

INSPECTION REPORT

COLMERS FARM SCHOOL

Rednal, Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103563

Headteacher: Mr M. Gardner

Reporting inspector: Mr C. Sander
OIN 4151

Dates of inspection: 21 - 24 May 2001

Inspection number: 186511

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Secondary
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Bristol Road South Rednal BIRMINGHAM West Midlands
Postcode:	B45 9NY
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr N. Hughes
Date of previous inspection:	22 January 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
4151	Mr C. Sander	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>The school's results and achievements</p> <p>How well are pupils taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
9511	Mrs E. A. Longfield	Lay inspector		<p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
13217	Mr M. Butterworth	Team inspector	<p>Physical education</p> <p>Special educational needs</p>	
20716	Mr A. R. Grogan	Team inspector	History	
22723	Mr B. Hartman	Team inspector	Mathematics	
2200	Mr J. Stirrup	Team inspector	English	
20243	Mr D. Benstock	Team inspector	Science	
10941	Mrs R. Robinson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
20533	Mr D Rogers	Team inspector	Art	
31779	Mr V. Harrison	Team inspector	Design and technology	
12336	Mr J. M. Overend	Team inspector	Geography	
	Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities

19404	Mr L. Shubeler	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
30128	Mrs S. M. Stanley	Team inspector	Music Religious education Equal opportunities	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Colmers Farm School is an 11-16 Foundation school for boys and girls situated in Rednal, a suburb of Birmingham. It is broadly average in size with 1026 pupils on roll and has increased in size by approximately 11 per cent since the previous inspection. It is oversubscribed. Its admissions policy emphasises its commitment to include all pupils within its immediate community. As a result, nearly all of them live within approximately one mile of the school. The socio-economic background of the pupils is below average. Twenty-four per cent of the pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, a proportion above the national average. Attainment on entry is below the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, 32 per cent, is above the national average. Twenty-seven of these pupils have statements, a proportion broadly in line with the national average. Two pupils speak English as an additional language. Ninety-four per cent of the pupils are white and just under 4 per cent are Black-Caribbean heritage. The school is involved in the national initiative 'Excellence in Cities'. It is a locally designated 'art site' and its work in the visual and performing arts is a distinctive feature. Sixty-four per cent of the pupils continue in education beyond the age of 16, an increase of 10 per cent over the past five years.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school. The headteacher provides excellent leadership. The strong emphasis on target setting challenges all pupils to achieve well and the school makes very good arrangements to include all its pupils in its very good levels of provision. Results are in line with the national average and well above average for similar schools nationally in English, mathematics and science at the ages of 14 and 16. GCSE results in 2000 were well above the average for similar schools. The quality of teaching is very good and pupils make good progress to reach standards that are in line with the average for all schools nationally. Behaviour and relationships are very good throughout the school. The unit costs are above average. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Pupils make good progress and achieve results in national tests and GCSE examinations that are well above the average for similar schools.
- Standards are very good in science and physical education.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Standards of behaviour and pupils' enthusiasm for their school are very good.
- Procedures for monitoring and assessing pupils' attainment, progress and personal development, including target setting, are very good.

What could be improved

- There were no key issues identified in the inspection.
- A small number of minor matters have been drawn to the attention of the governing body for possible inclusion in the next annual improvement plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in January 1996. It has made very good progress since that time because the excellent leadership of the school places a very strong emphasis on continuous improvement. In 1999 it was officially recognised as the ninth most improved secondary school nationally. Standards have risen at the ages of 14 and 16. Improved standards in literacy help many pupils to make good progress. The quality of teaching and learning is much improved and is often very good. The governors' very good action plan has successfully dealt with nearly all of the issues raised at that time. Attendance is greatly improved and is now in line with the national average. Standards in design and technology are much higher and the subject is now very well managed. The use of information and communication technology [ICT] is now a developing strength. The school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all its pupils.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	C	B	C	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

Standards on entry to the school are below average. They are broadly average at the age of 16. The school has met its challenging targets for national tests and GCSE results. Pupils of all levels of prior attainment, including those with special educational needs, achieve well. Progress by the age of 14 and by the age of 16 is good.

National test results at the age of 14 in 2000 were broadly in line with the national average for all schools. They were above average in English, below average in mathematics and broadly average in science. These results were well above the national average for similar schools. In English the proportion of pupils achieving above the standard expected nationally was in the top five per cent for similar schools. Both the girls and the boys did similarly well. The trend of improvement has been in line with the national trend. It has been greatest in English.

Standards reported in the year 2000 statutory teacher assessments were broadly average and above in music, design and technology and modern foreign languages where boys did particularly well. They were below average in art and geography.

Standards at the age of 14 are currently in line with those expected nationally. They are good in English, science, physical education, art and drama and satisfactory in all other subjects. They are much improved in art and geography. Pupils achieve very well by the age of 14 in science and English, satisfactorily in modern foreign languages and well in all other subjects.

GCSE results in 2000 were well above the average for similar schools and broadly in line with the national average for all schools. They represent a very good level of achievement. The best results, and well above average, were in science. They were above average in art, business studies, drama, English literature, ICT and physical education. They were below average in history and Spanish, and well below average in design and technology and geography. The girls did better than the boys, but the latter's results were higher than the average for their age group nationally. The trend of improvement in GCSE results is above the trend nationally.

Standards at the age of 16 are currently higher than those indicated in the year 2000 GCSE results. There has been a big improvement in geography and design and technology. Standards in science and physical education are very good. They are good in art, geography, ICT and music, and satisfactory in all other subjects. Pupils achieve very well in science, music and physical education by the age of 16, satisfactorily in modern foreign languages and well in all other subjects.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils of all ages are eager to come to school, participate with enthusiasm and enjoy their lessons. They respond very well to the high expectations of their teachers.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils are courteous to adults and to each other. This helps to create a natural atmosphere of orderliness and calm. They show a very good level of self-discipline. Exclusions are low.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Nearly all pupils show a mature attitude in lessons and work well with each other. The very good relationships in lessons help them to make good progress because they listen carefully to each other and to their teachers. They willingly help others.

Attendance	Satisfactory. It is in line with the national average and much improved since the last inspection. Punctuality is satisfactory.
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TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years
Lessons seen overall	Very good	Very 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 and learning is very good. It is a strength of the school. The quality of teaching was very good or better in 26 per cent of the 149 lessons and satisfactory or better in all lessons seen. It was good or better in 79 per cent of lessons. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. The teaching of all age groups in science, physical education, art and drama is very good. It is good in English and mathematics, satisfactory in modern foreign languages and good in all other subjects. Literacy skills are well taught in many subjects and good use is made of ICT. Numeracy skills are well taught in mathematics but they are not taught systematically in other subjects. The grouping of pupils according to their levels of attainment is well managed, and there is good support for pupils with special educational needs. As a result, the school meets very well the needs of all its pupils.

The strongest features in the very good teaching are the careful planning, well chosen methods, high expectations and skilful organisation of lessons that encourage the full participation of the pupils. As a result pupils of all levels of prior attainment make very good gains in knowledge, understanding and skills. They work hard, show a very good level of interest, concentrate well and make good progress. The very good use of assessment helps pupils to understand clearly how well they are doing and the very good emphasis on setting of targets results in a very purposeful attitude to learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The requirements of the revised National Curriculum have been fully implemented and there is a good range of additional activities. There is good provision for GCSE short courses in Years 10 and 11. The provision of two modern foreign languages in Years 8 and 9 is inefficient.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Procedures to identify pupils' needs are good and the deployment of additional support is well planned and very effective. Individual education plans identify targets for improvement and pupils are involved in reviewing their progress. Sometimes subject teachers are insufficiently clear about these targets.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. Provision for the general welfare and personal development is good for the very small number of pupils who occasionally enter the school at an early stage of language acquisition. However, there is no initial assessment procedure.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is good. It is satisfactory for their cultural and spiritual development. There are many opportunities in lessons for pupils to develop independence, self-discipline and consideration for others.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes very good care of its pupils. This involves not only their safety and welfare but also very well-planned arrangements to monitor progress and set challenging targets so that all seek to achieve to the very best of their ability. Assessment arrangements are very good. The partnership with parents is very good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The headteacher has very successfully established a shared and very strong commitment to raising standards throughout the school. Delegation is excellent. The senior managers fulfil their roles very well and very good teamwork is a strength of the school. Subject leadership is very good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. All statutory requirements are met except for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all. Their level of direct involvement is high, particularly in agreeing targets for improvement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. Test and examination results are analysed thoroughly against agreed targets. The review arrangements of the school and subject improvement plans are extremely thorough. The regular review of the subject departments is an excellent feature.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Financial planning is very carefully linked to the priorities of the school improvement plan. The principles of best value are applied well to major expenditure decisions. Additional funding as part of the national initiative 'Excellence in Cities' is very well used to support the needs of gifted and talented pupils. The overall levels of staffing, accommodation and learning resources are good.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's high expectations for all its pupils. • The leadership and management. • The high quality of the teaching. • The good progress pupils make. • They feel comfortable about approaching the school when problems arise. • How the school helps the pupils to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The timetable for the completion of homework.

Those parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting and completed the questionnaire expressed very strong support for the school. The proportion of parents who agreed very strongly with the above list of the school's good features was very high. The inspection team looked carefully at the arrangements for homework. These are good overall. The policy and timetable is generally adhered to. The school is conscious of the need to monitor ever more carefully that homework is set in accordance with the agreed timetable. The findings of this inspection support the parents' view that Colmers Farm is a very good school because high expectations are a key characteristic of its leadership, management and teaching. It serves its community very well indeed and prepares all of its pupils very well for the responsibilities and challenges of adult life.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

- ◆ *The word 'standards' is used to define how well pupils are doing when their work is compared with what pupils nationally are expected to know, understand and be able to do at the ages of 11, 14 and 16.*
 - ◆ *The word 'results' refers to how well pupils do in national tests and GCSE examinations.*
 - ◆ *The word 'achievement' refers to how well pupils are doing at the age of 14 compared with what they were able to do at the age of 11, and at the age of 16 compared with what they could do at the age of 14. It indicates how much progress they are making.*
1. At the time of the inspection, pupils in Year 11 were engaged in private study at home in preparation for their GCSE examinations. Pupils in Year 10 were involved in school examinations for part of the week of the inspection. The standards pupils reach and the progress they make by the age of 16 were, therefore, evaluated mainly through additional analysis of the work they had completed prior to the inspection, and in discussion with them and their teachers.

Standards on entry to the school

2. Standards on entry to the school are below average. In the national tests taken at the age of 11 in the final term of primary school, just over two-thirds of the current Year 7 pupils reached the expected standard, Level 4, or better in English and mathematics compared with three-quarters of all pupils nationally. Four-fifths of the pupils reached the expected standard in science, a proportion broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils who did better than the standard expected nationally in these three subjects was broadly in line with the national average. The current Year 8 reached similar standards when they took the national tests in 1999.
3. The results of cognitive ability tests [CATs], taken by all pupils shortly after they start at the school, confirm that standards on entry to the school are below average across all year groups at the age of 11. Approximately three-fifths of the pupils recorded below average scores and the scores of just over one-tenth of the pupils were above average. The proportion of pupils with identified special educational needs is above the national average.

Results, standards and progress at the age of 14

4. When the school was previously inspected in 1996, results in national tests at the age of 14 were below average, the standards of work generally were below those expected nationally and pupils made satisfactory progress. Results, standards and progress in work seen are now much improved because the specific weaknesses in teaching and learning identified at that time have been very well addressed.
5. The good progress that all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make by the age of 14 is evident in their national test results in English, mathematics and science, the statutory teacher assessments in the other subjects of the National Curriculum and also in the pupils' work that was analysed during the inspection.
6. Results in the year 2000 national tests taken by all pupils at the age of 14 were broadly in line with the national average. The trend of improvement over the last five

years has been broadly in line with the national trend. The rate of improvement has been greatest in English. In each of the last three years, both the boys and the girls have done similarly better than their age groups nationally.

7. Overall these test results were broadly in line with the national average for all schools. Results were above average in English, broadly average in science and below average in mathematics. Nearly three-quarters of the pupils reached the expected standard in English and just less than two-thirds did so in mathematics and science.
8. The standards reached by the boys and the girls in the year 2000 national tests were broadly similar to their age groups nationally. Both the boys and the girls did well in English and reached a satisfactory standard in science in comparison with their age groups nationally. Girls did less well in mathematics. The relatively good performance by the boys is an important factor in the overall improvement in standards.
9. A comparison between pupils' standards on entry to the school and their results in the national tests shows that they made good progress between the ages of 11 and 14.
10. These results were well above the average for similar schools, [FSM]. The percentage of pupils exceeding the national expectation in English was in the top five per cent of similar schools nationally.
11. The school has set and met challenging targets for improvement in national test results at the age of 14 for the last three years. The improvement owes much to the very good level of expectation that is consistently evident in the teaching of these subjects.
12. Standards reported in the year 2000 statutory teacher assessments in the other subjects of the National Curriculum were broadly in line with the national average. In some subjects, for example art, the assessments were too severe. The above average standards in design and technology showed a marked improvement since the previous inspection. Standards were also above average in modern foreign languages and music. They were below average in geography and art, where the boys did less well than their age group nationally, and broadly in line with the national average in all other subjects. Compared with their age groups nationally, the boys did particularly well in design and technology and modern foreign languages.
13. Standards at the age of 14 in work seen during the inspection were broadly in line with the most recent national test results and statutory assessments. They were higher in English, science, physical education, art and drama where good standards were consistently evident. Standards were satisfactory in all other subjects. Achievement and progress are good or better in all subjects except in modern foreign languages where they are satisfactory. They are very good in English and science. This good level of achievement owes much to the consistent quality of the good and frequently very good teaching across the school, the strong emphasis on target setting and the high level of expectation.
14. Standards in English are above those expected nationally because pupils have plenty of opportunity to develop their oral, reading and writing skills. There is a good variety of imaginatively planned activities that includes regular use of ICT and places a strong emphasis on teaching the basic skills. Their readiness to listen carefully in lessons is a strong feature that helps them to make good progress.
15. The very good teaching of investigative skills and the well-planned opportunities to use ICT to analyse and present data help pupils to reach standards that are above those expected nationally at the age of 14. Pupils have a very good range of opportunities to apply their good scientific knowledge and understanding and to think carefully.

16. Standards in mathematics at the age of 14 are broadly in line with those expected nationally. Most pupils' knowledge and understanding of number is generally satisfactory, many can perform calculations of area and volume accurately, but most do not yet have sufficient confidence in using algebra to achieve above the standard expected nationally.
17. There are several good features in the overall satisfactory standards that pupils attain in their other subjects at the age of 14. Some higher attaining pupils achieve good standards in design and technology because they use technical language accurately and with confidence when completing their evaluations. The good emphasis on research, experimentation and personal interpretation is helping many pupils to develop better drawing and painting skills in art. Imaginative teaching in geography is helping some pupils to achieve a good standard of work because it helps them to gain a fuller understanding and appreciation of geographical phenomena. The good teaching of basic skills in history helps some lower attaining pupils to achieve well and reach standards that are close to those expected nationally. The good teaching of composing skills is helping to raise standards further in music.

