

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **LACON CHILDE SCHOOL**

Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire

LEA area: Shropshire

Unique reference number: 123578

Headteacher: Dr Gill Eatough

Reporting inspector: Brian Evans  
1049

Dates of inspection: 6 – 10 March 2000

Inspection number: 187070

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16 Years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Love Lane Cleobury Mortimer Kidderminster Shropshire
Postcode:	DY14 8PE
Telephone number:	01299 270312
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Anne Parker
Date of previous inspection:	12 February 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Brian Evans	Registered inspector	English as an additional language	What sort of school is it?
			What should the school do to improve further?
			How high are standards? a) the school's results and achievements
			How well are pupils taught?
			How well is the school led and managed?
Brigid Quest-Riston	Lay inspector		How high are standards? b) pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the school care for its pupils?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Roland Portsmouth	Team inspector	Mathematics	
		Equal opportunities	
Colin Robertson	Team inspector	Science	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Lynn Bappa	Team inspector	History	
Kenneth Boden	Team inspector	Design and technology	
Monica Christian	Team inspector	Information technology	
Wendy Easterby	Team inspector	English	
		Key Stage 4	
Mark Gill	Team inspector	Physical education	
		Geography	
Christine Humphreys	Team inspector	Art	
Cheryl Jackson	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
John Morrell	Team inspector	Music	
Jacqueline Pentlow	Team inspector	Religious education	
Diane Shepherd	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	

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Inspection Quality Division  
The Office for Standards in Education  
Alexandra House  
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London WC2B 6SE

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

The Lacon Childe Community School is a well below average-sized mixed comprehensive school with 499 pupils on roll. The school roll is rising. There are few pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and very few who have English as an additional language. One hundred and twenty seven pupils have special educational needs and 31 have statements; both of which figures are above the national average. Pupils' attainment on entry is in line with the national average for comprehensive schools.

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

This is an improving school in which pupils achieve above average standards. Pupils have good attitudes to learning. Most teaching is good and much is very good or better. The school curriculum provides a broad range of opportunities which benefit all pupils. There are very good care and guidance arrangements and the school keeps parents well informed about children's progress. The school works closely with parents. The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection and is responding well to the challenges or issues it faces. It is led and managed efficiently and imaginatively so that measures are achieved in a cost-effective way providing good value for money.

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

- Good ethos for learning leading to positive attitudes from pupils of all attainment levels.
- Very good leadership by headteacher.
- Very good support for pupils' social and moral development.
- Very good careers guidance.
- Good teaching leading to rising standards.
- Very good links with the community.
- Good teaching of basic literacy skills.

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

- Performance management including more consistent use of performance data to identify individual pupil need.
- Provision for religious education for all pupils which currently does not meet statutory requirements.
- There is no daily act of collective worship.
- Standards of numeracy across the curriculum.

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

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

The school was last inspected in February 1996. There has been a very significant improvement in art which now meets National Curriculum requirements and pupils achieve above average standards. History resources have been improved and again standards are much higher than at the last inspection. However, the school has made little progress in provision for religious education resources and the subject is taught only in Year 7 and does not meet the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. There has been satisfactory progress in developing information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum. Since the last inspection the school has gained accreditation as Investors in People although the appraisal process is in abeyance pending new DfEE requirements. The school improvement plan reflects good progress in reviewing schemes of work and departmental planning. Staff awareness of differences between the attainment of boys and girls is much improved.

Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory and there are good systems and strategies in place for further raising standards.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	A	B	C	C

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

The proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A\*-C in 1999 was close to the national average but below the national average for 5 or more A\*-G grades. Over the last six years the school's GCSE point score per pupil has risen more slowly than the national trend. Girls achieved higher grades than boys overall but in most subjects this difference was no greater than that nationally.

In 1999, the average points score achieved by pupils in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 at the age of 14 was well above the national average. However, there were significant differences between the average points score in each of the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In English, the average points score was well above the national average, it was above the national average in mathematics and at the national average in science. Across the curriculum pupils' standards of literacy are above average and enhanced in Year 7 by the school's continuation of the literacy hour from their Year 6 in primary school. Number skills are in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving level 6 was well above the national average for English, above the national average for mathematics and close to the national average for science. The overall trend in average National Curriculum points scores over the past four years has been close to the national average.

Standardised tests and Key Stage 2 levels show that the overall profile of pupil attainment on entry to the school is at the average for comprehensive schools. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' achievement in comparison with similar schools is above average. It is very high in English, below average in mathematics and well below average in science in comparison with pupils from similar schools. By the end of Key Stage 4 attainment in comparison with schools with similar proportion of free school meals is less reliable because of the low entry in 1999. Inspection evidence indicates that the 1999 GCSE results were in line with similar schools.

The school has set challenging targets based on good monitoring of pupil progress.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good: attitudes have a significant and positive effect on learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good.
Personal development and relationships	Very good.
Attendance	Well above national average.

Behaviour is very good overall. There are only occasional lapses. Standards of behaviour are also very good as pupils move around the school. They are lively and energetic, but considerate, friendly and polite. Bullying or oppressive behaviour rarely occur. There were no permanent exclusions last year and the level of fixed term exclusions is low.



## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is good in both key stages. Of the 121 lessons observed nearly in three every ten were very good or excellent and seven in every ten were good or better. Ninety nine per cent of lessons were at least satisfactory. These proportions were similar for both key stages and show a significant improvement on the figures for the last inspection in 1996.

Teaching is at least good overall in all National Curriculum subjects. It is satisfactory in Year 7 in religious education. In physical education, teaching is very good in Key Stage 3 and satisfactory in Key Stage 4 and in music it is good at Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4. Teaching is very good in both key stages for art and geography and in expressive arts in Key Stage 4 where very good use is made of resources and of support staff.

The teaching of basic skills and teachers' expectations of pupils of all attainment levels and including special educational needs is good.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory: range includes a very good expressive arts course in Key Stage 4 but the requirement to teach religious education to all is not met.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good: pupils with special educational needs make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good: provision is very good for social and moral development and good for spiritual and cultural development. Provision for informing pupils on aspects of the wider multi-cultural society is limited.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good.

Although opportunities are taken as they arise and most subjects to promote spiritual values, there is no coherent policy across the school. In other areas there have been significant improvements since the last inspection.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good: the headteacher gives very strong leadership and is very well supported by deputy headteacher, staff and governors.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good: governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

The school's evaluation of its performance	Good: there is a good pattern of review and planning across all aspects of the school.
The strategic use of resources	Good: resources are used efficiently in the context of a smaller than average secondary school.

The school has adequate accommodation, staffing and learning resources; the school provides good value for money and applies 'best value' principles effectively.

### **PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School expects pupils to work hard and achieve their best.</li> <li>• Pupils make good progress.</li> <li>• Behaviour is good.</li> <li>• Kept well informed about their child's progress.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework.</li> <li>• School working closely with parents.</li> <li>• More activities outside school.</li> </ul>

Inspection evidence confirms the strengths identified by parents. However, inspectors observed that generally homework is set regularly and appropriately and that links with parents are satisfactory. The school is aware of the difficulty of transport for pupils after the school day and has bid successfully for monies to meet this need.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. The proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A\*-C in 1999 was close to the national average but below the national average for 5 or more A\*-G grades. Over the last six years the school's GCSE average point score per pupil has risen more slowly than the national trend. Girls achieved higher grades than boys overall but in most subjects this difference was no greater than that nationally.
2. In 1999, the average points score achieved by pupils in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 at the age of 14 was well above the national average. However, there were significant differences between the average points score in each of the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In English, the average points score was well above the national average, it was above the national average in mathematics and at the national average in science. Across the curriculum standards of literacy are above average and enhanced in Year 7 by the school's continuation of the literacy hour from their Year 6 in primary school. Number skills are in line with national expectations but standards are hindered by a lack of a common policy on numeracy across the curriculum. The proportion of pupils achieving level 6 was well above the national average for English, above the national average for mathematics and close to the national average for science. The overall trend in average National Curriculum points scores over the past four years has been close to the national average.
3. Standardised tests and Key Stage 2 levels show that the overall profile of pupil attainment on entry to the school is at the average for comprehensive schools. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' achievement in comparison with similar schools is above average. It is very high in English, below average in mathematics and well below average in science. By the end of Key Stage 4 attainment in comparison with schools with similar proportion of free school meals is less reliable because of the low cohort numbers in 1999. Inspection evidence indicates that the 1999 GCSE results were in line with similar schools.
4. Most pupils make good progress as they move through the school in both key stages. Pupils make very good progress in English in Key Stage 3 and good progress in Key Stage 4. In mathematics and science, good progress is made at both key stages although in both these subjects understanding lags behind knowledge.
5. Pupils make good progress in art and music at Key Stage 3 and very good progress at Key Stage 4. In design and technology, information technology and history, progress is good at both key stages. Very good progress is made in geography at both key stages. Good progress is made in modern foreign languages at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory progress at Key Stage 4. Most pupils make good progress in physical education and those studying the GCSE course in physical education make satisfactory progress. In expressive arts GCSE courses at Key Stage 4 pupils make very good progress.
6. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Classroom assistants work well with teachers and give good support to pupils. The progress made by talented pupils is satisfactory. The school has established since the last inspection a very comprehensive database which includes details of individual pupils' standards as they move through the school. Its potential for improving standards is not yet fully developed. However, the more effective use of this information in curriculum planning and in the classroom to meet individual needs effectively is a key element in the school's strategy to meet the challenging targets it has set for itself in Key Stage 3 assessment tests and GCSE examinations for 2000.
7. Since the last inspection standards in English, mathematics, art, geography, history, information technology, modern foreign languages, music and physical education have improved. They have been maintained in science and design and technology. They have remained very low in religious education which is taught only in Year 7.

