

INSPECTION REPORT

Castle High School
Dudley

LEA area : Dudley

Unique Reference Number : 103867

Headteacher : Mr G M Cresswell

Reporting inspector : Mr A J Wood
1494

Dates of inspection : 27th September to 1st October 1999

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Information about the school

Type of school :	Comprehensive
Type of control :	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils :	11 to 16
Gender of pupils :	Mixed
School address :	St James=s Road Dudley DY1 3JE
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Appropriate authority :	Governing body
Name of chair of governors :	Mr A G Jones
Date of previous inspection :	September 1995

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		Teaching
C G Dumbleton, Lay Inspector		Attendance
		Support, guidance and pupils' welfare
		Partnership with parents and the community
E Milroy	Religious education	Pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development
		Leadership and management
		The efficiency of the school
M Ferguson	Mathematics	
J Bakewell	English	The curriculum and assessment
K M Lambert	Science	Staffing, accommodation and learning resources
K Boden	Design technology	
M Smith	Information technology	
B Hancock	Modern foreign languages	Attitudes, behaviour and personal development
H Olds	History	Equal opportunities
	Geography	
K Jeavons	Art	
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Main findings

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- ! attainment in art is very high and results at GCSE are exceptional
- ! provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good
- ! higher attainers succeed relatively well at GCSE
- ! there is a very good range of activities outside lessons
- ! it has a very good pastoral system
- ! it promotes very good relationships and personal development
- ! the leadership of the head teacher is very good

WHERE THE SCHOOL HAS WEAKNESSES

- ! poor standards of literacy hinder pupils' progress and contribute to low examination results
- ! attendance is below average

The school's strengths far outweigh its weaknesses. The governors' action plan will be based on the weaknesses and a copy will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress since the last inspection with the issues identified.

Curriculum teams generally work closely together and the work of the Curriculum Team Leaders has been reviewed and is monitored. In nearly all subjects, there is an appropriate balance of activities in lessons; these include independent learning, although opportunities for higher attainers are sometimes insufficient. Work is now satisfactorily matched to pupils' attainment in most cases. The personal and social development programme has been reviewed and offers very good support to form tutors; its teaching is now satisfactory and similar to that of other subjects. The arrangements for extended registration time are now well co-ordinated and the time is usually used constructively. Assemblies are arranged in accordance with the governors' policy, but the school still does not comply with the requirement to provide a daily act of worship for all pupils. Provision for religious education has been extended to Year 10 and is of satisfactory quality, but the time is short.

The school has continued to encourage better attendance and there has been improvement. The school's ethos remains caring and is now strong.

The school has also responded well to other points raised by the previous inspection. It has good systems in place to improve further.

STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS

The following table shows standards achieved by 14 year olds in national tests in 1999 and by 16 year olds in GCSE examinations in 1998:

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools
Key Stage 3 tests	E	B
GCSE examinations	E	C

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

At Key Stage 3, the results in mathematics and science are above average in comparison with those of similar schools. Results in English improved in 1999 so that they were in line with those of similar schools.

At GCSE in 1998, the proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more grades A* to C was above that of similar schools. In 1999, the proportion gaining 5 or more higher grades was the best in the school=s history.

The best subjects at GCSE are art, music and religious education. Results in English, mathematics and science are well below average overall, although English and mathematics improved in 1999. Results in geography and physical education as a GCSE subject are also well below average.

QUALITY OF TEACHING

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Satisfactory	Art, Religious education, Modern foreign languages, Pupils with SEN	
Years 10-11	Satisfactory	Art, Modern foreign languages, Music, Pupils with SEN	
English	Satisfactory		
Mathematics	Satisfactory		

Teaching was at least satisfactory in 95% of lessons and very good in 15%. The 5% of lessons that were unsatisfactory were spread amongst five subject areas.

Teachers have a very good knowledge of their pupils and manage them well. Pupils are told clearly what the lesson will be about. Learning support teachers and assistants contribute very effectively to the work of curriculum areas to pupils' benefit.

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

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Good.
Attendance	Below average in spite of the school=s efforts.
Ethos*	Strong and caring. Expects the best of everyone.
Leadership and management	Very good. Clear-sighted, dedicated and very supportive.
Curriculum	Broad and balanced. Good use of alternative examinations
Pupils with special educational needs	Very good provision. Good teaching and effective support.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Good. Pupils work well together and value the different ethnic heritages.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Sufficient teachers. Very good number of support and technical staff. Very good level of resources. Good accommodation, but some unsatisfactory indoor facilities for physical education.
Value for money	Good

* Ethos is the climate for learning: attitudes to work, relationships and the commitment to high standards.

THE PARENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What most parents like about the school	What some parents are not happy about
<ul style="list-style-type: none">! the standard of work achieved! its readiness to listen! the range of activities outside lessons! the information about children=s progress! homework! children like school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">! standards of behaviour! the handling of complaints

Inspectors support parents' positive judgements. Pupils' work is usually matched to their attainment and pupils with special educational needs make good progress. The school is committed to involving the community in its work and consults widely on changes. There is a very good range of activities available to pupils at lunchtime and after school. Reports provide suitable information and meet statutory requirements. Homework is set regularly. Pupils are happy at school.

Parents' concerns about behaviour and the handling of complaints are not supported. Pupils' behaviour is good and staff manage pupils well. The school is always ready to investigate complaints and to listen to concerns.

Key issues for action

This is what the school should do next:

- # raise attainment generally, but particularly in English, mathematics and science, by co-ordinating across all subjects:
 - common approaches to using and improving pupils' literacy and numeracy skills;

(This is discussed in paragraphs 11, 16, 21, 22)

- # improve pupils' literacy skills by co-ordinating across all subjects:
 - more structured group discussion;
 - more opportunities for pupils to make extended statements;
 - more use of extended writing;
 - a better structure to extend the range of writing;
 - the development of the skills of reading for information;
 - the improvement of the capacity to make personal notes;

(This is discussed in paragraphs 21, 22, 29, 102, 107, 110, 122, 130, 138, 144, 146 and 151)

- # seek to raise pupils' attendance by:
 - reinforcing existing measures;
 - making contact on the first day of absence for all pupils;
 - introducing a computerised system to provide quicker analyses and rapid daily information for form tutors;
 - maintaining the form tutors' role in monitoring and encouraging better attendance, but supporting them further in routine tasks;
 - discussing with the local education authority how approaches to improving attendance can be made more consistent across the statutory age range for education;

(This is discussed in paragraphs 38, 71 and 74)

- # in addition to the key issues above, consider some less important general weaknesses for inclusion in the action plan. These are discussed in paragraphs 51, 63 and 92. Additional points relating to individual subjects are discussed in paragraphs 107, 115, 122, 136, 144, 151, 167, 174, 182 and 190;

- # in view of the recent and very significant investment in computer equipment, consider including in the action plan:
 - ensure pupils have regularly and frequently opportunities to gain knowledge and develop skills in information technology by:
 - incorporating further the use of IT across the subjects of the curriculum.

(This is discussed in paragraphs 23, 113, 122, 143, 151, 154, 157 and 159)

Introduction

Characteristics of the school

1. The school is situated in the centre of the town of Dudley. The number of pupils on roll has risen slightly since the last inspection and the number of younger pupils is above that suggested by the standard admission number. Pupils live in the area around the town centre and the majority comes from five primary schools, although there are pupils from about 20 primary schools in total. The area served by the school is significantly disadvantaged and includes three of the wards with the highest level of deprivation in the local authority area. The proportion of pupils taking free school meals is 42% which is above average. The proportion of pupils from homes in which English is not the first language is very high at 40%.

2. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school covers the whole ability range, but overall is well below average. *Their results in the national tests at aged 11, for example, are well below average and the schools' testing of reading comprehension shows more than three-quarters to be below average.* Since the last inspection, the local authority has established a designated Individual Needs Resource base in the school for 5 pupils with moderate learning difficulties in each year group. The local authority has made statements of special educational needs in respect of 26 pupils and a total of 340 pupils (34% of the number on roll) are on the school's register of special educational needs. In 1998, about a third of pupils stayed in full-time education after the age of 16.

3. The aims of the school are to seek out and foster the special talents of individual pupils and to provide, within a controlled and orderly environment, a stimulating and supportive atmosphere which will give all members of the school community equal opportunities to develop. The areas identified for pupils' individual development are expanded under the heading of academic, social and personal growth.

4. The school's published targets for GCSE results in the year 2000 are:

Percentage gaining 5 or more grades A* to C	21%;
Percentage gaining 1 or more grades A* to G	87%;
Average points score	25.

These are below results attained in recent years, but were realistically set in the light of the prior attainment of pupils in the current Year 11. The school considers that more recent evidence suggests that pupils will exceed these targets.

5. The school's priorities are set out in a development plan. The overlaying objectives are the maintenance of high standards already achieved and the further raising of standards wherever possible. Detailed objectives are set under the seven headings of action plan issues (from the previous inspection), pupil monitoring, pupil entitlement, pastoral care, parental engagement, accommodation, and staff development.

Key Indicators

6. *Attainment at Key Stage 3*¹

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3

for latest reporting year:

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	97	108	205

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	35	51	39
	Girls	64	47	30
	Total	99	98	69
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	49 (27)	48 (39)	(35) 36
	National	(65)	(60)	(56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	14	22	11
	National	(35)	(36)	(27)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	32	53	44
	Girls	46	37	45
	Total	78	90	89
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	38 (35)	44 (37)	51 (49)
	National	(62)	(64)	(62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	7 (15)	28 (20)	17 (27)
	National	(31)	(37)	(31)

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

7. Attainment at Key Stage 4²

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1998	85	93	178

GCSE Results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	13	61	74
	Girls	29	74	84
	Total	42	135	158
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	24 (24)	76 (81)	89 (90)
	National	44.6 (43.3)	89.8 (88.5)	95.2 (94.1)

Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and percentage of *such pupils* who achieved all those they studied:

	Number	% Success rate
School	75	100
National		79.2

8. Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions)

missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year :

		%
Authorised Absence	School	11.3
	National comparative data	7.9
Unauthorised Absence	School	1.0
	National comparative data	1.1

² Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

9. *Exclusions*

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age)

during the previous year :

	Number
Fixed period	49
Permanent	3

10. *Quality of teaching*

Percentage of teaching observed which is :

	%
Very good or better	15
Satisfactory or better	95
Less than satisfactory	5

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Educational standards achieved by pupils at the school

Attainment and progress

11. Overall results at GCSE are well below average. The proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more passes at grades A* to C and the proportion gaining 5 or more grades A* to G were well below average over the period 1996/98. Pupils are successful in a variety of subjects at GNVQ and also in a Certificate of Educational Achievement in a wide range of subjects. Pupils= low level of literacy inhibits the raising of standards.

12. In 1998, the proportion gaining 5 or more grades A* to C was better than in similar schools, although results overall were in line with similar schools. The extensive use of qualifications other than GCSE enables the school to offer a more suitable accreditation for many pupils, but potentially reduces the proportion gaining 5 or more grades A* to G.

130 Overall results at GCSE are better than those reported by the last inspection. The results for higher grades in 1999 at 29% were the best since the school was formed. Results have a rising trend over the five years 1994/98, broadly in line with the national trend.

140 Pupils from different ethnic heritages are equally successful at GCSE. The difference between boys= and girls= performance is broadly in line with the national difference, although girls are noticeably more successful than boys in gaining 5 or more grades A* to G.

150 The most successful subjects at GCSE are art, music and religious education. The results over time in art are exceptional, in music well above average and in religious education above average. In all three subjects, pupils perform relatively better than in their other subjects. Attainment in art and music has improved dramatically since the last inspection, whilst religious education has maintained relatively high standards. A few pupils are entered for Urdu and Panjabi and achieve good results.

160 In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, results at GCSE have remained well below average overall since the last inspection, although English and mathematics improved in 1999.

170 In French and German, there has been a steady improvement since the last inspection and results, for selected groups, are now above average. Business education has results in line with the national average. In English literature and history, results improved in 1999, but over time are below average, as are the combined results in design technology. Results are well below average in geography and physical education as a GCSE subject. Most of these subjects have similar standards to those reported in the last inspection. Pupils perform less well in geography than in their other subjects.

180 Results overall are well below the national average in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. However, overall they were above those of similar schools in 1999 and were in line with them in 1998. In mathematics and science, results are above those of similar schools. In 1999, results in English improved from well below similar schools in 1998 to be in line with them.

190 From the observation of lessons and the inspection of pupils= work, it is confirmed that attainment overall is well below average by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. However, there is variation across subjects. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, attainment is well below average overall, although slightly better in English at Key Stage 4 and mathematics at Key Stage 3. In other subjects, attainment for younger pupils is broadly at the

national average in art, music, religious education and physical education, although below in other subjects. For older pupils, attainment is very high in art, above average in music and broadly average in modern foreign languages and religious education, but below in other subjects. Standards in geography are well below average throughout.