Results, standards and progress at the age of 16

18. At the time of the previous inspection in 1996, GCSE examination results were below the national average, with just under one-third of the pupils obtaining 5 or more grades A*-C. The rate of improvement in the results of both the boys and the girls has been above the trend nationally over the last five years. In 1996 the average total points score was four points below the national average. In 2000, it was 1.6 points above it. This strong feature of the school's improvement was officially recognised by the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State in 1999.
19. In 2000 the proportion of candidates entered for five or more GCSE examinations was broadly in line with the national average. Half of the pupils obtained five or more grades A*-C, a proportion broadly in line with the national average. The girls did better than the boys, but the latter's results were higher than the average for their age group nationally. The above average results of the boys have been a consistently good feature over the previous three years.
20. The proportion of the boys and the girls who obtained 5 or more grades A*-G was below the national average. This is because some pupils are entered for GCSE short courses that are not currently included in the government's statistical analysis and also because some lower attaining pupils enter for a smaller number of GCSE examinations.
21. The GCSE results compare very favourably with similar schools and indicate very good progress. They are well above average when a comparison is made with the standards the same pupils had reached previously at the age of 14. The proportion of pupils who obtained five or more grades A*-C was well above the average for similar schools [FSM], and the proportion obtaining five or more grades A*-G was broadly in line with it. Results were well above the average for similar schools in English and mathematics and in the top five per cent nationally in science.
22. In art, business studies, drama, English literature, ICT and physical education, GCSE results in 2000 were above the national average. They were well above the national average in science. Both the boys and the girls did better in these subjects than in their other subjects.

23. Results in religious education were very good. A high proportion of Year 11 followed the short course, approximately two-thirds of whom obtained grades A*-C. One-third of these pupils gained the highest grades A*-A.
24. Results were below average in history and Spanish, and well below average in the full GCSE course for resistant materials within design and technology. Staffing difficulties were a factor that contributed to the well below average results in geography.
25. The standards in work seen during the inspection are good. They are higher than those indicated in the year 2000 GCSE examination results. Standards are much improved in design and technology and geography and better in history.
26. Standards are highest in science and physical education. Very good teaching in science ensures that by the age of 16 pupils acquire a very good level of knowledge and understanding and their investigative skills are highly developed. The ability to apply a very good understanding of scientific concepts to support their investigations was a strong feature of the work in Year 11 that had been completed prior to the inspection. In physical education, very good teaching enables pupils to apply their skills very well in games, and the written work of many GCSE candidates is very good.
27. Standards are above those that pupils are expected to reach at the age of 16 in art, geography, ICT and music. The work of higher attaining pupils in art is impressive because pupils are encouraged to further develop and explore their ideas. The 'scholarship group' arrangements are very effective in challenging the gifted and talented pupils to raise their standards still further through more extensive research. Standards are much improved in geography because many pupils now have a much better understanding of geographical processes and their ability to extract information from the text is also much better. The very much better standards in design and technology are the result of the much better teaching of research and practical skills, including modelling.
28. Standards are above those that pupils are expected to reach nationally in ICT, because pupils are encouraged to develop their skills within a wide range of challenging assignments and they use their good literacy skills well. They are above the standards expected nationally in music, because the very good teaching provides a very well planned range of listening and performing activities
29. It was not possible to observe any drama lessons in Years 10 and 11 but those pupils who performed in a production of *The Last Resort* demonstrated very good devising and improvisational skills.
30. Standards are broadly in line with those expected nationally at the age of 16 in mathematics and English. When pupils are confident in their reading of examination texts this frequently results in good standards in English. The majority of pupils read with a satisfactory level of understanding and this determines the overall quality of their written responses to literary texts. Some lower-attaining pupils struggle to reach a satisfactory standard because they write down everything they remember about a text, rather than analysing carefully the requirements of the question. In mathematics, some higher-attaining pupils can solve complicated equations using a variety of methods, including trial and improvement. Their quality of presentation is good and their algebra is logically laid out, and so easy to follow. As at the age of 14, higher levels of algebraic skills are required if pupils are to achieve higher than their currently average standards.
31. Pupils make good progress and achieve well between the ages of 14 and 16. Their progress is very good in science, music and physical education and satisfactory in

modern foreign languages. In all other subjects it is good. The very good level of expectation in so much of the teaching results in high levels of motivation and increasing self-confidence as pupils get older.

32. Standards in literacy are good. They are much improved since the previous inspection. At that time there were weaknesses that impeded progress and contributed to results that were below average. All subjects now include references to developing literacy in their planning and grammar is taught well in modern foreign languages. In most subjects, good use of oral work is helping to raise standards but this feature is unsatisfactory in modern foreign languages. Standards of written work are good because many subjects, including history, geography, music and art, promote the skills of note taking and extended writing. Drafting skills are used well in English and mathematics. Overall, a weakness at the time of the previous inspection is now a developing strength.
33. Standards of reading are generally good. Many pupils display a sound knowledge of subject vocabulary, and all are given regular opportunities to contribute to the reading of textbooks. Pupils display good writing skills when writing about the activities in which they have been involved, or responding to questions concerning the work they have studied. Handwriting and presentation is usually at least satisfactory and often good.
34. Standards in numeracy are satisfactory. Most pupils can apply these skills when required to do so in such subjects as science, geography and design and technology.
35. Standards in ICT are good overall, and much improved since the last inspection because there are good planned opportunities to develop and apply a good range of skills in many subjects.
36. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because they are well supported in lessons, and subject teachers are both sensitive to their learning difficulties and challenging in their expectations. They make very good progress in English and science by the age of 14 and satisfactory progress in mathematics. In all three subjects, their progress is good by the age of 16.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

37. Pupils' attitudes towards their school are very good. In discussions, pupils expressed a very positive appreciation of what the school provides and expects of them. Nearly all pupils, of all ages and different levels of attainment, have very good attitudes to their school work. They are eager to come to school, participate with enthusiasm and enjoy their lessons. They respond well to adults and to each other. Their written work is well presented, but some lower attaining pupils do not always complete it. They value each other's work and make good contributions to the lessons. The large majority of pupils sustain good levels of concentration and show good self-discipline when working on their own or with each other.
38. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good and has a positive impact on their work and concentration. They mix well at break and lunchtime and this contributes to the overall very orderly but relaxed atmosphere in the dining room and around the school.
39. In lessons, pupils respond well to the high expectations of their teachers, the support staff and other adults. The result is a positive climate for learning with no evidence of aggressive or racist behaviour. Pupils with special educational needs are well-behaved in lessons because of the good support and guidance they receive from the

classroom support assistants. There is no graffiti, or evidence of vandalism or damage to property. No incidences of bullying, sexism or racism were seen. Misbehaviour is infrequent and when it occurs it is dealt with promptly and effectively. The level of exclusions is low and below the average for schools of this size. The decision to exclude is taken only on few occasions and in appropriate circumstances.

40. From the time the pupils join the school, they establish very good relationships with staff, with other adults and with each other. Teachers value pupils' work, praising effort and good work. Most pupils respond in a positive manner to the very well planned merit system. They appreciate the clear explanations they get from their teachers. The pupils work well in pairs and small groups during lessons.
41. Pupils' personal development is good. For example, many pupils show a high degree of concern for others and plan opportunities for their own personal development in the Year 8 Challenge. This year they are raising money to support a child in the Third World. In Year 11 many pupils act very responsibly as prefects and also help to run the SAFE club for younger pupils who need help and support. Many pupils have also shown a high degree of responsibility in helping to devise the Code of Conduct, which is displayed in all the rooms in the school. One group in Year 8 is currently following the 'You Can Do It' programme to improve attitudes to learning by increasing their levels of perseverance and readiness to work with others. Pupils show respect for the different beliefs expressed by others. Nearly all pupils show concern for others if they are unwell or otherwise upset. There is a good range of sports activities music, and drama productions, including *The Last Resort*, which the Year 10 drama pupils performed during the inspection.
42. Attendance has improved greatly since the last inspection. It is now in line with the national average. The unauthorised absence is in line with the national average. Punctuality is satisfactory. Most pupils arrive and get to lessons on time during the day. Following consultation with local employers, the school has introduced a 'clocking-in' system for those pupils whose attendance or punctuality is unsatisfactory.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

43. Year 11 pupils were on study leave in preparation for their GCSE examinations and Year 10 pupils were taking school examinations during part of the inspection week. The overall number of lessons observed in Year 10 was similar to other year groups but no lessons were seen in Year 11. As a result, the analysis of pupils' work and of schemes of work provided important additional evidence in the overall evaluation of teaching and learning.
44. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. It was very good or better in just over a quarter of the 149 lessons seen during the inspection. Teaching and learning were good in more than three-quarters of the lessons seen. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Excellent teaching was observed on five occasions. The very high proportion of consistently good teaching is a strength of the school and one of the hallmarks of its improvement since the last inspection. These findings support the very high level of satisfaction expressed by those parents who attended the meeting prior to the inspection and completed the questionnaire.
45. There has been a very good degree of improvement in the overall quality teaching and learning. Teaching and learning are now very good in science, physical education, drama and art and good in all other subjects except modern foreign languages where they are satisfactory. At the time of the previous inspection teaching was 'generally good' and 'better in Years 7, 8 and 9'. There were, at that time, weaknesses in pupils'

attitudes to learning and teaching methods sometimes provided too little opportunity for pupils to take an active part in lessons

46. Pupils with special education needs are well taught because the banding and setting arrangements enable teachers to match work more precisely to their needs. They are very well supported by the classroom assistants. Gifted and talented pupils are well taught, and particularly so in science, music, physical education and religious education. Additional lessons for gifted and talented pupils, funded through 'Excellence in Cities', are a strong feature in the teaching of art, music, drama and physical education. The organisation of teaching groups on the basis of prior attainment supports the better matching of work to meet the needs of all pupils and ensures a high degree of inclusion.
47. The strongest features in the teaching and learning are: the very good planning of lessons and the very well organised schemes of work; the very good level of expectation and the very good management of pupils' learning. These features promote very positive attitudes, provide a very good range of opportunities for pupils to participate actively in lessons and result in good levels of concentration and a readiness to work hard. As a result pupils of all levels of prior attainment, including those with special educational needs, make good gains in knowledge, understanding and skills. The emphasis on developing pupils' understanding and skills is a particularly strong feature of the teaching and learning in science, art, physical education and ICT.
48. The planning of lessons is very good in most subjects. The recent revisions of schemes of work provide very good coverage of Curriculum 2000. There is a consistent emphasis on explaining carefully what pupils are going to learn, at the start of the lesson. This is a particularly good feature of the teaching in music, art and religious education, where there are also opportunities to review learning at the end of the lesson. The careful matching of work to pupils' various levels of prior attainment is a good feature of the planning in history. Very good planning is also a strong feature in English, mathematics and science. The well-planned range of activities that involve speaking, listening, reading and writing engage pupils' interest well in English. The sequencing of activities in mathematics is much improved since the last inspection. The very good planning of science lessons includes very clear explanations and skilful questioning, often conducted at a challenging pace, that result in very good gains in understanding. These features of very good planning help pupils to get fully involved in the lesson and develop a good level of understanding. Planned provision for oral activities is unsatisfactory in modern foreign languages because there are insufficient opportunities to apply and develop further their basic knowledge of words and phrases.

49. Very good teaching methods provide frequent opportunities for pupils to take an active part in lessons. This is an excellent feature in music. The imaginative organisation of lessons that encourages the full participation of all pupils is a very good feature of many geography lessons. The very good relationships and consistent emphasis on high expectations across subjects and in all Years, means that pupils naturally expect to work hard and do their best. As a result, behaviour and attitudes are invariably good and pupils show increasing confidence in their learning. This is an important reason why so many pupils do well in physical education.
50. Teaching methods contribute well to pupils' personal development because they provide many opportunities for pupils to work together and learn from and with each other. It is a strong feature in drama, English and geography and a very strong feature of the teaching in science where the skilful organisation of practical activities promotes learning that is both rigorous and enjoyable. The very good development of pupils' imaginative response and appreciation is a strong feature of the teaching and learning in art. This emphasis upon promoting pupils' personal development as well as ensuring that all pupils make very good gains in knowledge, understanding and skills in the subject is a particularly strong feature of many lessons in science, religious education, drama and art.
51. In most lessons, time and resources are well used. The quality of displayed work is very good and much better than is generally the case in many secondary schools. It provides stimulating illustration of standards and expectations, as well as recognising and sharing the achievements of the pupils. This was a good feature in geography and art. The very good use of time and resources is one of the strongest features in the teaching of ICT. The recently purchased interactive whiteboards are already being very well used. Good pace is a striking feature of many science lessons and is also evident in the best teaching in mathematics and design and technology. Video resources are used well in history and help to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding in ways other than through the printed word. They are also effectively used, in the study of media, in English. Occasionally, the pace of learning is too slow in design and technology when pupils are not given enough opportunity to plan work for themselves.
52. The quality and use of on-going assessment is good. Some aspects of current practice are very good, for example in English, where questions are used skilfully in lessons to check pupils' level of understanding and marking reinforces their awareness of how well they are doing. In a minority of subjects, marking does not define clearly enough what pupils need to do to improve. The strongest feature of assessment is the very good use of target setting that includes specific reference to the National Curriculum levels. Nearly every pupil, when asked, could identify their current level of attainment, and nearly all were able to indicate what they needed to do to improve their standard. Assessment procedures in physical education are excellent and very good in English and science. They are good in all other subjects and are a significant factor contributing to the improving standards.
53. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subjects. This is a particularly strong feature of the very good teaching in physical education where it is very well used when demonstrating new skills. As a result, pupils have a good understanding of how to improve. It is also a very good feature of the teaching of music that helps pupils to perform and compose well. In the best teaching in geography, very good subject knowledge is used imaginatively to create stimulating lessons that require a high degree of active participation by the pupils. Consequently they sustain their interest, enjoy the lesson and make good gains in understanding as well as in knowledge.
54. Pupils learn very well across all Years because literacy skills are well taught in all subjects. As a result, most pupils have a good understanding of technical vocabulary

and reading skills are well taught so that pupils make good gains in knowledge and understanding through their study of text books. Research skills are well taught and the library is well used. The good development of literacy skills in mathematics is a strong feature that promotes good communication skills. In art, the very good teaching of the basic skills of painting and drawing when pupils enter the school supports their good progress in understanding and applying artistic techniques. Pupils' literacy skills are well taught in modern foreign languages, resulting in good standards of written work, but the range of opportunities to develop speaking skills is unsatisfactory. The generally good quality of carefully presented written work provides strong evidence of the care taken by nearly all pupils in completing their work.