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

8. Pupils' attitudes to their studies are good. They are very willing to become involved in the life of the school. In a Year 10 English lesson, for example, pupils were buzzing with enthusiasm as they entered the classroom, then worked hard and enjoyed the lesson. A good working atmosphere is a feature of many lessons, such as the Year 9 design and technology food lesson when pupils were busily involved but very willing to explain their choice of country and discuss the dish they were preparing. Year 8 pupils were eager to take part in a music lesson and to sing the more difficult parts. However, there are a few occasions when pupils are slow to respond to teaching.
9. There is considerable enthusiasm for the number and variety of extra-curricular activities organised by the school. Pupils make the most of the opportunities the school provides for them. They like the sport, drama and music and show their appreciation by taking part in large numbers. The trips and visits, some residential, some abroad, are also very popular.
10. Behaviour is very good overall. In lessons behaviour is almost always of a very high standard. There are only occasional lapses. Standards of behaviour are also very good as pupils move around the school. They are lively and energetic, but considerate, friendly and polite. Pupils pause in their playground football games, out of courtesy and for reasons of safety, if visitors or members of staff need to pass through. Bullying or oppressive behaviour rarely occur. There were no permanent exclusions last year. The level of fixed term exclusions is low.
11. Pupils respond very well to the provision made for their personal development. They are ready to become involved in activities and to take the opportunities for responsibility which the school offers them. For example, Year 8 pupils enjoy their Challenge programme which encourages independent research and develops social skills. The quality of relations in the school is one of its strongest and most attractive features. Pupils interviewed all commented on the friendly atmosphere that prevails in the school. Several gave this as the reason they wanted to come to Lacon Childe. The sense of community within the school is strong. The school council feels it has a useful role to play. Pupils are aware of the impact of their behaviour on others. They co-operate well together when they work in pairs or groups as, for example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson where a group of pupils worked out solutions on the board for the whole class, who listened attentively and responded well. Pupils are very considerate: they are always ready to help others. Relations between pupils and members of staff are also very good. In a Year 11 English lesson, the pupils and their teacher worked together as a team. Pupils trust their teachers and have considerable confidence in their support and advice.
12. The level of attendance at the school is 94.1 per cent. This figure is well above the national average of 91 per cent. Authorised absence is 5.4 per cent. The figure for unauthorised absence is 0.5 per cent compared with a national average of 1.1 per cent. Lateness is not a significant problem and is usually caused by buses not arriving on time.
13. The high standards of the last inspection report have been maintained.

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

14. The quality of teaching is good in both key stages. Of the 121 lessons observed nearly three lessons in every ten lessons were very good or excellent and seven lessons in every ten were good or better. Ninety nine per cent of lessons were at least satisfactory. These proportions were similar for both key stages and show a significant improvement on the figures for the last inspection in 1996.
15. Teaching is at least good in all National Curriculum subjects. It is satisfactory in Year 7 in religious education. In physical education, teaching is very good in Key Stage 3 and satisfactory in Key Stage 4 and in music it is good at Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4. Teaching is very good in both key stages for art and geography and in expressive arts in Key Stage 4 where

very good use is made of resources and of support staff.

16. Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding is good in all subjects. Basic skills are well taught for pupils with special educational needs.
17. Lesson planning is good and teachers set clear learning objectives for pupils in most lessons. Teachers' expectations are good for pupils of all attainment levels. Teachers' methods and organisation are good in both key stages.
18. Classroom management is good and teachers' use of time and resources is good.
19. Since the last inspection there has been a satisfactory improvement in teachers' use of ICT. However, it is not uniformly developed across all subjects. Not all departments have their own equipment or use the networks on a regular basis. Overall, pupils have a good understanding of how computers can help them in processing data but do not have enough access to them in all subjects as, for example, in history.
20. Teachers assess and mark pupils' work effectively though there are weaknesses in some subjects where assessment is not linked to National Curriculum levels and pupils do not have enough information on how to improve their work.
21. Homework is set satisfactorily on most occasions and in line with the school timetable but with some variations between teachers.
22. There is a close relationship between the quality of teaching described in the above paragraphs and the extent to which pupils acquire new knowledge and skills. Overall in both key stages pupils of all attainment levels and pupils with special educational needs have positive attitudes to their work. They make good gains in learning. The pace of learning in most lessons is good. Pupils apply their physical and creative skills well.

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

23. The school offers a rich curriculum in many respects but there is a glaring omission, namely that religious education is taught only in Year 7. It was noted at the last inspection that the school was failing in its statutory duty to provide religious education throughout both key stages and to hold a daily act of collective worship. This is still the case. The spiritual development of pupils was also identified as an area for development. Overall, provision for spiritual development is good and has improved since the last inspection because the whole school ethos encourages pupils to reflect on aspects of the world around them. Although opportunities are taken as they arise and most subjects to promote spiritual values, there is no coherent policy across the school. In other areas there have been significant improvements since the last inspection. Art provision is now very good, and fully in line with the National Curriculum. ICT has developed strongly. There are separate lessons in ICT in each year of Key Stage 3 and the subject is available as an option in Year 10.
24. Adequate time is given to the core subjects and all pupils study double science in Key Stage 4. In Year 7, arrangements are made to continue the literacy hour, familiar to pupils from their primary schools, and the entire school joins in a fifteen minute reading session each week. There is only limited teaching of drama (restricted to Year 8) but an unusually wide range of three modern foreign languages in Key Stage 3. The learning opportunities provided within subjects are good or very good in some areas, such as music, art and physical education, and are at least satisfactory in all others, with the exception of religious education. Voluntary revision classes are available in most subjects.
25. The range of activities beyond the classroom was judged at the last inspection to be outstanding and continues to be a significant strength of the school. There is an impressive programme of musical activities, visits from authors, drama productions, visits to theatres, art galleries and

museums, and trips abroad. Additional funding has been obtained to extend the range of after-school activities and there is a strong commitment to providing an enriched curriculum for pupils who might otherwise be disadvantaged by living in remote rural areas.

26. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good and is enhanced by the ethos of the school. Appropriate values are promoted daily through the way in which people treat each other. There are clear expectations and boundaries and a pleasant, civilised atmosphere prevails. Moral and social issues are more formally encountered within the classroom in various subjects, for example through English literature. Pupils experience a good range of cultural influences, both in lessons and through additional activities, but there is not enough provision made for preparing pupils for life in a multi-cultural society.
27. The provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is satisfactory overall. No lessons took place during the period of the inspection: judgements are based on documentary evidence and interviews with co-ordinators and pupils. The weekly lesson is taught by tutors according to plans prepared by the head of Year 7 and key stage co-ordinators. Topics selected are appropriate, and outline planning is soundly based. The Year 8 Challenge programme makes a useful contribution to pupils' personal development. There are more specialist teachers at Key Stage 4. Modules are planned effectively to suit this age group and environment. Health, sex and drugs education are shared between the personal, social and health education programme and the science department and are covered satisfactorily.
28. There is a very good programme for careers education which has been recognised by an Investors in Careers Award. Co-operation between the school and the local careers service is particularly close. This gives the programme the flexibility to adapt successfully to pupils' individual needs. The Careers Open Evening for pupils in Years 9, 10, 11 and their parents is very well attended. Schools and colleges in the area which offer the post-16 stage of education are strongly represented. This is important given the rural location of the school. Work experience is well organised for Year 11 pupils. Outside mentors help with letters of application and interview practice.
29. The school has very strong links with the community it serves. It is at the centre of life in the area and draws on what is available - facilities, natural resources, local professional expertise - to extend pupils' learning. The links are reciprocal: pupils help in the community, for example at the Peter Rabbit Nursery deliberately sited in the middle of the school and by cooking business breakfasts. Facilities are shared for the benefit of the community and widely used by local organisation: there is also an extensive programme of adult education.
30. The school's relations with primary schools and post-16 establishments are constructive and very well developed. The termly primary liaison meetings, visits by the Head of Year 7 and careful exchange of information all ensure that the transition from primary to secondary school is made as easily as possible. The computer facilities at Lacon Childe are used regularly by primary school pupils. Pupils are given very good guidance to help them decide where to go on leaving the school. All choices involve travel. The school is keenly aware of pupils' need to have the right information before deciding and maintains close links with colleges in the area.
31. The community contribution at the time of the last inspection was already good and has continued to improve. Good links with primary schools and post-16 colleges have been maintained. Careers education has improved.

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

32. The school takes good care of its pupils. Tutors and key stage co-ordinators know pupils well. There are good procedures to ensure their health and safety, both within the school, and on visits outside. The key stage co-ordinators monitor attendance efficiently with the help of the Education and Welfare Officer (EWO) and take prompt action when necessary. There are very good procedures to promote discipline and good behaviour. Pupils are managed well. The emphasis is on achievement of all kinds. This is recognised in several ways: merits, reward stickers and the head's commendation. A range of sanctions, beginning with the red dot in a

pupil's logbook, is used when necessary. Although bullying is rare, any cases that do arise are dealt with promptly and effectively. Procedures for child protection are satisfactory.

33. Systems to assess and monitor pupils' performance are good overall. There are variations in practice between subjects. Most departments, such as English, art, geography and music, assess pupils' work very efficiently to build up comprehensive and detailed profiles on individual attainment. Results are analysed and used to guide future planning. In other subject departments both the procedures to assess and monitor pupils and the use made of the resulting information are satisfactory but less well developed.
34. Tests taken in primary schools provide a firm base for academic information about pupils. Results from school examinations, monitoring reports, and further tests are added to this base to compile a comprehensive record of pupils' academic progress and effort during their time at Lacon Childe School. This information is well co-ordinated and held centrally on computer. It is easily available to all members of staff with academic and pastoral responsibilities. This information is used effectively to give pupils good academic and personal guidance and support. It helps, for example in the choice of subjects to study for GCSE, or to predict grades, or to decide whether pupils would benefit from having a mentor, from among the teaching staff or from outside the school. Such initiatives encourage pupils to do their best and contribute to raising achievement.
35. The last inspection report stated that the school looked after its pupils well: it continues to do so. Standards of assessment and the use made of results still vary between subjects. There have been improvements in the quality of academic support and guidance given to pupils.

