

# INSPECTION REPORT

**THOMAS, LORD AUDLEY SCHOOL**

COLCHESTER

LEA area: ESSEX

Unique reference number: 115207

Headteacher: Mr R Brewster

Reporting inspector: W Keast  
1522

Dates of inspection: 8<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> January 2001

Inspection number: 186558

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11-16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Monkwick Avenue  
Colchester  
Essex

Postcode: CO2 8NJ

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr B Littlewood

Date of previous inspection: 8-19 January 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1522	W Keast	Registered inspector		The school's results and achievements. How well are pupils taught?
19798	J O'Keefe	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development. How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
24142	S McConville	Team inspector	English Drama English as an additional language	
1292	V Foster	Team inspector	Mathematics	
29742	P Fyans	Team inspector	Science	
23880	O Hall	Team inspector	Art and design Special educational needs	
2495	B Munden	Team inspector	Design and technology	
25073	S Jordan	Team inspector	Geography History Equal opportunities	
10817	G Rayner	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	How well does the school care for its pupils?
4617	R Fox	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
11746	R Coulthard	Team inspector	Music Religious education	How well is the school led and managed?
3726	M Bean	Team inspector	Physical education	
19122	A Hope	Team inspector	Visually impaired unit	

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Thomas, Lord Audley is a mixed comprehensive school on the southern edge of Colchester. It has 980 pupils, which is about the same as most secondary schools. The school has a 10 place unit for visually impaired pupils. There are 26.3 per cent of the pupils on the special educational needs register. Including the pupils in the unit, 2.75 per cent of the pupils have statements of special educational needs - most of these are for learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties. These figures are broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils (17.4 per cent) entitled to a free school meal is broadly in line with the national average. A very small number of pupils comes from homes where English is an additional language and one of these pupils is at an early stage of speaking English. The small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds reflects the nature of the area. The majority of pupils come from an area where there is some social and economic deprivation. Pupils come to the school with attainment which is below the national average as indicated by the national testing at the end of Year 6 and in the standardised testing which the school carries out early in Year 7.

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

This is an effective school. The overall standards reached by pupils are comparable with the national average, and above average in comparison with similar schools. Despite a dip in 2000, the rising trend in results, over the last five years, has been at least in line with the national trend. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall, with much that is good or better. The leadership and management provided by the governors, headteacher and teachers is satisfactory. The school provides sound value for money.

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

- works collaboratively to minimise the impact of staffing difficulties
- achieves creditable standards overall and particularly in art and religious education
- makes very good provision for visually impaired pupils
- provides a good standard of accommodation and learning resources
- assesses, monitors and supports pupils' attainment and progress well
- provides good careers education and opportunities for pupils' cultural development

#### **What could be improved**

- the current underachievement in English in Years 7-9, and in science and mathematics in Years 10 and 11
- the effectiveness of the teaching and developing of literacy skills
- the classroom support available for wide ability and lower attaining groups
- the curriculum balance in Years 10 and 11
- attendance rates and pupils' attitudes to learning

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

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

The school was last inspected in January 1996. Improvement since then has been satisfactory. Since that inspection, results at both key stages have increased. Following the inspection, action was taken on all the key issues raised in the report. Clear progress has been made on the monitoring of pupil progress, the development of information and communication technology, and increasing the opportunities for pupils' spiritual development. The statutory requirement for religious education in Key Stage 4 is now met. The school has continued to work to improve pupils' attendance, foster positive attitudes to learning and, within an overall focus on raising achievement, address the difference

between that of boys and girls. The school still does not meet the statutory requirement for collective worship. Staffing problems have slowed progress in the last twelve months.

## STANDARDS

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

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

Results overall, in 2000, in the end of Year 9 national testing were in line with the national average and well above average in comparison with similar schools. Results in English were above, in mathematics were in line and in science were below, the respective national averages. Girls and boys performed equally well. The trend over the last five years is similar to the national trend. At GCSE, the good comparisons based upon the average point score result from the higher than usual number of subjects that all pupils enter. The proportion of pupils who achieved five or more grades A\*-C is below the national average while the proportions achieving five or more grades A\*-G and achieving at least one grade A\*-G, are well above. Whilst, in most subjects, the proportion of pupils who achieve grades A\*-C is significantly below the national average, a higher proportion of the year group are entered. Results in art are similar to the national average. Those in religious education are above the expectations of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. At GCSE, the trend over the last five years is above the national trend. Overall, girls outperformed boys to a similar extent as they do nationally.

The school did not meet its target for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\*-C but was very close to its average point score target and exceeded its target for the proportion of pupils gaining at least one grade A\*-G. Significantly higher targets have been set for 2001.

The evidence from the inspection is that standards in Year 9 are at national expectation in most subjects. They are above in religious education and below in English, music and drama. Standards are below national expectation, in Year 11, in English, mathematics, science, French and drama, and well below in German. They are above in art and well above in religious education. In other subjects, standards are at nationally expected levels. Overall, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. It is satisfactory or better, in most subjects, in both key stages. There is underachievement in English in the first three years and in mathematics and science in the examination years.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Unsatisfactory, particularly towards learning by a minority in all years.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Satisfactory. Generally good in and out of the classroom but marred by some instances of poor behaviour in a few lessons.
Personal development and	Satisfactory. Relationships are often good. Limited opportunities to take



relationships	responsibility.
Attendance	Unsatisfactory. Poor attendance has an adverse effect on these pupils' attainment.

Most pupils enjoying coming to school and are very positive in their response. The attitudes to learning of a minority not only affects the progress that they make in their work but has an adverse impact upon others in their classes. The irregular attendance of a minority disrupts the learning of the majority because teachers have to spend time helping them make up the work they have missed. To this extent, pupils are unaware of the impact of their actions on others. Pupils do not feel that bullying is a problem. Instances are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

### TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years
Lessons seen overall 151	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

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

Teaching was satisfactory or better in 94 per cent of lessons and was very good or better in 23 per cent. It was unsatisfactory or poor in six per cent of lessons. There was no significant difference between the key stages. Teaching in English, mathematics and science is satisfactory. It is satisfactory, or better, in all subjects. It is most effective in art, design and technology, religious education and drama. The strengths of the teaching lie in teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of examination requirements, the effectiveness of their planning and their management of pupils. Comparative weaknesses are the variability within a subject and the weaker behavioural management strategies of some inexperienced teachers. The majority of pupils concentrate well, work hard to increase their knowledge, and develop their skills. Their learning is satisfactory. The learning of a minority of pupils is adversely affected by their own attitudes and responses.

Skills of numeracy are satisfactorily taught in mathematics and their use is developed in other subjects of the curriculum. The teaching of literacy skills is currently unsatisfactory because newly introduced strategies have not yet had time to make their impact.

The needs of the visually impaired pupils are met very well. The learning activities base effectively supports those who might otherwise have been excluded, those returning from longer absences and those who, for whatever reason, are experiencing short term learning problems.

### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. Enhanced, in the early years, by drama and a second language. Lacking, in the examination years, any vocational or work related courses. Careers education is good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory. They are well supported when withdrawn for small group work but receive limited support within mainstream teaching.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual,	Satisfactory. Provision for cultural development is good. Provision for spiritual development has improved and is now satisfactory. The

moral, social and cultural, development	statutory requirement for collective worship is not met.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Satisfactory. Good procedures for assessing attainment, and monitoring and supporting progress and personal development.

Parents are generally satisfied with the school, the values it promotes and the education their children receive. They are kept well-informed about their children's progress and other school events and are consulted over proposed changes.

The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is good provision for the more able pupil but, for lower attaining pupils, the examination load is overly challenging. A review is underway. Use has been made of new opportunities to modify the curriculum for a small number of pupils in these years but statutory procedures have not been followed.

Extra curricular activities cover a wide range. A particular strength is in the number of pupils involved in foreign visits and exchanges. Some interest clubs flourish but staffing changes have temporarily halted others. Subject support is offered but pupil response is low.

Good counselling is provided when needed. Bullying is effectively dealt with. Good mentoring promotes achievement.

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

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Satisfactory. Headteacher strongly promotes the school's values. Coping well with present difficulties. Those with new or temporary responsibilities fulfilling their duties well.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactorily. Statutory duties fulfilled and a clear knowledge of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Unsatisfactory. Good monitoring procedures, currently reduced, but not sufficiently rigorous.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory. Planning priorities are supported through financial planning.

The provision of suitably qualified and experienced staff to meet the needs of the curriculum is unsatisfactory. The adequacy of accommodation and of learning resources is good.

Management at departmental level is at least satisfactory and often good. There is a shared commitment to raise standards. Heads of department currently have little time to carry out their monitoring. Governors are very supportive, question planned developments but are insufficiently involved in planning the school's long-term development. Good use is made of the new technology for record keeping and routine tasks.

A recent audit report confirmed the good standard of financial management. The governors make good use of the principles of best value within the model financial regulations provided by Essex County Council.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that pupils are expected to work hard and achieve their best</li> <li>• that they feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or concerns</li> <li>• that they feel well informed about progress</li> <li>• that children make good progress</li> <li>• that the school helps their children to mature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the quantity and the marking of homework</li> <li>• behaviour</li> <li>• the extent to which the school works with them</li> <li>• the range of extra-curricular activities</li> </ul>

The inspectors would agree with parents' views of school expectations, approachability and provision of information. They believe that, while progress is certainly satisfactory, there is opportunity for improvement in this and in opportunities for pupils to take and show responsibility. They would agree with parents that there is some inconsistency in the use and marking of homework. The behaviour of a minority does impact on the learning of others although the school, as a whole, provides a safe and supportive environment. In the inspectors' view, the school does work closely with parents and the range of activities is wide. Although some interest clubs no longer run due to staffing issues, opportunities provided for subject support often receive little support.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

- 1 In this report, the term 'standards' refers to pupils' attainment relative to some clear benchmark, such as National Curriculum levels, or descriptions, at the end of a key stage. 'Above average' standards, for example, means that a higher proportion of pupils of a particular age are succeeding at or beyond the level set in the majority of schools. 'Achievement' on the other hand, reflects the accomplishment of pupils in relation to what you would expect of these particular pupils. The pupils' prior attainment, what they can already do, is the reference point for pupils' achievement. Similar schools refers to those schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to a free school meal.
- 2 The attainment of pupils when they come to the school, as shown by their results in the national testing at the end of Year 6 and by the analysis of testing provided by the Local Education Authority, is below the national average. The attainment on entry, of the cohort of pupils who completed their GCSE examinations in 2000, was lower than preceding or following groups of pupils.
- 3 Results, in 2000, of Key Stage 3 national testing were close to the national average and were well above average in comparison with similar schools. Results in English were above, in mathematics were in line and in science were below the respective the national average. Boys and girls performed equally well. On average, over the last three years, girls have performed slightly better than boys, particularly in English. The school trend, over the last five years, is in line with the national trend. This represents good achievement.
- 4 In 2000, the proportion of pupils who gained five or more grades A\*-C (36.0 per cent) in the GCSE examinations was below the national average and below average in comparison with similar schools. This is a drop from the previous two years. The proportion of pupils who gained five or more grades A\*-G (98 per cent) and the proportion of pupils who gained at least one grade A\*-G (100 per cent) were each well above the corresponding national average and were very high in comparison with similar schools. Based upon the average point score per pupil, results were in line with the national average and above average in comparison with similar schools. Girls performed better than boys to a similar extent as they did nationally. On average, over the last three years, results have been above the national average and the school trend, over the last five years, has been above the national trend.
- 5 The majority of pupils are entered for ten full GCSE subjects as well as a GCSE short course in religious education. This is generally more than in most secondary schools and is why the average point score per pupil is higher and, using this measure, comparisons are more favourable. It also means that a greater proportion of pupils, than is the case nationally, is entered in each subject. This, in turn, means that the proportion of those entered who gain the higher grades is likely to be below the similar figure nationally. Subject by subject, the proportion of pupils who gained grades A\*-C was significantly below the national average for nearly all subjects. Results in religious education were significantly above and those in art and physical education were in line. The average point score, of those entered in each subject, was generally closer to the national average and represented between a half and a full grade difference. Generally, pupils' average point score in each subject was close to that gained by pupils who had achieved the same average score in the national Key Stage 3 testing in 1998. Nevertheless, pupils in this year did not achieve as well as pupils in the two previous years.
- 6 The school did not reach its target for the proportion of pupils who would achieve five or more grades A\*-C. It was very close to its target for the average point score per pupil and exceeded its target for

the proportion of pupils who would achieve at least one grade A\*-G. Targets for 2001 have been set which are considerably higher than those reached in 2000 and, given the staffing difficulties encountered since these were set, are likely to prove over-ambitious.

