

INSPECTION REPORT

SANDYE PLACE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Sandy

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109651

Headteacher: Mr P G Teague

Reporting inspector: Mrs V A Mason
10598

Dates of inspection: 3 – 6 April 2000

Inspection number: 187527

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Middle deemed secondary
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	9 - 13
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Park Road Sandy Bedfordshire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr G Newman
Date of previous inspection:	February 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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			How well is the school led and managed?
B Quest-Ritson	Lay inspector		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?
E Barratt	Team inspector	Geography	The school's results and achievements
		History	How well are the pupils taught?
M Pennington	Team inspector	French	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
		Equal opportunities	
R Hobson	Team inspector	English	
J Bowden	Team inspector	Physical education	
		Special educational needs	
C Elliott	Team inspector	Science	
M Breedon	Team inspector	Art	
P Wilson	Team inspector	Music	
G Preston	Team inspector	Design and technology	
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P Draycott	Team inspector	Religious education	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	11
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	14
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	16
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	19
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	20
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	20
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	22
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	24
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	28

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Sandy Place is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 9 to 13; with 464 pupils, it is larger than most middle (deemed secondary) schools. There are approximately equal proportions of boys and girls. Although the number of pupils overall is fairly static, movement of pupils during the year is higher than average, with approximately 14 per cent of pupils either joining or leaving the school at times other than the start or end of the year. Pupils come mostly from Sandy and the surrounding area, and from a wide spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds, although the social circumstances of a significant number are relatively disadvantaged. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, 21 per cent, is above the average for middle schools nationally. Almost all pupils are white, but there are a few who speak English as an additional language. There is also a small number of traveller pupils on roll. When they enter the school, pupils' attainment spans the range, but overall it is slightly below the average for their age. The school has identified 26 per cent of pupils who require some additional support for their special educational needs; this is a similar proportion to that found in most schools. Twelve of these pupils have a statement setting out the specific provision to be made for them.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school, with many good features. The school fosters among its pupils positive attitudes and is particularly successful in promoting their understanding of moral and social responsibilities. The school is very well led and there is a strong commitment among all staff and governors to strive to do better. The teaching is good overall and standards are rising. The school's income is lower than average, but it manages this very efficiently so that money is available to support its priorities for development. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The high proportion of good teaching in Key Stage 2 leads to pupils making good progress and achieving well.
- The very good provision for pupils with special educational needs ensures they are fully integrated into all aspects of school life and that they make good progress in their learning.
- Pupils' personal development is promoted well; the provision for their moral and social development is particularly strong.
- The headteacher, well supported by his deputy and the governing body, provides a clear lead and direction, and all work together to move the school forward.
- Finances are managed very well so that money is available to support the school's developments.

What could be improved

- Provision for and standards in information technology at Key Stage 3.
- Some teachers' skills in managing pupils' behaviour and the level of demand made on pupils in some lessons in order to raise the quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 to a consistently high level.
- Leadership at the level of the subject co-ordinator.
- The frequency and rigour of monitoring and evaluation of teaching and the standards of pupils' work.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the last inspection in February 1996, the school's priorities have focused on raising standards. In this it has been successful and standards are higher, overall, than at the time of the last inspection. This is attributable to improvements in the quality of teaching, which is better than at the time of the last inspection, although there are some weaknesses in Key Stage 3 that need to be addressed. The key issues raised in the last inspection have all been tackled, and, for the most part, successfully. Provision for the pupils with special educational needs is now very well organised and managed and, as a result, these pupils make good progress and are successfully integrated into the life of the school. Time for the personal, social and health education programme is better organised, and the curriculum, overall, is better balanced, although the arrangements for information technology in Key Stage 3 are unsatisfactory. The school's planned programme of maintenance has resulted in generally good accommodation, but the facilities for food technology and textiles remain poor and affect the standards the pupils can achieve. Overall, improvement since the last inspection is good.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on average points achieved by pupils in the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum tests.

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

Between 1996 and 1999 the pupils' performance in the tests for 11 year olds has increased steadily in English and science. In English the increase is greater than that nationally and the pupils' results were above the national average. In mathematics, the trend followed that seen nationally between 1996 and 1998, but in 1999 results fell and the pupils' performance was well below the national average. When compared to schools with similar characteristics, the pupils at Sandye Place did better in science, and in English their performance was particularly good. In mathematics, however, they did not do as well as pupils in similar schools.

The standards of work of the current Year 6 pupils reflect the above average test results in English. In science and mathematics the standards are better than in the tests: in science they are above the level expected nationally and in mathematics they are typical of the standards attained in most schools. In their other subjects, Year 6 pupils attain good standards in history, French, music and religious education.

Standards in Year 8 are above those expected of pupils of a similar age in English, history, geography, French, music and religious education. In mathematics and science pupils are on course to reach the level expected at the end of Key Stage 3. Weaknesses in the curriculum for design and technology and information technology result in low standards in these subjects in Key Stage 3.

The standards, overall, are rising and pupils achieve well in relation to their starting points. The ambitious targets the school has set itself should be reached.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils are keen to learn and most are willing to be involved in lessons and try hard to do their best.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	In lessons the vast majority of pupils behave well, but a few of the older boys do not always do so. Outside the classroom behaviour is good, but a few boys have been excluded at lunchtimes for a short period until they modified their behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils' personal development is good. Pupils get on well with each other and with their teachers.
Attendance	Satisfactory overall, although authorised absence is higher than average and is highest in Year 8, where the irregular attendance of some boys hinders their progress.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 9-11years	aged 11-13 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Satisfactory

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

The quality of teaching is good overall. It was at least satisfactory in 91 per cent of the lessons seen. In 40 per cent it was good, in 18 per cent very good, and in five per cent it was excellent. Eight per cent of teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory and one per cent poor. Overall, teaching is stronger in Key Stage 2 than Key Stage 3. Most of the unsatisfactory and poor teaching occurred in Key Stage 3.

Throughout the school the teaching of English, mathematics and science is good. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are taught well and, as a result, standards are rising. In all subjects there are examples of good quality teaching; it is of a consistently high quality in history and music. Teachers plan well to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and give them good support in lessons so that they, too, make good progress. The higher attaining pupils are also set suitably challenging work and they achieve high standards in most subjects. Most of the unsatisfactory teaching was in physical education but there was also a small amount in science, art, geography and French. In the main, the teaching was unsatisfactory because pupils' behaviour was not managed well enough, and the tasks failed to build on what pupils had already learned – they were either too easy or too hard.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The Key Stage 2 curriculum is well planned and is broadened by the inclusion of French. In Key Stage 3 the provision for information technology is unsatisfactory and statutory requirements are not met. The range of extra-curricular activities extends the pupils' experiences and provides opportunities for them to pursue their interests and talents.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. The pupils' progress is good because the teachers plan work that is suited to meet their particular needs. The school takes great care to ensure that the pupils are included in all aspects of school life.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The few pupils whose first language is not English are given good support in the classroom so that they can cope with the same work as the other pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Pupils' personal development is good. There are many opportunities for them to think about moral issues and to develop social skills. There are good opportunities for pupils to appreciate the tradition of other cultures but fewer opportunities for them to experience spirituality.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The overall level of care is good. Procedures for ensuring pupils' welfare, health and safety, including child protection are well in place. Pupils' personal development and their progress are monitored closely so that help and guidance are provided when these are necessary.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	The school seeks to work in partnership with parents. Termly meetings give parents the chance to meet staff and discuss their children's progress, but the end-of-year written reports do not always provide them with enough information about how well their children are doing. The Parent Teacher Association makes a significant contribution by raising funds for resources and equipment.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher leads by example, and with his deputy, has established a strong sense of teamwork. The quality of leadership from subject co-ordinators is inconsistent, and in some subjects it is not strong enough to ensure plans for development are pushed ahead.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors take an active part in planning for the school's development and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They fulfil their role very well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school uses assessment and test data well to judge its performance and identify where improvement is needed, but it does not monitor and evaluate teaching and pupils' work often enough or with sufficient rigour to identify precisely where and how standards can be raised further.
The strategic use of resources	The school manages its budget very efficiently and seeks to get best value in what it spends. Books and equipment are used to good effect to support both teaching and learning.

The school has an experienced staff whose subject specialisms are utilised well to ensure good teaching across the range of subjects. Every endeavour has been made to minimise the disruption caused by long-term absence of a key member of staff; the arrangements at the time of the inspection were satisfactory. The accommodation is good overall, although facilities for food technology and textiles are poor and affect the standards the pupils can achieve. Books, materials and equipment are in good supply, although some of the computer equipment is becoming out-dated.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like the school • They feel able to approach the school with concerns • The school expects their children to work hard and do their best 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour and elimination of instances of bullying • Greater consistency across the classes in setting homework • Amount of information about what is taught and how their children are getting on • The range of activities outside of lessons

The parents' positive views are endorsed by the inspectors. The inspection team agrees that there are instances of poor behaviour, but the school has good procedures to promote discipline and good behaviour and to eliminate bullying. The inspection evidence indicates that, with few exceptions, homework is set in accordance with the school's policy and the amount is appropriate for pupils' ages. The information sent to parents about the curriculum is typical of that provided by most schools, but the inspection team supports the parents' views about the information on their children's progress: the end-of-year reports are too variable and some do not give a clear indication of the pupils' progress. The range of activities outside lessons is good, and particularly strong in music. The school has tried to continue with sports activities in the absence of the head of physical education, but the number of sports fixtures has reduced.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1 The results of tests administered at the time of pupils' entry to the school indicate that their attainment is slightly below the average for their age when they join the school in Year 5. In the national tests in English at the end of Year 6, pupils' performance has risen over the last four years, and the rate has been greater than that seen nationally. In 1999, the school's results were above the national average and pupils' results were well above the average for similar schools¹. In the science tests, the pupils' performance has also increased over the last four years, the trend being in line with that seen nationally. In 1999, the pupils' results in science were as found in most schools and they matched the average for similar schools. In mathematics the pupils' performance matched the national average between 1996 and 1998, but fell to well below it in 1999; the results in this year were also lower than the average of similar schools. This school attributes the decline to insufficient coverage of the mathematics curriculum, including aspects of mental calculation.

2 Overall, standards have risen in Key Stage 2 since the time of the last inspection. The standards seen in the work of pupils currently in Year 6 are well above those expected for their age in English. In science, the rising trend seen in the tests is reflected in the pupils' work and attainment is above the level expected at the age of 11. In mathematics, the standards are typical of most pupils of this age. The significant improvement in the standards in mathematics, in comparison with the 1999 Key Stage 2 results, is attributable to the good quality teaching and the increased attention to developing pupils' skills in mental calculation. In the non-core subjects, the standards seen were above those expected of pupils of a similar age in history, French and music; and in line with expectations in all other subjects. Standards in religious education were above the expectations of the locally Agreed Syllabus.

3 Standards in Year 8, overall, are typical of those expected at this point of Key Stage 3, although in a number of subjects standards are above those expected, and better than at the time of the last inspection, as borne out by the work in pupils' books and in the lessons seen. In English, attainment is above that expected and the pupils are well on course to reach standards that are as good as, or better, than those expected nationally. In mathematics, science and physical education standards have been maintained: they match those expected at this stage of Key Stage 3. Comparison with the attainment of the same cohort of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 in 1998 indicates that pupils have made good progress in English over the last two years, improving their standards from average to above those expected at this point of Key Stage 3. In mathematics and science, comparison with the 1998 results indicates that pupils have made satisfactory progress in sustaining average performance. The school's action following the last inspection to address the low standards reported in art, geography, French and religious education has proved successful. Standards in art are now typical of those found in most schools, and in geography, French and religious education there has been considerable improvement, and standards are now above those expected at this point in the key stage. Standards have also risen in history and music and are now above those usually found among pupils of this age. In design and technology and information technology, weaknesses in the curricular provision result in standards that are lower than expected at that age.

¹ Comparisons are made with schools that have a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals.

