

INSPECTION REPORT

LODE HEATH SCHOOL

Solihull

LEA area: Solihull

Unique reference number: 104113

Headteacher: Mr M. Juby

Reporting inspector: I. D. Thompson
12271

Dates of inspection: 15th – 19th January 2001

Inspection number: 185970

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Lode Lane
Solihull
West Midlands

Postcode: B91 2HW

Telephone number: 0121 704 1421

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr R. Jones

Date of previous inspection: 6th November 1995

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12271	I. D. Thompson	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and achievements How well pupils are taught How well the school is led and managed What the school should do to improve further
9009	V Bradley	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well the school cares for its pupils How well the school works in partnership with its parents
14893	O Denson	Team inspector	Science Provision for pupils with special educational needs	
19913	R Garrett	Team inspector	English	
15051	L Kauffman	Team inspector	Design and technology Information and communication technology	
27368	M Merchant	Team inspector	Geography	
4757	D Morris	Team inspector	Art and design Music	
2141	J Oxley	Team inspector	Physical education	
20412	D Shepherd	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Equality of opportunity	The curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils
30427	F Shuffle-Botham	Team inspector	History Religious education	
8341	W Wimshurst	Team inspector	Mathematics	

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
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	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	12
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	15
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	17
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	20
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	22
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	23
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	25
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	26
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	30

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Lode Heath is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils in the 11-16 age range. There are 1010 pupils on roll, which is about the same as most secondary schools. The school serves a suburban area of north-east Solihull. Pupils come from the full range of social and economic backgrounds, many from outside the school's immediate catchment area. Few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Two pupils have home languages other than English and are at an early stage of language acquisition.

The intake is broadly comprehensive. However, more pupils than usual have above average levels of prior attainment. Overall, attainment on entry is slightly above average. The proportion of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs, including those with statements of special educational needs, is broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good and improving school that is well led and managed. The quality of teaching is good and pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. Pupils of all levels of attainment achieve well and standards are rising rapidly. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school is well led and managed. The headteacher provides very clear educational direction. Governors are very effective in supporting and monitoring the work of the school.
- Financial planning is very good.
- Teaching is good, much of it very good.
- Literacy and numeracy are developed very well.
- Relationships in the school are very good and lead to good attitudes by pupils.
- Provision for extra-curricular activities is very good.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development is good; provision for moral development is very good.
- Standards of achievement in music are very high throughout the school.

What could be improved

- The organisation and distribution of curriculum time through the timetable.
- The quality of information to parents about pupils' progress.
- Provision for the use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection in November 1995. Standards of teaching and of attainment have improved. The school has made progress on most of the key issues. However there are still shortcomings in the provision for ICT across the curriculum; attention is still required to the information provided to parents; the school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	B	A	A	B

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

The results of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in 2000 were well above the national average in English and mathematics. They were above average in science. Taking the three core subjects together, results were above the national average. In comparison with results obtained in schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds, results in English and mathematics were broadly average but in science they were well below average. Comparisons with test results when pupils entered the school show that the majority of pupils do as well as they should in Years 7-11. The rising trend of the school's results was broadly in line with the national trend.

In the 2000 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C was well above average. The proportions gaining five or more grades A*-G and one or more grades A*-G were close to national averages. Pupils' average points score was well above average in comparison with all schools, above average in comparison with schools taking pupils from similar social backgrounds and above average in comparison with their attainment at the end of Year 9. Results have risen at a faster rate than nationally since 1994, with a marked rise over the last two years.

At Grades A*-C results were well above average in English literature, history, mathematics, music, science and religious education. They were above average in business studies, English, French, and geography. Results matched national averages in German and information technology. They were below national averages in art and design and design and technology. Results at grades A*-G were close to national averages in all subjects except design and technology, music and religious education, in which they were below.

Pupils' best overall results compared with their achievements in other subjects were in religious education, music and physical education. Poorest results were in design and technology and ICT.

In work seen during the inspection in Years 7-9, standards are above average in English, mathematics, design and technology, geography, history, ICT, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. Standards are in line with those expected in all other subjects. In Years 10 and 11 standards are well above average in music and above average in English, mathematics, geography, history and modern foreign languages. Standards are in line with those expected in all other subjects.

Pupils achieve good standards in relation to their prior attainment in most subjects throughout the school. Achievement is very good in music and physical education in Years 7-9; it is satisfactory in art and design and science. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is very

good in music, good in religious education and satisfactory in art and design, design and technology, geography, ICT and mathematics.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good – pupils are keen to learn and play an active part in lessons.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The great majority of pupils are self disciplined and courteous. The unsatisfactory behaviour of a minority of boys affects the learning of all in their classes.
Personal development and relationships	Provision for pupils' personal development is good. Relationships are very good.
Attendance	Good. Attendance is above average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 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.

The overall quality of teaching is good. Teaching is never less than satisfactory. It is good in 44 per cent of lessons, very good in 20 per cent and excellent in eight per cent. The proportions of lessons reaching these standards are similar in all years, the only notable difference being a higher proportion of inspirational teaching in Years 7-9. Consistently good teaching is matched by the quality of learning and reflected in the achievement of pupils of all abilities as they move through the school. Teaching is very good in music and physical education. It is good in all other subjects except religious education, in which it is satisfactory.

The strengths of teaching lie in teachers' knowledge of their subjects and the way in which they plan interesting lessons that challenge pupils of all levels of attainment and build their confidence. The skills of literacy and numeracy are taught very well.

Teaching has improved considerably since the previous inspection when 15 per cent of lessons were of an unsatisfactory standard.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Provision is good. The way in which curriculum time is organised through the timetable is unsatisfactory.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils are well integrated into the life of the school and are well supported to make good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Pupils are provided with effective support by their teachers and their classmates and make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. The school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development. Provision for their moral development is very good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. There are very good procedures for supporting pupils' personal development and for providing educational guidance.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	The school works well in partnership with parents. Reports do not provide sufficiently clear information about how well pupils are doing and what they need to do to improve.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very clear direction. Management overall is good although there are weaknesses in the production of the timetable that affect standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are very effective in contributing to the management of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school regularly reviews its performance. The long-term effects of decisions are carefully evaluated.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good use of available resources. Staffing, accommodation and learning resources are all adequate for the school's needs.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pastoral care• The standards achieved• The school is approachable• Pupils are expected to work hard and do their best.• The leadership provided by the headteacher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More frequent and detailed information about progress

The inspection team agrees with parents' positive views and their concerns relating to information about progress.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The results of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in 2000 were well above the national average in English and mathematics. They were above average in science. Taking the three core subjects together, results were above the national average. In comparison with results obtained in schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds, results in English and mathematics were broadly average but in science they were well below average. Comparisons with test results when pupils entered the school show that the majority of pupils do as well as they should in Years 7-11. The rising trend of the school's results is broadly in line with the national trend.

2. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C was well above average. The proportions gaining five or more grades A*-G and one or more grades A*-G were close to national averages. Pupils' average points score was well above average in comparison with all schools, above average in comparison with schools taking pupils from similar social backgrounds and above average in comparison with their attainment at the end of Year 9. Results have risen at a faster rate than nationally since 1994, with a marked rise over the last two years. The school has set increasingly challenging targets, based on assessments of individual pupils' prior attainment. These are higher than those set by the local education authority, reflecting the headteacher's principal goal of raising standards of achievement. The target for 2000 was just exceeded and the school is on track to meet its targets for 2001.

3. At grades A*-C, results were well above average in English literature, history, mathematics, music, science and religious education. They were above average in business studies, English, French and geography. Results matched national standards in German and information technology. They were below national averages in art and design, design and technology and physical education. Results at grades A*-G were close to national averages in all subjects except design and technology, music and religious education, in which they were below.

4. Pupils' best overall results compared with their achievements in other subjects were in religious education, music and physical education. Poorest results were in design and technology and ICT.

5. In work seen during the inspection in English, standards of attainment at the ages of 14 and 16 are above average standards nationally. This represents good achievement by many pupils, given that attainment on entry is only slightly above average overall. Lower attainers and pupils with special educational needs benefit from the attention given to literacy in Year 7; they make good progress. By the age of 16, a high proportion of pupils can write at length, use information effectively and adapt their language style to suit the context. Throughout the school, speaking and reading aloud are often confident and fluent.

6. The contribution of other subjects to standards of literacy is very good overall. The school's strategies for improving literacy skills have been put into practice very effectively. A

wide range of opportunities for reading, speaking, listening and writing are provided, together with good teaching of these basic skills, across the curriculum. Teachers use display effectively to focus attention on key words in their subjects. Pupils are encouraged to listen to and support each other, resulting in greater confidence and willingness to speak. Very good attention is paid to basic literacy skills in the school's programme of extension studies lessons, which helps build pupils' confidence in their reading.

7. In work seen during the inspection in mathematics, standards are above average at ages 14 and 16. Number skills are satisfactory for most pupils in Years 7-9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Shape and space and data handling are good throughout but algebraic skills are less well developed. Problem solving skills are satisfactory.

8. Standards in numeracy are good. By the age of 16, most pupils are able to handle number confidently both mentally and when using calculators. In science, pupils are able to calculate efficiently using percentages and decimals. Measuring skills are good; in design technology pupils measure accurately and in science they use units of measurement confidently. Data handling skills are good. Pupils can recall a wide range of techniques for handling information. For example, in geography most pupils can draw graphs well and are able to use scales appropriately. Very good use is made of extension studies lessons to develop pupils' numeracy skills.

9. In work seen during the inspection in science, pupils' standards of attainment are in line with those expected nationally at age 14 and above those expected nationally at age 16. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are broadly average and their achievements by the age 16 are better than might be expected in relation to their prior attainment. Pupils of all abilities develop a good grasp of scientific terminology and can use it confidently in discussion. They respond accurately to questions and can recall previous learning. Pupils are able to predict the likely outcome of an investigation accurately with satisfactory levels of reasoning.

10. In work seen during the inspection in the remaining subjects of the curriculum, standards achieved by pupils by the age of 14 are above average in geography, history, ICT, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. Standards are in line with those expected in all other subjects. By the age of 16, pupils attain standards that are above average in geography, history, modern foreign languages and music. Standards are in line with those expected in all other subjects.

11. Pupils achieve good standards in relation to their prior attainment in most subjects in Years 7-9. Achievement is very good in music and physical education, it is satisfactory in art and design, design and technology, ICT, religious education and science. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is satisfactory overall. Achievement is very good in music; it is good in English, history, modern foreign languages, physical education, religious education and science. The achievement of boys and of girls is similar in relation to their prior attainment with the exception of a minority of boys in Year 10 who are not doing as well as they should, mainly because of their complacent attitudes and immature behaviour. Pupils enter the school with slightly above average standards of attainment. By the age of 16, their GCSE average points score is well above average in comparison with all schools and above average in comparison with similar schools. In 2000, only one pupil left the school without any qualification.

12. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language make similarly good progress to other pupils. The support that the few pupils with English as an additional language are given in lessons by their classmates is a reflection of the positive attitudes cultivated by the school. Pupils at stage 1 (of the Code of Practice for special educational needs) have support in mathematics and English, although other departments can request help from the learning support co-ordinator. Targets for pupils at this stage are not specific. Pupils at stages 2-5 have learning support targets, which are reviewed regularly as they make progress. They make particularly good progress towards their targets when classroom assistants are involved in their support. There is movement between the stages as pupils make progress and good use is made of assessment advice from outside agencies such as the Educational Psychology Service.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

13. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. The vast majority of pupils like coming to school, show interest in their work and persevere with the tasks set. Good attitudes to learning are a reflection of the very good relationships within lessons and throughout the school.

14. In physical education, pupils are highly motivated, are enthusiastic and develop good skills in working as a team. In history, pupils are keen to participate in discussions, and question appropriately what they hear, for example in a Year 9 lesson when pupils questioned the fact that Hitler hated socialists yet was a member of the National Socialist Party. In mathematics, most pupils listen attentively, and are confident when answering questions.

15. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is good. A positive characteristic of the school is the courtesy shown to visitors by pupils.