- 7 From scrutiny of work and classroom observation, overall standards being demonstrated in Year 9 are in line with, and in Year 11 are below, those expected of pupils of these ages. In Year 9, standards in English are below national expectation while in mathematics and science they are in line. In Year 11 they are below national expectation in all three subjects. Achievement in English is unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3 but is satisfactory in Key Stage 4. In Key Stage 3, achievement in mathematics is good and in science is satisfactory but is unsatisfactory in both subjects in Key Stage 4.
- 8 In other subjects in the curriculum, standards in Year 9 are in line with national expectation in most, above in religious education and below in music and drama. In Year 11, standards are in line with national expectation in history, geography, design and technology, music and physical education. They are above in art and well above in religious education. They are below in French and drama and well below in German. Nevertheless, this represents satisfactory achievement in most subjects at both key stages. In Key Stage 3, achievement is good in art, geography, history, German and religious education and, in Key Stage 4, is good in music and very good in art and religious education.
- 9 Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall at both key stages. Pupils who individually attend the learning activity base to rebuild their confidence, catch up on missed work or have emotional or behavioural problems, make good progress. In art, pupils with special needs achieve high standards at GCSE with many achieving Grade C. Pupils, withdrawn in small groups for literacy enhancement, including reading, are making variable progress. Year 7 pupils, on the lower stages of the special needs register, withdrawn for English, consolidate knowledge on nouns and adjectives satisfactorily. However, their very poor reading skills inhibit progress in word building, and the opportunity to experience any new learning is limited. A group of Year 8 pupils display good speaking and listening skills when they discuss a poem but, progress is slower than expected, for example in highlighting rhyming words, because pupils have difficulty in reading and understanding the task. At Key Stage 4, in lessons observed, pupils take part in role-play to encourage collaborative skills and many make good progress in discussion-based activities. However, standards in planning, organisation and presentation in written work are low, resulting in lower than average achievement overall. Girls make more consistent progress than boys because they are better motivated. Pupils with statements and those on Stage 3 of the register are making satisfactory progress towards the set targets.
- 10 Standards in reading and writing across the curriculum are below average. The most recent initiatives to improve these basic skills amongst the weakest pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 are too new to be evaluated. There is a significant minority whose skills are too weak to manage competently in all their subjects. There is evidence that reading standards are improving as a result of intensive reading programmes, reading in tutor time and the good use of new literacy materials. Pupils who receive extra support make good progress.
- 11 Writing standards are marred by constant errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar which persist for many pupils throughout the school. Handwriting and presentation are frequently careless. The structuring of writing and directing it for different purposes is difficult for many pupils. Good frameworks for written work are offered to pupils in art and science. Drafting, used well in history enquiry work for example, raises standards by helping pupils plan, edit and refine their writing.
- 12 Standards of numeracy are satisfactory. In lessons which start with a mental mathematics activity pupils reinforce and extend their numeracy skills. For example, Year 9 pupils in a low ability set could

add two 2-digit numbers in their head and explain their strategies. Where knowledge of number bonds is weak this slows down the rate of working. Pupils are able to display and interpret data, sometimes with the aid of a computer. They make estimates, with varying degrees of success. In Year 8, pupils in a middle ability set were able to find approximate answers to long multiplication sums, but pupils in a low ability set had difficulty in making sensible estimates of percentages of given quantities. Pupils use graphs in subjects such as design and technology, science and geography but overall the opportunities for them to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum are limited.

- 13 Overall, standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are generally in line with national expectations at the end of Key Stage 3. By the end of Key Stage 4, overall standards are not yet consistently in line with national expectations however, as opportunities across the curriculum are yet to develop fully. Pupils' work is best when they use computers to present and organise information, when for example, editing and correcting prose in English lessons. In this aspect, their standards are in line with expectations. Opportunities are developing in other aspects, for example, in writing control programs, or creating scattergraphs using spreadsheets. When they occur, pupils reach expected standards in these activities. Development is being supported by the appointment of a co-ordinator and the inclusion of ICT opportunities in subject schemes of work.

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

- 14 Overall, pupils' attitudes to their work are unsatisfactory. In many lessons, particularly where teaching is good, pupils behave well and work hard. This was most apparent in Key Stage 3. However, in many lessons, particularly in Key Stage 4, a significant minority of pupils lack motivation, are noisy and treat teachers and each other with disrespect. These pupils show little understanding of the effect of their actions on others. Many pupils spoken to, who were keen to learn, complained that their lessons are often disrupted by this minority which restricts everyone's progress. Parents also expressed their concerns over some behaviour in the school. In art, and often in religious education, however, pupils respond very well, are attentive and keen to learn. Lunchtimes are well organised and orderly, with pupils queuing appropriately and sitting in friendship groups. In assemblies, pupils arrive quickly and quietly, listening politely to staff. Most pupils move around the school sensibly although some are very noisy. Pupils do not consider bullying to be a big problem in the school and are confident that staff will deal with it effectively when it occurs. During one lesson, however, a bullying incident was observed which caused considerable distress to the pupil concerned.
- 15 Relationships are satisfactory overall in the school, and are good or very good in drama, mathematics, science and art. In lessons where teaching is less effective, behaviour and attitudes deteriorate, affecting relationships between staff and pupils. There are supportive relationships between form tutors and their pupils. When given the opportunity to take responsibility and show initiative, pupils respond well. For example, in Year 11, student assistants help the newly arrived Year 7 pupils with their literacy.
- 16 Pupils with special education needs display satisfactory attitudes in the learning support area. Where pupils are well supported in mainstream lessons, they show confident attitudes. Pupils withdrawn for teaching and support at Key Stage 3 behave well, though they lack motivation and enthusiasm, at times, because activities are over-directed by the teacher. In Key Stage 4, attitudes to work in the key skills and alternative course, in place of modern languages, are overall unsatisfactory. A significant few boys display poor behaviour and this is having a detrimental affect in learning and progress overall.
- 17 Attendance in the school has deteriorated since the last inspection and is now unsatisfactory, with levels continuing to fall. Both authorised absences and unauthorised absences are above the national average. A significant minority of pupils have erratic attendance records. Pupils interviewed during

the inspection complained that these frequent absentees are restricting their progress when, on their return, lessons are delayed as teachers have to brief them on work missed. A newly established electronic registration system enables staff to check where pupils are at every lesson, but it is too early for this to have had any impact on pupils' attendance figures.

- 18 Registers are taken promptly and efficiently at the beginning of each lesson. Most pupils arrive at school on time, although some who travel long distances sometimes have problems with their buses being delayed.

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

- 19 The overall quality of teaching in both key stages is satisfactory. Just over forty per cent of the teaching observed was satisfactory and approximately half the teaching observed was good or better. Nearly one quarter was very good or excellent. Six per cent of the teaching was unsatisfactory or poor. Pupils' learning related closely to the quality of teaching they experienced. High quality teaching led to good learning taking place as pupils gained new knowledge, applied themselves to their work, and practised their skills and understanding in new and familiar contexts. Where teaching was satisfactory overall, the learning of a minority of pupils in middle and lower sets was reduced by these pupils' poor attitudes to work.
- 20 The various features which contribute to the quality of teaching are at least satisfactory. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject are generally good and this shows through the clear explanations that are given, in many subjects, and in good lesson planning. This clear start to lessons ensures that pupils know what they are expected to learn and the careful planning ensures that the work they are given moves their learning on from the knowledge and skills they already have. Perceptive questioning, in many subjects, challenges pupils to justify and explain their understanding and identifies and clarifies any misunderstanding.
- 21 The majority of teachers use a range of strategies to engage the pupils interest and to best present different aspects of their subject. For example, whole-class instruction for a new method in mathematics, small group discussion on a piece of text in English or individually supported work on computers. The length of a double period is, for some pupils, too long and teachers do not always have sufficient variation in activities to maintain their interest and involvement. Homework is used to support learning with both specific tasks being set as well as more open research and reading ones. As some parents suggested, there is too great a variation in the rigour with which these tasks are marked.
- 22 The management of pupils is, overall, good, although a significant minority of pupils present a challenge both in terms of their motivation and applying themselves to their work. The majority of pupils concentrate on their work, work steadily, make satisfactory advances in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Teachers' expectations, of what pupils can and should do, are appropriate and lessons progress at a steady pace.
- 23 Teaching was unsatisfactory when pupils made little or no progress. This was often linked to unsatisfactory behaviour. Learning was insufficient when the task given was inappropriately low, when the task was not understood because explanations were not clear, or when a teacher's own subject knowledge was insufficient to provide challenge to the pupils. On occasion, these shortcomings contributed to a breakdown in control. In a very few lessons, where work had been well planned, pupils took advantage of the teacher's inexperience or weak strategies for behaviour management and, again, this led to a breakdown in control. The instances of unsatisfactory teaching occurred in several subjects.

- 24 Teaching in English is satisfactory, with much that is good. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was the result of inexperience in handling difficult behaviour and the lack of classroom support. In the best teaching, clear and shared learning outcomes focus pupils' efforts and strategies are chosen which help pupils succeed. In Key Stage 3, the unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour of a significant minority of pupils results in unsatisfactory learning overall. Learning in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. In mathematics, teaching is satisfactory. Clear explanations, effective planning and well used homework contribute to sound learning in both key stages. Pupils learn to work systematically and, generally, maintain concentration. In science, teaching is satisfactory. Well planned lessons and good recording of attainment, understood by pupils, result in satisfactory learning at both key stages. Pupils are good at learning facts and satisfactorily develop their practical skills. In Key Stage 4, the extent to which average and lower attaining pupils take responsibility for their own learning is unsatisfactory, with pupils going off-task unless tightly controlled. In all three subjects the quality of teaching varies widely.
- 25 Teaching, and the subsequent learning, in the other subjects of the curriculum, are at least satisfactory.
- 26 In art, teaching is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4. Very good relationships, a shared recognition of the criteria for success and opportunities, particularly in Key stage 4, for independent work result in good learning by the younger pupils and very good by the older ones. Good teaching leads to good learning in design and technology. Very good teacher knowledge and understanding result in well-planned lessons with high quality demonstrations. Regular assessment and supportive feedback help pupils to learn and to improve their standards. Teaching in geography is satisfactory and pupils' learning is sound. Good management of pupils allows teachers to move around the class, supporting individuals. The teaching helps pupils make good progress in developing their literacy skills. A limited range of strategies is used and assessment does not ensure that all pupils are aware of their own standard.
- 27 Teaching, and pupils' learning, in history are good. High expectations, thorough preparation, clear explanations, skilful questioning and very good assessment procedures ensures pupils understand what they are taught and how they can raise their standards. Good teaching in ICT leads to good learning. Careful planning results in new work building on a pupil's previous understanding. Good, on-going assessment identifies any misunderstandings and informs what is taught next. Teaching in French and German is satisfactory, and is good in German, in Key Stage 3. Teachers have a good subject knowledge and provide good role models for the spoken language. A variety of activities, in most lessons, develops pupils' listening, speaking and writing skills well. The teaching in Key Stage 3 German was particularly effective because of the pupils' response to the teachers' input.
- 28 Teaching in drama is good. Good structure to the lessons ensures that the time available is most effectively used, and that pupils understand what they have learnt. Learning is good in Key Stage 3, where pupils respond with greater commitment, and satisfactory in Key Stage 4. In music, teaching is variable, but satisfactory overall, in Key Stage 3. It is good in Key stage 4. Careful planning makes use of good, well organised resources. Time is used well to provide a brisk pace of working. Learning is sound in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4.
- 29 Teaching and learning, in physical education, are satisfactory. Teachers are committed and enthusiastic but the teaching is inconsistent across the department. Good teaching combined the sharing of intentions, thorough warm-up routines leading into the activity, a brisk pace with progressive practices, and the evaluation of learning at the end. Such teaching engaged the pupils from the start. Too often, teaching showed only some of these features. In religious education, teaching is good in Key Stage 3, and very good in Key Stage 4. Good challenge, brisk pace, a good range of methods and



a learning environment in which supported, independent working is encouraged, lead to pupils acquiring knowledge and developing skills in research and evaluation. Learning is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4.

- 30 The teaching and development of literacy are, currently, unsatisfactory. The school has developed a detailed literacy policy and staff training has made teachers more aware of the issues. All departments promote the use of correct vocabulary special to the subject. A working group exists to promote more subject involvement. However, this is a developing area where currently there are inconsistencies in teacher expectation and approach. Pupils with very low reading scores have limited opportunity to improve their reading skills as the literacy programme is focused on writing, grammar and comprehension and does not always meet their immediate needs. Information technology programs, to improve reading spelling and comprehension, are not part of the schemes of work. Planning, between the English and learning support departments, for literacy in Year 7, is still at a developmental stage. This is because of the recent management changes in the special needs area and insufficient English teaching expertise.
- 31 Pupils satisfactorily acquire their numeracy skills in their mathematics lessons. Planning in Year 7 is in line with the National Numeracy Strategy and a numeracy policy is in development.
- 32 The quality of teaching overall, for pupils with special needs, is satisfactory. Good relationships within the learning support area fosters a secure learning environment, for example, in the lunch-hour and the after school homework clubs and when pupils are withdrawn for small group work. Occasional weakness in this teaching occurred in the effectiveness of planning and teaching methods, for example, where activities were not sufficiently challenging and opportunities for more practically based tasks were limited. Support for pupils with statements and those with involvement in outside agencies is satisfactory. Within the subjects of the curriculum, individual education plans are inconsistently used in teachers' planning for pupils on the lower stages of the register, and their progress is insufficiently monitored. The support provision is mainly committed to the programme within the learning support base. The amount available to provide classroom support, particularly in those groups where pupils are of wide ability, is insufficient to ensure that the behavioural and learning problems of the minority do not adversely affect the learning of the majority.