200 Attainment seen during the inspection confirms that the school's targets for GCSE in 2000 are realistic. It is likely that the targets for 5 or more grades A* to C and for the average points score will be met successfully. However, because of the increasing use of accreditation alternative to GCSE, the target of 87% for 5 or more grades A* to G will not be met. If the number of pupils gaining 5 or more grades A* to C is to continue to improve, standards in the core subjects, particularly science, must rise.

210 Skills in literacy are well below average and the support given across subjects for the development of pupils' skills is inconsistent. When there is well-planned and good structured support, pupils perform satisfactorily, but the skills displayed in one subject do not appear to transfer easily to others. On entry to the school, reading is well below average. Non-readers and those with complex difficulties make good progress, although for a significant minority of pupils, difficulties with basic literacy persist throughout Key Stage 4. Many other pupils progress with reading, but have limited skills of reading for information and of note-making in their own words. Skills in speaking and listening are under-developed in most subjects; opportunities for structured discussion and sustained oral presentation are few and pupils have poor skills in this area. Written work is often based on short answers in worksheets and many pupils lack the ability to structure their work in the appropriate form.

220 A considerable number of pupils have difficulty in all areas of mathematics. Skills of numeracy are low, although regular mental and non-calculator number work is improving mental skills. Some curriculum areas feel that lack of numeracy skills limits pupils' progress; *for example, in electronics, where use of formulae is important in helping to understand the concepts and in modern foreign languages where teaching $\frac{A}{time}$ and $A \times shopping$ are made more difficult.* There is appropriate, but limited, use of mathematics across the other subjects of the curriculum. Graphs to represent information are used in geography, science, design and technology and in GNVQ courses. In art, spatial concepts are used effectively and the ideas of proportion are used in design technology.

230 One week prior to the inspection, the school had a high performance network with 160 stations installed through the Dudley Grid for Learning scheme. As might be expected, both staff and pupils are in the process of familiarising themselves with the equipment and its capabilities. On entry to the school, pupils display a very wide range of achievement. While some are able to present information in attractive formats, others find operating the keyboard quite difficult. The IT course brings most pupils to a level of basic competence. Pupils encounter a satisfactory range of software tools for word-processing, information handling and control applications, but their experience is insufficient for many of them to develop confidence to the level required by the National Curriculum; attainment is below average; progress and continuity are unsatisfactory. *A group of pupils in Year 10 using a database, for example, had no other experience than an introduction in Year 7.* Some departments are making good use of IT. However, these, and other learning activities, are not yet sufficiently embedded in the broader curriculum to support pupils in building IT knowledge and skills in a progressive manner.

240 Progress over time is satisfactory in both key stages. In individual lessons, it is usually sound and sometimes good. Progress was judged to be satisfactory in over four-fifths of lessons seen and good in just under two-fifths.

250 Pupils enter the school with attainment well below average. In Key Stage 3, they make satisfactory progress in most subjects and good progress in some. In addition, pupils show good personal development and those with special educational needs make good progress. In Key Stage 4, progress is at least satisfactory in all subjects and is good in some.

Progress over both key stages is satisfactory, although the overall attainment remains well below average.

260 In the core subjects, progress is satisfactory overall in mathematics, science and English during Key Stage 4, but unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3 in English. In other subjects, it is good in art, history and religious education at Key Stage 3. Older pupils make very good progress in art and music; their progress in modern foreign languages is good.

270 Pupils with special educational needs make good progress over time. Many have difficulties with reading and writing, but make good progress for their ability. *Many reports of meetings to review the progress of individual pupils, for example, indicate the good progress made by many pupils, and parents who take up the opportunity to contribute to these meetings are very often pleased with the progress of their children.* Many pupils with learning difficulties are successful in gaining accreditation for their work. Factors contributing to this good progress of pupils with special needs are:

- # the very good management of provision;
- # the very good work of learning support teachers and assistants;
- # the increasingly successful work of subject departments to develop and use appropriate teaching methods and materials.

280 A number of pupils, particularly at Key Stage 3, have difficulties with English as an additional language. The good support they receive is an important factor in the good progress they make in speaking, reading and writing English.

290 To raise standards further, the school should:

- # improve pupils' literacy skills by co-ordinating across all subjects:
 - more structured group discussion;
 - more opportunities for pupil to make extended statements;
 - more use of extended writing;
 - better structure to extend the range of writing;
 - development of the skills of reading for information;
 - improvement of the capacity to make personal notes;
- # raise attainment in the core subjects;
- # support pupils in building IT knowledge and skills in a progressive manner.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

300 The attitudes of the majority of pupils to school are very positive. They are prepared to work hard, they are usually attentive in lessons and they take pride in their work. They arrive in school appropriately and smartly dressed. They take good care of the fabric of the school. They are eager to support school functions, *such as Open Evening, fund raising events and drama productions.* In assemblies, they are a polite and appreciative audience. Attendance at extra-curricular activities is high and pupils appreciate the range and number of activities which take place.

310 In lessons, pupils are generally well motivated and responsive. There is a good working atmosphere throughout the school. Pupils generally show a responsible attitude to their work and are prepared to help one another. *For example, in lessons using computers, pupils who feel confident are prepared to help others without being asked by the teacher and often take it upon themselves to check on others who they know are feeling less secure.*

320 Pupils' behaviour both in lessons and around the school is good and they respond well to good teaching. Despite some narrow staircases and corridors, they generally move around calmly and quietly. They show respect for staff and are friendly and courteous to visitors.

There is an effective behaviour policy. A working group of staff, representing all areas of the school, meets each term to consider issues relating to behaviour. The school places an emphasis on rewarding good behaviour and this is becoming embedded in classroom practice. Pupils respond well to the merit system. *A lower attaining science group, for example, spent the last five minutes of the school day in silence looking for typing mistakes in a worksheet with the promise of a merit for the first to find the two mistakes.* Both parents and pupils feel confident that bullying or any other bad behaviour will be dealt with swiftly and effectively. The school deals with exclusions fairly and according to proper procedures. There is a falling trend in the number of exclusions in the school over the last three years. During the last twelve months there were 49 fixed period exclusions and 3 permanent exclusions. Both figures are average.

330 Relationships in the classroom are very good. Pupils are responsive to teachers and good relationships make a significant contribution to an atmosphere conducive to learning. Pupils work very well with one another, with children of different gender, race and creed showing mutual understanding and respect.

340 Pupils show responsibility in organisational tasks in many areas of school life, *for example in the library, on reception and by taking part in the Year Representatives= Meeting. This group recently played a significant role in producing the "Ground Rules", an extension of the behaviour policy, which is now displayed in every classroom. All Year 11 pupils take a turn at being a prefect. Some Year 10 pupils take responsibility for a group of new pupils and spend the day with them as part of their induction to Castle High School.* In lessons much of the work is carefully managed by teachers to achieve appropriate change of pace and activity to match pupils= attainments. However, opportunities for pupils, particularly higher attainers, to learn independently from time to time are not consistently established across the curriculum although pupils are able to work independently when the opportunity is offered. Pupils are allowed to use the IT facilities during breaks, lunch times and after school. On these occasions they often engage in useful research and study. *For example, two boys had discovered a new item of software that allows electronic circuits to be designed and tested on the computer screen. Not only were they making good use of this software, but when asked they could think through and explain the advantages of using such simulation software.*

Attendance

350 Attendance is below average. Since the last inspection, attendance has improved overall apart from one year. Continuing to encourage better attendance was identified as a key issue in the last inspection report and the school continues to make exhaustive endeavours to improve attendance.

360 There are contributory factors, not found in all schools, to the high rate of absence. These are the admittance of pupils, including those excluded from other schools, with an established history of poor attendance and a relatively large transient population, with leavers slow to notify their change of school. Many parents condone their child's non-attendance at school. Many pupils take holidays, including extended visits abroad, during term time. *Four weeks into the school year, for example, 69 pupils were either on holiday or had been away from school on holiday already.* Following the failure of a range of measures to work with, and gain co-operation from some parents, there have been prosecutions, but these have had a minimal effect.

370 The school day generally starts promptly. Some pupils arrive at school late, but lateness is monitored by teachers and leads to detention. Pupils generally move purposefully between lessons. Congestion occurs in some narrow corridors and stairways in the main building and causes delay. The entrance to the science block is particularly narrow, and it takes nearly five minutes for the building to empty. Some pupils moving between blocks,

particularly between periods 4 and 5 in the afternoon, waste time. A few pupils arrive up to 10 minutes late for lessons, and they are not always adequately challenged.

380 To raise standards further, the school should:

- # reinforce existing measures;
- # introduce a computerised system to provide quicker analyses and rapid daily information for form tutors;
- # discuss with the local education authority how approaches to improving attendance can be made more consistent across the statutory age range.

Quality of education provided

Teaching

390 Overall, the quality of teaching is broadly average for secondary schools. It is at least sound in most lessons, good or very good in just under half, but unsatisfactory in about a twentieth. Teaching has improved since the last inspection. There are fewer unsatisfactory lessons and more good ones.

400 There is a high proportion of good teaching in art and modern foreign languages at both key stages. Religious education has a high proportion of good teaching for younger pupils and music for older pupils. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good throughout. All curriculum areas, except information technology, have some good or very good teaching. There was more than one unsatisfactory lesson seen in English and mathematics.

410 The strengths of the teaching lie in the good knowledge teachers have of their subject, the good planning of lessons within the structure of the schemes of work, the very good knowledge teachers have of pupils and the clear explanations of the purpose of the lessons. These strengths are seen in most lessons. A weakness seen in far fewer lessons is the matching of work to pupils' needs.

420 The previous inspection had two key issues relating to general teaching. These were insufficient matching of work to pupils' needs and a lack of independent learning. In nearly all subjects, there is an appropriate balance of activities in lessons; these include independent learning, although opportunities for more able pupils are sometimes restricted. Work is now satisfactorily matched to pupils' attainment in most cases. Further attention to matching work to pupils' needs is necessary in English, which has mixed-ability groupings, in geography, in music, in physical education and in design technology for younger pupils. Pupils with special educational needs now receive learning tasks much more closely matched to needs, an improvement since the last inspection. The good range of learning materials developing in subject departments is a significant factor contributing to this improvement.

430 A further key issue from the last inspection related to the use of support staff in lessons. Learning support teachers and assistants contribute very effectively to the work of curriculum areas to pupils' benefit. Their use is very good and this feature of teaching for pupils with special educational needs builds on the effective practice at the time of the last inspection. Joint planning between support teachers and subject teachers is good, although the time for this is restricted. The flexible work of support staff in lessons very appropriately allows pupils with special educational needs independent working time.

440 Pupils with special educational needs make the best progress in those lessons in which subject teachers provide a clear framework for learning and there are regular changes of activity. Skilful questioning is used to develop pupils' understanding and abstract learning is linked to real experiences. *In a Year 11 GNVQ Health and Social Care lesson, for example, the general responsibilities of employers and employees for health and safety at work was based on the experience of a visit to a community residential home.* Pupils also progress well when they are actively involved. *In a Year 9 science lesson on electrical charges, for example, pupils were used very effectively to illustrate the transfer of negative and positive electrical charges.*

450 Teachers manage pupils well in lessons and there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere in nearly all classes. A member of the senior management team is available to provide additional support for sudden emergencies with difficult pupils so that learning may continue for the rest of the class. Appropriate methods and a suitable variety of activities produce lessons that interest and motivate pupils. *For example, in a Year 9 French lesson*

aimed at answering the question, AQu=est-ce que tu as fait en vacances?≡, the teacher managed the pupils superbly and provided regular changes of activities; pupils responded very enthusiastically; they worked hard and fast with understanding and accuracy. By contrast, pupils do not respond well when the organisation is weak and the aim is not clear. In a Year 10 English lesson focussing on wider reading for GCSE, for example, the introduction rambled and lacked clarity; although the material was suitable, organisation was weak and there was no attempt to match the work to pupils= needs; a few pupils talked quietly through the introduction and some others did not listen; most gradually settled to the task, but there was some drifting and some were not sure what was required; higher attainers lacked challenge.

460 Many teachers have high expectations of pupils and by communicating the purpose of the lesson clearly ensure a good pace of learning. *In a Year 8 music lesson with a middle attaining group, for example, the task was to compose an 8-bar tune at the keyboard; the pace was intensive; time and resources were very used effectively; high expectations ensured that pupils performed at the national average; pupils were fully involved, enjoyed the lesson and were delighted with their success. However, some teachers do not expect enough and their pupils do not achieve as much as they should. In a Year 11 geography lesson considering the factors that influenced the location of industry, for example, although the management of pupils was good, the expectation was not sufficiently high for a set one and the lesson lacked pace; higher attaining pupils did not make the progress they should with the written task.*

470 Many teachers use questioning techniques skilfully to widen pupils= understanding and confidence. *In a Year 9 religious education lesson on the topic of forgiveness, for example, the teacher used pupils= opinions very successfully to deepen the discussion. In a Year 11 mathematics lesson on solving quadratic equations using graphs, for example, the pupils listened carefully to the teacher=s very good explanations and responded confidently to open-ended questions.*

480 Subject teachers and support staff manage pupils with special needs well and have friendly and purposeful relationships with pupils. In the best practice, teachers and support teachers demonstrate a measure of team working. *For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson the support assistant was seen to take responsibility naturally for maintaining the class on task, whilst the subject teacher was working with an individual pupil. Team teaching between subject teachers and support teachers, where appropriate, could be further developed. For example, in a Year 7 mathematics lesson on multiples, factors and prime numbers which consisted of short periods of class teaching alternating with worked examples by pupils, the support teacher might have contributed to the short sessions of class teaching.*

490 Pupils= work is marked regularly in all subjects. Many teachers add comments to help pupils see how they can improve. This practice is well developed in art, science and for pupils with special educational needs. In design technology, assessment procedures are well developed to provide much valuable information about pupils for staff. However, in some subjects, it is not clear that pupils fully understand the levels they have achieved or what they have to do to make progress.

