion of this, along with how teachers can make more reliable judgements about what pupils know and can do, is necessary in raising standards further. This will ensure that these judgements more fully inform the next stages in planning what pupils need to learn, and hence what levels of challenge need to be provided for pupils.
135. The subject co-ordinator is relatively new to the post and is highly committed to the subject and its continued improvement. The co-ordinator recognises that the role requires teaching and learning in the subject to be monitored and evaluated across the school. In practice, this is not yet happening rigorously or systematically. Greater clarity and guidance as to what is expected are required. The subject's development plan, whilst providing an overview of intended developments, would benefit from further improvement. More attention needs to be given to what specific actions are required to achieve the areas for development and to their evaluation in respect of the impact on standards and quality.
136. The previous inspection identified the need to develop the use of sketchbooks as a means of recording observations and developments. This has been addressed and is now an integral feature of lessons where appropriate. The need for better assessment and

recording systems was highlighted. Some consideration has been given to this, but more work in respect of assessment practices and procedures is required.

137. **Key points for action.**

- More clearly define, within planning, what is to be taught and what pupils will learn, so that teachers can decide more accurately what pupils know and can do in order to inform future planning.
- Develop further the role of the subject co-ordinator in monitoring and evaluating the work of teachers and pupils.
- More closely evaluate the outcomes of actions and development in terms of the impact they are having on standards and quality.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

138. Design and technology is taught to all pupils in mixed ability class groups by a combination of class and subject specialist teachers. As boys and girls move through the school, they gain experience in using wood, metal and food in well-equipped specialist accommodation. In addition, pupils also gain some insights into control technology. At the time of the inspection, there were temporary staffing and management arrangements in place for the subject.

139. Standards are, overall, below average. Whilst most boys and girls in Years 5 and 6 attain standards that are broadly average when compared with the national expectation, many pupils attain below this, with attainment not reflecting their levels of ability. In Years 7 and 8, a similar pattern of attainment can be seen. Whilst some pupils attain the national expectation, many attain below it. The majority of pupils demonstrate achievement that is in line with their ability but a significant number do not achieve to their full potential. In Years 7 and 8, this is largely because work is too narrowly focused and confined largely to initial designing and then making. In some areas, such as in work with food, work is predominantly in making only. As a result, pupils are not able to demonstrate attainment in researching and investigating how to develop and refine their initial ideas about designs. They also have few opportunities to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of what they have made, or to modify them in the light of these evaluations. This leads to pupils not being fully aware of all the features which make up the subject, and consequently to below-average standards overall in the subject.

140. Attainment and progress in individual lessons seen were much better than could be seen from pupils' work over time. During lessons, work was done to consider the characteristics and handling qualities of materials, for example, ways of combining materials and making objects move. However, very rarely is this built upon by pupils researching and investigating for themselves. As a result, pupils do not record their findings and do not consider other choices that might be available to them when making their products. During lessons which focus on skills development, pupils are developing practical expertise and have an improving understanding of the technical language associated with the subject. However, pupils' knowledge and understanding about the processes involved in designing and making things are not secure as this is less well developed by teachers. This lack of understanding of key ideas about the subject contributes to pupils not sufficiently building their work in a lesson on what they have already done and consequently to their slow overall progress.

141. The quality of teaching across the age range is sound overall but with some variation and lack of consistency. Whilst teaching in most lessons displays many positive features, significant shortcomings in planning and assessment are evident. The pace of lessons at times is too leisurely with insufficient work being planned for pupils. On other occasions, it is much too brisk to secure key concepts and opportunities are missed to develop the design process as a whole. However, features of teaching seen that made positive contributions to pupils' learning included good questioning which probed pupils' understanding of work in progress, very positive relationships, class routines and careful attention to health and safety issues.
142. Pupils' attitudes to learning are sound and frequently good. Pupils generally listen to and follow instructions. The majority organise and manage their work well and use tools and equipment carefully. Within workshops they are developing satisfactory graphic skills as seen particularly in their work on designing a study bedroom and a hot-pot stand. Good levels of co-operation were seen in all lessons.
143. The current scheme of work has good features but fails to give sufficient emphasis to key aspects, particularly of design and evaluation. It will need to be reviewed and extended to incorporate the revised national requirements for the subject. This necessary development will provide the school with an ideal opportunity to introduce a wider variety of materials, such as acrylics and textiles, into the programme. Similarly, it will also enable links between and across the work done with various materials to be further improved. This is needed to improve continuity and progression in the teaching programme, so that pupils' work builds more securely on what they have already learned. The review will also assist teachers to plan more precisely what they want pupils to learn and hence what they need to teach in order to make more reliable judgements about what pupils of all abilities know and can do. This is an area for considerable development as current practices are not secure.
144. The routine management of the subject is satisfactory. Policies are in place but planning for the strategic development of the subject would be improved by more detail, particularly in respect of monitoring and evaluating the work of teachers and pupils across the subject. More attention needs to be given to this, as well as deciding the extent to which any actions taken have had a positive impact on standards and quality. The very recently appointed acting co-ordinator, along with other key staff, recognise and are committed to the continued development of the subject. However, much of what is required will need to be supported through providing opportunities for teachers' professional development which look more precisely at meeting the needs of the subject as it is currently described in the National Curriculum.
145. There are also significant shortcomings in resources for the subject. Whilst pupils undoubtedly benefit from the opportunity of working in specialist rooms from the age of 9, the lack of books and computer programmes to support the development of pupils' research, investigation and designing skills is not helpful.
146. Since the last inspection, progress has been made in addressing health and safety issues and the quality of materials used by pupils to ensure better quality outcomes. A review of the balance of the programme across the materials against the National Curriculum was undertaken but does require further work.