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

- 33 Curriculum provision is satisfactory with strengths and a few weaknesses. The weekly teaching time, of approximately 25 and a half hours, is slightly above that of most schools and there are plans to increase it a little more.
- 34 The curriculum, in Key Stage 3, meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and is broadened by the addition of drama in each year and a second foreign language, for most, from Year 8. The amount of time for each subject is generally sufficient and similar to the national pattern. The exception is art, where a single period a week provides insufficient time to develop 3-dimensional studies fully. This was identified in the previous report. However, with a period being 50 minutes long, this would be difficult to resolve because two weekly periods would be over-provision. Mathematics has good provision through the additional sets created in each year.
- 35 In Key Stage 4, pupils follow a broadly similar curriculum to that in Key Stage 3 within which they can choose which language, which humanities subject, which design and technology subject and which creative arts subject they wish to study. An additional option choice enables pupils to study a second subject from these groups or extend their curriculum with drama, information and communications

technology or physical education. All subjects lead to GCSE examinations. Additionally, pupils choose a full or short GCSE course in religious education. All pupils, therefore, study, and are expected to be examined in, ten and a half subjects. This is good provision for higher attaining pupils but, for many, it is overly challenging and adversely affects the standards they reach. The present curriculum does not include any vocational or work-related courses nor is there any other way of accrediting pupils' achievement. This is under review. Advantage has been taken of new regulations and a small group of pupils, in each of Years 10 and 11, has been dispensed from the requirement to study a language. They follow a course involving ICT and basic skills. The reduction of time allocated to mathematics is having a detrimental impact upon the standards reached.

- 36 The curriculum is well planned at subject level. Many subjects, such as religious education, geography, history, design technology, art, information and communication technology, mathematics in Year 7 and Key Stage 4 and English in Key Stage 3, have good schemes of work. Planning is less satisfactory in science and in modern foreign languages.
- 37 The quality and range of the curriculum for special needs pupils, overall, are satisfactory though there are shortcomings in the effectiveness of the literacy programme, which is at an early stage of development. In Key Stage 4, there are few opportunities for lower attaining and special needs pupils with learning and behaviour difficulties to develop effective study skills, and a significant minority in Years 10 and 11 are disillusioned because courses are insufficiently practically based.
- 38 The school makes satisfactory provision for extra-curricular activities. Strengths in the provision are the daily ICT club, the range of sporting fixtures, the regular art and design and technology workshops, the foreign visits and exchanges in which a large number of pupils are involved. Subject-specific support is provided in science for a fast track group in Year 9 and in art where there has been substantial improvement since the last inspection, with an artist in residence for pupils in Key Stage 3 and gallery visits. Other subject support, although sometimes offered, receives little response. A number of previously held activities, for example in science, mathematics and music, have stopped or been reduced due to the staffing problems.
- 39 The school makes satisfactory provision for pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE). The programme, currently under review, contains appropriate course-work on drugs education and sex education. It is effectively taught each week by form tutors, supported by appropriate schemes of work and materials. Members of the community, such as the police and the school nurse, are used well to enhance the quality of the programme and to ensure the pupils receive well qualified advice and guidance. Close liaison, between the senior staff with overall responsibility and the heads of year, ensures consistency in the quality of delivery.
- 40 Equality of opportunity is good. The school policy was re-written during 2000 after wide consultation. The resulting policy is a succinct statement that covers all relevant areas. Responsibilities are clearly identified. Setting by ability in most subjects helps in the provision of work which is best matched to pupils' needs. The learning activities base is effective in supporting access to the curriculum for those returning from long absence or who are in danger of being excluded or becoming school refusers.
- 41 The provision for careers education is very good. The careers programme begins in Year 9, where it forms part of the PSHE programme. This is complemented by industry days. Plans are developing to extend this programme into Year 8. Careers education develops well in Key Stage 4 and all Year 10 pupils benefit from a well-managed three weeks' work experience placement. During the inspection, an evening meeting for pupils about to embark on work experience and their parents, was very well attended, strongly emphasising the high priority it has in the Year 10 programme. There is close liaison

with the local careers services, and representatives from local industry provide guidance for pupils in learning to write job applications and developing interview techniques.

- 42 The school has developed good community links. Curricular extension activities take place within the local community, for example, when drama pupils give performances and art pupils create work to enhance the appearance of local shopping areas. Many of the largest local businesses make contributions to the careers curriculum and this is complemented by liaison with a local Rotary Club, to emphasise the importance of small businesses. Good links are maintained with the Army, which has a significant presence in the local area.
- 43 The school maintains sound links with partner institutions. The links with local primary schools ensure smooth transition at age 11. The school contributes to the work in these schools through, for example, drama performances. The close links with the two major further education providers leads to former pupils often returning to advise current pupils when they are considering the next stage of their education. The school is beginning to develop closer links with the local university in order to provide enhanced support for its pupils who are considering higher education.
- 44 Governors discharge their duties effectively with regard to the curriculum and statutory requirements are generally met. The school has taken the opportunity, available for the first time this year to disapply the requirements of the National Curriculum in modern foreign languages for a small group of pupils in Years 10 and 11. However, although parents are kept fully informed, the necessary procedures have not been followed. The provision for religious education, identified as an issue in the last report, now meets statutory requirements and the GCSE full and short courses are well established.
- 45 The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall, with strengths in the cultural provision. Spiritual provision was highlighted as a weakness in the previous report and staff have received training in this area since then. Evidence of this is now clear in planning although not always so apparent during lessons. In art and religious education in particular, however, this aspect is now well developed, with pupils encouraged to think and talk about appropriate issues. The school still does not meet the statutory requirement for collective worship.
- 46 Provision for pupils' moral development is satisfactory. Pupils consider moral issues and dilemmas in, for example, religious education, drama, history, geography and PSHE. In other areas of the curriculum planning for this aspect is less explicit. Assemblies often have moral themes and tutor times are used effectively to promote this aspect. For instance, in one assembly for Years 7 and 8, pupils were encouraged to reflect on new year resolutions and how they might add to peoples lives. Tutor times are well planned and most provide a calm and orderly start to the day.
- 47 Opportunities for pupils social development are provided in the good range of outings and trips, such as those to France and Germany as part of their study of modern foreign languages. The annual camp, in Key Stage 3, provides very good opportunities. When pupils are provided with opportunities to work in pairs and small groups, they generally respond well. For example, when discussing ways to complete examination coursework in mathematics. Opportunities to show initiative and take responsibility remain limited. Provision for social development is satisfactory overall.
- 48 Pupils' cultural development is fostered well. A range of visits to art galleries, theatres and museums is provided as well as visits to the school by artists, authors and musicians. Multi-cultural provision is now good with strong emphasis in art, where displays show work in the styles of artists around the world. In history and geography, lessons are carefully planned to increase pupils' awareness of other

cultures. In design and technology, good use is made of food and textile examples from around the world.

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

- 49 The school makes satisfactory provision for the care and welfare of its pupils. There are appropriate procedures for child protection and a designated member of staff. Health and safety guidelines are set out in the staff handbook and staff are aware of procedures. When a small fire was discovered during the inspection, evacuation of the school took place quickly and in an orderly manner. The school is developing a risk assessment procedure, with regular inspections and reports. Care is taken over the health and safety of pupils on work experience, with all placements being professionally assessed for this. The particular needs of pupils in the visually impaired unit are well addressed by, for example, the provision of high visibility markings on stairs and areas of glass. Pupils are well known by tutors, who stay with the same classes as they rise through the school. When necessary, counselling of pupils is good. There is, however, no regular training to update staff on child protection issues.
- 50 The monitoring of pupils' academic performance and their personal development is good. The educational support and guidance they receive is satisfactory. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are satisfactory. There is an appropriate system for referring misbehaviour to heads of department and heads of year, and the action taken is recorded and filed for future reference. Bullying is dealt with firmly but sensitively, with good counselling in a specialised unit, both for pupils who are bullied and those responsible for bullying.
- 51 There are good procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development. Target setting includes both academic and personal targets. Subject teachers, form tutors, parents and pupils work together to identify these and monitor progress. These procedures have developed quite recently and are beginning to take effect. There is a good internal mentoring scheme which is now being further improved, by enlisting the support of student mentors from the local university, for pupils identified as potential entrants to higher education.
- 52 Pupils with special educational needs are identified at Year 6 and good contacts with primary schools ensure a smooth entry to senior school. Pupils are tested in reading, spelling and comprehension in the first term of Year 7 and special needs pupils are placed on the register. There are weaknesses in the rigorous identification of pupils in Year 7 and in the effective movement of pupils on Stages 1 to 3 of the register. Support from specialist agencies is used effectively. Pupils with statements and those on Stage 3 of the register are effectively monitored and annual review assessments meet statutory requirements. Day provision, as outlined in statements of special educational need, is good.
- 53 The school has introduced a number of new initiatives to improve attendance since the last inspection. Staff now telephone the homes of absent pupils on their first day of absence, if no message has been received from parents. An electronic registration system has recently been introduced and an extra member of staff employed to oversee the scheme and make contacts with parents should any concerns arise. The school continues to benefit from strong support from the education welfare officer who visits weekly to check figures and follow up any persistent absenteeism. The school misses opportunities to stress the importance of good attendance to parents and pupils in, for instance, the school prospectus.
- 54 Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good. A well thought-out assessment policy informs the collection, recording and reporting of pupil attainment and progress. The policy is being implemented across all subjects and procedures are good in many subjects. They are very good in art, where there is also good use of pupil self-assessment. There are some weaknesses in

geography. National Curriculum levels are assigned at least once a term and in subjects, such as mathematics, the pupils know the level at which they are working, but lack of such information in modern foreign languages hinders progress. Assessment at the end of Key Stage 3, in terms of National Curriculum levels, is secure in most subjects but is over-generous in history, geography and design and technology.

- 55 The use of assessment information to guide curriculum planning is sound overall. It is used particularly effectively in history, art and religious education but its use is underdeveloped in physical education. Assessment data is appropriately used in the allocation of pupils to sets.
- 56 Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic progress are good. The termly assessments of National Curriculum levels or likely GCSE grades lead to targets, negotiated between tutor and pupil and shared with parents, and subsequent reviews of progress. Computers are increasingly being used to collate, analyse and circulate the extensive pupil data held. This school analysis is now complemented by the outcomes from a nationally standardised project to which the school subscribes. Pupils compile their National Record of Achievement to demonstrate their progress while at school. A key issue from the previous inspection, the monitoring of pupils' progress, is now being suitably addressed.

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

- 57 The school has satisfactory links with its parents. Overall, parents are happy with the education the school provides but some expressed concerns over aspects of pupils' behaviour and the marking of work. The home-school agreement is fully in place and signed by all new pupils and their parents.
- 58 A small but dedicated team of parents runs the Parent Teacher Association and regularly organises fund raising events for the school, providing useful funding for additional resources.
- 59 The school provides a satisfactory range of well produced information for parents in the form of the prospectus, letters and half termly newsletters. There are regular consultation evenings and meetings. Pupils' annual reports are well presented and provide useful information for parents on their children's progress.
- 60 Parents of pupils with special educational needs are invited to their children's progress reviews. Teachers use pupils' planners well to convey messages to parents and will telephone pupils' parents to inform them of any problems and also of any accomplishments.
- 61 Parents themselves often use the planners to pass comments to teachers. Although parental attendance is good at meetings concerning GCSE options and work experience, in general, meetings provided for parents on curriculum and other issues are not well attended.

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

- 62 At the time of the inspection, the school was experiencing difficulty in filling some teaching vacancies. The school was functioning with only one acting deputy head, following the promotion of one of the permanent post holders and the secondment of the other. Nevertheless, the management of the school was secure. The headteacher's leadership is characterised by a deep pastoral concern for the welfare of pupils and staff. He maintains a conspicuous presence around the school and strongly promotes its values. Pupils at all levels find him approachable, and confidently and informally discuss their concerns with him. Others holding acting or permanent posts at senior management level fulfil their duties well. In particular, the heads of Key Stages 3 and 4 play an effective and pivotal role in co-ordinating the

pastoral and academic organisation of the school. All staff have clear and up-to-date job descriptions. Heads of department manage their subjects at least satisfactorily. Management is good in design and technology, history, music and drama. It is very good in art and religious education. Staff have readily accepted temporary additional responsibilities to minimise the impact of staff shortages on pupils' progress, and to compensate for short-term gaps in the management team. Overall, the management of the school is satisfactory.

- 63 There has been considerable disruption to management in the learning support department and organisation has suffered. However, the present co-ordinator has good systems in place and the special needs team share the commitment to succeed. The weaknesses observed were mainly in the limited access for the learning support co-ordinator to attend regular senior staff meetings. Staff knowledge about the recent changes within the special needs area is limited and there is insufficient internal staff development on the use of pupils' individual education plans to plan work and set subject specific targets.
- 64 The school has a worthwhile overriding aim, implicit in all its work, to promote the personal and academic development of all pupils. There are comprehensive and wide-ranging objectives covering all areas of development. These now include promoting a spiritual element in pupils' daily lives, which was an omission at the time of the previous inspection. The school's concern for constantly raising standards of teaching and learning is reflected in its everyday work and organisation, for example, in the detailed analyses of examination results. However, the aims of the school are not published in the staff handbook this year.
- 65 There have been problems in appointing a full complement to the governing body recently, and there are still two vacancies. Governors carry out their statutory duties satisfactorily, although they have not ensured that an act of worship is provided daily for all pupils nor have they recently circulated the school's aims to parents. Governors have a satisfactory knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are kept well informed by the head and receive occasional presentations from staff about educational developments. There is a written report from each department, at the full meeting each term. Governors occasionally visit lessons, but they are not able to carry out a regular schedule of visits during the school day and they are not linked with individual departments. This limits their effectiveness as critical friends. However, governors are involved in the rolling programme of departmental reviews which the senior management team carries out. The governors trust and rely heavily on the professional judgement of the headteacher, particularly in respect of the curriculum. They question planned developments but do not themselves make an adequate contribution to planning the school's long-term development. Governors support school events well and their overall contribution to the running of the school is satisfactory.
- 66 Procedures for evaluating and improving teaching are unsatisfactory. The programme of reviews by the senior management team operates on a two-year cycle, but subsequent target-setting and its monitoring lack rigour. The effectiveness of these procedures, and the impact of line management on individual departments, have been significantly impaired by recent staff changes. Monitoring of planning, teaching and marking is carried out regularly in some departments, notably in physical education, history and religious education, but there is inadequate time for all heads of department to carry this out formally. Plans for the reviewing of teaching staff in connection with the performance management of staff are well advanced. Appropriate training has taken place and the system is ready for implementing.
- 67 The school's plans for development are satisfactory. Short and medium term aims are appropriate. They include the current bid to attain language college status. There are wide-ranging, whole-school initiatives to raise standards in reading, writing and spelling, and to establish a positive book culture

amongst pupils. The development of ICT across the school is the other major academic focus. There are useful initiatives on behaviour, attendance and the teaching of citizenship, as well as for the professional development of staff and the further training of governors. Improving standards of teaching and learning is a continuing priority, but the school does not have a specific and strategic plan for its longer-term development, which is unsatisfactory. Criteria for measuring the success of some developments are vague, and the desired impact on pupils' learning is insufficiently spelt out. Plans for the development of individual subjects are relevant and realistic but the annual planning cycle does not enable departmental and whole-school priorities to be fully co-ordinated.