500 Parents identified homework as one of the features they liked about the school. Arrangements are satisfactory and homework is set regularly to a timetable, which is sent to parents annually. Pupils are very well supported by a range of homework clubs. Older pupils have a planner to record homework, younger pupils have a diary and pupils in Year 7 are properly encouraged to record details accurately. In the sample of diaries seen, recording was satisfactory, and it was unusual to find that no pupils had copied the homework timetable in to their diary.

510 To raise standards further, the school should:
ensure work is matched to pupils= needs in all subjects;

- # extend the comments on marked work to show pupils how they can improve.

The curriculum and assessment

520 Curriculum planning is well supported by schemes of work. The content of the curriculum provides breadth and balance and meets the requirements of the National Curriculum, although the time for core religious education at Key Stage 4 is insufficient to meet the requirements of the courses selected. The taught week is in line with recommendations and is sufficient for the delivery of all aspects of the curriculum.

530 One of the key issues of the last inspection was to review the personal and social education programme and its delivery. It has been reviewed and offers very good support to form tutors. Its teaching is satisfactory and is similar in standard to that of other subjects.

540 At Key Stage 3, the curriculum fully meets the requirements and includes very good provision for personal and social education. Pupils are set by ability after being taught in mixed-ability tutor groups for some or all of Year 7, although English retains mixed-ability grouping throughout the key stage. These arrangements are generally appropriate. The organisation of history and geography into humanities in Year 7 does not meet the aim of easing pupils' transition from primary school, because the teaching can involve a number of different teachers and further changes when moving from mixed-ability groups to setting. Drama is only taught to pupils in Year 8 and its relationship with English or with Expressive and Performing Arts is unclear.

550 The curriculum at Key Stage 4 includes the required subjects of the National Curriculum, religious education, personal and social education and three subjects of pupils' own choice. The optional subjects include business education, performing arts and a number of courses leading to GNVQ. These extensions of the curriculum provide good opportunities to match courses to pupils' needs, interests and abilities. The extensive use of a range of qualifications enables the school to offer more appropriate accreditation for some pupils. Good opportunities exist for pupils with special needs to gain accreditation for their achievements by entry for GCSE, GNVQ or the Certificate of Educational Achievement. A foundation level GNVQ course in Health and Social Care provides appropriate work-related study for some pupils disaffected from a modern foreign language. The programme for personal and social education includes religious education taught by form tutors and very good support for careers education. Sex education follows the governors' policy and it is taught alongside modules in science in the context of caring and stable relationships.

560 Curriculum provision for pupils with special needs is very good. Pupils have good access to the National Curriculum and attend subject lessons alongside all the other pupils. The inclusion of all pupils with special needs in the educational and social life of the school is a very good feature of the provision. Key factors in the very good curricular provision are the very good support available in lessons and the increasingly successful hard work by subject departments, with the advice and help of the learning support staff, to develop and use appropriate teaching methods and materials to meet pupils' learning needs.

570 Provision for pupils with additional language needs, by teachers from the local authority multi-cultural service is good and very appropriately integrated with the learning support across the school.

580 A very good programme of careers education is delivered to pupils from Year 9 onwards. It supports pupils well prior to their option choices. Through different projects, including college link courses, the school works very positively to provide for disaffected pupils. Much effort is made in helping Year 11 pupils find the right course or route for them.

There is very good liaison between the school and its Careers Advisor. Their joint planning and co-ordination is effective and beneficial to the pupils. Careers Education and Guidance is extended by special events which help raise pupils' awareness of the range of routes open to them at the end of their formal education. Pupils have access to a satisfactory range of specialist literature and computer programs. The school makes extensive efforts to inform and involve parents in this aspect of its work.

590 The school provides a very wide range of extra-curricular opportunities and these are well supported by pupils. A sound range of competitive sports at local level is offered. A good range of clubs supports both leisure and academic interests. Music is particularly well supported and the number and variety of playing and singing groups is impressive. Pupils have access to computers for the development of computer skills and for completing other work. There are a number of visits both in this country and abroad in which relatively large numbers of pupils take part.

600 Clear and detailed whole school policies for assessment, recording and reporting set out clear principles and guidelines for practice. Assessment criteria and levels of attainment are made clear to pupils in some subjects, but this needs to become more consistent practice. The development of pupil self-assessment is inconsistent across the curriculum although there is some good practice. Good use is made of Individual Education Plans to identify targets for improvement by those pupils with learning difficulties. These tend to focus on literacy and rarely mention numeracy.

610 A good range of assessment data has been compiled and is well used to inform planning and predict outcomes. A detailed performance review is now undertaken. Results are analysed by gender and by ethnicity so that patterns can be determined and pupils identified for particular support.

620 An extensive assessment programme for children with special needs is used very effectively to monitor pupils' progress and to plan future learning. Statements and statutory annual reviews for the pupils concerned, are used very effectively to review progress and plan for future learning needs. Individual educational planning is thorough and very effective.

630 To raise standards further, the school should:

- # review the organisation of humanities teaching in Year 7;
- # make clear to pupils their levels of attainment in all subjects.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

640 The school makes good overall provision to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, acts of collective worship play a smaller part in supporting pupils' spiritual development than in many schools. Pupils have only two opportunities each week to meet together as part of a community. In the week of the inspection only two out of five assemblies included acts of worship, although all contained moral teaching and one was of very high quality. The school undervalues worship and pupils themselves play no part in provision. Many subjects contribute to supporting provision. *For example, religious education gives pupils an opportunity to study the beliefs and ways of life of the five major world religions with respect, while rooting pupils in their own religious tradition. The quality of music and art offered to pupils lifts the human spirit and demonstrates its potentialities for creative endeavour.*

650 Provision for moral development is good. The school has adopted a code of conduct developed by parents, pupils and teaching and support staff together. The result is a consistent approach to right and wrong within the daily life of the community. Respect for

people's health and safety and care for property is an expectation of the whole community. A pivotal focus of provision is the quality of relationships between teachers and pupils which are a model of respect and tolerance. Teachers are very good role models. Moral questions arise in lessons. *In history, for example, pupils are given opportunities to consider questions of good and evil when studying the role of Hitler in the second world war. In English, older pupils grapple with these questions further through a study of A Macbeth*≡.

660 Provision for social development is good.. The school provides a series of responsible roles for pupils to undertake. *For example, pupils act as school receptionists and prefects; the many music groups acquire the skills of performance in sharing in the local community and as far afield as the Fairfield Hall in Croydon and on a tour of Austria. Groups of pupils are made responsible for the booking arrangements for the community theatre.* In school productions, as many pupils as possible are engaged to give all an opportunity to extend their social skills. Pupils learn to be spontaneously generous even although their own circumstances may not be very prosperous. They are given good opportunities to contribute to those less fortunate than themselves. *An appeal for specified goods to send abroad to Honduras after a recent hurricane, for example, produced such an overwhelming response from pupils such that the organisers had to rent a small lorry instead of a van to take the goods to the port of Southampton. An appeal for the A Save the Children Fund*≡ *produced the second highest giving of any school in the West Midlands.* The school successfully creates a healthy climate for personal growth by bolstering pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence and emphasising the value of individuals to one another and to society as a whole.

670 Very good provision is made for cultural development. Pupils= aesthetic development and cultural understanding are given a real boost through their work in art, music, modern foreign languages and religious education. The local environment provides extensive opportunities for pupils to understand their local heritage and its place in the national heritage. Generally the opportunities are well exploited by the school. The rich ethnic and religious mix of the community helps pupils appreciate a range of cultures and the music, art and religions which spring from them. This experience is matched by a developing awareness of the richness of the pupils' own cultural inheritance.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

680 Overall arrangements for supporting and monitoring pupils' learning, welfare and guidance are very good. The head teacher and staff provide a caring and secure environment for pupils which is exemplary. By successfully creating a climate of mutual respect and value for the individual, the school provides conditions highly conducive for learning and personal development. Almost all form tutors are highly effective in their role. The twenty minute tutor period, which follows morning registration, provides valuable opportunities for staff and pupils to develop trust and understanding and is now well co-ordinated. The time is usually used constructively. Tutors in each year group are very well supported by pastoral team leaders. The schools= good induction programme prepares and supports new pupils in their transition between the primary and secondary phase of their education. Support teachers are caring, but not sentimental, in their dealings with pupils with special educational needs and they have appropriate expectations of success.

690 Pupils' progress is consistently monitored and effectively supported by teachers. *In Years 7 to 10, for example, review and guidance sessions take place twice each year; the form tutor interviews each pupil individually to ensure that progress and other issues are discussed and targets negotiated.* For pupils in Year 11 there is target sharing and a mentoring programme. Good provision supports pupils= progress outside lessons. *For example, there are daily homework clubs with a member of staff on hand to support; many pupils make good use of this facility; older pupils also have access to a twilight homework*

club at a nearby college; prior to examinations, revision classes are held. These features support the pupils' education effectively.

700 The learning support co-ordinator and her team of support teachers and assistants provide very good additional educational and pastoral guidance for pupils with learning difficulties. Pupils with behavioural difficulties are appropriately supported. There are very good links with external agencies for pupils with special educational needs. Pupils with English as an additional language get good personal and community support from the local authority multi-cultural Service. Specialist and home liaison teachers work in school.

710 The school's arrangements for recording and monitoring attendance are good. Since the last inspection, the school has reviewed and developed its procedures. Registration procedures are generally efficiently dealt with by form tutors, although, in a small number of instances, registers show no mark against individual pupils' names. Attendance is a constant priority for the school and it is very closely monitored. The school and the education welfare officer work very closely together in trying to reduce the many absence problems. A comprehensive range of initiatives is in place to encourage and improve attendance. Following a pilot scheme, the school has now introduced first day contact with homes for most year groups.

720 Measures to promote discipline and good behaviour are effective. The school's code of conduct applies to all members of the school community, including staff. Teachers almost always have consistent expectations for good behaviour. Rewards and sanctions are appropriate. Instances of challenging behaviour are usually dealt with quickly and appropriately. Rare instances of bullying are taken seriously by the school and every effort is made to resolve issues. Home School Agreements have very recently been implemented.

73. Arrangements for ensuring pupils' well-being are satisfactory. The school's health and safety policy is supported by a range of procedures. Risk assessment is in place in practical areas, but is yet to be fully implemented throughout the school. A designated member of staff is responsible for matters relating to child protection and staff are aware of procedures.

74. To raise standards further, the school should:

- # reinforce existing measures on attendance;
- # make contact on the first day of absence for all pupils;
- # maintain the form tutors' role in monitoring and encouraging better attendance, but supporting them further in routine tasks.

Partnership with parents and the community

75. The school makes good efforts to involve parents in their child's education and the life of the school. It has very good arrangements for communicating with parents for whom English is an additional language. A good range of information meetings is arranged at appropriate stages and may include a range of external specialist speakers. *The material provided includes, for example, a school calendar and homework timetables; parents of older pupils receive information about GCSE, such as course work dates, revision sessions and ideas about how to help and encourage their child.* Much of the information is mailed to parents. Parents are kept informed of their child's progress through interim and annual reports. Annual reports on progress provide parents with suitable information and meet statutory requirements. The school makes contact with parents to commend improvement or when concerns arise and, if necessary, home visits take place. Parents' views are canvassed through open meetings organised by the Friends= Association.

76. Annual reviews of statements, including transitional reviews, are carried out within the statutory period. Specialist agencies are involved and parents are encouraged to contribute.

There are good arrangements to inform parents about their children=s difficulties and try to involve them in meeting needs.

77. The school is over-subscribed and popular with parents, but their engagement with the school is limited. *In Year 7, for example, about 80% attend the new parents= induction meeting, but attendance at parents' evenings steadily declines and by Year 11 it has dropped to around 40%.* However, many parents do provide financial support in order to enable their children to take part in extra-curricular activities. The Friends= Association works extremely hard to raise funds for the benefit of the pupils. Some parents help with the day-to-day work of the school.

78. Overall links with the community are good. Pupils following the performing arts GCSE course work closely with West Midlands Police to provide information for the community. Their latest joint venture has involved pupils in a Junior Neighbourhood Watch project with particular reference to drug awareness. The very good collaboration which has taken place between the pupils and the police liaison officer has resulted in a quality production devised by the pupils and performed by them to a very high standard. Their production is due to be performed before the Home Secretary.

