

INSPECTION REPORT

The Holly Hall School

Dudley

LEA area: Dudley

Unique reference number: 103875

Headteacher: Julie Cutts

Reporting inspector: Mark Woodward
11049

Dates of inspection: 10 – 14 January 2000

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M J Price
Date of previous inspection:	February 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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Mark Woodward	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it/What should the school do to improve further
			The school's results and achievements
			How well are students taught
			How well is the school led and managed
			School data and indicators
Suzanne Smith	Lay inspector	Equal opportunities	
			Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the school care for its students
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents
			Accommodation
Gordon Allison		Geography	Staff development, induction
James Berry		Science	How well the school cultivates pupils' personal - SMSC
Elizabeth Charlesworth		Music	
Alan Giles		Physical education	
Jeffery Hardman		Information technology	
		Design and technology	
Bob Hartman		Mathematics	The school's results and achievements(S)
			Assessment
John Mallinson		History	Staffing
Peter McKenzie		Modern foreign languages	EAL
			Resources and finance
Eileen Metcalfe		Art	
Cedric Sander		English	The school's results and achievements(S)
Robert Tweed		Religious education	
		Special educational needs	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is a smaller than average mixed comprehensive school of around 600 pupils, evenly divided between girls and boys. It has chosen to adopt Foundation status having become a grant maintained school in 1993. The school is over-subscribed and is in an area where surrounding schools with similar intakes are part of a recently created Education Action Zone. Three of the four main feeder schools are part of this Zone.

The pupils are from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Around 60% are Anglo-European, 14% Asian Indian, 13% Asian Pakistani, 6% African Caribbean and the remainder from Asian, other black or mixed race backgrounds. Around 200 pupils have English as an additional language which is very high, 80 of whom are at an early stage of language acquisition.

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is stable, currently 31%, and is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs is 36% which is well above the national average, whilst the proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is well below the national average at 0.5%. The majority of these pupils have learning difficulties whilst a smaller proportion have emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Attainment on entry to the school is low in relation to national standards, although it has risen in recent years. Pupils' language skills are weaker than their other core skills. Up until two years ago, the majority of pupils had significantly lower than average reading ages on entry.

More pupils are choosing to stay in full time education after leaving the school than at the time of the last inspection, whilst fewer are going directly into full time work.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The overall effectiveness of the school is good. This success is particularly evident in the high standards that pupils achieve in relation to their prior attainment, and in their positive attitudes. To achieve this, the school has worked hard to raise the aspirations of the pupils who have less advantaged backgrounds, on average, than pupils nationally. The very good leadership and management of the school has resulted in pupils being given a good education by committed and skillful teachers. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection.

The school receives considerably more money per pupil than most schools and it is successful in raising the standards of the pupils. It therefore provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- During their time in the school, the standards achieved by the majority of the pupils rise in relation to the standards achieved by pupils nationally.
- At both key stages, pupils achieve particularly well in information technology, geography, physical education and religious education. They also achieve well in mathematics and design and technology at Key Stage 4 and in music at Key Stage 3.
- The leadership and management of the school are very good and this is the key factor in the school's improvement.
- The headteacher gives strong leadership and enables other managers to develop and fulfil their roles effectively.
- The governors are very effective in helping the school to improve.
- The ethos of the school promotes the achievement of high standards.
- The overall quality of teaching is good at both key stages.
- The morale of staff is high because their work is appreciated and they are given opportunities and the encouragement to develop their knowledge and skills.
- The induction arrangements for new staff are exemplary.
- The aims of the school are very well reflected in its work.
- The management of the site is very effective.
- Pupils' progress is assessed and monitored well.
- Target setting is successful in motivating pupils to achieve higher results.

- The Monthly Merit Marks have significantly improved the attitudes and progress of Year 11 pupils.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are generally very good.
- The pastoral provision is very effective in supporting and encouraging the pupils.
- The Personal Development Programme is very well planned and well taught.
- Spending is carefully monitored.

What could be improved

- Standards are not high enough in history and in modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4.
- The progress of some groups of pupils should match that of the highest achieving groups of pupils.
- The negative attitudes of a small minority of the pupils, mainly boys, affect their progress.
- The management and educational provision for pupils with special educational needs is not sufficiently well co-ordinated.
- The development of pupils' literacy skills does not have a sufficiently high priority across the whole school.
- The provision for religious education and information technology does not comply with National Curriculum requirements.
- Whilst effective practices are shared across the school there is so much good work being done that more benefit could be gained from developing this process.
- Pupils' progress reports do not give parents sufficient information.
- Information technology is not used sufficiently within departments to improve pupils' learning.
- Some laboratories, design and technology rooms and the music room are too small for the number of pupils currently being taught in them.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in March 1996 and its progress since then has been very good. There has been a significant rise in examination results; for example in the GCSE examinations in 1995, the average total points scored by the pupils was 30 compared with 37 in 1999. Also, the proportion of pupils gaining 5A*-C grades rose from 26% to 41%. The proportion of boys gaining 5A*-C grades has risen at a faster rate than that of girls, but girls still achieve more higher grades than boys.

Overall, the school has made good progress in tackling the key issues identified by the last inspection report. Pupils use a wider range of learning skills and they are more involved in their own learning. Assessment practices are now very good. They are used well by most departments to monitor pupils' progress, to set targets for future performance and to plan the curriculum to meet the pupils' changing needs. The appraisal of teachers is now effective, and the performance of departments is also assessed and monitored well; weekly meetings between senior and middle managers ensure that action points are speedily identified and resolved. School priorities are now clear to all because staff take part in strategic planning. There has been a greater emphasis on pupils' spiritual development in schemes of work but it has yet to be seen in teachers' regular practice. Improving the management of the provision for pupils with special educational needs remains a priority as does the expansion of information technology into subject areas. The information technology department has, however, worked effectively with other heads of departments to ensure that the information technology courses support learning across the curriculum. Arrangements are planned to meet the requirements for a daily act of collective worship but not all teachers carry them out.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				Key	
	all schools			similar schools		
	1997	1998	1999	1999		
GCSE examinations	D	D	C	A	well above average	A
					above average	B
					average	C
					below average	D
					well below average	E

The schools' GCSE results are very good in relation to the pupils' standards when they arrive at the school. The results have improved steadily since the last inspection. Over the past three years they have improved at a faster rate than the national average and have been well above average when compared with the results of pupils in similar schools. The school sets targets on the basis of the pupils' prior attainment using appropriate indicators and it has done well to exceed these in the past two years. Its targets for 2005 are very challenging. They plan to exceed national average results and to improve their results each year. The targets set for 2000 and 2001 are now too conservative based on the school's recent performance.

At both key stages, pupils achieve particularly well in information technology, geography, physical education and religious education. They also achieve well in mathematics and design and technology at Key Stage 4 and in music at Key Stage 3.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils have very positive attitudes to the school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The behaviour of the majority of pupils is good both in class and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	There are very good relationships in the school both between pupils and between pupils and teachers. This is one of the factors that enhances the personal development of the pupils.
Attendance	Levels of attendance are satisfactory. They are broadly in line with the national average.

The school is a harmonious community where the great majority of pupils enjoy the opportunities that they are given to make progress academically and personally. Their levels of achievement are enhanced by this positive culture.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

In the 129 lessons seen during the inspection, 92% were satisfactory or better, 59% were good or better and 18% very good. Teachers expect the pupils to work hard and achieve success. This is one of the key factors in explaining the success of the school in raising pupils' levels of achievement.

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

The quality of teaching and learning at both key stages is satisfactory in English and good in mathematics and science. The teaching in mathematics has improved significantly since the last inspection.

In the other curriculum subjects there are particular strengths in teaching and learning at Key Stage 3 in religious education, physical education, art, design and technology, information technology, geography, music and in the personal development programme; and at Key Stage 4 in religious education, physical education, art, design and technology, information technology, geography and in the personal development programme. The teaching of history at Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory. The teaching of language skills is satisfactory and the teaching of number skills is good.

Most pupils achieve well in relation to their prior ability as a result of teachers meeting their needs effectively. There are variations in the effectiveness of teachers in planning work for pupils with special educational needs. This is because the provision is not well co-ordinated through the use of their individual education plans. The learning of pupils with English as an additional language is enhanced by the support of additional teachers in the classroom. The impact of these teachers is not maximised because most of them have not been trained for the task. There are some good practices for stretching the most able pupils, for example, by entering them 'early' for the mathematics GCSE examination. The school has identified the need to stretch these pupils even more effectively.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Overall the curriculum is satisfactory. There are, however, weaknesses at Key Stage 4 in the provision for information technology and religious education which do not meet statutory requirements.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The planning of provision for pupils with special educational needs is unsatisfactory because individual education plans are not sufficiently specific and are not used by teachers in all subjects.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils with English as an additional language have their needs assessed well and receive sufficient, though insufficiently trained, classroom support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Pupils are given very good opportunities for moral and social development, good opportunities for cultural development and satisfactory opportunities for spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares for its pupils very well.

Particular strengths of the curriculum include the provision of a good range of creative arts courses. The personal development programme is also a strength. It is well organised and covers an appropriate range of topics in a thorough and imaginative way. This helps to ensure that the non-specialist teachers are able to teach it effectively.

Good links have been established with local feeder schools and further education colleges which help to ensure that the curriculum is well developed in response to the progress that pupils have already made and their future learning needs.

Overall, the school takes care of the pupils very well. It praises them for their achievements and successfully provides an education for them that prepares them well for life beyond school.

The school works hard to establish good relationships with parents from all sections of the community. It is largely successful in this aim, for example, there was a very successful Eid party organised during the inspection week. An area of weakness is the detail given to parents about pupils' progress in the annual reports.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is very well led by the headteacher and senior staff. Middle managers are also generally very effective. This is because they are given opportunities to develop their roles in a supportive structure.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors make a major contribution to the success of the school. They bring a variety of skills into the organisation and are very effective in helping to steer its development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school analyses its performance very well and uses information technology effectively in this process.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are generally used well by the school. Careful monitoring procedures ensure that purchasing is closely related to development needs.

The principal reason that the management of this school is very effective is because it supports the teachers in producing high quality work. The school has a very positive feel about it which starts with the headteacher and senior management team and communicates itself through to the pupils through the high expectations that the teachers have of their work, attitudes and behaviour.

Very effective line management procedures help to ensure that action to address issues is taken promptly and that middle managers feel well supported. A good range of performance monitoring tools are used which means that staff are aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This results in staff feeling involved in development planning which increases their job satisfaction.

The school has very good procedures for ensuring that best value purchasing principles are applied.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources are satisfactory.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The pupils make good progress• The school expects the pupils to work hard• The pupils enjoy school	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The quantity of homework• The range of extra-curricular activities• The extent to which the school works with parents• The quality of information provided for parents

The inspection team agrees with all the positive comments made by parents. In terms of the issues; homework practices were found to be satisfactory; there are good opportunities for the pupils to take part in extra-curricular activities; the school works hard to establish links with parents; and a good range of information was given to parents through regular communications such as the weekly newsletter. An area of weakness is the quality of pupils' annual progress reports.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. The pupils perform better in comparison with national standards by the time that they leave the school than they do on entry. They arrive at the school achieving low standards compared with pupils nationally and leave achieving standards that are broadly average compared with pupils nationally. This good progress is made because they are taught well and are given the opportunities, encouragement and support to succeed.
2. Whilst the standards of the pupils on entry to the school are low, they have risen in recent years. This can be seen in the fall in the proportion of pupils who enter with below average reading age scores, particularly in the last two years. Up until two years ago, the majority of pupils had significantly lower than average reading ages. Cognitive Ability Test results confirm this situation as pupils' verbal reasoning scores were consistently low. These tests have been replaced by another entry level test called 'Midyis'. The results of this test are higher which confirm the rising trend in pupils' standards on entry.
3. Pupils' results in the Year 6 National Curriculum tests do not clearly indicate performance trends over time. There has been variation in their outcomes nationally which may at least partially explain this.
4. The rise in standards achieved by the school is less apparent by the end of Key Stage 3 than at the end of Key Stage 4. The results of the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 1999 were below the national averages across the three subjects. They were below average in mathematics and science and well below average in English. The lower performance in English reflects the lower performance of pupils on entry to the school by measures of literacy compared with measures of other capabilities, such as numeracy. Between 1996 and 1998 the Year 9 test results were well below average in English and mathematics, and below average in science. The results of girls and boys have been similar in comparison with the results of girls and boys nationally over the past 4 years.
5. Of the three core subjects, the most improvement since the last inspection in raising standards has been made in mathematics. Inspection findings confirm that substantial improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in mathematics have been made in recent years and that this is the reason for the improvement in standards.
6. Based on teachers' assessments of their pupils' performance at the end of Key Stage 3, standards in 1999 in design and technology, geography and information technology were broadly average whilst they were below average in history and modern foreign languages. Inspection judgements confirmed these results except in information technology where standards were judged to be above average and in modern languages where standards were judged to be average.
7. Taking into account test and examination results, and the observation of the quality of pupils' work in lessons and books, standards compared with pupils nationally at the end of Key Stage 3 are high in information technology; they are average in design and technology, modern languages, geography, art, music, physical education and religious education; and low in English, mathematics, science and history.
8. GCSE results have improved substantially since the last inspection, particularly the proportion of pupils gaining 5A*-C grades. This has risen from 26% of the pupils in 1995 to 41% in 1999. In this same period, the pupils' average total points score has risen from 30 to 37; the proportion of pupils gaining 5A*-G grades has risen from 84% to 95%; and the proportion of pupils gaining 1A*-G grade has risen from 90% to 99%. The rate of improvement represented by these results is faster than that achieved by schools nationally.
9. In 1999, and over the past 3 years, the GCSE results of girls and boys were close to national averages, based on average total points scores. Compared with the results of pupils in similar schools, the 1999 results were well above average by all the key measures and they were above average when compared with the same pupils' results in the 1997 National Curriculum tests.