147. **Key points for action.**

- Ensure that curriculum planning more accurately reflects all aspects of the subject and that it identifies more clearly what pupils need to learn, so that teachers are more able to determine what pupils know and can do.
- Build upon the already supportive climate of collaborative working to ensure that all those contributing to teaching design and technology plan to secure improved continuity and progression for pupils.
- Improve upon the current arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the work of teachers and pupils.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

148. Geography is taught in mixed ability classes throughout the school, by both specialist and non-specialist teachers. In addition to observations made within classrooms, a close examination was made of a sample of geography work from each class, together with that in displays in corridors and classrooms. Discussions were held with the subject co-ordinator, classroom teachers and the pupils.
149. Standards are generally above average. Inspection findings show that the attainment of a substantial majority of pupils exceeds the national expectation at the ages of both 11 and 13. These results show an improvement, particularly for pupils aged 11 to 13, in the standards reported during the last inspection. This improvement has been brought about by the high quality support given to non-specialist teachers by the subject co-ordinator and the hard work being carried out by teachers in assessing and reviewing the quality of pupils' work against that expected for pupils nationally.
150. Between the ages of 9 to 11 and 11 to 13, the progress made by pupils, including those with special educational needs, is good. Younger pupils in Year 5 discuss knowledgeably conditions of poverty in a part of Kenya and actively debate how different types of aid by world charity organisations could change the lives of the people who live there. They accurately and sympathetically compare living conditions, housing and education in Kenya with their own. By the age of 11, pupils are able to use atlases and maps of different scales confidently to support their learning. Year 6 pupils use details from views and aerial photographs to help them develop their understanding of the effects the building of a by-pass road around Newport, near Cambridge, will have on local people and businesses. Older pupils in Year 8 show good recall of their previous lessons and use their knowledge well to make good progress in lessons to investigate the occurrence of earthquakes and volcanoes around the world. They are able to talk in detail about the movements taking place within the earth that cause volcanoes to erupt. By the age of 13, pupils have a clearly developing understanding of how the world is shaped and the ways in which attempts are made to improve living conditions in parts of it.
151. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are good overall throughout the school. During the inspection, they were never less than satisfactory. They are attentive listeners and willing to share their ideas with others. Higher attaining pupils ask searching questions and some offer their own theories, as in a Year 8 lesson on earthquakes and volcanoes. Pupils work supportively together in groups and show initiative in their use of classroom resources. They enjoy their lessons, respond

enthusiastically to their teachers in answering questions and keep up their concentration throughout their lessons. Through their studies of other countries and communities, pupils are extending very well their awareness of different cultures and traditions as, for example, the work of Year 5 pupils on village life in Kenya. This work made powerful use of pupils' poetic, artistic and literary skills, as well as extending their geographical knowledge and skills.

152. The overall quality of teaching is good across the school. Teaching seen during the inspection was never less than satisfactory. Teaching continues to improve upon the high level of good teaching observed during the previous inspection. Where very good teaching was observed, the teacher's use of specialist vocabulary and choice of activities was particularly challenging and pupils were encouraged to use their knowledge to develop new ideas. Class management is good at all ages and promotes good behaviour. Lesson planning sets out what is to be achieved and this is clearly shared with pupils. Pupils are given good feedback on how well they have achieved during lessons. However, this is largely informal. Teachers gain considerable information on how well pupils tackle the work they are given, but this is not systematically recorded, or used in planning future work. This, at times, limits the effectiveness of lessons in moving pupils on from what they already know and can do. Teachers sometimes overlook opportunities to develop geographical skills, such as the use of maps and photographs, to more demanding levels. This was an issue raised at the last inspection in 1995.
153. Geography is well managed across the school and the process of monitoring and supporting non-specialist teachers by the subject co-ordinator is helping pupils to make good progress. The recording of pupils' periodic assessments, which are compared to national standards, is giving teachers a better idea as to how their own pupils are performing. Plans to further opportunities for improving fieldwork experiences for each year group are in the process of being developed and will further broaden their learning. Pupils currently have some opportunities to undertake practical fieldwork. This helps the progress they make in applying their knowledge to real, local situations. The department has appropriate plans to extend this aspect of its work.
154. Since the last inspection, developments have been made in the area of assessing pupils' work, but the issue of using information gained to improve planning of future work remains. There are now more opportunities recognised, from which pupils' level of working can be identified. This can form a basis from which teachers plan to extend pupils' learning even further. The co-ordinator is very aware that the use of information technology in geography remains undeveloped across the school and is planning to introduce appropriate computer-based activities into schemes of work.