4 Effective use is made of a range of standardised tests to establish benchmarks, track progress and to set appropriately high targets for improvement in the core subjects. This process is well supported by good liaison with the partner lower schools and the upper school to which pupils transfer at the end of Year 8. The targets set for attainment in the core subjects at the end of Key Stage 2 in 2000 are ambitious but realistic in the light of the standards of work seen during the inspection. The procedures for target setting in the non-core subjects are insufficiently rigorous and systematic to be fully effective in raising standards. Practice suffers in particular from the absence of systematic monitoring and evaluation of the work in the classroom.

5 Pupils' literacy skills are above national expectations at the end of Key Stage 2. The school has adopted the National Literacy Strategy, which results in the structured acquisition of literacy skills, and by the end of the key stage most pupils are able to write using punctuation to mark simple sentences and spelling basic words correctly. Higher attaining pupils write quite well developed accounts and explore their ideas in some depth. The progress in writing continues through Key Stage 3, so that by the end of Year 8 most pupils can write reasonably sustained pieces using largely accurate spelling, paragraphing, punctuation and grammar and showing an awareness of the reader. By the end of Key Stage 2 most pupils can read simple texts with enjoyment and are able to employ several strategies to decode a word when they come across one with which they are unfamiliar. Higher attaining pupils read fluently and with confidence. By the end of Year 8 most pupils can read a range of texts with understanding, identifying key features and themes. Most pupils can express their views fairly confidently, using appropriate vocabulary, and by the end of Year 8 many can put across their views convincingly in discussion. Listening skills are a strength across the school. The pupils' skills are developed well in some subjects, such as history, geography and French, but in others they have fewer opportunities to use and develop their skills, particularly in reading and writing.

6 Throughout the school pupils are competent in basic numeracy. The attention now given to developing pupils' skills in mental calculation is proving effective, and most readily recall number facts and use these to do mental calculations efficiently. Their skills in solving problems are developing well and they are able to explain their methods and reasoning, using correct mathematical terms. Pupils use their mathematical skills appropriately in their other subjects, when called upon to do so. When working on patterns and constructions in art and design and technology they apply spatial concepts and use their knowledge of the properties of shape to help with their design work. In geography their knowledge of scales and co-ordinate geometry serves them well when working with maps, and their science activities provide them with many opportunities to use their knowledge and skills as they record and interpret their results in a variety of tables, charts and graphs.

7 Pupils with special educational needs make good progress at both key stages. This is attributable to the care taken by teachers to ensure that these pupils are given the help and support they need in lessons. When additional adult support is available in lessons the pupils' progress is especially good. The learning support assistants who help the pupils with statements of special need know them well and provide unobtrusive help that enables them to keep up with the rest of the class. Overall, the pupils make good progress toward the targets set for them in their individual education plans.

8 The setting arrangements in English, mathematics and science are particularly effective in ensuring that the higher attaining pupils also have opportunities to work to their potential. In these subjects they achieve well and their progress is good. In other subjects teachers usually plan work at different levels to take account of the range of abilities in the class and pupils of the highest ability make good progress overall. They are motivated by their teachers' high expectations and the challenging work set.

9 Overall, pupils achieve well in relation to their starting points. Their achievement is well supported by the good quality of the teaching in the great majority of subjects. This is particularly well exemplified in the core subjects. In mathematics and science, for instance, pupils make good gains in their knowledge and skills because of the clarity in the teaching, which enables pupils to understand their work and what is expected of them. Similarly in English, the teachers' enthusiasm and high expectations lead to pupils working and progressing well. In most other subjects, achievement is similarly well fostered; for example, history and French strongly promote the development of subject skills. In Key Stage 3 some pupils do not achieve as well as they might, usually because the teaching is less effective. In these instances pupils' misbehaviour is not managed effectively and the work is not always demanding enough, with the result that little new learning takes place.

10 Pupils respond well to demanding work and make good and, in the case of higher attaining pupils, often very good progress. This was well exemplified in pupils' enthusiastic response to the high expectations of the best teaching in English, mathematics, history, French and religious education. In some subjects, however, there are occasions when the demands made of pupils are too modest and progress is slower. For instance, in English in contrast to the high demands of the best practice, there are instances where the pace and nature of the work is undemanding and pupils make less progress as a result. Similarly, in French, again where pupils achieve well overall, they achieve less when the level of challenge is not well judged and the work is either too easy or too hard.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

11 The pupils' attitudes to school are generally good. The vast majority are keen to learn and willing to become involved in lessons. They are particularly fired up when the teachers challenge them with interesting work, and they try hard to do their best. In a Year 5 literacy lesson, for example, pupils enjoyed the work so much that they wanted to continue beyond the end of the lesson. In a history lesson, the same year group were inspired by the discussions on why and how pyramids were built; they responded enthusiastically to the teacher's questions and were eager to show their knowledge and put forward their ideas. Pupils are confident to join in discussions in the knowledge that others will respect their ideas. For example, in a Year 8 English lesson, where pupils were considering the text of Martin Luther King's speech, pupils readily joined in discussions and were confident to express their views on racism. Most pupils take care with written work and are proud when it looks good.

12 Standards of behaviour are good overall. Pupils behave well in lessons: a purposeful learning atmosphere prevails. However, some pupils – a minority, and mostly older boys - can play up those teachers who do not manage them well. They were observed, for example, behaving badly in one lesson, yet perfectly in the next because they understood and respected the teacher's high expectations for the way they behaved. Around the school and when moving between lessons the pupils behave well. They are friendly and courteous to visitors, ready to engage them in conversation and to help with doors and keypads.

13 At breaks and lunchtime the behaviour is generally good, particularly in the dining room, where lunchtime is a pleasant social occasion. During the early part of the inspection the weather was too wet for pupils to go outside. The majority occupied themselves sensibly, but in some year bases there are few games and materials for them to use on these occasions and a few, mostly boys, became boisterous and noisy. The school works hard to promote good behaviour in the playground and most pupils abide by the rules. There are, however, exceptions: some parents expressed concerns about bullying and the pupils who met inspectors mentioned instances of such behaviour, which occur largely within year groups. Pupils confirmed that the school acts when such incidences are reported. The final sanction of exclusion for unacceptable behaviour is used judiciously and there were no permanent or fixed period exclusions during the last academic year. The school has, however, excluded several pupils, mostly older boys, at lunchtimes for short periods until they understand the boundaries between good and poor behaviour. Most respond and try to modify their behaviour, but the school has found it necessary to exclude three pupils from school for a fixed period during the current year.

14 Pupils respond well to the provision for their personal development. Relationships in the school are good, and the pupils get on well among themselves and with their teachers. Pupils are supportive of one another and those with special educational needs are well integrated and enjoy good relationships with their classmates. Pupils work together well, and in many lessons they were observed working collaboratively in pairs or small groups. In such lessons their discussions often led to good progress as they bounced ideas to and fro. For example, in a Year 8 mathematics lesson, the pupils' understanding of probability was deepened as they discussed why the results from practical work did not always produce the results expected theoretically. Similarly in science, pupils worked efficiently in small teams to complete an investigation on the effect of forces, each contributing to the decisions about how they would conduct the experiment and record their results. Pupils are willing to contribute to the school community. The Year 8 pupil librarians have their own job description and take their duties seriously. Year 8 pupils also help younger ones with paired reading. Pupils are able to organise themselves and show initiative as well as independence in the ways they do this.

15 Attendance rates have remained at around the national average since the time of the last inspection. Authorised absence, however, is above average and is highest among the older pupils. Examination of registers showed that a number of boys in Year 8, most of whom are on the special educational needs register, have a pattern of frequent absence for short periods. This affects their progress and teachers constantly have to help them to try to catch up.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

16 The quality of teaching is good overall. It was at least satisfactory in 91 per cent of the lessons seen during the inspection. In 40 per cent it was good, in 18 per cent very good, and in five per cent it was excellent. Eight per cent of teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory and one per cent poor. Overall, teaching is stronger in Key Stage 2 than Key Stage 3: 73 per cent of the teaching in Key Stage 2 was good or better in comparison with 55 per cent in Key Stage 3, and almost all of the unsatisfactory and poor teaching occurred in Key Stage 3. However, the overall quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection; there has been a significant increase in the amount of good or better teaching

17 Teaching is of a consistently high quality in about half the subjects but less consistent in the rest. In all the core subjects the proportion of good and very good teaching is high, though a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was seen in science. The benefits of training for the national strategies in literacy and numeracy are evident: the basic skills of literacy and numeracy are well taught within English and mathematics lessons. Teaching was of exceptionally high quality in history and music with all the teaching seen judged to be good, often very good and at times excellent. All the teaching seen in information and communications technology was also good. In most other subjects teaching is more variable. For example, in geography, French and design and technology while most of the teaching seen was good or better, there was some where practice was weaker. In geography and French this included a small amount that was unsatisfactory. There was some unsatisfactory teaching also in art where teaching was never better than satisfactory. The highest proportion of unsatisfactory teaching occurred in physical education where teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory in two of the eight lessons seen and poor in another one.

18 Pupils' learning is well supported overall at both key stages by the teachers' good subject knowledge and good lesson planning. In the great majority of subjects teachers use their subject expertise very effectively, both in communication and planning, to enable pupils to acquire knowledge, understanding and skills. For example, in an English lesson in Year 8 the teacher used her subject expertise very well to help pupils understand how to undertake a literary analysis of the text being studied. History is another example where pupils' learning benefits from the good subject knowledge of the teachers, especially in arousing their enthusiasm and enabling them to work accurately as historians from Year 5 onwards. There are instances, however, where teachers' skills are not consistently used to best effect. In French, for example, language skills develop well in Key Stage 2 because all the teaching is conducted in French, but to a lesser extent in Key Stage 3 because the language is used less consistently in lessons. In geography pupils in a Year 6 lesson made very little progress because the teachers subject knowledge was not used effectively to ensure that the pupils understood their work.

19 Lesson planning is usually very effective in ensuring that pupils build on what they have already learnt so that they make good progress. Most lessons have clear objectives that, at best, are shared with the pupils, thus enabling them to understand the purpose of their work. Only rarely is lesson planning deficient, as was the case in physical education, when insufficient attention was given to ensuring that all pupils were fully involved during lessons and to providing opportunities for them to plan and evaluate their performance.

20 The high levels of challenge in much of the teaching inspire pupils to work hard and to be determined to succeed. This was evident, for example, in mathematics where pupils enjoy the challenge of working things out for themselves and in the majority of lessons there is a buzz of purposeful activity; in history, in the high level of intellectual effort made by Year 7 pupils in response to the inspirational teaching on the murder of Becket; and in a Year 5 lesson in religious education where pupils relished the challenge to learn about the significance of various symbols associated with Hindu gods and goddesses. There are, however, instances of pupils not making enough progress because of inconsistencies in the demands made of them. For example, pupils are not always sufficiently challenged to improve their standards in art, and in design and technology too little is expected of pupils in terms of the development of research and design skills.

21 At best, good use is made of questioning and small group work to challenge and develop pupils' thinking. For example, in design and technology the best teaching uses both effectively to help pupils apply their knowledge and evaluate their ideas. There are further good examples of such practice in science, history and in English with particularly effective use being made of group work in these subjects. This was well exemplified in a Year 8 lesson in English where a group of boys discussed thoughtfully and articulately issues of fairness and justice, and in a Year 6 history lesson, where a group of girls thought deeply about the moral implications of the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs.

22 Pupils work productively, both together and individually, in most lessons. The majority are keen to learn and their interest is well sustained by a good pace of learning and the effective use of resources. Most subjects however, do not use information and communications technology enough as a means of supporting pupils' learning. Pupils concentrate well and work hard in most lessons. At best, a good pace of work is established and sustained, with pupils responding with interest and quickly involving themselves in their learning. Most lessons are characterised by good classroom relationships, which generate a good learning ethos.