10. Girls out-perform boys substantially by the 5A*-C measure: for example, in 1999 51% of the girls gained 5A*-C grades compared with 35% of the boys. There is a less marked difference between girls' and boys' average total points scores. In 5 of the last 6 years, boys' average total points scores have been higher than girls' when compared with boys' and girls' averages nationally. In two of these years, boys exceeded the results of boys nationally. Since the last inspection when the lower performance of boys was reported as a key issue, their results at GCSE have improved at a faster rate than those of the girls.
11. In 1999 the proportion of pupils gaining A* and A GCSE grades rose substantially. The cohort was of a higher standard than the Year 11 cohort of 1998 but this was still a creditable performance. Tracking some of the most able pupils based on their 1997 National Curriculum test results, their GCSE results represented satisfactory progress overall with some making very good progress; for example the boy who gained 4A* and 7A grades. In order to improve the performance of the most able pupils further, the school has begun to examine its provision for these pupils more systematically following the publication of a 'paper' by a member of the teaching staff.
12. In 1999, the pupils' GCSE results were above average compared with their performance in the 1997 National Curriculum tests.
13. Pupils are particularly well stretched at Key Stage 4 in mathematics. A substantial proportion of the Year 11 pupils is entered for the GCSE examination sixth months early. The results of both the 1999 and 2000 Y11 cohorts were both very good, almost all of those entered gaining an A*-C grade. Already, 39% of the Year 2000 cohort have gained an A*-C grade in mathematics. This strategy has been very successful in motivating the pupils to achieve high standards.
14. In mathematics and modern foreign languages, some pupils are entered for certificate of achievement courses which run alongside GCSE work. Results in mathematics are satisfactory. They are unsatisfactory in modern foreign languages where too many pupils fail to achieve a pass grade.
15. The school uses performance tracking information supplied by Durham University. This enables the school to see which subjects are most effective in helping their pupils to achieve good standards. A similar calculation is carried out by Ofsted. Combining the two analyses, in the GCSE examinations in 1999, the most effective subjects were mathematics, geography, business and media studies, food technology, music, religious education and statistics. The least effective were English literature, French, German, Urdu, history and communication studies. In 1998, the most effective subjects were science, business and information studies, religious education, drama, geography and food technology; the least effective were French, German, computer studies, music and Urdu.
16. The most progress among the pupils who left the school in 1999 was made by the pupils from Asian Indian and Asian Pakistani origins whilst it was lowest among the pupils from Anglo European origins. There was no clear distinction observed by the inspection team between the attitudes to learning in class between pupils from different ethnic backgrounds. However, there is clearly an issue here that the school needs to investigate in order to make the progress of all pupils consistently good.
17. There is more confidence in the language skills of pupils with English as an additional language at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. Speaking skills develop more quickly than writing skills and the pupils generally make more progress in subjects which rely less on the written word.
18. Taking into account test and examination results, and the observation of the quality of pupils' work in lessons and books, standards compared with pupils nationally at the end of Key Stage 4 are; high in information technology; average in mathematics, design and technology, geography, art, physical education and religious education; low in English, science, modern languages and music; and very low in history.
19. Overall, the school achieves standards that are satisfactory in relation to pupils' prior attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 and good in relation to their prior attainment by the end of Key Stage 4.
20. The school's GCSE examination targets are based on reliable prior attainment data. The 2005 targets are challenging but the targets submitted to the local education authority for 2000 and 2001 are now conservative in the light of the school's recent performance.

21. Pupils' skills in speaking and listening are higher than their skills in reading and writing. This applies to most pupils, including those with English as an additional language. In lessons seen during the inspection there was no significant difference in the standards achieved by boys and girls in speaking and listening. However, standards overall are low at the end of Key Stage 3. Higher and middle attaining pupils can answer questions clearly and confidently in class but most pupils do not speak at length or develop an idea orally. Many middle and lower attaining pupils cannot sustain concentration within group work and lack the confidence to express themselves clearly. Standards improve significantly in Key Stage 4. For example, Year 10 pupils were able to present a well prepared choral reading of a poem and in Year 11 higher attaining pupils show a good degree of skill in preparing an oral presentation about significant personalities of the last millennium. In most other subjects pupils have a satisfactory degree of opportunity to develop skills in speaking and listening. However, these are limited in history.
22. Skills in reading are also developed satisfactorily in most subjects. There is a good range of opportunities to read and understand poetry and prose in English in order to prepare for tests and examinations. The department has developed a particularly good range of comprehension assignments and useful resources to help pupils to understand the language of Shakespeare by the end of Key Stage 3. However, only higher attaining pupils are able to analyse texts and very few are able to compare different texts. Some teachers encourage pupils' wider reading and there is a very good range of fiction in the school library that is well used by pupils. Girls make greater use of these opportunities. In order to raise standards further the department needs to establish consistent arrangements across the department to monitor and support pupils' wider reading.
23. The range of writing skills is very wide indeed. Many higher attaining pupils are able to write accurately and at length by the end of Key Stage 3 and continue to develop these skills well so that by the end of Key Stage 4 they write with a high degree of assurance and accuracy. Narrative and descriptive writing are particularly good. Middle and lower attaining pupils are less confident in their writing and do not write at length. Few are able to paragraph their work consistently. Pupils with English as an additional language also have variable writing skills. Many are skilled writers, but a significant proportion lacks the range of expression in writing that leads to higher grades at GCSE. Although dictionaries are available in the English rooms they are not regularly used and lower attaining pupils achieve a low standard of spelling. The overall presentation of work is satisfactory but many pupils do not write in joined script. The absence of a handwriting policy is restricting standards.
24. Pupils achieve a basic level of numeracy that enables them to make progress in all subjects. They are able accurately to recall number facts, including multiplication tables, but appear more proficient at this in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4. In geography, pupils effectively use a range of skills in data handling, which includes the use of scatter graphs and correlation in Year 11. Pattern work, including symmetry and enlargement, is developed well in art. Modern foreign languages use numbers to count, enumerate, support dates and also to handle data including the use of bar charts – all in the target language. Scope to use and display pupils' abilities in number, graphical, recording and measuring skills are evident in other subjects including science, physical education and design and technology.
25. The mathematics department has a policy to encourage short numeracy activities in all of its lessons. This has a positive effect on pupils' numeracy skills. The department has produced a good whole-school numeracy policy, together with some suggestions as to the best practice to encourage numeracy generally. Additionally the in-school *Academic Bulletin* has been well used to make other subject areas more aware of the opportunities for numeracy in their lessons, together with information as to what to expect pupils who are at certain National Curriculum levels to do.
26. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress at both key stages in most subjects. Progress is unsatisfactory in modern foreign languages and history. Additional support enables pupils to make progress in reading across both key stages, so that by the time they are in Year 10, only 12 pupils currently have a reading age of less than 10. The school does not set itself any overall targets for standards in literacy or numeracy for pupils with special educational needs, so progress towards such targets cannot be assessed. Individual education plans also lack the specific targets needed to assess progress effectively on an individual basis.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

27. The attitudes to school of the vast majority of pupils are very good. At both key stages they enjoy coming to school and are often enthusiastic about their work. They respond positively to their lessons, usually listening attentively and trying hard to meet the high expectations of their teachers. In the majority of lessons they show interest and the ability to concentrate well, particularly in lessons where careful planning has resulted in the setting of well-prepared and stimulating work. Pupils with special educational needs have positive attitudes to the school. They work hard in lessons with very little evidence of poor behaviour. They ask for help when they need it, and respond well to support from the special educational needs co-ordinator and learning support assistant.
28. Pupils appreciate the range of extra-curricular activities provided and many value the provision for 'catching up' and doing homework. All pupils from within the broad range of ethnic groups that make up the school population are valued equally and there was no discernible difference in their motivation to learn during the inspection. However, different groups of pupils make progress at different rates which suggests that there are variable work attitudes over time. Links between home and school for the ethnic minority groups are strong and have a positive impact on the ability of pupils to take full advantage of the education provided. Most pupils take a pride in their work and try hard to complete tasks set. Where this is not so it is often linked to poor attendance levels.
29. Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations of their personal organisation, for example in the way they keep their portfolios and return homework. High standards of personal initiative were observed during the inspection, for example, in information technology where pupils were seen to initiate work beyond the expectations set for them, and in art where the vast majority of pupils use initiative and imagination to pursue their own ideas. Response to the opportunities provided to take responsibility for school routines is very positive. Prefects go about their duties in a mature and responsible manner. The student council run by pupils is a strength of the school. It is supported well by pupils and those holding office show high levels of commitment to improving the school and its environment. Opportunities provided through the personal development programme result in high levels of social awareness and an understanding of community issues both in school and beyond. Pupils are attentive to the needs of others and gain an insight into the lives of those less fortunate than themselves through their work for charity.
30. Behaviour both in lessons and around the school is usually good and results in safe movement about the site and the majority of pupils being able to take full advantage of learning opportunities provided. A few pupils, usually boys, do not value their education sufficiently. They are immature and lack self-discipline, resulting in them being disruptive and sometimes rude to their teachers. This is reflected in the views of some parents, however, where such behaviour occurs it is dealt with well and rarely results in any appreciable interruption to learning for other pupils. A few boys from ethnic minority groups are disrespectful towards female teachers and this has an adverse effect on how well they learn. Generally pupils respond very well to firm and fair discipline, seeing the need to respect the rights of others to work. Pupils have a very good understanding of school rules and expectations; these are reinforced consistently by staff. The incidence of exclusion, although high in relation to similar schools, is as a result of consistently applied criteria. Reasons for exclusion are sound and time spent out of school kept to a minimum. Thorough monitoring of excluded pupils shows no difference in levels between ethnic groups. The school plans the re-integration of pupils well and encourages parents to be involved in promoting changed behaviour patterns. Pupils confirm that there is very little bullying and none was observed during the week of inspection. Where it occurs it is taken very seriously and fully investigated. This helps younger pupils settle happily and confidently when they start at the school in Year 7. School premises are treated with respect, there is little graffiti and waste bins are usually used to good effect. Pupils take a pride in their school and this is evidenced in the work of the school council that has taken positive action to reduce the amount of litter. Pupils are polite and courteous to visitors. They are pleased to discuss their work and most are able to do so with confidence.
31. Positive relationships between pupils of the various ethnic groups and with adults are very good and a strength of the school. An ethos of optimism and goodwill is promoted very successfully through the pastoral system and permeates relationships throughout the school. Pupils usually work well together and collaborate effectively where given opportunities to do so. They are supportive of each other, for example when performing, and show good levels of respect for the contributions and opinions of others. Pupils from the mix of ethnic groups get on very well together and respect each others' religions and

cultures, as was seen at the 'Eid Party' held at the school during inspection week. At lunch and break times they socialise well in pairs and small groups and those that choose to play team games do so amicably.

32. Levels of attendance are 91.3% and broadly in line with the average for similar schools. They are rising and make a satisfactory contribution to the attainment and personal development of pupils. Unauthorised absence is below average at 0.2%. The school usually maintains levels of attendance above 90% in all year groups and has had particular success in raising standards at Key Stage 4 with its monthly merit marks, which have been recently instituted in liaison with pupils. Whilst the majority of pupils arrive on time for the start of the school day and lessons usually begin on time, too many are either slow to join registration groups, arrive during the registration period or loiter between lessons. This reduces the productive time available to teachers.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

33. Overall, the quality of teaching at both Key Stages 3 and 4 is good and this is the major factor in enabling pupils to learn effectively in both key stages and to achieve high standards at GCSE compared with the standards they achieve when they arrive at the school. The teaching quality has improved since the last inspection.
34. In Key Stage 3 the quality of teaching is very good in physical education, religious education and art. It is good in mathematics, science, design and technology, information technology, geography and music, and satisfactory in English, modern languages and history.
35. The quality of learning at Key Stage 3 is very good in physical education and religious education. It is good in mathematics, science, design and technology, information technology, geography, art and music and satisfactory in English, modern languages and history.
36. In Key Stage 4 the quality of teaching is very good in physical education and religious education. It is good in mathematics, science, design and technology, information technology, geography and art; it is satisfactory in English, modern languages, and music; and unsatisfactory in history.
37. The quality of learning at Key Stage 4 is very good in physical education and religious education. It is good in mathematics, science, information technology, geography and art; it is satisfactory in English, design and technology and modern languages, and unsatisfactory in history.
38. The teaching in this school has strengths that far outweigh its weaknesses. Teachers generally have good subject knowledge and very good relationships with the pupils through which they manage their classes effectively. They plan lessons systematically and use a range of successful techniques to enhance pupils' learning.
39. Some of the best teaching is seen in religious education and physical education. In both departments lessons are very well organised to ensure that pupils' interest and motivation are sustained. Pupils are expected to have positive attitudes and to behave well, which they readily do because the lessons are challenging and interesting. In history, there is too much teacher-centred activity which does not encourage the pupils to think enough. Pupils' learning is reduced by the limited range of teaching methods used.
40. The school offers gifted and talented pupils a number of opportunities to make the best use of their abilities. In mathematics, the most able are entered for the GCSE examination early so that the most successful can gain an additional qualification in statistics. This programme has proved to be very successful. Also, the school offers a wide range of subsidised musical instrument tuition. An example of very good violin teaching was seen during the inspection.
41. A particular strength of most of the teaching in the school is the high expectations that the teachers have of the pupils. This is a characteristic of the whole school ethos. It derives from the very good leadership and management of the school offered by the headteacher and senior staff and is carried through by a committed and capable middle management team who support and monitor teaching effectively.