- 68 Despite staffing difficulties, the school is making satisfactory progress towards its stated targets. Over recent years, the school has raised its attainment annually, except for a dip in GCSE results in 2000. The use of ICT is being significantly extended over most areas of the curriculum. An electronic system of registration has been introduced as a means of raising levels of attendance. Staff who are keen to further their careers are strongly supported in their professional development and there is a positive ethos towards continued improvements in teaching and learning. There is a good sense of common purpose and the school has, at present, a satisfactory capacity for developing further.
- 69 The governing body has a satisfactory grasp of finance and monitors the school budget monthly. Governors work closely with the headteacher and the school finance officer to ensure that financial resources are used to support the educational directions of the school. A good standard of financial management was evident from the 1999 audit report, supported by effective use of the computerised record keeping system. Available resources are efficiently used and grants received by the school are used for their specified purpose. The governors and headteacher make good use of the best value principle within the model financial regulations provided by Essex County Council.
- 70 The provision of teaching staff, for the needs of the curriculum, is inadequate. Several subject areas have experienced considerable difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified and experienced teachers in recent months. This has had a significantly detrimental effect on the attainment of pupils in several subjects, notably in modern foreign languages, science, English and music. In many cases, the teachers at present in these departments have taken on extra teaching work-loads in order to compensate and ensure that the quality of opportunities offered to the pupils remains at a good level. However, this inevitably means that other areas of their work, such as development and management tasks, suffer because of lack of time. In other subjects, the staffing levels are satisfactory and in physical education they are very good. The teaching staff are well supported by sufficient and well qualified technicians and administrative colleagues.
- 71 There is satisfactory provision for professional development which includes follow-up procedures to ensure that there is value for money for the school, as well as for the member of staff and the department concerned. New procedures are being developed which will ensure equality of access to in-service training for all staff.
- 72 The school makes good provision for the induction of newly qualified teachers, in particular, and experienced teachers, new to the school, are invited to participate in much of this programme. The staffing difficulties experienced in many departments has led to a deterioration in the quality of support given to graduates who are pursuing a course of teacher training within the school.
- 73 Overall, accommodation is good. There are sufficient classrooms and specialist accommodation, except for music practice rooms. The accommodation for pupils with visual impairment, information technology and the new drama facilities is very good. The school resources centre is large, well organised and provides a good working environment for individuals and teaching groups. The accommodation for physical education is enhanced by having exclusive access to the sports hall during

the school day. The condition of accommodation is generally good although the cleaning of some of the teaching blocks and staircases is unsatisfactory. The school has good procedures in place to provide an ongoing programme for redecoration and includes special marking of potential hazards to support pupils with visual impairment. Recent refurbishment of the food technology rooms is very good but the layout and storage facilities, in the resistant materials studios, is affecting the practical activity that can take place.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

74 While doing all that is possible to recruit sufficient experienced and qualified teachers to meet curriculum and management needs, to raise standards and continue to improve the education provision, the governors and staff should:

- (1) improve the current underachievement by addressing the contributory factors which include classroom support, curriculum time, challenge and pace;  
(*Paras: 7,24,82,95,104*),
- (2) improve the effectiveness of the teaching and development of literacy skills through close co-operation between the English and the learning support departments and through all subjects consistently implementing the school literacy policy;  
(*Paras: 9,11,26,30,84,107,121,135,136,143,149,177,184*)
- (3) improve the classroom support provided particularly for teaching groups which include a wide ability range or which contain a high proportion of lower attaining pupils or pupils with special educational needs;  
(*Paras: 10,24,32,86,101,137,158,183*)
- (4) complete the current curriculum review and seek ways of reducing the examination load for some pupils, accrediting pupils' attainment other than by GCSE examination, and introducing vocational and work related elements into the curriculum;  
(*Paras: 32,34,35,37*)
- (5) improve attendance and pupils' attitudes to learning through working co-operatively with parents to help pupils recognise the impact of these on their own and others' attainment.  
(*Paras:11,14,16,17,19,22,24,27,53,82,87,88,104,105,107,120,122,130,146,158,175,176,178*)

In addition, the governors and school should consider addressing the following less important, but significant, issues in their action plan: non compliance with requirement for collective worship (*para 45*); greater reliability in Key Stage 3 assessment (*paras 117,125, 133,141,179*); greater awareness by pupils of their attainment levels (*paras 54,129,166, 179*); increased opportunities to take responsibility (*paras 15,24,47,156,175,177*); greater involvement of governors in strategic planning (*para 65*); more rigorous and effective monitoring (*paras 66,132*); better use of IEPs (*paras 32,63*); improving social inclusion of VI pupils (*para 65*); more rigorous monitoring and record keeping in learning support and VI unit (*paras 52,79*).

## **THE UNIT FOR VISUALLY IMPAIRED PUPILS**



- 75 The provision for visually impaired (VI) pupils is a very effective feature of the school. The unit, an LEA provision established in September 1997, is funded for ten pupils with a visual impairment. At present, nine pupils in Years 7 to 10 are attached to the provision and all are fully included in the mainstream school classes. It is well-staffed with the teacher-in-charge also being part of the school's learning support department. Additional technician time has been provided to support the pupils' ICT needs.
- 76 The VI pupils vary in ability, but the majority have no additional learning difficulties and have been placed in middle and top ability sets. All pupils have statements of special educational need, there are no disapplications from the National Curriculum and all statutory requirements are being met. The pupils' progress is systematically monitored. The Annual Statement and pupils' targets are reviewed appropriately, and there is good communication between subject teachers and the staff of the unit. Information from monitoring and the assessment of pupils' work is effectively used to guide planning. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils with a visual impairment and include them in class discussions wherever possible. The classroom support for VI pupils is generally very effective and the learning support assistants are utilised appropriately. Linking them to different subjects has been successful, enabling them to build up an expertise in those areas. However, a minority of subject teachers are not sufficiently involving the learning support assistants in the planning and management of the lesson, which limits their effectiveness. Withdrawal from lessons is kept to a minimum. Where it does occur, usually for the teaching of braille and touch-typing, it is well planned and delivered.
- 77 VI pupils are included, wherever possible, into the mainstream school and are encouraged to attend extra-curricular clubs; many attend the weekly 'homework club' in the unit. The pupils are given the opportunity to attend all school outings, including trips abroad, and also attend events specifically for students with a visual impairment, such as the theatre and RNIB holidays. However, although the VI pupils are included academically, they are not yet fully accepted, socially, by their peers.
- 78 The staff are very committed, enthusiastic and hard working and have excellent knowledge of the pupils' individual and specific needs and their family circumstances. Parents are encouraged to visit the school and to be involved in their children's education. Relationships between staff and pupils, are excellent. Consequently, the majority of VI pupils are very confident, motivated and have high self-esteem. The unit provision has been developed very well since it was established. There is a clear vision of its further development and improvement. The teacher-in-charge provides clear direction and manages the budget effectively. All staff are well trained in their specialisms and are following further professional development courses. The teacher-in-charge contributes to the school training for new staff each year.
- 79 Communication within the unit, and with the learning support department, is good and regular meetings take place. Policies and a unit development plan are being developed but are not yet in place. The recording of monitoring, the minuting of meetings and the maintaining of daily written records, particularly to support annual reviews, are not sufficiently formalised. There is insufficient monitoring of the way support in the classroom is operating.
- 80 The accommodation is excellent and an integral part of the school, situated next to the learning support department. It is very well resourced. The provision for ICT is particularly good, with each pupil having a lap top computer as well as access to the computers in the unit. All pupils have received touch-typing lessons and are proficient at keyboard work. Three closed-circuit televisions and other low vision aids, such as magnifiers and telescopes, support the pupils in their lessons. The enlarged and modified teaching materials produced in the unit are of a very high standard and are often utilised by the VI pupil's sighted peers because of their clarity. The teacher-in-charge liaises closely with the subject teachers to purchase subject-specific specialist equipment where appropriate.

- 81 The unit has excellent links with outside agencies related to health and visual impairment. Good links with primary schools, and with specialist careers officers and the local providers of further education, ensure appropriate transition into and from the school.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	151
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	52

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

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	19	29	42	4	2	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*

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	980
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	171

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	27
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	231

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	40
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	46

### *Attendance*

#### **Authorised absence**

	%
School data	11.2
National comparative data	5.9

#### **Unauthorised absence**

	%
School data	1.2
National comparative data	0.4

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

***Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3***

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	99	94	193

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	67	68	57
	Girls	81	63	51
	Total	148	131	108
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (60)	68 (67)	56 (56)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	37 (18)	43 (39)	23 (22)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	38	75	59
	Girls	63	83	58
	Total	101	158	117
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	54 (60)	83 (76)	61 (69)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	21 (32)	54 (48)	30 (32)
	National	31 (31)	49 (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	85	116	201

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	18	83	85
	Girls	55	113	115
	Total	73	192	200
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	36 (45)	98 (96)	99 (98)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	94.4 (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	39.1 (42)
	National	38.4 (38.0)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	15	100
	National		n/a

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	1
White	979
Any other minority ethnic group	

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	154	5
Other minority ethnic groups		

*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)	52.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.7

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	20
Total aggregate hours worked per week	486

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.5
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	23.8
Key Stage 4	20.7

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	2640005
Total expenditure	2588369
Expenditure per pupil	2599
Balance brought forward from previous year	86574
Balance carried forward to next year	138210

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

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	980
Number of questionnaires returned	245

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

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	29	60	8	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	38	53	6	2	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	18	55	15	6	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	57	18	7	1
The teaching is good.	21	66	3	2	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	30	53	12	4	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	45	44	7	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	48	48	3	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	24	53	17	3	4
The school is well led and managed.	32	53	4	3	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	28	60	5	4	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	23	47	10	3	17

### **Summary of parents' and carers' responses**

Approximately ten per cent of parents added comments to their questionnaire returns. A quarter of these were full of praise for aspects of the school's work. Other comments were of an individual nature and tended to be made by just one respondent.

### **Other issues raised by parents**

Most parents at the parents' meeting expressed general satisfaction with, and confidence in, the school. They felt well-informed about school activities and their children's progress. They believed their children to be well supported. The school was felt to be doing all it could to address poor attendance, general behaviour issues and incidences of bullying if they occurred. Parents were less satisfied with the regular setting and marking of homework. Parents felt that there was a wide range of extra curricular opportunities although those in music were poor.

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

### **ENGLISH**

- 82 Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 have risen over the last three years. In 2000 they were above the national average and well above those of similar schools. Pupils did better in English than in maths or science. Girls did better than boys, as is the case nationally. However, the standard of work of pupils in the current Year 9 is below national expectations. This is the result of weaknesses in reading and writing and poor attitudes from a significant minority of pupils which disrupt the work of the others. The work of higher attaining pupils in the two top sets shows a mature response to contentious issues like vivisection, and good planning for class debates. In classes with a wider range of attainment, pupils' preparation is less thorough and finished pieces of work are not sufficiently developed.
- 83 GCSE results have fluctuated widely since the last inspection. In 2000, the proportions of pupils gaining a grade A\*-C in English Language and in English Literature fell sharply to well below the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-G was maintained at the national average. The school entered a greater proportion of the year group for the examinations than is the case nationally, significantly so for literature. Girls outperformed boys by a wider margin than they do nationally. This was more noticeable in the higher grades and in literature.
- 84 Evidence from the pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that standards in Year 11 are below national expectation. They do best in small group oral work and show confidence sharing ideas. Individually, they talk easily to teachers and other adults. Opportunities for pupils to give formal presentations are limited and many do not listen well in class discussions. In written work, higher attaining pupils have clearly been moved by the poems of Simon Armitage. Pupils' understanding of the play 'The Crucible' benefited from seeing a good local production. In Years 10 and 11, pupils read challenging GCSE texts but rely heavily on guidance from teachers for interpretation. Many pupils, including higher attaining pupils, still show weaknesses in their writing. Errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar are commonplace and pupils lack the vocabulary and the sentence structures to respond succinctly to the standards required in GCSE essay writing. Few spend enough time improving their writing, remaining over-dependent on the teachers to proof read their work. They do not all use their drafting books to best effect.
- 85 Pupils enter the school with below average attainment in reading and writing. Current Year 9 pupils show unsatisfactory progress in acquiring and developing their English skills. New strategies are now in place to address the problem early in Year 7. Pupils are beginning to make steady progress in reading as a result of the intensive programme introduced in the first term and an emphasis on literacy skills in English throughout Years 7 and 8. By Year 9, few pupils claim to read for pleasure and rely too much on the teacher to read aloud and explain meaning. Pupils extend their range of work as they move to Year 9. Whilst pupils plan their work, there is insufficient redrafting, or correcting, of first attempts to create accurate, finished writing. The majority of pupils make satisfactory progress through Key Stage 4 becoming more confident in their structured oral work. Most pupils write with variable, but increasing, control and understanding of form, particularly as they undertake GCSE coursework.
- 86 Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress when they receive extra help. Without support in class, many pupils with learning or behaviour difficulties struggle to concentrate on



the work. Pupils with special educational needs in Years 10 and 11 make unsatisfactory progress, frequently lacking the individual classroom support they need.