55. ICT skills are well taught and their use is now a developing strength in teaching and learning in many subjects. There has been very good improvement in the teaching of literacy skills. Numeracy skills are well taught in mathematics but not systematically in other subjects. .
56. Provision for homework is good. A minority of parents expressed some concerns about the pattern and purpose of homework. It is set regularly and most pupils complete it promptly. It is well used in religious education to prepare for subsequent lessons and in science and mathematics both to consolidate and extend learning.

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

57. The quality and range of learning opportunities are good overall. The legal requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met and there is a good range of additional opportunities. Equality of access and opportunity are very good. The current provision fulfils the aims of the school and meets the needs of all its pupils well.
58. The overall strength of the curricular provision is its rigour and range that is well documented within the recently revised schemes of work. The length of the teaching week is in line with national guidelines, and the allocation of time to different subjects is appropriate to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. The good provision for GCSE short courses in Years 10 and 11 in design and technology, religious education and ICT enables pupils to increase the number of qualifications they gain at the age of 16. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good because they are able to participate fully in all subjects and a very high proportion of them gain a good range of GCSE qualifications at the age of 16.
59. The strategy to develop literacy skills is well planned. The allocation of additional time for English in Years 7, 8 and 9 has helped to improve literacy as part of the wider improvement strategy to raise standards in all subjects. Oral skills are well developed in drama. The planned provision within schemes of work to develop ICT in all subjects is good. There is currently no similarly systematic arrangement to develop numeracy skills other than in mathematics.
60. The good provision for short courses in Years 10 and 11 in design and technology, religious education and ICT enables pupils to increase the number of subjects that they study and the qualifications they gain at the age of 16. Additional opportunities for study beyond the planned timetable of lessons are very good. These include good provision for gifted and talented pupils through a 'scholarship' scheme that provides additional lessons in art, music, drama and physical education.

61. There is currently no provision for vocational education but the range of subjects offered in Years 10 and 11 meets the needs of all pupils well and fulfils the aims of the school.
62. The quality of assemblies is good, includes a suitable act of worship and helps to develop the very good ethos of the school. However, they are not held every day for all pupils and the legal requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is not therefore fully met. The current provision of two modern foreign languages before the age of 14 is unsatisfactory and inefficient.
63. There is a good range of additional opportunities that contribute well to pupils' personal development. These include good opportunities for additional study and very good opportunities for residential education. In modern foreign languages there are regular opportunities for educational visits, including trips abroad and to the local airport. The drama department produces a number of school productions and pupils regularly engage in workshops with the University of Warwick. There are museum trips run by the science department and industrial awareness is well promoted within the provision for careers education. Satisfactory use is made of the local community to provide further learning opportunities, particularly in history, geography, and music. In history, pupils are offered the opportunity to visit Ludlow and Stokesay castles, the Black Country museum and the Imperial War Museum amongst others. Music offers extra enrichment via concerts and workshops. Major events, such as Science Challenge and Space Camp, are run by the science department. In design and technology there is an opportunity to visit Legoland in Year 7.
64. A good variety of extra-curricular activities that further broadens the range of learning opportunities is provided at lunchtime, after school and during holidays. These include an ICT club. The opportunities to participate in sports activities are very good for pupils of all ages. The design and technology department runs a well-supported food club. Many subjects offer revision sessions at different times of the year. These arrangements contribute well to the general well-ordered and pleasant atmosphere around the school during lunchtime. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, have equal access to shared extra-curricular activities.
65. The provision for careers education and guidance is good, maintaining the strengths identified at the time of the previous inspection. It is taught within the PSHE programme in conjunction with the Careers Advisory Service. New initiatives include a "World of Work" day in Year 9, where representatives from commerce, industry and business run workshop sessions in school on aspects of career. The work experience programme is very good and the local business partnership is involved in an awards system that has a high profile in the school. The school is involved in a pilot scheme using progress files similar to records of achievement. Plans are in place to involve Year 8 pupils in careers education and guidance activities.
66. Provision for pupils' personal development is good. An important strength of the planned curriculum is the opportunity provided to develop independence, responsibility and consideration for others within many lessons. The amount of actual time to develop knowledge and understanding of PSHE issues is restricted in Years 7 and 8 but events such as the Year 8 Challenge develop well many pupils' social awareness and responsibility. These opportunities involve the pupils in identifying their own challenges. This enables them to learn through experience and activity beyond the classroom. There is appropriate provision made within the PSHE programme for sex education and drugs awareness and both are well taught by specialist teachers.
67. Provision for pupils' moral development is good. Assembly themes, such as dedication and achievement, place a strong emphasis on the work ethic, encouraging

pupils to aim high and take pride in their achievements. Awards evenings celebrate pupils' success in all areas of school life. A new code of conduct, agreed through consultation with parents and pupils, focuses on pupils' rights and responsibilities, emphasising mutual respect and support. These ideas are explored further in the personal and social education lessons. Across the curriculum there are many opportunities to discuss moral issues, such as the Year 10 history class studying the consequences of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany. Parents expressed a high level of satisfaction at the way in which the school is helping pupils develop into mature, responsible young people.

68. Provision for pupils' social development is good. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop social skills and understanding about living in the community. In discussions with the pupils from each year group it was clear that they felt very involved in their school and appreciated that their views were listened to. The teaching methods used in many lessons place a strong emphasis on providing opportunities for pupils to work in groups. Teachers establish good relationships with their classes, and tutors promote a shared sense of responsibility by holding pupils accountable for their form's behaviour in all lessons. In most subjects, pupils learn to collaborate in pairs and small groups. Teamwork is a strong feature of work in drama, music and physical education. The Year 8 Challenge has a community dimension, involving pupils in a sponsored walk in aid of a children's hospice and a child sponsorship scheme. Year 11 pupils participate in community service within their PSHE lessons. These include aspects of citizenship. Many senior pupils fulfil the role of prefect, making a valuable contribution to the school community by reminding pupils of the school's expectations at break time and during lunchtime and also by setting good example. Some of them are attached to the 'SAFE Club' for vulnerable pupils, offering them support when needed. There are fewer opportunities for younger pupils to exercise responsibility, except for the 'pupil receptionists' scheme.
69. The provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. It has improved since the previous inspection. Many school assemblies provide well-planned opportunities for reflection on moral and social issues, but there is a need to develop a more consistent approach to spiritual matters in assemblies and across all subjects. There is sometimes good provision for spiritual development in music, geography, science, information and communication technology, religious education where pupils are given the opportunity to think and develop their own ideas based on evidence for and against such questions as 'Is there a god?', and physical education where there is very good celebration of pupils' achievements in the excellent displays.
70. The provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. There are opportunities in religious education to study the major world religions and in music to learn folk music from the British Isles and instruments and styles of music from China, America and Indonesia. There are exchanges in modern foreign languages to enrich pupils' awareness and knowledge. Pupils' cultural awareness is generally well developed in drama, art, history and geography. School trips and visits include museums and residential weeks and weekends. Opportunities for pupils' cultural development have improved since the previous report but they are limited in design and technology, science, mathematics, and drama. In English pupils develop a good understanding of their cultural and literary heritage.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

71. The school takes very good care of its pupils. This involves not only their safety and welfare but also very well planned arrangements to monitor progress and set challenging targets so that all seek to achieve to the very best of their ability. Teachers and other adults in the school are vigilant, sensitive and supportive of the pupils in their care. The care provided for pupils with special educational needs is very

good. Teachers know their pupils very well and use this knowledge sensitively to guide their pastoral care. This very good quality of guidance helps them to make good progress.

72. Child protection arrangements are satisfactory. Staff are aware of the procedures to follow and the designated member of staff is known by all the adults in the school.
73. Procedures to ensure pupils' health and safety are very good. The monitoring, promotion and practice of safety and security arrangements are shared by the heads of year, heads of departments, teachers and other staff. Staff and pupils are aware of health and safety practices and clear guidelines and procedures have been established. Health and safety is reviewed regularly and checks made of the building and grounds by the site manager. There are good, regular arrangements for carrying out safety checks of the premises and electrical equipment. The standard of care of the premises and grounds is good. Fire drills are carried out regularly. The arrangements for first aid and medicines in school are very good and well recorded.
74. There are very good arrangements for promoting and monitoring pupils' behaviour. Staff, pupils and parents are very clear about the Code of Conduct, which provides a strong framework to support good behaviour and underpins the caring atmosphere in the school. The school has very good strategies for dealing with any issues of inappropriate behaviour.
75. Arrangements to promote and monitor good attendance are very good. The senior management team has devised a very wide range of effective strategies to improve attendance. The appointment of an attendance secretary reflects the high priority the school has given to this issue. An increased awareness by parents, pupils and staff is reflected in the very good improvement in attendance since the last inspection. Pupils and parents are equally clear about what the school expects for attendance, punctuality and authorisation of absence. Letters are sent to parents to seek their help when attendance is unsatisfactory. There is effective liaison with the educational welfare officer if it does not improve. Pupils use their planners to record and monitor their attendance. The school nurse provides good support to the school, dealing with medical checks and supporting personal and health issues.
76. Procedures to monitor and support pupils' personal development are good. Their needs are well known to the staff. The 'credit' system recognises and rewards attendance, good work and effort helping to raise their self-esteem. One group in Year 8 is participating in an additional initiative, 'You Can Do It', to improve learning attitudes.
77. The school's procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are very good. Practice across the subject areas is carefully monitored and individual subjects are held accountable.

78. Standardised tests are used to confirm the levels of pupils' prior attainment when they enter the school at the age of 11. However, there are no formal assessments to identify the starting levels of knowledge, understanding and skills in subjects other than mathematics, science, English and modern foreign languages.
79. The assessment arrangements are very effective because they make very good use of data to set targets and review pupils' progress towards them. All subjects set individual, annual targets in Years 7 to 9 and GCSE target grades in Years 10 and 11. Individual subject areas contribute to the very well co-ordinated whole school arrangements that include the use of 'key assessments' to measure pupils' National Curriculum levels at intervals negotiated with senior managers. This has the advantage that it is flexible enough to take account of natural subject differences without losing the advantages of a common system. It also provides useful and valid comparisons of standards across all subjects.
80. All pupils know their National Curriculum levels or GCSE targets in individual subjects and how close they are to meeting them. Pupils write their subject targets in their planners. There are, around the school, posters that challenge pupils to strive for their targets and to be 'level-headed'. They communicate very effectively visual images that help to remind pupils of their commitment to achieve and contribute to the very purposeful atmosphere that characterises the school. Statements concerning the standards required in the National Curriculum are displayed prominently in classrooms. These are referred to in lessons when advising pupils what they need to do next. As a result, there is a pervasive ethos of 'getting on' as well as 'getting along'.
81. The detailed assessment policies are very good. These describe a well-planned pattern of assessment during the school year including the reviewing of target grades in GCSE subjects (including analysis of the actual grades) and annual examinations in all subjects. They also set out clearly the rationale and guidelines concerning assessment and day-to-day marking. Subject teachers are required to inform pupils regularly of their progress and what they need to do to improve. There is also clear guidance for discussions with pupils about their progress-monitoring sheets and the subsequent self-assessments based on these twice-yearly items. These policies are put into practice very effectively because considerable care has been taken to make sure they are fully understood by all parties. This is an important reason why they are proving to be so successful.
82. Individual subject areas decide on their own day-to-day marking procedures under the umbrella of the whole-school assessment policy. Heads of subject monitor pupils' written work on a regular basis, but some tend to place more emphasis on checking that work has been completed and marked than on evidence of comments which inform pupils what they need to do in order to improve their work. Not all departments compile collections of pupils' work to illustrate, for internal standardisation purposes, what is expected at particular National Curriculum levels of attainment.
83. The use of assessments in planning is good. For example, as a result of assessments in ICT, units of work have been revised, and in science assessments are very well used to analyse the effectiveness of schemes of work. Senior managers use ICT well to manage and interpret assessment data. This includes linking the monitoring of attendance with the monitoring of progress. The level of current expertise amongst the heads of subject is satisfactory and increasing.
84. Assessment arrangements in many subjects are very good because care is taken to keep pupils very well informed and directly involved in the process. They are excellent in physical education, where meticulous care is taken to keep assessment and its

recording up to date, through the very good use of ICT. Records and targets are displayed for pupils in all years. The pupils make good use of the system. Assessment procedures and their use are very good in English, mathematics, science, history, drama and music. In English, for example, pupils use 'critical partners' to help monitor and improve the quality of their work. In science, all assessment results are publicly displayed, producing a healthy air of competition that is having a positive effect on standards.

85. The school's procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs are good. These meet the statutory requirements. Although individual education plans are satisfactory overall, they rarely give subject specific targets and this makes the precise measurement of progress difficult.
86. Only occasionally do pupils for whom English is an additional language enter the school at an early stage of language acquisition. They receive good support for their general welfare, but there are no formal assessment arrangements and educational provision is sometimes confused with that for pupils with special educational needs.
87. The provision to report on pupils' progress to parents is good. The annual reports sent home about pupils' progress are satisfactory. There are additional 'progress monitoring' sheets, which are sent home twice a year. Consultation evenings for parents' are carefully planned to occur immediately following the annual examinations and the associated reports.
88. Considerable thought has been given to making the whole assessment process and its use as clear as possible to staff, pupils and parents. As a result, assessment is clearly understood by all and has the maximum effect on raising standards.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

89. The school has established a very strong partnership with the parents. Nearly all of the parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting and completed the questionnaire were very supportive of the school and valued greatly what it achieves as well as what it provides. As a result the school is oversubscribed. In particular, almost all agreed that the school had high expectations, that their children made good progress and that the school was well led and managed. A high proportion strongly agreed that their children were very well taught. Most parents would feel comfortable about approaching the school on any matters of concern. Inspection evidence supports these very positive views of the parents.
90. The quality of information provided by the school is appropriate to inform parents of the work of the school and how their children are progressing. The prospectus is very informative but the content of the last governors' annual report did not include all the legally required information. Sometimes the individual subject comments in the annual reports do not give the parents sufficient information about what their children have learnt in each subject. There are also termly monitoring reports for achievement and effort. Parents have the opportunity to discuss the information in all the reports at the termly parents' evenings. They appreciate the strong emphasis the school places on discussing and addressing concerns promptly. The pupils' planners include information about homework and attendance levels, thus providing an effective two-way communication between school and home.
91. Parents make a good contribution to pupils' learning and the life of the school. The majority of parents attend and enjoy the annual Presentation Evenings, when pupils' achievements in schoolwork, sport, attendance and outstanding contributions to the school life are celebrated. The very positive response from parents to these evenings has resulted in Presentation Evenings being held for each age group. Parents were

consulted about the Code of Conduct and a very high proportion have signed the Home School Agreement. Parent governor positions are all filled.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

92. The leadership and management of the headteacher are excellent. He has very successfully established a shared and very strong commitment to raising standards throughout the school. The consistent implementation of the comprehensive range of school policies is a strong feature that illustrates well the very high quality of his leadership and his success in establishing shared and deeply held values. As a result, both the commitment and capacity to improve the school further are excellent.
93. The very good ethos and determination to succeed that permeate the school owe much to his frequent presence around the school. Pupils are accustomed to him visiting their lessons, and value highly his personal concern for their progress. Those parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting expressed very strong appreciation for this aspect of his role. Working in close consultation with his staff and governors, and very well assisted by his senior managers, he has achieved a very good level of improvement since the last inspection.
94. The deputy and assistant headteachers also provide highly effective leadership and fulfil their roles very well. As members of the school strategy group, they monitor the work of the school closely and have made a major contribution to the school's improvement in terms of standards, pupils' attitudes and attendance. The degree of delegation is excellent, including early opportunities for recently appointed staff to take responsibility in subject areas. This is an important aspect of the very strong unity of purpose throughout the school. A strong emphasis on accountability is balanced by very good support and guidance provided by the very well planned management structures.
95. The school's mission statement and aims express a strong commitment to improving the quality of learning by promoting the personal development of all pupils. Highly effective target setting is an important characteristic of the very successful improvement strategy.
96. The annual school improvement plan is very good. It identifies a manageable number of important areas for action and planning priorities are very well defined. They include aspects of teaching and learning, assessment, the development of ICT, the implementation of the National Curriculum 2000 and initiatives linked to 'Excellence in Cities.' This inspection report includes substantial evidence of the highly effective implementation of the plan. Responsibilities are defined for each action area and timescales are realistically challenging. The planning cycle is well managed and provides for a very good level of consultation. Performance indicators identify clearly the expected results when action has been taken but these do not express, with sufficient clarity, the intended impact on standards, teaching and learning.
97. The close link between departmental and school improvement plans leads to a common determination to fulfil school priorities.
98. The arrangements to monitor and evaluate the work of the school are very good. An excellent feature is the system of detailed reviews of subject areas conducted by the headteacher and his deputies. The monitoring of teaching and learning by subject leaders is good overall.
99. The overall quality of subject leadership is very good. It is excellent in physical education and very good in science, geography, history, music, drama and religious

education. It is satisfactory in modern foreign languages and good in all other subjects. Departmental improvement planning is consistently good and supports well the school's emphasis on raising standards. The appointment of two 'heads of school' has further improved the very good management of pastoral care across the school.

100. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is well led and managed. Organisation and administration are strong. There is a small amount of withdrawal from English lessons for reading in Years 7 and 8. Teacher assistants provide very good support for both teachers and pupils and enable pupils to participate fully in lessons. There is a well-appointed learning support room.
101. The management of arrangements for pupils who speak English as an additional language is unsatisfactory because assessment arrangements are not documented. Whilst the number of pupils involved is low and there is only occasional need to make provision, there is no advice for subject teachers in the otherwise excellent staff handbook.
102. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities very well and makes a significant contribution to the success of the school. It ensures that the legal requirements for the curriculum are met fully except the provision for a daily act of worship for all pupils. A degree of continuity of membership since the last inspection has helped the school to manage smoothly its transition from grant maintained to foundation school status. The committee structure is very good. The level of direct involvement is high, particularly in agreeing the targets for improvement. All governors attend regular presentations on curriculum issues and several have observed lessons in school. As a result, the governing body is well placed to act as the school's 'critical friend', because it has good direct knowledge of what the school does well and where it is seeking to improve.
103. The school manages its financial affairs very well. Procedures to set and monitor the budget, by governors and senior staff, are thorough and well established. They ensure that expenditure is linked to educational priorities and the principles of best value are applied to all major management decisions and financial transactions. There is a secure delegation of financial responsibility and efficient systems for the ordering and receipt of goods.
104. There are clear links between financial planning and the school's strategies for improvement. The allocation of funding to school priorities is rigorous and there are very good arrangements for subject departments to bid for additional funding to fulfil their planning objectives. The linking of funding to expected improvements in standards and teaching is a strong feature. However, these are not explicitly stated in the school improvement plan. Independent accountants are employed to audit school finances annually. Financial controls are rigorous.

105. Funding received through special grants is used effectively to help raise standards and provide wider educational opportunities for pupils. There are detailed and well-documented arrangements for the deployment of the additional funding received through 'Excellence in Cities'.
106. The school uses its resources well. The ratio of computers to pupils is broadly average and they are very well used to support learning in many subject areas. However, they are insufficient within the design and technology areas to provide a satisfactory range of ICT activities. The ratio of books to pupils is broadly average.
107. The overall match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is good. Support staff are very well deployed to support those pupils with special educational needs. Recent staffing difficulties affected results in mathematics and geography last year but these have been resolved. The well-designed school timetable supports the very effective deployment of staff. Some teachers teach in more than one subject area but this has no adverse effect on standards.
108. There are very good arrangements in place to support performance management and these have evolved from the very well established arrangements for staff development and the monitoring of teaching. Staff development is very well linked to the priorities identified in the subject development plans. The management of induction arrangements for new staff is very good.
109. The standard of accommodation is very good and very well maintained. Nearly all subjects have well-defined areas but the two music rooms are some distance apart and this can create difficulties in the deployment of equipment. The high quality of the displayed work in classrooms, on corridors and in the shared areas of the school is a strong feature that emphasises the school's high expectations and wish to recognise the achievement of all its pupils.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

110. Colmers Farm is a very good school.

There were no key issues identified by the inspection team.

However, the inspection team has identified the following minor issues that the headteacher, senior staff and governors may wish to include in its subsequent annual improvement plans:

- (1) Make provision for a daily act of worship for all pupils.
(Paragraphs: 62, 102)
- (2) Improve the development of speaking skills in modern foreign languages.
(Paragraphs: 48, 246)
- (3) Make more explicit in the school improvement plan the intended impact that each key action of the plan will have on teaching, learning and standards.
(Paragraph: 96)
- (4) Extend assessment arrangements when pupils enter the school to establish a baseline of what pupils know, understand and can do in each subject of the National Curriculum where national tests are not undertaken at the age of 11.
(Paragraphs: 78, 184, 197, 219, 259)
- (5) Establish a co-ordinated strategy to develop numeracy skills in all subjects.
(Paragraphs: 55,59)
- (6) Improve the assessment procedures for any pupil who speaks English as an additional language and is at an early stage of learning when entering the school.
(Paragraphs: 86,101)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	149
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	43

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	23	53	21	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	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1026	n/a
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	246	n/a

Special educational needs	Y7-Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	27	n/a
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	326	n/a

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	7
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	28

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.2
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.7
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	110	95	205

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	74	70	68
	Girls	73	55	54
	Total	147	125	122
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	72 (74)	61 (69)	60 (64)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	39 (31)	39 (41)	28 (26)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	67	58	64
	Girls	71	49	55
	Total	138	107	119
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (65)	53 (63)	59 (48)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	28 (36)	28 (32)	29 (20)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	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	107	82	189

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	50	91	101
	Girls	44	71	80
	Total	94	162	181
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	50 (56)	86 (90)	96 (98)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	40
	National	38.4

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	37
Black – African heritage	4
Black – other	0
Indian	12
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	3
White	964
Any other minority ethnic group	3

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	2
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	2	1
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	3	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	28	2
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	60
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	24
Total aggregate hours worked per week	534

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 2	n/a
Key Stage 3	24.5
Key Stage 4	20.98

Financial information

Financial year	2000
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	£
Total income	2672001
Total expenditure	2580850
Expenditure per pupil	2555
Balance brought forward from previous year	36283
Balance carried forward to next year	127434

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1027
Number of questionnaires returned	109

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	45	46	6	4	0
My child is making good progress in school.	60	35	5	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	30	58	5	6	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	48	17	3	2
The teaching is good.	52	39	3	2	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	46	41	8	5	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	69	28	3	1	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	79	18	3	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	42	45	8	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	68	27	3	1	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	54	38	4	2	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	36	47	7	5	6

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

ENGLISH

111. Standards in English are broadly in line with national expectations. They are above the standards expected nationally at the age of 14 and broadly in line with them at the age of 16.
112. When pupils enter the school at the age of 11 their results in national tests and scores in standardised tests [CATs] are below average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is above average. They achieve very well by the age of 14 and well by the age of 16.
113. In the year 2000 national tests taken by all pupils at the age of 14, results were above the average for all schools nationally and well above the average for similar schools [FSM]. Nearly three-quarters of the pupils reached or exceeded the nationally expected standard, Level 5; just below two-thirds of all pupils did so nationally. The proportion exceeding Level 5 was also above the national average. These results indicate that pupils of all levels of prior attainment, including those with special educational needs, made very good progress and achieved very well by the age of 14.
114. The year 2000 GCSE results at the age of 16 were broadly in line with the national average. Fifty-five per cent of the pupils obtained grades A*-C. Nearly all pupils gained at least a grade G, a proportion broadly in line with the national average and above the average for similar schools. Many pupils with special educational needs obtain at least a grade F, indicating a good level of achievement and progress. The majority of pupils also took the English literature examination. Nearly three-quarters of them obtained grades A*-C and nearly every candidate obtained a grade G or better, both proportions being above the national average. A comparison between these results and their previous national test results at the age of 14 indicates that pupils made good progress between the ages of 14 and 16 and achieved well
115. Standards in work seen were consistent with the most recent test results, confirming good achievement. They were higher than those expected nationally at the age of 14 and broadly in line with them at 16.
116. At the age of 14 standards in speaking and listening are above those expected nationally. The listening skills of many pupils are very good and this is an important reason why they make good progress in lessons. They listen well to their teachers and are keen to respond to their challenging questions. They also make good progress in developing their speaking skills because there are plenty of opportunities in lessons to organise and plan their learning through well-structured oral activities. They gain greatly from these opportunities because of their readiness to listen to and respect each other's opinions, modifying their ideas in order to meet the needs of the group. This combination of so many pupils' mature, co-operative attitudes, and the well-planned opportunities to use the spoken word for a range of different purposes provides a very secure foundation for progress in lessons and also over time. A good example of this was observed when lower-attaining pupils in Year 9 took on the role of policemen and questioned a 'suspect' about his involvement in the murder of a number of people and also when higher attaining pupils put together a social workers' case conference in order to decide the legal guardian for Buddy, a character from a novel of the same name.
117. Because pupils in Year 11 were engaged in study at home in preparation for their examinations it was not possible to evaluate standards in speaking and listening at the

age of 16. Assessment data for GCSE speaking and listening indicates that nearly all pupils continue to make good progress. Oral work is well planned and used well to develop a greater understanding of both literary texts and contemporary issues. For example, some pupils in Year 10 displayed effective oral skills as they prepared an imaginary press conference following on from the events surrounding Romeo's banishment. Another group engaged in research in order to put together an oral activity on the contentious issue of removing human organs without permission and its current impact on organ donations.

118. Standards in reading are good at the age of 14. The majority of pupils read confidently, in a fluent manner and with a good degree of expression. This shows that they understand what they are reading, and also appreciate how to communicate that meaning well to a listener. Their good progress is supported by the wide range of reading opportunities within the well-planned schemes of work, with pupils reading an imaginative, challenging range of literary and factual materials. As a result, they make very good progress in their critical responses and develop a good level of understanding of what they read. All pupils are given the opportunity to read and appreciate a number of good quality poems and contemporary novels. They read pre-twentieth century poetry and literature, including some challenging texts, such as *'Beowulf'* and *'The Canterbury Tales'*.
119. Regular opportunities for silent reading at the start of lessons and regular visits to the school library support the very good progress that pupils make by the age of 14. Statistical evidence from the library and discussion with pupils indicate that they have good reading habits and regularly buy books for themselves or have them bought for them.
120. Standards in reading are satisfactory at the age of 16. Many pupils continue to make good progress and nearly all pupils develop a good level of skill in summarising the narrative, and in identifying and comparing aspects of different characters. Some become increasingly alert to the development of themes, but only a minority of pupils are confident in the more advanced skills of interpretation and analysis. Most pupils make a satisfactory level of critical response to literary texts.
121. Standards in writing at the age of 14 are good because basic skills are very well taught and ICT is used in each unit of work. Imaginative teaching provides a very good range of written tasks that not only meet the requirements of the national tests but engage the interest and promote a good level of motivation. Grammar, punctuation and spelling are all taught well. The sequence of lessons is well planned so that pupils have opportunities to write for different purposes, in a range of different styles and for different audiences. Such good variety sustains pupils' interest well. For example, in their study of Shakespeare, pupils produce character studies, imaginary letters between characters, diary entries and newspaper reports. Many pupils show flair in their creative writing and higher attaining pupils organise their ideas well when writing about such issues as bullying or animal experimentation. Pupils make good progress in these aspects of their writing because research skills are well taught and they are encouraged to plan their lines of enquiry for themselves. This often provides pupils with the opportunity to use their research skills and to develop independent learning skills.

122. Many higher- and middle-attaining pupils can write neatly and at length, with a high degree of accuracy. They organise their work well into paragraphs. Most lower-attaining pupils, and particularly those with special educational needs find it difficult to write at length, with work being somewhat superficial in nature and containing a number of errors.
123. Standards in writing at the age of 16 are satisfactory. The overall quality of their written work is strongly influenced by the degree to which they have developed good skills in reading for meaning because many GCSE assignments stem from a response to texts or other materials that have been read and studied. Higher-attaining pupils respond well to these demands. As they become more confident in their reading of texts they write with greater assurance when expressing a personal response to a novel or poem and also in analysing aspects of its style. Note taking is well taught and this helps pupils to organise their final written work well. Their writing about the psychological nature of individuals and the social and historical context of literary texts was assured and well informed, with good, detailed reference to the text to illustrate the points they make.
124. Higher-attaining pupils write well-planned, detailed essays in which they make a strong personal response to specific issues and, in the best work, explore abstract concepts. Most middle-attaining pupils use their sound understanding of storylines, characters and issues in the texts they read but are more confident in their ability to write about these factors in relation to one book or play, than in drawing comparisons between two or more texts. As a result, much of their work is of a satisfactory standard. Most lower-attaining pupils do not reach the standard expected nationally because they tend to write down everything they know about a book or play. Consequently, whilst much of their work is accurate it does not demonstrate the ability to plan a well-organised response to the question that has been set.
125. The quality of teaching is good. It was good or better in almost three-quarters of the lessons seen and sometimes very good. No teaching seen was less than satisfactory. It was possible to observe only a small number of lessons in Year 10 and no lessons in Year 11 because the former were taking school examinations and the latter were studying at home in preparation for their GCSE examinations. However, an analysis of schemes of work and of pupils' written work completed prior to the inspection both provide good evidence of the thoroughness, imagination and good level of challenge in the teaching.
126. There are several very good features in the consistently good quality of teaching that help pupils of all levels of prior attainment, including those with special educational needs, to learn well and make good progress.
127. Lessons are very well planned. Schemes of work have been revised since the last inspection. As a result, the links between the development of reading, writing and skills in speaking and listening are much stronger. Great care is taken at the start of the lesson to ensure that all pupils understand fully what they are going to learn and how this will help them to improve the standard of their work.
128. The management of pupils' behaviour is very good. Relationships are very good and pupils respond very positively to the challenge and variety of the tasks set. Their learning is very well managed because pupils are frequently provided with opportunities to make decisions and organise how they will complete a task within a small group. As a result, their interest and concentration is sustained and learning proceeds at a good pace. They respond well to the good level of expectation. Praise and encouragement are well used to raise pupils' self-esteem and confidence. This was a particularly strong feature in the teaching of lower-attaining pupils. Pupils with

special educational needs are well taught because the classroom support assistants interpret well the objectives of the lesson, offering advice and guidance to the pupils but also challenging them to think things out for themselves.