42. A key factor in enabling teachers to appreciate the level of work that pupils are capable of is the very effective way in which they carry out assessments. These are well linked to performance benchmarks, such as GCSE grades, and therefore aid target-setting. Most teachers give clear guidance to the pupils about how they could improve their work in order to meet their targets. Targets are set in each year in consultation with parents during a well planned day in which the curriculum is suspended to allow such discussions to take place. This is a good use of school time because it sharpens pupils' and parents' understanding of what the pupils can achieve.
43. In Year 11, assessment and target-setting practices are tightened further through the introduction of the Monthly Merit Marks. This involves the teachers in each subject making a monthly assessment of the standards and effort made by the pupils. A performance percentage is then calculated for each pupil. This is then sent to parents and used by teachers and the pastoral team to ensure that pupils are on course to achieve expected GCSE grades. It has been very successful in motivating the pupils as many Year 11 pupils explained to inspectors. This success in improving motivation and performance can be seen through indicators other than GCSE results; for example, the attendance of Year 11 pupils has risen by 3% since its introduction.
44. Most teachers use a range of effective methods to promote the learning of the pupils. In information technology lessons, for example, teachers use information technology very effectively as a whole-class teaching aid. Good demonstrations are given in design and technology and art, and lessons are particularly well structured in geography and science. The management of pupils is good in all subjects and by the great majority of teachers.
45. The principal reason that the management of this school is very effective is because it supports the teachers in producing high quality work. This is achieved because the headteacher encourages teachers and managers to take responsibility for their pupils and their areas of management. This results in high staff morale because they feel accountable, but also able to make changes in the way that they work, to achieve higher results.
46. An illustration of the way that teaching has improved through positive management and teacher action can be seen in mathematics. At the time of the last inspection the subject was under-performing. New teaching methods were researched, trialled and implemented and the subject is now one of the more effective. This has been achieved with almost the same team of teachers.
47. Pupils arrive at the school with low levels of literacy skills compared with pupils nationally although the most recent arrivals are showing comparatively higher levels of capability. Through the learning opportunities offered by the school, the pupils develop their literacy skills sufficiently well to achieve good GCSE results across most of their subjects in relation to their prior levels of attainment. However, standards in English are lower than those in mathematics and science, both when the pupils arrive at the school and when they leave. The absence of a whole-school teaching strategy to improve pupils' literacy is therefore an obstacle to bridging the gap between the performance of pupils in these core subjects:
48. The teaching of numeracy is well done by the mathematics department who include numeracy sessions within all of their lessons. Some departments, such as geography and art, make significant contributions to the reinforcement of these skills.
49. The teaching of information technology is good within the specialist department. The teachers help the pupils to develop skills and to apply the work that they do in other subjects. Teachers in most other subjects make insufficient contributions to the development of pupils' information technology skills.
50. Subject departments are inconsistent in their ability to manage teaching for pupils with special educational needs. Support is good, for example, in science, religious education and geography, satisfactory in mathematics and weak in English and modern foreign languages. The majority of teachers plan work effectively for pupils with special educational needs and use methods which enable them to make progress. They do not make effective use of individual education plans, however, and are not always familiar with their content. They do not make use support teaching efficiently and the liaison between class and support teacher is often weak.

51. The special needs co-ordinator works energetically and enjoys good relationships with pupils. She helps other pupils in classrooms as needs arise, and runs a well-supported lunchtime club which gives additional support. Specialist teaching lacks the level of task analysis needed to enable pupils to overcome specific learning difficulties.

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

52. The school has a clear set of curriculum aims. These seek to meet individual needs, promote equality of opportunity within a broad and balanced provision and prepare pupils for adult life. It provides a satisfactory range of opportunities across the subjects taught at Key Stage 3 although there is currently provision for only one modern foreign language. However, the school does make effective provision for pupils to take public examinations in Urdu and Gujarati. Statutory requirements are not fully met at Key Stage 4. In response to the findings of the last inspection, aspects of religious education and spirituality have been planned within the personal development programme but, in practice, these are insufficient to meet the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. A particularly strong feature for a school of below average size is the provision for media studies, music and drama at Key Stage 4. Documentation defines clearly a range of cross-curricular themes. There is a satisfactory strategy to teach numeracy skills but there is no whole-school strategy to teach literacy skills across the curriculum. This is an area of weakness.
53. There have been significant developments since the last inspection to promote further the very good links with local primary schools through the 'bridge curriculum' and there are very strong, well established links with a range of local colleges of further education. These arrangements support a good degree of curriculum continuity beyond the age of 16.
54. There is very good provision for pupils' personal, social and health education. The personal development programme is very well co-ordinated and covers a good range of topics that are relevant to particular year groups. These include appropriate attention to drug misuse. The governors have agreed a policy for sex education and this is taught very effectively by a team of specialists led by the headteacher. The arrangements for careers education are very good indeed and work experience arrangements involve more than one hundred employers. Links with the local community are strong and good use is made of the locality to enrich the study of geography. The recent development to provide community service for Year 10 pupils has further enriched curriculum provision. However, insufficient use is made of the locality in the study of history and science.
55. Some parents have expressed concerns about the range of extra-curricular activities offered by the school. However, the school does in fact provide a good range of opportunities including choir, keyboards and wind band within music, information technology clubs, dance and drama clubs, the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and a range of sports teams. A strong feature of the school's provision is the commitment of the teaching staff to provide additional teaching both at lunchtime and after school. There are also good arrangements to support the progress of pupils who have special educational needs through the 'catch up' clubs held at lunchtimes.
56. The lack of a whole-school literacy strategy affects the efficiency of teachers in approaching this key area. In a number of subjects, particularly those with a high emphasis on reading and writing, weaknesses in pupils' skills in these areas adversely affect their capability of achieving higher standards in national tests and examinations.
57. Pupils with special educational needs have access to broadly the same range of curriculum opportunities as their peers, and to the same extra-curricular activities. The arrangements made to withdraw pupils from some of the modern languages teaching for basic English, however, are unsatisfactory. The way that pupils are chosen is not entirely clear, and the language teaching they lose is not compensated for with appropriate work in English. Pupils' individual education plans lack the specific targets, detailed methodologies and clear timescales which are needed, both in basic skills and in the core subject skills. Pupils with statements of special educational need are further disadvantaged by the fact that the statements also lack clarity and focus. Greater opportunities for independent learning are needed in order

to promote pupils' personal development more effectively; for example, by using information technology more effectively.

58. The school provides a welcoming environment, where pupils are valued and respected and where in turn pupils welcome and respect. Overall provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of school life is good.
59. The provision made for spiritual development is satisfactory. Since the last inspection there has been a great deal of thought, work and training to enable a more clearly focused programme to be taught. The result has been a substantial improvement. All departments have been asked to identify areas in which they can contribute. As might be expected there are strong responses from religious education. The input from the very well planned personal development programme is also very significant and it frequently demands reflection on fundamental questions, values and beliefs. There is good use made in art of spirituality in the study of such topics as stained glass, illuminated manuscripts and the use of masks for spiritual and symbolic purposes. English provides another dimension via drama and imaginative writing and maths from pattern. Whilst some other departments make significant contributions, there are others where this aspect of education is largely neglected or incidental.
60. There is a spiritual contribution from the "Thought for the week" programme, which is operated on a class basis as a minute's silence for reflection towards the end of morning registration. How effective this is depends upon which class is considered: it can be very well done with serious reflection, promoted by the teacher's demeanour, introduction and control of the environment. However, in too many cases there are interruptions, pupils who behave badly or are unaware of what they are supposed to focus on. Pupils feel little ownership for "Thought for the week" as they have little input into its formulation. Assemblies are not acts of worship, but they do invite reflection, have a strong moral emphasis and a spiritual dimension. Nevertheless the school does not meet statutory requirements for providing daily acts of collective worship, which is unchanged since the last inspection.
61. The school makes very good provision for the moral development of its pupils. They are clearly expected to behave well, care for others and to have a well-developed sense of right and wrong. The school's policies on behaviour, bullying, racism and equal opportunities together with its aims, all set up a framework for this environment. It is put into practice by a very well planned and delivered personal development programme, complemented by consideration of moral issues across most subjects of the curriculum. The pupils' work in religious education shows a high level of moral judgement and values drawn from considering Christian and Islamic values and traditions. Moral issues are developed in other curricular areas such as drama and history in the study of Nazi Germany. All staff provide firm role models and the school's collective view of moral issues is well communicated to pupils due to the close pastoral system and warm relationships, which exhibit a promising degree of mutual trust.
62. There is a very good provision made for social development. Here again the input from the personal development programme is very strong and positive. A large number of course units deal effectively with social skills and interactions, such as that employed in a Year 8 lesson on passive, assertive and aggressive behaviour. Much was assimilated from this on the characteristics of these and the primacy of assertive behaviour over the other two: the method of delivery, by acting out various situations with different behaviours, was both memorable and enjoyable. Across the curriculum many subjects include group work where pupils of different genders and ethnic origin usually work harmoniously towards a common aim. This is especially well demonstrated in sport, which also provides good opportunities to join sporting teams. Expedition experience is offered through the Duke of Edinburgh's award and the Youth Theatre encourages further dramatic opportunities. The school provides work experience and links with industry are exploited and currently a citizenship course is being developed. Pupils' sense of social responsibility is demonstrated by their fund raising for charity and their community service. Much is gained from the residential creative arts courses at Ingestre Hall and the geography course in Salop and it is also notable that the school participated in Sir Simon Rattle's biggest orchestra in the world. Pupils take responsibility as prefects, being on reception duty and manning the gates amongst other things. They also participate in the School Council, which is generally thought to be a useful vehicle for promoting pupil ideas. The school reinforces good social behaviour by celebrating its success in assemblies.
63. The provision for cultural development is good. Many cultures and traditions from around the world are represented in the curriculum. English, art, music and history introduce their pupils to Shakespeare,

Chaucer, classical music, European art and British traditional history. Religious education gives good insights of the traditions and cultures associated with such faiths as Christianity, Islam and Judaism: it also lays on visits to cathedrals, mosques and gudwera. Music encompasses Indian, Chinese, Caribbean and western styles, whereas art includes the consideration of Aboriginal and African art. In addition to its languages input the language department organises trips to Germany, whilst the geography department considers what it is like to be a pupil in Japan. Pupils much enjoy and greatly benefit from the creative arts courses on music, poetry and drama at Ingestre Hall, but more use could be made of visits to theatres, galleries and concerts. Major cultural festivals are celebrated at school such as Christmas, Diwali, Eid and some Caribbean festivals.

64. Since the last inspection the school has greatly increased the cultural diversity of its taught curriculum, developed effective monitoring of its personal development programme and much improved the spiritual provision.
65. The result of all this is a good ethos with few tensions between races or pupils and staff. Pupils are leaving the school with a useful range of personal and social skills together with the knowledge that validates their development.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

66. This is a major strength of the school. The welfare and personal support of pupils is given high priority by the management and staff. Very good arrangements are made to ensure the pupils' health, safety and wellbeing. Pupils usually stay with the same form tutor from Year 7 and this results in the tutors knowing them, and often their families, very well indeed. There is a strong pastoral system and very positive relationships between staff and pupils that ensure problems are shared and dealt with effectively. The role of the pastoral team is supported well by a full range of effective policies that are kept under review and updated as needed. There is suitable liaison with support services where this is needed.
67. The child protection policy is in line with guidelines from the local child protection committee. The recently appointed designated person responsible has been suitably trained and pupils are monitored effectively through the pastoral system. The school has plans to include child protection procedures in the induction of new staff and briefing for supply teachers but has not yet done so. Training for all staff on child protection issues has been included in plans for staff development over the next year.
68. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place for health and safety matters. The requirement for statutory testing of equipment is fully met. Risk assessment procedures have been developed and generally work well, although documentation is not fully developed in all subjects. There are suitable arrangements for dealing with first aid emergencies, but the room set aside for medical purposes is not yet appropriately equipped. Emergency evacuation procedures are practised regularly.
69. The behaviour and discipline policy sets clear guidelines that are well known to pupils and consistently applied by staff. An anti bullying culture is fostered well through the personal development programme. This has resulted in few cases of bullying that are dealt with quickly and effectively when brought to the attention of staff. The 'bully box' instituted at the suggestion of parents provides good support for less confident pupils but is not opened with sufficient frequency. Procedures relating to exclusions are clear, in line with statutory requirements and consistently followed. Reasons for exclusion are justified and the length of time spent out of school is kept to a minimum. The strong support for pupils returning from exclusion and involvement of parents in helping to achieve an improvement in behaviour have a positive impact on its effectiveness. The introduction of the Monthly Merit Awards is a great success in motivating pupils to work hard and to attend school regularly.
70. Statutory requirements regarding registration are fully met. The tardy arrival of some pupils and lack of whole-school strategy result in registration periods not always being used to best effect. The school has an effective working relationship with its education social worker, however, current systems for monitoring of attendance levels are cumbersome and do not facilitate the targeting of pupils with specific levels of attendance under 90%. Registration at each lesson results in the prompt identification and follow up of missing pupils.