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

36. Parents are very pleased with the school and what it provides for their children. A very high proportion responded to the questionnaire. These responses were very supportive. Almost all parents who returned the questionnaire consider that the school expects hard work from pupils and gets good results. Parents say they feel able to approach the school with questions or problems. Parents also think the school is well led. Inspectors agree with their views. A few parents have concerns about homework and the information they receive about their children's progress. Inspectors consider that homework set is generally satisfactory, but that there are sometimes problems with marking it. Inspectors conclude that the quality of information about progress is satisfactory. However, the annual reports to parents vary between subjects in the extent of the information provided and in whether they suggest what pupils need to do to improve.
37. The school has established very effective links with parents. The termly newsletter is an impressive publication. There is a very good range of information about the school itself, both on paper and on the well-designed web-site. The school is careful to consult and involve parents in changes at the school, such as the planned development of extra sporting facilities in conjunction with the community. Parents receive information about progress each term, either short monitoring reports, or full records of achievement. The latter vary in the amount and type of information they give parents. Some are very good and overall they are satisfactory but there are qualitative differences between subjects. The school uses its own grading system and does not routinely refer to National Curriculum levels. Parents give the school very good support. Attendance at consultation evenings and other events is very good. The Parent/Teachers Association is an active and successful body of fund-raisers. Parents support sporting fixtures and help with transport for these and musical events. Pupils' logbooks are used regularly and provide good home/school contact.
38. The school has maintained the good links with parents which were noted in the last inspection report. The quality of information for parents on progress in the annual records of achievement is satisfactory and similar to the last report.

## HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

39. The school is very well led by an enthusiastic, knowledgeable and effective headteacher who is given good support by the deputy headteacher. The school improvement plan reflects the school's good insights into strategic planning and a clear vision in the context of new local and national initiatives, such as the setting up of a senior management approach to performance management. Priorities are effectively communicated to all staff, pupils, parents and the wider community. The leadership style is based on a consultative model. School targets and priorities are expressed in a well constructed school improvement plan approved by the governing body. It is reviewed regularly and adapted appropriately when new conditions of funding, new initiatives or changes in staffing arise.
40. The school has a very good tradition of pupil performance analysis which increasingly forms an integral part in performance management as, for example, in teachers' target-setting for individual pupils. There is a sound but embryonic framework for monitoring and supporting good classroom practice. The senior management team work well together and the school's daily routines are well organised. Overall there is a good awareness and a shared commitment to improving standards amongst senior staff. Management responsibilities are delegated efficiently. Heads of department vary in their effectiveness but provide good leadership and management skills overall. The school's appraisal procedures are in abeyance until further guidance is given by the DfEE.
41. The headteacher and staff work closely with the governing body. Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The governing body fulfils its statutory duties in all respects except for the provision of religious education in Years 8-11 and for a daily act of collective worship. Committee minutes reflect the good support it gives the headteacher. The governing body make a very good contribution to enabling the school to make the best strategic use of its resources and ensure that specific grants and additional funding are spent appropriately. For example, it has successfully sought the support of the local education authority, local community and other revenue sources to update its facilities. Educational priorities in the school improvement plan are supported through careful financial management. Governors oversee that the principles of 'best value' are applied in securing resources and services. This is a particularly important issue in Lacon Childe School since its facilities are heavily used by the local community.
42. There is an adequate number of teachers to match the needs of the National Curriculum but not for teaching the Locally Agreed Syllabus in religious education. Special needs staff are well-qualified and led. They give pupils with special educational needs good guidance and support and work effectively with classroom teachers. Teachers are given very good back-up by administrative and support staff who contribute significantly to the smooth day-to-day organisation of the school. The staff development programme meets the needs of the school improvement plan. Provision for the induction of newly qualified staff and staff new to the school is very good.
43. Resources are at least adequate and in some areas good. The learning resources centre and library make a particularly impressive contribution to developing pupils' skills of independent learning.



44. Accommodation is at least adequate for all subjects and for some subjects, such as music, it is good. However, space is increasingly at a premium as the school roll rises and is cramped in the smaller classrooms and workshop areas, particularly food technology.
45. Leadership and management overall is good. The overall efficiency of the school as measured by academic and personal achievement is good. Attendance is well above the national average. The school gives good value for money.

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

46. The headteacher and senior management team have a good base on which to make further improvements in standards. To raise standards further the governors and staff should
- Analyse the school's extensive assessment database more rigorously in monitoring pupils' progress by
    - relating teachers' assessments and marking to National Curriculum levels;
    - informing individual pupils on how they can improve their standards;
    - supporting good classroom practice in identifying individual pupil needs.  
[Paragraphs 6, 33, 41, 74, 90, 116, 121, 132, 147]
  - Implement the priority in the school development plan for the provision of religious education for all pupils and provide arrangements for a daily act of collective worship.  
[Paragraphs 23, 42]
  - Agree and implement a whole school policy for improving standards of numeracy across the curriculum in line with the school's development plan.  
[Paragraphs 2, 68]

The following matters are identified as weaknesses which should be considered by the school;

- Make provision to extend pupils' multi-cultural awareness.  
[Paragraph 26]
- Improve spelling by introducing the spelling policy.  
[paragraphs 49, 56, 114]

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	121
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	51

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	26	41	29	1	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	499	N/a
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	33	N/a

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	31	N/a
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	127	N/a

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	2

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.9
National comparative data	9

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.1

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	47	51	98

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	38	29	29
	Girls	48	42	35
	Total	86	71	64
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	88 (68)	72 (76)	65 (69)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	63 (37)	44 (47)	17 (35)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	30	32	30
	Girls	48	45	45
	Total	78	77	75
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	80 (73)	79 (71)	77 (73)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	51 (42)	41 (43)	36 (44)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	35	34	69

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	14	30	34
	Girls	19	32	34
	Total	33	62	68
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	48 (53)	90 (93)	99 (98)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	36
	National	37.8

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

### **Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	2
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	497
Any other minority ethnic group	0

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

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	12	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	29.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.9

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

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

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	311

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

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	23.1
Key Stage 4	18.9

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1998/1999
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	£
Total income	1143935
Total expenditure	1125114
Expenditure per pupil	2569
Balance brought forward from previous year	27840
Balance carried forward to next year	46661

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

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	495
Number of questionnaires returned	279

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

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	49	9	4	3
My child is making good progress in school.	46	51	4	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	35	58	3	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	58	15	1	1
The teaching is good.	38	54	4	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	44	47	6	2	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	56	39	4	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	35	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	37	47	12	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	49	44	3	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	39	54	3	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	33	49	9	4	6

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

None.

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

### **ENGLISH**

47. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, results for English were well above the national average and very high in comparison with schools with a similar intake. Sixty three per cent of pupils gained the higher levels of 6 or above. Girls performed better than boys but by less than is found nationally. Pupils did much better in English than in mathematics and science. Results had remained constant at about the national average for three years but shot up in 1999. In the GCSE English examinations average grades have fallen in the last three years with only 48% of pupils gaining grades A\* to C, in 1999, below the national average of 55% and well below average compared to similar schools. Results at A\* to G, however, were in line with the national average. In the English literature examinations, for which a high proportion of pupils is entered, results in 1999 were in line with national averages. They fell in 1998 but then returned to previous levels. In both examinations girls performed better than boys by more than they do nationally.
48. Judging from work observed during the inspection standards in English are above average compared to national standards. At the end of Key Stage 3 standards are well above average. High attaining pupils write at length and sustain the interest of the reader. They read Shakespeare with understanding and choose challenging texts in their own reading. Average attainers talk confidently, for example about their reading and write interesting biographies using detail well. Low attaining pupils write in simple sentences correctly punctuated and set out speech accurately. They have a good vocabulary for their ability, employing such words as 'exploited', 'realistic', and 'narrator'. Their spelling is sometimes inaccurate and some use capitals indiscriminately.
49. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards are in line with those found nationally. In Year 10 standards are above average. After the disappointing results in 1999, the delivery of the course has been improved in several ways. Planning is much more explicit and thorough and coursework is now completed in Year 10. Schemes of work focus more on progressive development of skills. Coursework folders of high attainers contain work of a very high standard, meticulously presented. They reveal very good use of detail to support strong critical analysis. They are independent thinkers who show thoughtful response to poetry both in content and style. They express ideas confidently in group work on love poetry, listening carefully to each other and moderating their ideas accordingly. Average attainers understand their reading, write reasonably accurately and make clear oral responses, if unextended. They do make errors in spelling, for example, 'women', for, 'woman'. Low attainers have more serious problems with spelling but show engagement with texts such as, 'The Full Monty' and use detail to support their ideas. They can sustain ideas in writing, and respond to questions appropriately. At both key stages girls perform better than boys but the difference decreases as pupils move through the school. Greater use of non-fiction in the teaching is one of the ways with which the gap is being lessened as well as greater use of information technology. Standards of reading and speaking are higher than standards of writing at both key stages, especially with the lower attainers. Pupils enjoy their reading and reading habits in the school are good. Many lessons begin with quiet reading and the whole school reads for fifteen minutes on Wednesday morning. Reading has a very high profile in the school, including much stimulating display on the walls. Work is often word processed, considerably improving presentation as well as providing greater motivation. Drafting is used effectively throughout the school.
50. Pupils make good progress during their time in the school. It is very good at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. The revision timetable recently introduced for Year 11 pupils, for example, ensures all is covered at a fast pace even where teaching is less secure. On occasion in lessons progress is excellent. Year 8 improved their writing enormously developing dialogue into sustained writing because of a tightly structured and interesting series of lessons which focused attention closely on how to write as well as what to write. On the very rare occasions where progress is unsatisfactory this is linked to teaching which is unsatisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs make progress at a similar rate to others in the class, with good help from

learning needs assistants and methods and resources appropriate to their ability, such as writing frames.