129. The quality and use of on-going assessment is another very good feature that helps pupils to make good and sometimes very good progress in lessons. Pupils are fully aware of their current National Curriculum standard and their target level for the end of the year. As a result they know what they are doing well and what they need to do to improve. Questions are very well used at the start of lessons to check pupils' current level of knowledge and understanding and again at the end of the lesson to check what gains have been made. Opportunities are taken regularly in lessons to check how well pupils are doing, and this helps them to make good progress. The marking of work is very good. As a result pupils of all levels of prior attainment, and particularly the higher-attaining pupils have a very good understanding of how well they are learning. This is a major strength of the current provision.
130. Where teaching was very good, teachers displayed a personal enthusiasm for the work in hand, had high expectations of pupils, and provided them with challenging activities that linked very carefully the development of skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening. Imaginative teaching promoted rigour, enjoyment and pupils' active participation.
131. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. National test results and GCSE results are higher because there have been significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning and particularly in the much wider range of well-matched opportunities for pupils to participate more actively in lessons. An important factor that has helped to improve standards has been the additional English lesson in Years 7,8 and 9.
132. Leadership and management are good. The acting head of English has led the department well. The very strong teamwork has produced a good degree of consistency in the implementation of policies and a strong, shared commitment to raise standards further.

Literacy across the curriculum

133. Provision is much improved since the last inspection and standards have risen accordingly. What was a weakness at the time of the previous inspection in 1996 is now a developing strength. There is a policy for literacy in all subject documentation, with many identifying strategies for raising literacy skills relevant to individual subjects. The quality and range of opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their literacy skills is now good.
134. The development of oral skills is an important factor in the teaching of English, mathematics, science, ICT and art, with regular opportunities for pupils to respond to teachers' questions. The prominent display of key words is a distinctive feature of many classrooms. This provides a strong, visual reminder to pupils that helps them to develop a good grasp of the technical vocabulary for each subject and enhances pupils' communication skills. In many lessons, pupils have regular opportunities to develop their oral skills. There are a small number of exceptions to this good practice. In modern foreign languages speaking skills in the target language are under-developed, though pupils regularly listen to native speakers on taped recordings. The development of oral skills is also less than satisfactory in religious education and music where pupils do not articulate their ideas and opinions in a sufficiently clear manner and are not encouraged to make an active oral contribution to lessons.

135. Much time is spent on ensuring that pupils are provided with the opportunity to develop writing skills in individual subjects. In English, pupils write for different purposes, in different styles and with a specific audience in mind. Most pupils develop good note-taking skills, and regularly write about the activities they have undertaken. Opportunities are provided for pupils write in an extended manner in English and modern foreign languages with some good examples of written work being observed in music, religious education and art. Teachers regularly correct pupils' work in most subjects. Pupils re-draft their work in English and maths with the intention of improving it. Handwriting and presentation are at least satisfactory and often good. Most subjects provide pupils with the opportunity to word-process their work.
136. All of these strategies and practices develop pupils' understanding of the importance of literacy skills and their contribution to interpreting and communicating information.

DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES

137. Standards in drama are above those that pupils are expected to reach at the age of 14. Only a minority of pupils have had previous opportunity to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills in drama when they enter the school at the age of 11. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress and achieve well because the planning of activities provides good opportunities for them to speak with greater confidence and to contribute through working as members of a group in improvisation.
138. The contribution of drama to pupils' personal development is very good, both in lessons and through the very good range of extra-curricular activities and school productions. Pupils make very good progress in appreciating the value of working with others and exercising self-discipline as well as gaining insights into contemporary issues, including moral dilemmas. In this way it makes a very good contribution to improving pupils' attitudes.
139. The proportion of pupils who choose to study drama beyond the age of 14 is slightly above the national average. They make good progress. GCSE results in 2000 were above the national average. More than three-quarters of the pupils obtained grades A*-C. Just over two-thirds did so nationally. All the pupils obtained at least a grade G.
140. Standards in work seen are above those that pupils are expected to reach nationally. Pupils in Year 7 made good progress in a very imaginative unit of work on the media and the music industry. They used a good range of drama skills to create some truly believable characters from within the pop music industry. The effective learning observed in this lesson was aided by the teacher's high expectations, and the well-pitched questions that challenged pupils to think in greater depth about the characters they were creating. The subject matter was of obvious interest to the pupils. They displayed very good self-discipline, and worked with increased effort as they explored, refined and improved upon their original efforts
141. Pupils make good use of ICT to support their well-planned research when creating a presentation. For example, they used the BPI (British Phonographic Industry) website on the Internet. This contributed to good progress and learning.
142. Good learning and progress were likewise observed in two lessons in Year 8 on the more lighted hearted subject of 'Super-Heroes'. Many pupils displayed a real sense of commitment to their work as they utilised a good range of previously learned drama skills. These included 'freeze frames' and 'thought-tracking'.

143. The majority of pupils had a simple yet effective understanding of the use and importance of motivation in the creation of character, and were confident in their ability to talk about this aspect of their work.
144. Pupils' good learning was demonstrated in their good response to teacher's questions as they discussed the importance of the use of language, gesture, facial expression and body language in the creation of their 'Super-Heroes'. The very good learning and progress in one of the Year 8 lessons observed was influenced by the very good team teaching and additional support.
145. Nearly all pupils are eager to share their work with the rest of the class and demonstrate a clear sense of audience. They are sensitive to others when making constructive comments about each other's work and how it might be improved.
146. It was not possible to observe any lessons in Years 10 and 11 during the period of the inspection. A performance to an invited audience during the week of the inspection of *The Last Resort*, an original, improvised work by Year 10 GCSE pupils indicated that many pupils have very good devising skills and are able to create a believable character and sustain it over a period of time. A number of particularly gifted pupils focussed on the psychological nature of some complex characters and were convincing in their ability to convey ideas, emotions and feelings.
147. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers are very secure in their subject knowledge and convey it to pupils in a challenging and exciting manner. As a result, nearly all pupils frequently show a high level of interest and commitment with many participating with both enthusiasm and self-discipline. Objectives for the lesson are shared with the pupils, and the well-sequenced activities enable pupils to make progress in their learning by using a range of drama skills in increasingly complex and demanding activities. Teachers demonstrate a real personal enthusiasm for the work in hand, with pupils actively wanting to please their teachers in the work they produce. This was a common factor in the good, and often very good, learning which took place in the lessons observed.
148. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The department's assessment records indicate that standards have risen both at the age of 14 and at the age of 16.
149. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Very good subject knowledge is a strong feature of the leadership that sets and reaches good standards. Teamwork is very good and there is a very strong and shared commitment to raise standards further. Very good documentation that includes a very imaginative scheme of work that supports a consistent level of high expectation across the teaching team. The very good assessment arrangements are a strong feature of the very good management of the subject. These include good opportunities for pupils to evaluate their work and to contribute to the management of their own assessment.

MATHEMATICS

150. Standards on entry to the school are below average.
151. Results in the year 2000 national tests at the age of 14 were below the national average. Just over three-fifths of pupils reached the expected standard, Level 5 or above, compared with the national figure of almost two-thirds. Over a third of pupils gained Level 6 or above, a proportion higher than the national average of just over two-fifths. The boys did slightly better than the girls, as is the case nationally. The year 2000 results were well above the average for similar schools [FSM] and represent good achievement and progress by the age of 14.
152. There has been an improving trend in results since the last inspection but the proportion reaching the nationally expected standard dipped in 2000 owing, in part, to staffing difficulties. Standards in mathematics over the last three years have been below those in English and science.
153. GCSE results in 2000 were exactly in line with the national average and well above the average for similar schools [FSM]. Just under half of the pupils obtained grades A*-C. The girls did slightly better than the boys, as is the case nationally. Over nine out of ten pupils gained grades A*-G grades, a proportion below the national average. A higher proportion of boys than girls obtained at least a grade G.
154. The trend in standards at GCSE mirrors those of the national tests at age 14 – steadily rising standards - from below national standards in 1997 to above average in 1999 but with a 'dip' in 2000 as a result of staffing difficulties. Over the last three years pupils have done less well in mathematics than in English and science.
155. The standards of work seen during the inspection were broadly in line those that pupils are expected to reach nationally at the ages of 14 and 16. A comparison between these standards and the results of standardised tests [CATs] and national tests show that pupils make good progress and achieve well by the age of 14. Pupils with special education needs make satisfactory progress overall by the age of 14. They make good progress by the age of 16 because the work they are given to do is challenging and well matched to their needs. These pupils are also supported well by the classroom support assistants.
156. At the age of 14, the lower-attaining pupils, after some initial difficulties, calculate with negative numbers in the context of temperature and successfully convert between different metric units. The quality of their presentation tends to vary. Middle-attaining pupils, by the age of 14, substitute numbers into formulae, perform area and volume calculations confidently, but are sometimes careless with the units of their answers. Higher-attaining pupils make the occasional slip when simplifying algebraic expressions involving brackets. They use trigonometry to calculate lengths of various sides and angles in right-angled triangles. A lack of confidence in algebraic skills restricts the level that all pupils reach.
157. By the age of 16, lower-attaining pupils collect data from investigations, finding rules, and describe verbally any patterns they find. Middle-attaining pupils investigate similar patterns and usually write algebraic expressions to describe them. Some higher-attaining pupils solve complicated equations using a variety of methods, including trial and improvement. The quality of their presentation is good and their algebra is logically laid out. As at the age of 14, weaker levels of algebraic skills limit the standards achieved.

158. Pupils make less use of ICT than in some of their other subjects but plans are in place to include opportunities to develop and apply these skills within the schemes of work. Some good use of software in tandem with 'normal' class work was observed with a higher-attaining Year 9 class who were studying trigonometry.
159. Numeracy skills are generally satisfactory, but some of the lowest-attaining pupils have difficulty recalling multiplication facts by the age of 14.
160. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards at the age of 16 have risen and are now in line with those that pupils are expected to reach nationally. This is because the quality of teaching has improved and there is now more emphasis on developing investigative. There has been substantial improvement in assessment procedures; predicted National Curriculum level and GCSE grades are used to track pupils' progress and all pupils know these and their present National Curriculum levels. Pupils are now encouraged to explain the reasoning behind their answers. The monitoring of teaching has become more rigorous.
161. The quality of teaching is good. It was good or better in more than three-quarters of the lessons seen and very good in one-fifth of them. It was possible to observe only a small number of lessons in Year 10 because pupils were involved in school examinations. No teaching was observed in Year 11 because the pupils had started private study at home in preparation for their GCSE examinations. However, the analysis of pupils' work in Years 10 and 11 confirmed that the good features of teaching evident in Years 7,8 and 9 were also evident in Years 10 and 11.
162. The strongest features are the very good planning and very good classroom management. As a result, pupils work with a strong sense of purpose and their interest is usually sustained well. These features also help pupils to persevere when they find the work difficult.
163. The level of subject knowledge is good and this promotes the good teaching of basic skills. Most lessons involve some practice with basic number work and the recall of mathematical facts. In some lessons pupils are specifically asked to estimate what a reasonable answer might be before carrying out the actual calculation, and occasionally pupils are challenged to justify their use of a calculator over other methods. Basic literacy skills are much better taught than at the time of the previous inspection. Many pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 word-process their accounts of mathematical investigations. They make drafts in order to improve the final version. Opportunities for pupils to talk about mathematics and respond to questions are well planned. Pupils are asked to explain how they arrive at their answers, to listen to others' explanations and to read aloud from their textbooks when appropriate. All classrooms have 'word walls', displaying various mathematical words, which teachers refer to during the course of lessons. This added emphasis on communication increases pupil's confidence and understanding of the subject and is an important improvement since the last inspection. It is helping to raise standards.
164. There are many other good features in the teaching of mathematics. Improved lesson planning has resulted in a wider range of organisational arrangements and the better sequencing of activities within lessons. Pupils with special educational needs are well taught because their needs are carefully identified and they are supported well by the classroom support assistants. Useful homework is regularly set and this helps pupils both to consolidate and apply their understanding.
165. The best lessons are characterised by good pace and challenge so that pupils achieve well and enjoy their work. Where teaching was satisfactory, there remains a tendency

for pupils to have fewer opportunities to participate actively in the lesson, because the teacher spends too long talking to the whole class.

166. A very good lesson for higher-attaining Year 7 pupils on geometrical constructions began with a quick-fire mental mathematics activity involving the addition of decimals, followed by the challenge to draw a triangle of particular dimensions by any method pupils thought fit – leading to pupils' 'discovery' that compasses greatly ease the task.
167. Leadership and management are good. There is a strong and shared commitment to raise standards. The department is self-critical and systematically investigates ways to raise standards further, such as changing the choice of GCSE examination. After school revision sessions are well attended and appreciated by the pupils.

Numeracy across the curriculum

168. Pupils apply their mathematical skills well in subject areas other than mathematics. In science in Year 7 they demonstrate good estimating and measuring skills and most pupils produce good graphical work. In Years 7 to 9 there is evidence of pupils of all abilities having the skills to represent data graphically and to read and interpret scales on a range of instruments. In Year 10 science, algebra is developed in the use of equations. However, although the actual development of numeracy in science is good, the focus is really on science – numeracy is almost a by-product.
169. There is a good range of opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills in design and technology. They measure, weigh and calculate proportions, and make costings of finished items to a good degree of accuracy. They communicate using numbers, graphs, models and diagrams. There is accurate work in the production of scale drawings and patterns. Pupils collect, present and interpret data in design projects when researching a topic. ICT is sometimes used to present data. Work in history and geography shows pupils interpreting numbers, graphs and tables competently. In Years 7 to 9 symmetry is studied in art. The calculation of price, change, and times of arrival and departure of buses and trains are features of work in modern foreign languages.
170. There has been a whole-school numeracy audit and plans are in place to produce a numeracy policy.

SCIENCE

171. When pupils enter the school at the age of 11 their results in the national test at the end of primary school are broadly in line with the national average but their scores in standardised tests [CATs] are below average.
172. The national test results at the age of 14 in the year 2000 were broadly in line with the national average for all schools and well above average for similar schools [FSM]. Three-fifths of the pupils reached or exceeded the nationally expected standard, Level 5. Just under a third of them achieved Level 6, a proportion in line with the national average. The boys did slightly better than the girls, as is the case nationally. The results of both the boys and the girls were exactly in line with their respective age groups nationally. Pupils did better in science than in mathematics but not as well as in English. The trend of improvement over the last five years has been broadly similar to the national trend, maintaining a similarly above average performance between 1997 and 1999, before declining slightly in 2000.