23 The pupils' good behaviour in the majority of lessons is well supported by the teachers' high expectations and skilful behaviour management. There are however, instances when teachers do not control the class so well, and of learning being hindered by pupils not engaging fully with their work and behaving poorly.

24 The pupils' interest, involvement and understanding of their work are well supported by effective use of homework to extend work in lessons and to prepare for the next stages of learning. In most cases the homework set is relevant and supports learning as in English, mathematics, science, French and religious education. In history and geography, however, homework is set less systematically as an integral part of learning.

25 Pupils' progress and achievement are regularly monitored by whole-school assessment procedures but practice in day-to-day marking and recording of progress is more variable. For instance, it is generally good in the core subjects, but practice is often weaker in other subjects. In history and geography day-to-day marking varies in its thoroughness and the extent to which it assists pupils to improve their standards. Pupils are not fully aware of the progress they are making in information and communications technology because systems for monitoring pupils' work in lessons are not well developed. In French, pupils do not always learn enough from their written mistakes because their work is sometimes marked very superficially.

26 Pupils with special educational needs and those who are most able are taught well and make good progress overall. The setting arrangements in the core subjects and the generally good match of work to their learning requirements serve the pupils well. The special needs co-ordinator liaises well with subject departments, especially English, to ensure that there is effective provision for pupils with special educational needs. These pupils have clear targets in their individual education plans and learning support assistants work alongside them to ensure that the targets are reached. The very few pupils with English as second language are also given good support and they too make good progress.

27 The teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory overall. In addition to the good practice in English, there is a growing awareness of the need for a strong emphasis on the development of literacy skills in most subjects. This especially evident in history and geography, where pupils' skills in writing are developed, and in design and technology and science, where pupils use their mathematical skills effectively. There is still room for a greater contribution of other subjects, however, to developing pupils' literacy and numeracy skills.

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

28 The school has successfully maintained a broad curriculum and has remedied the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection by increasing the time for personal, social and health education, music, art and religious education. The limitations of the accommodation for food technology and textiles, however, remain and result in shortcomings in the design and technology curriculum in Key Stage 3.

29 The Key Stage 2 curriculum meets statutory requirements and is enriched by the inclusion of information technology as a separate subject and non-statutory French. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have been implemented successfully, and the structured approach to teaching literacy and numeracy skills is proving effective in raising standards. There is a growing awareness of the need for a strong emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy skills in most subjects, but, as yet, there is no strategy to bring this about and no statement as to how each subject might contribute. Practice, therefore, is inconsistent. Overall, however, pupils in Key Stage 2 are provided with good learning opportunities for their academic and their personal development.

30 Weaknesses in the provision for information technology in Key Stage 3 result in the school not meeting in full the statutory requirements. In this key stage there are no separate information technology lessons and the school relies on covering the Programmes of Study through other subjects. While some subjects make use of new technology, the school's plan that indicates how and where the various aspects of the National Curriculum in information technology can be taught within other subjects is not implemented well, and coverage is incomplete.

31 The school has a commitment to ensuring that all pupils are treated equally and is successful in meeting its aim to assist all pupils to achieve their potential. The arrangements for grouping pupils according to their abilities in English, mathematics, science and French are effective, particularly in English and mathematics where the groupings are such that both the high flyers and the slower learners are able to work at a rate and level suited to their needs. Booster classes in English and mathematics, outside normal lessons, also provide opportunities for those higher attaining pupils who are regarded as having the potential to achieve level 6 in the national tests to forge ahead. The school is also prepared to try new initiatives, for example, by seeking to ensure that boys work to their potential in English by organising separate gender groups in Year 8. The results of this are to be evaluated and will inform future practice. Since the last inspection, the school has reviewed its practice for supporting pupils with special educational needs. Most support is now given within lessons, so that pupils are totally included in all activities. Similarly, the small number of traveller pupils are fully integrated into the class activities.

32 The curriculum for all pupils is extended by a programme of personal, social and health education. The attention given to this area of pupils' personal development since the last inspection has resulted in a comprehensive programme that also deals appropriately with sex education, drugs misuse and anti-bullying awareness. The overall content of the programme is good, but the detailed planning relies largely on published materials. The pupils are interested in these, but some of the materials are not well suited to their age and could, with advantage, be adapted to match the pupils' needs more closely. For example, in a Year 5 lesson the language content of the information sheets about the dangers of smoking was too difficult for many of the pupils and the objectives of the lesson were rather lost as some pupils struggled to read the sheet.

33 The curriculum is also enriched by out-of-hours activities. Activities are varied and provide good opportunities for pupils to pursue their interests and talents in, for example, science, art and pottery, French, information technology and, above all, music. Opportunities for pupils to develop their musical skills are many – from large-scale productions to individual instrumental tuition. Pupils welcome these opportunities and many achieve success in external music examinations. The parents' concerns about the extent of extra-curricular activities relate mostly to the more limited programme at present caused by the absence of the head of physical education. The school has endeavoured to provide an after-school sports programme but fixtures against other schools have been reduced.

34 The school has maintained the good links with partner schools that were reported at the time of the last inspection. Links with the upper school are particularly strong and the termly meetings between the local middle schools' subject co-ordinators and the heads of departments in the upper school result in good continuity in the curricular provision for pupils when they transfer at the end of Year 8. Meetings between the contributory lower schools and Sandye Place staff are not as regular, but there is a good flow of information, particularly on pastoral aspects and about pupils with special educational needs, that ensures the pupils' needs are well known before they join the school in Year 5.

35 The school places a high emphasis on pupils' personal development and strives in all it does to meet its aim to promote the traditional values of self-respect, tolerance and sensitivity to others. Its provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall and it succeeds in providing a happy and purposeful environment where pupils are valued as individuals.

36 Opportunities for developing pupils' spiritual awareness are satisfactory. The comments in the previous inspection report were considered and a policy for pupils' spiritual and moral development has been produced. Most subject areas now include reference to these dimensions in their handbooks but opportunities are not always identified or developed fully in lessons. There are instances in English where teachers exploit opportunities for discussion about values and beliefs, for example, when pupils study Dr Martin Luther King's speech, and there are examples of reflective writing displayed around the school, such as some poetry written by pupils focusing on hopes for the new millennium. However, the role of the whole curriculum in providing opportunities for spiritual development is not yet fully considered and this leads to inconsistencies and missed opportunities. Spiritual awareness is best promoted in religious education, where pupils' development is very well supported both through the content of lessons and by the teaching and learning approaches used. Pupils are encouraged to think for themselves, to consider the beliefs and values of others and to address questions such as "Does God exist?" and "Do miracles happen?" They explore the significance of symbols and practices from a range of religions, reflecting on their importance for believers. They are encouraged to take the spiritual dimension of life seriously and to respond thoughtfully to different beliefs.

37 The school now ensures that the requirements for collective worship are met, and pupils attend an assembly programme that focuses on issues of spiritual and moral concern. The majority of this programme is of a broadly Christian character but other faiths and life stances are also considered. Opportunities are given for pupils to reflect or join in prayer. Senior teachers take a very active role in organising and presenting key stage and year group assemblies and other teachers also take part regularly. Pupils act as readers and sometimes help in presentations but opportunities for them actively to organise or lead any aspects of the programme are not frequent. Music forms part of assemblies sometimes but it could be used more, particularly as pupils enter and leave assembly, to create an appropriate atmosphere.

38 Pupils' moral development is very well supported through the high moral values that permeate the school's life and work. Pupils know what is right and wrong and what is expected of them. They are encouraged to consider reasons for and consequences of their actions. The school very effectively fosters values such as honesty, fairness, tolerance and respect for self and others. Moral development is very well supported within the context of a number of subjects, such as religious education, history and geography and the personal, social and health education programme provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to address issues of moral and ethical concern. Moral values are also fostered on other subjects, such as physical education, where, for example, a Year 6 assessment task specifically refers to fair play and co-operation and thus contributes to encouraging a sense of what is right and wrong.

39 The social development of pupils is very good and opportunities are given for them to relate positively to their peers, adults in the school, and the wider community. Relationships are very good and are based on mutual respect and understanding. Pupils are confident, polite and friendly. They work co-operatively together, as evidenced by the good collaborative work in groups and pairs seen in many lessons. For example, in mathematics whilst developing independence and self-confidence they collaborate well through many paired and small group activities. In French, particularly in Years 7 and 8, they interact well and in history and geography relationships are cordial and much collaborative learning takes place. The school's achievement, co-operation and endeavour (ACE) award emphasises the importance that is placed on working together and helping others. Charitable events give pupils opportunities to show concern for the wider world and in assemblies there is often a focus on caring for others. Pupils have a number of opportunities to take responsibility for themselves and others, some act as various types of monitors, they take turns at being duty receptionist, and they act as librarians and class representatives.

40 The provision made for pupils to appreciate their own culture is good but the range of opportunities to explore the richness and diversity of other cultures is not as extensive. Participation in school productions and concerts, trips and visits, and inviting visiting speakers into school all make positive contributions to pupils' cultural development. In religious education opportunities to explore a range of cultures are taken very well. For example, pupils are encouraged to consider the richness and diversity of the world in which they live and to respect the beliefs, views and customs of other people. Opportunities are taken to explore the diversity of Christian culture through, for example, examining pictures of Jesus from different parts of the world. In history, geography and music pupils consider a range of cultural differences but there are some missed opportunities across the rest of the curriculum, such as in art, where focusing on art forms from around the world is not a strong feature.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

41 Overall, the school provides a good standard of care. It took appropriate action after the last inspection to remedy the health and safety hazards highlighted in the report, although the shower provision in the changing rooms has not been improved and still fails to provide privacy for the pupils. The school has good procedures to ensure that the school is a safe place for its pupils, including regular checks of the premises and equipment to ensure that they present no potential hazards. The school's procedures for child protection are well in place, and known to staff.

42 The school works hard to achieve high standards of behaviour and has good procedures to promote discipline and good attitudes, though the way they are applied can vary since good behaviour is promoted largely through good teaching. When teachers have difficulty managing pupils, the procedures do not work so well. The personal, social and health education programme gives due attention to helping pupils to understand the impact of anti-social behaviour, including bullying. The pupils comment that any instances of such behaviour are followed up when reported, although a few parents expressed concern at the time it sometimes takes to eliminate the offending behaviour. The ACE awards, given for achievement, co-operation and endeavour are popular and encourage pupils to do their best.

43 The school has good systems for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. Policy is clear, and systems are manageable, co-ordinated well and enable staff to check pupils' progress readily. Procedures are particularly good in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In most other subjects, including religious education, regular and systematic formal assessments, recorded well and reported each half-term, ensure that pupils' progress is checked against expected levels of attainment. Teachers use the information from their assessments well to plan their lessons and set work that builds on what the pupils have already achieved. In design and technology and information technology, however, practice is inconsistent and pupils' progress cannot be monitored easily in these subjects.

44 Since the last inspection the school has made significant strides in the way it analyses data from standardised and internal tests and it makes good use of the information to help measure the school's performance as well as to help determine the groups in which pupils will work. This information, together with that from teachers' assessments, is used also used to highlight where individual pupils might require help so that support can be given. The school is currently introducing a central computerised system for recording and analysing data. A priority in the school's current development plan is to enable teachers to make full use of this information to meet individual pupils' needs more successfully across the whole curriculum.

45 Procedures for identification and assessment of pupils with special educational needs are very effective. A major strength is in the systems to identify pupils with initial causes for concern. This ensures the earliest assessment of the pupils' needs, so that appropriate support can be provided. The well-established and positive relationships the school has developed with outside specialist agencies mean that specialist help may be called upon when necessary. The involvement of subject teachers and form tutors in the review of pupils' individual education plans ensures that the pupils' needs are well known. This is demonstrated in lessons, where teachers' planning ensures that the content and level of work takes account of the pupils' needs. The good progress made by these pupils is largely due to the quality of this planning.