## **HISTORY**

155. History is taught in mixed ability classes throughout the school, by both specialist and non-specialist teachers. In addition to observations made within classrooms during the inspection, close examination was made of a sample of history work from each class, together with that in displays in classrooms and corridors. Discussions were held with the subject co-ordinator, classroom teachers and their pupils.

156. Standards are above average overall. Inspection findings show that the attainment of a substantial majority of pupils exceeds national expectations at the ages of both 11 and 13. Pupils in both these age ranges, including pupils with special educational needs, make good progress. These results show an improvement upon the standards reported during the last inspection. They have been brought about by an effective use of resources and the support given to teachers by the subject co-ordinator in a relatively short period of time.
157. By the age of 11, pupils show a good understanding of the historical periods that they study and are developing their ability to use a variety of sources of evidence to draw conclusions and report them. In a lesson on life in Victorian times, pupils in Year 5 examined a variety of actual Victorian household articles, which they investigated for clues as to what they were used for and compared them with modern day appliances to show how lifestyles have changed. Pupils discussed with interest what it must have been like to live in houses during the nineteenth century and the high value that Victorians put on what are now everyday goods. Year 6 pupils, investigating the 'new' houses of the 1930's compared with the cramped housing in towns of the early, twentieth century, used present day estate agents' details of houses to produce advertisements for 1930's semi-detached homes. They used this information to recognise changes in family living styles from this period to the present day. By the age of 13, pupils show an increasing factual knowledge and understanding of the history of Britain and other countries and display a maturing view on the use of evidence available to them. Year 7 pupils selected, from a variety of different people's points of view, the evidence to show who had the greatest claim to the throne of England in 1066 and gave reasons for their choices. In their studies of the lifestyles of the Indians of North America, Year 8 pupils considered the effect of European settlers upon the tribes through first hand evidence of the time and discussed the fact that many of their points of view are biased against the Indian people.
158. Pupils' attitudes towards learning in history are consistently good between the ages of 9 to 11. They are good overall from 11 to 13. During the inspection, they were never less than satisfactory. Pupils enjoy working in the subject, listen attentively and answer questions with enthusiasm and confidence. They handle resources and artefacts with care and interest, work well together in groups and support each other when presenting information.
159. The quality of teaching is consistently good for ages 9 to 11 and good overall for 11 to 13 year old pupils. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the period of the inspection. This is an improvement, particularly for pupils aged 9 to 11, upon the level of good teaching observed during the last inspection. Pupils are well managed, which promotes good behaviour, and lively questioning encourages them to respond enthusiastically. In lessons where teaching was either good or very good, pupils were presented with a range of resources and artefacts to investigate, which enabled them to use their knowledge and skills of enquiry in learning about the past and consider the effects of changes on people. Teachers plan a good range of activities well. These activities interest their pupils and help them to develop their historical knowledge and skills of enquiry; and the purpose of these activities is clearly shared. Within each topic, opportunities for assessment have been identified but, as yet, do not use information gained from these assessments in their future planning as much as they

should. This weakness was an issue raised in the last inspection.

160. History is well managed by the new co-ordinator, who has clearly identified the areas that need support to develop the subject further. Schemes of work, which had previously been produced by different teachers, are now being rewritten using guidance from the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's history schemes, in order to bring about a more systematic development in pupils' gains in knowledge, understanding and skills. Samples of work from each teacher are also collected by the co-ordinator in order to monitor the progress of pupils' learning; and discussions are held with teachers to support them in their planning.
161. Since the last inspection, there has been an overall improvement in the quality of history teaching. Opportunities to extend the quality of pupils' writing and discussions, which had been identified as a weakness, have been completely addressed and are now a real strength in pupils' work as observations within lessons and reference to the high quality of display work in classrooms and corridors demonstrate. The subject co-ordinator is well aware of the need to develop the use of assessment information in order to further extend the level of learning, particularly of the higher attaining pupils. The use of information technology activities remains undeveloped and is to be addressed through support with the county's subject adviser.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