- 87 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3, particularly in Year 9, where a significant minority of pupils are noisy, calling out and demanding attention. This seriously disrupts learning where the teacher's class management is not strong and has a major impact on standards. Behaviour is satisfactory overall in Key Stage 4 and potential disruption is generally managed well. Higher attaining pupils in Year 10 applied intellectual effort to think for themselves in a study of magazine advertisements, using to good effect their knowledge of graphics and display. However, lower attaining pupils in mixed ability classes quickly lost interest and concentration when a task was not straightforward and tightly controlled by the teacher. Boys in particular complete what is required of them with little sense of urgency. Boys and girls work well together.
- 88 Overall the teaching observed was satisfactory, with much that was good. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was the result of inexperience in handling difficult behaviour and the lack of classroom support. In the best teaching, clear and shared learning objectives focused pupils' efforts. Strategies were chosen which helped pupils succeed. For example, boys responded best to short tasks. Weaker teaching, particularly in Key Stage 3, where pupils were taught as if they all learned and worked at the same pace resulted in a lack of attention and challenge. Well-selected books, like the Harry Potter stories, are much enjoyed and provide good opportunities to improve independent reading. Drafting books, introduced in Year 7 and used throughout the school, enable pupils to adapt their style for different purposes, including letters, diaries, book reviews and biographies. Careful marking, with targets, enables pupils to understand what was good about their work and how it could be improved. Pupils are managed better in Key Stage 4 where, for example, an initial reluctance from the boys in Year 11 to participate in dramatic role play in 'Macbeth' was handled sensitively by the teacher. Homework was set irregularly and pupils not always given time to write it in their planners. As a result of the satisfactory teaching, pupils learning in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. In Key Stage 3, the unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour of the significant minority results in unsatisfactory learning overall and insufficient progress being made.
- 89 Within the last year, staffing in the subject has undergone a considerable change which has reduced the number of experienced teachers. This has coincided with a change in the way that the school uses its learning support assistants. As a consequence, there has been a reduction in new development, including sharing good teaching methods, and in lesson monitoring. The management of the department, in these circumstances, is good. A strength is that initiatives from new members of the department are well received and pursued. The school magazine, *The Griffin*, is one such initiative, involving many pupils and achieving national acclaim. Visits to the theatre and elsewhere receive support and create interest, but generally there is a disappointing response by the pupils to the full commitment of the department.
- 90 Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory with strengths being maintained. English teachers have played a major part in defining literacy needs and have supported other departments' contribution to improving pupils' competence. Schemes of work in Key Stage 3 are now good. Provision and use of information technology are good and are helping to raise standards in both key stages. The department has a clear view of where further improvements in staffing and in the curriculum are needed.

## **MATHEMATICS**

- 91 Results in mathematics, in the national tests at the end of Year 9, have remained steady over the last three years. In 2000, they were in line with the national average but above average in comparison

with similar schools. Pupils' performance in mathematics was worse than in English but better than in science. On average, over the last three years, girls have done better than boys but to a similar extent as is the case nationally.

- 92 The standard of work of pupils currently in Year 9 is also in line with the national expectation. Higher attaining pupils solve simultaneous equations, average pupils calculate areas of circles and lower attaining pupils calculate probabilities.
- 93 GCSE results in mathematics have fallen since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A\* to C has fallen and the proportion gaining at least grade G increased to the national average. In 2000, the proportion of candidates gaining A\*-C was well below the national average although the average point score per pupil was closer to the national average. Pupils made less progress in mathematics than in their other subjects.
- 94 The evidence from scrutiny of the pupils' work and from lesson observations is that Year 11 pupils' attainment is below national expectation. The highest attaining pupils find the area under a curve and use the properties of quadrilaterals. The lower attaining pupils find the symmetries of plane figures. All pupils carry out investigations in mathematics, including pieces of coursework, as part of the GCSE requirement.
- 95 When compared to their earlier attainment, pupils' achievement in mathematics is good at Key Stage 3 but unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4. The reduced curriculum time at Key Stage 4 is one factor having a negative impact on pupils' progress. When they enter the school in Year 7, standards are below average. From this low baseline, pupils make good progress across Key Stage 3. For example, in a lower Year 9 group, pupils learned to find areas and perimeters. In a higher group in Year 8, pupils learned to plot graphs of straight lines and in a middle group in Year 7, pupils learned to solve simple equations.
- 96 Pupils with special educational needs make good progress at Key Stage 3 and sound progress at Key Stage 4. The setting of pupils from half term in Year 7 onwards, with more sets than registration groups in each year, has a positive impact on progress. The use of telescopes and enlarged question sheets aid the progress of visually impaired pupils, including those in high ability sets, at both key stages.
- 97 Overall, the teaching observed was satisfactory. The quality of teaching ranged from unsatisfactory to very good. Most teachers have good subject knowledge which enables them to give clear explanations. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on grouping continuous data, where the teacher explained the continuous nature of measurement in a way which increased pupils' understanding. Effective lesson planning is a strength. For example, in a Year 10 lesson on transformation of formulae, the work built suitably on the simpler formulae and equations which had previously been studied. Teaching is less effective where planning does not take sufficient account of pupils' abilities and overestimates what they are capable of doing. Teachers use time within the lesson efficiently. Many lessons get off to a brisk start with starter questions on the board or mental mathematics activities. Homework is set and marked on a regular basis and this helps pupils to improve their performance. Teaching is unsatisfactory where pupils' behaviour is not effectively managed and results in limited progress.
- 98 As a result of the sound teaching, pupils' learning is also sound. Pupils learn to work systematically, as in the Year 11 lessons where they were carrying out coursework investigations. They sustain concentration, as in a Year 10 lesson on calculating angles and a Year 7 lesson on substitution and

equations. Learning is less good where, for example, the reason for using a method has not been given.

- 99 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall. Relationships are good. Pupils collaborate well when given the opportunity, as in a Year 11 lesson where they discussed strategies for carrying out an investigation. They take commendable care over their written work.
- 100 The improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Results at Key Stage 3 have improved while those at Key Stage 4 have declined. Girls and boys now perform equally well. The quality of teaching has been sustained. A more rigorous monitoring system has been developed and attainment is now recorded in terms of National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3. Pupils know the level or grade level at which they are working. Schemes of work are now in place to ensure that all attainment targets are covered. Schemes of work are extensive for Key Stage 4 and, in Year 7, they are based on the National Numeracy Strategy. Leadership and management of the department are sound. Those with responsibilities within the department have a good understanding of the work of the department and plan strategically to address issues.

## SCIENCE

- 101 Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 remained close to the national average between 1997 and 1999. In 2000 they were below the national average, but close to that for similar schools. Pupils did worse in science than in English and mathematics. The standard of work of pupils currently in year 9 is close to national expectations. Pupils in low ability sets demonstrated their understanding of the effect of forces on motion. They used ideas, such as friction and gravity, to explain movement down slopes and understood that a trolley would stop moving if forces on it were balanced. However, their behaviour was poor and they were unable to benefit from the practical activity. Another set used a computer simulation with interest to investigate the factors affecting photosynthesis. A top set demonstrated that they had the oral and writing skills to engage with a lesson on rock types. They were able to use information from geography to explain the deterioration of stone statues. Pupils responded best to well-planned, well-paced lessons. In these, they showed a good grasp of technical vocabulary and the ability to reason scientifically during question and answer sessions. Pupils found it difficult to stay on task in lessons where, due to staffing difficulties, activities were less well structured or learning needs were not adequately supported.
- 102 GCSE results have fallen since the last inspection. In 2000, the results were well below the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-C fell but the proportion gaining A\*-G remained close to the national average. The average point score was below the national average but remained close to the 1999 score.
- 103 The evidence of the pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that Year 11 pupils' attainment is below average. Pupils in the top set worked well at an ICT simulation and showed that they could manipulate the internet and spreadsheets to help them understand and plan a forthcoming investigation. In the second ability set, however, pupils' planning skills were weak and they had little concept of how to prioritise tasks. A significant proportion of pupils in middle and lower sets took little responsibility for their own learning. When given the opportunity to work in groups, they went off-task easily despite the efforts of the teacher. They could not recall information such as the names of common acids.
- 104 When compared to their earlier attainment, pupils' achievement in science is good at Key Stage 3. When they enter the school in Year 7, standards are below average. From this baseline pupils make good progress until the end of Year 9, when they are performing close to the national average. For example, in a Year 7 mixed ability group, pupils set up series and parallel circuits and explained why

the brightness of the bulbs changed as more were added to the circuit. Pupils in a Year 8 higher set investigated the forces affecting how a parachute falls. They demonstrated, during discussion, their understanding of how various factors affected the parachute. In a lower attaining set, pupils were able to explain how rocks weathered. They were also eager to share their excitement about the lunar eclipse due that evening. Pupils' achievement in Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory. When they entered Year 10, standards were close to the national average, but in lessons observed in the key stage, overall standards were below the national average. Pupils in a top set Year 10 lesson knew the names of types of electromagnetic radiation and explained the meaning of frequency. In a second ability set, pupils were able to recognise only fairly elementary differences between living things, such as humans and fish, and during the activity many were not focused on the task. Pupils in a lower attaining set, studying chemicals from the earth, were very boisterous and were difficult to control during question and answer session. However, they knew about oil, petrol, water, and metals and that electrolysis could be used to extract some metals. They were eager to do practical work but failed to listen to instructions with sufficient care and so became confused.

- 105 Visually impaired pupils make good progress because resources are targeted to meet their needs. They are supported by classroom assistants, large size work sheets and a laptop computer. However, pupils with other special educational needs are less well supported, particularly in larger sets in Key Stage 3. Although they make satisfactory progress with respect to gaining knowledge, their practical skills are not as well developed as they could be. In Key Stage 4 the general behaviour and attitude of some of the lower ability groups was unsatisfactory and made the teaching of practical skills very demanding.
- 106 Overall the teaching observed was satisfactory. Teachers use the well-documented scheme of work as a basis for well planned lessons. They keep good centralised records of pupils' achievement, which enable them to track pupil performance and predict both National Curriculum and GCSE grades. These are known by the pupils so that they understand their targets and have a good idea of how to achieve them. Although tests and investigations are well marked, there is some inconsistency in marking pupils' books. Generally teachers use the marking policy agreed, but there is little use of comments about the quality of the work. The weaknesses observed were mainly in ensuring that there was sufficient pace and intellectual challenge to lessons and that learning objectives were clear to both the teacher and the pupils.
- 107 As a result of the satisfactory teaching, pupils' learning is also satisfactory. They are good at learning facts and satisfactorily gain practical skills such as using equipment, measuring, plotting graphs. They have the oral skills to enable them to explain their science. However their writing skills are less well-developed and most written work seen was descriptive. The exception to this was the practical investigations each pupil produced. Those pupils seen using ICT seemed at ease with the technology. With the exception of the more able, pupils' willingness to take responsibility for their work was unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4. They easily went off-task unless teachers controlled them closely. This resulted in learning, in some lessons, being less satisfactory than the teaching.
- 108 Pupils' attitude and behaviour overall were satisfactory. Relationships between teachers and pupils were good. The pupils responded well to well-structured lessons that had a good range of activities and a good pace. However, at Key Stage 4, the attitude of a significant minority of pupils made some lessons difficult to teach.
- 109 The improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Although the standards in lessons at Key Stage 4 remain below national expectations, those in Key Stage 3 are now at the level of national expectations. Whilst teaching overall has remained satisfactory, there is no longer a significant minority of lessons where learning is unsatisfactory, despite the current staffing problems. ICT is now

used within the faculty and dataloggers have recently been delivered. The department is satisfactorily managed, and the strengths include very good accommodation, good resources, good technical support and the very firm commitment to improvement by the teachers. The main weakness in the department, which affects learning, is the unsatisfactory staffing situation. At the time of the inspection, only three of the seven full-time teachers had been at the school before September 2000. The four new teachers included one newly qualified teacher, one unqualified teacher and two supply teachers. The head and the second in department are recent, acting appointments. This situation has resulted in other weaknesses in the strategic use of resources and the monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching in science.