46 Tutors and year group co-ordinators both help to monitor personal development and attendance, though the time they have to do this is limited. The educational welfare officer supports the school in its monitoring of attendance and follows up cases where absence is high. The school seeks to encourage good attendance and parents are given the dates of the national tests well in advance, so that holidays in this period are avoided. The school does not otherwise actively promote high attendance levels by routinely following up those groups of pupils with irregular patterns of attendance.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

47 Most parents are satisfied with the school and what it provides for their children. Of those who responded to the questionnaire, most consider their children like the school. They feel able to approach the school when they have concerns. Parents think the school expects their children to work hard and do their best. The inspection team agrees with these views.

48 The school places a high priority on working in partnership with parents. The prospectus, governors' annual report and monthly newsletters provide current and prospective parents with a range of useful information about the school and the provision it makes for its pupils. Parents appreciate the termly consultation evenings when they have the opportunity to discuss their children's progress. Attendance at these meetings is good and the different focus that each of these meetings takes helps parents to get a complete picture of how well their children are doing. Some parents, however, expressed the view that they were not kept well informed about how their children were getting on. The inspection team agrees that the information in the written reports to parents is not always as helpful as it might be; reports vary too much in what they tell parents about how their children are doing: some are good and give a clear picture of progress in the subject, others just say a few words about the child's attitude to work.

49 The school encourages parents to become involved in their children's learning. Parents were consulted on the content of the new home-school agreement and over three-quarters of parents have shown their commitment to a partnership with the school by signing and returning these agreements. A number of parents expressed concerns about inconsistencies in the amount of homework set, and several commented there was too little homework in Year 8 to prepare pupils for the upper school. The inspection findings, however, present a generally satisfactory picture: the amount of homework is appropriate for pupils' ages and it is set in accordance with the school's policy. Teachers take care to ensure that pupils record this in their homework diaries, and examination of a sample of the diaries show that parents regularly sign them, and a number make good use of them as a means of communicating with the teachers.

50 Parents are generally supportive of their children's education, and attendance at consultation evenings is good. The parent teacher association states that attendance at some of the events it organises is disappointing, but the association does, however, raise a significant sum each year at these events, which is used to provide resources and equipment.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

51 The school is very well led; the headteacher leads by example and is well supported by his deputy. Together they have established a strong sense of teamwork among the staff and governors, all of whom share a commitment to continue to improve and raise standards. It is a team that is capable of taking the school forward.

52 The school took positive action after the last inspection to address the key issues. The strengths in development planning, reported in the previous inspection, have been sustained. The strength of such planning has led to systematic attention and review of progress in dealing with the issues raised in the last inspection report. Most of the issues have been addressed successfully. Teaching is now better overall, although there are weaknesses in Key Stage 3 that need to be addressed. As a result of improved teaching and curriculum planning, standards in art, geography, French and religious education, which were reported as below average, are now better, notably so in religious education. Similarly, the English curriculum has given greater attention to developing the pupils' skills in literacy and oracy, and these are now good, although there is still more to be done to ensure that these skills are developed in other subjects.

53 The school is not complacent about its successes and it strives to do better. Its plans for future development include new initiatives that focus well on raising standards. Priorities are determined with staff and governors after they have evaluated the current position to determine what needs to be done next. However, the frequency and rigour of monitoring and evaluation of work in the classroom by subject leaders are insufficient to determine what works well and precisely where and how improvement is most needed. The monitoring of teaching undertaken by the headteacher and his deputy has provided useful information that has enabled support to be given where necessary, but both have heavy teaching loads, recently increased because of long term absence of key staff, and they have been unable to observe teaching and monitor pupils' work regularly. In contrast, assessment information from tests is thoroughly analysed and the information is used well to identify groups and individuals who need support for their learning. For example, the organisation of pupils into teaching groups based on the assessment information helps teachers to plan work at a suitable level, and the trial single-gender groups in English in Year 8 followed analyses which showed that boys' progress reduced in the upper part of the school. The school also uses the assessment information well to set targets for future performance. The targets for pupils' performance in the Year 6 statutory assessments in the current year are challenging yet achievable.

54 Teachers with responsibilities for subjects manage these well, but the quality of leadership is more varied. In English and mathematics it is particularly strong and the improved standards now seen in these subjects owe much to the lead provided by the co-ordinators. In some other subjects, for example, humanities and technology, the co-ordinators do not provide a strong enough lead to their teams to ensure that plans for development are pushed ahead. At present, line management of subject co-ordinators is not sufficiently clear, so the weaknesses in leadership at this level are not always identified or addressed. The failure to meet the National Curriculum requirements in information technology at Key Stage 3 is, in part, because the overall responsibility for ensuring effective coverage of the Programmes of Study through other subjects is not clear enough.

55 The composition of the governing body is truly representative of the community and provides the range of skills and experience that it needs among its governors. In their committees, governors receive wide-ranging information from the headteacher and staff, and some are regular visitors. These activities result in the governing body having a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses that helps them to shape the direction of the school and make effective contributions to planning when priorities and spending are determined.

56 The school's arrangements for financial control and management are very efficient. The administrative manager, the headteacher and governors' finance committee work closely together to ensure that the budget is tightly controlled so that money is available for the improvements detailed in the school's plan for development. The school's income is lower than in most middle schools, but it is managed with skill, and best value is sought, for example, by comparing costs of different suppliers, before purchases are made. The very effective leadership and management by the special educational needs co-ordinator ensure that the funds the school receives are used efficiently to provide as much support as possible for pupils with special needs. The school is particularly successful in providing equality of opportunity for these pupils, and there has been considerable improvement in supporting these pupils within their normal classes, so that they are included in all activities. Similarly, the small amount of support for traveller pupils is used well to give additional help in lessons so that the pupils can take an active part.

57 The school gives high priority to staffing, and has taken every step to minimise the disruption caused by the long-term absence of a key member of staff. Parents' concerns about continuity are understandable, but the present temporary arrangements are satisfactory and ensure that pupils are able to make progress. Induction arrangements for the staff filling these temporary positions are good and the staff are well supported by the headteacher. Prudent financial management and the extra teaching taken on by the head teacher has enabled the school to provide additional teaching groups in English, mathematics and science. These arrangements, together with careful deployment of teachers with specialist subject knowledge, are proving effective in raising pupils' achievements in these subjects.

58 As in most schools, formal appraisal of staff has lapsed pending the new statutory arrangements to be introduced later this year. The school does, however, identify where staff development and training are required to implement its plans for improvement and staff are provided with appropriate opportunities for in-service training and for their own professional development. Well-focused school-based training for the staff has resulted in the successful implementation of the National Literacy Strategy, and more recent training is helping staff to implement the National Numeracy Strategy. Further training is required, however, to increase the staff's competence in the use of information and communications technology to support teaching and learning in all subjects.

59 The school followed the recommendation in the last inspection report and planned a rolling programme for upgrading the accommodation. This has resulted in good accommodation overall. The central computer suite has up-to-date equipment and this is used effectively to enable all Year 5 and Year 6 pupils to have a dedicated information technology lesson each week. Limited funds, however, mean that the school has been unable to keep pace with the rapidity of technological change and much of the computer equipment outside the suite is dated and not as useful for developing pupils' skills and supporting their learning. Despite its age, however, more effective use could be made of this equipment in some subject areas.

60 Since the last inspection, headway has been made in providing subject specific resource areas in the year bases, and each year base is now well equipped with relevant books and materials. Limited funds and space have prevented action to improve the facilities for textile work and food technology, and these remain poor and restrict the standards that pupils are able to achieve, particularly within the Key Stage 3 curriculum.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

61 To continue to raise standards the headteacher, staff and governors should:

(1) Improve the curricular provision for information technology so that statutory requirements are met and more effective use is made of new technology to support teaching and learning by:

- ensuring that the school's plans for teaching the National Curriculum information technology Programmes of Study at Key Stage 3 through other subjects are implemented;
- developing the use of information and communications technology in all subjects;
- providing further training to increase the staff's competence in the use of new technology;
- providing more up-to-date computer equipment, as funding allows.

(Ref paragraphs 3, 22, 30, 58, 59)

(2) Raise the quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 by:

- ensuring that the modest demands made on pupils by some teachers are raised to the high level made by most;
- improving the skills of those teachers who find difficulty in managing pupils' behaviour.

(Ref paragraphs 17, 20, 23.)

(3) Strengthen the leadership of subject co-ordinators by:

- introducing a clearer structure of line management to oversee the work of the subject co-ordinators;
- defining more precisely their responsibilities.

(Ref paragraph 54)

(4) Improve the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation of the school's provision and standards it achieves by:

- increasing the frequency and rigour of monitoring, undertaken by the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the subject co-ordinators, of teaching and pupils' work.

(Ref paragraph 53)

In addition to the points above, governors should consider as part of their action plan how they might improve:

- attendance, particularly among the older boys whose irregular attendance hinders their progress.

(Ref paragraphs 15, 46)

- the provision for food technology and textiles in Key Stage 3

(Ref paragraphs 28, 60)

- the quality of information given to parents in the end-of-year written reports

(Ref paragraph 48)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	91
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	31

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	18	40	29	8	1	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

	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils on the school's roll	464
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	99

Special educational needs

	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	12
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	121

English as an additional language

Number of pupils with English as an additional language	5
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Pupil mobility in the last school year

Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	35
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	44

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.7
National comparative data	6.0

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	0.4

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	1999	65	73	138

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	44	40	57
	Girls	57	41	58
	Total	101	81	115
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	74 (65)	60 (53)	85 (70)
	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	36	46	50
	Girls	51	52	52
	Total	87	98	102
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	64 (62)	72 (53)	76 (67)
	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (71)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	2
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	451
Any other minority ethnic group	13

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	0	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: Y5 – Y8**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	22.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y5 – Y8

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	181

Deployment of teachers: Y5 – Y8

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	88.1
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Average teaching group size: Y5 – Y8

Key Stage 2	24
Key Stage 3	25

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	927,015
Total expenditure	916,529
Expenditure per pupil	1,890
Balance brought forward from previous year	10,966
Balance carried forward to next year	21,452

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	464
Number of questionnaires returned	107

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	33	52	11	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	21	62	14	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	14	57	15	8	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	9	59	22	8	2
The teaching is good.	23	56	13	1	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25	44	22	8	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	41	45	12	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	30	61	8	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	28	36	27	6	3
The school is well led and managed.	27	52	13	3	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	16	63	14	3	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	11	43	19	10	16

Other issues raised by parents

Several parents included written comments with the questionnaires. The most frequently raised issues were:

1. Bullying was a concern
2. The amount of homework was inconsistent and some thought insufficient in Year 8
3. Concerns about staff absence in Year 8

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

ENGLISH

62 The majority of pupils come into the school with attainment levels which are a little below the national average. This is borne out through analysis of school performance data. The National Literacy Strategy is having a positive impact on learning in the lower schools, and standards in literacy are rising on entry to this school. When pupils arrive, most listen well, speak with confidence, read simple texts with understanding and can write simple sentences generally accurately. Higher attaining pupils read a wider range of texts fluently, and use appropriate strategies to help them understand what they read. They also write imaginatively and are beginning to adapt their writing to different readers.

63 During the two years from entry to the end of Key Stage 2, pupils make good, and sometimes very good, progress. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils are attaining levels in National Curriculum tests which are above national averages. In the 1999 test results, compared with schools with a similar social intake, pupils' results were well above average attainment levels. Over the last four years, the pupils' performance in the English tests has risen and at a rate that has exceeded the national rate. Standards among the current Year 6 pupils are, overall, well above average. All pupils listen well and most express themselves confidently using a fairly wide range of vocabulary. Lower attaining pupils read a range of simple texts with enjoyment and they use the alphabet to locate books and find information. They write in a straightforward way, using largely correct spelling, punctuation and grammar. Higher attaining pupils speak fluently in a range of contexts and what they say is interesting and engaging. They are able to identify key features from texts which they read, and can quote relevant passages to support their point of view. Higher attaining pupils' writing is technically accurate and is varied and interesting.