162. Information technology is taught to pupils across all year groups. No separately timetabled lessons are specifically given to the subject as it is currently delivered through specific topics within the teaching of other subjects. A large number of teachers are thus teaching aspects of the subject, some of whom have had in-service training in aspects of information technology. The subject is co-ordinated by the deputy headteacher. A computer room equipped with a networked suite of computers and a large interactive white-board, using a system new to the school, had been in use for a term at the time of the inspection.
163. During the week of the inspection, judgements were based on limited lesson observations, due to timetabling arrangements, on work in several clubs outside lesson time, scrutiny of pupils' work, discussions with pupils and teachers, and displays across the school.
164. Across the full age range, pupils attain at least in line with national expectations and their abilities, with a significant number of pupils attaining levels that are high. Pupils make effective use of information technology when given the opportunity in a number of subjects, particularly science, English, mathematics, humanities and design and technology. In other subjects, it is less well established. All pupils made good progress in the lessons and clubs observed. Pupils' written work also showed good progress over time. Displays around the school confirm pupils' capability in word processing, the use of spreadsheets, desktop publishing and the use of an increasing range of software and the internet to enhance and further extend their learning in some subjects.
165. The quality of teaching in observed sessions was good. Most teachers are keen to

develop the use of information technology in their lessons although teachers' expertise and confidence reflect some variation. However, well-established plans for their training should go some way to addressing this. In the lessons observed, teachers recognised that the majority of pupils were bringing prior experiences from home and in most cases they built upon this, whilst ensuring that pupils without such experiences were not disadvantaged. The very positive relationships enable teachers to learn alongside pupils when exploring the potential of information technology. This was evident in the confidence with which pupils and teachers worked together in using the recently-installed network of computers and 'interactive' display screen.

166. The quality of learning displays many good features. Pupils, including those pupils with special educational needs, confidently use information technology resources to enhance their learning. Boys and girls demonstrate and clearly explain their understanding. This was particularly evident in Year 8, where in a science project about the Earth in space, they demonstrated the ability to search, interpret and analyse information on the Internet, selecting that which was relevant, presenting information in a spreadsheet. High levels of peer group support were also evident both in lessons and in the information technology clubs, where, for example, pupils were seen to use the Internet to support revision for national tests and use desk top publishing to produce the school newspaper.
167. The scheme of work provides a helpful starting point but with more detail would offer greater support for teachers. Whilst information technology features in some subject schemes, this is not consistent from subject to subject and will need to be addressed in all subjects when teachers consider the revised National Curriculum requirements. Currently, insufficient attention is paid to assessing what pupils know and can do and using this information to more effectively inform planning of what they should be given to do next. This is an area for development, particularly as the subject is taught through work in a number of subjects. Monitoring of each pupils' overall attainment and progress in information technology is at an early stage of development. Records for each pupil are mainly limited to a record of tasks tackled and samples of work done. Attention also needs to be given to developing further work in using computers for measurement, control and data logging.
168. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of teachers and pupils are, at present, informal. Monitoring is not systematic and there are no clear, agreed criteria for what features are to be monitored or how findings are to be shared and used. Improved procedures are required to enable the co-ordinator to assure that declared, planned intentions are realised. This will also help teachers to decide the extent to which actions are having a positive impact on standards and quality.
169. The school has invested significantly and purposefully to improve both the level of resourcing and the access to information technology equipment for all pupils, with further developments planned. This confirms the school's commitment to offering the best opportunities to all pupils, including finding strategies to support pupils with specific learning difficulties. The school will need to monitor closely the impact of this ambitious investment, and of the training that is planned to improve and further extend teachers' information technology expertise and subject knowledge.

170. Since the previous inspection, the school has made considerable progress. Whilst most subjects now contribute to the delivery of information technology, the school needs to secure more consistent contributions both across and within subjects.
171. **Key points for action.**
- Secure more consistency in all subjects in respect of their delivery of information technology.
  - Improve subject planning, assessment strategies and recording systems.
  - Extend the arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the work of teachers and pupils.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