16. Behaviour in most lessons is very good. There is a small minority of pupils who are uninterested in learning and troublesome in lessons where activities are not interesting or sufficiently challenging. When inappropriate behaviour is not successfully managed, it has an adverse effect on the learning of other pupils. Pupils in several year groups expressed this view in discussions with inspectors. Evidence from lesson observations indicates that some teachers are particularly successful in ensuring good behaviour. For example, in physical education the interest of all pupils is maintained because tasks are carefully designed to match their capability, are well organised and appropriately challenging. The attitudes and behaviour of the majority of pupils throughout the school show that they think about their actions and the impact these have on others. In class discussions, most pupils listen well, share resources and give good levels of support to each other. For example, in a food technology lesson, the help and support given by pupils to each other when working in groups had a positive effect on the standards achieved by all.

17. Pupils show interest in their work and most concentrate well over long periods of time. When concentration is seen to decrease, it is often towards the end of the sixty-minute lesson, particularly when some pupils have lessons in the same subject twice in one day.

18. During the last school year there were five permanent exclusions and 36 fixed period exclusions. In this year, the number of exclusions has decreased significantly since the introduction of a system in which, before exclusion is considered, pupils are required to work

in isolation for short periods of time. In addition, before exclusion, pupils are invited, with their parents, to meet governors and review the unacceptable behaviour.

19. There is no racial tension evident in the school; pupils from different ethnic backgrounds mix harmoniously and through their own choice. Although the school and pupils acknowledge that on occasions bullying does occur, pupils confirm that, despite some boisterous behaviour in corridors and recreation areas, they do feel safe and secure in school. The system for pupils to report bullying on behalf of others is effective and helps to ensure that when bullying does occur, it is dealt with promptly and effectively.

20. Pupils on the school's register of special educational needs are fully integrated within the mainstream school. Overall the attitudes of pupils with special educational needs are good. They attend school regularly and they are well motivated. They benefit from the opportunities for learning support and, as these are provided while the other pupils are doing extension studies in literacy and numeracy, they do not miss other parts of the curriculum. In many lessons, when pupils have support and work is sufficiently challenging and clearly explained, they are well behaved and attentive. Behaviour is unsatisfactory in a very few lessons when pupils lack the organisational skills and the self-discipline to cope with the challenge of subjects without additional support. In some lessons in design and technology and science, other lower attaining pupils distract some pupils with special educational needs. Pupils are positive about the support they receive and this is evident in their willingness to attend the learning support department and in their relationships with the learning support staff. There is no difference between the attitudes of boys and girls and there are similar numbers of each on the register.

21. Pupils respond enthusiastically to opportunities to take part in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities. A large number of pupils are involved in these activities, particularly in games and sports, musical activities and drama.

22. Pupils are given excellent opportunities to contribute to the life of the school through the school council. There are regular meetings, attended by representatives of all year groups. The headteacher and a governor attend these meetings. Pupils are able to raise and discuss a wide range of concerns and suggestions, which are valued and listened to by the school. The chair and vice-chair of the school council attend governors' meetings; their views are listened to and respected; there is clear, direct communication between pupils and the governing body. Pupils respond very positively to the opportunities for responsibility. Prefects and librarians make valuable contributions to the smooth running of the school. The head boy and head girl successfully represent the school within the community.

23. Attendance is above the national average and the incidence of unauthorised absence is slightly below that nationally. The attendance record of most pupils is very good, but there are a number of identified pupils whose attendance record is unsatisfactory. The school works effectively to encourage those pupils to attend. There is regular and supportive monitoring of pupils' attendance, in conjunction with the education social worker, who works very effectively with the school. Most pupils arrive at school punctually, and there are effective systems in place to ensure that appropriate sanctions are imposed if pupils regularly arrive late.

24. Pupils' generally very good attitudes and behaviour are a strength of the school, and this is recognised by parents.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

25. The overall quality of teaching is good. Teaching is never less than satisfactory. It is good in 44 per cent of lessons, very good in 20 per cent and excellent in eight per cent. These proportions are similar throughout the school, the only notable difference being a higher proportion of inspirational teaching in Years 7-9. A key feature of the majority of lessons is effective planning. Most teachers use a variety of methods to stimulate interest and to build confidence. Teaching has improved considerably since the previous inspection when 15 per cent of lessons were of an unsatisfactory standard. The quality of teaching is matched by the quality of learning and reflected in pupils' achievement as they move through the school.

26. In Years 7-9, teaching is very good in history, music and physical education. It is good in all other subjects except science and religious education, in which it is satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is very good in modern foreign languages and music. It is good in all other subjects except design and technology, ICT and religious education, in which it is satisfactory.

27. Teachers know their subjects well. This underpins their authority in the classroom and supports good planning. The result is that lessons enthuse pupils and engage them in purposeful learning. For example, in a Year 9 music lesson, an inspirational teacher provided a lively practical introduction to African music combined with skilful demonstration that demanded a response from pupils. This led to excellent learning because pupils knew what was expected of them, were so well motivated and enjoying their work. Occasionally teachers do not make full use of their expertise. For example, in a Year 10 geography lesson on urbanisation, the teacher did not use his subject knowledge to plan tasks to capture pupils' interest and demand creative effort. Learning, although satisfactory, was pedestrian and few pupils worked at full stretch.

28. A key feature of the school is the way that all teachers share responsibility for developing pupils' literacy and numeracy. Unusually, in this inspection good examples of attention to literacy and numeracy were seen in subjects across the school; literacy notably in history, design and technology, mathematics and science and numeracy in English and modern foreign languages. Pupils are given practice to develop confidence in their skills. This illustrates the effectiveness of the school's policies for literacy and numeracy and the training provided to implement them.

29. The majority of teachers use a variety of methods to involve pupils in learning so that they are keen to learn, behave well, develop good attitudes and time is used to the full. This is particularly strong in modern foreign languages where the range of activities in most lessons maintains interest and keeps pupils working at a cracking pace. The effective foundation provided in the early years creates an enthusiasm for language that is sustained into Years 10 and 11. For example, in a Year 7 German lesson the teacher amused and involved pupils with an imaginative series of active games that made them use the language. The result was excellent learning; pupils developed confidence and consolidated their skills while having fun. In a Year 10 French lesson, the teacher's evident love of the language was shared with her pupils. They showed very good knowledge of vocabulary in a stimulating mixture of

activities and all could speak competently. In addition, behaviour was exemplary because of the very positive relationships established between teacher and pupils.

30. Homework is used well to extend work in class and to encourage independent learning. It is usually rooted in pupils' classwork so that it is relevant to what they are doing. For example, homework for a Year 8 history class, the need for further research using the history web-site, grew out of their lesson on the gunpowder plot. This also reflected very good forward planning by the teacher to ensure that relevant material was available.

31. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress when teachers use a variety of methods and when work is suitably matched to individual needs, for example in mathematics. However, teaching materials in some subjects are not always suitably matched to their needs so that they either do not complete tasks or take longer to complete them. In French and mathematics there is good support from the learning support assistants and pupils make good progress. Pupils are involved in deciding where they would like their support. Learning support assistants are sensitive to the needs of pupils in lessons and are skilled at being available if needed but respecting the independence of pupils who appear to be coping. The few pupils who are at an early stage of learning English are well supported by the teachers and their classmates so that they make good progress.

32. Teachers know their pupils well. They expect high standards of behaviour and encourage positive attitudes towards learning. The raising of teachers' awareness of their pupils' capabilities and pupils' expectations of themselves was one of the first targets for the school when the headteacher took over. The school's success in working towards this target is seen in rising standards of teaching and attainment. Effective classroom management is based on high expectations and good relationships. In the majority of lessons, clear goals are set and the level of challenge is appropriately matched to pupils' individual needs. The system of grouping pupils according to their ability helps but teachers have to plan carefully and work hard to manage this successfully in the many large classes. In a particularly successful Year 8 mathematics lesson, the teacher set very clear goals for practical activities which were well matched to pupils' learning needs in a large class. The lesson was planned with a good progression of activities and the teacher's enthusiasm promoted very positive attitudes. The difficulties created by having two one-hour lessons separated only by a short break were not allowed to affect the high quality of learning.

33. The marking of work is satisfactory overall. However, it does not consistently tell pupils exactly what they need to do to improve so that they clearly understand their own level of attainment. Most teachers make satisfactory use of day-to-day assessment to support learning in lessons. However, although the use of assessment is satisfactory, it is not used as effectively as it could be to support planning or to provide information about progress so that pupils are clear about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. This is the only aspect of teaching that is not well developed in an otherwise positive overall picture. A useful tool to guide teachers' planning to meet individual learning needs and to support pupils' progress is not as effective as it could be. This also affects the quality and usefulness of information that is provided through reports.

34. Teachers make good use of available resources. Support staff are generally well briefed so that they can play an effective role in pupils' learning. The use of ICT to support learning is restricted by the inadequate availability of equipment. When access to equipment

is possible, it is used to good effect, except in art and design where equipment is available but staff are not trained to use it.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?

35. The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. In Years 7-9, it contains all subjects of the National Curriculum, together with religious education and personal, social and health education. A particular feature is the provision of an extension studies programme, which includes literacy, numeracy, investigational skills and citizenship. Very good use is made of extension studies lessons to develop numeracy skills. In Years 10 and 11 all pupils follow a core curriculum with further options to provide breadth, including a limited range of GNVQ courses. Unusually, all pupils follow a GCSE short course in religious education. The length of the teaching week at 25 hours is in line with DfEE recommended time.

36. Serious deficiencies in the construction of the timetable, principally in the way subject teaching time is distributed, are having a detrimental effect on standards. The distribution of curriculum time across the week leads to a higher than necessary proportion of non-specialist teaching and an inefficient use of available specialist time. A clear example of how this affects standards is in modern foreign languages. The overall quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is better because teachers have more opportunity to teach their first foreign language. In mathematics, the quality of learning is affected by other timetable anomalies. Year 8 have two lessons on one day, separated only by a 20 minute break; Year 10 have two lessons on the same day, another the next, and two of these are in the last period of the day. Classes are taught by more than one teacher in several subjects, such as English, mathematics and modern languages, with the result that too much time is spent on co-ordinating arrangements rather than on teaching. In English in Years 7-9, lessons are also often bunched towards the beginning of the week. The amount of time allocated to design and information technology in Years 7-9 is insufficient to meet National Curriculum requirements fully; this is affecting the development of pupils' basic skills.

37. The school makes very good provision for developing literacy and numeracy skills. Policies are very well developed and provide useful guidance. The extension studies programme makes an effective contribution that underpins the close attention paid to these basic skills in subjects across the school.

38. The school makes available a very wide range of extra-curricular activities that enrich curricular provision. About 50 per cent of pupils take an active part in extra-curricular sport, supervised by a total of six staff. The music department provides a particularly wide range of extra-curricular activities, which contribute to pupils' enjoyment and learning. Many departments offer clubs, activities and educational visits as well as residential trips abroad. The Friday evening drama club often caters for more than 100 pupils.

39. Equality of opportunity is a central feature of the school's vision. Priority is given to the development of confidence and positive attitudes so that all pupils may make the best academic and social progress of which they are capable. The few pupils with English as an additional language are fully integrated into the school, as are all pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds. The school's inclusion policy focuses strongly on monitoring and supporting individual progress. The system of banding and setting provides all pupils with access to the curriculum at a level appropriate to their individual needs. Pupils with special educational needs have access to the full national curriculum, although one pupil is currently disapplied. Efforts are made to integrate all pupils as soon as possible by focusing support in the areas it is needed so that, for example, effective support is given two or three times a week on an individual basis for a pupil for whom English is an additional language. Learning support is currently based around literacy and numeracy except for those pupils who have statements that identify a need for more specific support. Movement of pupils between the stages of support is frequent and is properly reviewed and documented. The school makes satisfactory provision for the needs of gifted and talented pupils. All departments build additional task into their planning so that pupils are adequately challenged and many provide additional activities after school. Gifted pupils in modern foreign languages are provided with effective additional support in classes. After school activities in drama, music and physical education give pupils opportunities to excel.