71. The personal development of pupils is a significant strength of the school. Planning is thorough and comprehensive. It includes relationships, citizenship, health education, sex education, drugs awareness and study skills amongst others. This prepares pupils well for making choices and decisions affecting their lives both in and beyond school. The careers guidance programme is thorough and effective. It is suitably supported by well-planned periods of work experience and community service.
72. The school works in close liaison with local primary schools resulting in good quality curricular and pastoral liaison that supports setting arrangements effectively and helps pupils settle quickly and happily into Year 7.
73. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are very good. Assessment, recording, marking, presentation and reporting are covered in a good range of concise whole-school policy documents. These contain sound aims and principles and offer useful guidance. Issues relating to assessment, including target setting, have been brought to the fore by whole-school, in-service training and through the in-school *Academic Bulletin*.
74. Most departments carefully interpret school policy and provide detailed and helpful advice in their own handbooks or other documentation. The day-to-day assessment of pupils' performance and the recording of individual attainment and progress are good in most subjects, particularly so in art, English, geography, mathematics, religious education and science. The assessment of homework is generally good, as is the quality of feedback given to pupils to help them improve. The good practice of involving pupils in their own assessment is growing, particularly in art and religious education.
75. The school has a wide range of assessment data for its pupils. These include the national Key Stage tests for the relevant subjects, (along with those for Key Stage 2 from their primary feeder schools), reading age and cognitive test results and also nationally validated commercial tests which allow objective target setting for all years in the school. This data is stored electronically and is accessible to teachers, though it could be made available more efficiently.
76. The school makes very good use of its assessment information to plan curriculum development and whole-school, subject and individual target setting. A day is set aside each year for the whole school devoted to the negotiation and setting of individual targets in subjects – parents are invited to attend. Pupils find this a useful exercise, which they feel helps them to improve their levels of attainment.
77. Good use is made of assessment data to analyse the value that the school is adding to pupils' progress as they move through the school. Particular attention is given to the monitoring and analysing of gender and ethnic differences in attainment and progress. Analysis of the relative performance of departments and sets within departments is also carried out as a means of finding good practice and improving performance. Other hypotheses are investigated. For example, the mathematics department is currently investigating to see if age of pupils within a year group might have an effect on performance in mathematics, a possible reason being differences in language development with pupils' ages.
78. Assessment arrangements for pupils with special educational needs fully meet statutory requirements. There are good procedures in place for the identification and assessment of those pupils who are at Stage 2 and above on the Code of Practice, but the assessment of progress towards individual education plan targets is hindered by the unsatisfactory quality of these targets. Review reports satisfactorily cover the essential areas of information including, where necessary, National Curriculum levels, and parents' evenings are well attended.
79. The school has made good progress in the practice of assessment since the last inspection, building on the limited good practice identified at that time. In particular, marking policies are now adhered to, resulting in greater consistency and departmental and individual target setting are more refined and effective.
80. Support for pupils with English as an additional language is provided from an Ethnic Minority Achievement grant and provides a co-ordinator, one full-time equivalent home/school liaison person and additional support from a range of teachers in the school, who work with individual pupils in the classroom. These teachers keep records and monitor pupils' progress. No specific evaluation of the success of language support work is carried out. Pupils are selected to receive language support on the

basis of detailed information from primary schools collected according to the local education authority's profile.

81. During the inspection no planning was seen in any lesson of specific provision for pupils needing support for English as an additional language. In geography, some ethnic minority pupils do not produce extended writing and in English, some ethnic minority girls are not always involved in classroom activity. The school has concentrated on cultural integration and mentoring to raise the achievement of specific ethnic groups. In social groupings around the school, ethnic minority pupils were observed to use English effectively in relationships with their peers.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

82. A high proportion of parents completed the questionnaires provided prior to the inspection and response to the provision made by the school is generally good. The large majority feel their children like school, that they are expected to work hard and are satisfied with the quality of teaching and the progress their children make. These views were confirmed during the week of inspection. A substantial number of parents do not feel that their children receive the right amount of work to do at home. Departments were seen to operate some variable practices but overall, the arrangements for, and quantities of, homework were satisfactory during the inspection week.
83. Parents are generally happy to approach the staff with questions or concerns, although a high proportion does not feel that the school works closely with them. This view is not substantiated by inspection findings. These indicate good levels of involvement that have a positive impact on learning. There are parents' workshops that both help parents to support their children's work at home, for example with target setting and study skills, and enhance understanding of what is taught, as in the sex education and drugs awareness programmes. Levels of support for events involving pupils, for example sports fixtures and drama productions, are good, as is attendance at consultation evenings and the governors' annual general meeting. The English department produces a useful guide for parents about how to support literacy at home and in Year 11 the mathematics department provides mental mathematics questionnaires for which the answers are available to parents; these support learning well. The introduction of the home/school agreement has supported parents' understanding of their role in their children's education well. Where the school has cause for concern about individual pupils, staff seek to involve parents at an early stage.
84. Encouragement for the parents of the large number of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds to be involved in school life is strong and includes home visits where needed. There are coffee mornings and collaboration over the celebratory events relating to religious festivals and cultural traditions. The attention given to encouraging these parents to be involved in the life of the school has resulted in high levels of participation.
85. A substantial number of parents do not feel sufficiently well informed about how well their children are getting on at school and this view is shared by the inspection team. Annual progress reports give good quality information about the courses of study followed and pupils' attitudes to their work. What they know, understand and can do is less consistently well reported and many of the targets set are too general to be of real value in helping parents and pupils understand what must be done to improve. In some instances targets are not set; this applies particularly to higher attaining pupils. Levels of attendance are not always reported.
86. Parents of pupils with special education needs are invited to their children's annual review of progress. However, they do not have a clear role in making decisions about the targets to be set.
87. The school provides parents with a broad range of good quality information that is translated into other languages as needed. The prospectus and annual report from governors give up-to-date information about the school's provision, its routines and expectations. Weekly newsletters are lively and informative, providing an ongoing record of school events and reminders about diary dates. These, together with letters home about specific activities and parents' briefings, for example prior to residential visits, ensure parents receive good information about the school and events relating to their children.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

88. The leadership and management of the school have improved since the last inspection. The school was last inspected in February 1996 and its progress since then has been very good.
89. The school is very well led by the headteacher and senior staff. They have created a positive professional culture in which teachers are supported and encouraged to produce high quality work. The school has a very positive feel about it which starts with the headteacher and senior management team and communicates itself to the pupils through the high expectations that the teachers have of their work, attitudes and behaviour.
90. The school has ambitious long-term aims contained within its 2005 strategic plan. These are challenging but achievable in the light of the school's recent performance. Appropriately they concentrate on raising standards but they also recognise the multi-cultural nature of the school's community and the needs to prepare pupils for work and life beyond school. These aims are very visible in the school's work.
91. Middle managers are generally very effective. This is because they are given opportunities to develop their roles in a supportive structure. They readily take these opportunities and many make significant contributions to the leadership of the school by developing new practices which improve the quality of the educational provision. A good example of this can be seen in the planning and management of the personal development programme. This is carefully structured, teachers being well prepared for their lessons. Each module of the courses is evaluated by the teaching team and modified each year, and the co-ordinator evaluates three lessons each week in order to keep track of the programme's effectiveness.
92. The reason that all the management tiers work so effectively is because of the line management structure. In most weeks, middle managers meet with the senior manager to whom they are responsible in order to discuss progress. The regularity of this contact, together with the availability of performance information, provides the drive behind the school's improvement.
93. The governors have high expectations of the pupils, staff and management and make a major contribution to the success of the school. They bring a variety of skills into the organisation and are very effective in helping to steer its development. Three of the governing body have made major contributions to the staff development programme and the success of their inputs can be seen in the increasing effectiveness of management practices.
94. The school analyses pupils' performance very well and uses information technology effectively in this process. All performance information is shared with staff which results in an ongoing professional debate about how improvements can be brought about. The very good communication between management layers enables the impact of initiatives to be monitored effectively.
95. There are also good procedures for appraising staff. Teachers are regularly observed in the classroom by heads of department or senior managers and all departments have been inspected by outside consultants within the last 2 years.
96. There are significant weaknesses in the current arrangements for managing special needs provision within the school. They are ineffective in ensuring that departments take their responsibilities fully on board. Although there is a committee with representatives from each department, staff do not yet have a clear view of the division of responsibility between subject teachers and the special needs coordinator. Although the special needs co-ordinator is hard-working, she does not have sufficient impact on the quality of provision. The designated governor is committed and enthusiastic and the school has arranged a good induction programme for her. The school's resources for meeting special educational needs are spent appropriately, but do not give satisfactory value for money.
97. As reported at the last inspection, the governors' finance committee meets regularly and is fully involved in strategic financial planning and receiving monitoring reports. Day-to-day monitoring and administration continues to be very efficient, which is confirmed by the most recent audit report. Structures are in place which ensure that the delivery of the school's development planning targets is the

basis of budget decisions. The impact of spending is evaluated carefully through the development planning process.

98. Specific grants are well applied: the Ethnic Minorities Achievement grant provides classroom support for English as an additional language; a small Single Regeneration Budget grant also supports ethnic minority pupils; Standards Fund supports a range of activity including a good programme of staff induction and development. Pupils with special educational needs have limited classroom support provided from the school budget but the use of the learning support assistant in the classroom is not managed to provide optimum value.
99. The school has a high level of income-per-pupil and a low staff contact ratio. Teaching staff costs are low in the present year. The learning resources budget is very low and forecast to decrease, although there are bidding mechanisms for departments to attract additional developmental spending. Learning resources are well linked to development targets.
100. The estates and contracts manager is very effective. He has been well supported in setting up good systems and procedures which enable the school to run smoothly and leave senior managers to concentrate on issues directly related to the pupils' educational needs. He, and senior managers, now have considerable experience of managing contracts and the school continues to search for best value by being represented at a local forum of Foundation Schools who share best practice. Good procedures for ensuring that best value purchasing principles are applied. All expenditure in excess of £100 is subject to the scrutiny of three quotations, against a service specification.
101. The school planned to achieve a rolling underspend of at least £100,000 in each financial year to protect against the loss of specific grants at the end of Grant Maintained status. This has resulted in a contingency fund which stood at 10.6% of the total budget for the last financial year. The business plan for the next five years is vague in that it makes no provision for inflation, nor for the specific use of the accrued contingency fund. Although there will subsequently be a more precise two year financial plan, the projected use of such a significant sum of money lacks sufficient detail.
102. The school receives considerably more money per pupil than most schools and it is successful in raising the standards of the pupils. It therefore provides satisfactory value for money.
103. The school is adequately staffed to teach the whole curriculum. All staff teaching National Curriculum subjects are qualified teachers. There are some examples, as in history, where a few lessons are taught by qualified teachers who are not specialists in that subject, but the number is small, and standards are not adversely affected. The proportion of teachers to pupils is slightly better than the national average for schools of this type. Men outnumber women in senior positions, but no more than in many schools. There is an even balance between teachers with experience of over twenty years - nearly half the staff - and those who are relatively newly qualified.
104. Ancillary staff are sufficient in most subjects although both food technology and information technology have slightly less support than they need. The staffing of the department for pupils with special educational needs is inadequate and there has been no training for the non-specialist teachers who assist pupils with English as an additional language.
105. Priorities for development are clearly spelled out in governors' minutes and staff meetings. Chief among them is the desire to improve teaching and learning. Approaches are discussed openly with staff. Senior management now spend more time observing lessons and discussing classroom practice. The school has recently embarked on several initiatives to sharpen everybody's understanding of personal relationships, bringing in consultants to conduct staff training. The school has recently achieved accreditation with Investors in People, winning praise for the excellence of its submission.
106. The school's strategy for appraisal and performance management is good. Systems for appraisal are well established, and in most cases found to be highly effective. Teachers are given agreed targets and the training required to achieve them. There are several examples of teachers negotiating new responsibilities as a result of appraisal and undertaking them with great success. Ancillary staff are fully involved in the life of the school, and give much valued support. They are also now subject to appraisal, one of the many outcomes arising from 'Investors in People'. Morale is high among all staff working in the school.

107. The arrangements for staff development are very good. In-service training needs are clearly identified at whole-school and individual levels. Priorities for training are clearly linked to the school development plan. The monitoring of training is very effective, as all departments are required to discuss the issue at their departmental meetings. Teacher training days are used effectively to support school development. School staff lead training sessions, which have been particularly useful. For example, all staff are receiving information technology training which is targeted at their specific needs.
108. New staff are supported very well indeed. The induction mentor has prepared an exemplary programme of advice and guidance, and is himself always available for help. Support of similarly high quality is given by the new teacher's department. Frequent opportunities exist for the new teacher to be observed, to observe experienced teachers teach, and to discuss what can be learnt.
109. Since the last inspection high standards of staff development have been maintained, and improved in many areas such as the involvement of outside specialists, and the appraisal and training of ancillary staff.
110. The quality of accommodation is satisfactory overall. Provision for information technology has been upgraded recently and is of a particularly high standard, offering an excellent foundation upon which to support the ICT curriculum. Accommodation for humanities supports teaching very well. Storage space is inadequate in some areas, particularly music, English and art. Good facilities for teaching drama have a positive impact on the standards achieved. Most subjects have sufficient suitably sized accommodation available to them. In science and design technology, some rooms are too small to allow effective practical work and there is insufficient accommodation for music. Subsidence on the sports field requires frequent attention and reduces the effectiveness of the space available. There are plans for dealing with this when funding becomes available. Some of the common areas of the school are too small for the numbers needing to use them, for example the library, staff room and hall. Despite a recent doubling in size, the dining room is still too small to accommodate the number of pupils using it at the same time. This number has risen steeply since the school has changed the contractor providing meals. The contracts and estates manager is very effective in ensuring the premises are maintained to a high standard. The school is to be commended for its ongoing programme of evaluating and improving the accommodation.
111. The allocation for learning resources is very low and the impact of this is felt most strongly in music, where there are inadequate percussion instruments, and in modern foreign languages, where there is no published course in use at Key Stage 3. The school library is also affected in that there is only a small collection of books which is, however, relevant and well managed. Despite the low levels of books, the library is a good feature of the school, having study facilities incorporating the new technologies and being open to pupils during lunchtime and during the day. The librarian offers valuable support to pupils and maintains collections of books and cuttings to support project work. The science and fiction collections are particularly good. A good level of borrowing is generated. The careers library adjoins the library and is part of the information service provided to pupils.
112. Although facilities for information and communication technology are good in the specialist department, there remain deficiencies in some departments such as mathematics, modern foreign languages and music. However, the school awaits the delivery and installation of new hardware, as part of the Dudley Grid for Learning.
113. Overall, the school has made good progress in tackling the key issues identified by the last inspection report. Pupils use a wider range of learning skills and they are more involved in their own learning. Assessment practices are now very good. They are used well by most departments to monitor pupils' progress, to set targets for future performance and to plan the curriculum to meet the pupils' changing needs. The appraisal of teachers is now effective, and the performance of departments is also assessed and monitored well; weekly meetings between senior and middle managers ensuring that action points are speedily identified and resolved. School priorities are now clear to all because staff take part in strategic planning. There has been a greater emphasis on pupils' spiritual development in schemes of work but it has yet to be seen in teachers' regular practice. Improving the management of the provision for pupils with special educational needs remains a priority as does the expansion of information technology into subject areas. The information technology department has, however, worked effectively with other heads of departments to ensure that the information technology courses support learning across the curriculum.

Arrangements are planned to meet the requirements for a daily act of collective worship but not all teachers carry them out.