173. GCSE results overall in the year 2000 at the age of 16, including double and single award science, were well above the national average. The proportion of all pupils gaining grades A*-C was well above average, with boys achieving slightly, but not significantly, better than girls. The percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-C was high compared to schools with pupils having a similar prior attainment at age 14 years, and also high compared to similar schools [FSM]. Over the past three years the percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-C in science has remained consistently well above average.
174. Standards at the age of 14 are above those that pupils are expected to reach at the age of 14. They are higher than those indicated in the year 2000 national tests. At the age of 16 they are well above the standard that pupils are expected to reach nationally. Pupils of all levels of prior attainment, including those with special educational needs, make very good progress and achieve very well. Their previously completed work, as well as what they did in lessons, show standards stem from the very good teaching of investigational skills. For example, having made careful observation of leaf structure, they carry out tests for starch and record the data systematically. A significant number of pupils consider the reliability of the experiment, and many compare results with predictions, based on their knowledge and understanding. By the end of Year 9, many middle- and higher-attaining pupils studying life processes have a good knowledge of essential aspects such as environmental pollution. They use ICT expertly to analyse their data and present findings to others.
175. On the evidence of previously completed work, many pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a very good overall knowledge of essential facts and make very good progress in further developing their experimental skills. The very good teaching places strong emphasis on developing scientific ways of thinking and many pupils apply this well when conducting investigations. For example, all the higher-attaining pupils in Year 10 have at least a good knowledge of the factors that affect the rates of chemical reaction, and carry out experiments to investigate them with confidence. Many have a very good understanding of the molecular explanation. Middle- and lower-attaining pupils have a very good level of competence, but are more uncertain about the application of their knowledge to unfamiliar problems. Pupils in Year 11 have a very good level of knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts, especially supporting their investigation coursework.
176. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress when additional classroom support is provided. Usually, many pupils in the class benefit from help with understanding instructions or reading in these circumstances. Good support is directed towards the lower band groups, resulting in their very good progress. On other occasions, however, progress is very dependent on the nature of the work. Group practical work is often effective as good relationships provide an encouraging environment in which pupils help each other. Where work is more theoretical, the progress of pupils with special educational needs is often more limited. In such instances, progress relies on the individual attention from the teacher, rather than materials that match their individual needs.
177. Standards of literacy are good, with most pupils producing neat, well-presented work. Good use is made of grammar in the description of experiments, and diagrams are usually clearly labelled. Technical vocabulary is used well, and pupils demonstrate a good level of oral skills. This is encouraged in the teaching. Standards of numeracy are good, with pupils using numbers well in recording results and in using scales for measurement. In Year 7 pupils develop their understanding of probability, graphs and algebra through specifically designed activities, and this is continued in science experimental work in later years. ICT skills are increasingly being developed through

science, in word processing and especially in using light and heat sensors with portable palmtop computers. Pupils, in Year 9 and above extend their skills into spreadsheets and the Internet, although everyday application is relatively infrequent.

178. Attitudes to science are good. Pupils are confident and respond well in discussion. They carry out tasks set with enthusiasm and most are highly motivated. The degree of application is noticeably strong in all classes, irrespective of their level of attainment. Because tasks have been carefully matched to the ability range in the group, pupils approach them very positively, assured of success. Homework is completed with utmost reliability. Behaviour is very good in lessons, and pupils have excellent self-control, respect for their teachers and consideration for others. They collaborate well in practical work, sharing ideas and resources well. Their regard for safety is excellent.
179. The quality of teaching is very good. It is a strength of the school. During the inspection, all of the lessons observed were judged to be at least good and two-fifths of them were very good or excellent.
180. The teaching of science has many very good features. It is both thorough and stimulating. Pupils of all levels of prior attainment learn very well because their teachers use their good subject knowledge to create very well-planned lessons. Their learning is very well managed and the very good relationships in lessons engender self-discipline as well as enthusiasm and curiosity about science. Clear explanations and skilful questioning, often conducted at a challenging pace, ensure that pupils make very good gains in both knowledge and understanding. There are plenty of opportunities for practical work and this helps pupils to apply and extend their understanding. Homework is used very well to extend and to consolidate pupils' learning.
181. The very good level of expectation reinforces the high level of challenge, and this motivates pupils to work at a good pace but also to take care to complete tasks thoroughly. The very good assessment procedures, including the use of National Curriculum levels, keep pupils fully informed of their progress and provide challenging targets for further improvement. As a result there is a strong commitment to work hard in lessons and a desire to improve. Assessment is carried out regularly and is used well to identify current levels, progress made and new targets for improvement. However, these are not always indicated in comments when pupils' written work is marked.
182. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Standards have improved significantly and the achievement of pupils, across the school, is now very good. A high standard of investigational work has been maintained. Teaching has improved and is currently at a very good standard. Teachers have even higher expectations, and pupil management continues to be good. The use of ICT has significantly improved. Schemes of work are much better and improved planning ensures that work is now more closely matched to meet the needs of different groups of pupils. Methods of teaching are less teacher-directed and involve pupils more in their learning.

183. Leadership and management are very good. Subject improvement planning is very good and clearly linked to the priorities of the school improvement plan. There is a well-defined strategy for further improvement. Teamwork is excellent and supports consistent standards and expectations. Teachers' work is monitored by direct observation and through analysis of assessments for teaching groups. Informal evaluation of teachers' work is made, but it is not yet rigorous enough to provide teachers with an appraisal of their strengths and areas for improvement of skills. Good support is given to the newly qualified teachers. Schemes of work are continually being reviewed and development is shared. Regular meetings are held to evaluate ideas, and priorities in the improvement plan are directed to raising standards still further.

ART AND DESIGN

184. The results of standardised tests [CATs] when pupils first enter the school at the age of 11 are below average but no formal assessment is made of pupils' artistic knowledge and skills.
185. Results in the year 2000 statutory teacher assessments at the age of 14 were below those reported nationally. Just over half the pupils reached the standard expected nationally compared with three-quarters of pupils nationally. The girls did better than the boys.
186. GCSE results in 2000 were above the national average, maintaining the consistently good standards of the previous four years. The number of pupils who studied this subject beyond the age of 14 was more than twice the national average. Three-quarters of the candidates obtained grades A*-C, a proportion above the national average. The proportion obtaining at least a grade G was slightly lower than the national average. These results represent a very good level of achievement.
187. The standards of pupils' current work at the age of 14 is much higher than those indicated in the year 2000 statutory teacher assessments. At that time assessment was too harsh. At the age of 16, the standards of pupils' work are similar to those indicated in the year 2000 GCSE results. The good quality of much of the work produced shows that pupils make good progress by the age of 14 and also by the age of 16.
188. Standards are higher than those expected nationally because a very strong emphasis is placed on developing good drawing and painting skills. As a result pupils develop a good range of basic skills and techniques that they can then apply in more complex creations, across a wide range of media. The lesson time in Years 7 and 8 is greater than in many schools and is used well to establish a strong foundation of artistic skills.
189. These good standards at the age of 14 are illustrated well in the work of many pupils who demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of technical vocabulary and a good range of drawing and painting skills. Their work is based on research and experimentation, with regular homework that supports development and encourages individuality. Higher-attaining pupils produce strongly drawn and well-finished work. The extended work, based on 'Insects', and the work inspired by 'Aboriginal art forms' were good examples of work that was of a consistently high standard. Sometimes, the work of lower-attaining pupils is unsatisfactory because insufficient care is taken in drawing and composition, and work is sometimes unfinished.
190. Standards are good at the age of 16. The previously completed work of the current Year 11 pupils was good and sometimes impressive. Higher-attaining pupils have developed impressive drawing skills and their finished pieces are developed to high

standards of artistic competency and originality. Pupils identified by the department as being gifted and talented are additionally challenged through the work of the 'scholarship group'. Research is often extensive and wide-ranging. Their knowledge of artists and art movements is broad and influential in their work. Pupils are encouraged to work independently and to pursue individuality. Batiks inspired by Asian art, fabric work emerging for studies of African art as well as the ceramics inspired by the designs of William Morris, are good examples. The finished work of most lower-attaining pupils shows less attention to detail and is more limited in research and enquiry. However, pupils with special educational needs are well integrated and make good progress.

191. Since the last inspection improvement has been good, both in terms of examination results and the quality of provision. The subject has become increasingly popular and the teaching team has increased accordingly, providing opportunity to include the specialist teaching of fine art. Recent improvements in accommodation have created a very good learning environment. There has been much improvement in the use of ICT and the introduction of 'scholarships' for gifted and talented pupils has helped further to raise standards.
192. The quality of teaching is very good. It was never less than good in all lessons seen and very good in two-fifths. Excellent teaching was observed in one Year 10 lesson. It was not possible to observe teaching in Year 11 as the pupils were on home study leave to prepare for their GCSE examinations. However, the good, and sometimes very good, standard of their previously completed work provided strong evidence of very good teaching and learning.
193. Pupils learn very well and make very good progress overall. The teachers use their very good subject knowledge with a high degree of skill. A very effective scheme of work teaches skills systematically whilst presenting pupils with an increasingly challenging set of assignments. Individual lessons are very well planned. The review of work at the end of the lesson is particularly effective because it encourages pupils to think about how well they have done and how they might improve their work. This opportunity to reflect, often after an intense period of concentration, promotes very good learning.
194. Expectations are high and much of the work is imaginatively stimulating. As a result, pupils want to do well and many are enthusiastic about their work. Tasks are carefully organised to match the needs of the pupils. This helps to maintain their confidence, particularly when working with new materials or when learning new techniques. The rigorous teaching of basic artistic skills establishes a firm foundation for future good progress. Time and resources are used very well in lessons so that pupils are afforded opportunity to take care with their work, whilst at the same time being challenged regularly to improve it. The use of assessment as input to planning, as well as target setting in all years, is effective and contributes to the very good examination results. The end of lesson review, with regular pupil involvement, is used very effectively on most occasions. Marking is regular, diagnostic and informative.
195. The department does much to extend the spiritual dimension of personal development through discussion on artists and art movements and also through the very wide variety of extra curricular opportunities.
196. Leadership and management are very good. There is a strong determination to maintain high standards. Improvement planning is very good because it establishes a strong link between improving provision and expertise and raising standards. Teaching and learning are monitored regularly through class visits. The team of four specialists is very well managed. Strong team work results in a consistent level of high

expectation and a shared commitment to further improvement. The care and attention given to creating effective displays of work further raises the level of expectation as well as celebrating the high quality of current work.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

197. When pupils enter the school at the age of 11 their scores in standardised tests [CATs] are below average but there is no formal assessment of their knowledge, understanding and skills in design and technology.
198. Results in the year 2000 statutory teacher assessments at the age of 14 were above average. More than three-quarters of the pupils reached the standard expected, compared with two-thirds of pupils nationally. The girls did better than the boys but the latter performed much better than their age group nationally.
199. The year 2000 GCSE results were below the national average for grades A*-C and A*-G in full courses overall. The graphics results, however, were above the national average for A*-C grades. In the short GCSE courses, pupils attain considerably better results, with an improvement shown over recent years. Pupils entered for the certificate of achievement were all successful.
200. Standards in pupils' current work at the age of 14 are broadly in line with those that pupils are expected to reach. A minority of pupils do better than this. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls.
201. Pupils of all levels of prior attainment, including those with special educational needs, make good progress by the age of 14. This is illustrated well in the improving quality of pupils' design folders that show an increasing range of presentational skills. Higher-attaining pupils use a widening range of technical language with increasing accuracy in evaluations, produce an increasingly good range of ideas and provide good analysis of existing products in their designs. This was seen in a Year 8 mobile phone project and a Year 9 storage box project where pupils also used the Internet in their research. Middle- and lower-attaining pupils can produce good work but their progress is slower because their work often displays weaker research, drawings that are ill-proportioned, labelling that is incomplete or written work that is unfinished.
202. Standards are also broadly in line with those expected nationally at the age of 16. Pupils make good progress and achieve well by the age of 14 and satisfactorily by the age of 16.
203. In the GCSE short courses, pupils use a range of presentational techniques to illustrate their work including commercial material, photographs, use of colour and freehand sketching. This was illustrated well in a resistant materials project investigating candleholders, a graphics project researching children's play areas and a food technology project investigating in-flight meals on an aircraft.
204. In the GCSE full courses there is also good work in each area. For example, ergonomic data was well used in a transportation project in resistant materials. Cultural influences in product design were a good feature in a food technology project in Year 11. Where the work is weaker it is mainly due to shallow research and poorer presentation. There are insufficient resources to provide a satisfactory range of opportunities to use ICT. Practical outcomes, including modelling are of a good standard overall. Pupils on the certificate of achievement course increase their practical and social skills confidently, as observed in a food technology lesson preparing a health food product for a party.

205. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It was good or better in just over half the lessons seen, and never less than satisfactory. The better lessons had good pace, used time and resources effectively, set clear objectives and had good pupil management. This was seen in a Year 8 lesson on structures where pupils experienced a "hands-on" approach to discovering strengths and weaknesses in constructions, a Year 9 lesson where pupils were planning a product for a target group and a Year 10 lesson where pupils responded to challenge and expectation when learning about two-point perspective drawing. In these, and other good or very good lessons, pupils increased their learning and understanding through the effective teaching methods that pupils motivated and on task. On occasion, lessons can lack real pace and the strong direction by the teacher affords little opportunity for pupils to make decisions or plan work for themselves.
206. Assessment procedures are good and form an integral part of schemes of work. National Curriculum levels are displayed in all rooms and pupils have the generic skills required for each module in their workbooks. Pupils' self-assessment is also a positive feature in this process. On occasion pupil targets for improvement are not specific or sufficiently challenging.
207. Since the last inspection improvement has been good, and particularly so over the last 18 months. This followed a senior management review of the work of the department that resulted in a further change in leadership. A rigorous revision of teaching in Years 7,8 and 9 has resulted in a much clearer understanding of the required standards, a significant raising of expectations and the much improved teaching of skills.
208. Leadership and management are very good. The health and safety issues raised at the time of the last inspection have been dealt with. The most recent change in leadership has brought much greater rigour to the drive to raise standards in an area that was very weak at the time of the last inspection. The department is efficiently managed and documentation is very thorough and well prepared. The good display of pupils' work and the well-organised workrooms set a tone of high expectation. The monitoring of teaching and pupils' progress is a growing strength that is producing much improved standards already at the age of 14 and laying the foundations for similar improvement at the age of 16.