40. The provision for personal, social and health education is satisfactory. Form tutors have very strong relationships with their groups, which are used to advantage when teaching the programme. There is some monitoring of the programme and it is very well taught. It includes drugs education, sex education and skills for life. The scheme is intended to build progressively throughout a pupil's school life. It is in the process of being reviewed to ensure that all aspects are adequately covered.

41. The provision for careers education and guidance is good. Provision includes the opportunity for all Year 10 pupils to have work experience. Teachers prepare pupils for work experience carefully. Pupils are monitored during their placements and the experience is followed up effectively in school so that pupils benefit from it.

42. The school has satisfactory links with the community. It has links with business and industry through the work experience programme and staff and pupils visit two local motor manufacturing companies. The local community church provides a useful counselling service for all members of the school community.

43. There are good links with local primary schools and with sixth form colleges, so that transition between establishments is smooth. Parents appreciate the efforts made to integrate new pupils.

44. The school makes good provision for pupils' personal development. Provision for pupils' moral development is very good. Opportunities for spiritual awareness, and social and cultural development are good.

45. There are daily assemblies, but each year group only has one per week. There is not always time for reflection and there is no planned follow up with, for example, a thought for the day or a theme for the week. There has been no improvement in this since the last inspection.

46. Opportunities for pupils' spiritual development are found across the curriculum. For example, the religious education department makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual awareness. In lessons, pupils reflect on the existence and nature of God and debate issues, such as the sanctity of life. In history, the lives of factory workers and children are studied, encouraging good spiritual development through empathy. Personal and social education lessons on the Holocaust provide pupils with opportunities for reflection and for expression of feelings. Music provides opportunities for creative expression and inspiration.

47. There is a strong moral emphasis in the school, reflecting the school's values of care and respect for individuals. Teachers provide very good role models through their care for individuals, which parents appreciate. All departments expect civilised behaviour from their pupils and all make the difference between right and wrong very clear. Issues with moral dimensions such as drugs and adoption are discussed in personal, social and health education lessons.

48. Good opportunities are provided for pupils' social development. They are encouraged to collaborate positively in subjects such as physical education, design and technology and music. The teamwork displayed when pupils were orienteering was exceptional. Pupils are expected to respect other people's views and to listen to each other in all classes. Aspects of

citizenship are taught in extension studies. Pupils have an excellent record in raising money for charity to express their social concern.

49. Good opportunities for pupils' cultural development are provided across the curriculum. Music makes a significant contribution to the cultural life of the school and introduces pupils to the music of other cultures. In design and technology, the characteristics of other cultures are considered: for example, fabric printing designs in textiles. In geography, the Internet is used to explore other cultures. In Year 9, pupils look at the impact of cultural questions on economic development and population growth.

50. The school has made considerable improvement in the way the curriculum is structured since the previous inspection. It would now be useful to review provision to ensure that schemes of work fully exploit spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

51. Teachers know individual pupils very well, and are fully aware of their physical, emotional and intellectual needs. They respond to them in a positive and very supportive way. Very good relationships between teachers and pupils encourage a very positive atmosphere in the school, which provides a very good learning environment. Expectations of work and conduct are high and nearly all pupils respond to these positively. Pupils value the merit system, and appreciate the certificates awarded.

52. Parents recognise and appreciate the high quality of pastoral care provided by the school. Tutors and heads of year monitor pupils' personal and social development very effectively in conjunction with the head of pastoral support. The heads of year work well together and meet regularly to review pupils' attendance and behaviour, identify any concerns and provide appropriate support. The school works well with the education welfare officer, who provides a high level of active support. For the small number of pupils throughout the school who are identified as lacking motivation and needing additional support, there is good systematic monitoring of their progress. All pupils are encouraged to set themselves targets, but these are not sufficiently specific to support the raising of standards.

53. The learning resource centre is used effectively to support pupils' learning by making available, at lunchtimes and other times, a wide range of research materials, books and computer links. Teachers provide good assistance for pupils in finding suitable material to help with homework and independent learning projects.

54. Attendance records are kept in accordance with statutory requirements. Attendance continues to be good. Unauthorised absence is slightly below the national figure. The school continues to remind parents about the detrimental effect on their children's progress when holidays are taken in term time. Registers are taken at the start of lessons and a system of random spot checks has recently been introduced to ensure the accuracy of registration procedures.

55. Pupils' academic progress is monitored very effectively in individual subjects. For older pupils there are records of expected grades in examinations and their progress towards achieving those grades is reviewed regularly. The school is developing systems to ensure that pupils' attainment is assessed against national standards and that progress of individuals is

monitored throughout the curriculum. There are good systems in place for heads of year to target individual pupils, review their attainment and motivation in all subject areas, and provide additional support. Parents are appropriately involved in this process.

56. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good. National Curriculum test results at the age of 11 are used to build up a clear picture of pupils' attainment when they arrive at the school. In addition nationally standardised tests have been introduced for Year 7 to support this profile. They are used well to identify pupils with special educational needs and to place pupils into groups. At the end of Year 9, National Curriculum test results and YELLIS data are used well to set targets for pupils. Arrangements for assessing attainment are good in many subjects. It is very good in some, for example religious education and English.

57. The assessment of the needs of pupils with special educational needs and the monitoring of their progress are good. Documentation meets the requirements of the Code of Practice, learning support targets are clear, precise and focused on the needs of the pupil. Individual targets are reviewed regularly and all subject teachers are asked to contribute to the review. Unfortunately, the rotation of groups of pupils in the design and technology department means that requests for information rarely get to the pupil's teacher and no information from this subject is included in the review. In mathematics the assessment tasks are not graded in difficulty so that pupils with special educational needs achieve little success. In science, they are given graded tests in which they can achieve a reasonable score that is later converted into a predicted grade. This is a practice that should be shared more widely with other subject areas.

58. The use of assessment information to guide curricular planning is satisfactory overall. However, departments vary in how far they have developed the use of data. In about half of the departments across the school, for example modern foreign languages and mathematics, it is used well to plan work for pupils. In the others, although developing, it is not yet used as effectively as it could be to influence teaching and review the curriculum. Many subject co-ordinators lack the expertise to identify specific targets for pupils with special educational needs in their subjects so that pupils' needs may be overlooked in some lessons. This is a weakness that the learning support co-ordinator has identified as an important area for development and training.

59. The overall procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' progress are good. The recently introduced policy for data management is beginning to have some effect on how subjects use the data provided to monitor progress of pupils. In some subjects, for example geography and religious education, very good methods are in place for the tracking of pupils' progress. In others, for example design technology, it is not yet used well enough to track pupils' progress as they move through the school.

60. The school has recognised the need to ensure that the loosely structured programme of personal, social and health education contains all the necessary elements required, including sex education, drugs education and citizenship. Many aspects are currently being taught well in religious education, physical education and other subjects. A newly appointed co-ordinator is currently carrying out a review to confirm that all pupils are receiving their National Curriculum entitlement.

61. Good advice and guidance are available to pupils concerning careers and further education. Liaison between the school's careers adviser and the careers service is very good. Good links with the two main providers of post-16 education ensure that pupils are aware of the possibilities available to them. Pupils are able to take advantage of a wide range of appropriate opportunities for work experience. The work experience programme is well organised and co-ordinated.

62. There are satisfactory child protection procedures in place, which meet statutory requirements. Two teachers are designated as having responsibility for child protection. Liaison with appropriate services is satisfactory and with the education welfare officer it is very good.

63. There are sound policies and practices on health and safety. The health, welfare and safety of pupils are given appropriately high priority. Safety equipment is checked periodically and the procedures for recording and reporting accidents effectively implemented. Monitoring of action taken to address health and safety concerns reported by staff is effective. The headteacher and members of the teaching staff provide effective supervision of pupils' departure at the end of the school day.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

64. The school successfully encourages a good working partnership with parents. Parents are very supportive of the school, and appreciate the care and support given to their children. Parents feel that they can approach the school with concerns and problems, to which the school responds appropriately. Parents appreciate the positive learning environment of the school and that expected standards of behaviour and commitment to working hard are high. The school takes parents' views into account by consulting them through annual questionnaires about a range of school practices and plans.

65. Parents confirm that induction procedures when new pupils enter the school are good. Information about careers and the possibilities available for post-16 education provision is good.

66. Parents are required to sign pupils' homework diaries weekly. These diaries provide a good means of communication between home and school. The support from parents for homework makes a positive contribution to pupils' learning. Well-presented newsletters give parents a good range of useful information.

67. Music and drama productions are very well supported and enjoyed by parents. Parents provide valuable support to sporting events and fixtures. They provide a good level of support to the school through the Parent Teacher Association (PTA); through fundraising events, the association provides additional resources for the school.

68. Attendance at parents' consultation evenings is high. The school is approachable. Tutors, heads of year, teachers and senior staff are available for consultation by parents. Parents are involved at an appropriately early stage if problems occur. The school sends letters home to parents when pupils have achieved well.

69. The quality and range of information available to parents through pupils' annual reports is unsatisfactory. They do not give information about pupils' attainment compared with national standards and they are not sufficiently individual. Reports do not give pupils an opportunity to contribute. Targets are set for improvement, but these targets are not precise enough to support the raising of standards. Parents are given a good opportunity to contribute to the targets for their child at an annual day set aside for this purpose. Parents would like more frequent reports about their children's progress. Inspectors believe that the quality of reports requires improvement, rather than the frequency with which they are issued.

70. The prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents do not fully conform to statutory requirements. The prospectus gives a wide range of useful information, but should include the name of the chair of governors. The governors' annual report to parents effectively informs parents about the school's progress and achievements during the year. However, it does not contain a statement on school security or give required details of the arrangements for pupils with disabilities, or of the facilities to assist access by them.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

71. The quality of leadership and management in the school is very good. The headteacher provides very strong leadership. He has been the driving force in establishing an atmosphere of confidence and hard work in the school, which parents recognise. His commitment to improvement is evident in the broad range of initiatives he has put into place over the last two years. The success of focusing particularly on raising expectations and promoting positive attitudes is already showing in improved examination results and pupils' good attitudes to learning. The regular programme of faculty reviews, linked to target setting and school improvement planning, contributes strongly to raising standards. Strengths and weaknesses are well understood and effective action is taken to secure improvement. The headteacher has established a very clear direction for the work of the school, developing a common sense of purpose with the staff, so that the school's aims and values are reflected in all its work. The contributions of all members of staff are valued. The members of the small senior management team, which includes the business manager, work well together through daily informal contacts and more formal weekly meetings. All members have the opportunity to discuss their work with the headteacher in individual fortnightly meetings.

72. The overall quality of leadership at middle management level is good. It is never less than satisfactory. The school has very good systems for monitoring and evaluating its performance, particularly teaching. Faculty heads and heads of department have key roles, together with the senior management team, in the monitoring and support of teaching. The effectiveness of their efforts is shown in the considerable improvement in the quality of teaching since the previous inspection. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during this inspection. Very good management is an important factor in English, modern foreign languages, music and religious education. Although there is some development of good practice, for example in geography and religious education, assessment is not used as effectively as it could be to monitor standards, to support the planning of teaching or to set targets for improvement. The management of data at the whole-school level has the potential to provide departments with very useful information.

73. The school's commitment to inclusion is reflected in the high quality management of the learning support department. All statutory requirements for the provision of pupils with special educational needs are met. The learning support co-ordinator is a member of the senior staff group and is the manager for the Key Stage 3 Pilot programme for raising achievement. There is a clear development plan for the implementation of the pilot scheme with the stress on literacy and numeracy. Initiatives to improve pupil transfer, teaching and learning and staff development training are supported by funding. The learning support co-ordinator receives good assistance from the local education authority. The special educational needs panel meets weekly so that pupil referrals can be dealt with efficiently. There are termly visits from the Educational Psychology Service but these focus heavily on stage 3 to stage 4 assessment rather than on advice about meeting pupils needs at stage 2. The co-ordinator is aware that educational psychology time could be used more effectively. Parents are involved at all stages of assessment and support and are asked to authorise pupils' withdrawal from extension studies to attend learning support lessons. Correspondence with parents is friendly and supportive. Parents are rightly satisfied with the work of the learning support department.

