

INSPECTION REPORT

BIRCHENSALE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Batchley, Redditch

LEA area: Worcestershire

Unique reference number: 116967

Headteacher: Mr M. T. Revell

Reporting inspector: Denis Pittman
16976

Dates of inspection: 3rd – 7th April 2000

Inspection number: 187682

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle deemed Secondary

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 9 to 13

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Birchensale
Bridley Moor Road
Redditch
Worcestershire

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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr. Neil Williams

Date of previous inspection: 6th March 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Denis Pittman	Registered Inspector	History	Characteristics of the school How high are standards? How well is the school led and managed? How well are the pupils taught?
John Brasier	Lay inspector		Pupils attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school work in partnership with parents? How well does the school care for its pupils? Staffing, accommodation and learning resources
Roger Perkins	Team inspector	Mathematics Religious Education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Donald Innes	Team inspector	English Physical Education	English as an additional language
Silvia Innes	Team inspector	Science Design and Technology	Special Educational Needs
Sue Jones	Team inspector	Music	
Brian Downes	Team inspector	French	Equal Opportunities
George Rayner	Team inspector	Geography Information Technology	
Peter Harle	Team inspector	Art	Assessment Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.

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The Registrar
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Birchensale an average sized Middle School of 358 pupils, aged 9 to 13 (170 girls, 188 boys) – the roll has been increasing in recent years. The school primarily serves the Batchley ward of Redditch. The overall attainment of pupils upon entry to the school, at age 9, is below average. The school has identified 119 pupils as having special educational needs of whom seven pupils have statements – the overall figure is broadly average for a school of this type. There is a higher than average number of pupils who have English as an additional language. The socio-economic background of pupils is diverse, with 13 per cent of the roll coming from ethnic minority communities. The school's data indicates that 87 pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is above the national average, although the actual eligibility figure is probably substantially higher.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Birchensale is a very good school, with a strong sense of community in which everyone feels valued. Pupils enjoy coming to school, and make good progress in their academic and personal development. Co-operation and healthy competition are encouraged through all aspects of the school. The very good quality of leadership provides a clear vision and a strong sense of purpose. Staff work well together making a positive commitment to improving standards and promoting the values of the school. Standards of attainment in the core subjects are improving, and are now closer to the national average. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils make good progress, and achieve well in their lessons.
- There is strong and sensitive leadership provided by the headteacher.
- Pupils develop self-esteem and good relationships.
- Standards of behaviour and attitudes to learning are very good.
- The quality of teaching is good.
- Pupils are well cared for and are given very effective guidance in their social, moral and academic development.
- The range of learning opportunities is good and the provision for extra-curricular activities is excellent.

What could be improved

- Standards of examination performance in English, mathematics and science at Key Stage 2.
- Standards of attainment at Key Stage 3 in design technology, and the quality of leadership and management in the subject.
- The organisation and accuracy of written work at both key stages.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good progress since the previous inspection. The issues raised at the last inspection have been successfully addressed. The school now fully complies with the National Curriculum requirements for science, religious education and information technology. Teaching has continued to improve in most subjects – there are examples of very good teaching in art, English and physical education. The curriculum provision for French and standards of attainment have improved dramatically; pupils' attitudes towards the subject are better. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is more effective through a more consistent monitoring of individual requirements. The school assessment policy now provides appropriate guidelines for subject co-ordinators in the formation of procedures.

The literacy policy is helping to raise standards, but the accuracy in writing and spelling is still in need of attention. The effective strategy for target setting, coupled with more consistent assessment, is helping to raise pupils' expectations of themselves. School development planning has continued to improve and provides an efficient focus for the school's work. Review and evaluation procedures, developed by the governors and the senior management, are improving the quality of work in the school.

There have been significant improvements in the quality of accommodation. The high standard of decoration and display creates a positive and stimulating environment for children to learn. This is particularly reflected in the library, which is an effective resource for independent learning. The school has successfully created a

dynamic learning culture. The greater emphasis given to delegation and accountability has led to a general improvement of management competencies in subject co-ordinators.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11-year-olds based on average point scores at Key Stage 2.

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

The general standards of attainment of pupils in English and mathematics are below average on entry to the school. Overall results in the 1999 national tests for 11-year-olds in the core subjects is below average. Attainment in English and science is below the national average for all schools and in mathematics it is well below. However, standards of performance in all three subjects have continued to improve in line with the national pattern. In comparison with similar schools the attainment of pupils in English is above average and for mathematics and science it is broadly average. The improving standards, as shown in lessons, are as yet not reflected in test results. The school has met its previous targets and has set realistic goals for the current Year 6 pupils.

In lessons, at both key stages, standards of attainment in geography and physical education are above national expectations. In most other subjects attainment is in line with national expectations for both key stages. Achievement in art improves through successive key stages to become above average at the end of Year 8. In English, science and design and technology attainment is below national expectations at Key Stage 3.

Given pupils' prior attainment their progress in lessons is predominately good, in most subjects, through each key stage. However, achievement is unsatisfactory in design and technology at Key Stage 3, particularly in pupils' work with resistant materials.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils enjoy many of their lessons, showing an excellent involvement in the learning opportunities provided. Very good relationships exist between pupils and staff.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils work well together, supporting each other very effectively. Bullying is rare – pupils show a great respect for others' feelings and beliefs.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils are actively encouraged to take responsibility and show initiative.
Attendance	Good.

There is a good involvement by pupils in the House and extra-curricular activities. These activities effectively promote co-operation and competition in a positive way.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is satisfactory or better in 99per cent of lessons. It is very good in 30per cent of lessons and unsatisfactory in a negligible number. Teacher's good subject knowledge and effective planning provide very good opportunities for pupils to learn. There are examples of good teaching in most lessons. The effective management of pupils and their positive rapport with staff are conducive to productive learning. Standards of literacy and numeracy teaching are good – this results from the successful implementation of the national initiatives in these areas. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs and those pupils with English as an additional language is good. Pupils develop good skills in music, physical education and art. The quality of assessment procedures in geography and the expectations of pupils' level of work in design and technology are unsatisfactory.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The overall provision is good. There is a good range of subjects with a particular strength in the excellent opportunities for extra-curricular work.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. There is good progress through both key stages, and careful monitoring.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Pupils are well supported and show increasing levels of confidence.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. The social and moral development of pupils is very good; a strength of the school.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Support and guidance are very good. Relationships are very supportive and constructive. Periodic reviews are particularly helpful in setting targets for pupils.

The curriculum meets statutory requirements although there is insufficient use of information technology in some subjects. The participation rates in clubs and activities are very good. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum including the provision for French. The statutory requirements for pupils with special educational needs are met and pupils are well-integrated into lessons. There are very good and constructive links with first and high schools which maintains the continuity of pupils' learning.

Pupils are provided with good opportunities to develop self-confidence and self-esteem through community service, acting as monitors and House activities.

Pupils feel safe and confident which has a positive impact on their enthusiasm, personal development and improving standards in most subjects. The school has a good health and safety policy. The procedures for promoting good behaviour and improving attendance are excellent.

The procedures for recording and monitoring pupils' progress are good and continue to improve. Reports to parents give a good overview of general performance but lack sufficient detail about attainment relative to national levels and what pupils can do and understand.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher is very effective and provides clear educational direction - leads by example. Good support from other management staff - good team ethos
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors take a keen and informed interest in the school's work. They take a full part in forward planning and fulfil most of their statutory responsibilities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Effective evaluation of teaching through direct observations and reviews of the overall quality of work in subject areas.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Resources are efficiently deployed through effective planning and a good analysis of educational priorities.

The aims of the school are clearly expressed and effectively inter-woven into its day-to-day activities. The work of the school is efficiently monitored which has led to higher quality teaching.

Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school through their committee structure, presentations from staff and training programmes. The governing body does not have its full complement of members and as such does not satisfy statutory requirements.

Most subject areas are efficiently co-ordinated and Heads of Year are effectively involved in monitoring the academic progress of pupils. However, the management of design and technology is unsatisfactory. A particular strength amongst the staff is the shared commitment to improvement and a willingness to evaluate their work critically.

The provision for accommodation is satisfactory and allows most areas of the curriculum to be taught effectively. The provision for information and communication technology is good. The general level of resources is good and adequately satisfies curriculum requirements. Pupils have appropriate access to textbooks and a range of learning materials. The library is well resourced. The school very effectively monitors and evaluates its financial decisions to ensure that the principles of 'best value' are applied.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The good teaching, which is linked to high expectations and the good progress which results from this. • The approachability of the school. • The good leadership reflected in the support and concern shown by most staff. • The maturity and responsibility shown by pupils. • The wide range of extra-curricular opportunities provided. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework is not distributed evenly, but tends to be bunched up on particular days. • More information on their children's' progress. • A closer relationship with the school.