## **ART AND DESIGN**

- 110 The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were in line with those reported nationally with a quarter of the year, mostly girls, showing above average standards. Standards of work seen during the inspection are broadly in line with national expectation. Pupils are strongest in the good levels of planning and presentation in sketchbooks and in the linking of references to artists in their investigative studies. The majority of pupils make good use of a wide range of materials. Year 9 pupils show inventive and imaginative use of photomontage to build up a portrait in a Cubist style. Pupils at all levels of attainment show successful writing skills when they describe paintings and evaluate artists' techniques because they use well structured writing frames to enhance their descriptions. Pupils' drawing skills overall are satisfactory, however, three-dimensional studies are underdeveloped across the key stage because of the limited time allocation in Key Stage 3.
- 111 GCSE results in art have risen steadily since the last inspection and been significantly above the national average in the past four years. In 2000, however, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-C fell to the national average while the average point score remains above average. All pupils have achieved a grade A\*-G since 1996. Pupils did better in art than in their other subjects. Girls outperformed boys by a wide margin.
- 112 The evidence of the pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that Year 11 attainment overall is above national expectation. The exploration and development of ideas in sketchbooks is a strength. The majority of pupils work from direct observation with increasing confidence. They respond to new ideas effectively through sustained experimentation with mixed media including information technology and three-dimensional materials. The opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge of artists and see original paintings has increased since the last inspection. For example, Year 11 pupils visit art galleries in preparation for exam work and this has contributed to raising their attainment at GCSE. Displays of GCSE art work on 'Changes' show good use of artists' reference materials, extending pupils' insight and giving them confidence to communicate their own visual ideas. Pupils' knowledge is weaker when placing artists in their historical context. Disruption of teaching for one group has led to lower standards because the quality of research, investigation and the development of ideas are inconsistent, particularly for higher attaining pupils.
- 113 When compared to their earlier attainment, pupils' achievement in art is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4. Pupils join Year 7 with a wide range of attainment in drawing, painting and three-dimensional studies and make good progress as they increase their skills in exploring, in investigating and making, and in evaluating outcomes. For example, Year 8 pupils use a range of textured papers, fabrics and drawing to create a two-dimensional composition based on still-life studies. Above average attainment is shown in mixing and controlling paint, by higher attaining pupils in Year 8. This is extended successfully into Key Stage 4 where sketchbooks are well used as a studio tool and pupils make very good progress through well-structured teacher planning which enables pupils to learn independently. For example, pupils describe a painting in terms of content, form,

process and mood with a helpful writing frame which improves their use of art vocabulary and extends their writing and research skills. Higher attaining pupils in Year 10 show above average skills in the application of colour and in the study of artists, such as Frida Kahlo or Paula Rego, to help refine their work. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress across the key stages because they receive effective support through good explanation and demonstration of tasks by their teachers. Most pupils with special needs achieve well in art at GCSE.

- 114 Overall, the teaching observed was good, and most effective in Years 10 and 11. Teachers' very good relationships with pupils promote confidence and self-esteem. Teachers have a clear focus on examination syllabus requirements and the criteria for success. This has helped to make their teaching more effective in Year 9, and as a result, there is a higher than average uptake in Year 10. There is a good balance between skills-based teaching and the opportunity for pupils to work independently. Interesting artefacts and resources are imaginatively grouped to stimulate and motivate pupils of all levels of attainment to draw from direct observation. Teachers' planning is well linked to assessment criteria and is inspiring because consistent reference is made to artists' techniques and purpose. For example, Year 9 pupils learn how the sharp lines and multiple viewpoints of Picasso's 'Weeping Woman' affect the mood and meaning of the painting. Teachers have good expertise in explanation and demonstration and they make good use of picture resources and their own sketchbooks to exemplify good practice. Where teaching is less effective, pupils are insufficiently engaged in sharing ideas with the rest of the class and evaluation sessions are inconsistently used to assess what pupils have learned. Homework is well linked to classwork and day-to-day assessment is very good across the key stages. As a result, pupils are aware of their targets, produce a good quantity of work and know their predicted grades, which increases the pace of learning.
- 115 Pupils' attitudes to art are very good. They respond enthusiastically to the positive learning environment, particularly at Key Stage 4. The majority of pupils are willing to listen to instruction, enjoy the art activities and are very well behaved. However, a few boys in the lower years are inattentive and display disruptive behaviour which has an unfavourable impact on progress in some lessons. Pupils' personal development and relationships are very good, due to the commitment of staff who give freely of their non-contact time.
- 116 Management in art is very good. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. The steady rise in attainment to above national average and improvement in the quality of teaching are impressive. The successful development of research and investigation in sketchbooks has resulted in a more coherent linking of critical and contextual studies and an increased awareness of multicultural references. Standards of written work and the use of art vocabulary in the department are good, with the introduction of the literacy project. Assessment has been well developed across the key stages. The department has a clear view of where further improvements need to be made, for example in raising boys' achievement and developing information and communication technology in schemes of work at Key Stage 3. An increase in time at Key Stage 3 has not been effected since the last inspection and, as a result, the quality of three-dimensional studies remains limited.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

- 117 The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were well above those reported nationally. However, evidence of the inspection indicates that these assessments over-estimated what pupils achieve. The standard of work of pupils currently in Year 9 is in line with the national expectation. Pupils perform a good variety of tasks that develop their knowledge and skills in both designing and making. In each of the contributory design and technology subjects, pupils carry out research, produce drawings of their own ideas and develop their own solutions into final plans. Knowledge is developed and well recorded in pupils' books. Pupils are encouraged to make good quality products in all subjects

and this results in well-made items in a range of appropriate materials. Work in books and folders varies in depth of content and quality of presentation, depending on pupils' ability, but course work is satisfactory in all subjects. For higher attaining pupils, the range of ideas and the presentation of work, including drawing skills are good.

- 118 GCSE results in design and technology have been below the national average since the last inspection. In 2000, the results overall were below the national average for the proportion of pupils gaining A\* to C grades but the proportion gaining a grade A\*-G was close to the national average. A significantly higher proportion of the year group was entered for the examination, than is the case nationally, and the high proportion gaining at least a grade G is a clear indication that pupils of all ability, including those with special educational needs are using their ability well in design and technology. Results for graphical communication and textiles technology are much higher than in food technology and systems and control. Girls continue to outperform boys by a wider margin than is the case nationally.
- 119 The evidence of the pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that the attainment of Year 11 pupils is, overall, in line with national expectation. The structured approach, used by teachers to address coursework, is enabling all pupils to fulfil the requirements of the examination. In the better folders, such as in Year 11 graphics, textiles and food technology, the quality of research, analysis and development of ideas is very good. Pupils are developing knowledge and skills and applying these well in their coursework. Drawing and presentation of work is often very good and there is good use of computer generated work in some folders. The lack of depth in the work of less committed pupils is affecting the standards they achieve. Very good scale models are produced in graphical communication lessons, and finished products from previous practical work indicate that all pupils develop good practical skill across the range of materials used. Although folder work is weaker in resistant materials and systems and control, some creative modelling is being carried out as a result of good, collaborative, small-group work when, for example, pupils produce working robots.
- 120 Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress throughout the school. Higher attaining pupils and some with low prior attainment make good progress but the progress of some pupils who are less committed is unsatisfactory. In Year 7, pupils develop ideas for soft toys and then produce well made machine knitted toys with features applied by hand. Pupils, in Year 8, apply knowledge and skills effectively when making a mechanical toy in wood. The foreign foods project in Year 9 enables pupils to produce well researched and presented folders. They showed very good preparation skills when producing a recipe which includes pasta. In Years 10 and 11, progress varies considerably between subjects and individual pupils. In Year 10, pupils demonstrate good understanding and application of knowledge in producing questionnaires, recording results of surveys and adapting recipes to include aspects of healthy eating in their work on snack bars. In year 11, pupils produce some folder work of very high quality when researching and applying influences of other cultures in their textiles work. However, some pupils in graphics are too slow to engage in their classwork and assignments are handed in late.
- 121 Overall, teaching is good. All teaching is at least satisfactory, and frequently good or very good. Teachers have very good technical knowledge and a very clear understanding of the requirements of the National Curriculum and examination work. This enables them to focus their work, give high quality demonstrations and provide individual support to pupils in lessons. Overall, planning is good. In the majority of lessons, time is well used and teachers' expectations of behaviour and performance are high. Pupils are managed well and a good range of teaching methods is used effectively. Technical language is developed through oral work but some opportunities are missed to develop further literacy and numeracy skills. Computer-generated work is increasingly used in research and the presentation of pupils' work. Good assessment procedures provide very good support and discussion with pupils about their work and is effective in focusing the work of individuals. The very effective and regular

assessment of pupils' work and extended written comments, in Key Stage 4, enable pupils to improve their work. The good teaching leads to good learning.

- 122 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are usually good and often very good. Almost all pupils settle to work quickly and overall there is a positive attitude towards learning. Most pupils respond well to their teachers' high expectations of behaviour and are keen to do well. They concentrate well and many spend considerable time and effort, outside lessons, in improving their work. Some individuals and small groups of pupils, who are less positive about their work and can be relatively unresponsive and unproductive in lessons, need careful management. The success of lower attaining pupils is due to the sustained effort and concentration that they give to their work.
- 123 Leadership and management are good with close co-operation between teachers. Effective use is made of current staffing, accommodation and learning resources in spite of continuing staffing difficulties. Departmental documentation is good and there is a very effective approach to monitoring the development and improvement of the subject. Accommodation is good, but the layout of workshops restricts the space available for making activities.
- 124 Overall, standards have been maintained and, in some respects, improved since the last inspection. Pupils now receive worthwhile experiences in both designing and making, in all of the contributory design and technology subjects. There is now a very well structured approach to the teaching of the design and technology curriculum across the school.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

- 125 The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were above those reported nationally. However the evidence of the inspection indicates that these assessments were inaccurate, tending to overestimate what pupils have achieved. The standard of work of pupils currently in Year 9 is in line with national expectations. Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the places and themes studied. They are proficient in a range of geographical skills and have a good understanding of scale and the measurement of distance, direction and the use of grid references. They are able to use their atlas skills in developing their locational knowledge. They are less successful in the use and interpretation of data, and their understanding of processes is under-developed.
- 126 GCSE results in geography have fluctuated over the past three years but have fallen since the last inspection. In 2000, the results were below the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-C fell and the proportion gaining grade G was in line with the national average. Pupils did better in geography than in their other subjects. Girls outperform boys by a wider margin than is the case nationally.
- 127 The evidence of the work scrutinised and lessons observed showed that Year 11 pupils' attainment is at the nationally expected level. Their knowledge and understanding of environmental issues are particularly good. In a lesson on 'People and Work' pupils demonstrated a secure understanding of such specialist terms as accessibility, brown-field and green-field sites, distribution and location. They acquire the skills necessary for enquiry work though they have insufficient practice in statistical techniques and the use of maps, for example the interpretation of synoptic charts in the study of weather.
- 128 When compared to their earlier attainment, pupils' achievement in geography is good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory overall. When they enter the school in Year 7, standards are below average. From this low baseline pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3. They are encouraged, in overcoming weaknesses in literacy skills, to make good progress in their written work. High attaining pupils have



opportunities to exploit their talents and all pupils are able to make progress. Pupils with special educational needs receive very good support from classroom teachers and they make satisfactory progress. In Key Stage 4, achievement is satisfactory overall. However, lower attaining pupils sometimes fail to complete work essential to their full understanding and for effective revision; in lessons where the resources and tasks more closely match their needs, progress is much better.

- 129 Overall, the teaching observed was satisfactory in both key stages with examples of good and very good practice. As a result of the satisfactory teaching, pupils' learning is sound. Teachers are good at managing pupils, and move around the classroom providing a good level of individual support for pupils. They have good subject knowledge resulting in interesting and clear explanations. Teachers are competent in the teaching of basic skills, as reflected in the good progress made by pupils in the acquisition of literacy skills in Key Stage 3. The evidence of the lessons observed and the work scrutiny indicates a lack of variety in the methods used and insufficient attention paid to the development of pupils' skills in numeracy and information and communication technology. The quality and usefulness of ongoing assessment and record keeping are weaknesses; marking is variable and, though there is some good practice, most fails to comply fully with the school policy. As a result pupils' self knowledge of their learning is limited and, subsequent improvement reduced. Teaching in geography makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through, for example, the emphasis placed on the importance of cultural traditions in the study of less economically developed countries in Year 9.
- 130 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour were at least satisfactory; in the majority of lessons they showed interest in the subject and, where the teaching was particularly good, enthusiasm. A significant majority of pupils are reluctant to complete homework and their response to the teachers' efforts to provide additional help, by running extra revision classes and coursework clinics, has been disappointing.
- 131 The day-to-day management of the department is satisfactory and appropriate priorities for development are laid out in the departmental plan. The revision of schemes of work over the last year, a continuing process, has provided much improved support for the teaching. Clear and useful documents provide details of the learning experiences together with identified opportunities for assessment and use of information and communication technology.
- 132 The improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The requirements to develop skills, knowledge and understanding have been addressed successfully. Fieldwork has been extended across both key stages and there is better equipment for practical work. The information provided for parents is much improved and addresses both progress and attainment. The department has been partly successful in developing strategies whereby teaching and learning better meet the needs of all pupils. A useful start has been made in monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning more effectively, but this is, as yet, not sufficiently comprehensive or rigorous.

## **HISTORY**

- 133 The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were above those reported nationally. However, the evidence of the inspection indicates that these assessments were inaccurate, tending to overestimate what pupils have achieved. The standard of work of pupils currently in Year 9 is in line with the national expectation. Pupils are strongest in the skills required for the interrogation of sources, they are able to draw inferences and cite evidence. They have an increasing appreciation of the different interpretations which may be placed upon events, people's actions and changes.