74. Management is less successful in the organisation of teaching and the distribution of lesson time through the timetable. Classes may have more than one teacher for separate

lessons in the same subject on the same day; some have two lessons separated by a short break; classes have all their lessons in a subject bunched in one part of the week and then none for a number of days; the way time is distributed across the week requires an unnecessary amount of teaching by non-specialists in some subjects; some classes have all their lessons in a subject during the last period of the school day. Staff work hard to minimise the difficulties that these unsatisfactory arrangements create. Nevertheless, there is an effect on standards and continuity.

75. The governing body is very active and committed in its support for the school. The school is self-critical and governors are an important link in the school's extensive consultation of its community. Governors bring a wealth of expertise to bear in the discharge of their responsibilities. They clearly understand the challenges that face the school, particularly managing with a very small contingency reserve of funds. Frequent contacts, including attendance at school council meetings, keep them well in touch with what is happening in the school. Consequently, they have a very good working knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, which enables them to make a significant contribution to development planning and school improvement. Governors set appropriately challenging performance targets for the school and for individuals, which are reviewed regularly. The governing body does not fully meet its statutory responsibilities in respect of provision for cross-curricular ICT in Years 7-9 and fails to meet statutory requirements in respect of provision for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

76. Development planning is very good. The school's consultation and self-review systems enable the careful identification of priorities. The school improvement plan is a detailed working document that outlines targets, time-scales, responsibilities, resource implications and success criteria. It fully reflects the commitment to raising standards and improving the quality of education provided. The majority of issues from the previous inspection have been dealt with successfully. However, the issues concerning assessment practice, the quality of reports to parents and the provision for ICT have not been fully resolved.

77. Financial planning is very good, supported by efficient routine administration of the budget. The principles of best value are applied very well to the strategic use of available funds to support school improvement. Spending is closely linked to the priorities of the school improvement plan. For example, Standards Fund finance has been used for ICT training for staff, social inclusion initiatives and the Key Stage 3 Pilot scheme to improve literacy and numeracy. The learning support department provides efficient and effective support for pupils with special needs. Resources from the local education authority for specific pupils are clearly earmarked. These represent 40 per cent of the funding for learning support.

78. The match of teaching and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is satisfactory overall. Although standards have not been affected, difficulties in some departments place undue strain upon heads of department in planning, co-ordination and monitoring. There is a good induction programme for staff new to the school, including newly qualified teachers; good mentoring arrangements are in place. Newly qualified teachers in English and mathematics confirm that they are well supported by senior management and in their departments. The process for ensuring teachers' professional development is well managed and effectively evaluated. The school's "in-house" system of training through the

work of the learning management group has had a positive impact on the quality of teaching. Teacher appraisal is now part of performance management and appropriate training has been undertaken. The school benefits from the efficiency of its administrative support staff and day-to day running is smooth. Clerical staff are allocated to departments to support their work.

79. Overall, the quality of the school's accommodation is satisfactory. The quadrangle, the playing fields and surroundings are pleasant features of the accommodation. However, there are some deficiencies. Some classrooms are too small for the numbers of pupils in classes, for example in modern foreign languages and design and technology. The textiles room is in poor condition. Accommodation for the learning support department is too small for its needs. A number of departments have inadequate storage facilities. The sports hall floor and outside hard play areas are in need of repair.

80. The overall provision of resources is satisfactory. Departments have adequate, sometimes good, quantities of books and equipment to support learning. The learning resource centre provides a well-organised and pleasant central resource. Pupils make good use of the books and computers at break, lunchtime and after school. There are insufficient computers in the school to meet all its learning needs.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

81. In order to raise further the standards of work and the quality of education provided, the governors and senior management team should:

- (1) Improve the construction of the timetable so that teaching time for subjects is more evenly spread through the week.
(Paragraphs: 17, 36, 74, 86, 90, 97, 102, 145, 153)
- (2) Improve the quality of information to parents about pupils' progress so that they know clearly how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
(Paragraphs: 33, 69, 76, 98)
- (3) Improve the provision for the use of ICT across the curriculum.
(Paragraphs: 34, 76, 80, 90, 96, 99, 109, 119, 145, 147, 152)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	153
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	47

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
8	20	44	28	0	0	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	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1010
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	62

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	5
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	119

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	31

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.8
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.9
National comparative data	1.1

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 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	102	95	107

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	81	82	66
	Girls	86	85	70
	Total	167	167	136
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	85 (75)	85 (80)	69 (65)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	25 (23)	50 (46)	29 (27)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	56	86	50
	Girls	75	88	59
	Total	131	174	109
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	66 (75)	88 (79)	55 (67)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	63 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	25 (38)	40 (51)	28 (34)
	National	31 (24)	39 (36)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	82	86	168

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	40	73	80
	Girls	56	84	86
	Total	96	157	166
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	56 (48)	91 (93)	97 (97)
	National	49 (48)	89 (86)	94 (94)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	44.8 (44.1)
	National	38.9 (38.1)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	
Any other minority ethnic group	

The school is unable to supply the information required by this table.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	53.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	13
Total aggregate hours worked per week	300

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.7
Key Stage 4	26.2

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	3	0
Indian	2	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	29	4
Other minority ethnic groups	2	1

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

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	2 194 958
Total expenditure	2 242 660
Expenditure per pupil	2 313
Balance brought forward from previous year	66 779
Balance carried forward to next year	19 077

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1010
Number of questionnaires returned	279

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	51	4	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	42	51	1	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	28	59	5	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	53	15	3	5
The teaching is good.	30	61	3	1	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25	47	20	3	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	46	3	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	56	41	2	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	27	55	14	2	2
The school is well led and managed.	42	52	2	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	42	51	5	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	37	49	5	2	6

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

ENGLISH

82. At the ages of 14 and 16, standards of attainment are above average compared with those expected for pupils of the same ages nationally. Pupils achieve well, particularly in Years 9 and 11. This is because of the quality of teaching, which is good overall, and the very good leadership of the department. There is a strong focus on improving examination performance, on cultivating good relationships between teachers and pupils and on providing a variety of interesting and challenging activities that involve the pupils.

83. In 2000, the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 or above in Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests was well above the national average and higher than in 1999. Using average points scores for comparison with all schools, pupils' performance was above the national average. In comparison with similar schools, performance was close to the average. Pupils' performance in English and mathematics was similar, and better than in science. The trend of average points scores for English over the last five years is broadly in line with the national trend.

84. In 2000, results for A*-C grades in GCSE English were above average and well above average in English literature. Results for A*-G grades were close to national averages for both subjects. Pupils' average points score in English was above average in comparison with similar schools and above average in relation to their attainment at the end of Year 9.

85. In work seen during the inspection, the standard of attainment at age 14 is above average standards nationally. The standard represents good achievement by many pupils, given that attainment on entry of the current Year 7 is only slightly above average overall. They benefit particularly from the emphasis given to improving their performance in national tests in Year 9. Lower attainers and pupils with special educational needs benefit from "progress groups" which concentrate on literacy skills in Year 7 and good classroom support thereafter; they make good progress in English despite their difficulties. Speaking and reading aloud are often confident and fluent, even among lower attainers. Writing skills, particularly note-making, use of vocabulary and ability to analyse and make judgements, are above average overall. However, lower attainers continue to have problems with spelling, punctuation of sentences and the structuring of their written work.

86. In work seen during the inspection, the standard of attainment is above the level expected nationally at the age of 16. The standard is above what might be expected given pupils' Key Stage 3 performance in 1999 and represents good progress in Years 10 and 11. In Year 11, a high proportion of pupils can write at length, use information effectively and adapt their language style appropriately to suit the context. They can search a text quickly because they have good knowledge and understanding. However, although the work of higher attainers is thorough and conscientious, it is not concise enough. Their work would benefit if they were to focus on key points or issues when analysing a text or constructing an essay, rather than attempting to cover all possible contingencies. Speaking and listening skills are also above average, particularly when used in discussion. In Year 10, attainment standards are closer to average at present, reflecting the way inexperienced and non-specialist staff have

had to be deployed this year and the lack of concentration shown by a small number of pupils in their lessons.

87. The contribution of other subjects to standards of literacy is very good overall, showing that the school's strategies for improving literacy skills have been put into practice very effectively. A wide range of opportunities for reading, speaking, listening and writing are provided, together with good teaching of these basic skills, across the curriculum. Noteworthy examples occur in mathematics, where teachers use the vocabulary associated with mathematical concepts and pupils can use and recall the names associated with parallel lines, bearings and special angles. Similarly, in science, teachers encourage the use of appropriate scientific terms and language. They provide opportunities for pupils to revise the terms and use them, so that even the youngest pupils know and can use words like "kinetic" and "potential". Older pupils are encouraged to understand the meanings of words from the way they have been derived from other languages – for example, "meta-morphic". Teachers use display effectively to focus attention on key words and encourage thinking about science. In design and technology a wide range of technical terms is introduced at an early stage and reinforced by a list of key words in pupils' books. If pupils have difficulties with literacy, they are given guidelines to help them structure their work. Pupils are encouraged to listen to and support each other, resulting in greater confidence and willingness to speak. Very good attention is paid to basic literacy skills in extension studies lessons where pupils were observed reading aloud with confidence.

88. Attitudes to learning and standards of behaviour are good. Pupils usually listen with interest, participate well in group activities and work hard. Occasionally, some pupils can lose concentration when left to work independently or fail to listen quietly when someone else is talking. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good when they encounter enthusiastic teaching and stimulating activities. For example, a Year 7 class responded with much involvement, co-operation and interest when their teacher presented a challenging activity on the vocabulary of poetry as a puzzle to which pupils had to find the answer. Another Year 7 class was stimulated by their teacher's delivery of poems, by Benjamin Zephaniah and Tom Leonard, to engage in excited discussion and questioning about the writing of poetry. A Year 11 class, when challenged to produce a solution to a simulated emergency, worked enthusiastically and collaboratively in groups to prepare presentations of their ideas to the class. Pupils as a whole have many opportunities to develop as individuals and gain confidence through such speaking and listening activities.

89. Teaching is good overall in both key stages. Learning also is good overall, reflecting the quality of teaching in each key stage. A strong feature is the range of challenging activities or approaches offered to the pupils, reflecting the care taken by the head of department over teaching schemes which support national requirements, examination criteria and the National Literacy Strategy. For example, a Year 8 teacher's choice of activity (a class poem created as if constructing a pizza from different ingredients) led to above average attainment from his lower attaining pupils. In a Year 10 class the teacher successfully used 'brainstorming' and charting activities to involve pupils in a lively discussion about 'love' and 'love clichés'. Later she set challenging homework requiring good understanding of, and empathy with, a character in 'Much Ado About Nothing'. A further strength of teaching is the good relationships between teachers and pupils. A Year 7 teacher's use of humour and her ability to give pupils a sense of achievement produced an enthusiastic response and strong motivation to succeed among lower attaining pupils. A Year 11 teacher's personal feedback to individuals enabled pupils to make progress when re-drafting or organising a letter about foxhunting and raised their confidence. Teachers apply a particularly clear focus on examination work in Years 9 and 11 and their expectations of high standards contribute

significantly to pupils' performance. An occasional lesson, particularly in Year 10, loses pace and learning slows because a teacher has to check some pupils for persistent talking, or because a teacher's involvement with one group of pupils results in others becoming distracted. Occasionally a teacher misjudges the timing of activities in an attempt to complete what was planned, with the result that pupils cannot do full justice to the teaching or their own efforts. These occasions are rare and usually arise from inexperience and lack of confidence.

90. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection in 1995. Standards of attainment have improved. The positive features of the last report remain true and those matters referred to as requiring attention have substantially been addressed. There are several barriers to further improvement. Access to computers to support learning is difficult. There are staffing difficulties involved in broadening the curriculum to include drama beyond Year 7 and media studies in Years 10 and 11. The distribution of teaching time is unbalanced across the week and leads to an over-dependence on non-specialist teaching. The department's accommodation is shabby. It is a tribute to the very good leadership of the head of department and the commitment of her colleagues that standards remain high in such circumstances.

MATHEMATICS

91. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests at the age of 14, attainment was well above the national average. This represents a significant improvement on 1999 results. They have risen at a faster rate than nationally over the previous two years. In relation to average points scored, attainment was well above the national average when compared with all schools and with similar schools. These results represent good achievement in relation to pupils' attainment when they entered the school. There was no difference in the performance of girls and boys. Results in mathematics were similar to those in English but better than those in science.

92. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was well above the national average. These results are a significant improvement on previous years' results and represent satisfactory achievement in relation to pupils' attainment at the age of 14. Girls performed slightly better than boys. The proportion gaining grades A*-G was in line with results nationally. Pupils performed as well in mathematics as they did in most other subjects they studied.

93. In the work seen during the inspection, standards are above those expected at the age of 14. Number skills are satisfactory for most pupils. Algebraic skills are not as well developed; many pupils still have difficulty with solving equations. Measuring skills are good; higher attaining pupils in Year 8 can measure lengths of lines accurately using a variety of methods and in design and technology pupils are able to measure materials accurately. Shape and space and data handling are good. Lower attaining pupils are able to find angles in polygons using triangles and average attaining pupils are able to draw scattergraphs and identify appropriate correlation. Problem solving skills are satisfactory. By the end of Year 9, pupils are able to identify patterns, establish rules and use formulae. The use of extension studies lessons is having a very good impact on improving pupils' skills in mental calculations.

94. Standards in the work seen during the inspection are above those expected at the age of 16. Number skills are good for most pupils. They handle numbers and percentages well mentally and use calculators confidently and accurately. Algebraic skills are still not well developed for many pupils, although higher attaining pupils in Year 11 can simplify expressions which contain brackets and handle indices confidently. Data handling skills are good; these are reflected in geography where pupils use graphs confidently. Pupils' understanding of shape and space is good; average attaining pupils have a good understanding of graphs. Problem solving skills are satisfactory.

95. Attitudes to learning are good. Pupils behave well and usually concentrate well during lessons. When attitudes are not as good as they should be, it is mainly those of boys in lessons when pupils have had a mathematics lesson previously in the day, or during the last lesson of the day. Pupils listen attentively while teachers are talking and are usually eager to contribute to discussions. The presentation of work in books is good. Pupils present their work well with charts diagrams and tables usually well drawn. Few books were seen in which pupils' work was not well cared for.

96. The overall quality of teaching is good. This is having a significant impact on improving standards by the end of Year 9 and improving GCSE results. All teachers have good subject knowledge and are able to explain concepts clearly. Lesson planning is good; clear objectives are set and good links are made between lessons. Teachers usually manage pupils well and the available time is often used to the full, ensuring that pupils usually make good progress with their tasks in lessons. Questioning is generally good and explores effectively what pupils already know and understand about the topic covered. However, in some lessons, teachers do not always ensure that all pupils contribute to discussions. Teaching methods are usually appropriate to help pupils learn and include practical and mental activities. Good feedback is given to pupils during lessons to help them overcome difficulties and identify how well they are doing. Books are well marked. Homework is used effectively to build on what pupils have learned. Appropriate challenge is usually provided in the activities and planning usually ensures that the tasks meet the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs. Although good use is made of new technology to support teaching, little use is made of computers to support learning.

97. The overall quality of learning is good. All pupils are achieving well during Years 7 to 9. Higher, average and lower attaining pupils all achieve good standards. Pupils with special educational needs are achieving well as a result of good teaching that provides a good range of activities suited to their needs. Achievement during Key Stage 4 is satisfactory; pupils usually achieve results in line with those predicted from their prior attainment. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. This is reflected in the GCSE results where nearly all pupils are entered and most pupils gain at least grade G, representing considerable achievement by many. Most pupils are acquiring skills, knowledge and understanding well. They usually work productively during lessons and show interest in what they are doing. Although progress is good in most lessons, it is generally unsatisfactory in those lessons where pupils are having mathematics for the second time in the day.

98. The department is well led and managed. The head of department provides a clear direction for the subject. There is a clear commitment by all teachers to raising standards. Teaching schemes are good and are well supported by appropriate worksheets and textbooks. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. Accommodation for teaching

is good and is well used. The storage space available, however, is poor. The quality of reports is unsatisfactory. They do not adequately identify the strengths and weaknesses of individual pupils in the subject or what they need to do to improve their standards.

99. Good improvements have been made since the previous inspection. Higher attaining pupils now achieve standards in line with their ability. Results at the end of Year 9 have improved and pupils are now able to apply their knowledge better to problem solving. The quality of teaching and learning have both improved. Teaching schemes, development planning and resource management are better although the use of computers to support learning has not improved.

SCIENCE

100. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests the proportions of pupils, at the age of 14, achieving level 5 and above and level 6 and above were above the national average. Girls' results were better than boys'. In comparison with schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds, the results in science were well below average. In recent years results have been above the national averages but the trend in improvement has not been as good as the national trend. English and mathematics results were similar and both were better than those in science.

101. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was well above the national average in comparison with schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds. All pupils gained grades A*-G, which is higher than the national figure. Girls' and boys' results were similar. These results are good in relation to pupils' prior attainment and show a marked rise over the previous year.

102. Attitudes are satisfactory overall. Pupils work well together, sharing equipment and results and they work well in teams to evaluate information. They are used to listening to each other and show respect for other points of view. Pupils with special educational needs are included and supported in groups. The unsatisfactory structure of the timetable means that some pupils in Years 7-9 have three different teachers. This is having a considerable impact on attitudes and ultimately on standards. In addition, some pupils have more than one lesson in a day, the second frequently being the final period in the day. Pupils' ability to concentrate and the continuity of learning are affected. In some lessons in Years 8 and 10, the attitude of some pupils becomes too casual and they find it difficult to focus on the task so that they waste their own and other pupils' time.

103. In work seen during the inspection pupils' standards of attainment are in line with those expected nationally at age 14 and better than those expected nationally at age 16. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are broadly average and their achievements by the age 16 are better than might be expected in relation to their attainment at the age of 11. Pupils of all abilities are developing a good grasp of scientific terminology and can use it confidently in discussion. They respond accurately to questions and can recall previous learning. For example, pupils of all levels of attainment understand the concept of a fair test and they can plan an investigation taking into account several varying factors. They then record their observations accurately and share their results with other pupils in order to obtain reliable data from which they are then able to calculate results. In this way, pupils carried out investigations into the properties of insulators and into the behaviour of penguins in

conserving heat. Pupils are able to predict the likely outcome of an investigation accurately with satisfactory levels of reasoning. However, some pupils lack concentration and do not complete written work, diagrams and results. This means that they have incomplete records of work and are not able to revise effectively for modular and end of topic tests.

104. The quality of teaching is good overall and is matched by the quality of learning. Lessons are well planned, resources are well prepared and teachers keep up a challenging pace. Teachers find interesting ways to explain concepts and develop pupils learning by applying ideas to familiar and everyday things. The relationships between teachers and pupils are good so that pupils speak confidently, ask questions and express ideas. There is good use of scientific terminology, with key words defined and reinforced. During question and answer sessions teachers are skilled at encouraging and supporting pupils' dialogue by paraphrasing with more accurate terminology the responses that pupils make. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on friction, all pupils were able to contribute ideas, even with limited knowledge of the correct terms and the teacher continually rephrased their contributions to reinforce the key words they needed to know. Pupils' independent learning skills are developed when they are encouraged to research using books and the Internet. They develop creative ways of displaying their findings and they are confident in the way they communicate them. For example, pupils learned about the planets in one lesson by producing high quality posters; they learned about fossil fuels in another by producing a television programme for children. Homework is used well to extend pupils learning. In some otherwise satisfactory lessons, the attitudes of a small number of pupils, mainly boys, are too casual and they require considerable attention from the teacher to keep them working. In these lessons some higher attaining pupils coast whilst the others catch up. Occasionally some lower attaining pupils lack the organisational and social skills to cope with work that is not matched well enough to their needs so that they do not make enough progress in the lesson.

105. The leadership and management of the department are good. The departmental handbook is a good practical document setting out clear aims and a very thorough health and safety policy, including the risk assessment. Responsibilities are delegated to other members of the team so that there is the opportunity to develop strategies to raise pupils' attainment such as the CASE (cognitive acceleration in science education) project in Years 7-9, which is designed to help pupils develop their scientific thinking. The use of computers is being developed and one teacher has responsibility for liaison with primary schools with a view to improving the continuity of pupils' learning. Teachers have the opportunity to work together with some groups of pupils in Years 10 and 11 which helps them to share ideas about teaching. Resources are well maintained and managed by a team of three technicians. GNVQ engineering has recently been introduced and GCSE results are improving. The department has set challenging targets for improved standards of attainment.

106. The department has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection. The performance of girls has improved and was better than boys in the last National Curriculum tests, although boys' and girls' results at GCSE were similar. All pupils follow the double award course but there are opportunities for lower attaining pupils to sit the single award examination. In reality this is not very popular with parents.

ART AND DESIGN

107. GCSE results for grades A*-C have fluctuated in recent years from above the national average in 1998 to below it in 2000.

108. In work seen during the inspection, the standard of attainment at the age of 14 broadly matches the standard expected nationally. Units of work provide experience of art and design processes, for example research, exploration of detail, and trials leading to finished pieces of work. A Year 9 unit of work focuses on war. Pupils study examples of pictures by Paul Nash and Picasso's *Guernica* and copy these into sketchbooks. Drawing skills are satisfactory but knowledge of the artists is vague and pupils make little emotional response to these pictures. Pupils have a sound knowledge of colour theory and are able to use pastels, crayons, and water colours. Year 8 pupils explore the art of surrealists Dali and Magritte and Year 7 are encouraged to use their imagination, creating fantastic creatures based on the poem 'Jabberwock'. Understanding of tone is limited. Three-dimensional work is mainly pottery, though there is a unit of work in which pupils produce masks. The standard of this work is satisfactory.

109. In work seen during the inspection, pupils attain standards by the age of 16 that match those expected for pupils of the same age nationally. Year 11 folders provide evidence of good productivity and research. The work of higher attaining pupils shows good control of tone in a variety of media. Some of the best work is a series of pictures depicting preparations for an Indian wedding. These are nicely drawn and painted with a real sense of style. The best of the drawing is from direct observation. Work from secondary sources is not as good and lacks impact and freshness. Pupils' knowledge of artists and art and design terms is weak. Since the previous inspection there has been little change in attainment at the ages of 14 and 16.

110. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject, which they use well to introduce pupils to the wonders of art and design. For example, in a Year 9 lesson the teacher's clear understanding and knowledge of surrealism supported a good review of the movement's characteristics. Pupils were fascinated by the examples provided and enthusiastic about their own associated work. The teaching of basic skills in the use of media is satisfactory. Teaching methods are generally effective but some aspects of learning are not consolidated well. For example, although most pupils in a Year 11 class were able to refer to established artists, only about one-third really knew much about any artist's work. This could be improved by a more rigorous approach to the study of artists and cultures. Little use is made of ICT to support learning, or to explore creative possibilities. Planning is very good; lessons are well organised, time is used well and good use is made of resources. Work is matched well to pupils' individual needs and teachers provide effective individual support and demonstrations to promote progress. Teachers manage their classes very well so that behaviour and attitudes are good, enabling pupils to concentrate on their work. The great majority of pupils work well together and their creative effort and productivity are good. Good quality teaching leads to pupils of all levels of attainment acquiring their knowledge, understanding and skills better than might be expected. Assessment is generally well used to ensure that pupils have a clear idea of the standards they achieve and what they need to do to improve their work.

111. Accommodation for art and design is good but the kiln room has no extractor fan and there are no warning signs for when the kiln is in use. Little use is made of computers because staff lack expertise and training.

112. Asbestos was discovered in the building at Easter 2000, which led to its closure for a whole term while the necessary alterations were made. The effect of this on morale in the department was severe. Lessons took place in non-specialist rooms, with a consequent effect on the range and type of work that was possible. Much work affected by dust was destroyed including a considerable amount of pottery. It has taken over a term to catch up and return to a normal pattern of working.

113. Since the last report there has been little change. Standards are much as they were and teaching and learning are very similar. Assessment and reporting procedures have improved.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

114. Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment at the age of 14 years in 2000 were below both national and local averages. A recent rigorous review of teaching schemes, using nationally agreed units and the introduction of a foundation skills course is improving pupils' attainment.