The team supports the positive views expressed by parents. On the issue of homework inspectors agreed that this could be improved by a review of the schedule and further guidance for pupils. In relation to children's progress, reports should be more specific about targets and levels of attainment. The team found no evidence, which supports the view that a closer working relationship between parents and the school is not encouraged. The relationship is actively promoted through formal and informal meetings, and regular newsletters.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. The school takes pupils with the full range of ability but, in general, standards of attainment are below national expectations on entry for English and mathematics. This is evident from the LEA standardised test results which pupils take early in Year 5. Standards in spelling and writing are weaker than other literacy skills.
2. Overall results in the 1999 National Curriculum tests for 11-year-olds in the core subjects are below average. Attainment in English and science is below the national average for all schools and in mathematics it is well below. However, standards of performance in all three subjects have continued to improve in line with the national picture. The attainment of boys and girls in the tests was similar for science. However, in English girls achieved better than boys but in mathematics the reverse position was evident. Over the last four years the achievement of boys in the core subjects has been below the national average, and for girls achievement has been well below. This pattern of attainment is against the national trend. The school is increasingly using assessment data to identify potential underachievement amongst girls.
3. In comparison with similar schools the attainment of pupils in English is above average and for mathematics and science it is broadly average. The improving standards, as shown in lessons, are as yet not reflected in test results.
4. The school has met its previous targets and has set realistic goals for Year 6 pupils who will be taking the National Curriculum tests this year. These targets have been based upon a thorough analysis of individual pupil's potential and prior attainment – inspection suggests that the targets, although challenging, are achievable.

Standards seen during the inspection

5. The standards seen in English, mathematics and science during the inspection are better than the test results. In lessons, by the end of Key Stage 2, and by age 13, standards of attainment in geography and physical education are above national expectations. In most other subjects attainment is in line with national expectations. Achievement in art by the end of Year 8 is above average. In English, science and design and technology attainment is below national expectations at Key Stage 3.
6. In English pupils limited language skills improve significantly during Key Stage 2, but progress is sometimes uneven. Pupils listen carefully to teachers and, increasingly, to each other with good understanding. They speak clearly and communicate confidently using a satisfactory range of vocabulary. Generally standards of reading are good. Pupils read aloud with increasing confidence and accuracy. Skills of writing are weaker than those of speaking, listening and reading. At the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils can communicate their ideas in recognisable sentences and paragraphs and understand that different styles are needed for different purposes. They have too few opportunities to learn to organise material when writing at length. The quality of written work of most pupils, is reduced by the frequency of misspelling of words in everyday use, and other errors such as mistakes of elementary grammar. In Key Stage 3 a similar balance of general strengths and weaknesses is evident. Confidence in reading continues to improve. Technical language is not used as accurately by some younger pupils but most can recognise important details

of what they read and higher attaining pupils can explain their significance. Almost all pupils write with increased ambition in their use of vocabulary and communicate clearly. However, the kinds of error evident in Key Stage 2 continue to reduce quality.

7. Progress in literacy is supported in most subjects to a satisfactory extent. All subjects encourage pupils to understand and use technical terms appropriately although some uncorrected inaccuracies were apparent in English and geography. Pupils are often appropriately involved in paired discussions or as a full class, particularly in English and science. In many subjects pupils have good opportunities to read aloud and listen to teachers reading. The skills needed for research such as skimming texts to make notes of important details are encouraged in English, information technology and science. Generally there are no strategies to improve spelling or sentence construction applied consistently in all subjects. At both key stages, and especially at Key Stage 2, pupils have too few opportunities to write at length with clear guidelines about the organisation of their material. Pupils make purposeful use of time set aside for personal reading with their tutors and, when paired with older pupils, to practise their skills.
8. In mathematics lessons, attainment by the end of Key Stage 2 is in line with national expectations. Higher attaining pupils are competent across a range of mathematical skills and ideas. Pupils cope well with questions involving negative numbers and are confident in calculations involving decimals and fractions. However, some lower attaining pupils are not so confident and do not readily recall the basic multiplication tables. They are better in their knowledge and understanding of geometrical ideas such as symmetry. Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 8 is also generally in line with national expectations overall. Higher attaining pupils understand and use the concept of ratio and complete long multiplication questions successfully. Pupils with average attainment have appropriate number skills which enable them to use short-cut methods of rearranging problems for ease of mental calculation. Lower attaining pupils have limited mental skills. Most can deal with simple addition but are handicapped by their incomplete recall of the harder multiplication facts.
9. Pupils' skills in using and applying number in other subjects are in line with national expectations. They record observations and interpret various graphs in science. Pupils estimate and measure accurately in most aspects of design and technology. In geography they produce appropriate bar charts showing rainfall levels in the Midlands and line graphs to compare monthly temperatures in Birmingham and the Lake District. In history pupils complete accurate time-lines to illustrate events in the lives of Charles 1. Number is used particularly well in the introduction to some modern languages lessons when pupils complete mental arithmetic tasks in French. In art pupils develop their spatial awareness when considering the rotation of images.
10. In science pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 2 and by age 13 is only marginally below national expectations and confirms a continuing trend of improvement. In Year 6 pupils carry out investigations competently and record their observations accurately. They understand the concept of fair tests. The planning of investigations and drawing conclusions from what they have observed, however, has some weaknesses. In general, pupils show a satisfactory understanding of scientific concepts and work safely when carrying out investigations. By the end of Year 8, pupils can investigate electrical circuits. They understand the principles of the water cycle but their knowledge of some materials and their properties is superficial.
11. Overall, pupils' achievements, given their prior attainment, are predominately good at both key stages in most subjects. Pupils do well in mathematics, science, French, geography, physical education and music. Achievement in English is better at Key Stage 2 than at Key

Stage 3. In art, there is good development of pupils' observational skills and vocabulary. Achievement in design and technology is more variable, being good in Key Stage 2 but unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3. In geography and history there is more enquiry-based work through the extension of fieldwork. Achievement is in line with the expectations for the locally agreed syllabus for religious education, and similarly with national expectations for history and information technology.

12. In lessons there is no significant difference in the standards achieved by boys and girls, and similarly pupils from ethnic backgrounds achieve equally well. Higher attaining pupils make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress in most lessons. There is an effective policy on how subjects should support pupils identified as having specific learning difficulties. This has led to a structured provision in most subjects, and appropriate opportunities for developmental work are given. Generally pupils with statements of educational need and those who have individual education plans make good progress over time. Those pupils for whom English is an additional language also make good progress and become increasingly confident in lessons.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

13. Attitudes, values and personal development are one of the many strengths of the school, with behaviour, personal development and relationships being very good. Pupils' interest and involvement in activities are excellent. This is a substantial improvement upon the last inspection and it has a significant effect on pupils' achievements.
14. Pupils enjoy school. They are enthusiastic in lessons. Pupils speak highly of their teachers and other adults. Most are keen to get down to work and show a genuine interest in their lessons, especially in answering questions. These very positive attitudes are the result of the calm but firm application of the behaviour policy, the brisk and appropriate pace and challenge in everything that takes place in the school, and above all the enthusiasm demonstrated by the teachers themselves. Pupils' involvement in activities is excellent. At the end of the day the school 'buzzes with excitement as pupils prepare for their sporting interests or other activities. A remarkably high proportion of pupils have represented the school at sport. At lunch-time pupils use the computer room, work in the greenhouse or pursue their other interests, supervised only by a small group of prefects. Pupils who have special needs show interest in their work and they are keen to learn. Very good relationships exist between support staff and pupils.
15. Behaviour is very good. In a high proportion of lessons behaviour is very good. Around the school pupils move calmly and cheerfully. They are polite to staff and visitors and keep the school tidy and in good condition. Pupils are very proud of their school and the improvements that have been made in recent years. They look after their own and others property with care. Pupils behave well at lunch-time and talk to each other sociably. They are considerate to each other. Behaviour on the playground is also very good. There is no evidence of any oppressive behaviour, although staff admit that it very occasionally happens. Exclusions are only used as a last resort and are lower than at the last inspection.
16. Relationships are very good. Teachers know pupils very well and enjoy working with them. Pupils get on well with each other, working very amicably together. In Year 8 pupils help each other to make progress in their reading. They are appreciative of each others' work, even to the extent of giving a spontaneous round of applause, for example when reading out poems they have composed.

17. Personal development is also very good. There are many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility, whether planning the composition of flower-beds around the school, or suggesting ideas for assemblies and then taking part. Pupils act as monitors and effectively take responsibility for lunch-time activities. Other pupils take part in paired reading and give good service when new pupils are being inducted into the school.
18. Attendance is good and is better than at the last inspection. Attendance figures have improved over the last four years, and the current year is continuing that trend. There is little lateness. Lessons start on time and registers are efficiently maintained. All absentees are telephoned on the first day if no notification has been received – these procedures are effective in monitoring attendance.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

19. Teaching is a strength of the school. It is good or better in almost three out of four lessons; 30 per cent of these lessons are of a very good standard. Almost all lessons (99 per cent) are satisfactory; there is a negligible amount of unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching is consistently good through both key stages. Lessons in art at Key Stage 3 are excellent and in information and communication technology in Key Stage 2 they are very good.
20. A number of features contribute to the good teaching. Classroom management and control are very good; all teachers establish a good rapport with pupils and use encouragement to effectively motivate them. There is often a crisp pace through lessons and resources are used well to promote pupils' knowledge and skills. Teachers have good subject knowledge; this is applied particularly well in art and physical education to promote the good skill levels of pupils. In English there is increasing confidence in the use of the literacy framework. The impact of this initiative is in turn being reflected in the work of other subjects through an emphasis given to the development of technical vocabularies. Teachers' knowledge and skills in information and communication technology are developing but currently insufficient emphasis is given to its inclusion in lessons such as mathematics. There are no general weaknesses in teaching. The small amount of unsatisfactory features in some lessons is related to inconsistency in marking, inappropriate expectations in order to challenge pupils, and insufficient variety in learning activities.
21. The school has an effective programme for teaching literacy and numeracy skills at Key Stage 2 and this has a positive influence on the Key Stage 3 provision. In both key stages staff employ teaching methods based on the literacy and numeracy frameworks, which raise pupils' achievements markedly. The strategies for teaching literacy are good in reading, speaking and listening and satisfactory overall in writing. There are sound strategies for teaching numeracy with a strong emphasis on oral work and mental calculation in mathematics lessons. Teachers are developing opportunities for using numeracy in other subjects.
22. There is very good planning through effective schemes of work in almost all subjects. This focuses successfully on coverage of the literacy and numeracy strategies, National Curriculum requirements and religious education. The teaching of basic skills is good in both key stages. In Year 8, pupils are developing their skills in searching the Internet, collecting information and putting it into appropriate files. Detailed planning is an effective feature of most lessons. This provides a clear structure and focus for lesson activities, although in some subjects, such as history, lesson plans become over prescriptive and provide insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn independently. Generally, the quality of lesson planning ensures the good development of ideas and leads to sustained improvements in pupils understanding.