- 134 GCSE results in history are similar to those reported at the time of the last inspection. In 2000, the results were below the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-C remained the same and the proportion gaining at least grade G was in line with the national average. The results have improved when compared with performance in other subjects and pupils now do better in history than in their other subjects. In previous years girls have outperformed boys, but in 2000 the results of the two groups were very similar.
- 135 The evidence of the pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that the attainment of Year 11 pupils is at the nationally expected level. The development of their subject skills is maintained; pupils are increasingly able to evaluate sources and have a sound grasp of cause and consequence. They select, organise and use relevant information to produce structured answers. Such skills, essential for enquiry work, were demonstrated in a lesson in which the pupils addressed the question "Who were the Plains Indians?". The weak literacy skills of a relatively small number of individual pupils reduces their attainment.
- 136 When compared to their earlier attainment, pupils' achievement in history is good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. When they enter the school in Year 7, standards are below the average. From this low baseline pupils make good progress. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on 'The Roman Army' all pupils made very good progress in their understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of being a Roman soldier. The work was well matched to the needs of the pupils. In a Year 8 lesson, pupils made decisions on the relative merits of Charles 1<sup>st</sup> and Cromwell as leaders. Pupils in Year 7 experience difficulties in communicating their knowledge and understanding through their written work. However, in Years 8 and 9 this weakness is not as evident. In Key Stage 4, high attaining pupils develop their skills through extended writing and open-ended assignments. All pupils assemble a record of work that will provide a good basis for revision.
- 137 Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in both key stages because of the very good support of teachers and the care taken to provide resources and tasks at an appropriate level. As a result achievement is good. Where learning assistants are provided, opportunities for improvement are increased.
- 138 Overall, the teaching observed was good. Teaching was more effective in Key Stage 4 where it was all very good or better. The specialist teachers have very good subject knowledge which enables them to give full and clear explanations. They question pupils skilfully, challenging them to develop their answers and to provide evidence in support of their views. Lessons are very thoroughly prepared, reflecting an appreciation of the needs of the pupils and teachers' high expectations. A range of resources and methods is used to good effect. Teachers manage pupils well. The quality and use of ongoing assessment is a notable strength. A high standard of marking includes precise information, in the form of short-term targets, as to how pupils might improve their work. Record keeping is of a similarly high standard. Insufficient use is made of information technology in the teaching and the practising of pupils' numerical skills is neglected. As a result of the good teaching, pupils' learning is also good. The focus on literacy skills, so evident in the teaching, has a very beneficial impact on the development of pupils' skills at both key stages. The teaching provides good opportunities for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
- 139 Pupils respond positively to the good teaching. They show interest in the subject, are willing to contribute to discussions and their written work reflects a thorough understanding. Behaviour was good in all but one lesson. When required to form groups, or in response to any other instruction, they are co-operative. Pupils respect the contributions and views expressed by others, this being of particular value during group activities. They work hard to complete the tasks set and sustain concentration.

140 The strong leadership and very good management of the head of humanities, as acting head of history, contribute much to the quality of teaching and learning in this subject. Improvement from the last inspection has been satisfactory. Schemes of work have been revised and provide very good guidance to support teachers' lesson preparation. The deficiencies in pupils' understanding and practising of subject skills, identified in the previous report, have been addressed in full. There is no longer evidence of work that fails to challenge pupils. The focus on the teaching of literacy has resulted in a marked improvement in the pupils' ability to organise and communicate their knowledge and understanding. The assessment of pupils' work is now clearly linked to the National Curriculum and forms an integral aspect of teaching and learning. The department has the capacity and commitment necessary to maintain current developments and for further improvement.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

- 141 The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were above those reported nationally. However, the evidence of the inspection indicates slight overestimation of what pupils have achieved. The standard of work of pupils currently in Year 9 is in line with national expectations. The work of pupils is best when they use computers to present and organise information. Pupils use word processing and art packages to present information and write a simple program in Logo. Most successfully integrate text and graphics, such as ClipArt images, and format documents to enhance their appearance. They undertake straightforward enquiries to obtain information which they compile in a spreadsheet. They then sort this to show, for example, records in size order. Higher attaining pupils quickly master new techniques. While many pupils work independently, some need considerable support from the teacher.
- 142 GCSE results in information and communication technology (ICT) have been improving each year. In 2000, results were below the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-C fell to well below the national average and the proportion gaining at least grade G was just below the national average. The school, however, enters nearly twice as many of the year group as is the case nationally. Pupils did as well in ICT as in their other subjects. Many more boys than girls study the subject and a significant fall in the boys' results was the reason for the overall decline. In previous years, boys had outperformed girls, but in 2000 the situation was reversed.
- 143 The evidence of the work and lessons observed showed that Year 11 GCSE pupils' attainment is a little lower than national expectations. They do best in using computers to present and organise information. Most create word-processed business letters and produce leaflets for specified purposes, using wizards in desktop publishing packages. They use spreadsheets to carry out costing calculations and produce appropriate charts and graphs to present information in different forms. Most know the meanings of a range of terms, such as 'data file' and 'electronic mail' and distinguish between different types of database. However, weaknesses in literacy adversely affect the standards of many pupils. Their written explanations are of a lower standard and sometimes show a lack of understanding of the question being answered. Pupils' attainment is weaker in aspects of modelling, control and measuring although opportunities in these aspects are improving.
- 144 When compared to their earlier attainment, pupils' achievement is good in Key Stage 3 and satisfactory in Key Stage 4. Pupils' attainment is below average when they enter the school. From this low baseline, pupils in Year 7 make good progress to reach nationally expected levels by the end of Year 9. Although the general level at GCSE is below average, a high number of pupils of lower prior attainment choose the subject and, when this is taken into account, their achievement is satisfactory. The work of pupils of lower prior attainment, including those with special educational needs, shows good progress over time. The improved use of formatting standards and the use of tools, such as the spell checker, enhances their work.
- 145 The overall quality of teaching in the observed lessons was good. It was never less than satisfactory and some teaching, in Key Stage 4, was very good. Teachers make links with preceding and following work so that pupils' learning has good continuity. They are aware of the needs of individual pupils and provide good support. Work is usually monitored well, so that pupils are not kept waiting for help and, knowing that their efforts will be regularly scrutinised, they maintain a good pace of work. Teachers use on-going assessment well to plan work which addresses the difficulties that it identifies. They generally maintained a good balance between control and helpful friendliness. Pupils usually responded positively to this environment, so that work proceeded well and behaviour was seldom a problem. The good teaching leads to good learning.

- 146 Most pupils respond well to good teaching and are usually engaged by their tasks, so that lessons have a busy atmosphere. Pupils share information and ideas, and often help each other. The attitudes and behaviour of a minority in Key Stage 4 is, however, unsatisfactory. These pupils lack enthusiasm and effort and are often uncooperative. They are unwilling to address even minor problems in their work without calling upon the help of the teacher.
- 147 Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The school has made some progress in remedying all the points for development from the previous inspection. Leadership and management are good. Resources are good and are well managed and maintained. The development of ICT is a clear priority in the school's planning. A separate department has been created to manage the specialist courses and the co-ordination of cross-curricular provision.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

- 148 The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9, in 2000, were in line with those reported nationally.

### **French**

- 149 The standard of work of pupils currently in Year 9 is in line with national expectations. Pupils are strongest in the receptive skills of listening and reading; speaking and writing skills are less well developed. Higher attaining pupils identify key points from a tape, about buying train tickets, played at near normal speed. Lower attaining pupils write descriptions of their daily routine in the present tense and are beginning to use the past tense with support. On entry to the school, Year 7 pupils have difficulties with listening, reading and writing, which affects standards significantly in the early stages.
- 150 GCSE results have improved during the past three years and there has been a significant increase in numbers taking a language at Key Stage 4 with most pupils taking GCSE in at least one language. This is a higher proportion of the year group than nationally. In 2000, results were below the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-C is increasing and all pupils achieved at least a grade G. Pupils do better in French than in their other subjects. Girls outperform boys to a slightly greater extent than they do nationally.
- 151 The evidence of pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that Year 11 pupils' attainment is below national expectations. Listening and reading skills continue to be better than speaking and writing, although pupils prepare coursework well.

### **German**

- 152 The standard of work of pupils currently in Year 9 is in line with national expectations. Able pupils use past and imperfect tenses to talk about weather and events in the past. Lower attaining pupils write short phrases accurately, and more extended paragraphs when describing people in the present tense. Most have well-developed reading and listening skills and higher attaining pupils have the confidence to talk to the class about their holidays. Writing skills, particularly of average and lower attaining pupils, are less well developed.
- 153 GCSE results have fluctuated since the last inspection. In 2000, results were well below the national average because the school entered a significantly higher proportion of the year group than is the case, nationally. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-C remained the same as last year and all pupils gained at least a grade G. This was above the national average and a significant achievement for the

range of pupils entered. Girls outperformed boys, particularly at the higher grades, by a wider margin than is the case nationally.

- 154 Current Year 11 pupils' attainment is below national expectations. Pupils do best when producing coursework, such as letters written by average attaining pupils in the present tense to pen friends. They do worst in groups, where the disruption in teaching over previous years means that they have a poor base of knowledge on which to build.

### **Modern foreign languages**

- 155 Teaching in both languages is sound overall. It is good in German in Key Stage 3. Most teachers have good subject knowledge and good classroom management. Most know their pupils well and assess them continuously, using the information gained to inform the next stage of learning. Strengths of the teaching were seen in a Year 8 German lesson where the teacher's humour, careful planning and excellent relationship with the class resulted in high standards and fast progress. Teaching was weakest in a Year 9 French lesson, where relationships with the teacher had deteriorated, partly as a result of disrupted provision in previous years and partly because the methods used by the teacher were not suited to the aptitudes and abilities of the class. In another lesson, learning was unsatisfactory because, although planning was sound and the syllabus had been covered, the teacher did not have sufficient expertise in German to challenge and enthuse the Year 11 pupils.
- 156 When compared to their earlier attainment, the achievement and learning of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, is sound overall. Achievement and learning are good in Key Stage 3 German because of the impact of the good teaching. On entry to the school, standards are below average and remain below until the end of the year. During the next two years standards rise and by the end of Year 9 they are in line with national expectations. In a Year 8 French lesson, for example, pupils made good progress practising the names of places in the town, and directions. They achieved well because they enjoyed the competitive element introduced into the lesson and were eager to please their teacher. The boys in this group were particularly motivated by the methods used. In Key Stage 4 most pupils build well on their knowledge and skills as they prepare for their GCSE examinations. When given the opportunity to work independently they respond well and help one another with their work. However, aspects of the National Curriculum programmes of study, such as reading for pleasure and the use of information and communication technology, are not used sufficiently at either key stage. There are too few opportunities for independent study and insufficient use of dictionaries. Pupils achieve less well in groups where staffing difficulties have disrupted their lessons or where the methods employed by teachers do not engage their interests.
- 157 Attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall and often good. They were marred by two instances of unsatisfactory and poor behaviour in Year 9 French.
- 158 The improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. The head of department provides sound educational direction. The subjects reflect the school's aims well and have been chosen as the area that will lead the school in its bid for specialist school status. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is developing. Schemes of work are in place but are sketchy, particularly in terms of the sorts of activities that can be used. There has been considerable support and ongoing discussion of issues but there is no up-to-date handbook to ensure that inexperienced teachers are adequately supported. Staffing difficulties, which have resulted in underachievement and unsatisfactory teaching in previous years, are still affecting the performance and attitudes of some pupils. Foreign languages assistants make a very good contribution to learning but the lack of classroom support assistants is hindering the progress and achievement of some groups, particularly the mixed ability groups in Year 7. Statutory requirements are not met in terms of the involvement of

ICT. Although there are adequate textbooks in German in both key stages and in French in Key Stage 3, the lack of a textbook in Key Stage 4 contributes to the difficulties experienced by new teachers. Some groups are very large in both languages.

## **PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Drama**

- 159 GCSE results in drama have fallen since the last inspection. In 2000, the proportion gaining grades A\*-C fell to well below the national average while the proportion gaining at least a grade G remained at the national average. The school enters three times as many of the year group than is the case nationally. Pupils did as well in drama as in their other subjects. Girls outperformed boys to a similar extent as they do nationally.
- 160 The standard of work for pupils currently in Year 9 is below the national expectation. In their exploration of feelings, moods and reactions to events, most show confidence in collaborative planning and group improvisations. For example, in one lesson, pupils discussed the pressures on young people and were forthright about the difficulties they face from their own experience. In response to tight teacher direction, they used their drama skills to show this in movement and tableaux. The higher attaining pupils, in particular, speak about their work, evaluating it and improving it, but they have a limited vocabulary with which to describe what they do. Written work lacks depth and is limited by weak literacy skills.
- 161 The evidence of the work done and the lessons observed showed that Year 11 pupils' attainment is below the nationally expected level. Most pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the basic techniques of drama. Higher attaining pupils develop sequences of role play which show a good grasp of the dynamics of speech and movement. Lower attaining pupils rely on the teacher for their ideas and guidance and have difficulty structuring their written coursework. One class discussed the qualities needed for teamwork and focused thoughtfully on their own and others' strengths and weaknesses in this respect. They raised the issue of absenteeism affecting group work and the impact of a lack of commitment and enthusiasm.
- 162 Although results had previously deteriorated, pupils now make satisfactory progress through both key stages as a result of improved teaching. They come to the school with below average attainment. In Year 7, where they learn to organise their work and solve problems in groups, they make steady progress. In Year 8, pupils extend their range of skills, working with more demanding topics and motifs. Pupils, in a Year 8 class, worked in pairs with varied success on a range of interview situations and techniques. Whilst most pupils engaged with the tasks well, some joined in with less enthusiasm. When pupils lacked the confidence to perform in front of the class, their embarrassment was very well managed by the teacher. In Year 9, pupils work on more abstract concepts, for example, 'fear' and 'persuasion'. This leads to more advanced techniques of presentation and places them on target for further improvement. A Year 10 group started and finished an exploration of an incident in the family by posing for the traditional family photograph. The task of reading facial expressions gave rise to good class evaluation. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, notably in speaking and listening.
- 163 Pupils' attitudes to drama are good. It is a popular subject and classes are often large. There are very good opportunities for personal development, both individually and in forming good relationships with adults and peers. Most pupils are well behaved in response to challenging tasks and good teacher management.