172. French is taught to all pupils. In Year 5, they are taught for one hour each week and in Years 6, 7, and 8 for two hours each week. Year 5 have half-hour lessons. Other years have a mix of one-hour and half-hour lessons. In Years 5 and 6, pupils are taught in their class groups and in Years 7 and 8, they are taught in groups according to their ability. French is taught by five teachers. The head of department is a French specialist and nearly all teachers are confident and have sufficient expertise in the subject.
173. By the age of 11, the majority of pupils have laid a firm foundation for their work in Years 7 and 8 and some have already reached a high standard for their age. They are able to understand short passages in French, in addition to single sentences of instructions and information, and can participate in simple conversations with confidence. They have begun to match the spoken word with the written word. By the age of 13, the majority of pupils have reached a standard which is at least in line with what is expected nationally and many achieve above this. Their writing and speaking skills have developed to include simple written tasks, for example, three or four sentences on a postcard, and longer, more complex conversations. The more able pupils can also talk and write about past actions and events. The majority of pupils have grasped the patterns of the language, thus enabling them to be more independent in what they say and write.
174. Throughout all four years at the school, the majority of pupils are challenged in their learning, enjoy the sense of achievement that success brings and consequently make good progress. The most able pupils have the tools to extend their knowledge and enjoy being able to do so. Most of those who find learning more difficult enjoy French and are able to succeed at their own level. However, in some lower sets in Years 7 and 8 pupils are underachieving because of the inappropriate nature of the tasks which they are set.
175. Overall, the teaching across all year groups is good. The majority of lessons seen were at least satisfactory with many being good or very good and one being excellent. Lessons are well-prepared, lively and challenging, making good use of resources and incorporating a wide variety of activities. Pupils consequently enjoy their learning, are keen to succeed and consequently make good progress. Good and innovative use is made of flashcards; repetition of vocabulary is lively, and songs make an enjoyable reinforcement to the acquisition of vocabulary. Displays in the classroom not only

create a stimulating and attractive environment but are also referred to specifically by both teachers and pupils as an aid to learning. Encouragement and praise are used continuously and promote a very positive atmosphere to which the pupils readily respond. The appropriate and challenging use of French by the teachers sets the French tone for the lessons and pupils therefore have no hesitation in having a go and, indeed, are becoming very confident in speaking French. The culture of learning set by most teachers is evident as soon as the pupils come into the classroom; they set about their work immediately and with enthusiasm. The great majority of French lessons are taught by teachers with sufficient expertise and confidence in the subject, even though some lack formal French qualifications. In the small percentage of lessons where there are shortcomings in the teaching, tasks set by the teacher are not always appropriate to the abilities of the pupils and consequently they are not able to achieve. For example, acquiring the patterns of a language, especially for less able pupils, is better achieved by active participation rather than by looking at a list on a board. These weaknesses mainly stem from a lack of expertise and confidence by the teacher. There is scope for a more systematic approach to monitoring teachers' strengths and weaknesses in teaching French and using the outcomes in deploying them and supporting their work.

176. The foundation laid in Years 5 and 6 has a very positive impact on the standards which pupils reach by the age of 13. When they are then arranged in groups according to their ability in Years 7 and 8, they are able to meet new challenges at their own level and make good progress. Pupils' work is marked regularly, they have regular assessment tests, and they are supported in lessons by teachers' comments which help them move forward. Teachers do not yet systematically use the findings from assessments in planning the programme of work for each class. For example, although individual pupils learn from their assessments, the results across a year group are not yet analysed to enable the department as a whole to identify areas of strength and weakness.
177. The motivation and achievement of pupils are also greatly enhanced by the well-supported visits to France in Years 6 and 8.
178. Since the last inspection, standards have been at least maintained and, in some areas, improved. The quality of teaching has improved and strategies are now in place for more good practice to be shared. The classrooms have been refurbished to a high standard and provide a stimulating environment. The most able and those who find learning more difficult are usually challenged at the appropriate level and make good progress.
179. **Key points for action.**
- Continue to implement the policy of sharing good practice in teaching to help ensure a consistency across the department.
  - Use the detailed assessment information, which is already available, to help plan for the future.
  - Deploy and support teachers to teach French on the basis of more systematic assessment of their strengths and weaknesses in the subject.