79. Good relationships have been developed with other local educational establishments. Representatives from local colleges of further education support special events, give talks and hold drop-in sessions for pupils. Pupils are encouraged to attend open days. There is good liaison with several primary schools in respect of induction arrangements, but other links with primary schools are under-developed, although each subject area has a curriculum link representative.

80. The work-related curriculum is greatly enhanced and extended by very good external support provided by a number of agencies such as the Careers Service, the Training and Enterprise Council, Business Education Partnerships, and a range of employers. All pupils undertake an effective programme of work experience. Pupils are well prepared before their placement and are monitored while out of school. They have good opportunities to review their experience upon their return to school.

The management and efficiency of the school

Leadership and management

81. Leadership and management are strengths of the school. The leadership is of the head teacher is very good . It is strong, firmly based on an open style of management, dedicated and very supportive. The head teacher is ably supported by the senior management team, who fulfil their responsibilities effectively for oversight of the curriculum and pastoral teams, and the links between them. The strong team gives the school purposive leadership and clear-sighted direction, often in an unobtrusive way. The governing body is closely involved with the school, meets its statutory requirements and monitors its work; *for example, by visits to departments on a two-year cycle and by regular reports from subject areas*. The leadership and management of subjects and the pastoral teams is good overall, sometimes very good as in art, music, religious education and in the provision for special educational needs. Curriculum teams generally work closely together and the work of the curriculum team leaders has been reviewed and is monitored.

82. The school development plan is succinct, with appropriately structured time scales, costings and evaluation opportunities built in. Curriculum team planning is closely linked to whole school planning through the regular meetings of curriculum team leaders. With some exceptions, there is a general consistency about the way policies and issues are tackled at class room level and across the whole school. The school has responded well to the key issues of the previous inspection and also to the other less important points raised by the previous inspection. It has good capacity to improve further.

83. The curriculum team leaders now have clearly defined roles and their responsibilities in monitoring are now explicit. An appropriate cycle of informal and also formally-minuted meetings is in place to maintain oversight of progress in the subjects. The senior management team reviews departmental progress annually. At intervals, the relevant member of the senior management team calls up samples from each subject area to monitor standards and progress, to comment on pupils= work and to maintain close oversight. Detailed review of pupils= performance and target-setting was put in place in September 1998.

84. The very good arrangements to identify, assess and record the names of pupils with special needs are very well managed and meet statutory requirements. Records of progress, are very well maintained and are used very effectively to inform practice. The success of pupils with learning difficulties in external examinations is monitored and compared with their previous achievements. Individual educational planning is thorough and very well organised. Teachers across the school are aware of the procedures for identifying and assessing pupils with special needs. Subject teachers are particularly aware of how they can provide for pupils= learning needs. Representatives from subject departments meet regularly with the learning support co-ordinator and this is an effective arrangement.

85. The management of special needs is very good. Provision is very well led. The special needs co-ordinator works very hard and successfully to implement the whole school policy for special educational needs and to ensure provision permeates the organisational, curricular structures and practice in school. Learning support staff are very well managed, supported and deployed. Support staff work very effectively with teachers. Resources for special needs are very well managed and maintained.

86. The school=s ethos remains caring and is now strong. It reflects the school=s commitment to equal opportunity for all, a value affirmed by its pupils. It is strong and caring and expects the best of everyone. A marked strength of the school is seen in its commitment to pupils with special educational needs, who learn alongside their peers as valued members of the community. It is also seen in the amicable, supportive and good humoured relations between

pupils of many different ethnic groups who learn to appreciate each other=s values and cultures. This enriches the work of the school. High expectations and a respect for the dignity of the individual are palpable, as a result of the very hard work of all staff to put the values into practice. Pupils are happy in school.

87. The school aims to give all pupils equal opportunity to develop and grow academically, socially and personally. Each aim is split down into achievable objectives which are carried out through the departments and the day-to-day life of the school . The school is generally successful in achieving these aims.

88. Assemblies are arranged in accordance with the governors= policy, but the school still does not comply with the requirement to provided a daily act of worship. Provision for religious education has been extended to Year 10 and is of satisfactory quality, but the time is short. Very good procedures monitor and record the success of the policy for special educational needs, but this information is not fully reported in the governors= annual report to parents.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

89. The level of staffing is good, with an overall pupil-to-teacher ratio below average for schools of this type. There is a good range from very experienced to newly qualified staff. Teachers= timetables are well matched to their qualifications. A reasonable gender balance exists in the senior posts in the school and there is a good balance of male and female staff overall. The provision of specialist teachers and support assistants for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The availability of staff to support pupils with statements for moderate learning difficulties is good. Technical support is very good and extends to subject areas such as mathematics and the humanities. Arrangements for staff development are effective, meeting the needs of the individual teacher, as well as the requirements of the school development plan. Arrangements for further training of non-teaching staff are well supported by the local education authority. Teacher appraisal is satisfactory. The induction programme for newly-qualified teachers provides good support. The administrative, technical and clerical staff supports the smooth running of the school well.

90. The school occupies an attractive site in the town centre. Accommodation is about adequate for current pupil numbers. Most is of a high standard with new and refurbished buildings providing good working facilities for most subject areas, but some of the indoor facilities for physical education are poor and isolated from the school and changing rooms are inadequate. There is no drama studio. Most classrooms and corridors throughout the school are enhanced by good displays of pupils= work. The very high standard of cleanliness adds to the welcoming atmosphere. The library is adequate. Specialist accommodation for pupils with educational special needs is of a high order and is very suitably positioned centrally in the school; it provides a very good focus for the professional support of staff as well as the support of pupils.

91. The range and quality of resources is very good. Computer facilities in the school are at a threshold of major change. As part of the Dudley Grid for Learning, large numbers of new computers have recently been installed and staff and pupil training is in progress. The learning support base has a good range of teaching and learning resources for pupils with special needs. Provision of information technology as an aid to learning for pupils with special educational needs is good.

92. To raise standards further, the school should:
seek better provision for indoor PE and for drama.

The efficiency of the school

93. The school manages the financial resources available to it very carefully and effectively. Financial planning is very thorough, prudent and far-sighted. Through its skilled bursar and the high degree of professional expertise of some governors, good advice is available to the governing body as it plans and assesses value for the money which it spends. Financial planning prepares for change well. *For example, the head teacher, bursar and a governor have attended a training conference on catering to explore options and prepare for the delegation of costs to the school in April 2000. The school built up a good contingency fund to prepare for the additional training needs and the conversion and furnishing of the accommodation so that the improved computer equipment provided by the Dudley Grid for Learning could be put into immediate use.*
94. Financial control and administration are carried out very efficiently by the bursar and other administrative staff, using appropriate computer systems. Records are easily accessible and maintained methodically. Correct and strict procedures are in place to release funds, and balances are reviewed regularly. After the last auditor's report a note of congratulation was received by the senior secretary for the administration she undertakes.
95. The school uses its resources well. Learning resources are used effectively and efficiently. Staff are generally deployed well. The pleasant accommodation, including the refurbished computer rooms, are efficiently used in the lunch hour and after school, as well as during the school day. Placing of subject departments in adjacent rooms makes for smooth and efficient communication and sharing of resources.
96. The resources made available for special educational needs are used very efficiently. Support staff are very effectively deployed to a clear strategy. Pupils with moderate learning difficulties are appropriately in the same tutor group with other pupils to make the most efficient use of support staff in subject lessons. Governors make a heavy financial commitment to supporting pupils with special educational needs, over and above the designated funding, mainly by the employment of support staff.
97. Given the unfavourable socio-economic circumstances of pupils, their very low attainments on entry to the school, the progress they make, their very good attitudes and the good quality of education offered by the school, the school provides good value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

English, mathematics and science

English

98. Results at GCSE in English and English literature have remained well below average since the last inspection, but both improved in 1999 when results in English literature were in line with the national average. Boys improved their performance to come closer to that of the girls. The entry of pupils for the Certificate of Educational Achievement was increased for 1999 and results were good with over 60% gaining either a merit or a distinction. Results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were poor in 1998 and well below those of similar schools. There was an improvement in 1999 and results were in line with those of similar schools, although still well below average nationally.

99. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is well below average. Pupils enter the school well below average and the level does not change significantly in Key Stage 3. Several basic errors remain and the structure of written work remains insecure. Speaking and listening skills are generally employed satisfactorily in group discussion, but pupils are usually very hesitant when extended statements are required. Basic reading competence has improved by the end of this key stage, but the ability to read and research for information is poor.

100. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is below average. Some able pupils do produce impressive work employing a good range of vocabulary within a variety of different structures. These are frequently imaginative, thoughtful and, where appropriate, show good critical understanding. Writing from the majority of pupils varies in its level of attainment, but by the end of Key Stage 4 is usually competent. Better preparation and drafting would improve the structure and depth of enquiry. Speaking and listening skills are often good within structured group discussion, but many pupils find it difficult to sustain statements at length and require more opportunities to practise. Reading levels are generally improving. The good collaboration between teachers and support staff, together with class reading time are important factors.

101. Standards of literacy are well below average and the support given across subjects for the development of pupils' skills is inconsistent. Along with the support in English there is good, structured support for extended writing in history, support for technical language in design technology and well-planned approaches in religious education which provide pupils with support for a variety of writing, including note-taking. Other departments provide some support, but this needs to be developed further and co-ordinated more systematically. In general, opportunities for structured discussion and sustained oral presentation are few and pupils have poor skills in this area. Written work is often based on short answers and many pupils lack the ability to structure their work in the appropriate genre. Skills in reading improve, but pupils still need more opportunities to practise, in particular to improve the skill of reading for information, including from computer screens and printouts, and the associated skill of making notes in their own words.

102. Progress in Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory overall. The most able pupils make satisfactory progress, responding positively to a range of tasks, but a greater degree of differentiation, offering them more challenging tasks, would enable them to develop their individual skills and perspectives to an even higher level. The majority of pupils of middle ability make slow progress overall. A significant minority of pupils enters the school with serious weaknesses in literacy skills. Several of these pupils have complex learning difficulties. Whilst some of these pupils still have serious shortcomings in their use of English by the end of Key Stage 3, the majority makes good progress. Progress in Key Stage 4 is

satisfactory and is better when pupils are actively involved in their learning. *A Year 11 class, for example, studying AMacbeth≡ made good progress in understanding some of the key themes of the play by considering, planning and presenting a dramatisation of part of the opening scene.* Progress is also good when pupils plan, discuss and draft their work to include editing and modification of their writing. However, the majority of pupils have an under-developed understanding of the drafting process.

103. Pupils are generally well-motivated and often show a keen interest in their work. They work very well together and group discussion is often lively. They usually concentrate well, particularly during the 10 minute quiet reading time at the beginning of lessons. They can organise themselves successfully, often following procedures efficiently and without instruction. Relationships between pupils themselves and with teachers are often of a very high standard. The ethos in some Key Stage 4 classes is often that of a mature tutorial. Pupils are generally prepared to put time into research projects, but do not always have the study skills to do this successfully.

104. Teaching is satisfactory overall in both key stages. It is good in about a third of lessons, but unsatisfactory in about one-sixth. This weak teaching is typified by a lack of clear purpose and a poor structure so that pupils drift from one task to another; the work does not challenge pupils sufficiently; in these circumstances pupils become restless and inattentive. All the teachers are specialist teachers of English and have a good command of the subject. They plan and prepare their work very thoroughly and there is a cohesive departmental approach based on the agreed schemes. Expectations are usually high, but the most able are not always challenged appropriately when there is a lack of differentiation in the work presented to the mixed-ability classes. However, when the work is matched to ability pupils respond positively. *A Year 8 class reading the teacher=s own version of ABeowulf≡, for example, had specific support for pupils with moderate learning difficulties; these pupils approached the reading in a different manner and produced narrative in the form of a storyboard; others wrote stories and the most able produced some impressive description.* The management of pupils is nearly always good and relationships are mostly of a very high standard. Teachers know their pupils well, including those in Year 7 who have been in the school for only a short time. Teaching is often brisk and lively, using different strategies including role-play. *A Year 10 class studying AOf Mice And Men≡ achieved an encouraging level of involvement in a Ahot-seating≡ exercise even though many were nervous; the teacher=s good organisation, sensitivity and own use of role were major factors in this success.* The department=s assessment policy is very thorough and the marking of pupils= work follows this closely. Comments are positive and there is good advice about the steps necessary for improvement. Schemes of work now include an IT element in all modules with an emphasis on word-processing. Good use is made of the computer room by some classes. *A Year 7 group, for example, made very good use of the facilities when working on their ASchool≡ topic; they remained well-focussed throughout the lesson and many achieved good levels, sometimes including computer graphics.*

105. The teaching of English is based on well-structured schemes of work and the range of resources is much improved. This is particularly true of the support for issues and interests of a multi-cultural nature and shows progress since the previous inspection. The department has designed assessment sheets in which both teachers and pupils evaluate progress and achievement and set targets for improvement. Folios of pupils= best work with assessment sheets are compiled throughout the key stages and provide a very good record of continuity and progression. Reports to parents are completed carefully and comments are clear and positive. However, the boxed section which identifies key skills at Key Stage 3 is limited to secretarial skills and does not include reading or speaking and listening; these skills are as important as the other skills and should receive the same prominence.