115. In GCSE examinations in 2000, results were below national averages although there has been a marked increase in the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C over the last four years. The school enters all pupils for GCSE. This has the effect of depressing average results when compared with smaller proportions of pupils entered by schools nationally. Girls' attainment continues to be better than that of boys.

116. In work seen during the inspection, by the age of 14 pupils attain standards that match those expected for pupils of the same age nationally. Girls attain higher standards than boys, with a greater difference than found nationally. This is because the girls have good presentation skills and they pay attention to detail and the completion of homework. The introduction of the foundation skills programme is ensuring pupils' attainment is in line with the nationally set benchmarks across all aspects of design and technology. Pupils understand and can follow the design process. For example, good research in textiles uses holidays as the focus for designing a souvenir to be sold to holidaymakers. This realistic topic builds on and extends the pupils' own holiday experiences and makes them compare souvenirs in order to plan their own design. Pupils with special educational needs work well; additional support helps them to achieve standards that match the targets set out in their individual education plans. They have greater success with practical work than theory. The few pupils with English as an additional language maintain good standards of work because much of the work is practical and depends less on language for understanding. They gain effective support both from teachers and from other pupils as they build up their language skills. For example, in an excellent Year 9 food technology lesson a pupil with English as an additional language was given very good support as pupils worked in teams to test the characteristics of ingredients for pastry making.

117. In work seen during the inspection, pupils attain standards by the age of 16 that are broadly in line with those expected for pupils of the same age nationally. The opportunity to achieve the higher GCSE grades is restricted by the inadequate provision of computers. Many middle and lower attainers have no sense of urgency about meeting coursework deadlines. This leads to incomplete major projects, with a consequent effect on examination results. Boys' work, in particular, too often shows a lack of the care and attention needed to gain

improve standards. A diary of time targets displayed in food technology is regularly filled in and discussed with pupils, which helps to improve their personal organisation and final products. During Years 10 and 11, active research techniques enhance product analysis in food technology: pupils use the Internet, the learning resource centre and community visits to research their product. The short term targets in each unit of the GNVQ engineering course are helping boys to organise their time more effectively. Immediate feedback helps them to focus on what needs improvement. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language are given the opportunity to enter GCSE examinations, but have difficulty with the written aspect of the major project.

118. Attitudes are generally good with the exception of a minority of Year 10 and 11 boys whose immature behaviour too often prevents them from making progress at a satisfactory rate. Generally, behaviour is good and pupils show respect for teachers and support staff. Personal development is strong because pupils are provided with opportunities to take initiative and to work independently. They work well together in groups and give each other support.

119. Teaching is good overall. The best teaching is characterised by good knowledge and experience that is shared with pupils through very good demonstrations and question and answer techniques that inspire pupils to work with enthusiasm. Meticulous planning builds upon pupils' prior learning to produce lessons that maintain pace. For example, in a Year 11 GNVQ lesson, the designing of a hand-held anemometer for a unit test, was executed at a swift pace because pupils were challenged by working to a sharp deadline. They took part in rigorous design discussions, which improved their initial ideas. Work is well matched to pupils' individual needs. Teachers provide effective support for those with learning difficulties and prepare extension work for higher attainers, gifted and talented pupils. Good displays are used well to support learning, to set standards and to celebrate achievement. For example, in a Year 7 resistant materials lesson, the teacher used displays of last year's projects to illustrate the high standards expected. Pupils referred to the displays throughout the lesson and were motivated to succeed by knowing what was possible. Effective attention given to literacy, numeracy and safety risk assessment enhances learning. Teachers use a good range of methods, such as displays of key word and writing guidelines to consolidate the use of technical language and to improve basic skills. Varied teaching methods help to maintain pupils' concentration and involve them in active participation in purposeful activity. Although the quality of learning generally matches the quality of teaching, a number of factors combine to impede pupils' progress. The time allocation is below that recommended nationally. This restricts the time available to consolidate learning and to improve skills through practice. The provision of ICT equipment is insufficient to support learning in design and manufacture. Although there is some good practice, marking and assessment are inconsistent. Opportunities are missed to ensure that pupils know how well they are doing and to set targets for improvement. Some of the department's accommodation is of poor quality, particularly the textiles room. Workshops with limited space for large classes, broken furniture and a leaking roof, do not provide suitable working conditions.

120. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection. Examination results have improved. The scheme of work is more closely matched to pupils' needs with improved design and make tasks. Teaching has improved but is not yet monitored to ensure good practice is shared. The inadequate provision for ICT remains an issue.

GEOGRAPHY

121. This is an effective and improving department. Observation of pupils' work shows attainment towards the end of Key Stage 3 to be above average. Standards attained by the vast majority of pupils are above those expected nationally and achievement by the age 14 is good in relation to pupils' prior attainment.

122. In GCSE examinations in 2000, results were above average in comparison with all schools and when compared with results obtained in similar schools. Results are improving at a faster rate than found nationally. Work seen during the inspection shows that this high attainment is continuing. The standards achieved by all pupils by the age of 16 are at least satisfactory; for higher attaining pupils they are good. However, lower attaining pupils do not always achieve the GCSE grades of which they are capable.

123. Progress is good in Years 7-9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Most pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of geographic processes and patterns and of environment themes. For example, in Year 7, pupils are already using appropriate geographic terms and have a good understanding of concepts such as conflict between different demands on resources in the National Parks. In Year 11, the vast majority of pupils are able to search for information using the Internet, but few are confident at interpreting this information and making reasoned judgements. Pupils with special education needs make satisfactory progress as a result of sensitive support by class teachers and learning support assistants.

124. In nearly all lessons, very good relationships and behaviour, often fostered by enthusiastic and stimulating teaching, contribute strongly to positive attitudes to learning. The great majority of pupils respond well. They are eager, enthusiastic learners who readily engage in productive group and pair work, helping each other to search for information and solve problems. However, a small minority has a short concentration span and lose interest if teachers' expositions are too long. Pupils are sometimes too ready to spend time on low level tasks; they need prompting to move on to more challenging activities such as interpreting information and offering explanations.

125. The quality of teaching is good overall. Half of all lessons are good or better and there is no unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching is most effective in Years 10 and 11. In the majority of lessons, teachers' good subject knowledge is very skilfully transmitted to pupils in a lively way. Teaching is invariably clear, stimulating and authoritative, drawing on many topical examples to illustrate and bring to life geographic themes. In a small minority of lessons, progress is slowed because teachers talk for too long, which results in pupils losing interest and becoming passive.

126. The quality of learning is good. Learning is accelerated in nearly all lessons by the very skilful management of pupils through high expectations of behaviour. Teachers create a relaxed yet productive atmosphere in classes, which is highly conducive to learning. When teachers expect much of pupils, as in a Year 9 lesson on Japan, the use of GCSE standard work prompts pupils to work at a fast pace. Teachers encourage pupils to persevere when faced with difficulty and, as a result, they readily engage in classroom activities, working with diligence and enthusiasm. Higher attaining pupils, in particular, are gaining a deep understanding of complex geographic issues, such as the environmental conflict arising from urban development.

127. Questioning is often effectively used to challenge and develop pupils' understanding, although in a small minority of lessons it is insufficiently probing and poorly directed, with the result that a small number of pupils sometimes dominate the lesson. The department skilfully uses a wide range of learning activities that are challenging, interesting and usually matched well to the needs of individual pupils. These are having a positive impact on attainment, particularly that of higher attaining pupils. Group work is very well used, enabling pupils to challenge and support each other in their learning. This was well demonstrated in a Year 8 lesson on industry when pupils evaluated the pros and cons of a new railway link.

128. In most lessons, which are longer than in most schools, very good levels of concentration and interest are well fostered by a brisk and purposeful pace. Time is used to the full. Teachers fully engage pupils in productive and interesting tasks that are usually well matched to their prior attainment, resulting in them maintaining interest and becoming active learners. Teachers' careful planning, which designs activities that encourage pupils to find out rather than being told, accelerates progress in most lessons. The confidence of teachers in using these methods is rewarded by the pupils' sense of achievement at their discovery of knowledge. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on volcanoes the sequence of tasks led pupils to discovering the impact of volcanoes on the human environment. This approach is not uniform across the department, however, and in a minority of lessons, too much time is spent on low level tasks such as copying, which prevents pupils from working at full stretch.

129. Homework, although regularly set, does not always support pupils' interest and understanding of their work. Too few tasks are set which encourage pupils to develop research skills, particularly the use of computers to search for and present information. Nearly all pupils are keen to succeed and most understand how well they are achieving. Pupils' work is regularly and accurately marked, but some teachers do not always provide helpful and supportive comments to encourage them to learn from their mistakes.

130. The subject is well led and managed and has benefited from intervention of the new head of faculty. There is now a shared commitment to raise standards. The department identifies clear targets for improvement and devises ways to reach them. The shared vision of the department fully matches that of the school. There is a strong culture of self-evaluation in the subject, through lesson observation, scrutiny of pupils' work, and the use of performance data.

131. Progress since the previous inspection has been good. Attainment has been improved, as has teaching and subject leadership. The department needs to build on this progress by continuing to develop consistent teaching methods that maintain and improve the attainment of all pupils.

HISTORY

132. Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment at the age of 14 show that standards have risen over the last four years and are now in line with national averages. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher levels of 6 and above, is below national averages, however it is rising steadily each year. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in the GCSE examinations in 2000 was well above the national average. There has been a considerable

improvement in results over the last three years. More girls choose to study history at GCSE level, and they achieve a higher proportion of grades A*-C than the boys.

133. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' attainment at the age of 14 is above the standard expected for pupils of the same age nationally. Pupils can identify the key features of the periods studied and they can use them to empathise with the people of the time, for example in a letter written regarding enlistment for the first World War. They can select information from a variety of sources, and are developing their skills of extended writing with the help of writing guides. Higher attaining pupils write fluently and demonstrate independent thought, for example in their diary entries for Henry VIII, reflecting his thinking at the time of the Reformation. Lower attaining pupils select appropriate information from the text in response to questions. Pupils have a good understanding of the use of primary and secondary sources and higher attaining pupils recognise the importance of cross-referencing to establish the validity of sources. Teachers encourage their pupils to develop their answers. With encouragement and guidance they can make links between events and identify the motives behind actions, for example when considering the plans of Hitler. The progress of pupils in the key elements of history is good. In lessons, there is no significant difference between the understanding of boys and girls, however boys dominate the class activities and the oral responses. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is good. The wide use of writing guidelines, graded questions and active learning techniques support their progress.

134. In work seen during the inspection, the attainment of pupils at the age of 16 is above average. Pupils develop a good understanding of the development of industrial Britain and make comparisons between England in the 18th and 19th centuries. They demonstrate recognition that not everyone shared the same viewpoint, for example over the redistribution of land at the time of enclosures. Higher attaining pupils write with understanding and compassion for the plight of young mill and mine workers; all pupils make links between the health of the people and poor living conditions. Pupils handle source material with confidence and they are beginning to consider the motives behind the way in which facts are presented. Research skills are good and most pupils use books, first hand re-enactments and the Internet to assemble the material for coursework. However, lower attaining pupils rely heavily on information supplied in class. Events are generally seen in isolation and, unless supported by the teacher, they fail to consider links across time or events. Many pupils use ICT to gain information and to produce their work. They do not always target their search in order to respond to specific questions and time is lost in general investigation.

135. The quality of teaching is good overall. It is very good in Key Stage 3. Lessons are well planned and lead to high quality learning. Teachers are at pains to use teaching methods that encourage pupils to use the information they obtain and to empathise with the past in order to understand the people of the time. For example, in a Year 9 role-play lesson pupils interviewed leading historical figures. The way that the activity was presented engaged pupils' interest and led to a good understanding of events. Teachers encourage pupils to consider issues from a moral standpoint. Aspects of the past enable pupils to consider their own values and the opportunity for pupils to visit 'Beth Shalom' – a Holocaust Educational Trust centre - is thought provoking and spiritually valuable. Very good pupil management results in a calm working atmosphere that supports pupils' concentration. Very good subject knowledge enables teachers to add colour to their lessons and to offer clear, confident support to pupils. Teachers make good use of question and answer in order to assess prior learning and to encourage pupils to develop their oral responses further. However, on some occasions, this questioning becomes too directed by the teacher, resulting in pupils being required to supply only a brief, obvious response. Good use is made of GCSE questions to enable pupils to build up recognition of the required criteria and ways to answer them.