114. The curriculum does not meet statutory requirements for religious education and information technology at Key Stage 4.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

115. Holly Hall is an effective school which is very well managed. It is therefore well placed to maintain the quality that it already offers and to make further improvements. To achieve this it should:

- Raise standards in history and in modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4 by;
 - Increasing the level of challenge and variety of learning opportunities in history lessons
 - Developing pupils' speaking skills in modern foreign languages
 - Improving teaching and learning resources in modern foreign languages

Paragraphs 6-7,14-15,18,34-37,54,184-189,200-208

- Increase the progress of all groups of pupils to the levels achieved by the most successful pupils by;
 - Developing strategies to identify and address the particular obstacles to achievement that some pupils experience
 - Improving the school's provision for raising pupils' literacy skills
 - Improving the attitudes of a minority of the pupils, particularly boys

Paragraphs 1-26,27-32,39,47,56,69,80-81,120-123,172,174

- Improve the co-ordination of the provision for pupils with special educational needs by;
 - Creating a more effective and accurate process for determining the learning needs of the pupils
 - Developing closer planning links between the special educational needs co-ordinator and heads of departments
 - Creating precise targets for pupils' individual education plans that all teachers can help them achieve
 - Improving the planning links between teaching and support staff

Paragraphs 26,50-51,57,78,86,96,98

- Ensure that the curriculum for information technology and religious education conforms with statutory requirements by;
 - Offering courses to all pupils at Key Stage 4
 - Making greater use of information technology within departments at both key stages

Paragraphs 49,52,114,124,141,153,178,188,190-194,221-232

- Improve the quality of the annual progress reports to parents by;
 - Including more precise details about the standards and achievements of the pupils
 - Indicating what pupils need to do to raise their standards further

Paragraph 85

- Ensure that teaching rooms in science, design and technology and music are sufficiently large to cope with the numbers of pupils in each class

Paragraphs 110,155,166,169,213

116. The inspection team also suggest that, given the strengths of the school, the existing sharing of good practice be extended to make the very best use of staff expertise and experience.

Other Features of the School

117. The inspection team considered the impact of the Monthly Merit Marks which are used with Year 11 pupils. This initiative has had a very positive impact on the motivation and standards of these pupils. All of the Year 11 pupils spoken to said that they worked harder and more

consistently because of the regularity of the assessments. Teachers find the administrative demands manageable and parents are pleased with the frequency of the feedback.

118. The GCSE results in 1999 were the highest that the school has so far achieved and this was the first year in which the Monthly Merit Marks had been in used in the present format. Also, the attendance level of these pupils was 3% higher than that of the previous year group.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

119.

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	129
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	59

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	16	41	33	8	-	-

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7- Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	584	
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	157	

Special educational needs

	Y5- Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	3	
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	141	

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	200

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	22

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.5
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	64	56	120

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	27	39	26
	Girls	30	28	24
	Total	57	67	50
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	48 (59)	56 (54)	42 (50)
	National	63 (65)	62 (59)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	13 (22)	27 (35)	13 (17)
	National	28 (28)	38 (38)	23 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	27	44	30
	Girls	31	32	29
	Total	58	76	59
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	48 (62)	63 (58)	49 (53)
	National	64 (62)	64 (63)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	14 (27)	31 (39)	23 (21)
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	1999	75	53	128

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	26	48	53
	Girls	27	73	74
	Total	53	121	127
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	41 (38)	95 (94)	99 (98)
	National	48 (46)	88 (88)	94 (93)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	37 (34)
	National	38 (37)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	33
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	32
Indian	82
Pakistani	74
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	2
White	348
Any other minority ethnic group	8

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	11	2
Black – African heritage	1	-
Black – other	-	-
Indian	-	-
Pakistani	5	-
Bangladeshi	-	-
Chinese	-	-
White	45	3
Other minority ethnic groups	-	-

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7– Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	36
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16:1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	1
Total aggregate hours worked per week	20

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	65.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 2	
Key Stage 3	24.4
Key Stage 4	21.3

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	1,662,471
Total expenditure	1,651,219
Expenditure per pupil	2,721
Balance brought forward from previous year	165,318
Balance carried forward to next year	176,570

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	584
Number of questionnaires returned	377

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	52	5	5	4
My child is making good progress in school.	41	50	6	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	35	50	7	1	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	30	49	15	4	2
The teaching is good.	36	52	5	2	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	31	45	15	6	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	43	6	4	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	34	2	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	23	52	16	5	5
The school is well led and managed.	32	53	4	2	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	51	6	3	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	29	41	13	4	13

Other issues raised by parents

Any other issues raised by a number of parents are included in the main body of the report.

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

ENGLISH

120. The results of the 1999 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were well below the national average and below the average for similar schools. Although national test results at the end of Key Stage 3 have been consistently well below the national average since the last inspection, so also have the standards of pupils when they enter the school. The results of girls are higher than the results of boys but the results of girls and boys are similarly lower than the results of girls and boys nationally. These results therefore represent a satisfactory level of achievement.
121. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are low compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally, and they are slightly lower in English than in mathematics and science. This reflects the low levels of literacy when pupils enter the school. Girls achieve higher standards than boys and have done so consistently since the last inspection. However, the standards achieved by boys have improved over the last three years. This indicates the department's success in addressing an issue raised at the time of the last inspection. Standards achieved by pupils for whom English is an additional language and by those who have special educational needs are satisfactory.
122. At the end of Key Stage 4, standards are low compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally. They are higher in English than in English Literature. Results in the 1999 GCSE English examination were below the average for all schools but above average for similar schools. This represents a good level of achievement when comparisons are made with the standards achieved at the end of Key Stage 3 and when they first entered the school. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C was 43% compared with the national average of 53%, and 97% achieved grades A*-G. Girls achieved higher standards than boys but did less well in English than in their other subjects. The trend in results has been steadily upwards since the last inspection. Higher attaining pupils achieve particularly well. In English Literature results were lower, with 32% of pupils achieve grades A*-C. This was well below the national average of 60%. The minority of higher attaining boys and girls achieve well. However, weaknesses in the critical reading of texts and limited writing skills result in low standards overall. Both boys and girls achieve less well in this subject than in their other subjects. Some pupils also study media studies as an option at Key Stage 4. Results in 1999 were well below the national average.
123. Although several teachers have visited local primary schools to learn more about the national literacy strategy, the lack of a whole school literacy strategy is restricting achievement across the school.
124. There has been a satisfactory degree of improvement since the last inspection. The department has addressed many of the weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection. Its teaching methods are now more varied and particular attention has been given to improving the attainment of boys. The improved practice has not yet had a significant impact on standards at either key stage. Improvements in the departmental scheme of work now provide a wider range of activities and there is now a better range of resources suited to pupils' different levels of attainment. Provision for pupils who have special educational needs remains unsatisfactory. Although improvements in the use of information technology are planned, current provision is unsatisfactory as its use is not planned clearly within the schemes of work.
125. The quality of teaching is satisfactory at both key stages. Teachers' good knowledge and understanding were evident in many lessons seen during the inspection. A particular strength is the way in which teachers engage the interest of all pupils at the outset of the lesson through clear explanations and the effective use of questions. They know their pupils well and the good relationships and clear expectations result in a generally positive response by pupils of different abilities. However, sometimes the teacher talks too much and the lower attaining pupils lose interest. There was a good degree of challenge in many of the best lessons seen during the inspection, for example, in the effective teaching of Shakespeare's Macbeth as part of the preparation for the national tests where special attention is given to encouraging higher attaining pupils to appreciate the historical background of the texts they are studying. Lessons are well planned and teachers have a good level of expectation. They make very good use of a range of

resources. This was well illustrated in a Year 10 lesson where lower attaining pupils were provided with a range of pictures to help them to develop a descriptive writing assignment on Blackpool. The level of their achievement was high as a result of effective teaching. Very good record keeping includes details of prior attainment, current standards and future targets. Teachers' understanding of the National Curriculum requirements at Key Stage 3 has improved since the last inspection and careful preparation for the national tests is now better.

126. The leadership and management of this subject are satisfactory. Improvements in teaching and learning are still not leading to significant improvements in results. However, there are very good arrangements to monitor pupils' performance in order to meet the targets within the department's improvement plan and current standards are in line with the departmental targets for 2000. These are well linked to the school development plan. There are also satisfactory arrangements to monitor the quality of teaching across the department. The department is developing a good range of teaching resources but needs to improve the provision it makes for pupils who have special educational needs and for whom English is an additional language when these pupils do not receive additional support in class.

Drama

127. Drama is taught to all pupils in Key Stage 3 within the creative arts department and is also studied as an option at Key Stage 4. The well planned curriculum and specialist teaching ensure that by the end of Key Stage 3 pupils achieve a satisfactory standard in their performance work and can review and comment critically on their own work and that of others. Results at GCSE have fluctuated over the last three years but overall, standards are high. They were lower in 1999 owing to several changes of teacher, 54% of pupils gaining an A*- C grade compared with the national average, 68%. Lessons revealed that following very good teaching, pupils had confidence in their performance work and a readiness to work together to improve it.
128. Since the last inspection there have been no significant changes in the quality of provision and facilities which both remain good.
129. Pupils are well taught in drama. Teaching is particularly effective at Key Stage 4. There is a good degree of challenge in the activities and pupils are regularly encouraged to make decisions and develop their own ideas. In the small number of lessons seen during the inspection they approached performance work confidently and the teaching methods gave an appropriate degree of direction.

MATHEMATICS

130. Performance in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3, based on the average National Curriculum points score for 1996 to 1999, is well below average for boys and below average for girls. With the exception of 1999, attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, over the last four years, shows a consistent, steady upward trend. The figures show no trend in the differences in attainment between girls and boys. In the 1999 tests, performance is close to the average for schools with pupils from similar backgrounds but well below average compared with all schools. The difference between the performance of girls and boys in 1999 is in line with the national trend, with boys achieving slightly higher levels of attainment.
131. The standards reached by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 are low compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally. By the end of Key Stage 3 the lowest attaining pupils use a calculator to solve simple problems involving the four operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. They successfully complete tally charts but are less secure when dealing with fractions. Middle attaining pupils in Year 9 carry out pencil and paper calculation methods to perform multiplications and divisions. A class of higher attaining Year 9 pupils calculated the values of terms of various sequences and built on this to gain an informal understanding of the convergence and divergence of sequences.
132. The 1999 Key Stage 3 test and examination results do not quite mirror the standards of attainment, at the end of Key Stage 3, observed during the inspection. The evidence of pupils' work, together with lesson observations, point to a level of attainment which is 'low' relative to national standards, rather than 'very

low'. All work and lessons observed are based on a representative sample across all the aspects of mathematics and pupils' ability. The discrepancy is accounted for by these pupils' lower than usual levels of attainment, based on Key Stage 2 and other assessment data, on entry.

133. The proportion of pupils achieving A*–C grades at GCSE in 1999 was around the national average. It was well above the average in comparison with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. Standards are rising significantly, both against national results and in comparison with other subjects in the school. In 1999, mathematics was one of the most successful subjects whereas in 1997 it was one of the less successful subjects. The proportion of pupils attaining A* – G grades is broadly in line with the national average over the past 2 years. Girls reach a higher standard than boys, as is the case nationally, but the actual difference in standards is greater than that nationally.
134. The standards reached by pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 are average compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally. Classroom observations do not show any significant variations in achievement for the different ethnic groups, but analysis of the proportion of pupils gaining A*–C grades in each ethnic group indicates that the highest standards are achieved by members of the Asian–Indian group. By the end of Key Stage 4 the lowest attaining pupils calculate simple percentages of quantities, estimate distances and lengths, construct and interpret stick graphs and solve problems involving money exchange rates. Middle attaining Year 11 pupils are able to simplify algebraic expressions, use a calculator to find powers and roots of numbers and to lay out numerical and algebraic work in a clear logical manner. The highest attaining pupils in Y11 are able to use a formula to solve quadratic equations, perform calculations involving the volumes of spheres and pyramids and calculate the probability of one or more events occurring under various circumstances.
135. The attainment of pupils on entering at Year 7, based on their Key Stage 2 levels, is low compared with the national average. A statistical analysis of the national data shows that the achievement of the pupils is satisfactory by the end of Key Stage 3 and good by the end of Key Stage 4. Many pupils achieve higher levels of attainment relative to pupils nationally who have similar attainment at the beginning of the Key Stage 4. Pupils with special educational needs make a similar rate of progress as their peers.
136. Some higher attaining pupils have the option of taking GCSE in the November of Year 11. In November 1999, 39% of the Year 11 pupils gained an A*–C grade at this early stage. Those who succeed are able to take an additional GCSE in statistics the following June and in 1999, the proportion of these pupils attaining A* – C grades was close to the national average. This process of 'fast-tracking' more able mathematicians and enhancing their learning through statistics is a very successful dimension of the department's curriculum development.
137. The great majority of pupils have a positive attitude to the subject, settle down very quickly at the start of lessons and give their full attention to the tasks in hand. They are willing to listen to others and help each other when the need arises. For example, a middle attaining Year 9 group, working on the interpretation of graphs, listened attentively when individuals read aloud questions or gave extended answers. Similarly, lower attaining pupils, in a Year 9 set, work together effectively in groups of four at an activity involving the classification of numbers. There is no graffiti on desks, scribbling on exercise books or defacing of wall displays. Pupils treat property loaned to them, such as calculators, with respect.
138. The quality of teaching is good at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Good teaching standards make a significant contribution to the quality of lessons and hence to the standards achieved. Lessons always have a definite structure and are well planned with good pace. Teachers have a secure command of subject matter. Clear goals are set with high teacher expectations. Most lessons begin or end with an activity that is valuable in reinforcing numeracy skills.
139. Homework is set regularly and generally used effectively to build on classwork. Work is marked regularly and consistently, and usually accompanied by positive comments, though in some cases there is little evidence that corrections are made. The department keeps comprehensive assessment records on its pupils. All Key Stage 3 pupils know the National Curriculum level they have reached and have a target level to aim for, which is pasted in the front of their exercise books. Key Stage 4 pupils have target grades to aim for, which are negotiated with their teachers. The targets are effective in motivating the pupils. In cases of concern over pupils' learning parents are involved as soon as possible. Relationships with pupils are good and there is a genuine respect and understanding for pupils. This produces an atmosphere in

which pupils are not afraid to make mistakes. Potentially difficult situations are avoided by skilful and patient pupil management by teachers. Discipline is firm but friendly. Teachers know the individual pupils with special educational needs in their groups, and their particular problems.