23. Teachers have good expectations of pupil performance. In music they are set challenging tasks through a wide range of activities. For example, in Year 8, pupils used a computer to record a chord pattern as a backing to their singing and playing of other instruments. These high expectations were also evident in a Year 7 physical education lesson where boys planned and rehearsed a complex set of movements in order to perform a Maori war dance. These examples reflect the good levels of productivity in most lessons and the good pace at which pupils work when motivated and interested.
24. The active involvement of pupils helps to sustain interest. For example, in English, teachers ensure that pupils are engaged in discussion, reading or writing throughout lessons rather than in listening to unsuitably lengthy explanations. Most teachers make good use of questions both to test and to extend pupils' understanding as for example in French. In this subject imaginative use is made of the overhead projector, pair and group work, writing and listening tasks, as well as music and mime. This is an important factor in maintaining pupils' interest and concentration over 70-minute periods.
25. Almost all teachers make effective use of a wide range of control and management strategies. The insistence on high standards of behaviour results in pupils sustaining concentration and staying on task. The very positive relationship staff have with pupils creates a good learning environment. This aspect of teaching is a strength of the school and contributes significantly to the ethos of co-operation and community apparent in its day-to-day activities.
26. Most teachers use time and resources well. For example, in Year 8 art lessons pupils use computers very effectively to manipulate images in complex ways to create interesting artistic designs. In history and geography local resources and field-trips are used well to develop pupils' interests and add relevance to their studies. In most subjects pupils are encouraged to use the excellent library facilities to support their own independent work. In English pupils are given challenging texts to develop their competence in reading and understanding. Most teachers plan for a summary or review session at the end of the lesson. This practice is effective in providing a context for pupils' learning, and works well in French, English, and mathematics.
27. Teaching by the special needs support team is very good. Teachers show high levels of expertise and patience, and they vary the activities well, which maintains pupils' interest. Within their own targets, pupils who have special needs learn well. Re-enforcement is the key to their learning and teachers are fully aware of this. Pupils have varied programmes of study, which enables them to consolidate the skills they need. The teaching of pupils with English as an additional language is supportive and pupils develop their confidence as their skills increase.
28. The day to day assessment of pupils' work is satisfactory in most subjects, although a greater consistency is needed in some of the procedures such as in geography. Pupils' progress is assessed well in English, mathematics, science, art, music, information and communication technology and French. The marking of pupils' work is mostly up to date, and written praise is given to promote pupils' learning. However, in some subjects, such as history there is insufficient clarity over the marking procedures to be used. In general, written comments are constructive and help pupils improve the quality of their work. Verbal praise, which motivates and sustains pupils' interest, is used frequently. Homework is generally well focused, involves research and is improving standards.
29. The general standard of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection with a

greater emphasis on adding variety to teaching methods and concentrating attention on how pupils learn. These strategies are having a positive impact on raising standards of attainment.

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

30. The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum, which meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and statutory requirements for religious education. The curriculum enables equal access for all pupils to the learning opportunities provided. The school has eliminated the areas of non-compliance indicated in the previous inspection report. The schemes of work for science cover National Curriculum programmes of study effectively; information technology is increasingly used across the curriculum and the Agreed Syllabus for religious education is fully implemented.
31. The governing body has produced a suitable curriculum statement, which forms a good basis for practice in the school. The school prospectus includes clearly written thumbnail sketches of all areas of the curriculum so that the parents are fully aware of school arrangements. The planning and provision of the curriculum are satisfactory, or better, in all subjects and good, or very good, in most cases. For example, they are very good in physical education and modern languages but although they are satisfactory overall in information technology there are weaknesses in the provision of controlling and modelling at Key Stage 3. The curriculum for design and technology at Key Stage 3 does not make adequate provision for the development of pupils' skills in resistant materials.
32. Pupils enjoy participating in the excellent range of extra-curricular activities. There is a wealth of activity including clubs before school, at lunch-time and after school. This is alongside a programme of visits in this country and abroad at weekends and other times. Staff give very generously of their time to organise all these activities; a very high proportion of pupils take advantage of these opportunities. There are well attended 'booster clubs' in English, mathematics and science. Staff also provide an early morning drop-in club for design and technology; all of these activities help pupils raise their standards of attainment. Many different sporting activities are provided, both within the school and in competition with other schools, for example, athletics, cricket, football, hockey, orienteering and rugby. Girls and boys participate together in many of these pursuits. The scope for pupils' musical expression includes keyboard, recorder and guitar clubs alongside a choir and an orchestra. All pupils have opportunities to take part in educational and leisure visits to various venues including the Malvern outdoor pursuit centre, Upton Warren and the annual trip to France.
33. There is very good provision for personal, social and health education. The programme is broad and balanced and is organised very effectively. It features personal relationships, self-awareness and responsibilities alongside wider issues such as preserving the environment and economic awareness. There are clearly laid down policies for both sex education and drug prevention. Sex education is appropriately provided within the science course. Drug awareness takes place in six-week courses in Years 6 and 8 and is part of the religious education programme. The specialist expertise of outside agencies is used judiciously to supplement the work of school staff. The school has good links with LEA departments. For example, the road safety department helps with cycling proficiency, safety around buses and lorries and runs a 'Walk to School' week. School nurses assist in the sex education course and the police liaison officer contributes to the drug awareness programme. Many other facets of school life also contribute to pupils' personal and social education. For example, a weekly whole-school assembly is instrumental in celebrating

pupils' wide ranging achievements thereby raising self-esteem as well as appreciation of others' accomplishments.

34. There are very good links with local first schools and with the neighbouring high school. These considerably ease the transition of pupils from one school to another. Information about pupils' attainment is routinely transmitted from first schools and is then used well to provide an appropriate curriculum for pupils. Year 4 pupils from the first schools visit the school on several occasions to become familiar with it before they transfer at the beginning of Year 5. Regular meetings with first school staff on the curriculum effectively maintain the continuity of learning. Subject co-ordinators similarly attend productive meetings with high school staff each term. Higher attaining pupils from the school are provided with good opportunities to attend enrichment sessions at the high school. There are well-established links with the local community, which help broaden pupils' learning. For example, pupils visit the National Water Museum, Worcester Cathedral art exhibition and Redditch library. The school choir and steel band play locally. Visitors make regular contributions to assemblies and other school functions.
35. All pupils who have special needs have full access to the whole curriculum. Withdrawals for extra help are efficiently varied, so that pupils do not miss work from the same subjects or lessons too often. The provision for pupils with English as an additional language provides them with skills to gain access to curriculum opportunities as soon as possible.
36. The provision for pupils spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC) is very good. Relationships between pupils and teachers and other adults in the life of the school are very positive. Staff and pupils alike are always mutually supportive. For example, in a year 5 assembly, pupils used poetry, which they had written themselves to give a performance and were treated with respect and open enthusiasm by the other children. Pupils are intensely loyal to their school and are proud of what they have achieved. The school has produced a very good overview of its SMSC provision called 'Making Choices' and this provides an appropriate context for its work in this area.
37. Spiritual education is good. There is a great deal in the activities of the school to inspire pupils, and they respond very well. In assemblies, class time and in many subjects, pupils gain insight into the values of society and of individuals, helping them to develop their own values. The spirit of enquiry and pupils being 'caught by ideas' is strong in art, English, design and technology, religious education and music. One pupil in year 8 was one of the first to work in art-based ICT, and rapidly gained skills and maturity to such an extent that he is now a respected ICT monitor, supporting both fellow pupils and staff – the impact on his self-confidence has been great.
38. Pupils' moral development is very good and is well supported by a good personal and social education programme. The school provides clear teaching on right and wrong and all pupils understand the school's code of conduct. The agreed behaviour policy promotes self-esteem. Moral issues are addressed in science and history, and in art pupils learn to value their own work and that of others. Fair play is encouraged in physical education; and in special education needs pupils learn about mutual responsibility.
39. Social education is also very good. Pupils learn to accept responsibility for their own learning as well as learning to be supportive of others. The school has a strong 'community' ethos. Collaborative work is particularly evident in English and physical education, and is good in most other areas of the curriculum. Social issues are effectively addressed in science and history. The impressive array of residential trips, in this country and abroad, provides meaningful social experiences for pupils. The ICT monitors learn

specific skills after school, and then support the work of others in class – for example in how to search the Internet. In using the new internet access, all pupils are to be given 50 credits to spend on printing – which encourages a responsible attitude to resources and an awareness of the impact of their own actions.