64 Standards of work seen in Key Stage 3 are above what might be expected for the pupils' age. When pupils leave to go to the Upper School at the end of Year 8, most are in line to achieve levels at the end of the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests which are as good as, or better than, those expected nationally. Lower attaining pupils write simple sentences accurately, and attempt complex sentences to convey meaning, using punctuation to mark sentences. Higher attaining pupils write both formally and informally and they choose vocabulary precisely. They use a range of punctuation and paragraphing correctly. All pupils listen very well and speak confidently. Some pupils do not yet use standard English consistently on formal occasions.

65 Pupils with special educational needs make good progress across both key stages. This is as a result of the department having close links with the special educational needs co-ordinator, the fact that teachers use pupils' individual targets in planning lessons, and in the positive attitudes pupils have to learning. Good strategies are in place to support pupils who have English as an additional language.

66 Attitudes to English among most pupils are good, and in many cases, very good. They are keen to learn and answer questions and participate in discussions with enthusiasm. One particular lesson observed during the inspection was with a group of Year 8 boys, who spoke thoughtfully and articulately about issues of fairness and justice. On another occasion, Year 6 pupils who were practising writing a sequence of instructions, enthusiastically volunteered to give examples and to read aloud from their work. Relationships between pupils and with teachers are very good and contribute to a positive climate for learning. Pupils work well, both independently, and in pairs and groups.

67 Overall, teaching at both key stages is good; it is always at least satisfactory and in seven out of ten lessons seen it was good or very good. The National Literacy Strategy techniques are effectively employed in Key Stage 2, and pupils enjoy the pace, challenge and variety of teaching in both key stages. Most teachers have high expectations of the pupils whom they teach, including those pupils who have special educational needs. They know their subject well, and their enthusiasm and encouragement to pupils contribute to lively lessons and have a significant impact on learning. Pupils' work is helpfully marked, with teachers writing appreciative comments and highlighting areas for improvement. There are some occasions when pupils make less good progress in lessons. Factors which contribute to this include slower pace of teaching, rather routine teaching materials and the occasional incident of less good behaviour from a minority of older boys. Classrooms in which English is taught feature helpful vocabulary lists on notice boards and attractive displays of pupils' work; these help to reinforce pupils' learning. Homework set is suitably challenging and extends pupils' learning beyond the lesson. Overall, the good quality teaching in both key stages leads to good progress and pupils achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.

68 The time in the curriculum for English is appropriate, and in Key Stage 3 a weekly drama lesson provides opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in speaking to an audience and working as part of a team. In one lesson observed, Year 7 pupils performed improvised pieces to the other pupils in turn, and they responded with maturity and appreciation. In all years, pupils are taught in groups according to their prior attainment and these arrangements are making a good contribution to their progress. In Year 8, middle attaining pupils are currently being taught in single-sex groups. This is a strategy which the school has devised, the intention being to allow both sexes to work to their potential. This strategy will be reviewed by the end of the academic year. The use of information and communications technology is not yet sufficiently consistent across both key stages. The department makes a good input to the extra-curricular activities of the school by organising literacy booster groups in Year 6, a newspaper club and theatre visits. Pupils also benefit from an interesting programme of visitors coming to the school, including theatre in education companies. The department contributes to pupils' social, moral and cultural development well through the study of literature and by providing occasions for pupils to discuss issues. Opportunities to extend pupils' spiritual awareness are less consistent. The links with the upper school, in particular, are good and these help to ensure smooth progression.

69 Since the last inspection, standards have risen. The department has introduced the National Literacy Strategy and revised its schemes of work, and they reflect the demands of the National Curriculum appropriately. There are now more opportunities for pupils to write in a variety of forms, for different readers, and there has been an improvement in pupils' presentation of written work. The quality of teaching is now consistently satisfactory or better. Whilst the teaching of literacy is good, and sometimes very good within the English curriculum, there is, however, little consistency throughout the curriculum, with different departments making varying, and variable, contributions to the development of pupils' reading, writing, speaking and listening. The history, geography and French departments have a particularly effective impact in this area, whilst there are fewer opportunities developed in science and technology. In classrooms in which mathematics lessons take place, there are good displays of mathematical vocabulary, and mathematics teachers reinforce the use of technical words in their teaching.

70 The department has effective practices to assess and monitor pupils' progress, and to use assessment to guide planning. Careful records are maintained, and teachers use these to plan their lessons. The individual targets set for pupils with special educational needs are clearly understood and monitored by teachers. Individual pupil target setting is better developed at Key Stage 2 than at Key Stage 3, and the department is well placed to extend this work further.

71 The management of the department is strong. The head of department has been in post less than two years, and on arrival she identified the development of the National Literacy Strategy as a key goal. Staff have had appropriate training and resources have been developed, and these measures have had an impact on standards at this key stage. The head of department has high expectations and sets high standards and there is in the department a climate of mutual support and sharing of good practice which have an impact on good teaching and learning. A programme for monitoring teaching has been initiated, although this needs to take place consistently. The head of department works closely with the head of drama and the special educational needs co-ordinator, and together they are moving the department forward.

MATHEMATICS

72 Pupils' performance in the Key Stage 2 statutory assessments followed the fluctuating pattern seen nationally between 1996 and 1998 and was around the national average in each of these years. In 1999 the results were not as good as in previous years and pupils' performance was well below the national average. The results were also lower than typically found in schools with similar characteristics to Sandye Place. The school has taken appropriate action to rectify the shortcomings and, overall, attainment amongst the current Year 6 pupils is now at the level expected for their age, and many pupils in the top set are on course to exceed this level. Boys and girls do equally well. The school has set realistic targets for pupils' performance in the tests, based on a thorough assessment of their previous achievements; it is well on course to meet the targets set for this year.

73 These improved standards are attributable to the good quality teaching and the increased attention to developing pupils' skills in mental calculation. Teachers plan their lessons well using the National Numeracy Strategy as a framework. Mental or oral work at the start of lessons is now the norm and is proving effective in sharpening pupils' recall of number facts and deepening their understanding of the number system. This was demonstrated in a Year 6 lesson, where pupils applied their knowledge of multiplication facts well, and were able rapidly and accurately to double numbers with two and three digits. In this particular instance, the teaching was especially effective because the teacher followed up the pupils' responses by asking them to describe their methods and then discussed alternative approaches. Standards in investigative work are generally good. Pupils understand the need to adopt a systematic approach when, for example, they try to find patterns in number sequences. In one such lesson, the pupils relished the challenge and showed a good understanding of number facts as they described how they had arrived at solutions to a problem by using their knowledge of multiples and products of odd and even numbers. In discussing their work they used mathematical vocabulary accurately.

74 In other aspects of mathematics – shape, space and measures and handling data – pupils also attain the standards expected nationally at the end of Key Stage 2. A good range of work has been completed so far this year and pupils in Year 6 demonstrate a secure body of knowledge of the properties of two and three-dimensional shapes, and produce accurate graphs and charts to illustrate a variety of data and information.

75 In Key Stage 3 the pupils build well on what they have learned in Key Stage 2, and the standards of work seen in Year 8 indicate that, overall, pupils are on course to attain the standards expected at the end of the key stage. Those pupils working in the top set are on course to exceed these standards. Most pupils are competent in basic numeracy and, as a result of thorough teaching, even the lower attaining pupils have a secure understanding of place value. This was evident when they explained clearly how the values of the digits changed when a number was multiplied or divided by 10 or by 100. Pupils' competence in basic skills stands them in good stead in other areas of the subject. For example, one class of Year 8 pupils made good progress and achieved high standards in their work on probability because they were able to handle the calculations involved with ease. The lower attaining pupils are not always confident; some find it difficult to apply their knowledge and skills to solve unfamiliar problems, and seek constant reassurance from the teacher in such circumstances. Most pupils, however, readily use their knowledge and skills in other subjects when called upon to do so. In science, for example, pupils construct and interpret tables and graphs in their experimental work, and in geography they apply their knowledge of co-ordinate geometry and scales when working with maps.

76 As at the time of the last inspection, the overall quality of teaching is good and promotes good learning and progress among the pupils. In the lessons seen teaching was never less than satisfactory; most was good and there were examples of some outstanding practice. The teachers use their specialist knowledge well to explain new work. Their expertise becomes evident in the way they question pupils and then build on their responses to make them think more deeply about how solutions to problems might be found. Pupils enjoy the challenge of working things out for themselves and in the majority of lessons there is a buzz of purposeful activity. The pupils meet their teachers' high expectations for their work rate and behaviour.

77 In general, the teachers have implemented the principles of the National Numeracy Strategy well and as a result, lessons are well structured. Pupils eagerly join in the mental or oral work at the start of lessons and are very motivated, for example, by trying to improve upon their previous best times for completion of a set of calculations. One of the features that distinguishes the best teaching from that which is only satisfactory is the way in which this session is planned. It is most effective when pupils are asked to explain their methods so that they learn from each other and build up a range of strategies for mental calculation. For example, pupils in a Year 6 class made very good gains in their skills and learned new ways of calculating as they considered, as a class, how they could "break down" a large number into smaller parts to ease the calculations involved when doubling the number. In this lesson the teacher's own excellent knowledge was evident as she skilfully led the discussion and reinforced the pupils' responses by clear explanations. Similarly, the plenary sessions are most effective where pupils are engaged in discussion to summarise the key points of the lesson.

78 Pupils know that they are expected to work productively and behave well and in most lessons they do so. The main shortcomings in the lessons that were satisfactory, rather than good, was that pupils were not pushed hard enough and their attention wandered too often from the task in hand.

79 The setting arrangements work well and the narrower range of abilities within each group helps teachers to plan work at a suitable level and to pace lessons appropriately. The demands made on pupils in the upper sets ensures that the higher attaining pupils are stretched to their limits. The pupils rise to the challenge and their progress is good. The teachers are equally alert to the needs of the slower learners and to those with special educational needs and work is well planned to take account of their stages of development. This is effective in ensuring that these pupils have time to consolidate their learning before moving on to new work. Examination of pupils' work shows that they generally achieve well in relation to their prior attainments and, overall, they have made good progress since the start of the year. Some, however, have difficulty in retaining their learning from one lesson to the next and their progress over time is slower. The progress of some of the Year 8 pupils, mostly boys, is also affected by their irregular attendance.

80 Assessment practice has developed well since the last inspection. Assessments are made on a regular basis and teachers make good use of the results to keep check on pupils' progress and to plan future lessons that build on what has already been learned.

81 The subject is well managed and the co-ordinator provides a good lead and sets a clear direction for future development. Priorities are appropriate and include increasing the use of information technology, which at present is not as extensive as it might be, particularly in the use of spreadsheets and databases to support pupils' learning in aspects of handling data. She gives colleagues good support to help them implement the National Numeracy Strategy, but opportunities to observe them teach have been few and monitoring of the work in the classroom is not frequent enough to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching and learning in order to identify more precisely where improvements are required to raise the overall quality. Opportunities for the other mathematics teachers to see the co-ordinator teach would also be of benefit, since her teaching is a model of good practice.

SCIENCE

82 In the statutory tests at the end of Key Stage 2 in 1999, pupils' performance matched the national average. The standards they achieved were above those typically found in similar schools. Over the past few years, pupils' performance in the tests has steadily improved and has closely followed national trends. There was no significant difference in the standards achieved by boys and girls.

83 The standards of work seen among the current Year 6 pupils indicate that the standards are continuing to rise; the pupils' attainment, overall, is above that expected for their age. The improved standards are the result of good teaching that promotes the pupils' learning well. The pupils are building a good body of knowledge across the areas of work studied. For example, the pupils in Year 5 have a good knowledge of food chains, evident in their discussions about the energy flow from producer to consumer, and pupils in Year 6 showed a good understanding of the way in which properties of materials are related to their use when they were discussing their experiments. The teachers give due emphasis to practical work, and, as a result, the pupils have a good understanding of how to plan and carry out an investigation.