GEOGRAPHY

209. Geography is an effective department in which the quality of teaching is good. Pupils are now making good progress by the ages of 14 and 16. Standards are improving but are not yet reaching the national average in the statutory teacher assessments at the age of 14 or in the GCSE examination at the age of 16.
210. Just over half the pupils achieved the expected standard, Level 5, compared to nearly two-thirds nationally in the year 2000 statutory teacher assessments at the age of 14. The girls did better than the boys.
211. In GCSE examinations in 2000, just over one quarter of the year group chose to study this subject, a proportion lower than the national proportion of just over a third. Results were below the national average. Almost two-fifths obtained grades A*-C whereas just under three-fifths did so nationally. This was an improvement on the previous year when just over one quarter of the pupils entered obtained grades A*-C. All pupils entered obtained at least a grade G, a proportion above the national average. The girls did better than the boys but the difference was less than it is nationally.

212. Standards in work seen at the age of 14 and at the age of 16 are higher than those reported in the statutory teacher assessments and GCSE results in 2000 because the staffing difficulties of recent years have been successfully resolved and the teaching much improved. The monitoring of pupils' work is now good and individual targets for improvement are set regularly. The setting of targets is now closely linked to the levels of the National Curriculum and the progress of pupils towards these targets is carefully monitored. As a result pupils now make good progress at the age of 14 and at the age of 16. This was particularly good in the current Year 10. Pupils have a greater knowledge and understanding of geographical processes and the features they produce, for example, coastal erosion. They explain the effects and consequences of human and physical activity, and their skill of extracting information to provide answers is improving.
213. The quality of teaching overall is good. It was good in more than three-quarters of the lessons seen, and never less than satisfactory. It was not possible to observe teaching in Year 11 because the pupils were on study leave to prepare for their GCSE examinations. Only a small number of lessons were observed in Year 10 because the pupils were taking school examinations during the week of the inspection. The teaching in one of these lessons was very good.
214. Pupils learn well because very good subject knowledge is used skilfully in the very good planning of lessons. The aims for each lesson and the standards expected are shared with pupils, so that they know exactly what they are expected to learn and how this will be accomplished. Time is managed very well. Good relationships help pupils to learn from each other when working together. Very good behaviour and attitudes to work ensure that lessons are purposeful and pupils fully employed throughout the whole lesson. Not enough attention, however, is paid to promoting the progress of pupils with special educational needs, particularly when they have no additional support in lessons.
215. A strong feature that helps pupils to learn well is the imaginative organisation of lessons. This both encourages pupils to take a more active part in their work and to undertake a series of structured tasks. As a result they develop good knowledge and understanding of geographical phenomena. Very good examples of this were seen in lessons, including simulation exercises. In Year 9 simulation exercises established the different standards of living between pupils in countries with low and high levels of economic development, while pupils in Year 7 undertook group work to help them understand why large areas of Brazil are being deforested. Good displays in classrooms develop interest in geography and also help to emphasise the expected standards of work. These include key words to reinforce understanding and National Curriculum levels and standards that remind pupils of how well they are achieving.
216. Since the previous inspection improvement has been good. The revised schemes of work now include better coverage of the requirements of the National Curriculum in Years 7,8 and 9 and much improved fieldwork arrangements in Years 10 and 11. There is now much greater use of ICT. These improvements in provision are leading to a steady improvement in standards.
217. The department is very well led and managed. There is a comprehensive range of policies and guidance. As a result, teamwork is strong and expectations are consistently high. Record keeping is very good, results are carefully analysed and targets for pupils meticulously set and monitored. Schemes of work are good, breaking down the various sections of the syllabus into programmes of work on a weekly or even lesson-by-lesson basis. The work of teachers is regularly monitored, both formally and informally, and pupils are informed of the standards they are reaching in terms of the various levels of the National Curriculum.

218. Within the department a very good climate for learning and raising standards has been created through the very good display in rooms and adjacent corridors. The department has a good level of resources and the well-qualified and committed staff work together closely in the interest of pupils

HISTORY

219. There is no formal assessment of pupils' standards in history when they enter the school. Results in standardised tests [CATs] indicate that literacy standards are below average.
220. The year 2000 statutory teacher assessments were broadly in line with the national average. Nearly two-thirds of the pupils reached or exceeded the nationally expected standard, Level 5. The girls did better than the boys and both achieved standards broadly similar to their age groups nationally. These results represent a good degree of progress and achievement.
221. GCSE results in 2000 were below the national average. More pupils in Year 11 took the examination than is the case in most schools nationally. Just less than half of the candidates obtained grades A*-C compared with three-fifths of all candidates nationally. The proportion obtaining at least a grade G was also below the national average. The trend in results has been rising over the last five years, but fell back in 2000 when a new course was examined for the first time. Pupils' performance in history was a little below the average of all the other subjects they took. Taking account of the general upward trend of results in recent years, standards in the subject overall are satisfactory.
222. Standards in work seen at the age of 14 are satisfactory. They are broadly in line with those expected nationally, as is the relative performance of boys and girls. Many Year 9 pupils have a good knowledge of 20th century history. Effective teaching of chronology enables pupils to understand the main changes in the periods studied. In lessons on the Home Front during World War 2, most pupils showed their ability to record relevant information on the blitz, evacuation and rationing from contemporary newsreels. They make good progress in developing enquiry skills through project work, writing up their findings effectively and presenting them well. Many pupils have a good understanding of cause and effect in history. This is evident in their essays on the causes of the Great War and its significance for women's rights. The use of writing frames to plan answers is helping lower attaining pupils to develop the skill of writing in paragraphs. Higher-attaining pupils show their depth of understanding in their ability to develop an argument and substantiate it with relevant facts. Pupils are able to use historical sources for information. Many were beginning to question the reliability of such sources in the Year 9 study of wartime propaganda. In general, pupils find it difficult to explain different interpretations of people and events, such as the differing views of Hitler held in Germany prior to 1933. As a result of the good planning of courses to provide practice in a range of history skills, pupils make good progress by the age of 14 and are achieving well in the subject.
223. Standards at the age of 16 are broadly in line with those expected nationally. Pupils make good progress over the course, achieving higher standards than their predicted grades at GCSE. They keep thorough notes on their courses, covering topics in the required amount of detail. Very good standards are evident in the coursework and essays of pupils on the Modern World course. Similarly, pupils in the middle band show good understanding of complex issues, such as the differences between peace agreements in Northern Ireland. A highly-structured approach to the course followed by lower-attaining pupils helps them to make good progress, building up a graphic

record of their work. Some pupils were unable to recall sufficient facts in the mock examinations to gain higher marks, but the focus on examination technique in the later stages of the courses, and a thorough revision programme, have improved their preparation. In lessons, Year 10 pupils were making good progress analysing evidence for the different stages in the Nazi persecution of the Jews, culminating in the Holocaust. A number of pupils are taking advantage of a field trip to Guernsey to study life under the German occupation of the Channel Islands.

224. Since the previous inspection improvement has been good. There is a rising trend in test and examination results. This is a direct result of improved assessment procedures, which cover all the subject skills identified in the National Curriculum. In addition, strategies for developing pupils' subject vocabulary and their writing, through more challenging assignments, has paid dividends. The accumulation of a portfolio of assessed work for each pupil is proving a powerful tool for monitoring progress and raising standards. Extra support for pupils whose work is on the borderline between grades C and D has also proved successful.
225. The quality of teaching is good overall. It was good or better in more than four-fifths of the lesson seen and very good in one-fifth of them. Teaching was never less than satisfactory. The teachers' detailed planning and very good working relationships with pupils enable them to manage learning efficiently and build up pupils' confidence. As a result, pupils across the ability range enjoy the subject and many want to study it beyond the age of 14. Teachers cater successfully for pupils of different levels of prior attainment by adapting materials appropriately to suit their needs. Effective use of video and ICT, as well as carefully planned opportunities for discussion, allow pupils to learn in ways that suit them best.
226. Tasks are usually challenging, requiring pupils to think for themselves, whether matching up 18th century farming problems and solutions in a lower-attaining Year 8 class, or deciding the best site for a Norman castle in Year 7 lessons. In the upper band classes, more could be expected of the highest attaining pupils, whether over the choice of exercises in Year 9, or by expecting them to produce essay plans in Year 10, rather than work to a model. Teachers check pupils' notes and mark assessed items thoroughly, but their comments sometimes lack the precision that pupils need to target improvement. Teachers' command of the subject and expertise over exam requirements combine to produce a very good revision course, including extra sessions in the Easter holidays. This prepares pupils fully for the final examinations.
227. Leadership and management are very good. There is a strong emphasis on raising standards. Good teamwork is a strong feature. This encourages the sharing of ideas and practice, resulting in consistent levels of expectation. Non-specialist teachers benefit from 'peer coaching' by a specialist mentor when planning lessons. Departmental documentation is excellent and there is continuous updating of schemes of work and refining of assessment tasks. Excellent accommodation is well used to create a stimulating subject atmosphere in all the teaching rooms. The added bonus of having a small computer room as part of the departmental suite gives ideal opportunity for pupils to research information. The result is a stimulating environment that promotes learning and enables pupils to make good progress in the subject.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

228. When pupils start at the school at the age of 11 their previous experience and level of skills in ICT are very varied. The statutory teacher assessments at the age of 14 reported in 2000 were broadly in line with the national average. Approximately half the pupils reached the nationally expected standard of Level 5.

229. GCSE results in 2000 were well above the national average. Four-fifths of the candidates obtained grades A*-C, compared with the national average of just over half. A much higher proportion of the year group took the examination than did so nationally. These results represent a very good level of achievement and were much higher than in previous years. Overall, pupils did slightly better in ICT than in their other subjects.
230. Standards overall are good. They are satisfactory at the age of 14 and good at the age of 16. Pupils achieve well and make good progress by the ages of 14 and 16.
231. At the age of 14 many pupils successfully complete a good range of challenging work. Consequently, they make good gains in knowledge and understanding and this is evidenced well in their work files. All pupils position text, choose a background colour and introduce some images from clipart, CD-ROM or the Internet to enhance their work. Most pupils carry out searches on the Internet and create interesting multi-page presentations. Higher-attaining pupils work more quickly and with confidence. All pupils review critically at a basic level the advantages and disadvantages of using different images. Lower-attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, show satisfactory and sometimes good ICT skills, but weaknesses in literacy affects the quality and quantity of their work.
232. In the work seen in the specialist examination courses, standards are above those pupils are expected to reach at age 16. Pupils achieve well and make good progress. They use increasingly more sophisticated ICT skills to tackle more complex assignments. A high degree of confidence, and thoughtfulness in their application, are strong features that help them to reach these good standards. Coursework shows good individual research by higher-attaining pupils, with good ICT skills, good presentation of work and critical evaluation. Pupils use a variety of software packages in an effective manner to illustrate important aspects of different topics. Higher-attaining pupils' good levels of literacy help them achieve a good standard of work in these assignments. Special educational needs pupils also make good progress in acquiring ICT skills.
233. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. They co-operate well, even when they have to share a computer. They openly enjoy the good teaching they receive and are comfortable with the atmosphere in class.

234. The quality of teaching of ICT lessons in the timetable is good. It was good in more than four-fifths of the lessons seen, and occasionally very good. Teaching was never less than satisfactory. Very high expectations and the very effective use of time and resources are the strongest features. As a result, pupils develop very good attitudes, using equipment with care and working well individually or with a partner. Teachers use their good subject knowledge well to provide clear explanations to the pupils. Pupils work purposefully, sustain interest and concentration and use their time well, because the objectives of the lesson are explained carefully. Lessons are well planned with a suitable balance of time between instruction and pupils working independently. Pupils respond well, reacting positively to the good management of the lessons. Good intervention by the teacher, in a Year 9 lesson, helped lower-attaining pupils to revise their layout and use the software successfully to produce quality work. The recently acquired interactive white boards are used very effectively to help pupils' learning. Teachers assess the progress pupils are making effectively so that they can help those in need of assistance.
235. In addition to being taught how to use computers, pupils are required to develop the use of ICT within the subjects of the curriculum. This is used with increasing confidence across many subjects. The Library computer facilities are well used throughout the day to provide opportunities for independent learning. Research via the Internet is regularly undertaken in many different subject areas, and many departments have included useful web sites in their schemes of work. The school's Intranet is well developed to aid pupils in their learning.
236. For example, in geography in Year 8, pupils selected data from the Internet to compare the energy consumption between less and more economically developed countries. This information was put into spreadsheets and used to make graphs of results. There is good use made of ICT in science, where palmtop computers are effectively used, and opportunities are given for Year 8 pupils to investigate noise levels around the school and for Year 9 pupils to analyse data from the environment indicating pollution levels. Computers are being used in almost all subjects to enhance the work done, but a few are handicapped by lack of up-to-date equipment and easy access to computers.
237. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Improved resources and revisions to schemes of work have led to improved GCSE results. The use of ICT in other subjects is much improved and is now frequently very good.
238. Leadership and management are good. Improvement planning is undertaken carefully and linked closely to the school improvement plan.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

239. When pupils enter the school at the age of 11 they have no previous experience of learning a modern foreign language. They make satisfactory progress by the ages of 14 and 16.
240. The statutory teacher assessments at the age of 14 reported in 2000 were above the national average. Just over four-fifths of the pupils reached or exceeded the standards expected nationally, compared with the national average of two-thirds. The girls did better than the boys, but the latter did very much better than their age group nationally. These results were higher than in the previous year.
241. The percentage of pupils who gained A*-C grades in their GCSE Spanish examinations in 2000 was below the national average. The percentage of pupils who gained A*-G grades was above the national average. A much smaller number of pupils

studied French as their GCSE foreign language and the proportion gaining A*-C grades was broadly in line with the national average. Over the last three years there has been an uneven trend in the GCSE results. In 1999 the percentage of pupils gaining A*-C grades was above the national average, but in 1998 it was below.

242. Standards at the age of 14 are not quite as high as those indicated in the results of the statutory teacher assessments reported in 2000. They are in line with the standards expected nationally and indicate satisfactory achievement.
243. Writing skills are good. They are better than at the time of the previous inspection. Many pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the rules of grammar. Their comprehension of the spoken language is generally good. However, speaking skills are unsatisfactory. Pupils lack confidence in speaking and do not use the foreign language for real communication in the classroom.
244. At the age of 16, pupils demonstrate standards that are broadly in line with what is expected nationally. Their knowledge of the rules of grammar is good. Higher-attaining pupils use accurately a range of tenses in their coursework, although they reveal an insecure knowledge of verb forms in their own free writing. Oral skills remain unsatisfactory. Pupils do not routinely use the foreign language, beyond the learning and practice tasks that they are given as part of their lessons.
245. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress throughout the school. At the age of 14 they write short phrases with the support of course books or word lists and adapt model texts to modify meanings. They take part in short, well-rehearsed conversations with intelligible pronunciation. At the age of 16 they write short paragraphs with the aid of written prompts.
246. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. It was good in just over a third of the lessons seen, and never less than satisfactory. Good features include the successful development of pupils' literacy skills, by making them think about the sounds and patterns of language and thus encouraging accuracy in written work. Good planning of the structure of lessons provides a variety of activities that enable pupils to practise a range of language skills. However, there are insufficient opportunities, especially in GCSE classes, for pupils to develop their speaking skills in small groups or pairs. This slows their progress in oral work. The foreign language is used extensively by the teachers to provide good models for their pupils, but they dilute the challenge that they set by failing to insist that their pupils use French or Spanish whenever possible.
247. The teaching of pupils with special needs is good. The good planning of activities, that are well matched to the needs of the pupils and that involve the pupils in active participation, generate enthusiasm and effective learning.
248. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Arrangements to monitor pupils' progress are now better because a system of standardised key assessments is well used. The quality of teaching is now more consistent because there have been planned opportunities to observe the teaching of other members of the department, and there is a greater sharing of teaching resources. However, a lack of continuity in the teaching team, with several changes of staff, has reduced the rate of improvement and the proportion of pupils who express a wish to study more than one modern foreign language beyond the age of 14 remains very low.
249. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. There are good procedures for monitoring the progress of pupils' performance, including the initial assessment of pupils when they enter the school at the age of 11. Resources are well deployed. However, current arrangements for curriculum provision for two languages

are unsatisfactory and inefficient because no pupils continue the study of two foreign languages in Years 10 and 11.