51. Pupils behave very well at both key stages and there are very good relationships both with teachers and with other pupils. Pupils are polite, friendly and respond quickly to requests. At Key Stage 3, pupils have very good attitudes to work which helps to raise their standards. They are enthusiastic about their lessons, keen to volunteer answers and to read aloud. There is some off task chatter from a few pupils at Key Stage 4, and some pupils are difficult to motivate, but attitudes are still good from the majority. High attainers in Year 11, for instance, showed themselves able to take control of their own learning when analysing poetry in groups.
52. Standards of teaching are good at both key stages. Standards of learning are good at Key Stage 4 and very good at Key Stage 3, helped by the positive attitudes of pupils. However, standards of teaching vary considerably, ranging from excellent on occasion to unsatisfactory on occasion. At both key stages two thirds of teaching is good or better. In the best lessons work is very well planned incorporating reading, writing and speaking, and ensuring all pupils are working at an appropriate level for their ability. Teachers have high expectations to which pupils respond. For instance Year 7 pupils enjoyed such demanding poetry as, 'Snake' and wrote high quality poems of their own in response. Year 9 pupils were expected to read beyond the literal when studying the transcript of the trial of Craig and Bentley. The best classrooms are visually stimulating, celebrating pupils' work, and displaying commonly misspelled words. Work is regularly and thoroughly marked with strengths and weaknesses picked out, then filed in very well organised folders so that pupils can see their own progress. Where teaching is less successful, question and answer sessions are not used sufficiently to assess pupils' understanding, to develop ideas or to harness them into productive class discussion; which is a most successful feature of the best lessons. Neither do teachers encourage pace and motivation by the use of timed tasks, again a feature of the best lessons. Although spelling errors are corrected the strategies for improving spelling are not systematic enough. A good programme has been devised but is not yet in practice.
53. The curriculum offers a good range of opportunities at both key stages including a Certificate of Achievement course at Key Stage 4, however, there is insufficient systematic coverage of drama. Assessment is very good at both key stages. It is used to monitor and encourage progress and analysed thoroughly to inform curriculum planning. The department is very well led. There is a clear vision for the future; new initiatives are planned carefully and moderated in the light of their effectiveness; the department keeps abreast of developments nationally. Systems for monitoring teaching are developing but have not yet resulted in the total spread of good practice.
54. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection, especially in developing assessment procedures and units of work. Standards have improved at Key Stage 3 and are rising now at Key Stage 4.
55. Areas to be addressed:
  - disseminate the very good practice in teaching across the whole department;
  - develop drama more systematically and more fully;
  - improve spelling by introducing the spelling policy.

## **Literacy**

56. Standards of literacy are above average. Pupils speak confidently, clearly and use talk analytically to compare and evaluate. They are enthusiastic readers, able to find information and identify relevant points. They use the library independently. They are encouraged to plan and draft their work carefully and are able to sustain their writing. Work is presented neatly and accurately, often word processed, and displayed to good effect around the school. The use of correct terminology is encouraged.
57. The school has made a good start to introducing a policy to develop literacy across the curriculum but has yet further to go to ensure all departments contribute as fully as possible. Most departments introduce new words carefully and teach how they are spelt. Many display key

words around the walls. Pupils know how to check their spellings on the computer. In areas such as history good standards in extended writing have a very positive effect. In geography comprehensive guidance on putting together GCSE coursework has a real impact on outcomes. The recently introduced literacy hour in which all pupils in Year 7 participate is beneficial in raising standards, especially at the extremes of the ability range. High attaining pupils produce a wide range of sustained and effective writing for a variety of purposes and low attainers develop their reading in a structured environment where they feel secure.

## **MATHEMATICS**

58. The pupils' results in the 1999 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were above national percentages for those achieving above levels 5 and 6. The difference in attainment of boys and girls was much greater than the national difference at level 5 and at level 6. The attainment of pupils in the current Year 9 is above that which would be expected nationally.
59. The pupils' results in the 1999 GCSE examinations were below national averages for all schools. Girls' achievements were slightly greater than those of boys; the difference was greater than the national difference. The attainment seen in the higher attaining Year 11 pupils was above that which would be expected when compared to all schools nationally. Standards over time are rising at a rate that is greater than the national increase. This is due to changes in the curriculum material and effective teaching. Almost all pupils were entered at GCSE level in 1999 but the cohort in Year 11 was very small and detailed comparisons with all schools are not valid.
60. From work seen during the inspection standards overall are slightly above the results at Key Stage 3 for 1999. This is due to a change in the teaching material; this has given greater rigour to class work. By the end of Key Stage 3 higher attaining pupils can manipulate quadratic equations and use trigonometry to solve right-angled triangles. This work is at level 8 and is indicative of the rise in standards at Key Stage 3 and the efforts made to extend the most able pupils. Average ability pupils can solve linear equations and use formulae connecting circumference and diameter of circles; this work is a level 6 and is at national expectations. Pupils with special educational needs can draw shapes and are numerate.
61. Progress overall is good with pupils' numerical work in Year 7 developing to ratio and percentages in Year 8 and to powers, roots and work involving indices in Year 9. Higher attaining pupils can investigate number patterns in Year 7 and solve equations; these develop into linear graphs in Year 8 and simple quadratic graphs in Year 9. This continues into Key Stage 4 with pupils following a GCSE course that is relevant to their prior ability and builds upon their previous knowledge. Pupils' progress is closely monitored and in some cases progress is good and as a result pupils' levels of entry are raised.
62. In both key stages, pupils' attitudes are good and in some cases very good. Pupils arrive at their lessons promptly, settle quickly and are attentive to their teachers. They are mutually supportive in lesson time and answer questions willingly to respond to their teacher or to confirm their understanding. They are prepared to give reasons for their answers even if they initially conflict with others. On the few occasions pupils were encouraged to participate in their lessons they did so willingly, without embarrassment and were well received by their peers. Their exercise books were generally neat, well kept and were free from graffiti. Behaviour in lessons was equally good with exchanges between pupils and teachers tempered with a degree of humour without compromising discipline.
63. Teaching was at least satisfactory and was good in 60 per cent of lessons. There were more good lessons seen at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. Good teacher knowledge and understanding enabled teachers to plan lessons well so that they contained examples that were relevant to the pupils' experiences or captured their imagination. The good relationship between teachers and pupils encouraged a positive working atmosphere and enabled lessons to proceed at a good pace. One good strategy that was frequently seen was a brisk exposition and discussion followed by a short, time-limited exercise. This was used several times in a lesson. This encouraged pupils to work at a brisk pace and sustained good levels of concentration. A



few lessons were seen where the pace, especially during the introduction, was slow and improved only when pupils started to work. Teaching strategies were mainly didactic and were limited by the lack of space in some classrooms. Where alternative strategies, especially a practical approach, were used they were particularly effective in engaging all pupils. Pupils with special educational needs were well supported either in small groups or by support staff in the classrooms and made good progress. All teachers were well aware of the individual educational plans for these pupils and took these into consideration during lessons.

64. The head of department is relatively new to the school and leads a team of mutually supportive, hard working teachers who are committed to raising standards. This is reflected in the departmental development plan that is aimed at raising standards in mathematics. There is some monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure that the standards do improve and this is another developing feature of the work of the department. There is an effective record sheet that is used to monitor progress of pupils during both key stages and this is further enhanced by the setting structure in Years 8 and 9. The setting in the current Years 10 and 11 is not as efficient and at present there is no setting by ability in Year 7. The setting structure is restricted by the use of part time staff that are not available for the whole week. The accommodation is in adjacent rooms; these are small for the number of pupils in many classes seen and this restricts the range of teaching strategies that can be used. The rooms are enhanced by attractive displays of pupils' work, some informative posters and some commercially produced posters illustrating a range of mathematical ideas. This adds to the ethos of the department.
65. There have been many improvements since the last inspection; the main feature is the use of new course material that has raised the standard of work in the classroom and the use of extra revision classes for pupils who want to improve their standard. There has been an increase in the number of pupils who have been entered for the higher level at GCSE level and for the higher grades in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3. There has been a sustained commitment to further investigational activities across both key stages which is reflected in the higher grades obtained. When this is set against the ability level of pupils on intake these increases are highly commendable.
66. Area to be addressed:  
– teachers to share good practice in the department on developing a wider range of teaching methods.

### **Numeracy**

67. Pupils' number skills are satisfactory but there is not a coherent approach to numeracy between subjects. Mental arithmetic skills are a regular part of the teaching of mathematics in the school and efficient calculator use is also taught. Pupils are taught basic drawing skills in mathematics. In GCSE geography, individual studies included data collection, processing and presentation. These were at a very high standard. Data handling and collection skills are evident in French and German. Line graphs are evident in science and pupils weigh and measure accurately in technology. In information technology, pupils use number work effectively when working with databases but do not use formulae to calculate answers in tasks involving spreadsheets. The school development plan includes a priority on developing a whole school policy on numeracy but lacks details of the costs involved in planning cross-curricular improvements.
68. Area to be addressed:  
- agree and implement a whole school numeracy policy.

## SCIENCE

69. Standards in science at the end of Key Stage 3 have been above the national average for the past four years, but by a steadily decreasing margin. In 1999, the percentage of pupils reaching level 5 and above in the statutory assessment tests was higher than average, while the corresponding figure for level 6 and above was close to the average. Girls have consistently out-performed boys over this period. The percentage of pupils attaining A\*- C grades in GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4 was a little below the national average in 1999, whereas in the previous three years the percentages were above. The proportion of pupils gaining A-G grades in 1999 was close to the national average, with boys attaining better results than girls.
70. Pupils currently in Years 9 and 11 are expected, on the basis of reliable assessment evidence, to achieve significantly better results than in 1999, arresting the downward trend. Inspection evidence confirms that standards are above average. Pupils enter the school with an average spread of attainment and encounter well organised teaching, based on a carefully planned scheme of work, in bright, cheerful laboratories. By the end of the key stage they have covered all the requirements of the National Curriculum in a systematic manner. They are able to carry out simple investigations, making predictions and evaluating results and they understand the importance of controlling variables. Their practical skills are good and they handle equipment with confidence. Pupils in Year 9 are divided into attainment sets. Those in the lowest set, many with special educational needs, make particularly good progress, even though some find the work difficult. For example, they carried out a simple investigation which required them to construct series and parallel electric circuits, working from circuit diagrams. This involved understanding formal symbols and dealing with apparatus such as power packs and ammeters. While some became confused at times, all persevered and most arrived at the correct conclusions. Higher attaining pupils in Year 9 are able to understand quite difficult concepts. For example, in a lesson on heredity, they successfully carried out exercises on the effects of combining dominant and recessive genes. Attainment in biology is higher than in the physical sciences at the end of the key stage, reflecting the more immediate appeal of the subject.
71. Pupils currently in Year 11 are on course to achieve above average grades in GCSE. They produce interesting accounts of investigations they have carried out as coursework. Many of these are wordprocessed, and there are good examples of the use of computers in the attractive displays of pupils' work in laboratories. By the end of the key stage, all pupils are in a position to take the double science examination, whether at Foundation or Higher level. Pupils in the lower sets in Key Stage 4 make good progress, particularly where teaching is well prepared and lively. In both key stages, pupils use simple mathematics confidently and are accustomed, from Year 7 onwards, to displaying results in tabular and graphical form. Many pupils, given the opportunity, write in a fluent and interesting way.
72. Pupils make good progress in both key stages but their understanding sometimes lags behind their knowledge. Enthusiasm for science wanes for some as the pressures of tests and examinations build up. Science is seen as essentially factual, allowing little opportunity for personal expression. However, where opportunities are provided, pupils do demonstrate creativity. Year 7 pupils constructed a delightful array of models of the cell, using odds and ends in the *Blue Peter* tradition; in Year 8, pupils devised a series of enticing travel brochures, extolling the virtues of the planets as holiday resorts; Year 10 pupils constructed ingenious 40 second timers based on a chemical reaction. Despite this potential, some lessons are insufficiently enriched. For example, a lesson on the halogens was based entirely on the textbook, with no demonstrations (or video clips) of actual reactions; similarly, a lesson on forms of energy was almost entirely based on a work sheet, when it could readily have been enlivened by a range of practical activities.
73. Teaching is at least sound in all lessons and good or very good in about half. Planning of lessons is good in Key Stage 3, where it is based on a published scheme, but more variable in Key Stage 4, where it is left to the specialist teacher of the subject. Good class management is a marked strength. Teachers often use questions well, taking care to link topics to previous learning. Some however, do not sufficiently check that pupils have really understood. Lessons proceed at a brisk pace and time is well used. The most successful teaching combines enthusiasm for the subject, a lively style, clear exposition and the use of a range of strategies.