140. The management of the department is good. It is well organised and works well as a team which is committed to raising standards of achievement. Improvements in pupils' levels of attainment may be attributed in some measure to changes in teaching methods. These are a result of careful planning and a willingness to look at good practice elsewhere, taking advantage of in-service training where necessary. There are regular meetings at which teaching and learning are the main feature, and at which ideas can be exchanged.
141. Pupils' experiences of information technology within mathematics are limited, but this is expected to change when new hardware, already purchased by the school, arrives. The department is situated in a group of four pleasant, well-decorated rooms. There is satisfactory textbook provision, including appropriate texts, especially for the lower attaining pupils. The learning resource centre has a modest but up-to-date stock of mathematics books.
142. Since the last inspection, standards at the end of Key Stage 4 have risen consistently. There have also been improvements in standards at the end of Key Stage 3, which are the result of the more focused nature of teaching, together with an ethos of achievement within the department. The challenge of work in Key Stage 3 has increased to a more appropriate level and there is now a greater attention given to National Curriculum levels of attainment and their targeting. The extent of pupils' information technology experience in mathematics is, however, still a weakness, though less so than at the last inspection.

SCIENCE

143. At the end of Key Stage 3 standards are low compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests the pupils' performance was below average when compared to all schools, but average when compared to that found in similar schools. Pupils enter the school with Key Stage 2 standards which are, on average, lower than those expected nationally; thus their achievement in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. There is little difference between the results of boys and girls. Whilst there was a surge in standards in 1997, there is little discernible trend in the results of recent years. The school's results in science between 1996 and 1999 based on average points scores were better than those in English and mathematics.
144. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards are low compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally. GCSE A*-C results are below the national average but the A*-G results are in line with the national average. In comparison with similar schools, the A*-C and A*-G results are above average. There is a creditable number of A* and A grades which rose substantially in 1999, although at the same time there are quite large numbers of F grades. Pupils are entered for double award science and the percentage entered for the examination is much greater than the national average. The achievement by the end of Key Stage 4 is satisfactory for most pupils and good for some of the higher attainers. The schools results for science are superior to those gained in English, but not as good as those seen for mathematics.
145. Observations of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work suggest that the standards are highest in biology and that this is especially true at Key Stage 4. Standards are sound in all other aspects of the subject and there are no obvious weaknesses.
146. Pupils' achievements are satisfactory by the end of Key Stage 3; those who arrive with the lowest standards or breadth of coverage are often greatly helped by the "Catch Up" booklets and certificates written by the school. As the key stage unfolds there is a rapid increase in the practical skills of handling apparatus, making good observations and deductions and with recording all in a well-structured form. Year 9 pupils are able to safely react a number of metals with acid and to work out a reactivity series from their observations. A Year 7 set containing more able pupils was able to explain both what the phases of the moon looked like and why they occurred by considering the evidence provided by an experimental simulation. There is a steady expansion in the breadth and the volume of knowledge, which is well supported by experimental work and linked to other areas of the curriculum. An exemplification of this is the work of Year 8 in investigating the probability of the inheritance of the dominant and recessive

forms of a characteristic by tossing coins and keeping a tally. Progress is regularly measured by end of module tests.

147. The achievement of pupils by the end of Key Stage 4 is satisfactory and often good for the top sets, where pupils are frequently very well stretched by challenging work. Practical skills continue to develop well and on the theory side there is a fast increase in both the range and the depth of knowledge. This includes making greater use of mathematical skills, such as employing formulae and finding percentage composition, and literacy skills involving the extraction, compilation and interpretation of information from a number of sources. There is also an increasing use of computers; especially utilising CD-ROMs for facts and using probes for investigation. Work done in sets aimed at the higher tier of GCSE, such as that of a top Year 11 one on ionic bonding and its implications, clearly enables pupils to go for A and A* grades.
148. Whilst in both key stages pupils make progress in learning facts and skills, it is often limited by teachers not ensuring with sufficient rigour that pupils understand why they are doing things rather than just how to do things. Progress is also inhibited by pupils not asking when they do not understand.
149. Pupils with special educational needs are well known to their teachers, who modulate their approach to be appropriate to the individuals needs. Teachers can also produce work which is modified to make it more suitable, but just as valuable. Whilst most make satisfactory progress, in relation to their peers, it could become good if more support was found.
150. Overall, the quality of teaching at both Key Stages 3 and 4 is good. Some lessons are very good lessons and occasionally there is a lesson that is unsatisfactory. Most lessons are well planned and start with re-establishing prior knowledge, before pushing forward. Objectives are crisp and clearly communicated. The pupils' views are actively sought and, by skilful questioning, amplified and synthesised into useful extensions of their knowledge and skills. In the best lessons pupils are stimulated to think and reason from what they already know by teachers who guide them stepwise, rather than tell them the facts. These lessons tend to employ the widest range of teaching strategies.
151. Where teaching is less successful, the pupils are questioned on facts, but not really involved with generating ideas. Practicals lack purpose because there are no control experiments or pupils have already seen the result demonstrated. The pace of lessons is slow and sometimes a lack of discipline creates an unfavourable learning environment. The work is unchallenging and has often been covered at that level during a previous key stage.
152. Marking is inconsistent. Work is usually corrected with ticks, assessment, future targets and praise but useful suggestions for its improvement are less frequent. Homework is usually set and often makes an important contribution to the pupils' learning.
153. The acting head of department is energetic, enthusiastic and efficient. There are very good schemes of work for both key stages covering all the National Curriculum Programmes of Study and material for foundation and upper tiers at GCSE. These are regularly reviewed in the light of assessment experience and National Curricular changes. A broad range of information technology skills is employed and whilst this area is developing well it is not yet satisfactorily integrated into the individual pupil experience. The curriculum would be enhanced by visits to places of scientific interest and the development of fieldwork.
154. Systems for assessing and analysing pupils' work are very good They allow the early detection of problems and enable productive target setting Resources are adequate. They are well maintained, stored and presented by an effective technical staff. The science section of the library is small, but good and well used: it contains both books and CD-ROMs and will soon give access to the internet. All this has a very positive impact upon academic standards. The accommodation is not very satisfactory, only two of the laboratories are of sufficient size to allow 30+ pupils to engage in practical work effectively with good safety. There is considerable potential for developing the useful area of the science computer suite if more and modern machines could be found.
155. The school has responded vigorously to tackle the shortcomings outlined in the last inspection. Whilst there has been no great difference in the numerical results of examinations it should be remembered that now all pupils do the double award science and much has changed. The underachievement of the most

able pupils has been rectified, as has the poor matching of work to individual needs by: new schemes of work, good setting and good use of assessment data to modify the delivery of courses. The standards of practical work in Key Stage 3 have been much improved by a more methodical approach. A much wider range of teaching strategies has been consciously developed and these are very successfully deployed. Very good use is now made of assessment data, in both key stages, to track individual performance. This is based upon module tests and on other assessments which enable target setting and remedial action to occur. The curriculum is also modified in response to assessment results. Whilst the development of information technology needs to go further, much progress has been made. The size of the laboratories in relation to the size of the classes remains a problem, but one new one of a good size has been provided. Much consultation has been done to improve the response to pupils who have special educational needs and this has resulted in a range of specially produced materials.

156. The science department is lively and very concerned to provide a good quality education for the pupils. It has many good structures and is always questing for ways to improve.

ART

157. Work done before this term shows pupils achieving average standards compared with pupils nationally at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4. All aspects of the National Curriculum are covered in the required detail with better than average work on some themes, such as portraits and work on still life compositions.
158. In GCSE examinations over the past three years pupils' standards have been broadly in line with the national average with regard to the higher grades of A* to C. A significant number of pupils did not achieve a pass grade in 1999 largely because of absences. However, a greater than average percentage of pupils achieved a grade A in 1999. Work in portfolios in Years 10 and 11 suggests that pupils are likely to achieve similar results although there is some unfinished work from earlier themes. Work done by Year 10 and 11 pupils in the past two weeks suggests that there is potential for improvement in GCSE results. They are making observational studies, working from illustrations of natural forms through to still life and abstract paintings, and are achieving a good level of finished drawings. Their confidence has been raised because the teacher gives very effective demonstrations and follows these up by providing them with a good range of stimulating material based on natural form.
159. Standards in art were high in all the lessons observed during the inspection. All pupils, including pupils on the special educational needs register, achieve satisfactory results and the majority reaches a high level. In Year 7, the great majority of pupils' work in tone patterns on a mathematical design are of a high standard. Pupils are helped towards this successful work by very good teacher demonstrations of the techniques of applying colour to achieve the desired effects. Colour theory is discussed in class and many pupils can recall prior learning on the composition of colour. In Year 8 pupils produce a wide range of shirt and waistcoat designs all at a good level, helped by relevant teaching and illustrations of the four stage graduated colouring process. In Year 9 pupils are introduced to graphic design through a study of heraldry. This work is made interesting as the teacher gives illustrations and demonstrations of what is possible and the techniques that can be used to achieve the desired effects. Pupils are given a wide range of stimulating materials so that everyone can attempt the work with confidence.
160. The previous art teacher left at the end of last term and the present teacher is in the second week of teaching in this school. The quality of teaching is good at both key stages. The teacher has very good knowledge and expertise in the subject. Teaching is characterised by a good choice of stimulating exercises and very good teacher demonstrations of procedures and techniques including how to apply colour to achieve tone, texture and three-dimensional effects. A quiet, firm discipline is maintained even with pupils who have difficulty with concentration. This enables all pupils to give full attention to their work. Pupils are given a good introduction to computer generated design. They are helped to see how art relates to the world of work. All pupils are given individual attention in lessons. They take an interest in their work.
161. An improvement since the last inspection is that pupils are taught techniques and processes by practical demonstrations or visual perception rather than by verbal instruction. There has been an improvement in GCSE results. The majority of pupils now use sketchbooks to develop ideas from source material. There is more use of the work of other artists, craftspeople and designers throughout the course of practical

work. Pupils in Key Stage 4 are fully challenged by GCSE coursework. They have a satisfactory understanding of the assessment system used by the department.

162. Strengths include the good quality of teaching at present. There is an interesting and stimulating programme of work for pupils. The teacher has a particular interest and good experience and expertise in using information technology for generating art and design which is to be promoted in school. Design and graphics are particularly strong. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
163. There is no provision for pottery although the school can have access to a kiln for firing. Although three-dimensional work is done in both key stages this aspect of art is weak. There is very little storage space and this hinders the development of three-dimensional work or any large-scale work. The application of paint is generally poor across both key stages, indicating that painting techniques have not been taught thoroughly or that there has not been enough emphasis given to this aspect of pupils' work.
164. Some areas have been identified as priorities. Art needs to be given a higher profile in the school, particularly with regard to the exhibition of pupils' work to raise aspirations and interest. The programme of work needs to be developed to stimulate and thus enable more pupils, particularly the lower attaining pupils in GCSE, to reach their potential. The techniques of drawing and painting need to be taught more formally from Year 7 onwards and plans should ensure that pupils put these skills into practice in subsequent work.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

165. Standards by the end of Key Stage 3 are average compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally. In the tests carried out at the end of Year 9, pupils' results were broadly in line with national averages. Schemes of work fail to incorporate opportunities for pupils to develop higher skills, which in part restricts the most able from achieving higher levels of attainment.
166. Standards of designing are high in food technology and textiles but lower in resistant materials where the emphasis is more on making. Standards are generally high in food technology; for example, more able pupils in a Year 7 lesson were able to achieve well because the teacher extended their learning through an exploration of the properties of materials and the science of cooking. Pupils in resistant materials demonstrated good making skills; for example, a Year 9 group who were constructing jewellery boxes. Despite the large group sizes for the size of some of the teaching rooms, pupils work safely and responsibly, wearing protective equipment when tasks require it.
167. In general, pupils with special educational needs are not sufficiently well supported because their needs are not identified effectively, individual education plans are not used for lesson planning and classroom support is mainly in the form of an extra pair of hands in practical lessons rather than a resource designed to help pupils achieve learning targets. However, a Year 7 class, with a majority of pupils who have special learning needs, achieved satisfactory skills in a sewing lesson. This was largely due to the individual attention given by the teacher; for example, the work in their folders was carefully marked and corrected.
168. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to C in the 1999 GCSE examination was in line with the national average. The results have risen over the past 3 years and are highest in food technology and textiles. In general, pupils perform better in design and technology than they do in the majority of their other subjects. The proportion of pupils gaining A* or A grades in 1999 rose substantially and was slightly above national average levels.
169. By the end of Key Stage 4 standards are average compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally. There are variations in standards across the subject disciplines. They are very high in food technology, average in textiles and resistant materials and low in graphics. A Year 10 group studying resistant material technology understood the correct procedures and processes for the correct and safe use of hand and machine tools. The range of construction materials available to the pupils in graphics is unsatisfactory as is the room in which they are working because it is not appropriately equipped for its purpose. This results in pupils becoming frustrated, particularly the boys, and lowers the standards that they achieve.