40. Cultural education is good. Pupils learn to see themselves as part of a wider culture than their own and the sense of mutual caring is also applied on a wider front. It is very strong in art, and history. In history lessons pupils study other cultures such as the Native American and are helped in their understanding by the use of external speakers. Art provides many opportunities to consider the diversity of other cultures. Learning to live in a multi-cultural society is embedded in the school's day-to-day activities.
41. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education has improved since the last inspection to become very good.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

42. The school cares well for its pupils as it did at the last inspection.
43. The school is a safe environment with good supervision at break-times, the start and end of the school day. All the expected safety measures are in place and regular safety checks and audits are made. Results are efficiently recorded and action taken where necessary. Child protection procedures are very good: the nominated person being very experienced in this field, with good contacts and knowledge of the local procedures. Appropriate training has been given to the staff. The welfare provision is also very good, with strict control of medication and the provision of free breakfasts for pupils entitled to free school meals. Local charitable bodies fund this facility. Topics and issues covered in the personal and social education programme help pupils to look after themselves; for example, the police make a valuable contribution on this theme. Both these and the content of some assemblies also make pupils aware of the right approach to the prevention of harassment, which is a community concern.
44. Attendance is extremely well monitored and promoted. Statistical details and pupils of concern are frequently discussed amongst staff and there is a very strong commitment to maximising attendance within the school. The school develops good strategies with the Education Welfare Officer and they work effectively together.
45. Rewarding achievement is an important part of the culture of the school. Recognition is given for good attendance, good work, good behaviour, sporting achievement and the accumulation of house points. This celebration of achievement in its broadest sense receives high prominence at the Friday assemblies. The success of these strategies is clearly reflected in the high motivation of pupils. The outcomes of these activities are effectively recorded and accumulated in the pupils' records of achievement. This reward culture is an important factor in promoting good attendance and behaviour. Treats, in out of school hours, are provided for those with good behaviour. For instance, Year 5 are running a trip to a wildlife park on a Saturday, but to qualify for the trip pupils have to climb a good behaviour ladder, and there are a number who will not qualify.
46. Good behaviour is very effectively monitored and promoted. The school has a comprehensive record of pupils' achievements and difficulties stored on computer, which is useful in noting repetitive problems and successes. The success of the behaviour policy depends on a very clear set of rules consistently applied by a staff. The staff are excellent role models and they treat pupils in the way they like to be treated themselves. The

headteacher provides strong leadership on behaviour issues.

47. The form teachers efficiently record an overview of pupils' academic progress in Years 5 and 6; they are responsible for the bulk of their teaching. The transfer of information is effective to form teachers in Years 7 and 8, where there is more specialist teaching. The school is in the process of centralising its assessment procedures on computer to make information more easily accessible. Target setting has commenced for all pupils, but targets are set by the pupils themselves and are not sufficiently related to performance in subjects.
48. In most subjects, the procedures for assessing and monitoring pupils' academic performance are satisfactory. There is an effective school policy, which has been adopted by the school and governors, and provides suitable guidance for all subjects. There are good procedures in English, mathematics, science, music and physical education. However, procedures for assessing performance in design and technology are inadequate. The planning for any modification to assessment as a consequence of Curriculum 2000 is well in hand. The overall monitoring of academic achievement is good. The Curriculum co-ordinator has very thorough central records that contain a full academic profile for every pupil. All staff have access to these records to support their work with pupils. Each pupil's record includes information from First Schools relating to attainment, and is designed to facilitate the passing on of appropriate academic records to the Upper Schools. There are very good links between this system and the Special Needs co-ordinator's own system, and this is viewed as being very important, since so many pupils have special needs.
49. Assessment is appropriately used to support and guide curriculum planning, both overall and as related to individual pupil need. This process is carried out through the year heads and also through curriculum co-ordinators. The co-ordinator led a training day for all staff on this matter to establish good practice. Short term planning is regularly reviewed and monitored.
50. Assessment was an issue at the last inspection both generally and in some subject areas. These issues have now been fully resolved, and the current position is generally good with areas for further development.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

51. The partnership and general relationship with parents is good; as it was at the time of the last inspection.
52. Parents believe that their children are receiving a good education as a result of good teaching, high expectations and good management. Most parents are pleased with the progress their children are making and find the school approachable when wanting to discuss issues. The extensive range of activities outside of lessons helps their children to become mature and responsible. They are less happy about homework, which they claim is not spread evenly through the week, and also feel that the school could keep them better informed about their children's progress. Parents also feel that they would like to work more closely with the school. The inspection team agrees with the favourable comments and the remarks about homework. The inspection team found that the school works as closely with parents as with other similar schools.
53. Parents support the school well. The Friends of Birchensale provide funds for the school as a result of the social events arranged. They also run a bank for the pupils. Parents give invaluable help on school trips, with refereeing and coaching sport, and decorating the

school. Most classroom assistants are parents who have been effectively trained at the school. The school has an appropriate home/school contract in place. This is exhibited in classrooms and is referred to by teachers when discussing behavioural issues with pupils. The school welcomes parents to musical and drama events, assemblies and sporting fixtures. There are two parents' evenings per year to discuss academic progress and parents may request an appointment to discuss a pupil's annual report. The school is ready to update parents on a pupil's academic progress at any time. Parents' views on pupil's progress are recorded and put on record. These features all contribute effectively to pupils' development.

54. The information provided to parents is satisfactory, the very good quality of the prospectus, annual report and newsletters being offset by some shortcomings in reports. Parents receive information on progress three times a year, but the details of what pupils know, can do and understand could be improved, particularly if referenced to National Curriculum levels. There are a few targets for improvement but they are often vague. There is no indication of how pupils might be helped to improve.
55. There are good induction procedures for pupils when they first join the school and the curriculum manager makes visits to ensure maximum continuity. Extensive efforts are made to accommodate the individual needs of all pupils – parents appreciate these efforts.
56. The liaison with parents by the special needs department is very good. Parents are contacted frequently and a record is kept of all such contacts. The findings of the inspection agree with the great majority of parents who express a high level of satisfaction with the support given to pupils.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

57. The school's aims and objectives give a clear purpose to its work. The excellent manner in which these aims and values are practised in the school is the result of careful planning, purposeful leadership and effective communication. The school has a caring, supportive ethos, which is valued by parents and the local community. The governors are actively involved in promoting the interests of the school and show high levels of commitment to their work. They have appropriate committees, which enable them to be effectively involved in decision-making processes. Formal and informal contacts enable the governors to exercise an effective monitoring role in relation to school activities. They have a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The close involvement of the chair of governors in the school has worked well in raising awareness of issues amongst fellow governors and in providing support where necessary. The Governing Body fulfils most of its statutory requirements apart from the fact that it currently does not have its full complement of members. The school is aware of the issue and is taking the necessary action to put this right. In general, the governors make a positive contribution to the life and development of the school.

58. The headteacher leads the school very effectively. His commitment, enthusiasm and clear sense of purpose have been significant factors in the school's continual improvement. He has adopted a participative and collaborative style of management. Decisions are arrived at by a thorough analysis of the problem or issue. A good working relationship with staff has created a climate of trust. Staff support each other very effectively and this helps to maintain the smooth running of the school.
59. The senior management team has been effective in monitoring the work of the school. This has had a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards of achievement. The implementation of policies has been mostly successful, particularly with the increasing use of targets to raise standards of attainment in lessons. Middle managers in most areas carry out their responsibilities efficiently and effectively. Particularly productive are the good working relationships that have been established within the various teams existing in the school. Most subject co-ordinators are efficient administrators and monitor well the work of their colleagues; this promotes improved standards. However, the co-ordination of design and technology has specific weaknesses in administration and planning. Co-ordinators adopt a common planning strategy for proposing development plans for their subject. This is an effective procedure for supporting monitoring and achieving consistency throughout the school. In general, subject planning is particularly effective in producing good work.
60. The high standards in the special needs department have been maintained. The organisation and leadership of the co-ordinator are very good, and staff work well together. They meet regularly and have a high level of commitment. Written information is good and useful, procedures are clear and the organisation of special educational needs and English as an additional language in the school is efficient and supports pupils well. Deployment of support staff is very well managed.
61. Long-and medium-term planning are of very good quality. School development priorities are effectively incorporated in a plan that is based around whole-school issues and specific targets for subjects. Current whole school targets are related to raising standards of attainment, developing literacy at Key Stage 3 and the implementation of ICT through the curriculum. The development plan efficiently identifies appropriate staff responsibilities, training implications and resource requirements. The subsequent review cycle of the outcomes of the action plans is a very effective strategy for ensuring targets are met.
62. The governors and senior management produced a detailed response to the last inspection. The governors have regularly reported subsequent progress with the plan. Improvements in the quality of teaching are attributable to the successful implementation of the monitoring procedures by the senior management. Curriculum issues such as meeting the national curriculum requirements for science, religious education and information and communication technology have been improved. The provision for ICT in the curriculum has improved but this is not reflected in an adequate use of information and communication technology in most subjects. The arrangements for pupils with special educational needs are now more effective with a more consistent monitoring of individual requirements. The school assessment policy now provides appropriate guidelines for subject co-ordinators in the formation of procedures. Overall, the school has made very good progress since the last inspection
63. The overall ethos of the school is excellent and builds upon a sense of shared values and mutual support. Parents at the meeting with the registered inspector, prior to the inspection, commented particularly on the caring ethos of the school. All staff, teaching and non-teaching, work closely together and the sense of 'community' is a strength of the

school. The commitment of the staff in supporting the school's provision both in terms of its curriculum and extra-curricular work, allied to effective management systems, provides a very good basis for sustaining improvements in the future.