The standard of marking varies. Some is perceptive and helpful but there are also examples of cursory marking, where significant errors remain unnoticed, and of work unmarked over long periods.

74. Pupils' behaviour in science lessons is very good. In some lessons there is a buzz of excitement. For example, a Year 7 class investigated the colour changes caused by treating universal indicator with various acids and alkalis. They thoroughly enjoyed this: handling the chemicals carefully, working pleasantly in groups, and discussing their results. However, at other times pupils, though well behaved, are rather passive. They ask few questions and placidly copy notes, sometimes with inadequate understanding. These differing attitudes have much to do with the liveliness of the teaching and the care with which lessons are planned.
75. The department is well managed at the administrative level. Good records of pupils' progress are kept and finances are well organised. More systematic monitoring of departmental policies is required, however.
76. The most striking improvement since the last inspection has been the provision of a suite of modern laboratories. These are large and well maintained and provide a pleasant environment for learning.
77. Area to be addressed:
  - Provide more opportunities in practical work for pupils to demonstrate their creativity.

## **ART**

78. Standards of attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 are well above average. By the end of Key Stage 4 standards are above average. All pupils gained A\*-C grades in the 1999 GCSE examinations which was a significant improvement over the previous year's results. Inspection evidence shows that pupils achieve above average standards in art. In both key stages the high quality of teaching enables pupils to make good progress. Pupils are offered very good opportunities to experience different approaches to art, craft and design. They are creative and imaginative and have good observation and recording skills which enable them to express their ideas and feelings in 2 and 3 dimensional forms.
79. In Key Stage 3 pupils in Year 7 know the characteristics of Aboriginal Australian designs and their origins. They develop and use them using stick painting to produce their own 'Dreaming' designs for decorating sticks stones and tubes. In Year 8, developing their observational drawings of 'Shells' through print making, painting, batik and wire construction.pupils referred to the bold work of Hundertwasser and the techniques he used to paint shapes. Year 9 pupils can extract elements from the works of Miro and use them draw and paint their own patterns refining their initial ideas using information technology.
80. In Key Stage 4, following a visit to Birmingham Art Gallery, pupils in Year 10 know the diverse methods used by some of the artists they recorded at the gallery. It is clear how their ideas have been modified and refined as their work progresses in 2 and 3 dimensions. In another Year 10 group, following a visit to Liverpool Gallery, they use drawing skills to exemplify specific aspects of the works and interpret them in free embroidery, braiding, collage and applique. Year 11 pupils demonstrate increasing knowledge and visual perception. They evaluate the works of artists and identify strengths and weaknesses. Their findings are then applied to inform their own developmental work for their main idea. They use a broad range of work from first and second hand sources to develop and to introduce new ideas. For example, one pupil used a series of exploratory drawings and techniques to develop his ideas linked to his main work, 'Journey'. Then, with informed critical references to the works of Alexander Rodchenko and Escher, made some firm decisions as to the final direction his very individual work will take.
81. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good and result in very good progress through the programmes of study, most especially by pupils with a talent for art. The very good teaching makes a significant contribution towards the pupils' success. All aspects of teaching are at least very good and some techniques in particular, including a very effective range of teaching methods and the use of assessment, are excellent models for enabling all pupils to reach their

potential. They are progressively introduced to a broad range of other artists and guided how to use such exemplars to inform their work and to develop their own ideas. They are taught the skills to effectively use materials, tools and techniques imaginatively for practical work and the visual and tactile elements included in their work.

82. The leadership and management of the subject is very good especially given the cramped nature of the art room. The high quality of pupils' work in a range of media is reflected in the well-presented art displays around the school.
83. Area to be addressed:  
- art accommodation to be given more space when opportunity arises.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

84. GCSE results in 1999, taken overall, are above the national average. All pupils achieved at least a grade A\*-G grade. Results have fluctuated in recent years but, after a dip in 1996, have begun to recover their high levels. The overall figure masks a wide variation between the subject components of design technology. In 1999 food technology achieved a success rate well above the national average and resistant materials was at the national average. The school has implemented effective measures to improve the disappointing textiles results and inspection evidence indicates that these are beginning to take effect. Graphic products and systems and control were not examined in 1999 but the latter is to be examined again in 2000.
85. By the end of Key Stage 3 standards are above the national expectation for pupils aged 14. Pupils are able to use a range of sources to find information for their topics. For example, pupils in a Year 9 food technology lesson, preparing a dish from their chosen foreign country, had produced thorough research gathered from the Internet, CD ROMs, books and magazines. Pupils have developed good recording skills and can present their work neatly and accurately using a range of techniques. For example, a Year 9 resistant materials group had produced computer-generated drawings for their mechanical toy project as well as hand-produced graphics and text. Pupils of all abilities are confident and competent in operating machinery and using hand tools. In a Year 9 textiles group, for example, pupils were able to set up sewing machines for use and, in resistant materials, pupils used drills and scroll saws sensibly and safely. Pupils with special educational needs play a full part in lessons. For example, in a Year 7 food technology group, seven pupils with special needs contributed well to the discussion on sensory testing procedures and developed a greater understanding of the necessary vocabulary. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards are above the national expectation for pupils aged 16. Pupils successfully undertake ambitious projects which give opportunities for developing high order skills. Pupils in resistant materials groups produce detailed research and use skilled manufacturing techniques appropriate to the material being used. Pupil folders show evidence of good standards of presentation skills and a good design methodology.
86. Progress at Key Stage 3 is good. During the key stage pupils develop sound practical skills and a good understanding of the process of designing and making. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in understanding the work and in their personal development. Their progress is aided by the effective use of learning support assistants. Progress at Key Stage 4 is good. Pupils extend earlier experiences and develop good independent learning skills throughout the key stage. This allows them to undertake individual projects with confidence and expertise. Year 11 electronics pupils, for example, developed a greater understanding of electronic circuits during a lesson where they had to use problem solving skills to make their circuits work. A pupil with special needs derived a sense of satisfaction from successfully solving the problem with his circuit.

87. Pupils enjoy technology work and are keen to participate in lessons. They listen attentively and generally conduct themselves sensibly and safely in practical areas. They are proud of their work and are willing to discuss it. Levels of concentration in lessons are high and there is little unnecessary conversation. Behaviour is very good and pupils co-operate well with each other. Good examples of politeness were seen particularly when pupils had to share equipment. Pupils with special needs respond particularly well and display perseverance in completing a task. For example, in a food technology lesson, Year 7 pupils with difficulties in setting work down neatly were making great efforts to enter the correct information on to their sensory test recording sheets.
88. Teaching at both key stages is good. In over three-quarters of lessons seen the teaching was good or very good. In the remainder it was satisfactory. Teachers generally structure lessons well. Targets are set at the beginning of lessons and often pupils are also given an overview of the lessons to come. Good classroom management skills enable teachers to organise complex activities involving a wide range of processes and equipment effectively. For example, the teacher of a Year 8 resistant materials group successfully directed the work of pupils making individual projects in wood alongside those who were being introduced to computer aided design and manufacture techniques. All pupils were actively engaged in their respective tasks and interest was maintained throughout the lesson. Teachers have established good working relationships with pupils based on trust and respect. Pupils with special needs are given appropriate attention and materials adapted to their needs. The marking of pupils work in some areas is not always effectively used as a means of communicating how pupils might improve their work.
89. The leadership of the department is good. Sound assessment procedures are in place and these will need to be refined and strengthened at Key Stage 3 to ensure that National Curriculum teacher assessments are accurate. The use of data to inform curriculum planning and to set targets for pupils is at an early stage and needs further development. National Curriculum levels are not used in day-to-day assessment and pupils are not familiar with the level at which they are working. A good start has been made on monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and, as this is extended, it should provide valuable information for further improvements. The head of department has been successful in attracting money and equipment from various sources. The acquisition of a computerised sewing machine and a computerised milling machine has enabled pupils to be introduced to computer aided manufacturing processes. Further developments of this work are planned. Design and technology has a high profile in the life of the school and links with the community are strong. For example, a breakfast club is organised once a month when pupils prepare and serve breakfast for up to twenty five members of the local business community. The school also participates in the neighbourhood engineers scheme. Good progress has been made towards meeting the targets set in the departmental development plan particularly in relation to the introduction of computer aided design and manufacture. Policies for the teaching of basic skills now need to be incorporated into the matrix for each project plan. Accommodation for food and textiles is inadequate and in need of upgrading.
90. Since the last inspection the school has improved its teaching of design skills and has broadened the curriculum by the introduction of computer aided machinery. Examination results, whilst lower than at the previous inspection, are rising.
91. Areas to be addressed:
- strengthen departmental assessment procedures so that they include National Curriculum levels in day-to-day assessment and report them to pupils;
  - upgrade accommodation for food and textiles when opportunity arises.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

92. Attainment is above average by the end of Key Stage 3. Attainment is well above average at the end of Key Stage 4. In 1999 grades A\* to C were gained by 67 per cent of pupils and all pupils gained at least grades A\*-G in the GCSE. These results were well above the national average and above the average of other subjects in the school. All pupils gained a grade and 37 per cent gained the higher grades A\*-B. Over time results have been improving steadily at a higher rate than nationally.
93. Pupils are provided with a very a good grounding in all basic skills in Year 7 and are starting to

make sense of some fairly challenging concepts. For example, a class of Year 7 pupils undertaking a study of possible sites for a car assembly plant were able to organise and rank the information provided to determine which locations would or would not be suitable. Learning is supported by a well structured curriculum that includes use of the local community for field studies in all years. Through these learning opportunities inquiry skills are well developed and pupils are acquiring a good grasp of social and environmental issues. Year 9 pupils display a sound understanding of the characteristics of the equatorial climate and are secure in their interpretation of this information presented graphically. Information technology is carefully structured into learning from Year 7 and this enables the majority of pupils to apply these skills most effectively to enhance the quality of their GCSE individual studies. Through these studies, more able pupils display very high levels of skill in gathering, organising and presenting information and in making secure evaluative judgments on their chosen topic.