## MUSIC

180. A specialist music teacher teaches all timetabled music lessons to pupils in their mixed ability classes. Instrumental teachers employed by the county music service provide tuition to 12 per cent of the pupil population. Music activities are available at lunchtime and after school directed by the music teacher ably supported by members of the school staff. Involvement is high with up to 20 per cent of the pupil population being regularly involved.
181. Based on the work seen during the inspection, standards for pupils who are aged 10 and 11 are broadly in line with national expectations. There are examples of good work in composition by many pupils and attainment is better than national expectations for some pupils. For example, pupils in Year 5 draft and redraft their work, create music linked to a mood or atmosphere and work together, performing with a shared feel for the steady beat. Pupils in Year 6 record their compositions using graphic and conventional notations. They perform an independent instrumental part with confidence, creating melodies that have a musical structure. They create effective accompaniments using simple chords.
182. Standards for pupils who are aged 12 and 13 are broadly in line with national expectations. Tape recordings, produced for assessing pupils' work, provide a record of composition work from many pupils with particular examples of work beyond national expectations. Pupils create music stimulated by study of parts of Britten's *War Requiem* which show understanding of the use of musical structure; some pupils work in two independent parts creating music with simple introductions. Others work beyond expectations in a range of musical modes, building their work on a study of features of medieval music. Although all pupils have a music book and use it to make initial drafts of their creative work and record their answers for tests of factual knowledge, written work is generally limited. This is an area for further development. The marking of written work is also limited and needs to develop so that pupils can be informed about what is needed to help them to get better at music.
183. Overall, progress for pupils aged 10 and 11 is good. During Year 5, pupils learn to perform rhythmic patterns from conventional notations with confidence; they develop vocal skills, paying attention to posture, duration, intonation and dynamics and work in unison or two and three parts in rounds. Pupils compose using the pentatonic scale and perform an independent instrumental part in an ensemble. Pupils know and respond to various traditional musical signs and draft and redraft their compositions using conventional notations. Pupils aged 12 and 13 make satisfactory progress. There are individual examples of particularly fine work in composition. During Year 8, pupils develop their performance work in a variety of musical styles; for example, they perform in a swing style and sequence simple chords into a blues format.
184. While most pupils respond with enthusiasm to good lesson plans that are full of genuinely musical activities, there is a particularly positive response from pupils in Years 5 and 6. Pupils share their successes with each other. For example, a boy in Year 6 presented his own composition for trombone and trumpet. This fine 'Fanfare' was drafted in class, completed and notated at home and then performed to his appreciative peers in class. The creative work of pupils is celebrated in well-prepared display in the main teaching room. Pupils with special educational needs are supported

in the development of their musical skills by careful individual support from the teacher.

185. Teaching is good and often very good. Although fairly new to the school, the teacher uses his knowledge of the strengths of individuals and his ability to use carefully framed questions to ensure that all pupils feel secure and confident and so most progress well. The secure specialist knowledge and confident delivery of the teacher inspires pupils to work with commitment and as a result they enjoy the challenges set and make good progress. During moments of individual teaching, often in practical tasks, support for individuals is good enabling them to learn and develop their skills and understanding. There are occasions when teaching misses opportunities to develop pupils' use of appropriate music language, including references to the elements of music; consequently pupils' verbal responses are limited.
186. Preliminary activities are well prepared and led with vigour and a sense of humour and so pupils respond with confidence and enthusiasm and make good progress. Inventive teaching related to areas of music which could be difficult for pupils to approach, such as conventional notations, is met with a sense of fun. Extension activities are sometimes re-set to suit the abilities of individual pupils, for example, those with instrumental skills; but this is an area that, with further development of the use of orchestral instruments in class, would enable more pupils to make even better progress. Homework is not set, which limits the opportunities for consolidation of new knowledge and the demonstration of pupils' own understanding of musical ideas.
187. An interesting atmosphere is created at the outset of each lesson with a carefully chosen piece of music that relates to the main focus of the lesson. This has the effect of ensuring a prompt start to teaching and centres the activities on listening. The brisk start to lesson contributes to a lively working atmosphere in the music room.
188. Learning is good because teaching methods are effective. There is good pace, a variety of musical activities and the teacher is demanding of concentration and effort and often gets the enthusiasm and commitment of the entire class. Time is generally used well although, as creative practical work is usually in the later parts of the session, there is a danger that time can run out as the creativity begins. The strength of the creative work in music will be further enhanced by the development of clearer steps of progression within the teaching of composition over Years 5, 6, 7 and 8, based on a better knowledge of pupils' prior attainment at the end of Year 4. At present, the planning of creative work in music does not define clearly enough what steps in progress pupils are expected to make over Years 5, 6, 7 and 8. This partly results from a lack of information about pupils' prior attainment when they start the school. These factors limit the overall progress for pupils in this aspect of their learning.
189. Music makes a positive contribution to the overall personal development of pupils through its commitment to a wide range of extra-curricular activities including junior and senior choirs, string ensembles, wind-band and keyboard and recorder clubs. In these activities, pupils learn to work as a team and have an opportunity to work with others beyond their own year group. Pupils also have an opportunity to develop a sense of personal responsibility. For example, a pupil organises and manages the setting up of the string orchestra as pupils arrive for the rehearsal. Members of the county music service, the music co-ordinator and other appropriately skilled members

of the school staff ably direct these activities. The support given by the county music service to pupils and the school is a particular strength. The quality of work in instrumental lessons is very good because the teaching is outstanding. The instrumental pupils are challenged and standards are high. Motivation is very high indeed and pupils speak of good relationships with staff and describe enjoyable and challenging lessons. Although the lessons are short, they represent good value for money. While the uptake of instrumental tuition is high, boys are under-represented in this area.