64. Financial planning is competent and efficient. The school development plan is effectively linked to budgetary decisions and financial commitments. The senior management team and the governors' financial committee work well together to produce a budget and monitor expenditure. The governors have prudently maintained the budget. Overall staffing costs are in line with national averages. Capitation for departments is allocated on the basis of development bids. These procedures are effective and ensure an equitable distribution of available funds. The overall, budget for learning resources is good and departments are efficient in ensuring the optimum use of their resources to ensure effective learning. The school closely monitors the use of funding for pupils with special educational needs and ensures that specific grants are used well and appropriately.
65. Effective procedures ensure good financial control. The relatively few recommendations of the last audited report have been successfully implemented. All spending is sufficiently monitored and regular financial statements are available for senior staff and governors. Subject development plans are effectively costed and relate well to the overall budgetary position of the school. The school monitors its expenditure very efficiently and ensures that the principles of 'best value' are applied systematically to its financial decisions. The overall quality of financial control and efficiency has continued to improve since the last inspection.
66. The school has worked hard to improve standards and has successfully promoted pupils' progress, learning and understanding. The high quality of education provided and the improving standards of teaching ensure that the school gives very good value for money.
67. Training needs are effectively based on the school development plan, especially whole-school issues. Once these have been satisfied the remaining training requirements, including those from appraisal, are prioritised. Appraisal procedures are very good. This has been continuous since 1993 and is based upon peer appraisal. Following the appraisal, a report is openly and constructively discussed with the headteacher and action points established.
68. The arrangements for the induction of new staff are excellent. Great care is taken to ensure that staff are monitored sympathetically and given every opportunity to refine their skills and improve their knowledge.
69. The match of teachers and support assistants to the demands of the curriculum is satisfactory. Generally there is a good match but weaknesses occur in design technology, where key expertise is lacking, and in Key Stage 3 where non-specialist teaching retards the progress of pupils. There is a significant improvement since the last inspection, when much use had to be made of supply teachers. Technician shortage remains a problem in design technology and will need to be addressed for the new computer suite. Staffing levels for special educational needs are good, enabling the department to provide very well for the pupils in its care. Support assistants receive good training from the special needs co-ordinator who also gives advice and help to teachers about support for pupils who have special needs.
70. The accommodation is much improved since the last inspection. It is now welcoming, bright and attractive and reflects the ethos of the school. For instance, the pupils' toilets are bright and pleasant, furnished with pot plants by the school's gardening club. The library

has been extended and is comfortable and welcoming. It has a good collection of books, including a collection on sport, which encourages boys to use the library. It is well used, some 60 books a week are borrowed. The weaknesses in the accommodation are the lack of science laboratories for some classes and the lack of music practice rooms. Accommodation in the special needs rooms is good and they are well equipped except for the lack of computers and software.

71. Resources are good in many subjects, particularly art, modern languages and physical education. There is a need for more cookers for design technology and more artefacts for religious education. The school makes good use of new technology to promote its smooth running and efficient administration.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to raise standards the school should

Improve test performance and attainment in the core subjects at Key Stage 2 by

- Using centralised assessment data to identify pupils who are underachieving
- Increasing pupils' independent learning skills

(Paragraphs: 2, 61, 73, 80, 88, 95)

Raise the standards of attainment by age 13 in design technology, and the quality of its management by

- Reviewing the curriculum provision for resistant materials at Key Stage 3.
- Improving the monitoring of pupils' progress and the assessment and recording of achievement.
- Ensuring relevant staff have appropriate training.
- Extending the level of staff expertise in the subject.

(Paragraphs: 11,48, 59, 69, 101, 105, 107, 110)

Improve the organisation and accuracy of written work at both key stages by

- Devising a more structured approach to the improvement of written work.
- Providing appropriate support and training for the implementation of school initiatives in this area.
- Ensuring subjects identify strategies for improving spelling and sentence construction.

(Paragraphs: 6,7,74,75,112,115,119)

Other issues for consideration

- Continue with the implementation of cross-curricular work in information technology.
(Paragraphs: 30,31,61,62,87,103,112,116,123,125,126)
- Identify more clearly levels of attainment in reports by referring to national benchmarks.
(Paragraphs: 54,109)
- Achieve a greater consistency in the development of numeracy skills across the curriculum.
(Paragraphs:21,115)
- Develop a computerised database of assessment information to determine targets for individual pupils.
(Paragraphs: 47,50,54,99,124,131)
- Extend the national learning strategies introduced in Key Stage 2 into Key Stage 3.
(Paragraphs: 61,79)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	86
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	20

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	27	43	26	1	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	1999-2000	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	358	N/A
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	87	N/A

Special educational needs	1999-2000	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	7	N/A
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	119	N/A

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	29

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	16
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	16

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	5.5
National comparative data	6.0

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	1.3
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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	54	27	81

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	28	33	38
	Girls	16	14	15
	Total	44	47	53
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	63(58)	58(49)	65(58)
	National	70(64)	69(58)	78(69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	32	36	35
	Girls	19	12	13
	Total	51	48	48
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	63(58)	59(62)	59(43)
	National	68(64)	69(64)	75(70)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	7
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	5
Indian	1
Pakistani	22
Bangladeshi	6
Chinese	0
White	313
Any other minority ethnic group	1

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: 1999-2000

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	18.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.9:1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y[] – Y[]

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	125

Deployment of teachers: Y[] – Y[]

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	80
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Average teaching group size: Y[] – Y[]

Key Stage 2	25.2
Key Stage 3	24.4
	n/a

Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	599853
Total expenditure	615447
Expenditure per pupil	1759
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	40000

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	359
Number of questionnaires returned	295

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	49	7	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	35	55	7	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	35	53	7	3	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	57	13	4	1
The teaching is good.	43	49	4	1	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	49	17	4	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	40	7	3	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	38	0	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	24	52	18	4	2
The school is well led and managed.	44	47	5	2	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	52	8	2	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	45	44	6	1	3

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

ENGLISH

72. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests, at the end of Key Stage 2, attainment was below the average of all schools but above the average for similar schools for the proportion of pupils attaining level 4 or above. The number of pupils gaining level 5 or above was well below the national average. In recent years, girls have attained more highly than boys but by a narrower margin than is found nationally. The trend of improvement in the same period has been similar to the national pattern.
73. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 and in Year 8 is in line with national expectations, except in writing where it is below average. Limited language skills evident at entry improve significantly during Key Stage 2, but progress over the range of skills is uneven. Pupils listen carefully to teachers and, increasingly, to each other with good understanding. They speak clearly and communicate confidently using a satisfactory range of vocabulary. They are keen to use technical terms when discussing aspects of language or features of poetry. Accuracy in the understanding of such terms is better in some classes than in others. In the best examples, pupils are able to discuss technical effects with confidence and good understanding. Pupils read aloud with increasing confidence and accuracy. Most recognise mistakes and are able to correct them. When they encounter unfamiliar words, an increasing number can suggest possible meanings. They know how to use dictionaries. The choral reading of pupils has good quality. A Year 5 class showed good understanding of the meaning, rhythms and technical features of a range of poems and very high levels of enjoyment. Almost all read with at least satisfactory understanding of the main sense and an increasingly significant minority can recognise, without undue reliance upon teachers' help, why some details are especially important and why writers have included them.
74. Skills of writing are weaker than those of speaking, listening and reading. At the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils can communicate their ideas in recognisable sentences and paragraphs and understand that different styles are needed for different purposes. They have too few opportunities to learn to organise material when writing at length. Their work often shows vigour in the choice of words and some good creative writing is produced. They take care with the presentation of their work. The quality of written work of most pupils, including some with otherwise good writing skills, is reduced by the frequency of misspelling of words in everyday use, and other errors such as mistakes of elementary grammar and confusion of capital and lower case letters.
75. A similar balance of general strengths and weaknesses is evident in the work of the oldest pupils (Year 8). Classes considering how a character in their class reader might have kept a diary recognised important features of diaries in a range of examples. They read aloud confidently and accurately and with satisfactory levels of understanding. Pupils preparing to write the diary of a character in a novel gained understanding from being introduced to examples of real and fictional diaries. Although they do not use technical language as accurately as some younger pupils, most can recognise important details of what they read and higher attaining pupils can explain their significance. At this stage, almost all pupils write with increased ambition in their use of vocabulary and communicate clearly. Some produce verse of exceptional quality. However, the kinds of error evident in Key Stage 2 continue to reduce quality.
76. At both key stages, pupils have very positive attitudes to their work. They are interested, enthusiastic, work hard and behave very well. They are confident in their relationships with teachers and each other so that they are able to suggest possible answers and explore

ideas knowing that their contributions will be valued. For these reasons, pupils at all levels of attainment make good progress in lessons and over time. Progress of both the highest and lowest attaining pupils in the mixed ability classes in Key Stage 3 is sometimes assisted by the provision of different levels of challenge in the tasks set, but not consistently. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because they are well motivated and very well helped by learning support assistants either in lessons or when withdrawn for specialist teaching. The targets identified in the education plans of many of these pupils are too imprecise to indicate how class teachers might most effectively help them to improve.