94. Pupils make very good progress through all years and particularly so through Key Stage 3 where they build their knowledge and understanding from the very good grounding in basic skills. In a study of population distribution Year 8 pupils applied their mapping skills successfully to describe the population distribution of the United Kingdom, used the terms sparse, dense and density correctly and started to hypothesize on the reasons for the differences. Pupils of average and lower ability in Year 10 identified and named the features of upland glaciated landscapes correctly and made good progress in understanding how some of these featured were formed.
95. The response of pupils in all lessons observed was never less than very good and sometimes excellent. The great majority of pupils of all ages and abilities sustain very good concentration throughout lessons. They listen attentively and are mostly clear and confident when answering questions, knowing that their views are valued. Behaviour is exemplary and working environment always calm and orderly. Written work is mostly well presented and very little is incomplete.
96. The very positive way pupils work can be attributed to the quality of teaching which is mostly very good in both key stages. Lessons are well structured and planned with great care. Learning objectives are very clearly communicated and the teaching and learning styles employed are consistently well matched to them. In their communication with pupils teachers are always calm and confident and they are skilled in building up the confidence of pupils. All these features were displayed in lesson for the Year 11 Certificate of Achievement pupils. The pupils' interest was claimed at the start with rock samples and photographs of a local quarry. From this point learning was highly structured and all pupils received constant individual support and guidance to ensure sound understanding and the correct recording of learning. Careful planning was reflected in a Year 9 lesson on the structure of the rain forest where guidance notes studied before a video extract was watched resulted in nearly every pupil spotting and noting all the key learning points offered. Where teaching was just satisfactory there were many positive features but the resources employed did not take account of the needs of the low attainer. The marking of pupils' work is systematic, consistent and largely informative.
97. Management and administration are excellent and there are clear and comprehensive policies in place to guide practice. The curriculum is broad and balanced and teaching is supported by very detailed schemes of work including a high quality Certificate of Achievement course for low attainers at Key Stage 4. Assessment procedures are very good with a detailed profile of each pupil's progress built up from Year 7. Judgements on pupils' levels at Key Stage 3 are carefully standardised and targets are set for pupils following the GCSE course. All attainment data is closely scrutinized and is used constantly to inform curriculum planning. Development planning is detailed and systematic and the professional development of staff well matched to emerging needs.
98. Since the last inspection very good progress has been made. The curriculum has been enriched by the Certificate of Achievement course and information technologies are now used far more extensively. The overall standard of teaching is higher and attainment in the GCSE has improved consistently and both assessment and management processes have been further refined.
99. Area to be addressed:

- further development of resources appropriate to the needs of low attainers.

## HISTORY

100. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, based on assessments made by teachers, was above what is achieved nationally by 14 year olds. The percentage of pupils achieving the highest grades was below the national average for pupils of this age. The attainment of boys was below that of girls although both achieved higher than the nationally expected levels. In the 1999 GCSE examination, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-C was just above that found nationally. The percentage of pupils obtaining the highest grades, particularly A\* and A, was below the national average.
101. Inspection evidence indicates that attainment is above national expectations by the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils have knowledge and understanding of a good range of historical facts, situations and characters and most pupils are developing a range of key historical skills. They understand that historical situations have causes and effects and can communicate their knowledge and understanding in extended pieces of writing. They handle sources of historical evidence competently. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment based on evidence seen during the course of the inspection is also just above what is found nationally. Higher attaining pupils produce answers which are sustained and developed and which demonstrate a good level of historical understanding. These pupils compare and contrast sources of evidence competently. Average attaining pupils show a sound grasp of factual information and write sensible answers to questions. All understand that it is important to use written evidence in order to justify their opinions, although lower attaining pupils fail to do this fully. Most pupils have, with guidance from their teacher, begun to carry out research for their local study.
102. Pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in developing historical knowledge and skills over both key stages. Pupils work hard and show good levels of concentration which has a positive impact on their learning. Pupils understand their own progress, take a keen interest in interpreting teachers' comments and know what they need to do to improve their work. Progress in written work is particularly evident over a period of time, with progression from sentences to structured paragraphs to extended pieces of writing being achieved at a steady rate by most pupils. A lesson in Year 7 showed pupils extending their knowledge and understanding of the Peasants' Revolt in order to build up a piece of extended writing on the causes of the revolt. Lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs improve their understanding of topics and, with support, improve the quality of their answers. Pupils of all levels of attainment continue to make good progress during Key Stage 4. Written work is generally of good quality and progress is evident in the skills of analysing the reliability of source material and the acquisition of a specialised historical vocabulary. The department now needs to concentrate on enabling higher attaining pupils to improve their skills in evaluation of sources of historical evidence.
103. Behaviour in lessons is very good. Pupils show interest in their work and are eager to do well. They are courteous and supportive of one another, and demonstrate good relationships with each other and with their teachers.
104. No lesson was judged unsatisfactory, and the quality of teaching was good or better in well over three-quarters of lessons observed. There are many strengths in teaching which have a positive impact on both pupils' attitudes and the quality of their learning. All teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge. All lessons seen were well planned, with clear objectives for learning. The recently developed schemes of work are very effective, clearly indicating what lower, average and higher attaining pupils are expected to learn. They will provide a good foundation for enabling the department to improve the levels and grades obtained by higher attaining pupils in history. Tasks and activities are planned to meet the needs of pupils of varying levels of attainment and these are supported by a good range of learning resources which challenge and inspire. Lower attaining pupils in Year 9, for example, listen to extracts from the novel 'Birdsong' in order to improve their understanding of conditions in First World War trenches and to provide motivation before having to write their own letters home from the Somme. Pupils are encouraged to apply intellectual and creative effort in their work. For example, pupils in Key

Stage 3 tackle a good range of written tasks, including formal assessments on whether General Haig can be considered to be a butcher or whether World War One was inevitable. This indicates an improvement since the last inspection. Good use is made of the assessment of pupils' attainment and progress in order to clarify what they need to do to improve. This understanding of what they need to do to improve has a positive impact on pupils' learning.

105. The subject is well managed with a clear commitment to raising standards. Departmental documentation is comprehensive and helpful. Great thought has been put into making the curriculum interesting and relevant, especially in Key Stage 4, where measures have been taken to make it a more attractive option, particularly to boys whose uptake of history has been low. There is some cause for concern in the accommodation provided for the subject. The main history base is a temporary classroom with limited space for display of pupils' work and other materials. Other lessons are taught in various non-specialist rooms, including a science laboratory where technicians often carry out routine tasks while history lessons are being taught. Issues raised in the previous inspection have been tackled.
106. Area to be addressed:
- raising the achievements of higher attaining pupils so that a higher proportion obtain the highest grades.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

107. The overall attainment of pupils in information and communications technology (ICT) at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the national average. Standards over the past three years have fluctuated mainly owing to changes in the school assessment procedures. The attainment of girls is higher than that of boys. Pupils' attainments in lessons and work in their files are mainly in line with national averages although in some aspects, attainment is above that expected for pupils of similar age. Progress overall is good. Most pupils enter school with a good general knowledge of computers and experience in using programs for words, numbers and pictures and a few know how to move robots. Pupils in Year 7 quickly become independent. They learn how to log on to the network, use passwords, call up programs and save and print their own work.
108. By the end of the key stage, most pupils have gained good keyboard skills as a part of each lesson for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 is devoted to keyboarding. These skills have a good effect on attainment in word processing, as many pupils do not need to watch the keys all the time and write quickly and confidently by looking at the screens. They know about spell and grammar checking and can use the thesaurus. Presentation of text is good as most pupils insert graphics on to their pages, understand about writing for differing audiences and use the desk top publishing programs skilfully.
109. Most pupils know how to load a CD ROM, find and use information from it, but as yet they do not fully utilise the Internet facilities to search for more up-to-date information. Database work is satisfactory. Pupils research well, can enter data on to a matrix, create data sheets and do simple alpha or numeric sorting. A few pupils know how to create graphs. Standards in using spreadsheets are sound. Pupils understand columns and rows and they can insert data into cells, but many pupils do not yet use formulae to calculate. Data monitoring is weak at this key stage. Pupils are not shown how to use the data-logging equipment until the end of the key stage and for a minimum time only. Computer control is weak as pupils do not build on to the experiences of moving screen robots in primary school and only experience actual computer control in Year 9, when, in design and technology lessons, they are shown how to program a traffic light sequence.