84 At the end of Year 8 the standard of pupils' work is close to that expected nationally in all aspects of science. The pupils make good progress and are on course to attain the standards expected at the end of Key Stage 3. In Years 7 and 8 the pupils are skilled in carrying out experimental work. For example, in a lesson in Year 8, they were systematic when recording their findings from an investigation on the chemical reactions of metals, and they constructed a reactivity series from their observations. The curriculum is well planned for progression from year to year, and pupils build well on what they have learned in Key Stage 2. For example, in Year 7 pupils extend what they had learned about light sources in Key Stage 2 to work out how light is reflected at plane surfaces and why coloured objects take on a different appearance under different colours of light. The pupils write clear accounts of their experiments and present their findings using appropriate graphs and charts.

85 The teaching, overall, is good in all year groups, and results in good achievement among the pupils. The teachers' satisfactory subject knowledge and the clarity of their explanations and instructions enable pupils of all abilities to acquire new knowledge and skills. For example, a Year 5 group studying food chains was introduced to new words, such as 'producer', 'herbivore' and 'carnivore' following an effective question and answer session. The pupils were anxious to point out that some animals do eat humans, so the teacher cleverly introduced the terms 'predator' and 'prey'. The pupils with special education needs also achieve well. Often they have support in the classroom, and teachers prepare special materials for them. The teachers generally plan their lessons well to include a variety of activities, so as to maintain interest and concentration to enhance the pupils' learning and encourage achievement. Particularly effective planning for a unit of work in Year 6 resulted in the pupils making excellent progress in developing practical skills of planning and recording, as well as increasing their scientific knowledge. The work was tightly timetabled over three lessons so that the theoretical and practical elements were well covered. In the one unsatisfactory lesson seen during the inspection, the inattentive behaviour and disruption caused by some pupils was not managed well. As a consequence, little new learning took place. Overall, assessment and marking are good and help pupils to understand how they are doing in relation to National Curriculum levels. There are, however, a few examples of careless marking, with errors going unchecked.

86 The pupils are generally enthusiastic and interested. The Year 5 pupils say they particularly enjoy working as scientists in a "real" laboratory. The pupils work well together and are well able to organise themselves for practical work. For example, when a Year 8 class was asked to test the reaction of four metals with four salts, the pupils organised themselves very efficiently, distributing tasks amongst themselves.

87 The school took appropriate action after the last inspection to increase resources, and apparatus and materials are now sufficient to support the curriculum. A scheme of work provides some guidance to staff to ensure progression from year to year, but it is not sufficiently detailed to help teachers with their daily lesson planning. As a result, the effectiveness of the planning is not of an even quality among the team. The scheme also requires updating to indicate where and how information and communications technology may be used to support both teaching and learning. At present, use of new technology is not extensive and falls short of what is expected in the science National Curriculum. Some monitoring of teaching has been undertaken by the subject co-ordinator, but is too limited to identify where improvements might be made to raise the overall quality.

ART

88 At Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3, pupils attain standards in art that are typical of those expected for their age. This represents an improvement from the time of the last inspection when standards in Key Stage 3 were reported as below average.

89 No lessons were observed in Key Stage 2, so standards of work in this key stage are based on evidence from pupils' previous work, teachers' plans and discussion with teachers and pupils. Standards of drawing and painting are sound, and improve steadily across the key stage. In Year 5 pupils' close observational drawing of fruit sections is detailed and careful. The pupils' skills are successfully extended in Year 6 through portraiture, and pupils' work shows a good understanding of facial proportion. Well-planned clay work results in imaginative and accurately sculptured masks. By the end of Year 8 pupils consolidate their knowledge of techniques using a wide range of media to extend their skills. For example, pupils' understanding of colour mixing and texture when depicting work in the style of Van Gogh enhances the quality of their work. Understanding of perspective and depth is effectively shown in pupils' work in their sketchbooks. In both key stages, pupils' knowledge and understanding of how the work of artists reflects the historical and cultural context in which art is made are less well developed than their skills of painting in the style of artists.

90 Teaching and learning are satisfactory and the majority of pupils make sound progress. The teacher's subject knowledge is secure and her planned activities engage pupils' interest and progressively develop their skills. Time is used effectively, ensuring that pupils have maximum opportunity for practical work. Routines are well established and understood, and this helps pupils to access materials efficiently and settle to work quickly. Lessons are well structured, so that pupils are reminded of previous work to help them in the next stages. For example, recall of previous work, and links to a gallery visit set the scene well for Year 7 work on cartoons. Pupils receive good support for technical skills and pupils' knowledge of colour and colour mixing is a strength and enhances their work. The teacher's intervention, however, to individuals and groups is not sufficiently focused to challenge and extend pupils' knowledge of artists' work. Pupils have opportunities to evaluate their own work; they are confident speakers and use art terminology appropriately. This could, however, be a more effective process if the pupils' responses were probed and extended so they can see how they might improve their work.

91 The majority of pupils have positive attitudes to art, and they work attentively at a good pace. For example, the Year 7 pupils were seen working collaboratively in a very positive manner, making joint decisions, and sharing resources, which produced work of pleasing quality. There are, however, a minority of pupils in each group whose behaviour hinders their progress and this is not being addressed firmly enough.

92 The improvements in the overall standards since the last inspection are, in part, attributable to a better scheme of work that ensures appropriate coverage of the National Curriculum. The units of work give pupils opportunities to develop diverse skills in two and three-dimensional work. Assessment processes have been put in place and work is regularly marked. The positive comments that accompany the marking encourage pupils, but give little guidance about how they can make their work better.

93 The school has addressed the health and safety issues related to the kiln room that were highlighted in the last inspection report. The overall quality of the accommodation, the resources, and display of pupils' work all make a positive contribution to pupils' learning and progress.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

94 The standards pupils attain in Key Stage 2 are as expected for their age. By Year 6, pupils' attainment in the areas of food, textiles and resistant materials, is typical of that found nationally among 11 year olds. In resistant materials, such as timber and plastic, pupils' skills of construction are better than average. For example, pupils used tools safely and with some accuracy, to manufacture a moving toy that incorporated the use of a mechanism. Pupils also begin to understand how mechanisms are controlled, as was evident in a group activity involving a traffic light simulation. In food technology, pupils, including those with special educational needs, measure and combine materials competently, in order to produce simple cooked products. While pupils make satisfactory and occasionally good, progress in their skills in making products, they show more limited development in being able to generate and present design ideas, particularly in food and textiles where the writing activities limit the range of response. Even so, by the end of Key Stage 2, pupils make sufficient progress to achieve standards in line with others of similar age.

95 In Key Stage 3, attainment in resistant materials is in line with what is expected nationally, but facilities for the Key Stage 3 curriculum in food technology and, to a lesser extent, textiles technology, hinder their progress, because only a half of the class can undertake practical activities at any one time. As a result, overall standards for design and technology are a little below those expected nationally at this age, and pupils do not achieve high enough standards given the sound foundation they have acquired in Key Stage 2. In resistant materials, most pupils measure and mark with accuracy, evident as they made printed circuit boards, and the higher attaining pupils in particular, have a sound understanding of simple electronic and mechanical systems. In textiles technology, the pupils successfully complete specific practical tasks, such as cushion making, and can tack and machine with reasonable accuracy. Across all areas of the subject, pupils' understanding of a design process is limited. In resistant materials, pupils begin to develop some design ideas but, in general, their skills in generating design proposals, and then subsequently making and evaluating the planned products are not as advanced as usual for their age.

96 The pupils mostly like the subject and are generally well behaved. There are occasional lessons in food and textiles technologies where pupils are initially unsettled but they are quickly engaged by the opportunities for practical work.

97 The teaching seen was always at least satisfactory and some had good features. Staff share a good knowledge of their subject and provide informed support that helps pupils develop their practical skills of construction. This was demonstrated when the teacher's expertise was used effectively to explain the work clearly and to plan activities that would provide a suitable level of challenge to the pupils. The pupils were interested in the work and by the end of the lesson had made good gains in their knowledge and understanding of printed circuit boards. The teachers have mostly good class management skills, ensuring a safe and orderly learning environment, though on occasion, the limits of the food and textiles area can result in more abrasive forms of behaviour control. A good feature of the best teaching is the skill with which whole-class questioning is used to help pupils apply their knowledge and evaluate their ideas. However, a considerable amount of teaching does not provide sufficient opportunities for design and so pupils, particularly the higher attaining, do not develop skills in wider research, planning and evaluation.

98 Since the last inspection, the subject leadership has been effective in the maintenance of the resistant materials area but there has been insufficient effort to develop a shared and coherent approach to the subject, for both curriculum and assessment. However, the National Curriculum requirements are met for both key stages and the school provides better than average practical making activities in Key Stage 2. Even so, the school has not been wholly successful in addressing concerns about design and presentation raised in the last inspection. Furthermore, the inadequacy of the food and textiles area, a major concern in the last report, continues to limit the progress pupils can make in Key Stage 3.

HUMANITIES

99 The humanities department comprises history and geography, which are taught separately, but are jointly staffed and managed.

a) GEOGRAPHY

100 Pupils in Year 6 are reaching standards which are close to those expected for pupils of a similar age. Standards in Year 8 are above the average expected at this point in Key Stage 3. Overall pupils' progress is effectively supported by good teaching but inconsistencies within the teaching, especially at Key Stage 2, prevent pupils progressing as well as they might at times. Most of the teaching seen during the inspection was judged to be good and some was very good, but there was also some that was unsatisfactory at Key Stage 2.

101 Sound subject expertise and careful planning enable pupils to gain satisfactory standards of knowledge, understanding and skills overall as they progress through Key Stage 2. Progress at Key Stage 3 is better, especially in terms of the development of geographical skills.

102 In the great majority of lessons teachers use their knowledge well to communicate clearly and to ensure that pupils learn sequentially. All lessons have clear objectives that, at best, are shared with the pupils thus enabling them to understand the purpose of their work and to engage closely in the different learning activities. In most lessons their learning is well supported and their interest sustained by the use of a range of well-chosen resources. For example, the use of high quality photographs in the study of Indian towns in a lesson in Year 7 strongly supported the development of pupils' investigative skills, and the clarity of their detail enabled them to make comparisons and to draw conclusions about the growth and changing nature of the settlements. Pupils' learning in this lesson was further enhanced by the effective use of small group and pair work to enable pupils to learn through discussion and assist each other in deepening their understanding. These strategies are a strong feature of most lessons.

103 At Key Stage 3 the pupils' knowledge and understanding are good and their geographical skills are better developed than at Key Stage 2. This was shown, for instance, in a lesson in Year 8 where pupils combined and applied their geographical knowledge, understanding and skills well in analysing the impact of the coming and, subsequently, the departure of the railway, on the social and economic structure of a small town. They made perceptive links in judging the causes of change, and the higher attaining pupils posed lively and searching geographical questions to further their understanding of patterns of growth and development. This lesson benefited in particular from the good historical and geographical knowledge of the teacher. The written work of most pupils in Year 8 reflects good knowledge and understanding of a wider range of geographical themes, for example, the structure of the earth, volcanoes and plate boundaries. It also demonstrates the good use of both literacy and numeracy skills.

104 Pupils work hard, with interest and they concentrate well in most lessons. They respond well to challenge, as was evident in a Year 5 lesson on the climate. Pupils were inspired by the teacher's enthusiasm, learning happily and working at full stretch in exploring the characteristics of the English weather and its measurement. Behaviour is good apart from where the teachers' skills in behaviour management are weak and the work set does not sustain pupils' interest. This was the case, for example, in a Year 6 lesson on contours where pupils did not fully understand the nature and purpose of the work. The use of homework to extend and prepare for work in lessons varies. Overall, it is not set sufficiently systematically as an integral part of learning.

105 Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, demonstrating sound factual knowledge. They are well supported in their learning by the good match of the work to their learning requirements and, when available, by effective help from learning support assistants.