77. The quality of teaching is good, often very good and occasionally excellent. It is never less than satisfactory. At Key Stage 2, teachers have successfully adopted styles of teaching and lesson organisation to match the requirements of the literacy hour. Subject knowledge is generally appropriate and often very good though occasional insecurities are evident in the use of technical terms. At both key stages, teachers explain tasks clearly, linking them to previous and future work. They end lessons with a summary of what has been learned which reinforces pupils learning. Almost always, they ensure that pupils are actively engaged in discussion, reading or writing throughout lessons rather than in listening to unsuitably lengthy explanations. Mostly, teachers make good use of questions both to test and to extend pupils understanding. They have high expectations of pupils effort, attainment and behaviour and their own enthusiasms have a positive effect on their classes.
78. The curriculum meets legal requirements. Drama cannot be taught since no appropriate room is available. The subject provides opportunities for pupils to use word processors but does not make a planned contribution to their development of skills in information technology. Improvement since the last inspection is good; there are more opportunities provided for pupils at Key Stage 2 to work in pairs or groups. Attainment at this key stage now more closely matches assessed abilities. The capacity for further improvement will be strengthened by the introduction of a structured approach to the improvement of the accuracy of written work. In addition, an extension into Key Stage 3 of some features of teaching and learning, such as the balance of activities within lessons which are successful at Key Stage 2, would enhance the development of pupils' skills and understanding.

MATHEMATICS

79. Pupils performance in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 2, based on the average National Curriculum points score they obtained from 1996 to 1999, was well below the national average. Results have improved year-on-year over this period and are anticipated to be very close to the national average this year. Overall performance in 1999 is in line with that of pupils in similar schools. Boys produced better results than girls, but boys formed a larger share of that year group. Standardised test results achieved by the 1999 Year 8 cohort were above average.
80. Inspection evidence shows that, by the end of Key Stage 2, pupils attainment overall is in line with national expectations. Pupils in the highest attaining class in Year 6 for mathematics achieve above average standards while others achieve average or below average standards. By and large, the more able pupils are competent across the various aspects of mathematics. For example, they cope well with questions involving negative numbers, are confident in dealing with decimals and fractions and determine angles in a triangle. Many lower attaining pupils lack confidence in their ability and do not readily recall the basic multiplication tables. They are better in their knowledge and understanding of reflective symmetry when it is considered in a practical context such as using centi-cubes on plastic grids.

81. Pupils attainment by the end of Year 8 is also in line with national expectations overall. Higher attaining pupils understand and use the concept of ratio in a range of problems, complete long multiplication questions successfully and enlarge shapes by various scale factors. Middle set pupils have sound number skills which enable them to appreciate and make use of short-cut methods of rearranging problems for ease of mental calculation. Lower attaining pupils have limited mental skills. Most can deal with simple addition but are handicapped by their incomplete recall of the harder multiplication facts.
82. Pupils attitude to their work is very good and their behaviour is exemplary. They listen attentively to the teacher and to other pupils when they are responding to a question. Pupils are interested in mathematics and keen to make progress, as shown by the high rate of attendance at after-school booster sessions in the subject. They always settle to class-work tasks promptly and sensibly.
83. The quality of teaching is good and sometimes very good in most lessons; it is never less than satisfactory. Pupils prior attainment in mathematics is below average when they enter the school. The quality of teaching enables them to make good progress in lessons and over longer periods of time. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject and are enthusiastic about it. In many lessons teachers enhance pupils literacy skills, by, for example, displaying mathematics vocabulary prominently in the classroom, making sure pupils write proper sentences and that they understand the meaning of mathematical words. Teachers prepare lessons very effectively, building on pupils' previous knowledge by making sure they know and understand relevant work from previous lessons before embarking on the next stage. This is necessary because some pupils find it difficult to recall key points from their earlier work.
84. Teachers use a wide range of teaching styles to help pupils acquire mathematical skills and knowledge and they manage pupils very effectively. They take due account of National Numeracy Strategies to enliven lessons and enhance pupils learning. Teachers often begin lessons with mental work, to sharpen pupils skills, and then involve pupils in whole-class activities and discussion in an effective way to reinforce their knowledge and understanding still further. For example, in a very good Year 6 lesson, the teacher formed two teams who proceeded to add pairs of negative numbers. Later, pupils were encouraged to come to the whiteboard to write their answers and explain their methods for finding remainders and fractions in a series of questions on division. This considerably enhanced pupils interest in the topic and concentration on it. In a small minority of lessons the teacher held forth and did not give pupils sufficient opportunities to make contributions.
85. In most lessons the time is used well; on very few occasions was any part of a lesson over extended. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, especially when helped by support staff. Teachers use resources well to make concepts clearer to pupils, particularly when pupils are fully involved in relevant discussion. For example, Year 7 pupils were greatly helped to understand how to calculate the area of a parallelogram when the teacher held up the shape and then through skilful questioning drew the appropriate method from the pupils themselves, eventually demonstrating by folding a corner of the parallelogram. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and conscientiously and give appropriate homework.
86. The co-ordination of mathematics is very effective, teachers are highly conscientious and they work well together. For example, colleagues covered the sudden absence of a key member of staff very competently and professionally so that the pupils were not adversely affected. There is a very high level of in-service training to meet needs of both the school and teachers themselves. There has been good progress since the last inspection. Pupils

attainment in Key Stage 2 tests is markedly better and there are clear targets for improving it still further. All pupils achieve levels at or above their capacity. Teachers build in mental and oral work to lessons regularly and systematically to raise pupils standards in this important aspect. The use of information technology in mathematics is still at an early stage of development.

SCIENCE

87. In the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 2, attainment is below the national average, but matches the averages for similar schools. Results have shown an improving trend over recent years. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls.
88. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils are only marginally below national expectations at the end of Key Stage 2 and confirms the continuing trend of improvement. Pupils carry out investigations and record their observations appropriately, for example when they investigate solvents and solutions. They recognise a saturated solution and use relevant vocabulary to describe their observations. They understand the concept of fair tests. Weaknesses are in contributing to the planning of investigations and in drawing conclusions from what they have observed. They predict what will happen and are frequently correct and recognise it as a learning experience when they are not. Pupils show a satisfactory understanding of scientific concepts and work safely and competently when carrying out investigations in the laboratory in Year 6. Pupils work collaboratively in groups in classrooms and in the laboratory.
89. At the end of Year 8, overall attainment is below national expectations. Most pupils have a satisfactory understanding of scientific concepts, for example when they investigate electrical circuits and they predict the brightness of the lamp when the orientation of batteries is changed. They understand the principles of the water cycle. Knowledge of some materials and their properties is superficial. For example, they can describe solids, liquids and gases but are less sure about the arrangement of particles within them. They have sound practical skills and are aware of safe working practice. They make relevant predictions but often need help to guide their thinking and for drawing conclusions about what they have observed.
90. Pupils achievement in relation to their prior attainment is good in both key stages. They progressively build knowledge and understanding through a well-structured programme of investigations. In Year 5 pupils are beginning to understand the processes by which they learn. They use this to advantage when they work in groups to research a topic which they later present to the whole class. This activity encourages the development of speaking and listening skills and their ability to take notes from an early age. In Year 6, most pupils have access to laboratory experience that increases their understanding of scientific investigations, which they learn to carry out systematically and safely. Laboratory experience is increased in Year 7 and pupils make good progress with learning new skills and concepts as well as building on those introduced in Key Stage 2. The transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 is smooth and effective because teachers know the pupils well and there is good liaison between staff and effective recording of previous work and standards achieved.