MUSIC

250. The majority of pupils enter the school at the age of 11 with very limited knowledge and skills in music. Standards at the age of 14 are broadly in line with those expected nationally and are above the standards expected nationally at the age of 16. Pupils make good progress by the age of 14 and very good progress by the age of 16 because there are many opportunities for them to develop their performance skills within the overall good provision.
251. The results of the year 2000 statutory teacher assessments were above the national average. Three quarters of the pupils reached the expected standard compared with two-thirds of pupils nationally. A small number of pupils achieved exceptional standards.
252. In 2000 the GCSE results at the age of 16 were slightly above the national average. The proportion of the year group who took the GCSE examination was much higher than in most schools nationally. More than two-thirds of the pupils obtained grades A*-C, a proportion slightly above the national average. The proportion obtaining at least grade G was below the national average. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. Over the last four years, results have improved and entry numbers have increased.
253. Standards in work seen at the age of 14 are broadly in line with those expected nationally but slightly below those indicated in the most recent statutory teacher assessments in 2000. Performance skills are frequently good. A small minority of pupils achieves standards that are higher than those expected nationally. These pupils are supported in their learning by additional teaching after school. Standards are higher than at the time of the previous inspection, because the good quality of teaching and the good provision of additional opportunities help many pupils to develop good performance skills. The very good provision of additional instrumental tuition for almost 100 pupils, supported strongly by the governing body, is helping to raise performance standards. There are many opportunities for pupils to perform in school, in the community and in the partner primary schools. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 also benefit in their learning by having access to a wide range of music technology including recording equipment. The provision of keyboards, however, is inadequate for the two music rooms that are located in different parts of the building.
254. Standards at the age of 16 are above those that pupils are expected to reach nationally. Those who choose to study music beyond the age of 14 all play instruments or sing to a good standard. Year 11 pupils were not in school during the inspection week. However, standards in work seen and in previously recorded performances were sometimes very good. Pupils' files indicate a very thorough coverage of the syllabus and a very good level of knowledge and understanding of the theoretical aspects of the subject. Responses to listening tests are of a good standard. Composing skills are good in a variety of styles, for example blues, and for a variety of instruments, including the guitar and voice. The music for performance had been well chosen to provide a good range of different cultures and historical periods. GCSE pupils take part in a residential course that provides additional resources. These raise further the standards of their composing.
255. The quality of teaching is very good. It was possible to observe only a small number of lessons in Years 7, 8 and 9. These included examples of very good and excellent teaching. Pupils in Year 11 were on study leave. One lesson only was observed in

Year 10 because the pupils were involved in school examinations during the week of the inspection. However, the very good quality and range of pupils' learning is well evidenced in their previously completed work. Teaching and learning are, overall, very good in Years 10 and 11. An important strength of the teaching across all years is the very good range of additional opportunities that are provided beyond the timetabled lessons.

256. Teaching methods, and the management of pupils' learning, are excellent. As a result, pupils' interest in listening critically to music, and in composing and performing, are very well developed and they show a good and increasing level of confidence. The teachers' very good level of subject knowledge, and very good level of expectation, ensure that pupils make good gains in knowledge, understanding and practical skills. Lessons are very well planned to encourage the full participation of pupils of all levels of prior attainment, including those with special educational needs. An important feature is the care taken to provide experiences that appeal to young people. This helps to sustain their interest and promote an enjoyment of music. As a result, they make good progress. For example, in an excellent Year 8 lesson, pupils made very good gains in composing a melody using the form AABA. In the previous lesson they had listened and played a popular song, which had the same musical form. A strong feature is the practice at the beginning and end of lessons to consider the objectives through discussion and the skilful use of questions. This helps pupils to reflect critically on the gains in knowledge, skills and understanding that they have made in the lesson. In the latter part of the lesson, pupils are also given the opportunity to evaluate their work and the work of others. This is a strong feature of the good assessment arrangements that identify the expected standards very clearly.
257. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in the quality of pupils' musical performance skills and in the increased level of additional instrumental tuition. Standards have risen and there is a growing enthusiasm for music in the school, reflected in the increasing numbers of pupils who choose to study the subject beyond the age of 14. A particular strength lies in the successes of the guitar players and the teaching of, and raising enthusiasm for, recorder playing.
258. Leadership and management are very good. The commitment to high standards is strong and well documented in both the revised schemes of work and in the departmental improvement plan. The quality of resources is good and they are well deployed although the two music rooms are not adjacent. The department has worked hard in developing links with the feeder schools.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

259. There are no formal arrangements to assess pupils' skills when they join the school at the age of 11.
260. The statutory teacher assessments reported in 2000 were broadly in line with the national average. Almost three-quarters of the pupils reached the nationally expected standard. The boys and girls achieved broadly similar standards. Progress is good by the age of 14 and pupils achieve well.
261. GCSE results in 2000 were well above the national average. The proportion of the year group who chose to study the GCSE course was broadly in line with the national average. More than three-quarters of the pupils obtained grades A*-C compared with just over half the candidates nationally. All the pupils obtained at least a grade G. The results of the boys and the girls were broadly similar. These results indicate a very good rate of progress between the ages of 14 and 16.

262. Standards at the age of 14 are above those that pupils are expected to reach nationally. Pupils of all levels of prior attainment make good progress in lessons and over time. Those with special education needs make very good progress, and gain much from their full involvement in team activities. In volleyball, the boys show consistently good levels of serving, and in two lessons they made very good progress in developing their skills. Boys and girls have good skills in both field and track events. Many pupils throw the javelin and putt the shot well, with a majority showing good consistency. Boys make very good progress in baton changing. By trial and error they decide which system of exchange to use in order to improve their performance. They show good understanding of the technical aspects of this event. The girls progress well in performing forehand ground strokes in tennis. .
263. Because pupils in Year 11 were on study leave at the time of the inspection and those in Year 10 were involved in school examinations there was limited evidence to confirm the standards of pupils' practical skills at the age of 16. In the three Year 10 lessons seen, standards were good and occasionally very good. The boys show command of basic skills in volleyball, playing the game well and using tactics appropriately. Better players consistently perform more advanced skills, such as the over arm and windmill serves and the spike. In theory-related practical lessons, pupils make very good progress in understanding concepts, such as the necessity of feedback in learning motor skills. Standards of written work in the GCSE course are very good, and an important reason why so many of the pupils do well and make very good progress. Pupils write well. They produce very good extended writing and show very good note-taking skills. Handwriting, spelling and punctuation are very good and pupils often word-process their homework. They demonstrate very good oral skills when reporting their findings from practical experiments or providing feedback on performance work.
264. Teaching is very good. It was good or better in all lessons seen, and very good in nearly three-quarters of lessons. A major strength, and an important reason why pupils make very good progress by the age of 16, is the excellent assessment procedures. These support, extremely well, the rigorous monitoring of progress. All the teachers are specialist trained and have a very good level of subject knowledge. Expectations are very good and the very good management of pupils establishes very good relationships. Personal development is well promoted because there many opportunities within the well-planned teaching for pupils to show self-discipline and work in teams. Levels of participation are high, and nearly all pupils bring the appropriate kit to lessons. These features establish a strong purposefulness, as well as an atmosphere of enjoyment and enthusiasm, that promotes good learning, fosters positive attitudes and results in a keenness to take part.
265. A strong feature of the good teaching methods is the well-conducted demonstrations. These very clearly show pupils how they might improve, to reach the expected standard. In this way, the most important characteristics of the each skill is emphasised, and consequently pupils are encouraged to concentrate on the specific things that will help them to improve their skills. Objectives are shared fully at the start of lessons so that pupils know what they are going to learn and this helps to maintain their interest and concentration. The very good arrangements for homework are a strong feature of the GCSE course.
266. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. GCSE results have risen considerably, from below the national average to well above. Standards of written work are now very good. The much-improved facilities include the provision of an astro-turf pitch, an updated fitness suite and the enclosure of the main outside courts. Improvements in the timetabling of the subject in Years 10 and 11 have resulted in the better planning of provision.

267. Leadership and management are excellent. Team work is of a very high order and results in a very strong commitment to raising standards. Extra-curricular provision is very good. There are activities every lunchtime and after school. Teams and individual pupils do well at city, and even national, levels, particularly in athletics and soccer. Netball teams do well at district level. A high proportion of pupils, boys, girls and those with special educational needs, take part in team games. Procedures to monitor pupils' progress are excellent. Improvement planning is very thorough and defines priorities for action very well. ICT is used very well and there is a very high level of skill in its application by more recently appointed members of the department. Displays throughout the department are excellent. They range from the informative or administrative to those which celebrate pupils' achievements, both as individuals and as members of teams

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

268. Standards are satisfactory. They are broadly in line the expectations of the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus at the age of 14. Some pupils achieve higher standards than this. Overall pupils make good progress.

269. At the age of 16 almost all pupils take the GCSE short course examination – a substantial improvement since the previous inspection. In 2000, the results were very good. Just over two-thirds of the pupils gained grades A* to C. Nearly a third of them obtained the highest grades A*-A. The examination results at the age of 16 and the standards reached at the age of 14 both indicate a good level of achievement and a good degree of progress. Higher-attaining pupils study the full GCSE course in extra time. There is no significant difference in performance between the boys and girls and most pupils gained the grades that their teachers expected of them. Standards have risen since the previous inspection, and reflect the very good teaching in the department.

270. At the age of 14 most pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the main beliefs and practices of Christianity and other major world religions, although they are sometimes uncertain when explaining what they have learned from these religions in the light of their own experience. Higher-attaining pupils write at considerable length and their work is neatly and attractively presented. A lengthy project on Judaism included a very good analysis of signs, symbols, food, clothes and festivals. It indicated a thorough understanding of Judaism through writing, illustrations, research and the use of ICT.

271. Year 11 pupils were involved in study leave at home during the inspection week and there was no work seen. It is not therefore possible to make a valid evaluation of standards at the age of 16. Standards in the current Year 10 are broadly in line with expectations. Pupils have a good knowledge of different religions and moral viewpoints on issues such as 'Death and Dying'. In work seen, there were examples of pupils expressing their thoughts through extended writing. Many pupils show a good level of understanding when comparing the viewpoint of the major religions on money and happiness. In one excellent response, the pupil reached the conclusion that you can be a millionaire and still not be able to find happiness.

272. The quality of teaching is very good. It was possible to see only a small number of lessons during the week of the inspection. Teaching was good or better in four of the five lessons. On two occasions it was excellent. The quality of pupils' written work, completed prior to the inspection, indicates that they learn very well in Years 10 and 11. Class work and homework are both planned very well and teachers use their very good subject knowledge very effectively to ensure that many pupils achieve a high level of understanding. There were many strong features in all the teaching seen. In

the best lessons, aims were made clear and returned to at the end of the lesson so that pupils could evaluate what they had learned. Similarly, in the best lessons, the teacher was able to relate the subject matter to pupils' own experiences, and draw out the spiritual and moral implications. This helped pupils to explore aspects of belief in depth and relate them to their own personal values, rather than just remaining on the factual level.

273. Many pupils of all levels of prior attainment achieve well and make good progress because the very good relationships in lessons promote a good degree of confidence and trust. Consequently, many pupils speak openly and also listen carefully and respectfully to each other. This was a particularly strong feature in the learning of higher-attaining pupils. In lessons where there is group work, pupils work collaboratively and this helps them to develop good social skills, independence and confidence. The subject matter in many lessons supports very well their moral, cultural and spiritual development.
274. Question and answer sessions are conducted well, to consolidate learning and to help pupils think more deeply about ideas and values. Teachers know their pupils well, and are aware of all those with special needs, including the gifted and talented. There is a wide range of religious artefacts in the department and one computer in each room. These resources are well used.
275. Suitable homework is set and used to good effect in most lessons. Marking is thorough and encouraging. For example, all Year 9 pupils had completed a homework on the debate for and against the existence of God. Most pupils had thought very carefully and produced a good standard of work using newspaper cuttings, cartoons, posters and extended writing.
276. The response, behaviour and attitudes of pupils are very good in all years. Pupils are always well-behaved, interested and engaged. This is a reflection of skilled teaching. Teachers have the respect of pupils and classroom management skills are excellent in all lessons. The personal development of pupils is well provided for in this subject. Opportunities for moral development are particularly good, as is their education about cultural diversity and the need for mutual respect for those different from themselves.
277. Leadership and management are very good. As a result there has been very good progress since the last inspection. Standards are higher in all years than at the time of the previous inspection. The quality of learning has improved and pupils' understanding is now more fully developed. Schemes of work are regularly updated and the level of resources has improved.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION [PSHE]

278. The school makes satisfactory provision overall for PSHE. It is very good in Years 10 and 11.
279. As at the time of the previous inspection, the formal programme of lessons in PSHE starts in Year 9. Within registration time, once a week, there is only a brief opportunity to teach PSHE in Years 7 and 8. The induction to school is well covered in Year 7 but the coverage of topics for the remainder of the year currently lacks coherence. The Year 8 'Challenge' is well planned. It provides an activity focus for personal development, setting pupils targets to develop their oral, physical, and creative skills, and to take part in a community service project. The opportunities for pupils of all levels of prior attainment, including those with special educational needs, to make decisions and plan what they will do, are a strong feature of these arrangements. There are also many planned opportunities to support pupils' personal and social development in drama. Sex education is taught in science, with planned opportunities to discuss the moral aspects of relationships in Year 9 of the PSHE course. This is well taught by a team of specialists in the context of health education and personal responsibility, and includes drugs education and aspects of citizenship.
280. Careers education and preparation for work experience are well taught in Years 10 and 11, and issues concerning the use of leisure and money management help pupils to prepare for adult life. Effective involvement of outside agencies, including a theatre group, enriches the curriculum. Personal development is also promoted through a fortnight's work experience in Year 10, and the opportunity for all pupils in Year 11 to do community service on placements one afternoon a week for half a term. The high priority placed on the personal and social development of its pupils is reflected in the school policy to award certificates for PSHE as part of pupils' record of achievement.