110. The overall attainment of pupils by the end of Key Stage 4 is above the national average. In the past two years, pupils' results in the GCSE examinations show that the percentage of A\* to C grades at 95 per cent is well above the national average, albeit from a small entry. Of the 14 pupils who took the examination, there were 6 at grade A, 5 at grade B and 2 at grade C. The pupils' results in information technology compare very favourably with results in most other subjects. By the end of the key stage, pupils who opt for GCSE build on to the skills learned during Key Stage 3 and use them in problem solving situations. They decide for themselves which piece of software to use for specific purposes; they research and analyse the situation and present work to demonstrate skill in using all the hard and software available to them. They, for instance, know and use data-logging equipment, show skill in computer control, use digital cameras, scan images, create web-site pages, interrogate the Internet and can evaluate ICT methods and the impact of computers on society. Pupils' files contain a good amount of basic theory and examples of their printed work. At this key stage, pupils annotate their work, which helps them when they need to revise for examinations.
111. The response to ICT is very good at both key stages. Most pupils show very positive attitudes to the subject. They are keen to learn and appear anxious to do well in lessons. Pupils use the computer suite before school and during play and lunch times and often work long after lessons have ended. Many pupils in Year 10, usually boys, are working very hard in creating extra pages for the school web-site and are justifiably proud of their efforts. During lessons, pupils work purposefully, often unaided, they concentrate well, keep busy and are willing to finish their work. Behaviour is very good. Pupils respect their teachers; they listen, speak politely and act upon instructions. Pupils treat the equipment carefully, even when unsupervised, and know the rules regarding the Internet. As there are sufficient computers, pupils usually work alone, but when asked, they are co-operative, help each other, make joint decisions and show interest in others' efforts. Personal development is good. Pupils show perseverance and individuality, especially in Key Stage 4 when they have to research and create their own work plans.
112. Throughout the school the quality of teaching in ICT is good. In the ten lessons observed, three were very good, four were good and the remainder satisfactory. All teachers who teach ICT are non-specialists, but are enthusiastic about the subject in which they have good knowledge. Teachers demonstrate well, which gives pupils accurate information and skills and confidence to try for themselves. Planning is good. The work follows the requirements of the National Curriculum and is broken into modules, which are designed to interest and stimulate the pupils to think for themselves. Lessons usually follow a set pattern of introduction, recap on previous work, typing practice, pupils' own tasks and a question and answer session at the end. This planning is effective as there is good use of time, pupils know exactly what they have to do and they are given enough time to make progress in improving skills. Teachers use correct language, which helps pupils to gain vocabulary and in many lessons, numeracy is addressed when pupils use numbers in tasks involving, for instance, databases or spreadsheets. Expectations are high.
113. Most teachers set work that is tailored to the individual needs of pupils and as a result, they all achieve well at their own levels. Pupils with special educational needs are often paired with more able or confident pupils so they make satisfactory progress and are not disadvantaged when working on demanding projects. The higher attaining pupils, especially those in Year 9, are given scope for development of projects as the set problems can be interpreted in diverse ways. Teachers treat pupils fairly and relationships are good. As there are no discipline problems, all pupils can get on with their work and are not disrupted. Marking is good. Pupils' work often shows good diagnostic comments telling pupils how the work can be improved, but not all spellings are corrected, which can give pupils wrong impressions of their word skills. Pupils understand the marking system and appreciate oral feedback in class, but they are unfamiliar with the relevant National Curriculum levels in order to assess their own capability.
114. Cross-curricular ICT is variable between subjects. Individual department papers indicate where ICT is to be used, but not all departments have their own equipment and some do not book the computer suites on a regular basis. Most teachers have attended training in the use of computers, but many need constant accesses in order to keep themselves up to date with developments. Departments such as geography, design and technology and special educational needs use the equipment well and often, which adds on to the experiences in formal ICT

lessons. Pupils gain skills in using, for instance, the satellite weather station, control boxes and software to develop basic skills. In English, science, art, history and physical education, pupils prepare texts, access information from the Web and CD ROMs, draw pictures and research art and artists, interrogate databases and measure physical changes. The departments of mathematics, religious education and modern foreign languages make a little, but insufficient use of computers and they do not capitalise on the pupils' skills and knowledge. In music, the computer-linked equipment is inadequate.

115. There is a newly appointed co-ordinator who gives sound leadership to the department. There is clear educational direction and a good development plan that focuses on an appropriate scheme of work, cross-subject links and increased staff and community use of the equipment. The last inspection report was positive, but the department has made very good progress since the last inspection. There is now discrete ICT for all pupils in Key Stage 3 and a new scheme of work, which is helping to raise standards. Pupils in Key Stage 4 can now opt to take the subject to GCSE level during school time. Cross-curricular use of ICT has increased greatly. Assessment procedures have improved, especially for pupils in Year 9, where work is more accurately assessed against National Curriculum levels, but assessment practice for Years 7 and 8 needs further development. There are now two computer suites with networked facilities and an improved range of software and peripherals. The ratio of pupils to computers is satisfactory. Local primary schools use the suites on a regular basis and pupils are now entering this school with better ICT skills than in previous years. The school has not yet conducted an audit to determine what equipment pupils use at home which would help to focus their class and homework more accurately.
116. Areas to be addressed:
- extend the range of ICT techniques in Key Stage 3 so that they build more effectively on pupils' primary experience;
  - continue to develop application of ICT in all subjects.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

117. Standards in both French and German are in line with national expectations by the end of Key Stage 3. In 1999, pupils were assessed by their teachers as working at the national level by the end of Key Stage 3. This has consistently been the case in recent years and is confirmed by the work seen during the inspection. However, the performance of girls was much higher than that of boys and this was not the case in the lessons seen.
118. Examination results at GCSE in French are in line with the national figure for those gaining A\*-C grades and A\*-G grades. The figures are distorted by the fact that last year only about half of the year group were entered for GCSE examinations. In German, results are well above the national figure for a small group of pupils. It is therefore difficult to make statistical comparisons but pupils who take the examination gain results that are about one grade above other subjects. Results in French showed some improvement last year although there were fewer entrants.
119. From work seen during the inspection, pupils show a good understanding of spoken language throughout the key stages. This is because teachers always use French, German and Italian as their main means of communication in class and this is a good improvement since the last inspection. In the best lessons, pupils were able to use the language effectively to communicate with the teacher. Speaking is well developed and particularly good in German where pupils are encouraged to extend their answers and to talk to each other in the language. Pupils enjoy repeating words aloud and usually speak in good accents. In most lessons, pupils of all levels of attainment are supported by material that is appropriate to their needs and this enables them to make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets set for them when they are taught with pupils of similar ability. Since the last inspection it has become a requirement to study a language at Key Stage 4 and standards have remained broadly the same in spite of the wider range of pupils now following courses.
120. The quality of teaching is good overall and very good in German. Lessons are well planned to

take into account the needs of individual pupils, including those on the special educational needs register. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects and know their pupils well. The best lessons have a range of activities, which cover the four attainment targets of listening, speaking, reading and writing. A very good lesson at Key Stage 4 enabled pupils to make very good progress in their learning because it was carefully planned, with a good variety of activities in the four skills. It was conducted at a good pace and gave pupils a chance to consolidate work they had done before as well as to cover new work. Pupils took their work seriously, responding well to the teacher and enjoying the lesson because they were fully involved. In another lesson, slower progress was made because the teaching was less lively and was not geared closely enough to the needs of individuals but the good behaviour of pupils meant that the aims of the lesson were fully met. Teachers use assessment at the end of each unit of work to judge the progress their pupils are making. This is linked to National Curriculum levels. Marking is completed regularly but at Key Stage 3 does not give enough information about what the pupils know and can do and what they need to do to improve their work. There is good but limited use of information technology, and teachers possess the necessary skills to include it in their teaching. They make good use of the Internet as a teaching resource. Opportunities to use school facilities are limited by the lack of access to computers.

121. Pupils show interest in their work and have a positive attitude to it. Behaviour in lessons is always good. Work is usually well presented and carefully completed.
122. Monitoring of teaching and learning now takes place regularly and is helping to raise standards. The new head of department has clear plans which are well thought out and teachers work well together. Although there are now more books, the supply is barely adequate for the number of pupils and this sometimes has a negative effect on their progress. The course book used for French is less appropriate than those used to teach German and Italian and it would be useful to evaluate carefully all books used to ensure that they meet the needs of all learners. At the moment pupils cannot regularly take books home to work from. This means that homework tasks are limited and lesson time is spent copying from the board. Other resources are well used. Italian has been introduced into Year 8 and is proving popular with pupils. Visits and exchanges to France and Germany are organised regularly and give good opportunities for pupils to widen their cultural horizons. The languages curriculum is unusually broad and this is to be commended. It would be useful, however, to consider how language teaching time should be best spent. The department is currently understaffed and this needs to be resolved.
123. Areas to be addressed:
  - teachers to review their marking so that it gives pupils a clearer focus on what they must do to improve their work;
  - increase number and quality of French textbooks;
  - review staffing provision and time allocation for languages.

## **MUSIC**

124. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are above average. End of key stage teacher assessment results for summer 1999 show pupils achieving above national expectations. They are the same as the previous year, but slightly less than those for 1997. GCSE results for music are above the school averages for candidates achieving A\*-C and A\*-G. Again, they are just below the results for 1998 and 1997, but the small number of candidates entered means that a variation of one grade can make a noticeable change to the results. The small numbers also make comparison with national figures insignificant.
125. Present standards in music at Key Stage 3 are above average. Pupils follow a largely practical course, which incorporates work on the elements of music and graphic notation in the first term of Year 7. In the first term of Year 8 pupils listen to examples of theme and variation and compose their own variation, and work for the first term of Year 9 covers exploring the blues and work on the musical 'Alice'. Standards at Key Stage 4 are above average in GCSE music. GCSE music is studied after school by pupils from the present Year 10 and Year 11, who also take the full range of options offered during lesson time. They are at present completing the mandatory coursework as well as preparing for the listening paper.