136. Pupils' attitudes are good and their behaviour is very good. They work in partnership with their teachers and support the active learning methods used. As a consequence, they are building up confidence and independence. Teachers value pupils' work and they reflect this in their efforts. Concentration is good and, when pupils are challenged to think for themselves, they ask questions as well as offering answers and show understanding.

137. The management of the department is good. A wide variety of opportunities are provided to support pupils' learning, including visits and re-enactments, for example to Quarry Bank Mill to visit a 19th century child worker's house. History makes links with other subjects in order to widen pupils' experience and understanding of topics. Art and design is used to enable pupils to visualise history. Display is a significant feature of the department. Models of castles, tee-pees and battles, together with artefacts from the past, contribute to the learning environment. The department has a variety of textbooks but pupils studying for the GCSE do not have an individual textbook for use at home.

138. The department has made good improvement since the previous inspection. Results have improved and pupils now handle source material with confidence. Written work now

involves comparison and explanation and there is now targeted assessment of key skills. The progress of pupils in the key elements of history skills is now measured and monitored through assessment tasks. This is an improvement. Pupils are set targets for improvement as a result of this assessment. However, no use is yet made of this information to identify areas of weakness and strength in teaching and learning, or to report to parents. Pupils are aware of the criteria for assessment but they do not have the opportunity to contribute to their own assessments.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

139. ICT is taught through a skill-based specialist course in Years 7-9 and through a GCSE course in Years 10 and 11. In 2000 a Key Skills course was introduced to give all pupils a qualification at the end of their secondary school career. The teaching of ICT in subjects has shortcomings.

140. In teacher assessments at the age of 14 in 2000, standards were below national and local averages. In GCSE examinations in 2000, results at grades A*-C matched the national average; all pupils gained grades A*-G. These results were a considerable improvement on results in 1999. Despite good specialist teaching, the inconsistent pattern of computer use across the school restricts pupils' opportunities to develop and apply computer skills in subjects across the curriculum.

141. Work seen during the inspection in core ICT lessons in Years 7-9 shows good standards developing. Regular practice is improving the learning of basic skills such as keyboarding and the use of the Internet. Challenging group work helps develop skills. For example, Year 7 pupils work in teams to produce a newspaper, experimenting with fonts and text sizes to produce the best headline. This and many other exercises make a good contribution to the development of literacy skills. In Year 9, pupils develop their graphics skills through the use of a desk-top publisher program. Work in Years 8 and 9 shows a sustained improvement because the newly piloted units of work are imaginative and put pupils into real situations where computers will be used; for example, using spreadsheets and databases for everyday activities. Girls develop their skills faster than boys. Where computers are used to support learning, in subjects such as geography, science, modern foreign languages and music, both boys and girls make good use of the opportunities. Pupils with special educational needs make sound gains in confident use of computers, and are proud of their skills. Pupils with English as an additional language make good progress because of the support they receive from teachers. The support they receive from other members of their classes is particularly effective for these pupils.

142. In work seen during the inspection at the age of 16, standards match expectations for the majority of pupils and are above average for higher attaining pupils. The set tasks help pupils to gain experience of meeting specific criteria and develop independent learning. A small minority of pupils is still dependent on teachers, although help sheets are available to remind them about a skill. Pupils write letters and reports and undertake longer-term projects. In their present module they are organising a charity event and experimenting with mail merge to help them prepare fliers, tickets and seating plans.

143. Attitudes to learning are good. The computers that are available to pupils at lunchtime and break are used to capacity. Pupils have the opportunity to practise and work together,

which improves learning. Despite the open access there is little damage because pupils respond well to the trust they are given. Behaviour is good; pupils are self-disciplined and have a responsible attitude to the use of computers.

144. Teaching in specialist ICT is good and supports good learning. It is taught by a small specialist team of full and part-time teachers. Teaching is well supported by a technician and a part time cross-curricular support assistant. This is an improvement since the previous inspection when there was little specialist teaching. Specialist ICT teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan to meet the needs of all pupils. They have a clear understanding of pupils' special needs and use good strategies such as planned intervention and discussion to guide progress in Years 7-9. In Years 10 and 11, they encourage independent learning. Classroom management is good, especially at times when computers fail to work and groups of three pupils gather around a screen. Teachers make very good use of the 'on screen tutor' programme to take charge of pupils' screens and teach them at their work-stations. However, the effectiveness of this technique is reduced when there are too many pupils to a computer because there are too few computers available for the size of the class. There are a few instances at the end of lessons when teachers do not review the work that has been done, which misses the opportunity to consolidate learning. Assessment is developing well, although not consistently. Marking is variable in quality. Classroom displays establish the standards that teachers expect. When teaching is very good, teachers' innovative planning inspires pupils and makes them think.

145. Learning in other subjects is unsatisfactory, partly because of unsatisfactory curriculum planning. For example, pupils in Year 9 had lessons using the same program three times in one day. Across the curriculum there is no consistent programme for the teaching and assessment of ICT to involve all departments. The varied approach between subjects misses the opportunity to develop and practise the application of skills learned in specialist ICT lessons. Some of the strongest teaching is in the humanities subjects, science and music. There are severe difficulties of access to computers and software, which impede learning. Teachers have had their skills audited, but are not satisfied with the training they have received through the nationally funded training programme. There is a need for further training.

146. The management of cross-curricular ICT lacks a structure to enable it to develop. This is slowing pupils' progress. Management is shared between the head of ICT who manages the teaching of specialist skills in core lessons and the head of the technology faculty who manages the use of ICT across the curriculum. The ratio of pupils to computers available is high (12:1 compared with the national average of 6:1). The department handbook is a good document that uses data well to identify improvement needed and contains a concise outline of the issues for ICT in the school.

147. Despite the difficulties, there has been good improvement overall since the previous inspection. Standards have improved, in particular examination results. The previous inspection report indicated that skills were from the narrow base of communication/presentation; this has also improved. Teaching, previously judged to be poor, has improved considerably. Two visits per year by the head of ICT to the main partner primary schools have created links that are helping the department to develop a programme of study that builds on pupils' prior learning. The lack of development in cross-curricular ICT was raised in the report of the previous inspection and, although this is improved, there are still shortcomings in core and foundation areas of the curriculum, particularly in art and design, design and technology, mathematics and physical education.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French and German

148. At the ages of 14 and 16, standards in French and German are above average, and above the standards that might be expected when considering pupils' attainment on entry to the school. In 2000, the proportion of pupils assessed by their teachers as working at or above the nationally expected level at the age of 14 was above average and this was confirmed by work seen during the inspection.

149. Results in GCSE examinations in 2000 were above the national average for the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C grades in French and in line with the national figure for the proportion gaining grades A*-C in German. Although the trend has fluctuated slightly, it has been rising since the previous inspection when the proportions of A*-C grades were below the national levels in both subjects. At grades A*-G, all pupils entered for the examinations gained a pass grade. This is better than the national picture.

150. In work seen during the inspection at age 14, standards in listening, speaking, reading and writing are all above average. Speaking, in particular, has improved since the previous inspection and pupils confidently use French and German, speaking with good accents and accuracy. This is because most teachers make good use of the foreign languages as the means of communication in the classroom. Reading and writing skills are consistently developed in Years 7-9 so that by Year 9 most pupils can read short passages of description and write about themselves in simple French, using past, present and future tenses. In most lessons, pupils of all levels of attainment are supported by material that is appropriate to their needs. This enables them to make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets set for them. Higher attaining pupils are given opportunities to reach high standards, through extension work.

151. In work seen during the inspection at the age of 16, pupils are able to express themselves very well in speaking and writing, with higher attaining pupils demonstrating an ability to write in accurate and interesting language with obvious pleasure. The foreign language assistant plays a useful part in motivating pupils to listen to and to speak German and adds an extra cultural dimension to the lessons in which he participates. There is a good range of material for reading and this skill is developed well so that pupils are able to connect the written and spoken word. As a result, they make good progress, whatever their ability. Standards in literacy are good, and reinforced by the variety of material that is used in the classroom.

152. The quality of teaching is good overall and sometimes very good or inspirational. It is very good in Years 10 and 11 because teaching assignments are better matched to teachers' first foreign language than at Key Stage 3. Lessons are very well planned to take into account the needs of individual pupils, including those on the special educational needs register. Teachers expect high standards. They know their pupils well and have good relationships with them. The best lessons have a range of activities, which cover the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. An excellent Year 10 French lesson enabled pupils to make excellent progress in their learning because it was carefully planned, with a good variety of activities in the four skills. It was conducted at a cracking pace and gave pupils a chance to consolidate work they had done before as well as to cover new work. Pupils took their work

seriously, responding well to the teacher and enjoying the lesson because they were fully involved in the chanting, rap and humour. Pupils made excellent progress in a Year 7 German lesson because the teacher made it so much fun, with a variety of challenging activities, that they extended and consolidated their vocabulary almost without noticing. However, in a Year 10 German lesson, progress was only satisfactory because the teaching was less lively and was not geared closely enough to the needs of individuals. The teacher did not have the confidence to use German as the main means of communication and so opportunities for learning were missed. In both languages, teachers use assessment at the end of each unit of work to judge the progress their pupils are making. This is linked to National Curriculum levels. Marking is completed regularly and gives good information about what pupils know and can do and what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils have a good awareness of the levels at which they are working. There is good use of ICT, but this is limited to one lesson per half term.

153. The quality of learning is good overall, and very good in Years 10 and 11. It is not as good in Years 7-9 for a number of reasons linked to the construction of the timetable. Pupils who study French in Year 7 have all three of their weekly lessons as the last lesson of the school day. This means that they are becoming tired and do not progress at as fast a rate as one might expect, given their motivation and enthusiasm. Pupils who study German in Years 7 and 9 have all three of their weekly lessons concentrated at the start of the week, with two lessons on the same day and then no lessons for five days. This lack of continuity is hampering their learning. Teachers often have to teach outside their main foreign language specialism, which makes inefficient use of their expertise.

154. Pupils show interest in their work and have a positive attitude to it. They are motivated by the good teaching they receive. As a result, behaviour in lessons is almost always good and sometimes very good. Work is well presented and carefully completed. Boys respond particularly well orally and all pupils are keen to take part in role-play and group work.

155. Management of the department is very good. Monitoring of teaching and learning takes place regularly. The head of department has clear plans, which are very well thought out, and teachers work very well together with her guidance. This leads to good standards of teaching and learning.

156. Since the previous inspection, the department has improved achievement in lessons and the attainment of pupils in examinations and teacher assessments. Standards are high because of the dedicated staff and the high profile of languages within the school. This is further enhanced by the variety of visits to both France and Germany and the link with a French car manufacturer.

MUSIC

157. Levels of attainment in Music at the ends of Years 9 and 11 are above average, reflecting pupils' very good progress through the school. Such high standards reflect very good teaching, including a high proportion of excellent, inspirational teaching and very good, often excellent, attitudes and behaviour.

158. The proportion of pupils gaining GCSE grades A*-C for the past four years have been well above the national averages with a substantial proportion of pupils obtaining A* or A. In 2000, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-G was slightly below the national average.

159. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2000 were above national expectations with girls attaining higher standards overall than boys, in line with the picture nationally.

160. In work seen during the inspection, attainment at the end of Year 9 is above average. Performing and composing skills are very well developed. For example, pupils perform complex African rhythms on percussion instruments and then develop them into interesting compositions combining melodies and drones and making creative use of the pentatonic scale. Listening skills and knowledge and understanding of musical vocabulary are unusually well developed.

161. In work seen during the inspection, attainment at the end of Year 11 is above average. Pupils show above average knowledge, skills and understanding of composing, performing and critical listening. For example, Year 11 groups, required to compose in twentieth century styles, produced excellent short pieces based on tone rows, the whole tone scale, or in one case a minimalist piece using specialised techniques. Knowledge of periods, composers, styles and the vocabulary to describe and discuss them is above average.