190. Since his recent appointment, the co-ordinator has made good progress in the development of new schemes of work. New units of work have been developed, including some related to world music and all place an emphasis on learning through practical experience. To ensure that maximum progress is made by all pupils there is a need to indicate in schemes of work precisely what skills are to be taught. This will allow clearer judgements of progress to be made, which will provide better information to underpin future planning.
191. Individual pupils use information technology to research musical topics from the Internet and to desktop-publish their work. However, computers are not available in the music area and so the statutory requirements of the music orders of the National Curriculum are not being fully met.
192. Music accommodation, while adequate, is a limiting factor on the range of musical activities that can be planned. The smaller teaching space is useful as a keyboard base but is too small to be used effectively for the larger ensemble rehearsals. The instrumental teaching rooms are too small for more than one-to-one lessons and are inadequate when they double as spaces for group composition. The provision of musical resources is adequate. Learning opportunities could be enhanced by the addition of larger electric keyboards with full sized keys, large tuned percussion instruments, and computers with appropriate sequencing software.
193. The appointment of the new music co-ordinator has had an immediate impact on the school. All the available evidence suggests that this will be a rapidly developing curriculum area.
194. **The main strengths of the department are:**
  - The high quality of teaching.
  - The enthusiastic response of pupils, particularly those aged 10 and 11.
  - The high quality of instrumental opportunities.
195. **Key points for action.**
  - A need for greater clarity of planning related to skills and the requirements of the music orders of the National Curriculum.
  - A need for the development of opportunities for pupils who are learning to play an instrument to use and develop their skills in music lessons.
  - Further development is required in the provision of appropriate tasks to challenge the more able pupils.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

196. Pupils are timetabled for two physical education lessons each week. They are taught by physical education specialists in mixed ability groups. During the inspection, weather conditions affected the planned programme so that many lessons were taught indoors. However, a range of practical activities were observed in athletics, cricket and tennis, within lesson and extra-curricular activities.
197. Overall, standards of attainment in physical education are at least in line with national expectations and are above in Years 7 and 8. For example, by 11 boys and girls in athletics establish stride patterns and take-off leg in learning the scissors high jump technique; in tennis they develop techniques to ensure controlled and effective forehand drives. By 13, pupils consolidate and extend their work in cricket batting and field skills, and in sprint starts, sprinting, long and triple jump. Standards in physical education lessons are supported by the wide range of extra-curricular clubs and school teams competing in inter-school fixtures, area competitions and tournaments. Pupils enjoy the school clubs which are very well attended. For example, the athletics club activity was supported by four teachers who provided opportunities for boys and girls to develop their skills in a range of events.
198. Pupils make good progress overall and are able to demonstrate sound knowledge, understanding and ability as they learn and consolidate skills in athletics, cricket and tennis and demonstrate awareness of teamwork and strategies. A significant number of pupils display high levels of ability. Pupils with special educational needs are extremely well supported, receiving individual attention and appropriate activities; this enables them to make very good progress, for example, in their hand-eye co-ordination. Pupils display very positive attitudes to their work. Dress is excellent. Pupils clearly enjoy the activities and challenges, working with enthusiasm, concentration and the ability to sustain high levels of work. For example, large numbers of Year 5 pupils taking part in 'potted sports' displayed great energy, responsibility and co-operation when working within limited indoor accommodation. The introduction of a challenging and differentiated skills-based course would further support progress for all pupils. In addition, pupils' awareness of the effects of exercise would be raised by the introduction of a health related exercise programme.
199. Teaching overall is good. In lessons seen, it was never less than satisfactory with some very good teaching observed. Lessons are well prepared and structured with clear objectives and key teaching points. Organisation and class management are effective and foster good relationships and behaviour. On occasions, the variety of activities is limited. Greater variety of skills practices, together with more challenging activities for the most able pupils, would raise standards still further. Overall, pupils respond quickly to instructions, understand what they need to do, stay on task and behave sensibly. Relationships are good, with respect, patience, tolerance and support accorded to pupils with special educational needs.
200. The department is effectively led and managed. Documentation is satisfactory and continues to develop. The overall time allocated to physical education is sufficient to fulfil the planned programmes of study, including swimming. The curriculum meets national requirements, as do the arrangements for assessment and reporting. The

department is hardworking and successful. The work of the main specialist teachers is very well supported by other teachers, some with specialist knowledge, who contribute significantly to lessons and extra-curricular activities. Monitoring teaching and learning to identify and share good practice is not yet well established. This also limits the extent to which the department's development plan and its priorities are based on a clear picture of where and how standards can be improved.. Responsibilities for monitoring and development are not yet clearly enough defined and need to be reviewed to further enhance the department's effectiveness.