91. Pupils attitudes to learning are very good. They are keen to learn and curious about what they are investigating. They concentrate well and work sensibly in pairs or small groups. They ask questions and are confident in expressing their ideas when answering questions. The high levels of motivation together with good teaching are significant in the progress pupils make in the long-and short-term. Pupils are very well behaved and trustworthy with equipment.
92. The quality of teaching is good and sometimes very good - it is never less than satisfactory. The latter lessons tend to be in classrooms where the limited resources available restrict the range of activities. Nevertheless, teachers cope well and achieve the best possible results. Basic skills of numeracy and literacy are well taught in all lessons with good use of key words for each topic which are introduced relevantly and in context. In two classes in Year 5, literacy skills are exceptionally well taught and prepare pupils effectively to undertake work in Key Stage 3. Non-specialist teachers generally have adequate subject knowledge but with some minor gaps. Their good teaching skills together with support from the subject co-ordinator compensate well for this. The very good subject knowledge of subject specialists provides pupils with a rich and varied experience as well as depth of knowledge. All teachers who contribute to the teaching of science have good and particular knowledge and experience to contribute and increased sharing of these qualities would be of benefit to the development of the subject.
93. Teachers have very good relationships with pupils, which encourage their co-operation in lessons. Practical investigations are carried out rigorously by specialists. In consequence the quality of learning is very good and pupils make good progress in lessons and over time, as is evidenced by the rising standards in the subject. Occasionally, tasks are not sufficiently well organised to encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own learning, for example in the planning and writing up of investigations, without unduly being dependent on teachers. Higher attaining pupils are provided with challenging work and opportunities for extended writing and research. Teachers encourage the use of computers for presentation of work and for research. Teachers positively encourage questions and readily involve pupils in discussion as for example in a Year 7 class about water. The overall excitement about science and the positive learning ethos engendered by teachers contribute significantly to the good quality of learning of pupils.
94. The assessment of pupils work and the recording of progress over time play an important part in the monitoring of the subject, which is effectively used to plan future work and to raise standards. Leadership of the department is very good and there is clear direction for the work of the subject. Policies and procedures are clearly thought through and statutory requirements are met. There is a shared commitment to raise standards and a willingness to learn on the part of staff. Although support time is limited, the part-time technician makes a good contribution towards the smooth running of the department. The work of learning support assistants is well managed and in consequence provision for and the progress of pupils with special educational needs is good. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. Because of the positive attitudes, the strong leadership, and good teaching skills, the department has the capacity to continue to make good improvements in the future; particularly in the area of increasing pupils independent learning skills in order to raise attainment.

ART

95. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 is at the national average, and in Year 8 it is above the national average. There is strong evidence of good progress from Years 5 to 8, and the greatest progress is with the specialist teacher. Pupils with special needs attain well in art, and higher attaining pupils are given work commensurate with their abilities. Standards in work using art-specific ICT are above the national average. In both Years 6 and 7 lessons pupils with special needs attain very well - producing exciting work of a high standard. For example, a Year 7 pupil with special educational need produced a multiple image of a door - part of the architecture project - using colour and line manipulation techniques to produce a very effective image. By year 8 pupils are manipulating images in very complex ways, using rotation, reflection, repetition and distortion effectively; they are also aware of what the program can not do. The ICT work in art is of an exceptionally high standard. Year 8 were in the early stages of producing three-dimensional work of good quality using a range of materials and skills, and based on direct observation and analysis. Display is very well used in the school to celebrate pupils' achievements. Every year, the year 7 pupils take part in the Lions International Peace Poster competition, and have consistently won the Redditch competition - last year a pupil won the Midlands Regional heat.
96. Pupil attitudes and behaviour are very good at Key Stage 2 and excellent at Key Stage 3. Pupils are very open and positive, showing great enthusiasm for their work in art. Characteristics seen included deep concentration, and total commitment. Pupils are strongly mutually supportive, and rise to the challenges set. In a year 8 lesson there was a buzz of excitement; hard work and a sense of fun fed on each other to great effect.
97. Teaching and learning are very good at Key Stage 2 and excellent at Key Stage 3. The professional support given to the non-specialist teachers at Key Stage 2 is very good, and gives the staff a sense of security and confidence. Teaching is regularly monitored throughout the department. In the best teaching, clear targets and criteria are established, and pupils know exactly what is expected of them, and how they are to attain good quality results. In Year 7 and 8 lessons the teachers enthusiasm and skill were effectively communicated to pupils, who responded with equal enthusiasm. Management and classroom organisation are excellent, with a constant focus on basic art skills and individually based refinement. Pupils consequently feel secure enough to take risks in a workshop atmosphere. There is an excellent working ethos involving both enjoyment and the pursuit of high standards. ICT teaching is excellent, including very good use of support staff with pupils having special needs.
98. Leadership and management in art are very good and effective. All teaching of art at Key Stage 3 is by the specialist, who also works with some classes at Key Stage 2 while supporting the non-specialists in the other classes. The art room is very good - the non-specialist spaces less so, with access to a sink causing a management problem in year 5. Since the art room is sometimes used for the teaching of other subjects, its use is less than efficient. Resources are very good. The curriculum is broad and balanced, and preparation for Curriculum 2000 is well in hand; the information and communication technology element of the curriculum is very good, supporting numeracy, and helping to develop spatial awareness. Support for spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions from art is very good. The assessment system and practice is very good, but there is scope for further development of the pupil self-assessment aspect.
99. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The specific issue about assessment system and practice has been fully resolved – this is now a very good department.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

100. Standards of attainment match national expectations at the end of Key Stage 2 and are below them at the end of Year 8. There are insufficient numbers of appropriately qualified staff to teach pupils to the expected standard for their age and ability in Key Stage 3. This reflects a similar picture to the previous inspection findings. No records of the attainment of pupils were available to demonstrate changes over time.
101. At the end of Key Stage 2, pupils have a satisfactory understanding of the design process which they use to good effect when they design novelty paper clips and pen holders using plastic. Construction skills are average and pupils demonstrate a sound understanding of structures when they describe the use of the triangle as the basis of a rigid structure. They have a satisfactory understanding of the ingredients they use and they modify recipes to design cakes for special occasions. Pupils work confidently and competently when they are engaged in practical tasks and they have a good awareness of safety.
102. At the end of Year 8, pupils have satisfactory design skills which they use to develop functional plastic cup holders for example, but making skills are below average and products are not finished to a high enough standard. Insufficient use is made of computers to enhance the presentation of work in both graphic and text forms, for example for their project on packaging for pens. Practical work available for inspection demonstrated a limited range of materials and skills that were below average for the age and ability of pupils.
103. Achievement is good at Key Stage 2 where pupils make appropriate progress with learning to design imaginatively and practically. The standard and use of design work has significantly improved since the previous inspection. Because they learn about the ingredients they use, pupils are better prepared to design their own recipes or modify standard recipes. They make good progress with designing products from plastic and using appropriate tools such as the strip heater to bend and shape them.
104. At the end of Year 8 overall achievement is below expectations. Pupils' design skills are good and they are being well prepared to look at commercial products critically as consumers. However, they do not improve their making skills sufficiently to reach appropriately high standards of construction or in the finish of their work. Pupils experience is restricted by the insufficiency of appropriate teaching expertise at this key stage. Pupils with special educational needs make progress similar to others at both key stages. In Key Stage 2, appropriately challenging work is provided and pupils are well supported by teachers.
105. At both key stages pupils have good attitudes to learning and they are very well behaved in lessons. They enjoy the opportunity to work creatively and to engage in practical activities. Occasionally they become restless and lose concentration but this is usually when they are required to spend too much time on writing activities. They are well aware of safety considerations and take good care when they use tools and machines.
106. Evidence of the inspection confirms that the overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. It is better in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 3. In lessons observed during the inspection the quality of teaching was good in most and never less than satisfactory. However, the range of teacher expertise is inadequate to cover all aspects of the subject at Key Stage 3, resistant materials, food and textiles. Teachers knowledge and understanding of the subject is satisfactory at Key Stage 2 and lessons are well planned to interest and motivate pupils. Lack of technician or other adult support and the limited availability of other resources restrict the range of activities in some classes. Teachers explain tasks very clearly so that pupils work confidently and safely.

107. An appropriate emphasis is placed on teaching about care for the environment and the materials used in lessons. Some lessons in Key Stage 2 are planned to be appropriately challenging for all pupils. There is suitable emphasis on the development of design skills but expectations are not high enough for practical work at Key Stage 3. Work is marked regularly, using the schools marking system, and teachers make constructive and helpful comments to help pupils to improve. There is no technician support, which leads to teachers time being inefficiently used.
108. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Pupils are provided with a broad and balanced experience but there is not enough challenge for pupils at Key Stage 3. Assessment of pupils work and monitoring of their progress over time against national criteria are unsatisfactory.
109. Management of the subject overall is unsatisfactory. There is an appropriate scheme of work in place for both key stages but at Key Stage 3 some features are insufficiently developed. Monitoring of pupils attainment and progress is inadequate at both key stages and not enough use is made of new technology. Since the previous inspection there has been some improvement to the teaching of design but there has been no improvement to the provision for resistant materials in Key Stage 3. The capacity to improve will be restricted until additional specialist staffing and technician support is available.

GEOGRAPHY

110. Attainment in lessons and work seen is good at the end of Key Stage 2 and in Year 8. Pupils in Year 6 have a good knowledge of a range of places in the UK and abroad and know the characteristics of such physical features as river basins. Understanding of the effects of rivers upon the land through which they flow, and of seasonal variations is good. Pupils are able to make comparisons between places, making relevant reference to characteristics such as location and weather, when, for example, in the role of travel agents, carrying out an exercise in which they recommend UK holiday destinations to customers with particular requirements. Vocabulary is proficient for all and good for many, with sophisticated terms such as deposition and precipitation being confidently and accurately used. Many are developing good enquiry techniques and are able to record findings in a variety of ways, including charts and graphs, and some make good reference to maps in their written work.
111. In Year 8, pupils have an appropriately developed level of knowledge and are able to make contrasts between the regions in countries that they learn about, when for example, comparing Aosta, the Mediterranean Coast and Sicily, when studying Italy. There is good awareness of the general factors affecting population distribution and ability to apply this to particular cases, when, for example, explaining why their home region is relatively crowded. Most, however, while able to identify such factors, do not yet explain them fully. Most can create legible and relevant maps to show such factors as population distribution and can interpret bar and pie charts when answering questions on comparative growth rates of various world cities. Use of ICT in such work is, however, rare. The level of pupils achievement, including those with special educational needs, is generally good, as they make good progress from their starting points at the beginning of key stages, particularly in Key Stage 2.
112. The general level of response is good and standards of behaviour in geography lessons are very good. Pupils listen well to teachers and to each other, sustain their concentration and collaborate willingly when working in pairs. Response to questioning is good, although

it does not often develop into extended discussion and in some lessons, pupils are very co-operative, rather than markedly enthusiastic.