106. Drama was introduced in Key Stage 3 in September 1998 and is taught to Year 8 only by teachers of English. Not all the teachers of drama are specialists, but they work well with the schemes of work prepared by the one specialist in the department. *For example, the*

teacher of a Year 8 class in the early stages of the drama course encouraged confident and concentrated work from the pupils by her enthusiastic and lively support. Drama is technically part of Expressive and Performing Arts and English teachers have no further role. Its isolation in Year 8 impedes continuity and progression. The position and nature of this subject need to be clarified and its position in the curriculum established more positively. Accommodation for drama is inadequate, being restricted to the Hall when available or to the ordinary classroom.

107. In order to raise standards further the school should:

- # match tasks more closely to individual pupils= attainment;
- # improve pupils= abilities to plan and draft their written work;
- # clarify the position of drama within the curriculum;
- # improve pupils= literacy by, for example:
 - establishing a representative cross-curricular working party to explore what support is already given by departments and considering how this might be co-ordinated, developed and extended;
 - finding out what experiences Year 7 pupils have already had as part of their primary school literacy hour and planning ways of building on the strategies used;
 - consulting other secondary schools where successful practice has been developed.

Mathematics

108. Results at GCSE are well below the national average in the proportion achieving the higher grades and below average in those achieving all grades. Standards are improving and pupils achieve average levels for the school. The results of the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 are well below the national average, but are above the results of similar schools.

109. By the end of Key Stage 3, achievement is below average; by the end of Key Stage 4, it is well below average. There are signs of improvement as the higher attaining pupils in Years 8, 9 and 10 achieve good standards. At the end of Key Stage 3, the majority of pupils can tally and draw appropriate bar charts and the highest attainers can draw and understand cumulative frequency curves. Algebraic understanding is limited: most pupils can work out simple sequences, some can solve simple equations and the high attainers can solve linear equations with brackets and use Pythagoras in context. By the end of Key Stage 4, the highest attaining pupils can solve simultaneous equations correctly. Investigational skills are developing with most pupils able to spot a simple pattern, many devise simple formulae and some work out more complex relationships and write them algebraically. However, skills in using their own ideas and putting their thoughts into writing are very limited. Regular mental and non-calculator number work is improving mental skills. A considerable number of pupils have difficulty in all areas of mathematics.

110. There is appropriate, but limited, use of mathematics across the other subjects of the curriculum. Graphs to represent information are used in geography, science, design and technology and GNVQ. *For example, in GNVQ, pupils drew a bar chart of use of health care professionals by families and in a Year 7 science lesson, an investigation on heating water with different flames led to two sets of results being drawn on the same axes with the teacher producing pre-drawn axes for some pupils.* In art, spatial concepts are used in perspective and also in scale and three-dimensional work; *for example, in the construction of a huge aeroplane from paper spills.* The ideas of proportion are used in design technology. *In a Year 11 design and technology lesson on electronic timers, for example, pupils discussed how to calculate the value of resistors and were able to answer question like: A>What happens if you increase by a factor of 10?≡ and Alf I double the resistance, what happens to the time?≡* However, some curriculum areas feel that lack of numeracy skills limits pupils=

progress; for example, in electronics, where use of formulae is important in helping to understand the concepts, and in modern foreign languages where teaching *Atime* and *Ashopping* are made more difficult. More needs to be done to encourage the use of mathematics in other subject areas with common approaches and co-ordinated use.

111. Progress is sound overall and in many lessons, good or very good. Pupils enter the school well below the national average and below similar schools. At the end of Key Stage 3, results, though still well below the national average, are above average in comparison with schools with similar backgrounds. Higher attainers generally make good progress. In lessons in which pupils are involved in the learning and work is at appropriate levels, progress is good. *In a Year 10 class working on long multiplication, for example, clear explanations, praise and encouragement gave the pupils confidence to succeed at a task that many people find difficult.* Understanding and knowledge of number bonds is developing well with the introduction of number practice without the use of a calculator as a small part of most lessons. Progress in the use and application of mathematics is sound, but the development of research skills is limited. In some lessons, progress is hindered because tasks are not matched to differing needs. *Some pupils, for example, understand and can do the work, but they are held back to wait for others to catch up or are given more examples at the same level instead of more challenging work.* Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, especially where there is the help of support teachers and tasks have been prepared which match their prior knowledge and takes concepts forward at the right speed. The curriculum assistant and the support staff provide very valuable help in the classroom.

112. Pupils generally behave well in lessons. They respond well when their teachers have high expectations. Most are confident in responding to questions and in explaining their thoughts to the rest of the class. When given the opportunity they work well together in developing ideas through discussion. *In a Year 8 class, for example, pupils were learning to use scientific calculators with different features to calculate roots and powers; they used their initiative, discussed well together, and, with the encouragement of the teacher, were able to use the calculators efficiently and accurately.* However, some teachers do not encourage joint working and use of initiative. Some pupils are reticent in answering and need encouragement from the teacher to gain confidence. A small number of pupils are difficult to keep on task. Most pupils produce well presented and accurate work. In a few cases work is untidy, careless and unfinished. Work is better where the teacher checks the exercise books more often.

113. Teaching is generally satisfactory and often good or very good although about an eighth is unsatisfactory. When teaching is less effective, it is too directed, the pace is too slow, tasks are not well-matched to attainment, explanations are not clear and pupils are not encouraged to be involved. When teaching is good, teachers have high expectations, lessons are well planned, explanations are clear and work is well matched to pupils' knowledge. The most successful teaching involves the pupils in the development of concepts by good questioning techniques. *For example, in a Year 11 class, quadratic equations were solved using graphs: the teacher shared his enthusiasm for the subject with the pupils, involved them in the learning with questions which made them think, used mathematical language and past knowledge throughout, and developed a good understanding of the concept.* Relationships with pupils are very good and teachers are generally supportive and caring. Teachers generally show a good command of the subject. Many teachers give clear lesson objectives. There is good use of mathematical language and an expectation that pupils will use correct language. Most teachers use praise and encouragement well to develop pupils' confidence. Good use of the overhead projector is seen in many lessons; *for example in a Year 11 lesson, pupils were looking for formulae from a pattern using squares and the use of the overhead projector, made the development of the formulae much easier to follow.* Set tasks are generally used to teach the application of mathematics. Learning would be enhanced if pupils were more often allowed to collect data for real-life situations they themselves have chosen to investigate. There is very limited use of information technology, although Year 9 pupils do a project using LOGO. Most lessons are organised effectively with

new work, a short revision section and a numeracy slot. *For example, one class was really involved in a Countdown sum for a few minutes and, in another, pupils were Adding on 11" and all were asked to do the examples in order round the room.* However, calculators are too often used for very simple calculations. Homework is given and is appropriate. Some teachers mark well with useful or encouraging comments. The new system where homework gets points for accuracy, effort and presentation, with a running total leading to merit awards, is good and should encourage pupils.

114. The curriculum area is well led and the teachers work well together. The scheme shows progression and continuity and includes some differentiated work for pupils= differing needs. However, in the scheme for the mixed-ability Year 7, the match of work to levels of attainment is not sufficiently explicit. Assessment is effective and is by end of module tests and tasks on the use and application of mathematics. Before each module test, parents are sent letters stating what will be tested and how they could help their children; this is a good feature. Pupils= self-assessment is at an early stage of development. A member of the department is responsible for links with primary schools, but these are not extensive.

115. To raise standards further, the school should:

- # share good practice in order to improve less effective teaching;
- # ensure that the levels and pace of work are appropriate for all pupils;
- # involve pupils more effectively in their own assessment.

Science

116. Results at GCSE in double balanced science are well below the national average. Most pupils follow a double science course to GCSE, but a number successfully follow a Science Plus course leading to a Certificate of Educational Achievement. Results in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 are well below the national average, but are above those of similar schools.

117. By the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, attainment is well below average. Practical work is generally of a sound standard, reflecting an emphasis on practical and investigational work in the department. *An able year 9 group in a lesson on electromagnetism, for example, was quickly able to construct a suitable coil and show the magnetic effect of passing a current through the coil.* However, pupils' general understanding of scientific facts and concepts across the biological, chemical and physical topics of the National Curriculum is often of a low standard. *A Year 11 group in an introductory lesson on the periodic table, for example, showed so little understanding of the related Key Stage 3 work that the teacher abandoned the planned lesson to revise earlier work.* Standards of oracy are usually satisfactory, but many pupils have problems with written work and the department has introduced some strategies to assist in this area. *In a lesson with a Year 8 low ability group, for example, great emphasis was placed on the pupils' success in a spelling test on scientific words.* A number of pupils also have problems with numerical work, although there is some good use of graphical work. *A mixed-ability Year 7 group, for example, had obtained data from a simple investigation in the previous lesson; the teacher started the following lesson by explaining how to draw the graph and helping pupils with the scale and any other difficulties which they experienced.* Currently there is limited use of data-logging equipment and other computer use by pupils, but this is largely caused by the change over to a more modern computer system in the laboratories. *However, in a Year 11 lesson with a low ability set, the group used a computer program to extract information about a number of different elements in the periodic table.* The curriculum includes a short course on science thinking skills. *In a Year 8 lesson, for example, pupils showed a good understanding of the idea of variables from Year 7 work and then made rapid progress to understand the idea of investigating two independent variables.* Pupils are encouraged to consider the role of scientific theories; *displayed in one*

laboratory, for example, was a poster prepared by pupils about the different understanding of the solar system by different civilisations and at different eras. In a Year 11 lesson, the different theories of the nature and formation of the solar system were used to illustrate understanding and misunderstanding of scientific ideas and theories.

118. Progress is generally sound. This is seen most clearly when there is development of practical skills and of scientific concepts and ideas. *For example, an enthusiastic Year 7 group, working on a cooling curve activity were to able handle equipment reasonably well, with careful supervision, and measured temperature well but had difficulties with measuring time intervals. A Year 11 group, working on an investigation in electricity, collected and assembled the equipment they had identified, obtained data and moved immediately to set up another version of the investigation.* However, some groups or individuals make limited progress as a result of their attitude to learning. *In another Year 11 group in a lesson on photosynthesis some pupils were able to explain the reason for the shape of a graph. Others gave meaningless answers, suggesting a lack of understanding of the basis of the work.* Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in science.

119. Attitudes and behaviour are generally of a good standard. In many lessons, this provides a good learning atmosphere in the laboratory, and pupils are often interested in the content of the work. However there is low level disruption and a negative attitude to learning from small groups in a number of lessons. Pupils work well in a variety of groupings. They show respect for school and each other's equipment and are usually sensitive to the needs of other pupils.

120. Teaching is sound overall and good in some lessons. All staff are well qualified for their teaching role. Lessons are well planned and the aims of lessons are shared with pupils. However, expectations vary. If the teacher ensures a good pace to the lesson, pupils normally respond accordingly, but in a few lessons achievement is limited by lack of pace or of clear direction. *A low ability Year 8 group in a lesson on diet, for example, was very restless and the gentle pace of the lesson allowed too many opportunities for unrelated chatter.* Relationships between staff and pupils are good. Most lessons are too strongly teacher directed. Other approaches are rarely used, except in investigations when the pupils have some limited control of their own learning. Pupils are taught in sets, but there are few opportunities provided to extend the higher attainers in the group except through investigations. *A higher attaining year 10 group in a lesson on heat radiation, for example, worked well on completing the practical activity and obtained results which could have been considered during the lesson rather than waiting for detailed graphs to be produced in the next lesson.* In some lessons, support is available for pupils with special educational needs, and the teaching of such groups is generally good. *In a very low attaining Year 11 group, for example, pupils were guided carefully and patiently to complete the bar charts and to make an evaluation of a simple investigation they had performed in a previous lesson.* Marking is generally of a good standard with many supportive comments on pupils' work. There are central records of pupil achievement in Key Stage 3, and this system could usefully be extended to Key Stage 4. There is very little pupil self-assessment.

121. The science staff, including the laboratory technicians, work well together. Technical support for the department is exceptionally good. Accommodation for science is of a very high standard, resources for science teaching are good and well used, and the new IT facilities are excellent. Professional development arrangements for teaching and technical staff are good. There is systematic monitoring of marking across the department and lesson observation has recently been introduced. There is useful departmental documentation with considerable emphasis on the analysis of external examination results.

122. To improve standards, further the school should:

- # review teaching and learning styles within the department;
- # develop the introductory work on pupil self-assessment;
- # develop strategies to ensure familiarity with the new computer equipment for staff

- and pupils;
- # experiment with different grouping, setting and teaching arrangements to improve pupils' attitudes to learning;
 - # continue to develop strategies to improve pupils' numeracy and literacy skills.

Other subjects or courses

Art

123. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to C at GCSE has risen dramatically since the last inspection. The results for 1998 and 1999 were exceptional, with all but one pupil gaining a higher grade and there was a good proportion of A and A* grades.

124. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with the level expected of pupils at the age of 14, but in some cases it is exceeded. Pupils receive an unusually broad art experience and develop a good range of skills. This is a strength of the department. The level of observation drawing is high. *Year 8, for example, have drawn insects and these show very good use of line and tone using a pencil.* Pupils show imagination and good use of previously taught skills. *For example, IT projects of stamp designs and Asian >Paisley= patterns show good use of other cultures as a starting point as well as good use of pattern and colours.* By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is very high and well above the national expectations. Pupils continue to build well on the secure foundations gained at Key Stage 3. Sketch books are used well in research. Artists, crafts persons, designers and their work are continually examined and the ideas used by the pupils in their own work. Examples of high quality, mature work in paint, pastel, collage charcoal, print, two- and three-dimensions abound in the art rooms and around the school. The high quality of these displays stimulates an interest in art and improves pupils= progress.

125. In Key Stage 3 pupils make good progress. Progress is evident in class work and in pupils= sketch books. Emphasis is initially placed on drawing and the effect of this is evident in the pupils= work folders; this allows a pupil=s development to be followed through the key stage. Skills and techniques are interwoven into the study of artists and creative forms from other cultures. Pupils experience a wide range, *including, for example, footwear from North American Indians, masks from Africa, fabric decoration from Asia and South America.* At Key Stage 4, pupils make very good progress. The broad foundation they receive at Key Stage 3 means they can select confidently from the variety of media and materials available. *The long lengths of printed patterns, for example, show pupils have a good knowledge of printing techniques and exploit them using colour and pattern to the full. The project on Asocial issues= in Year 10, for example, allows pupils to express their own ideas and feelings through a variety of media following detailed research and investigation; pupils now handle colour, texture and mixed media with confidence, showing good progress.*

126. Attitudes are very good and mature. Art is an extremely popular option in Key Stage 4 and the number taking examinations is well above the national level. Pupils behave very well and they are well organised and attentive. They keep on task throughout the lessons and many come back after lessons to continue with their work. There is a calm working atmosphere in the department. Relationships between pupils and staff are good. Pupils behave responsibly and clear away without any problems, often under difficult circumstances. Their capacity for personal study increases through the key stages. *Pupils are expected to use their sketch books for research and as a resource, for example, and there are many examples of carefully executed work in which pupils have invested a considerable amount of time and effort.* Pupils work well together and respect their own and other=s work. They respond well to the continual challenges, particularly in Key Stage 4.

127. Teaching overall is good and effective. At Key Stage 3, it is good, never less than satisfactory, and in most cases it is good or very good. At Key Stage 4, it is very effective and always good or very good. Teachers are secure in their knowledge and understanding. They have high expectations of the pupils. Lessons are well planned, organised and supported by a very good range of relevant resources. Objectives are clear and time is used well so that lessons are taught at a brisk pace. Discussion plays an important part in helping pupils to

develop their work; this is another strength of the department. *This showed, for example, strongly in the Year 10 project; pupils discussed particular issues, differing approaches, the quality of each other's work and how it could be related to the work of artists.* There is a very warm and welcoming attitude within the department and great effort has been made to provide an excellent working environment. The resources and visual aids are used effectively. Relationships with pupils are good and teachers never raise their voices. Pupils with special needs are well supported and achieve very good results in class and examinations. Homework is an integral part of the scheme of work, is set regularly and marked. Comprehensive assessment procedures are in place, including pupil self-assessment, and the pupils are in no doubt of the level that they are achieving and what they must do to improve and develop. Where end of lesson summaries are used they enhance the lessons still further. Praise is used to very good effect.

128. The department is extremely well led and forms a very enthusiastic, effective, hardworking and committed team. All the points raised in the last inspection have been addressed successfully. The scheme of work is planned to provide pupils with a rich and very varied art experience. Pupils' work is taken out into the community, *for example, through exhibitions and joint projects for the millennium with the Glass Museum.* Much has been achieved since the last inspection.

Design technology

129. Overall results at GCSE are below the national average in resistant materials courses and in line with national figures in food technology. Since the last inspection there has been a small upward trend in examination results for resistant materials. GCSE results in food technology have shown a downward trend over the same period. Results in child development are well below the national average and also below the standards achieved in other subjects in the school.

130. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is below the national average. Lower attainers are hampered by a lack of literacy and numeracy skills. *For example, their recording skills are poor and their work folders often untidy.* They are encouraged by their teachers to demonstrate their capabilities through the more practical aspects of the subject. Some higher attainers, however, are able to show an appreciation of the process of designing and making. *For example, they can explain, either verbally or by graphic means, some of the processes they are using.*

131. By the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is below average. Pupils can often make good verbal contributions to lessons, but lack the practical skills to record and present their work in a neat manner. *For example, some members of a Year 11 graphics class could make good analytical comments on the work under discussion but their individual design folders were disorganised and contained poor quality work.* Better structuring of project work at Key Stage 4 now allows suitable opportunities for pupils to develop independent learning skills. Pupils use a wide range of resources in research for their projects including computers. *For example, pupils in a Year 11 food technology lesson were able to use Internet sources to obtain useful information for a project on special diets.*

132. Progress at Key Stage 3 is sound. *The higher attaining pupils, for example, have understood new ideas, adopted sound working procedures, and are beginning to develop the skills needed for successful project work.* These skills are under-developed in lower attaining pupils, who make slow progress in spite of the great efforts made to overcome the obstacles to progress caused by pupils' low literacy and numeracy skills. Progress at Key Stage 4 is sound overall. *For example, some pupils are able to build on earlier experiences and use independent learning skills, but make slow progress and require significant support and guidance from the teacher.*

133. The majority of pupils are attentive and keen to contribute to lessons. Examples of inattentiveness and lapses of self-discipline are few and usually dealt with effectively. Pupils generally co-operate well with each other and with staff. Work supports personal development. *For example, pupils with special educational needs in a Year 10 food lesson were clearly gaining from the experience of organising their own time, effort and resources to carry out their plan of action.*

134. Teaching is satisfactory overall and sometimes good. Teachers are knowledgeable and bring a wealth of background experience to their work. They make good use of praise and positive comments to encourage pupils, and they have established relaxed and friendly relationships with pupils. Most classrooms are orderly and give an air of purposeful activity. The best teaching is characterised by clear explanation of the task ahead, clear target setting and a choice of topic that is relevant to the pupils. *For example, in a Year 7 food technology lesson, pupils were given the context of using food to cheer up someone not feeling well. Pupils were given clear targets for the lesson and beyond.* Where teaching is less successful it is often as a result of a lack of variety in both teaching methods and activities. The pace of lessons is generally satisfactory, but in some cases pupils need to work faster. *For example, a Year 8 lesson on Structures consisted entirely of work on paper with no opportunity for pupils to be involved in any practical activity.* Projects for younger pupils are very tightly structured and do not properly match pupils' attainment. *Year 7 pupils, for example, have limited opportunities to contribute to the outcome of their project and this inhibits some high attainers from extending their work.* Assessment procedures are well developed and provide much valuable information about pupils for staff, although pupils are not involved in their own assessment. It is not clear that pupils fully understand the level they have achieved or what they have to do to make progress. *Pupils' work, for example, is marked regularly, but constructive comments are more often recorded at the conclusion of a project rather than during its course when they would be of greater value in helping the pupil to improve.* Teachers give good support to pupils experiencing difficulty and use humour to help motivate pupils.

135. Accommodation is spacious and well maintained, and pupils have access to a wide range of equipment and resources. Two well-qualified and experienced technicians give good support to the department. The available resources have been managed effectively and the department is well supported financially. The changes to the schemes of work and assessment procedures have enabled staff to establish a clearer picture of what each pupil has achieved and of their capability. This has had a beneficial effect on attainment and has created the potential for further improvements.

136. To raise standards further the school should:

- # organise projects in Key Stage 3 so that pupils can make greater individual contributions to the outcome;
- # make better use of assessment and marking to support pupils' progress.

Geography

137. Results at GCSE are well below the national average. Since 1996, results in GCSE examinations have fallen and are now below the average of other subjects in the school. In 1999, all pupils entered for the Certificate of Educational Achievement were successful.

138. Attainment is well below average by the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils in Year 7 enter the school well below national standards and there is little improvement by the end of the key stage. Pupils' oral work is better than their writing and weak literacy skills impede progress. From the scrutiny of work, attainment overall in Year 9 is well below average. However, pupils in the upper sets in Year 9 attain standards similar to those found nationally. *When*

studying local urban change or proposing urban renewal schemes, for example, a small minority can explain the sequence of events, but a few of the lower attaining pupils, working with these teaching groups, find the decision-making exercise too difficult or have too little understanding of scale to locate an airport. Pupils with special educational needs work well for their abilities in lower sets; *for example in Year 8 they can associate the food they eat with the farm products and match different kinds of farming;* and by the end of Year 9, lower attaining pupils have improved their graphical skills.

139. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is well below the national standard. The majority of Year 11 GCSE pupils work below the expected standard; *for example, in a case study on arable farming the majority can identify climate and relief, but only a few can match the soils appropriately.* Pupils in Year 10 extract key facts from books and computers and the Internet competently, *for example, on urban centres such as Kobe and San Francisco,* to prepare for mini-presentations. Within a Certificate of Educational Achievement group, the majority can access reference materials satisfactorily to make limited gains in knowledge and understanding. Their location of places is less accurate.

140. Progress during both key stages is satisfactory. Lower attaining pupils in Year 7 have limited knowledge, skills and understanding of geography. However, by the end of Key Stage 3, some skills are better. *For example, charts and diagrams are drawn more accurately; middle-attaining pupils have improved their mapping skills and can write more extensively on topics such as cold climates.* In lessons, higher attaining pupils in Year 9 generally make good progress although many do not read the whole question before starting to write the answer. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils working on new development sites make good deductions; *for example, to recognise the economic implications for seasonal workers in a seaside town and compare this with the congestion and air pollution caused by traffic jams in the tourist season.* GCSE course work makes good use of a range of source materials. The use of computers is not integrated into the curriculum, but individual pupils make good use of information technology.

141. Pupils respond well to the teacher=s questioning and respect each other=s contributions. They listen well. Most pupils concentrate in lessons. Behaviour is often good and teachers work hard to maintain discipline. Praise is used well and misbehaviour corrected quickly. Ethnic groups are fully integrated within the classroom. They respect each other=s values, customs and beliefs. Pupils often work well independently but when given the opportunity enjoy the challenge of working in pairs or groups, *for example, to extract information and prepare for mini-presentations.*

142. Teaching is satisfactory overall, but better at Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 4. Specialist teachers share a good command of the subject and many lessons have good features. These include a clear explanation for the purpose of carefully planned lessons. When the teaching has high expectations, tasks are well matched to the pupils' needs. However, too often pupils follow a common task and some worksheets still provide too few opportunities for pupils at all levels to extend their knowledge skills and understanding. The management of the pupils is consistently firm. On occasions, the teaching is lively and involves all pupils in a question-and-answer-session. *In a Year 8 lesson, for example, the quality of the teaching motivated pupils with learning difficulties to identify different types of farming in the United Kingdom from the food they had eaten the previous day; the exemplars pupils gave were then used skilfully to reinforce the pupils' enjoyment in learning; both class teaching and the support teaching was very effective.* However, on occasions in Key Stage 4, the weak structure for independent learning led to an over-reliance on worksheets and the textbooks with too few short term targets for the pupils. *A Year 11 group working on industrial location, for example, did not receive sufficient detail and reinforcement from the teaching, so that many pupils with weak literacy skills struggled with the theme's basic vocabulary.* Work is marked regularly, although geographical spelling errors are not always corrected. There are too few written comments to encourage higher standards.

143. The curriculum team leader is responsible for the administration and overview of geography and history, and there is a head of department with specified syllabus responsibilities. The leadership is competent and the administration thorough. In Year 7, pupils follow a combined humanities programme and this is followed by specialised units in Years 8 and 9. The curriculum provides insufficient planned opportunities for field work and information technology. The weaknesses identified in the last report have been addressed and resources are now good. However, this has not yet improved standards.

144. To raise standards further, the school should:

- # improve the weaknesses in literacy;
- # provide pupils with a more continuous experience of geography at Key Stage 3;
- # review the curriculum at both key stages to include use of computers and opportunities for practical geography, particularly fieldwork.

History

145. Results at GCSE have remained below the national average since the last inspection, although there was an improvement in 1999. Pupils' performance is similar to that of most other subjects in the school.

146. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is below average. Pupils in Year 7 are well below the national average. Orally pupils are confident, although their writing and spelling is weak, and only a small minority can answer in sentences and paragraphs or combine sources of information appropriately. *In humanities lessons, for example, pupils studied a local example of a Norman Castle; they could recognise how the castle came to be built on a defensive hill site surrounded by arable and grazing land as both a home and a symbol of the knight's power.* In Year 8, both in lessons and from the work survey, about a third of the classes in the upper sets demonstrate an increasing depth of factual knowledge. *From their research on the way Wolsey gained his power from Henry VIII, for example, higher attaining pupils could give some reasons for Wolsey's importance.* By Year 9, higher attaining pupils have made significant gains in their knowledge, improved their skills of interpretation and can sequence events accurately from source materials. Lower attainers have limited powers of retention. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is below average. *In Year 10, for example, higher attainers recognise the similarities and the different perspectives of the propaganda from World War I posters to demonstrate a potential for about half to attain higher grades at GCSE.* Pupils with special educational needs in Year 10 attain relatively well. Higher attaining pupils in Year 11 show satisfactory research skills using the Internet to extract relevant information, whilst the remainder of the group write notes to complete a satisfactory volume of work. Pupils in a lower attaining group work well below the national standard and find it difficult to record information in draft form for their course work; *although they know, for example, how Hitler regarded the Jews as enemies and imposed strategies of oppression in Poland.*

147. Progress during Key Stage 3 is good and during Key Stage 4 satisfactory. At both key stages high, average and lower attaining pupils, including those with special needs, progress as well as or better than expected. The level of attainment is improving slowly. In Year 7, pupils review their previous work and then make useful contributions to question-and-answer sessions. They acquire new learning from role play; *for example, they chose the best route to the castle.* By Year 9, lower attaining pupils can recognise changes; *for example, the industrial changes which occurred from the local extraction of iron ore.* Higher attaining pupils write sensitively and they draft their extended writing *to describe, for example, the transport changes occurring from the growth of steam trains and the advantages of turnpike roads.* At Key Stage 4, pupils in both year groups make good progress supported by videos. Higher attaining pupils can empathise well; *for example, with the difficulties of fighting in the trenches during the First World War.* Lower attaining pupils make appropriate deductions; *for*

example, to recognise the excitement and confidence Hitler generated in his early life and the subsequent suffering of the Jews. Pupils with special educational needs make limited progress in the initial stages of their course work, but some higher attaining pupils, in the work survey, display some very good progress; this includes, for example, extended writing from local source materials to interpret the events surrounding the initial meeting of an allotment association in 1918 and in this context make interesting connections with the local need for accommodation and the subsequent acceptance of women to work after the First World War.

148. Pupils respond well and enjoy their lessons. In Key Stage 3, there are often dramatic experiences from which the pupils learn effectively. They are attentive and interested and behaviour is good. Although some Year 7 pupils are a little slow to settle, they remain interested and motivated. Relationships are consistently good. Pupils are keen to succeed. They work well independently and at a reasonable pace. At Key Stage 4, the majority take their own notes from the video and draft their work. Pupils listen to one another, contribute to discussion and respect each other's culture. Ethnic groups mix well and boys and girls work together.

149. Teaching is good overall. It is always at least satisfactory and is good or very good in about two-thirds of lessons. Individual lessons are carefully planned within a well-considered framework to reflect the high expectations of the teachers and to incorporate a number of strategies, *for example, role play with Year 7 pupils*, and in the best lessons, the purpose is shared effectively with the pupils. The pace of lessons is good and on occasions this leads to exciting learning. Specialist teachers have a good, sometimes very good command of the subject, which they often use very effectively to enliven and focus the lesson; *this helped lower attaining pupils in Year 9, for example, to empathise well with the changing social conditions of the eighteenth century*. However, on occasion, planned extension materials for the higher attainers, within the scheme of work are not always used effectively and pupils spend too long on low level tasks. Opportunities are lost to raise their standard of literacy further. Overall, the teaching of pupils with learning difficulties is particularly good and the support teaching is very effective because it encourages pupils to think for themselves. In all classes, there are frequent checks on pupils' understanding and effective questioning. The management of the classroom and pupils' behaviour is consistent and firm.

150. The department is managed sensitively. Overall standards have improved since the last report. Resources are now good. Professional development is encouraged and effective.

151. To raise standards further, the school:

- # continue raising standards of literacy;
- # incorporate the planned use of information technology into the schemes of work;
- # use more extension material for the higher attaining pupils.

Information technology

152. One week prior to the inspection, the school had a high performance network with 160 stations installed through the Dudley Grid for Learning scheme. Uncertainty during the planning stages hindered curriculum development, although some useful steps were made, particularly in the selection of software that aids transition from the old system to the new. Staff are due to receive training from within the local scheme and from national initiatives. As might be expected, both staff and pupils are in the process of familiarising themselves with the equipment and its capabilities. Some important features are not yet in place. *For example, the capability to display computer screens to whole classes had not been installed in time for the inspection; paper curriculum support materials have not yet been developed by the school or provided by the local scheme.* However, the school is in a good position to move forward.

153. All pupils are taught information technology in Year 10, but only a minority (about 30%) is subsequently entered for a GCSE short course. Pupils completing this course perform satisfactorily and achieve results in line with the national average. This involves both pupils and staff working hard outside lessons as there is no time-table provision for information technology in Year 11.

154. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is below average. On entry to the school, pupils display a very wide range of achievement. While some are able to present information in attractive formats, others find operating the keyboard quite difficult. The IT course in Year 7, one hour per week, brings most pupils to a level of basic competence. However, they spend less time on IT in years 8 and 9, and this together with spasmodic IT experience in other areas of the curriculum means that skills are not developed in a progressive manner and progress is unsatisfactory. Pupils encounter a satisfactory range of software tools for word-processing, information handling and control applications, but their experience is insufficient for many of them to develop confidence to the level required by the National Curriculum. There is potential for improvement now that new facilities have been installed under the arrangements for the Dudley Grid for Learning.

155. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is below average. Results and progress are unsatisfactory because pupils lack full opportunity to develop skills and knowledge in a structured way across the key stage. This situation shows signs of improvement, but further development is needed, particularly to improve the take-up of information technology, and to set clear targets for better results at GCSE.

156. The specialist co-ordinator does most of the teaching with a few lessons taught by other teachers. They are often assisted ably by the IT technician, who has developed a support role. All the teaching seen was of a satisfactory standard. Despite the unfamiliarity of new equipment, lessons were orderly and well organised, gaining an enthusiastic response from pupils. Teachers were good at helping slower learning pupils and support teachers were also deployed effectively for this purpose. However, the learning tasks often lacked adequate challenge for pupils capable of higher attainment. *A lack of appropriate software guides, visual presentations and support materials, for example, prevented pupils working independently and encouraged an undesirable degree of teacher dependence.* Correcting this will contribute to raising standards.

157. The scheme of work adequately reflects the breadth required by the National Curriculum, but needs further development so that learning tasks offer greater challenge and better links with the work of other subjects. Some departments are making good use of information technology. *For example, an excellent multimedia application has been developed in religious education that incorporates high quality images, allowing pupils to explore places of worship. Good graphics work has occurred in art and pupils also use software for design purposes in design technology.* These, and new learning activities, need to be embedded in the broader curriculum so that pupils are better able to build IT knowledge and skills in a progressive manner.

158. The school is well placed to make improvements now that it has full access to the facilities of the Dudley Grid for Learning. These are strategically deployed with a good range of peripherals in attractive rooms. Useful Intranet resources had been developed and these are due for transfer to the new server. Now that the new computer suites are fully functioning, plans are also in hand to provide projection facilities, which are much needed.

159. To ensure efficient use of the equipment following a very large expenditure, the development should be formally included in the school development plan as a whole school initiative. Monitoring and a plan of implementation should be agreed by senior managers. Among the priorities should be:

- # including better and co-ordinated opportunities for pupils to acquire IT skills in a

- planned and progressive manner;
- # improving the scheme of work for information technology;
- # embedding of learning tasks using information technology throughout the subjects of curriculum;
- # adopting a more systematic approach to assessment at Key Stage 3 that pays due regard to the full range of IT experience of pupils and the accuracy of assessments;
- # raising standards at Key Stage 3 by providing resources to encourage independence;
- # reviewing the provision in Key Stage 4 with intention of increasing the number of pupils taking GCSE.

Modern foreign languages

160. Since the last inspection, results at GCSE have risen steadily for both French and German and, from a relatively small sample of pupils, are now above the national average. Assessment of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in listening, speaking, reading and writing, followed by teaching which is planned to address the weaker areas such as writing, has had a significant impact on raising achievement. The number of pupils entered for GCSE has risen since the last inspection and is set to continue rising.

161. By the end of Key Stage 4 standards of attainment in lessons in both French and German are at the national average. All pupils in Key Stage 4 now study a modern language, apart from those who at the end of Key Stage 3 take up a work-related course leading to GNVQ. Able pupils at Key Stage 4 are extended in lessons and some achieve high grades at GCSE. *For example, as well as doing the necessary reading and research in German holiday brochures, Year 11 pupils were able to convert a conversation in German about a recent holiday in Germany into a piece of extended writing in the past tense on the same theme.* Since the last inspection a new course leading to a Certificate of Achievement has been developed for those who are unlikely to enter for GCSE. This has been effective in offering more pupils a broader curriculum.

162. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards in French and German are below the national average. By the end of Year 9 lower-attaining pupils are still doing quite a lot of copy-writing and sentence manipulation with little extended writing. However, the school's highest attainers can write short passages using the present and past tense with a good degree of accuracy. *For example, pupils who are still at the start of Year 9 had written a postcard for homework explaining briefly who they were with and what they had done that day. One pupil wrote "Salut, Je suis au bord de la mer avec mes copains. Il fait chaud. Ce matin j'ai nagé. Ce soir je joue au volley. C'est formidable. A bientôt."*

163. Progress at both key stages is good, particularly since very many pupils arrive in school with below average levels of literacy. Able pupils at Key Stage 4 make very good progress. *For example, pupils in Year 11 studying French re-visited the topic of the weather; they were using an up-to-the-minute weather forecast downloaded from French television's web site and printed on to an overhead projector transparency in order to use the future tense to predict weather for the following afternoon; there was very good progress since Year 7 when they had learned to recognise and use simple phrases.* Good progress is promoted by the schemes of work which are differentiated to cater for pupils of all abilities and which enable pupils to build on what they have learnt year by year. Helpful time-tabling, where pupils receive two hours' modern language teaching per week at Key Stage 3 increasing to three hours' per week when the work becomes more challenging at Key Stage 4, is also a contributory factor.

164. Pupils' attitude and their behaviour are very good. They arrive on time with books,

pens and paper ready to work. Those pupils who rarely travel abroad benefit from the positive contacts through lessons with a foreign language and culture. Relationships between pupils and teachers are good-humoured, but respectful.

165. Teaching is good at both key stages. The wealth of experience and expertise in the department enables pupils to receive a very well planned and varied curriculum taught by subject specialists. Teachers' command of French and German is very good. They have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and they use learning materials that both interest and challenge pupils. *In a Year 9 German lesson, for example, the linguistic intention was to practise the superlative form of adjectives; the teacher made imaginative use of a geographical quiz with clues like, 'In dieser Stadt kann man das höchste Gebäude der Welt sehen.'; pupils thoroughly enjoyed the lesson and made good progress.* Pupils' work is regularly assessed in a number of ways. The results of assessments are well used to inform curriculum planning, but could be used further, at Key Stage 3 as well as at Key Stage 4, to improve the targets set for pupils, *by identifying, for example, how quickly they will learn skills.* More use of classroom observation would facilitate the spread of good ideas and teaching strategies.

166. The subject leadership is good. The department's work shows both clarity of thought and a sense of purpose. Within a secure framework of expectations there is scope for teachers' individuality and staff take responsibility for the delivery of the curriculum within their own classroom. The department has a development plan which is quite clearly presented, but does not name who is actually going to take responsibility for the actions, how much it will cost, by when it will be completed and how the impact on pupils' attainment will be measured. Resources and accommodation are very good and make a significant contribution to an attractive and stimulating learning environment. Improvements since the last inspection include matching teaching better to the needs of the pupils, extending the modern language curriculum and investing in resources for teaching, especially reading and reference materials. The department is in a strong position to continue improving.

167. In order to raise standards further, the school should:

- # consider extending the existing practice of setting realistic targets for each pupil in Year 11 into other year groups lower down the school.

Music

168. Results at GCSE are well above the national average and have been consistently improving since the last inspection. *In 1999, for example all pupils gained at least a grade C and there were five A* grades out of 19 entries.*

169. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment overall is at the national average, although some lower sets show attainment well below this level; by the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is above the national average. Music from the pop and rock fields are a strong feature with an exceptional number of playing groups, but this factor does not prevent pupils from showing a great interest in all music presented to them. There is strong vocal work. Listening skills and the linked aurally-based deductions are a strong feature of the higher attainers by the end of Key Stage 3. However, lower groups are less successful. *Some Year 8 groups, for example, were totally unable to link the letter notation with which they were presented to the sounds which it represented either in rhythmic or melodic terms.* Pupils with special needs do not always attain as well as they could, and the Key Stage 3 setting arrangements with its lower sets has an adverse impact on pupils' self-image, and subsequently on their attainment. More than 70 pupils have instrumental lessons, and there is an appropriate remission scheme. Around a quarter of the pupils take part in the very lively musical extra-curricular provision. *Earlier this year, for example, the school's second music tour to Austria took place.*

170. Progress at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall, but some lower sets do not make sufficient progress. At Key Stage 3, the very effective stage of review and consolidation in many lessons is part of the intensive developmental process - pupils are on the edge of their seats. Progress is good at Key Stage 4. *For example, one band on the basis of excellent skills developed, left school early last year to tour in Japan and achieved No 1 status.*

171. Pupils' attitudes are satisfactory overall at Key Stage 3. They are best with middle and upper sets. Some pupils in lower sets are still at the stage of playing around with the keyboard. In the best groups, concentration is good, there is strong mutual support, and a good work ethos. With the weaker groups, concentration is poor, attention spans are short and pupils have a poor self-image. Pupils have a good attitude at Key Stage 4. Few pupils enter the school with high attainment by conventional measures and it is a tribute to their commitment and enthusiasm that such good progress is made.