201. Playing fields are excellent and well maintained. However, the hard playing surfaces double as playground, and do not provide adequate accommodation for physical education. Indoor resources are adequate but are stretched if more than two teaching groups are timetabled together. Equipment is satisfactory in range, quality and quantity.
202. The school has responded positively to the last inspection. Gymnastics and dance have been reviewed so that the curriculum is better balanced. Staff training for dance has been undertaken and gymnastics and dance displays were held in the spring term. Although some storage arrangements have improved, the overall position remains inadequate for developing needs.
203. **Key points for action.**
  - Introducing a basic skills course in Year 5.
  - Integrating appropriate aspects of health related exercise.
  - Extending the range of activities and opportunities for pupils to learn and practise skills.
  - Design activities to challenge more able pupils.
  - More systematic monitoring of teaching and learning.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

204. Religious education is taught in mixed ability classes throughout the school. It is taught across the year groups by the specialist subject co-ordinator and by non-specialists, who are, in most cases, the pupils' class tutor. Throughout the inspection, observations were made in classrooms, a close examination made of a sample of work from each class, together with that in classroom and corridor displays and discussions held with the subject co-ordinator, classroom teachers and the pupils.
205. Inspection evidence shows that the attainment of a substantial majority of pupils at ages 9 to 11 is, overall, above the expectations of the Local Agreed Syllabus and at ages 11 to 13 is consistently above. These findings show an improvement at both age ranges from the standards reported at the last inspection. They reflect the hard work and management of the subject by the co-ordinator, particularly in the assessment of pupils' progress across the school and the support given to non-specialist teachers.
206. Throughout the school, pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. They are able to show an understanding of how different religions share similar features, such as values, holy books and places of worship. Year 5 pupils can write thoughtfully about how religion is important to people and affects their daily lives. In lessons on Hindu worship, they recognise the significance of the Puja and

write about the importance of objects and symbols. By the end of Year 6, pupils have developed their understanding of Christianity and can discuss how religious beliefs can be shown in a variety of forms. In a lesson in which the importance of symbolism in Christianity was discussed, they created symbols to reflect their own personality. By Year 8, pupils are able to consider a variety of moral issues. In a lesson exploring ideas surrounding the existence of God, pupils discussed sensitively issues of forgiveness and trust, and talked about the importance that a belief in God has to themselves.

207. Pupils' attitude and behaviour within lessons are good overall for pupils aged 9 to 11 and are very good for older pupils aged 11 to 13. Pupils of all ages enjoy their lessons and work well together. They are keen to contribute to class discussions, confident that their views will be valued.
208. The overall quality of teaching is good for pupils aged 9 to 11 and consistently good for those aged 11 to 13. This is an improvement on the last inspection. All teachers show a good understanding of the subject through sensitive questioning, which encourages pupils to explain their views. The telling of a story to show the importance of the Ichthus as a symbol of a secret Christian society in the time of Nero, held Year 6 pupils spellbound. Teachers are very clear about what they want pupils to learn and provide an appropriate range of activities and resources. Lessons have a brisk pace, which keeps pupils interested and on task and there are opportunities provided for pupils to reflect on moral issues. In the majority of lessons, however, activities are planned for the whole class and do not sufficiently help the more able pupils to develop further. This is not helped by the timetabling of half-hour lessons for some classes, which does not always give sufficient time to vary activities or provide opportunities for pupils to develop their ideas.
209. Through religious education lessons, pupils gain an understanding and opportunity to reflect upon their own and other people's lives and beliefs. Opportunities are taken to invite leaders of local faiths within the community into the school, which leads to pupils' fuller awareness and understanding of their own and others' beliefs and cultures.
210. Religious education is very well managed within the school by the subject co-ordinator. Pupils' work from assessments, planned into every topic, is reviewed by teachers in regular meetings and the school has begun to set targets for individual pupils based upon this information. The findings from assessment are not always systematically used by teachers in planning future work. Non-specialist teachers are given good support and guidance for their teaching. There has, however, been no systematic monitoring of the teaching and learning within lessons. This limits the co-ordinator's knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses in the subject and, consequently, the effectiveness of his support for colleagues and the further development of the subject. The co-ordinator has clearly identified areas for further development in religious education, but plans for development are not systematically carried through in terms of costs or how the extent of improvement is to be evaluated.
211. Since the last inspection, there has been an overall rise in pupils' standards of learning. Teachers now share clearly with pupils the purpose of activities in terms of

developments in their knowledge and understanding. Assessment practices have developed and are used to inform planning and provide targets for individual pupils' improvement. To raise standards in religious education further, the school needs to develop more fully the monitoring of planning and classroom teaching and ensure that planning reflects more closely pupils' starting points. Activities should be sufficiently varied to challenge all abilities but particularly the more able. The school is also aware of the need to develop appropriate information technology based activities within the scheme of work.