106 The progress of all pupils is regularly assessed against National Curriculum levels but insufficient use is made of these to set targets for improvement. Day-to-day marking is inconsistent in its thoroughness and the extent to which it assists pupils to improve their standards.

b) HISTORY

107 The attainment of pupils in history in Year 6, as they near the end of Key Stage 2, is above the level expected for pupils of a similar age. Pupils in Year 8 are also reaching standards that are above those expected at this point in Key Stage 3.

108 Pupils' progress and achievement are good at both key stages. Their learning is well supported by the consistently good quality of the teaching. Teaching was judged to be good or better in all lessons; in most it was very good, and in one lesson it was excellent.

109 Teachers use their good subject expertise and often their enthusiasm skilfully in communicating and in planning well-structured lessons, to arouse pupils' interest in the subject, and to enable them to work accurately as historians from Year 5 onwards. There are many instances of skilled narrative accompanied by well-structured and sequenced learning activities carefully designed to promote learning. As a consequence, the pupils develop good knowledge and understanding and use these increasingly effectively to provide descriptions and explanations, to discuss, and to make links between events, and between causes and effects. In a Year 5 lesson, for example, the pupils demonstrated a very good grasp of why and how pyramids were built, and in Year 8 pupils were able to draw on substantial knowledge and understanding in their discussion of the tensions between England and Scotland following the Act of Union.

110 The strong emphasis placed on the development of historical skills from the outset results in a good awareness of chronology, causation, development of empathy and pupils become increasingly confident in using evidence to find information. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils used pictorial evidence effectively to explain the impact of the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs, with higher attaining pupils, especially, working very thoughtfully in considering the issues from a moral perspective. As they progress through Key Stage 3 many also become increasingly confident in judging the reliability of historical sources, as was shown in a Year 8 lesson where pupils used their investigative skills well in examining evidence about the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, demonstrating also good levels of empathy.

111 Written work develops well from Year 5 onwards, reflecting increasingly good knowledge, understanding and effective use of sources. The written work of pupils in Year 6, especially that of higher attaining pupils, is accurate and well presented showing good use of evidence, and that pupils are beginning to understand difference between primary and secondary sources. By the time pupils reach Year 8 the written work of all pupils, but especially of those who are higher attaining, is usually well structured and accurate in its detail, but most remains descriptive rather than analytical. The progress made and the standards achieved by pupils with special educational needs are often better than expected as a result of their needs being well known and the work well matched to their learning requirements. The progress of all pupils is well supported at both key stages by their good literacy skills.

112 Pupils respond very well to challenge in the teaching and to the high expectations of the teachers. This was evident in a Year 6 lesson, where the pupils were studying the implication of conquests. They responded very well to the teacher's encouragement to think and debate issues in depth. It was also abundantly evident in the high level of intellectual effort made by the pupils in response to the inspirational teaching on the murder of Becket in a Year 7 lesson. Here, pupils worked at a very mature level in debating issues in depth from different perspectives in the context of role-play, demonstrating a very good grasp of complex and interrelated issues, such as the rival power of the church and throne, and of the structure of the feudal system. In both these lessons, and in most others, very good use is made of questioning to ensure and develop understanding, and also of small group and pair work to enable pupils to learn through discussion and to support each other in their learning.

113 The pupils concentrate well and work hard throughout lessons. Behaviour is very good. It is well supported by the highly effective strategies for behaviour management, the pace and interest of the work and the very good classroom relationships. Pupils' involvement in and understanding of their work are often well supported overall by the good use made of homework. Their progress is regularly assessed against National Curriculum levels but insufficient use is made of these assessments to set targets for improvement. Day-to-day marking varies in its thoroughness and the extent to which it assists pupils to improve their standards.

114 History and geography are jointly led and managed by the co-ordinator for the humanities. Whilst the co-ordination of work within the two subjects and the curriculum provided are satisfactory overall, the leadership and management of the subjects do not provide a clear direction for their work nor do they strongly promote high standards. There is neither formal delegation of responsibilities nor systematic monitoring of practice. The lack of coherence and shared purpose in the department militates against a united drive to raise standards. Development planning is heavily dependent on whole-school planning rather than being generated by department aims. The improvement since the last inspection has been modest and most has occurred because of the staff changes; these have resulted in an improvement in standards in geography especially, and less underachievement in both history and geography.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

115 With the recent introduction of modern computers in the taught programme, attainment overall at the end of Key Stage 2 is as expected nationally. The pupils demonstrate greater strengths in those applications that involve handling and communicating information. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, when given individual support, are competent in using the Internet and understand how to use search engines, for example to find data. The pupils are familiar with word processing programs and pupils in Year 6 showed growing confidence in their use of different font styles in an activity in which they were preparing a newspaper front sheet. In this lesson, most combined text and graphics effectively, and the higher attaining pupils developed different page layout and styles and incorporated content downloaded from the Internet. Overall, pupils' progress across Years 5 and 6 is satisfactory and pupils achieve appropriate standards, building steadily on what they already know and can do. Opportunities to use and develop information and communications technology skills in other curriculum areas are limited by resources and staff competence, but pupils do develop skills in some subjects. These include design and technology, where pupils working in groups, produce, for example, a set of computer instructions to control a traffic light simulation. In mathematics pupils develop their skills through the use of a program to control an image on the screen, entering, via the computer keyboard, distances and angles to be moved, as a set of commands. In science, the pupils make some use of spreadsheets for graphical presentation.

116 In Years 7 and 8 pupils have no timetabled lessons in information technology, the intention being that the National Curriculum requirements will be met through the use of information and communication technology in all subjects. The school has a curriculum map that endeavours to identify areas where pupils can build on their earlier skills, but in practice the use of computer technology in most subjects is largely unplanned and infrequent, depending on the interest and competence of individual teachers and access to resources. There is some evidence of pupils' work, often completed at home, showing skills in mainly word processing, but progress in this key stage is unsatisfactory and attainment is below that expected for their age. Pupils are not achieving as well as they should, given the sound foundation of the taught course in Key Stage 2.

117 Pupils in the Key Stage 2 lessons are very well motivated, if at times a little exuberant in their interest, and mostly co-operate well in the need to share computers.

118 Teaching in the Key Stage 2 information and communication technology programme is good, with the enthusiasm of a largely non-specialist staff engaging the interest of the pupils. Teaching is mostly well planned and sufficiently challenging to promote good learning among pupils at different stages of development. For example, pupils in Year 5 increased their knowledge and skills when they were introduced to the Internet and desktop publishing. Aspects of word processing are used effectively to support pupils' developing literacy skills. This is evident in the number of pupils beginning to draft and edit their work. The teachers, often well supported by the technician, provide sound guidance and ensure that all pupils, including those with special educational needs, are able to move forward in their learning. The teachers' class management skills are mostly good, though with pupils working in pairs on the computers for long periods, there tends to be some loss of momentum towards the end of the lesson. Procedures to monitor pupils' work in lessons are not yet systematic enough to keep a check on their progress, or to help pupils themselves to be aware of their progress.

119 The curriculum in Key Stage 2 meets statutory requirements, but the current arrangements in Key Stage 3 are insufficient to ensure complete coverage of the Programmes of Study and the requirements are not met in this key stage. In general, there is too little use of information and communication technology across the range of subjects and, in many, the use is far less than set out in the Programmes of Study for the individual subjects.

120 The school has a clear view of how it would like to develop this area of the curriculum and is seeking to address the need for staff training using the New Opportunities Funding and to update further its ageing computer facilities. However, it has not yet established an effective means of managing the whole-school provision of information and communication technology. There is an emerging team that teaches the Key Stage 2 programme, though it has yet to develop shared learning resources and a system of regular assessment. While there are plans indicating desirable cross-curricular provision, there are few means of supporting, monitoring and evaluating this provision. The school has made progress in addressing concerns about resources raised in the previous report by establishing a new suite of 15 computers, but its budget has not allowed it to up-date other equipment. Much of this is becoming out-dated and this places limitations on its use, although more use could be made of it to support teaching and learning.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

121 The provision of non-statutory French in Key Stage 2 enriches the curriculum. Since the last inspection, standards have improved. By the end of the key stage most pupils are approximately one year ahead of pupils of their age in other schools, reaching standards usually expected for the end of Year 7. They understand instructions and requests and can initiate conversation about personal details. They know numbers to 100 and understand key words from tape extracts. In their writing they are already trying to link short phrases into longer sentences and to write brief paragraphs about themselves. The highest achievers are securely at National Curriculum Level 3. They can remember a number of questions to ask their partners. In their written paragraphs they make parts of speech change according to rules of number and gender. Pupils of all levels of attainment achieve very well, many making rapid progress, because they are taught very well. They have very good attitudes to their learning and make full use of the additional two years study.

122 Most pupils maintain good progress in Key Stage 3. As a result of generally satisfactory, and sometimes good teaching, they achieve well in all skills and continue to progress to expected levels and beyond. Most average and all higher attaining pupils are challenged better than at the time of the previous inspection and move more quickly through National Curriculum levels. By the mid-point of Year 8 they remain well ahead of pupils of their age elsewhere. Typically, pupils can say what there is in the town and use phrases to invite each other out. They take part in short dialogues and write short paragraphs on their home and family. The lowest achievers write simple phrases and show a basic understanding of the vocabulary covered. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in understanding and speaking. The more able linguists continue to progress very well and reach expected standards for the end of the key stage a year early. They use perfect and imperfect tenses and a range of interesting structure. They redraft their written work and write extended paragraphs from memory, building up incrementally through routine practise in class. These pupils' interest in the subject remains high, and they develop some independence, amending what they say and write to make it more interesting. The teachers' ability to question has improved significantly since the last inspection, the result of specific departmental policy, but high achievers still do not use the language spontaneously between themselves. In all classes, some pupils need to speak up more and articulate more slowly when they ask their questions of each other. Some pupils of average and below average attainment underachieve in Key Stage 3. These pupils do not hear enough spoken language from the teacher and are not expected to produce enough from memory. Interest levels wane and effort declines.

123 Teaching is good overall. It was very good and sometimes excellent in over a third of lessons seen, and at its best in Key Stage 2 and in the express classes in Year 8. In Key Stage 3 it is occasionally unsatisfactory and there are some weaknesses in other lessons. Teaching and learning are very good at Key Stage 2 because all lessons are taught in French, enabling all pupils to receive a very good grounding in hearing the spoken language and modelling their own pronunciation. As a result, pupils develop very good early listening and speaking skills, and learning routines are firmly established. The teachers' planning is very good and includes precise reference to National Curriculum levels. Methods are very effective in enabling pupils to learn by using the language, for example, in mental arithmetic, asking each other for personal information, and playing dominoes to help consolidate phrases for telling the time. Expectations and challenge are of a high order. Pupils' learning and behaviour are managed very well and homework and resources are used well to consolidate and extend learning. Where teaching is very good or excellent in Key Stage 3, the same factors apply. Challenge is especially good: pupils are required to speak and write from memory, and planning to targeted National Curriculum levels is suitably supported by setting in Year 8.

124 Where teaching is less effective and occasionally unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3, planning does not refer to National Curriculum attainment levels and selected tasks are either unchallenging, such as copying or translating into English, or too challenging because they are unstructured. Pupils in these classes do not receive clear oral models to support their practice because drilling is untidy and they hear too much English. They do not learn enough from their written mistakes because their work is marked very superficially. These pupils, average and lower-attainers, mark time. Speaking and writing skills do not develop as well as before.

125 The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. More higher achievers than previously progress to National Curriculum level 4 and beyond. The response to some specific issues has been good, for example, in the use of rewards to improve impromptu speaking, particularly the asking of questions, and in assessment procedures. The range of reading material has been increased. The overall standard of teaching has improved because of higher expectations and challenge, and because learning objectives are now more prominent in planning. However, the department is unable to meet its high aims fully because some teaching is still not up to the high standard of the rest. The monitoring of teaching is inadequate. The application of information and communications technology has still to be planned systematically, and new software is needed to enable pupils to access the new computers. The use of e-mail and the Internet has not yet been explored. The quality of tape playback equipment is unsatisfactory, making listening unrealistically difficult. The current development plan is good, recognising most of the issues to be addressed.