170. In all the subject disciplines there has been good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in the monitoring and target setting for pupils. The department shares detailed progress records with each pupil, which are in part responsible for the high expectations of both staff and pupils.
171. Learning by the end of Key Stage 3 is good because of the careful planning of schemes of work which provide good opportunities for the pupils to experience the design and technology curriculum. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, pupils gained knowledge and understanding of conduction, convection and radiation as a result of the teacher's well planned activities. A weakness is the lack of planned opportunity for the most able pupils to achieve higher standards.
172. Learning by the end of Key Stage 4 is satisfactory overall, but there are inconsistencies; for example, Year 11 graphics folders show high quality plans which are not realised during lessons. Also in a Year 10 graphics lesson, too much time was wasted because of the poor behaviour of some of the pupils. In food technology, pupils' design folders show a real understanding of investigation, research and analysis skills. Within the areas of food and graphics, pupils make good use of information communication technology to support their learning.
173. At both key stages the majority of pupils demonstrate good attitudes with regard to the subject. They enjoy the practical activities and respond to the challenges of designing and making. There is evidence of good workshop practices that are integral to workshop and kitchen practices. They share equipment and are mindful of the dangers within a working environment. In all instances pupils wear protective aprons and without prompting and make full use of eye protection when working on machinery.
174. The quality of teaching is good at both key stages. This is evident when the organisation of the lesson is carefully planned and all pupils are clear about the tasks that they need to complete. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, the teacher carefully taught skills through a very good demonstration which also set the standard for the expected quality of the pupils' work. In a Year 7 lesson, the teacher encouraged the pupils to achieve high standards by setting them clear targets for what they should know, understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson. Teaching was unsatisfactory in one single lesson when a significant number of pupils disassociated themselves from the learning process and disrupted the learning of others. A significant strength of the teaching is the planning, target setting, and assessment of pupils.
175. Standards in graphics are adversely affected by an inappropriate and unsatisfactory room for the delivery of the subject, the use of non-specialist teaching and unsatisfactory construction resources. Cooking standards in food are adversely affected by the one hour lessons which limit the range of cooking that can take place. There is also an inadequate level of technical support, particularly in relation to the monitoring of ovens. Resistant material technology rooms lack sufficient designing capability and they are too small in relation to the number of pupils in classes. The distance between benches and machinery is below the recommended minimum.

GEOGRAPHY

176. At the end of both key stages the standards achieved by the pupils are average compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally. There has been considerable improvement in standards in recent years.
177. The proportion of pupils achieving GCSE A* to C grades has improved from 35% in 1997 to over 58% in 1999. Pupils perform better in geography than they do in the majority of their other subjects. Despite the rise in A*-C results, the proportion of pupils gaining A* and A grades fell between 1998 and 1999 whilst the proportion of these grades across the whole school rose significantly. A particular strength has been the significant improvement in the results achieved by boys. The department's targets anticipate further improvements in the GCSE results.
178. Standards observed in lessons confirm the picture shown by the examination results. Higher attaining pupils' work is of a particular high standard. This is especially true of their geography fieldwork files at the end of Key Stage 4. These show that the pupils have good research and data collecting skills, that they can draw valid conclusions from their research and that they can evaluate the relative success of their methods. Many pupils use information technology on their own initiative to effectively enhance their fieldwork. In lessons observed, pupils understood the relative merits of the use of different types of

graphs and could draw and analyse these accurately. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils can extract information from textbooks, summarise it and report back to the class on their findings. Insufficient use is made of information technology in lessons at both key stages.

179. Pupils in both key stages are particularly adept and confident in oral work, which is a reflection of the emphasis that teachers place on this to enhance pupils' understanding. Many pupils' written work, however, contains spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors. Writing by some pupils who have English as an additional language is often too brief and does not include enough developed points to gain credit in external examinations. Pupils' knowledge of geographical concepts is often good; for example, pupils understand the indicators that are used to identify less and more economically developed countries. The presentation of their work at both key stages shows care and attention to detail.
180. The achievement of pupils, in relation to what might be expected of them in terms of their attainment on entry to the school, is high. As they move through the school their written work improves in detail, accuracy and relevance. Their level of understanding of geographical terms and ideas also improves significantly. For example, by the end of Key Stage 4, pupils can accurately relate the terms 'core' and 'periphery' to Kenya. They were also able to explain why Kenya has a larger tertiary sector than most of the less economically developed countries. Pupils with special educational needs make progress appropriate to their level of prior attainment. The skilled teaching and positive pupil attitudes contribute significantly to the good progress made by the majority of the pupils.
181. Pupils' attitudes towards geography are good. They enjoy the subject. A large proportion of the pupils choose to take geography at Key Stage 4. They are attentive and interested and answer questions enthusiastically. They work together co-operatively and listen attentively to each other's point of view. Most pupils are keen to progress and achieve as highly as they can and in this are very well supported by their teachers. Pupils behave well in the vast majority of lessons but a small minority of boys in Key Stage 4 disrupted the flow of a lesson by making irrelevant comments.
182. Teaching at both key stages is good and makes a significant contribution to the improving standards and achievement of the pupils. Teaching methods are effective and appropriate. There is a particular emphasis on oral work and in many lessons all pupils make a contribution. Lessons are divided into sections of different activities that ensure pupils' interest is maintained. Lessons move along at a good pace. The management of the changes in activity is particularly effective, and contributes significantly towards lessons that are disciplined and purposeful. There are good relationships between teachers and pupils with praise and humour being used appropriately. Teachers explanations are clear and backed up by good examples. Expectations are high and teachers have a thorough knowledge of each pupil's progress and needs. Pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The marking of pupils' work is very good. It includes comments to indicate how the work could be improved and sets targets for the future. Information technology is not used as an integral part of the teaching and as a result its potential as a source for research and as a tool for analysis is not being fully utilised.
183. The leadership and management of the department are good. Since the last inspection there has been considerable improvement particularly in the standards achieved in examinations, the development of geographical skills and the identification of pupil targets. The curriculum is very well planned with comprehensive schemes of work. The department works well as a team with a clear focus on improving pupils' attainment. The quality of teaching is well monitored both by staff within the school and by local authority advisors. Overall the department is forward-looking and well able to respond to future developments.

HISTORY

184. In the 1999 GCSE examination, 26% of candidates obtained grades A* to C last year compared with a national average of 54%. The results are lower than the pupils achieve in their other subjects by a considerable margin, over a grade in 1999. The proportion of pupils gaining A* or A grades is low compared with the results of pupils in other subjects. There is little difference in the standards of boys and girls, either in class or in examination performance; nor any observable difference according to ethnic origin.

185. Standards are low at the end of Key Stage 3 in comparison with standards achieved by pupils nationally. Results in Key Stage 3 assessments are below the national average by nearly 20%. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils write accurate accounts of past events, with some reference to the historical sources. High attaining pupils can gather the evidence to assemble a detailed narrative, but without much explanation or analysis. There is little awareness that events may be interpreted in different ways. Pupils depend heavily on guidance from the teacher, as seen in an essay on changes in the 18th century iron industry. Low attaining pupils include similar content, but write less fluently and accurately. Some pupils can remember events previously studied, for instance, giving clearly expressed reasons why Henry VIII needed to divorce his first wife. In general, however, recall of previous work is weak.
186. Standards are very low at the end of Key Stage 4 in comparison with standards achieved by pupils nationally. Pupils do not often discuss what they are studying, and as a result cannot express their ideas fluently, nor learn from each other. There is no improvement from Key Stage 3 in their ability to recall previous work. Source questions are answered in a narrow sense, drawing very little on pupils' wider research. Extended writing is still dominated by factual narrative, rather than in weighing evidence, analysing it and drawing conclusions.
187. Pupils in both key stages could achieve at a higher level if they were given more guidance in how to think and research for themselves, and then share ideas with each other. The narrow range of teaching methods restricts the quality of work that pupils do. Progress through the key stages is slower than might be expected. This is true for pupils with special educational needs, and for those with English as an additional language, who, in other respects, appear not to be disadvantaged.
188. The quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall. Teaching at Key Stage 4 is weak. Teachers plan their lessons conscientiously and effectively. They possess adequate knowledge of the subject and explain it clearly, often with zest and humour, in such a way as to catch and hold pupils' attention. They give much praise. Relations with pupils are universally excellent, so there are no discipline problems. Marking is thorough: teachers write detailed comments which explain how the pupil can improve. The regular assessment sheets give a detailed analysis of the standard reached. However, there are weaknesses. An excess of teacher direction and teacher talk leaves the pupils ill equipped to handle their own learning. Tasks seldom require much thought or (in Key Stage 4) research beyond the text-book. Lessons have very little variety. Pupils seldom work in groups, or spend time talking about history. There is little discussion, role-play or debate. Pupils are not asked to use information technology, either to improve the presentation of their work or for research. They make few visits to museums or places of interest.
189. The last inspection listed a number of weaknesses. Those responsible for managing the history department have worked assiduously since then to improve performance. In the last couple of years more pupils have chosen history in Key Stage 4, including a greater number of higher attaining pupils. The department has changed the GCSE examination board, and re-stocked accordingly. All schemes of work have been completely re-written; a task completed most successfully. Measurable benefits now derive from the introduction of Key Stage 3 assessment sheets, enabling pupils, parents and teachers to see strengths and weaknesses in the work done. There is high morale among the three teachers teaching history, and a firm foundation for further developments. These should include widening the range and challenge of pupil activities; guidance in writing analytically; making use of information technology; and exploiting opportunities for study in the local area.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

190. The school does not comply with statutory requirements in ensuring that all pupils at Key Stage 4 have an appropriate information technology curriculum.
191. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are high compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally. The information technology department works very effectively in raising the standards of pupils in the other subjects of the curriculum; for example, in a Year 7 lesson, pupils' skills in art were developed through a software programme. This was designed to work alongside the art scheme of work and so it effectively supported their learning. The pupils are technically secure; for example, a Year 8 group from a lower ability set confidently explored lines and angles to

create ever-increasing complex spiral patterns within a 360° radius. They extended their learning into repeat patterns and all understood the formula used to create them. A Year 9 middle to lower ability set was able to design a PowerPoint computer slide show on a theme for geography related to volcanoes and earthquakes. Their ability to develop a series of slides and make good learning gains was as a result of the excellent use of new teaching technology and the teacher's effective lesson planning.

192. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards in information technology for those following a course of study are high compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally. In the examination for 1999, which is a joint examination with business studies, standards are very high. Twenty five pupils sat the GCSE examination and 80% of them achieved A*-C grades. A good proportion gained A* or A grades. The remaining pupils in Key Stage 4 have no formal timetable time to develop their information technology skills. The provision and the training of staff, whilst well advanced, is still in the planning stage.
193. A Year 11 group showed a clear knowledge of the program they were using and all were able to demonstrate high standards in organising and customising their work. They utilised fully the support functions within the menu structure to present their work. However, standards in a Year 11 group consisting of all boys are low. Attendance within the group is poor and the majority of pupils are predicted to achieve a low grade. In Year 10 pupils' attendance is again poor with only half the class attending the lesson observed during the inspection. Those who did attend made good learning gains and demonstrated satisfactory standards. Their folders show a range of work, from Year 7 through to Year 10, which is comprehensive and provides evidence that good learning has taken place during that period.
194. During the inspection, there was very little evidence of the use of information technology in other subjects, for example in English, mathematics, geography and history. In food technology and graphics pupils do use computers to word process and develop graphics and graphs for their portfolio work. Pupils in Year 11 spoke about the increased opportunities for the use of information and communication technology in lessons.
195. By the end of Key Stage 4, those pupils following a course of study towards GCSE make good gains in learning in the majority of lessons. A Year 10 group who have a non-specialist teacher due to staff absence make good gains in their learning due to the previous teaching of key skills which enabled the whole group to be in control of their own learning. Boys within the group are able to extend their knowledge and understanding through a confidence to explore, experiment and problem solve.
196. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils also make good gains in their learning. This was clearly seen in a Year 8 lesson in which 10 out of 19 pupils had a special educational need. As a result of very good teaching and the very good attitude to learning and behaviour of the pupils, they all made good gains in knowledge, understanding and skills.
197. Pupils clearly enjoyed their information technology lessons. Response is always good and pupils remain focused on their work. An all boys group of Year 11 pupils, identified as having negative attitudes, behaved in an exemplary fashion and concentrated throughout the lesson. They discussed their work and clearly enjoyed the time spent in information technology. All pupils seen using information technology equipment did so with respect. They recognise the value of equipment and treat it well.
198. The teaching of information technology is good at both key stages. Some very good teaching was also seen. Lessons are carefully planned, and the strength of the department is in the use of new technology to improve teaching effectiveness. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils. Assessment and target setting is a strength. A weakness is that at higher levels of information technology teaching, some aspects of programs are not yet fully understood by teachers who are themselves training to become information technology teachers. The linking of teaching to the schemes of work in other subjects is a significant strength.
199. The school, appropriately, has a clear vision for the future. Plans are at an advanced stage for each department to have a full and active role in the use of information and communication technology. New and existing systems together with up-to-date teaching technology provide excellent prospects for the

future. The school is linked to the National Grid for Learning and has plans in place for the training of all staff through the New Opportunities Fund.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

200. All pupils in the school learn German at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4, all pupils study one language from a choice of German, Urdu and French. Spanish is only currently offered as a Certificate of Achievement course.
201. Teacher assessed levels at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were low in comparison with standards achieved by pupils nationally. However, standards observed in lessons were average and, in many groups, the achievement of the pupils is good. Pupils have good skills of understanding and respond well in spoken German to tasks set. However, there is very little use of spoken language for genuine communication in the classroom and pupils rely too heavily on English to confirm understanding. Writing skills are often good and, in Year 9 particularly, pupils write accurately.
202. At Key Stage 4, standards are low compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally. In 1999, the proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades in French was well below the national average. The results show a decline in the three years from 1997. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades in German was below the national average in 1999, recovering to the 1997 level after a poor year in 1998. The proportions of pupils gaining A*-G grades were above average in both languages in 1999 and were better than in the previous three years. GCSE results in Urdu were below average. Over the past few years, pupils have gained lower results in languages than they have done in most of their other subjects. This is particularly the case in Urdu. The proportion of pupils gaining A* or A grades is lower than in most other subjects. Certificate of Achievement results in 1999 were below average in Spanish and, particularly, German.
203. Standards observed in German at Key Stage 4 are low and reflect recent results. The achievement of the pupils is unsatisfactory. Pupils have satisfactory skills in listening but are hesitant in spoken language and often reply in single words or short phrases. They make very little use of German for genuine communication. They also seek confirmation of understanding in English. Writing is often inaccurate and reflects English rather than German structures. Standards in Urdu are also low, although speaking is a good feature. Standards in French are very low in all skills.
204. Learning is satisfactory at both key stages. Most lessons begin with activities to confirm previous knowledge and pupils display satisfactory retention of vocabulary and structures previously learnt. The use of dictionaries and reference materials is more evident at Key Stage 4. At both key stages, the use of spoken language is unsatisfactory, except in Urdu. At Key Stage 3, pupils speak German in whole-class activities, but fail to sustain the language when working in groups and pairs. At Key Stage 4, pupils are very reluctant to use spoken German beyond the minimum level to fulfil speaking tasks. Boys and girls and pupils from ethnic minorities all make equal progress in lessons, but that of the highest and lowest achievers does not always reflect their potential.
205. Teaching is satisfactory at both key stages. Teachers plan lessons well and share objectives with pupils, often checking outcomes at the end of the lesson. Planning is lacking only in the provision of materials to extend the most able and to support pupils with learning difficulties. Although teachers work largely in German, there is too much use of English to ensure that pupils understand, when other strategies could be more effective and preserve an atmosphere of learning through the target language. Urdu lessons are conducted almost exclusively in the language. Teachers create a variety of opportunities for pupils to practise listening, speaking and writing, although pupils do not always take full advantage, fail to use the target language sufficiently and lack sustained concentration in independent and group work. There are no opportunities for independent reading.
206. Pupil attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory at both key stages. At Key Stage 3, pupils concentrate well when guided by the teacher in the whole-class situation but show less commitment in individual learning, particularly speaking in pairs and groups. At Key Stage 4, there is concentration but no obvious enthusiasm for language learning and pupils are insecure in speaking in the language. There are instances of poor behaviour in Urdu lessons by a small minority of boys, who are disrespectful to the teacher. This

deprives more committed learners of the teacher's time and attention and is one of the major reasons for the lower overall standards achieved by pupils in this subject.