126. Learning at Key Stage 3 is good. Pupils in Year 7 are working on rhythm. They have established the difference between pulse and rhythm and are now preparing to play a simple rhythmic pattern on the drum kit involving both hands and feet. Pupils in Year 8 are studying Indian music, writing their own raga and playing them with another partner providing a drone. Pupils in Year 9 are working in groups to prepare a scene from the musical "Alice". Some are practising a song on keyboards, others are reading through the words, whilst others are composing the music for the songs in the scene.
127. Learning at Key Stage 4 is very good. GCSE music candidates are listening to nineteenth and twentieth century music to identify the influence of the waltz in the compositions heard.
128. At both key stages pupils with special educational needs benefit from the differentiated tasks set where appropriate, and also from the support they receive from their peers, the teacher and support staff. The pupils make good progress.
129. Attitudes to learning and behaviour in lessons at Key Stage 3 are good. Pupils listen attentively to the teacher and participate well in class activities. They enjoy their singing activities, especially in Year 7 where they are working on a song which requires the singers to include hand movements, and miss out an increasing number of sung lines on each repetition. Pupils work well in groups and collaborate successfully to produce a final result. Attitudes to learning and behaviour in lessons at Key Stage 4 are very good in both music and expressive arts.
130. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is good and very good at Key Stage 4. The teacher has a very sound knowledge of the subject and is very experienced in teaching basic music skills so that all pupils can learn and make progress quickly. Tasks are well explained so that time is not wasted when pupils begin their work, lessons are well planned with a variety of activities, and resources are always relevant and thoroughly prepared. The teacher has a good relationship with the pupils and succeeds in motivating even those who have no interest in other subjects. Whilst there is little written work at Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 work is carefully marked against examination board criteria and returned with detailed comments to enable pupils to edit and re-present the work to gain a better result. The teacher's work is of a high standard and she expects high standards in return.
131. However, lack of resources prevents the department meeting Key Stage 3 requirements with regard to the use of computers, dedicated keyboards and music software. Instead of forming an integral part of the whole of the Key Stage 3 curriculum, it is only possible to use the computer in a limited manner in Year 9, consequently denying the previous two years, and especially those pupils with special needs access. The new National Curriculum is more specific in what is expected in this area. There is also a shortage of reference material in the form of CD-ROM, videos and books. Assessment is used to evaluate the curriculum and pupils' progress and either takes the form of verbal assessment during lessons or formal assessment, which contributes towards the pupil's final assessment grade at the end of each year. Formal assessment and reporting to parents is in line with school guidelines. It is not used to set individual targets. Pupils with special educational needs have a new form for their individual educational plan, but there is no room on it for outlining subject specific targets. It is school policy that music homework is not set regularly at Key Stage 3.
132. The music teacher is supported by instrumental teachers who give lessons on a variety of instruments to fifty pupils, nearly one tenth of the school population. In addition there is provision on the timetable for two ensemble lessons. This gives the pupils involved an invaluable opportunity to improve their ensemble and instrumental skills and contributes towards the extensions activities for the musically more able pupils. Extra enrichment activities in the form of visiting groups, a wide range of concerts, productions involving many departments and pupils, and visits to concerts and operas are organised. Links with local primary schools are strong and there are regular opportunities for their pupils to join in Lacon Childe activities.
133. Since the last inspection, the head of music has sought to address the issues mentioned in the last report. Differentiation has been given careful thought and consequently, strategies for providing appropriate challenge for pupils of all abilities have been identified. Singing now takes

place on a regular basis, and all pupils make good progress.

134. Areas to be addressed:

- rectify the insufficient numbers of computers and dedicated keyboards;
- provide realistic music targets for all pupils;
- build up a reference area of CD ROMs, videos and books to further pupils' independent learning.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

135. Attainment in physical education is above the national average at the end of Key Stage 3. The school judged 79% of pupils be working at or beyond level 5 at the end of Year 9 in 1999 which is consistent with the standards being achieved currently. Attainment is also above the national average in core physical education at the end of Key Stage 4. Attainment in the GCSE was well below average in 1999, with 27% of pupils gaining grades A\*-C and 96% gaining grades A\*-G. These results were well below the average of other subjects in the school, a difference which can in part be attributed to the abilities of pupils who opted for the course. Over time results have fluctuated with no overall trend.
136. Standards are good in all team games and particularly high in rugby at Key Stage 3 and in netball at Key Stage 4. In a core Year 11 girls netball lesson the standard of play overall was well above average. Playing patterns were clear, movement of the ball fluent and all pupils were fully conversant with the rules and played hard but fairly. Refereeing undertaken by pupils was fair, accurate and confidently performed. These high standards are reflected in the high levels of achievement across all sporting activities in inter-school competition. Attainment in gymnastics at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. For example a Year 7 girls class worked enthusiastically and produced a good variety of rolls, twists and balances working on the mats and apparatus. However, much movement is unrefined and few pupils link their movements into fluent sequences. The attainment of boys is a little better than that of girls at Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4 the standard of performance of girls match that of the boys. The theory course work of pupils in Year 11 suggests that a limited range of study skills is employed and the written work of less able pupils is rather thin and some is disorganized.
137. Progress is good through both key stages within core physical education and within Key Stage 3 it is often very good. Year 7 boys made good progress with the refinement of their paired balances and many added tidy entry and exit phases to their performances. In some games lessons particularly at Key Stage 3 progress is very good. For example boys in a Year 8 lesson made excellent progress with the application of recently learned rucking skills into competitive play, where they used them successfully to sustain and extend attacking movements. Progress in the GCSE course is satisfactory over time and in lessons observed. Year 10 GCSE pupils made satisfactory progress in acquiring an understanding of the cardiovascular system by putting together a model from its disparate components. Progress in doubles tactics was also satisfactory in a Year 11 GCSE practical badminton lesson. Though the lesson was well structured some pupils failed to apply themselves consistently to the task of improved teamwork and shot placement.
138. Pupils' application to their work is very good at Key Stage 3 and good overall at Key Stage 4. In all classes observed in Key Stage 3 pupils listened attentively, followed instructions to the best of their ability and sustained their efforts and concentration throughout the lesson. At Key Stage 4 pupils' application is very good in competitive activities and teamwork and team spirit can be quite excellent. However these qualities are not always displayed in skills practices and other routine activities. Collaboration in pair and group work is good and often very good, particularly at Key Stage 3.
139. The overall standard of teaching is good. It is very good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key 4. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. All lessons are well structured and learning objectives are clearly communicated. Very good teaching, as exemplified by a Year 9 rugby lesson, displays very good technical knowledge, high expectations and lots of enthusiasm that is

highly motivating to the pupils. In this lesson well structured skills practices were followed by a game during which coaching tips and judicious refereeing secured a balanced and open game to which pupils of all abilities contributed. Where teaching is satisfactory there are many positive features, as in a Year 10 badminton group, but there was insufficient pace and expectations were not high enough. Pupils' skills in self and peer evaluation are not being developed consistently. Good practice was observed in a Year 7 boys gymnastics lesson and a Year 11 netball lesson but other opportunities are missed. In some lessons there is no review of progress made.

140. The curriculum is broad and balanced and weighted towards traditional games and it mostly offers equality of opportunity. Extra-curricular opportunities are very good and enriched by excellent community links. Activities are well promoted and much time and support is invested by staff. Participation is excellent with two thirds of pupils participating. Assessment is systematic and a detailed profile of the progress of all pupils is developed. Though the head of department is substantially timetabled out of physical education, administration is very good. However, this arrangement is handicapping the monitoring, support and development of the department and there are weaknesses in current practices.
141. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The standards of attainment of girls have risen significantly. Community links are stronger and extra-curricular opportunities richer. Assessment is more refined and systematic and practice is now consistent. There have been improvements towards equality of opportunity and some improvements in pupils' evaluative skills.
142. Areas to be addressed:
  - develop pupils' skills in self and peer evaluation;
  - appropriate coursework support for developing basic literacy skills of low attainers in Year 11.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

143. The school does not fulfil the requirements for religious education as laid down in the Agreed Syllabus for Shropshire in that religious education is only being taught in Year 7 and should be taught to all pupils in Years 7 to 11. This inevitably means that attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is well below that expected by the Agreed Syllabus and that attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is poor.
144. The standard of work seen in Year 7 is just in line with that expected by pupils of that age. The pupils have a basic understanding of the life and work of Jesus, of symbolism and Hinduism. They are learning about religion but the area of learning from religion and developing views about the major issues of life are weak. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils can remember the work of earlier years.
145. Progress made within lessons and in Year 7 is satisfactory. The progress of all groups of pupils is similar. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are satisfactory and the majority take care with the presentation of their work. Homework is rarely set and so the pupils miss opportunities for independent research.

146. Teaching is satisfactory in Year 7. Good use is made of the local church and, in particular, the reference to the stained glass windows depicting the life of Jesus. Weaknesses include the lack of extension work and not making use of the opportunities to discuss issues that arise from studying the stories and the implication of the events. Marking of the work is variable with care taken over spellings but rarely gives constructive comments for improvement or uses assessment targets to enable the pupils to improve their work.
147. The subject has no head of department; there are no policy documents and limited schemes of work for the subject. Religious education has a low status within the school; this is partially caused by the lack of a clearly identifiable area, the limited resources available and no link governor. The pupils do not have the opportunity to handle or view religious artefacts on a regular basis. The lack of a specialist teacher means that a dynamic element is missing from the lessons and additional information is not always available.
148. Since the last inspection there have been several teachers of religious education but the issues raised in that report, the time allocation, a specialist member of staff, appropriate schemes of work, the need to improve the resources and a development plan have not been addressed. In fact at that time religious education was being taught to Years 7 and 8 and now it is only taught to Year 7.
149. Area to be addressed:
- implement the school priority to meet the requirements for religious education.

### **Expressive Arts**

150. Expressive arts are only taught at Key Stage 4 and give pupils the opportunity to amalgamate their music, art, drama, dance, and presentation skills in one examination. Standards are well above national expectations with 90 per cent of pupils gaining grades A\*-C in the GCSE examinations in 1999, an improvement on the 65 per cent in 1998. Inspection evidence confirms that these high standards are being maintained. Pupils work independently and take on responsibility for their own projects with maturity and enthusiasm. Diaries show thorough records of work being done and pupils keep to their own strict timetables. Completed projects are imaginative and professionally produced by both girls and boys. Pupils make very good progress, including those with special educational needs, for example in the creation of a splendid child's reading book.
151. Teaching is very good. The course is excellently planned and the professional delivery motivates the pupils well. Teaching is enthusiastic with very good subject knowledge and a good awareness of examination requirements. There is very good use of resources and of support staff.
152. Pupils are very well behaved and very well motivated. Excellent leadership ensures the high standards mentioned in the previous report continue. Learning at Key Stage 4 is very good. Pupils often work in groups and draw up schemes of work that enable each member to make a strong contribution to the final presentation.