MUSIC

126 Pupils enter the school with varied levels of musical skills and knowledge. As a result of good teaching, pupils make good progress and, by Year 6, standards are above those expected at this age. The pupils use a variety of instruments with competence for both performance and composition. They build well on their vocal and instrumental skills, and in Year 6 they sing and play melodic and rhythmic parts in group compositions, applying secure musical skills to the tasks. Vocal work is often a little above average, and includes some two-part singing. In Key Stage 3 standards of attainment are above average in composing and performing, and near average in appraising music. Pupils are conversant with a range of musical techniques. In Year 7 they use keyboards in projects on intervals. In Year 8 pupils are able to improvise in basic jazz compositions. Individual vocal and instrumental skills are often very good. Overall, standards in music are higher than at the time of the last inspection.

127 Pupils' attitudes in music lessons are usually good. The pupils' response is attentive, with appropriate levels of interest, co-operation and behaviour. They settle and respond well to instructions. These positive attitudes help their learning. The pupils work well individually and with enthusiasm in instrumental groups. In Key Stage 2, pupils co-operate well when working in groups, composing music, and they enjoy lessons involving performance. They listen attentively to instructions and to each other's compositions. Independent learning skills develop well in Key Stage 3; pupils at this stage often display good levels of concentration and they remain well focused on what they are doing.

128 The quality of class and instrumental teaching is good. The teachers' expertise and skills are used to good advantage in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities. The teaching embodies thorough planning, a range of interesting work and clear aims. The teaching successfully promotes pupils' learning and progress because tasks are modified to take account of the differing stages of pupils' musical development. For example, in Year 8, the musically talented pupils' skills in composing were advanced by more complex tasks, whilst those for others who found the work more difficult were pitched at a level that built on what they had achieved already. The pupils with special educational needs are given good support, and, where appropriate, modified tasks, so that their accomplishments and progress are at least satisfactory. In many instances their progress is good.

129 Instrumental teaching is carefully integrated into the work of the department. Visiting instrumental teachers have clear aims and keep good records. This contributes to the record of above average attainment in instrumental grade examinations. Many pupils pass such examinations with merit or distinction.

130 The department is well organised, with sound administrative processes in place. The long-term monitoring, assessment and recording of pupils' attainment and progress are sound, and the department is working to improve the use of assessment in relation to planning and setting targets. The curriculum provided is broad and contributes well to the pupils' personal development through opportunities to explore their own and other cultures, for example in work on raga. National Curriculum requirements are met, but the school has not yet improved the use of information and communications technology, highlighted as a weakness at the time of the last inspection. Extra-curricular provision is strong and a large number of pupils enthusiastically commit time and effort to the choir, orchestra and other groups. The pupils' achievements are celebrated in the school and in the community within a regular calendar of musical events. The large-scale productions provide opportunities for pupils to perform, and have a strong impact on the prevailing ethos of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

131 In lessons the majority of 11 year olds attain standards as expected for their age, particularly in their knowledge and understanding of the principles of games. They plan, develop and evaluate their own small-group invented games, and are thus developing their knowledge and understanding of principles, such as fair play, co-operation and rules. The great majority also has a secure understanding of the importance of warm-up before physical activity. There are no significant differences between the attainment of boys and girls. Overall, pupils in Key Stage 2 make satisfactory progress and achieve standards appropriate to their age and stage of development. Standards at the time of the previous inspection have been maintained.

132 In lessons, by the end of Year 8, the majority of pupils are on course to attain age-related expectations at the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils understand the principles and procedures of warm-up and are developing their skills and techniques in a range of activities. In volleyball, for example, most boys apply the dig and volley successfully in small-sided games, and some apply service techniques well. In dance, the majority of girls understand dance-specific terminology, such as level and cannon. Their group choreography skills, though, are not yet well developed. Overall, standards remain similar to those at the time of the previous inspection. In Year 7, however, the practical achievements of many pupils are less than expected for their age in basketball and football. This is a result of the unsatisfactory quality of teaching in their lessons.

133 Though no pupils identified as having special educational needs were observed with additional help, they are well supported and integrated. They make progress in line with their capabilities.

134 The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are sound overall. Many, particularly in Key Stage 2, are keen and enthusiastic and want to learn. This helps to create a positive learning atmosphere in their lessons. The majority of pupils also work well in pairs and small groups. However, the behaviour and attitudes of a significant number of Year 7 boys can be very negative. A few were observed being openly defiant to their teacher. Others are petulant and simply unco-operative. This results in a poor atmosphere for teaching and learning. Progress is therefore not made.

135 The quality of teaching is sound in Key Stage 2, but in Key Stage 3 there are significant weaknesses that make teaching in this key stage unsatisfactory. This represents a decline since the previous inspection when the quality was judged to be predominantly good at both key stages.

136 Unsatisfactory and poor quality teaching is mainly the result of inexperience and weaknesses in managing pupils' behaviour, which results in poor pupil response. Unsatisfactory teaching also occurred in a basketball lesson where the warm-up activity was not well considered and the challenge offered in the lesson was inappropriate. Because of the focus on the principles of the game, pupils made little progress in consolidating or developing their practical skills and techniques, for example, basic passing and dribbling skills in both drills and small-sided bench basketball. In a Year 6 games lesson, where the teaching was good, there was a prompt and effective start, warm-up was purposeful and pupils were fully involved in aspects of planning, performing and evaluating and were thus gaining greater insight into what they were doing. This also provided good challenge for the pupils. This was also the only lesson where effective and planned assessment was taking place. Though teachers were seen to circulate well and offer praise, encouragement and constructive criticism, there was little evidence of pupils' progress and achievements being assessed or of how such assessments were to be recorded.

137 Though the quality of teaching in the majority of lessons is sound, there are areas for improvement. The few non-participants are not always as fully involved as they should be. They are not always part of whole group introductions and sometimes sit at the side when skills are being broken down or demonstrated. This means they are not fully prepared for taking part in the next lesson. Many of the lessons, particularly for the younger pupils are task oriented and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to be involved in aspects of planning, performing and evaluating. Pupils are therefore not sufficiently developing their knowledge and understanding of the games and activities being taught. In some lessons teachers are effective in their use of question and answer sessions. This not only enables them to establish what pupils know and understand, but also enhances pupils' speaking and listening skills. There is, however, little use of display, for example, of key words, in order to enhance further pupils' literacy skills. In most lessons the variety of structured activities helps to ensure pupils are on task. However, sometimes the organisation of small-sided games, for example, is not effective enough. In a Year 5 hockey lesson, the space could have been utilised better thus ensuring all pupils were involved, whilst in a Year 7 basketball lesson three small-sided games, as opposed to two, would have enabled pupils to make better progress because of smaller numbers. However, the organisation of and use of space in a Year 8 volleyball lesson was good and this enabled all pupils to be active and make progress in the development of both their individual and teamwork skills.

138 The absence of the subject co-ordinator since last September has affected the physical education provision, its administration and its development within the school. Some issues from the previous inspection have yet to be fully addressed and the school has yet to take decisions about the new curriculum and assessment requirements that come into effect in the coming September. The quality and range of accommodation - there are extensive fields as well as a swimming pool - are excellent and allow a broad range of both winter and summer activities to be taught. There has been no improvement since the last inspection to the shower provision, and this remains unsatisfactory - showers do not provide the privacy expected by both boys and girls.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

139 Very good progress has been made in all aspects of the department's work since the previous inspection. Standards are now much better: by the end of Key Stage 2 attainment is slightly above the expectations of Bedfordshire's Agreed Syllabus for religious education, and by the end of Year 8 attainment is already well in line with the standards expected by the end of the key stage.

140 Pupils progress and achieve well at both key stages. Over Key Stage 2 they develop their ability to make simple comparisons and contrasts in relation to the religions addressed and have a developing understanding of the meaning of religious symbolism. During Key Stage 3 they use their knowledge of religious practices to explain the beliefs reflected in them, continue to make gains in understanding about the nature of religious symbolism and make links between faith and lifestyle. They have some opportunities to learn from members of faith communities. For example, a Sikh visits Year 7 classes and a Christian monk Year 8 classes. Higher attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall. Their needs are well known and teaching and materials are matched to their learning requirements.

141 Pupils respond very well to high levels of challenge engaging closely with their work. For example, Year 5 pupils were challenged in learning about the significance of various symbols associated with Hindu gods and goddesses and asked to deduce their meanings from the various pictures they were given. Pupils work hard to respond to such challenge and make good gains in knowledge and understanding as a result of it. The quality and detail of some of the written work are good and indicate a commitment to and enjoyment of religious education. There is very little unfinished work in books: homework is completed well, presentation is good and project work is completed with enthusiasm. All this shows that pupils' attitudes to religious education are very positive. Very good relationships and behaviour contribute strongly to the positive learning ethos in all lessons.

142 The quality of teaching is good. The vast majority of the teaching seen was either good or very good, with only one lesson where the weaknesses outweighed the strengths. The teaching team has a commitment to the subject and to the pupils, which reflects itself in the standard of the teachers' preparation and in their continuing effort to improve further the quality of what they provide for pupils.

143 Pupils' positive response and good progress are strongly promoted by the teachers' good management of the pupils, which ensures very good behaviour and discipline. When teaching is effective teachers have appropriately high expectations, which result in pupils applying good intellectual effort in their work. Teachers use questioning effectively to check pupils' knowledge, extend their understanding and encourage participation in lessons. For example, in a Year 6 lesson pupils were asked probing questions about the significance of different pictures of Jesus and how those pictures represented different aspects of Christian belief about him. In a Year 7 lesson pupils watched part of a video to support their learning about the importance of the Gurdwara (place of worship) for Sikhs. The video was stopped periodically, and challenging, open-ended questions asked them to consider how various practices reflect Sikh beliefs. Small group and paired work is used effectively to enable pupils to learn from each other. A range of suitable resources is used during lessons and good use is made of display materials in some classrooms to enhance learning. The scheme of work is detailed and provides a firm foundation for teachers' lesson planning, which is of a good quality. Unit and individual lesson plans are clearly linked to the learning outcomes laid down in the Agreed Syllabus, and these are shared with pupils. Tasks are well sequenced and matched to the needs of the pupils. The pace of learning is usually appropriate and sometimes good. Where teaching is less effective pupils are not sufficiently challenged, they complete simple comprehension questions with no opportunity given to assess or reflect on the religious significance of what they are studying, and their progress is consequently impeded.

144 The development of literacy is satisfactorily supported by the written and oral work engaged in and by the correct use of religious terminology. Plans are in place to develop this area further in the light of recent work produced by the Local Education Authority. There are detailed and planned opportunities within the religious education curriculum to use the Internet, CD ROMs and word processing opportunities. One teacher has recently been engaged in a term's research outside the school, funded by the Farmington Millennium Award scheme, to consider the use of the Internet to aid learning in the subject. This has already impacted positively on planning for and teaching religious education within the school.

145 Pupils' involvement and interest in their work are satisfactorily supported by homework, which is used to extend work begun in lessons and to prepare for the next stages of learning. Assessment procedures have developed well since the previous inspection but are not yet effectively focused on the standards that are being achieved and the consequent progress being made by pupils.

146 Religious education makes a very strong contribution to the school's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils. The content of the curriculum focuses on matters of religious, spiritual and moral concern. Pupils are encouraged to think for themselves about the significance of beliefs and practices through, for example, reflecting on the symbolism and significance of religious artefacts or pictures. They are encouraged to consider the consequences of their own actions, to work co-operatively together and to address how religious belief affects the lifestyles of believers. They are provided with a range of opportunities to develop respect for the beliefs and feelings of other people, even when they are different from their own.

147 The subject area is well managed and led. The subject co-ordinator and his team are committed to encouraging a high profile for religious education within the school and improving standards of attainment further. The team works co-operatively and well together. Its work is monitored using school systems. There is a clear development plan and resources are adequate and well matched to the needs of the curriculum.