207. The poor level of learning resources available to teachers in the department is having an adverse effect on standards. There are insufficient cassette players and overhead projectors to equip each classroom and this results in unnecessary planning complications. There is no suitable German course for most of Key Stage 3, and teachers are spending too much time producing or modifying in-house materials.
208. Management of the department is good: a team ethic is evident and appropriate planning is in place. This has been responsible for improvements already made. Teaching has been monitored as part of a policy of sharing good practice and this is supplemented by good whole-school monitoring procedures. The head of department is aware of the immediate needs for further development, namely: an increased use of the spoken language by teachers and pupils; improved provision for pupils of all abilities; and the need to integrate Urdu more into the department.

MUSIC

209. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards are average in relation to standards achieved by pupils nationally. Pupils follow a structured course which enables them to build their musical skills progressively and to achieve well. A strong feature of their work is the ability of pupils to keep to a steady pulse and maintain an independent part, both singing and playing. Pupils gain encouragement from the regular assessment of their work which enables them to set targets for improvement, grades being linked to National Curriculum levels as well as their effort. There is a lively spirit of enjoyment in all lessons, with pupils joining in enthusiastically in clapping and singing exercises. Year 9 take their studies seriously and work hard at improving their keyboard skills. Most, especially lower attainers, with encouragement from the teacher, use all five fingers and can play chord sequences fluently. They know the instruments of orchestral families and were heard to recognise and discuss the characteristics of Caribbean instruments. Most higher attainers are content to do what they are asked, but do not recognise opportunities to extend their learning, particularly when writing responses to listening exercises. Pupils with weak literacy skills, such as those for whom English is not the first language and pupils with special educational needs, do not always understand what is asked of them and are not able to respond adequately to listening tests. By contrast their practical work is on a similar level to the majority of their classmates.
210. At the end of Key Stage 4, standards are low compared with standards achieved by pupils nationally. The last two years' standards at GCSE were low with just over half the pupils in 1999 gaining higher grades although all pupils gained at least a G grade. The proportion of pupils gaining A* or A grades in 1998 and 1999 was in line with national averages. In 1999, pupils did better in music than they did in the majority of their other subjects.
211. Fewer pupils in the present Year 11 are producing compositions which match the expected level for higher grades. Harmonic and melodic development are elementary and there is little in the way of textural interest. There is a small number of exceptional pupils who are maintaining their level of work from Key Stage 3 by producing sparkling pieces with imaginative instrumentation and harmony. The same pupils are also skilled instrumentalists, but as there are very few pupils who take additional instrumental lessons, the standard of playing otherwise is low. Written work in response to listening and appraising is below what is expected based on their performance in the core subjects at Key Stage 3. Most pupils can recognise pulse and the different sounds of instruments but higher attainers do not respond to the need for extended written answers which are necessary if they are to achieve the highest grades. Beyond personal practice on their instrument there is very little to show that pupils pursue their musical studies independently. Homework is not set to encourage this, and factual information which they need for background to the listening paper is supplied by the teacher.
212. There is a range of extra-curricular activity including two ensembles, which generally meet weekly, and a residential course. During the inspection the choir was not well attended.
213. Since the last inspection a new head of department has been appointed. The main issue of assessment has been addressed and a thorough, workable system is now in place. A new room has been allocated for music, but this is still inadequate both in size and because it lacks storage facilities. Instruments are kept permanently on benches and this restricts the room for pupils to complete written tasks. There are still no

practice rooms where pupils can work in small groups or individually both at lunchtime and in lessons, but a room has been allocated to visiting instrumental teachers some distance from the music room. Of great benefit has been the establishment of a partnership with the Dudley Music Service who provide instrumental teaching and music-making opportunities for about 70 pupils, a provision largely funded by the school. This is a major contribution of the school to the development of a specialist curriculum for gifted and talented pupils.

214. The quality of teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Relationships are good and teaching methods take account of the needs of pupils, according to their age and ability. Older pupils are given longer periods of time to work at a task and in lower sets, younger pupils have more changes of activity and teacher support. Basic skills are well taught, such as good breathing and posture for singing. Higher attainers are not sufficiently challenged, the pace of lessons often dictated by less able pupils. They neither take the initiative, nor are they encouraged to explore beyond the basic task and therefore do not make as much progress as their less gifted peers. A very good violin lesson was also observed where the quality of musicianship inspired the pupils and gave them a good example to copy.
215. The department is well led by an enthusiastic musician who provides a range of opportunities for pupils to make music both in school and by using the Dudley Music Service. It is advantageous to the department to be part of a creative arts faculty which has developed successful projects that integrate the different curriculum areas. Common themes are explored across the arts discipline but the notion of common skills and vocabulary has not been explored. The quality of teaching and learning at Key Stage 3 is better than Key Stage 4 and reflects the head of department's priority to put in place a feasible system of assessment based on a scheme of work which enables pupils to learn and apply musical skills.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

216. By the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, standards in physical education are average in relation to standards achieved by pupils nationally. The achievement of the pupils based on their prior attainment is very good in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4. The gymnastics standards achieved by the oldest pupils at Key Stage 3 are average. They have good movement vocabulary and knowledge of sequencing, but the work lacks variety and technical difficulty, especially tasks requiring weight on hands. They make good progress in gymnastics across the key stage in relation to previous experiences. The standards in dance and basketball are high. There is very good achievement in dance. The pupils are able to develop sequences using sophisticated movement actions, and to choreograph complicated phases and routines. There is also very good achievement in basketball where boys develop a range of ball skills and expertly apply and adapt these to tactical and strategic court situations.
217. In a GCSE basketball lesson boys made excellent progress in attacking defensive organisations, they have very good knowledge and understanding of rules and strategic play. The badminton standards achieved by the oldest pupils at Key Stage 4 are average due to a wide range of abilities and previous experiences. The pupils generally have satisfactory hand and eye co-ordination, but lack refinement of shot and the necessary techniques to vary their game. Pupils of all abilities generally make very good progress in lessons, but less so at Key Stage 4, especially the most gifted pupils whose talents are not always fully challenged. Standards in theoretical GCSE studies are very low, many of the pupils in this cohort lack appropriate reading, writing and oracy skills.
218. The department has made some very good changes since the last inspection and has been successful in raising and maintaining high standards. The introduction of a GCSE course, the use of external competitions and coaching and a wider analysis of Key Stage 4 expectations are significant factors in these achievements. Timetabling initiatives have raised standards in the creative element of the subject and also allow more in-depth study in a range of programmes.
219. The quality of teaching is very good at both key stages. There is a very good learning atmosphere in most lessons where the teachers have high expectations of the pupils. Judgements are made about the levels of achievement, and planning and teaching accurately reflects relevant targets for improvement across the range of abilities. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge in a variety of ways to extend thinking and performance. Challenging questions and stimulating vocabulary are used in gymnastics, dance and basketball and the gains in pupils' knowledge and understanding are very high. In some lessons the most gifted pupils

are not always fully challenged and extended with relevant tasks. Pupils respond positively to some inspired teaching and their progress is enhanced by a willingness to improve on previous performances. Teachers and pupils use time and resources very productively. Excellent pace in a dance lesson results in completion of a sophisticated movement sequence and in gymnastics, apparatus is distributed very efficiently. A focus on the personal development of pupils through their learning is a strength of the department. Pupils and teachers work very well together and there are very high expectations of group collaboration and evaluation of performance. Current planning for theoretical studies does not take account of pupils' low literacy standards and the teaching does not ensure maximum verbal and written participation in the lessons.

220. The head of department offers a very clear vision of the role of physical education in pupils' learning and is an excellent role model for teaching. The department has a commitment to improvement. Ongoing development and change has happened as result of very good monitoring and evaluating procedures and the delivery of the curriculum has changed accordingly to reflect national expectations. However, restricted curriculum time for Key Stage 4 pupils makes it difficult to maintain high standards and motivation with the oldest pupils. The present imbalance in staffing for the department restricts the breadth of both the statutory and extra-curricular activities.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

221. Pupils' standards in religious education are average in comparison with the standards expected by the Locally Agreed Syllabus at the end of both key stages. At Key Stage 3, pupils achieve good grades on the school's internal written examination. They do so against a background of below average attainments on entry to the school. Their work shows a good breadth and balance of knowledge of the key elements of the main world faiths and can compare, for instance, Christian and Sikh forms of worship or Islamic and Jewish funeral rites. They can describe in detail the structure and purpose of different religions' places of worship and show sensitivity to the religious dimension of contemporary moral and social issues. Girls produce more extended work than boys, and show a better depth of understanding.
222. Taking account of their attainments on entry to the school, their achievements are good at both key stages. At Key Stage 4, 44% of pupils gained between an A*-C grade at GCSE in 1999 and all pupils gained at least a 'G' grade. This is close to the national average, and the school's analysis of "value-added" performance shows that these are good achievements for the pupils concerned.
223. Pupils show a good in-depth knowledge of both Christianity and Islam, the two religions which they study for GCSE. They produce extended writing of a high quality which, for example, demonstrates their understanding of how these two faiths approach complex moral issues, such as racism. They show good understanding of how the Old and New Testaments vary, for instance in their treatment of women in society. Girls achieve significantly higher standards than boys at both key stages, but there is little variation in performance between pupils of different ethnic backgrounds.
224. Although the GCSE course is popular and successful, the school does not comply with the statutory requirement to provide a course of religious education at Key Stage 4.
225. Religious education teaching is very good at both key stages. Well-planned lessons are carefully matched to pupils' abilities, and effective teaching methods are used. Pupils are kept firmly on task through a skilful combination of confident and effective classroom management and teaching which constantly challenges the pupils to produce their best work. Potentially disruptive incidents, such as a pupil's mobile phone ringing, are dealt with quickly and efficiently so that they are not allowed to have any negative impact on the learning environment. The teacher's mastery of the classroom is sufficiently assured to allow more adventurous teaching methods to be employed, and pupils would benefit from opportunities to exercise greater control of their own learning. Homework, for example, could be better used to enhance research skills.
226. Assessment is particularly well employed so that pupils know what level of work is expected of them, how well they are making progress, and what more they need to do to improve. Pupils' knowledge and understanding is regularly and comprehensively checked during lessons, and work is marked thoroughly and systematically.

227. The only unsatisfactory lesson seen in religious education was where a non-specialist teacher failed to gain pupils' attention satisfactorily as the lesson began, with the consequence that they spent too little time on task and made poor progress.
228. Pupils respond well to their lessons. They work with effort and concentration throughout the lesson, ask questions appropriately, and take a real pride in both the content and presentation of their written work. They can discuss their work intelligently. They clearly enjoy a good rapport with and respect for the teacher, and this is reflected in the high take-up rate for religious studies as a GCSE option.
229. The curriculum followed at Key Stage 3 provides a good combination of knowledge and understanding of the different faith traditions and their relationship with society. It also forms a sound basis for GCSE studies. The school is now working productively again with the local education authority to ensure continuity from primary to secondary school, following a period of relative isolation during the school's time as a grant-maintained institution. Learning also benefits from the experiences that are offered outside the classroom, such as visits to Lichfield Cathedral, Regent's Park Mosque, and a local Gurdwara.
230. Religious education is well-managed. It follows the humanities department's policies efficiently and effectively.
231. Religious education makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development. It is taught in a way which encourages reflection on the deeper and more spiritual aspects of life and enhances their awareness of the traditions of the different faith communities that make up British society. Through the discussion of issues such as abortion, racism, war and peace, the subject plays a particularly strong role in promoting pupils' social development. Responses to these issues are taught with proper regard to the maturity of pupils at both key stages, and also with a strong sensitivity to differences in their gender and cultural heritage.
232. The school has improved religious education significantly since the last inspection with the introduction of a popular and successful GCSE course. There have been clear improvements in the quality of both teaching and learning at both key stages, and the school now enjoys a satisfactory level of resources for teaching. The statutory provision for religious education at Key Stage 4 remains unsatisfactory but the school is discussing plans to introduce a short course and certificate of achievement regime for all pupils.