162. The overall quality of teaching is very good. There is a high proportion of excellent, inspirational teaching that leads to very high standards of achievement and promotes very good, frequently excellent, attitudes. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are excellent, as are teaching methods. For example, the head of department has devised a website on the Intranet which pupils can visit for information about music at Lode Heath. An important feature is that it can be used for GCSE revision, a notable and excellent use of technology to assist pupils' learning.

163. The quality of learning is very good. High, average and low attaining pupils acquire knowledge, skills and understanding better than might be expected when considering their prior attainment. Pupils with special educational needs and gifted and talented pupils make good progress. Teachers' lesson plans include work matched to pupils' needs so that all may achieve successfully and appropriately. For example, work on melody and drones began with a tune split up into a number of sections and written out in more or less random order. The task was to put them into the correct order and play them. At one level it was sufficient to actually place them in order, at another to do so and play the tune with the right hand successfully and at yet another level to add the drone with the left hand. This was a very effective approach which challenged all the pupils in an appropriate way. At all stages, pupils' very good behaviour and attitudes provide an essential framework for very good learning and progress.

164. The extensive range of extra-curricular musical activities provides abundant evidence of the commitment and energy of this fine department. The substantial programme of events such as concerts and shows, which arise from them, are greatly appreciated by the school and the local community. Extra-curricular musical group activities are very strong and well supported. Up to two hundred pupils participate each week in choirs, bands, and smaller ensembles. One of these, "Lode of Rhythm" was seen performing an excellent percussion piece, composed by a Year 10 pupil as part of her GCSE coursework, which she also directed extremely well. These activities and the imaginative programme of music support, including GCSE support, provided by the school or through the Solihull Music Service, extend and improve the musical attainment of large numbers of pupils.

165. Since the previous inspection, good levels of attainment have been maintained and improved upon. Good use is made of musical technology to support learning, although some machines are now out of date. Recording facilities are limited. The department continues to

provide valuable assistance to partner primary schools. The BBC is filming in the

department for the Open University for the second time since the previous inspection, recognising the high quality of its work.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

166. National Curriculum teacher assessments at the age of 14 in 2000 were in line with national averages and there was no significant difference between boys' and girls' results. The 2000 GCSE results were below the national average for the award of grades A*-C but were above average for the award of grades A*-G. Results are below those achieved in other subjects but an upward trend is being maintained. Practical skills are better developed than knowledge of theory. Boys take up the option more than girls do, although the number of girls choosing physical education GCSE is increasing.

167. In work seen during the inspection, attainment by the age of 14 is above national expectations in netball and below in volleyball. Standards vary according to the activity offered. Pupils show control in netball passing and shooting skills in different situations and their knowledge and understanding of the game is reflected in their positional play. In volleyball, basic shots and strategies are uncertain, partly because of pupils' limited experience of the game. Year 7 and 8 classes demonstrate very good teamwork and knowledge in orienteering sessions. A Year 7 class, in a netball lesson, improved in shooting and the standard in a modified game was high. Girls, in a Year 8 soccer class, understood and evaluated many of the skills involved but were not able to perform them consistently. Attainment by the age of 16 is in line with national expectations in GCSE theory. In Year 11, the written work is accurate and sufficiently extended to suggest that pupils are on course to improve on last year's results. Good relationships between staff and pupils and co-operative work are promoting better standards. Practical work in badminton and basketball is above national expectations in the planning and execution of basic skills and strategies. Pupils with special educational needs are provided with tasks closely matched to their needs, which enables them to make very good progress.

168. Attitudes are very good. Most activities are performed with enthusiasm and energy. In all years, concentration is very good and co-operative teamwork is excellent. Pupils take responsibility for their own learning. For example, warming up before a lesson is usually completed without the teacher's direction. Motivation is high and pupils make haste to their lessons and change quickly so that no time is wasted.

169. Teaching is very good overall, slightly better in Years 7-9 than in Years 10 and 11. There is excellent teaching in netball and orienteering, very good teaching in basketball and good teaching in Year 11 GCSE theory and girls' soccer. All the specialist staff plan their work carefully from the teaching schemes and expect high standards from pupils. Lesson objectives are made clear and feedback is given in all lessons. Pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own performance. Teachers' knowledge of the subject is very good and most lessons challenge pupils to achieve higher standards, particularly in games and orienteering.

170. The effective use of appropriate resources and work matched to their individual needs help pupils of all abilities to make at least good progress. At all times, classes are controlled well and efficiently organised. Safety procedures are taught so that the pupils can, for example, assemble badminton and volleyball posts with care. Lower attaining pupils are encouraged to reach individual targets, which help them to progress to partner and small

group work. The GCSE groups are progressing well. More attention paid to the use of ICT would enhance learning further. To achieve better progress in volleyball more attention is required to correcting basic skills.

171. The overall quality of learning is very good. Pupils make rapid progress, particularly in Years 7-9, because of the very good teaching. Learning skills are well developed; pupils take responsibility and show initiative. There is an awareness of tactics and strategies in games; planning skills are developed by co-operative work in orienteering. The feedback at the end of lessons helps pupils to evaluate their own strengths and provides challenges for their developing skills. Individual targets help GCSE pupils to direct their attention to relevant revision topics. There is an upward trend in standards from Year 7 to Year 11.

172. There is equal access to the subject for all pupils. The GCSE option is well supported and contains 60 per cent practical work, which is ideal for talented games players with some academic prowess. More than 50 per cent of the school population takes part in the after-school games programme and half a dozen staff conduct the sessions. As a result of this dedication, the school achieves well in inter-school fixtures and competitions. Assessment procedures are being developed in line with Curriculum 2000 and recording procedures and target setting are efficiently prepared. Reports to parents are too general and need to be more specific and related to what individual pupils need to do to improve. The head of department provides effective direction for the subject and the monitoring arrangements are having a positive effect on teaching skills. Corridors around the school have good displays of appropriate notices and information. Accommodation is adequate. The hard areas and the sports hall floor are in need of repair. Finance has been allocated for improvement.

173. Since the previous inspection, GCSE physical education has improved to a level that matches national expectations. Teaching has improved. The range of extra-curricular activities is very good because of staff dedication and pupil interest. Standards at Key Stage 3 have improved at a faster rate.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

174. Results in the GCSE short-course examination in 2000 were well above average. Results have risen over the last three years and have been consistently above national averages. Girls attain a higher proportion of grades A*-C grades than boys.

175. In work seen during the inspection, the attainment of pupils by the age of 14 matches the standards expected for pupils of the same age nationally. Pupils develop a good understanding of the key features of the major world faiths studied. They can use this knowledge to consider the place of ritual in the lives of believers, for example the place of pilgrimage in the twenty-first century. They investigate the variety of responses to significant times in our lives, for example birth, and contrast the rituals of the world religions that mark these rites of passage. Pupils undertake research and present their findings in displays and projects that are often thoughtful and well presented. Higher attaining pupils recognise the difficulties that may arise when the beliefs of two faiths conflict with each other. They can empathise with the opposing sides, demonstrating an understanding of the problems involved, for example in the disputed site of Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Pupils consider the difficult concept of suffering and the means by which Christians seek to reconcile this with the love of God; however responses generally lack a real depth of understanding, repeating the explanations given by teachers rather than wrestling with the question for themselves.

176. In work seen during the inspection, the attainment of pupils by the age of 16 is in line with national expectations. In lessons, standards are sometimes affected by the attitudes of a

minority of pupils who are reluctant to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Work seen in books is generally of a higher standard and indicates that pupils are developing a sound understanding of the effects of belief on the lives of believers. They consider contemporary moral issues, such as euthanasia and abortion, and reflect upon the influence of belief on the moral values that people hold. They are beginning to recognise from discussion that differing viewpoints may not always mean that one is wrong. Pupils compare beliefs concerning life after death and have the opportunity to consider their own ideas and values. They investigate the different interpretations of the creation of the world, although there is little evidence of pupils considering that all interpretations may have value to give to our understanding. Discussion heard in class did not generally display deep thought, however the extended written work of pupils of higher attainment contained reasoned explanation and argument that was supported by evidence and quotation. Pupils display a sound understanding of the specialist vocabulary involved and higher attainers write fluently and accurately. The responses of lower attaining pupils to questions are simple, often dependent on text and lacking independent consideration. Their oral work, however, can be thoughtful and suggests an understanding of the effect of faith on the actions of the believer. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress due to the nature of the teaching methods used. However, written information needs to be more closely matched to pupils' needs so that they can make better use of it.

177. The attitudes of the majority of pupils are satisfactory. They work well in groups, sharing information and their findings with the class, for example when considering the contribution of paintings to our understanding of the suffering Christ. Pupils are keen to respond to questions and discuss contemporary issues with thought and confidence. The behaviour of a small minority of boys in Year 10 has a negative effect on the involvement of the others in the class, on occasions leading to a reluctance to show interest and involvement.

178. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Much of the teaching in Years 7-9 is good and an occasional lesson is excellent. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives that are shared with the class. The quality of learning is satisfactory overall. Teachers make every effort to involve their pupils actively in their learning and use imaginative teaching methods. In some lessons there is too high a tolerance of noise and, as a result, these methods do not produce the level of thought and discovery that is possible. Written work is designed to encourage pupils to empathise with people from other cultures and faiths and to apply their knowledge to the effects of faith on the lives of individuals. Artefacts are used well to support understanding and opportunities are presented for pupils to experience other cultures through their visits to places of worship. Teachers treat the opinions and ideas of their pupils with respect, encouraging them to consider the views of others. Issues are discussed that are relevant to pupils, for example the nature of relationships, in order to stimulate interest. Pupils respond well in general to these issues although the level of some written responses accepted is low. Lessons are taught at a good pace. Time is allowed for pupils to reflect on the concepts and beliefs that they are studying and the department makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual development.

179. The department has an attractive and stimulating room where very good use is made of display to extend learning. However, many lessons are taught in a wide variety of rooms that do not reflect the work of the department. Teachers are well qualified. However, they have responsibilities outside the department and as a result their contribution to the department as a whole is limited. The department is well managed. The new assessment

system accompanying the new Agreed Syllabus is being introduced early so that pupils' progress across all classes can be monitored to ensure consistency.

180. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection. Standards have risen significantly in GCSE examinations. Adequate time is now provided to teach the syllabus and teaching schemes have been revised to make good use of it. Assessment systems are now in place to support the accurate monitoring of pupils' progress and to enable teachers to focus on strengths and weaknesses.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

181. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is enhanced by the provision of GNVQ Part 1 engineering and science courses and GCSE Business Studies.

182. Standards in these subjects are good and are improving.

183. Attainment of pupils following the GNVQ courses is above the national average. Nearly one-third of pupils are working towards Intermediate Level. Most pupils make good progress. They work with confidence on a range of demanding assignments and acquire skills of planning, research and evaluation of information. Most can use information technology to help them design and realise projects.

184. Attainment in business studies is also above the national average and has improved steadily over the last four years. Most pupils make good progress in Years 10 and 11. By the age of 16, most have a good knowledge and understanding of business processes, have a very good grasp of the appropriate terminology and can use it in a variety of ways. Pupils are skilful in searching for and evaluating information to use to support judgements, for example when evaluating the nature of business units.

185. Pupils following vocational courses invariably have a very good attitude to their learning. They are enthusiastic learners, work well in groups to search for and share information, and readily take responsibility for their own learning.

186. Teaching of the GNVQ and GCSE business studies courses is good. Teachers set clearly focused tasks and this fosters good learning. These tasks are invariably well matched to the needs of individual pupils and teachers ensure a brisk and purposeful pace which encourages pupils to work with effort and enthusiasm. Teachers' very good subject knowledge is used well to stimulate and enthuse pupils. For example, they use relevant and topical material to bring the subject to life. This, coupled with the high expectations that teachers emphasise, leads to pupils having the confidence to take responsibility for their own learning and contributes to the good progress which the great majority make.

187. The management of vocational provision is fragmented. No single individual has an overview of how this important part of the curriculum should develop to meet the needs of pupils and how good practice in one subject may be identified and shared with the others. The school is well placed to build on the success of this programme and extend the vocationally-related approach to learning to other subjects.