- 164 The teaching observed was at least good and some was very good. The teachers good levels of knowledge and understanding promote high standards. Work is clearly focused with learning objectives written on the board and discussed at the start of each lesson. Returning to these at the end of lessons enables pupils to understand what they have learned and to measure their own progress. Good use is made of the time, with short improvised tasks in practical work. Pupils from the visually impaired unit receive good support and take a full part in lessons.
- 165 There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Good teaching has been strengthened and is beginning to impact on standards. Two new drama studios and practice rooms, although they are not yet able to be fully equipped, give excellent opportunities for development in the subject. A newly appointed head of department is reviewing drama policies and priorities. In adjusting pupils to the new building, there is already evidence of good organisation and leadership. New schemes of work are being developed.

### **Music**

- 166 In the absence of the head of department for the majority of last school year, music was taught by non-specialist or unqualified staff. There is still a small amount of teaching undertaken by unqualified teachers. Statutory assessment of standards at the end of Year 9 did not take place. The standards of pupils currently in Year 9 are well below national expectations. Pupils have not gained a confident working knowledge of the elements of music specified in the National Curriculum. They have little confidence in their abilities to compose and perform in class and their overall knowledge of the rudiments of music is vague. For example, pupils showed below average standards of performance when improvising on tuned percussion. They lacked confidence and found it hard to maintain pulse and tempo. By the end of the lesson, a few could improvise simple phrases using a blues scale, but the ensemble skills of the majority were well below expectation.
- 167 Numbers taking GCSE in music are small and comparisons with national statistics are not significant. Results fluctuate but they are below average for grades A\*-C. However, they are better than at the time of the previous inspection. Despite staffing problems, four of nine pupils gained higher grades in 2000. All pupils have gained at least a grade E in the last three years; this is creditable. Girls achieve more highly than boys most years.
- 168 There was no evidence from written work but pupils showed, in class, that attainment in Year 11 is in line with that expected nationally. In the only lesson which could be observed, most pupils showed a good knowledge of traditional notation and understood the function and make-up of cadences. Several showed good keyboard skills and could, with practice, work out and play cadences at the end of musical phrases. Some proficient skills of improvisation were in evidence. Pupils have varied practical talents as singers and instrumentalists. Standards of performance and composing are satisfactory. Talking to pupils indicated that they have well developed musical interests and tastes, but their knowledge of traditional styles of music, different eras and major composers is below average.
- 169 When pupils enter the school their attainment is below average. While previous staffing problems have restricted the progress of those in Years 8 and 9, pupils in Year 7 have made good progress this year. They analysed, for example, how the composer achieved different moods in two versions of the same tune in 'Star Wars'. They subsequently composed their own sound pictures, performed them sensitively to the class and were able to note them down in the form of a graphic score. Pupils' understanding of the technical language of music is good for this stage. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 have not reached the expected standards in music for their stage in the school but they generally make good progress within lessons. For example, a Year 8 class showed a good understanding of how chords are formed and have begun to compose simple tunes over a specified chord pattern. Higher attaining



pupils did this rhythmically, but the majority, working in pairs, found it difficult to co-ordinate the tune and accompaniment. In Year 10, where the average level of pupils' musical accomplishment is high, pupils made very good progress in extending their practical skills as performers. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to other pupils in practical activities. Visually impaired pupils are very well supported and make good progress.

- 170 Overall the teaching was satisfactory in Key Stage 3. Most was good, but a small amount was poor. Teaching was good in Key Stage 4. Lessons are carefully prepared and resources well organised, so. Time is carefully apportioned to each activity to ensure a good pace of working. The teacher's enthusiasm is effectively communicated to the class. Classes are well disciplined and their energies effectively channelled into worthwhile creative activities. Pupils' learning is efficient. They sustain their effort well and are keen to achieve good standards. The teachers' practical skills are generally well used to demonstrate to, and enthuse, the pupils. Worksheets are of high quality. In a very good lesson in Year 7 on '*Star Wars*', the teacher demonstrated all these qualities and elicited thoughtful, oral evaluations from pupils on the performance of each group heard. In the poor lesson in Year 9, the activity failed to capture the interest of the class, some of whom then behaved noisily and insolently.
- 171 Pupils' attitudes are generally satisfactory and usually good in Key Stage 3. Their response mirrors the quality of the teaching. Mostly, pupils involve themselves enthusiastically in practical activities, collaborate purposefully together, and are responsible in their use of equipment. Attitudes are very good in Key Stage 4, where most of the pupils are furthering musical interests which are an established part of their recreational lives.
- 172 There has been satisfactory improvement in provision for music since the previous inspection. The subject is well managed and there are imaginative, new scheme of work which incorporate revised statutory requirements. Teaching is much improved overall and the department has the capacity to raise standards significantly. There has been some improvement in the accommodation but there are still problems of lack of space and inadequate soundproofing. Instrumental teaching is well established in the school. Although there is scope for further development, there are already good opportunities for pupils to develop socially and culturally through music. Pupils give performances in school and in the community and regularly donate proceeds from these events to charity.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

- 173 The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were in line with those reported nationally. The standard of work of pupils currently in Year 9, across a variety of activities, is also in line with national expectations. The attainment of some girls in netball is above average where they display a good ability to apply consistently the footwork rules and also have mature ball-handling skills. For some boys attainment is above average in football, where they show a good ability to control the ball and can pass and receive with accuracy.
- 174 GCSE results in the last three years have been fairly consistent. In 2000, the results were slightly below the national average. For the last three years all pupils have gained at least a grade G even though the school enters a larger proportion of the year group than is the case, nationally. Pupils do better in physical education than in their other subjects. In all three years the girls have consistently outperformed the boys.
- 175 The attainment of pupils currently in Year 11, in the theory component of the GCSE course, is below average. Their skills in independent learning and research are under-developed. They constantly rely on the teacher to feed them information, for example on the structure of the heart, rather than read a prepared text and find out answers for themselves. Improvement in this aspect of their attainment is a

target in the current departmental development plan. Their attainment in most activities is generally at nationally expected levels. In football and in basketball, pupils are competent in receiving and directing the ball, but their skills in working together as a team are poor. The attainment, of a small group of pupils in volleyball is above average. They have achieved a good level of play in a difficult activity. Well-taught skills are practised and these pupils show a mature and well-developed sense of teamwork.

- 176 Achievement, in lessons, was satisfactory in both key stages. Pupils made satisfactory progress in most of the activities taught. Greater achievement is hampered, in Key Stage 4, by pupils poor listening skills, when they do not always grasp an instruction or coaching point immediately. Achievement in core lessons in Key stage 4 is restricted, when lessons are treated as purely recreational and little, or no, teaching takes place.
- 177 In lessons where it took place, teaching was sound and sometimes good. Lessons were generally well structured although a thorough warm-up and cool-down were not used consistently. Little opportunity was given to pupils to take responsibility for these parts of the lesson and, where it was given, pupils were not able to perform with knowledge and understanding. In some lessons, particularly in Key Stage 3, good opportunities were given to pupils to plan and evaluate performance, but many pupils found it difficult to accept the notion of peer evaluation. Where teaching was good, pupils' attention was engaged from the start, intentions were shared, the warm-up was thorough leading into the activity, the lesson was conducted at a brisk pace with progressive activities, and learning was evaluated at the end. Many lessons did provide an opportunity to increase pupils' understanding of the relationship between fitness and a healthy lifestyle. Opportunities to use technical language, for example in naming muscles, joints and bones during practical lessons, were missed. In Key Stage 4, in lessons where no teaching took place, although pupils achieved well in terms of exercise, learning was unsatisfactory and pupils had no opportunity to increase their levels of attainment. The enthusiasm and commitment of the teachers are major strengths of the department.
- 178 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally satisfactory. They usually take part with enthusiasm and there are few non-participants, but pupils are often very noisy and inattentive. They have poor listening skills and, as a result, even when the lesson is well taught, they often do not achieve as well as they could.
- 179 The previous report emphasised that there was no significant difference between the achievement of girls and boys. This is no longer the case at GCSE, where girls have achieved significantly better than boys during the last three years. Cohesive policies and schemes of work are being developed which are beginning to unify the work across the department, even though boys and girls are generally taught separately. Assessment procedures have been modified to indicate more accurately the attainment and progress of pupils. This provides better information to aid curriculum planning. However, National Curriculum level descriptions are not yet sufficiently applied to the different activities to enable pupils to recognise their attainment. Dance and gymnastics have been developed for boys in Key Stage 3. Leadership of the department at present is good and developing well. The lack of a specialist room for examination groups and the inadequate space for storing resources were noted in the previous report but have not been remedied. Overall, the improvement is satisfactory.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

- 180 Standards in the current Year 9, are above those expected by the locally agreed syllabus. Pupils have gained a good knowledge of Christianity and other world religions. In addition, they have a good understanding of spiritual, moral and social issues, and religious responses to them. They have learned what a moral dilemma is, for example, in connection with the termination of a pregnancy. In candid

writing and sensitive discussion, pupils consider their own values and relate religious, moral and social issues to their own lives. They have cultivated the beginnings of self-knowledge by examining who and what influence them. They have looked at religious precedents for 'golden rules' for living promoted in different religions, and compiled their own ideas. Standards of presentation are good. Pupils re-draft some of their work and some is carefully and imaginatively illustrated. Sometimes they use computers to acquire information and present work, but this is under-developed. Lively styles of personal writing are encouraged.

- 181 Standards in religious education have shown marked improvement since the previous inspection. Results in the full GCSE course, in 2000, were well above national average. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-C has risen and the proportion gaining at least grade G is at the national average. Pupils do better in religious education than in their other subjects. A significantly larger percentage of pupils take the full course than is the case nationally. The take-up by boys is small, but increasing. Results in the short course, taken for the first time in 2000, are below the national average for the higher grades but the proportion of pupils gaining at least grade G is at the national average. Girls significantly outperform boys.
- 182 The evidence of the pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that Year 11 pupils' attainment is above national expectation over the whole range of topics studied. Personal views are lucidly expressed, for example, when pupils answer the question, 'Do you believe in divorce?' There are clear definitions of technical terms, and pupils consider material well beyond the narrowest expectations of the course, for example, when pupils compare sexual and family relationships in contemporary western society with those found under Islamic law. Lower attaining pupils generally produce less substantial work, but they write with understanding and sensitivity about their personal viewpoints. There is orderly and neat note-taking by all pupils, which provides a good basis for examination revision. There is much substantial writing of good technical quality.
- 183 When compared with their earlier attainment, pupils' achievement in religious education is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4. They come into the school with below average standards, overall, and reach expected standards by age 14. They write about significant influences on their lives and their understanding of life as a journey, thoughtfully relating the values encountered in religious education to their own experiences and hopes. In Year 7, pupils learn from considering attitudes to smoking, how to evaluate moral and social arguments and to consider points of view other than their own. Pupils have a good understanding of symbolism in religions. This develops well in Year 8, for example when they study Sikhism. Work of middle and lower attaining pupils is less substantial than that of higher attaining pupils, but their standards of personal writing are good. Pupils with special educational needs participate satisfactorily in all projects but, to gain full benefit from their work, some need more support than the class teacher alone can provide. In Key Stage 4, pupils build on the good research skills already developed and, through discussion and writing, are able to evaluate and compare ideas, for example concerning attitudes to marriage in Islam and Christianity.
- 184 Teaching is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4. Teachers challenge pupils rigorously, over the whole range of ability, and have high expectations of both standards and work rate. Lessons often start with a brisk question and answer session to establish a lively response, and then proceed at a brisk pace. Tight deadlines are set to ensure that time is productively used. Teachers employ a good range of methods. In all lessons observed, they created a studious atmosphere in which pupils were encouraged to take full responsibility for their own work. Pupils learn to develop skills in research and evaluation, in addition to acquiring knowledge. Teachers provide a good level of support for individual pupils when they are working independently. There is effective use of praise to acknowledge and encourage good work. In-class support, which was provided for a visually impaired pupil, was very effective, and the assistant gave useful help to other pupils too. Worksheets and other

materials are carefully compiled and of high quality. However, opportunities were overlooked for using religious artefacts to increase the initial impact of topics, such as Sikhism, Hinduism and the synagogue. Marking is regularly carried out in accordance with the school's requirements. Overall, however, there is too little correcting of mis-spelt key words.

- 185 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. Pupils are not naturally studious and the starts of some lessons are noisy. However, they respond readily to the high standards of teaching. Pupils work purposefully and sustain their effort well when working independently or in groups.
- 186 There has been good improvement in all aspects of the provision of religious education since the previous inspection. It has become a strength of the school. It is very well managed as part of the humanities faculty. Much of the teaching is by teachers who are non-specialists but able teachers. They are well supported, and their lack of specialist qualifications does not have a detrimental effect on standards. The schemes of work are challenging and make rigorous demands on all pupils. Extra tasks are regularly provided to extend the more able pupils. Religious education provides valuable opportunities for pupils to develop spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. No time is provided for teaching to be formally monitored by the head of humanities, but informal monitoring ensures that a high standard of provision is maintained.