172. Teaching is good overall, and often very good. The best teaching is characterised by a driving impact and intensive pace. Expectations are high, but with a supportive methodology. Excellent relationships produce a relaxed atmosphere, and even those with less commitment are kept on track.

173. Leadership in music is very good, almost charismatic. The curriculum satisfies National Curriculum requirements, but needs review in order to ensure better access for all. There are good links with primary schools, including an annual primary music tour, and good links with professional recording studios, as well as to the Birmingham Conservatoire, including the use of its *Gamelan*.

174. In order to raise standards further, the school should:

- # review the curriculum to improve access for lower attainers;
- # review the schools' setting arrangements as they apply to music at Key Stage 3.

Physical education

175. In addition to a programme of physical education taken by all pupils, a small number take PE at GCSE. The results in 1998 examinations were well below the national average, but the results in 1999 show a slight improvement, and all the pupils gained grades A* to G. There is little difference between the performance of boys and girls, or pupils of different ethnic groups or backgrounds.

176. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is broadly in line with the national expectation. Standards of attainment are similar to those observed in the previous inspection. By the age of 14, the majority of pupils attain satisfactory standards in team games. Sound standards were seen in soccer and netball, *in which, for example, the majority of pupils showed good ball control and use of space in the games.* Basic skills are performed with a degree of accuracy, and most pupils show competence in planning for performance, *for example in the ability to anticipate, to move to the ball and to intercept,* but few have developed more advanced skills. Pupils' skills of evaluation are generally under-developed in games, as there is a lack of opportunity for pupils to express judgements about their own or others' work. They rarely observe, analyse and comment on performance. Pupils of all levels of attainment make a sound beginning in their dance studies. Inspired by the contemporary dance work "Ghost Dances", boys and girls show a good sense of rhythm and movement dynamics, *for example, as they explored the theme of repression in Chile under General Pinochet.*

177. By the end of Key Stage 4, the attainment of pupils in the core physical education programme, generally match the level expected. There has been a slight improvement in

standards since the last inspection. By the age of 16, attainment in team games is average, and most pupils apply their knowledge, skills and understanding of rules and tactics effectively in soccer and netball. In basketball, some low attaining pupils, particularly girls, have not yet mastered the basic skills, which inhibits their effectiveness in play. By the age of 16, attainment in GCSE dance is above average. Work of a high quality was seen, *for example, as pupils rehearsed a group dance composed in collaboration with the West Midlands Police; pupils attained precision and fluency, as they performed a dance drama designed to promote drug awareness in primary schools.* Standards in GCSE practical course work are sound, with a minority of pupils performing at a higher level; *this was well illustrated by boys in soccer, as they refined their skills in the context of strategic play.* However, the majority of pupils' written work is below average, and shows limited understanding and application of theoretical aspects of the course.

178. Progress is satisfactory in both key stages. This is because pupils respond well to sound teaching, work at a steady pace and make good use of opportunities to practise. Pupils make gains in knowledge, skill and understanding in the majority of lessons. *Discernible progress by low attaining pupils, for example, was evident in a basketball lesson, where small sided games were matched to their abilities.* Gains in understanding are evident in games lessons in both key stages, *for example when pupils consolidate skills, learn to anticipate play and develop effective teamwork.* In some lessons, the highest attaining pupils make less progress than they could, because the pace of learning is insufficiently challenging. Average and high attaining pupils are often unaware of the specific actions they could take to improve their work. Where this is the case, it is linked to a lack of direct advice in mid-task from the teacher, and insufficient opportunity to evaluate and appraise critically their own work and that of others. Steady progress is made in games as pupils move through each key stage. Progress in dance is particularly good in Key Stage 4. Pupils with special educational needs are well-integrated into the physical education programme, and progress at a similar rate to their peers. There are opportunities in most of the major games and in dance for all pupils to participate in extra-curricular sport, and make further progress in their chosen activities.

179. Attitudes to learning are sound in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4. The majority of pupils are well motivated and enjoy the subject. These positive attitudes are expressed through good behaviour, and a high level of participation in lessons. Pupils take an interest in their work, respond well to tasks set and work hard. They show a responsible attitude to their work; *in games, for example, they play fairly and abide by the rules.* There is a good balance between co-operation and competition in play. Co-operative group work takes place effectively in most lessons. Good collaboration is a feature of dance lessons, with pupils showing a sense of commitment to their work and taking a pride in their performance.

180. Teaching is satisfactory overall and there are some examples of good and very good teaching. Although satisfactory, some teaching lacks rigour, and high attaining pupils are insufficiently challenged, as tasks do not always extend them. The strongest teaching is in Key Stage 4, reflecting higher teacher expectations. There was no judgement of teaching in the previous inspection report. The teachers have very good relationships with the pupils, and this contributes significantly to pupils' good behaviour and co-operation in lessons. Pupil management and organisation is a strength of the department. Teachers' subject knowledge is good, reflected in well prepared lessons with clear objectives, normally shared with pupils. However, the teachers are less secure about implementing the requirements of the National Curriculum to involve pupils in planning and evaluating, as well as in performing. A major weakness is that lessons are often too closely directed by the teacher, and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to make their own decisions, to evaluate performance and, therefore, to develop independence. In general, a limited range of teaching strategies is used and the pupils are not enabled to take responsibility or to discuss, investigate and solve problems. The strongest teaching has a demanding pace of learning, pupils are challenged both physically and intellectually, and they make progress through analysis and evaluation of their work. This was particularly evident in the teaching of dance. Skillful questioning which

helps pupils to evaluate, as well as demonstrate their knowledge and understanding is also a feature of good teaching.

181. Progress since the last inspection has been generally good, particularly in the school's endeavours to improve the indoor accommodation, and in the improvement of the quality of learning, and a corresponding rise in attainment, in the Key Stage 4 core programme, with fewer pupils under-achieving. However, there is still a great deal to do in order to raise standards of attainment further, particularly in GCSE. The department has an awareness of the need to raise pupils' attainment, but not a sufficiently sharp focus on ensuring that pupils make the best possible progress. Teaching and learning styles require developing. Extra-curricular sport and dance reflect a considerable commitment by staff from within and outside the department, and a well-supported programme enables many pupils to achieve success in their chosen activities. *For example, the Under 16 basketball team has been undefeated for two years in the Dudley league.*

182. To raise standards of attainment the department should:

- # ensure a demanding pace of learning in all lessons to enable pupils to make good progress;
- # ensure a range of teaching strategies is used to involve pupils more directly in their learning, particularly in evaluating performance;
- # monitor closely the effectiveness of the strategies used in GCSE to raise awareness of the weaknesses causing under-achievement;
- # introduce target-setting for GCSE pupils.

Religious education

183. Results for the full GCSE course have been at or above average over the last three years and in 1999 nearly all gained a higher grade. In 1999, nearly four-fifths of pupils entered obtained a distinction in the Certificate of Educational Achievement; this includes some from Year 9. Pupils perform consistently above their average level in other subjects.

184. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils have achieved average levels because considerable effort is given within the subject to improving pupils' literacy skills. Pupils acquire a sound understanding of what it means to be a member of any community and of a faith community in particular. They gain an elementary knowledge of world faiths through considering what it means to be a Christian, Muslim, Sikh or Jew through a study of places of worship and the festivals and celebrations of other faiths. Pupils remember their previous work well. *In a Year 9 lesson on forgiveness, for example, they knew that faced with the tragic killing of their relatives people respond differently with revenge or forgiveness; they understood that to forgive is very hard, but changes both the victim and the perpetrator of the offence. Pupils showed sufficient knowledge of the life of Jesus to be able to compare the act of forgiveness with the example of his death and the words from the cross, A Father, forgive them.≡*

185. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment in examination groups taught by subject specialists is about average, but attainment in general religious education taught by non-specialist teachers is below average. The standards required by the full GCSE examination are set before pupils early in the year. *In one lesson, for example, pupils acted as examiners, assigning levels to pieces of written work; they recognised the difference between simple attempts and work which contained much more evaluation with arguments sustained by evidence.* In general religious education, lessons are supported by good resource materials, but groups discussion skills limit attainment. Most pupils at this stage are capable of seeing and appreciating more than one viewpoint, but some make emotive responses and are not

yet at a level to argue a case sustained by evidence.

186. Progress is sound across Key Stage 3. It is occasionally very good, especially as pupils gain respect for their own developing beliefs and those of others, as well as the power of religious commitment to change behaviour. *They learn, for example that a mark of commitment is standing up for what is right.* They extend their technical vocabulary well and add new concepts to their learning to give more precision to their work. In Key Stage 4, progress for pupils taught by specialist teachers is good and for others satisfactory. *Pupils make good progress in considering, for example, Christian baptism and exploring symbolism, the meaning of sin for a believer, and the role and importance of godparents.* Other pupils make satisfactory progress overall.

187. Attitudes are very positive. Behaviour is usually good, often very good. *Year 7 pupils, for example, brought in objects to represent the community to which they belong. They were listened to respectfully and attentively and applause greeted their efforts.* Good, amicable and supportive relationships are found among all ethnic groups. In Key Stage 4, pupils taking GCSE work diligently and industriously. They co-operate well with their teachers and apply themselves seriously to the tasks in hand.

188. Teaching is good overall and particularly effective at Key Stage 3. Teaching by non-specialists of the core lesson in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory and the teaching on the GCSE course is good. Weaknesses in the core lessons at Key Stage 4 are failure to make use of pupils' personal experience through group work and an insufficient emphasis on the perspectives of other faiths. Specialist teachers have a very good subject knowledge and it is used well to enrich the detail of lessons. Their lessons are very well planned and prepared. The resource booklets prepared by the head of subject are differentiated to three levels of attainment and meet pupils' needs well. In Key Stage 4 they are particularly important in ensuring common standards and depth of knowledge in the core lessons. Teachers promote oral work very well. Good questions building on pupils' answers lead the pupils to the threshold of new learning. Teachers respect pupils' answers and wait for them to extend their answers and clarify their understanding. Computers are used exceptionally well and the teaching enhances pupils' IT skills. Pupils, including those with challenging behaviour, are managed very well. Day-to-day assessment is good.

189. Leadership is very good and provision is well managed. However, there are potential weaknesses in the arrangements for the short course in Key Stage 4: the assessment is separated from the teaching so may not influence the curriculum and its delivery; using form tutors who move with their group means that the expertise gained is lost each year and new groups of teachers must be trained. In addition, the time allowed is insufficient for the requirements of the course.

190. To raise standards further, the school should:

- # increase the time for the general course in Key Stage 4;
- # ensure the curriculum and assessment are more closely linked in the general course at Key Stage 4;
- # set in place appropriate review and training procedures to increase the expertise of tutors in Year 10.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

Summary of inspection evidence

191. The inspection team consisted of 14 inspectors, who spent a total of 54 working days in the school during the period of the inspection. During this time, 193 lessons, 36 registration sessions, 5 assemblies and a range of extra-curricular activities were inspected. All teachers with a full-time class teaching commitment were observed teaching at least once and nearly all more often. Planned discussions were held with over 25 members of staff and others involved with the work of the school. The chairman of the governing body and other governors were seen by appointment. All the written work of a sample of 6 pupils from four year groups, 24 pupils in all, was inspected. Inspectors also looked at portfolios of work. Planned discussions were held with groups of pupils from each year in the school. Inspectors also looked at the work of, and discussed matters with, many more pupils less formally. An exceptionally large amount of documentation provided by the school was analysed in advance of the inspection. The registered inspector held a meeting attended by 10 parents prior to the inspection. The team considered responses to a questionnaire from 29% of parents of pupils in the school and a number of letters from parents and others.

Data and indicators

192. PUPIL DATA

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 - Y11	1002	26	340	377

193. TEACHERS AND CLASSES

Qualified teachers (Y7 - Y11)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	67.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	14.8

Education support staff (Y7 - Y11)

Total number of education support staff

18

Total aggregate hours worked each week

302

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:

80

Average teaching group size:

KS3

20.5

KS4

15.4

194. FINANCIAL DATA

Financial year:

1998/99

	,
Total Income	2538542
Total Expenditure	2526321
Expenditure per pupil	2521
Balance brought forward from previous year	35682
Balance carried forward to next year	47903

195. PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:

1022

Number of questionnaires returned:

291

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school	19	64	9	7	1
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	33	54	6	4	2
The school handles complaints from parents well	21	57	9	9	3
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	20	61	12	7	1
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	29	57	8	5	1
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	36	54	5	4	1
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	31	55	10	4	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	26	60	7	5	2
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	21	57	15	5	3
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	18	49	20	10	3
My child(ren) like(s) school	32	52	10	4	2