113. The quality of teaching is good in both key stages and is sometimes very good in Key Stage 2. In most lessons, there is good integration of knowledge of places, understanding of geographical themes and geographical skills, which strengthens the progress of pupils in developing a well-rounded awareness of geographical patterns and processes. In one Year 7 lesson, for example, pupils developed their understanding of the effects of floods on people in Bangladesh that built upon a sound foundation of general knowledge about the country, supported by the ability to locate it in the context of physical and political features of its region. In the few cases where integration is not so good, there is insufficient reference in planning to geographical skills. The effect is that opportunities to reinforce such important skills as interpretation of maps and reference to globes and atlases, in order to fix the location of places learned about and identify relevant physical and human features, are not maximised.
114. Teachers often plan well to meet the differing needs of their pupils, so that work is manageable for all and provides increased challenge for those capable of meeting it. Pupils are managed well, with tasks being clearly time limited and monitored, so that pace and focus are strongly encouraged when pupils are working individually and in pairs. There is good support for the development of literacy skills, with appropriate focus on the development of geographical vocabulary and, in some lessons, the use of writing frames to support pupils in developing structured, extended writing. However, there is insufficient systematic planning of the contribution to numeracy skills, so that the considerable potential of this aspect is not maximised. The main weakness is in the quality of marking, which is characterised by lack of dialogue or guidance on improvement. Spelling mistakes, including key geographical terms, are often uncorrected.
115. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory overall. There has been a significant improvement in the availability and quality of textbooks, so that the level of these resources is now good. Standards are now more consistently in line with national expectations for age and pupils are now well supported in developing and using correct geographical terminology. The level of provision of opportunities for extended enquiry for the more able has improved, but needs to continue to do so. However, ICT continues to be insufficiently used and objectives, in relation to the opportunities to be provided for pupils to reinforce geographical skills, are still not always clear in planning. Lack of suitable blackout facilities remains a problem in at least one classroom.
116. The local community makes very good contribution to the learning of geography. Local visits, which provide productive contexts for pupils to develop and apply their fieldwork skills, take place regularly. There are also very good links with the schools partner institutions. The school participates fully in the Redditch Schools Geography Pyramid, which has formulated a common syllabus outline for all schools in the town. This ensures full coverage and continuity, which are particularly important in a situation in which pupils do not take a complete, legally required, key stage in one school. It also provides a productive forum for allowing the co-ordinator to participate with colleagues from other schools, in promoting and developing the subject.
117. The leadership and management of the subject are good. A strength is the extent of support that is given to the non-specialist colleagues who teach the subject, which they clearly value. This balances clear, strong guidance with opportunities for teachers to exercise creativity in planning and teaching. However, to maximise the impact of this, it is important that there is as much staff continuity, from year to year, as possible. There is a

general need to monitor and develop some aspects of teaching, such as marking more fully.

HISTORY

118. By the end of Key Stage 2 attainment is in line with national expectations. Most pupils are able to understand chronology and the main characteristics of the periods being studied. They understand that an event can have a number of causes, and recognise change and continuity. This is evident when pupils in Year 5 made comparisons of maps of the Old and New World when discussing the journeys of explorers. Average and higher attainers appropriately organise and communicate their ideas in various forms of extended writing. Year 5 pupils, for example, wrote imaginative pieces of work on what they thought it would be like to have been a sailor on board an explorer's ship. Some pupils have sound skills of researching and recording evidence, promoted through project work. They select information relevantly from a range of sources suited to their different attainment needs and satisfactorily record their conclusions in simple sentences. Higher attaining pupils are beginning to use a wider range of sources to make more evaluative judgements, as when Year 6 pupils examined a variety of evidence on the qualities required of different slaves in Sparta. However, such skills of critical analysis are only occasionally seen in lower attainers.
119. By the end of Year 8, pupils levels of attainment are broadly in line with those expected for their age. Nearly all pupils, including those with special educational needs, have a sound knowledge and understanding of the main features of the periods studied. Pupils are developing enquiry skills especially if clear objectives have been set by the teacher, as for example in a Year 7 lesson when pupils were studying the advantages of the Feudal System. Some higher attainers are beginning to prioritise various causes, as, for example, when Year 8 pupils considered the social background of the native Americans, and the major characteristics of their lifestyle.
120. Pupils achievement is satisfactory in both key stages. They progressively build knowledge and understanding through a well-structured programme. In Year 5 pupils begin to use their developing historical skills to advantage when they investigate a topic which they later discuss with the whole class. This activity encourages the development of speaking and listening skills and their ability to take notes. Pupils at Key Stage 2 develop an understanding of sequencing and learn to distinguish between different kinds of sources and between facts and opinions. By Key Stage 3, satisfactory progress is being made in developing more confidence and fluency with oral skills through group activities and the teachers' active use of questioning the class. The transition from Key Stage 2 to 3 is smooth and effective because teachers know the pupils well and there is good liaison between staff and effective recording of previous work.
121. The attitude of pupils to work in lessons is mostly good and is never less than satisfactory. Nearly all pupils listen attentively, settle to their work quickly and concentrate well for the whole lesson. They behave very well and have a good relationship with their teacher. They co-operate well and show respect for each other's views and feelings. Nearly all pupils are able to work effectively by themselves or in a group when given the opportunity. Many are enthusiastic and this leads them to ask pertinent questions or volunteer their own answers. Pupils across the attainment range take pride in their work and presentation, and work is rarely left uncompleted. Lower attainers and those with special educational needs frequently strive hard to succeed, especially when supported by the appropriate materials.

122. The quality of teaching is generally satisfactory and sometimes good. Most teachers are non-specialists but have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the subject. Their good teaching skills, allied to the support from the subject co-ordinator, compensate appropriately for this. Lessons are usually well planned, following a prescribed format, with clear learning objectives that the pupils understand. Basic skills of literacy are well taught in most lessons with good use of key words for each topic. The high level of prescription in some lessons leads to insufficient variety in teaching methods and affects the productivity in pupils' learning. However, careful consideration is given to matching the materials used to the requirements of lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. Classroom management and control are good, with high standards of discipline and good relationships with the pupils. More opportunities for group work are needed and provision for independent enquiry using information technology. In the single lesson where teaching was unsatisfactory a clear focus was not provided for the lesson and pupils were not engaged in suitably challenging tasks. Homework is set and marked regularly, but there are inconsistencies in the quality of the supportive comments in order to encourage pupils to improve.
123. Ten teachers, mostly non-specialists, teach history. The co-ordinator provides clear educational direction for work in the subject and sets appropriate standards for teaching and expectations of pupils. Teaching schemes of work have been effectively developed and the availability of learning resources, particularly textbooks, has improved. A good programme of outside visits and visiting speakers supports the curriculum. The monitoring of teaching by the co-ordinator needs to be more regular to encourage the spread of good practice. There are appropriate assessment procedures that are well linked to moderation meetings to achieve consistency in the subject. Assessment results of whole year groups are not yet being centrally recorded or analysed to plan teaching or identify targets for pupils; this is a weakness. Overall, however, there has been good progress since the last inspection.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

124. In lessons in which information and communication technology is taught, or is a significant factor, attainment is above national averages at the end of Key Stage 2, and in Year 8. However, limitations on opportunities to develop basic skills in ICT courses, and to systematically and progressively apply and consolidate these in a range of subject contexts, mean that this is not fully reflected in overall attainment levels in pupils work. Nevertheless, work produced is generally in line with national averages in both key stages.
125. At the end of Key Stage 2, most pupils know the purposes of a range of hardware and software and can competently word process their work, many use formatting facilities well to enhance the presentational impact. Most capably use a sophisticated database and are developing a range of techniques, such as filtering and transferring information from databases to spreadsheets, to an extent that is ahead of normal expectations for their age. Understanding of the respective uses of software such as word processors and PowerPoint packages is good. In Year 8, pupils are developing their ability to search the Internet and are able to extract relevant information and paste it into a word processor. They can translate information in spreadsheet tables into a variety of graphical formats such as scatter graphs and bar and pie charts, often exercising higher skills such as the use of trend lines in graphs. In both key stages, however, knowledge, skills and understanding of control and measuring software and techniques are much more limited. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in those aspects of ICT in which they have opportunities to develop their capability, mainly when they use computers to handle and communicate information. However, achievement is considerably lower in using

computers to control equipment and take measurements, due to limited opportunities to work in these aspects.

126. Pupils attitudes to opportunities to work with computers are very good. They always behave well and enthusiasm is high. Pupils work together well in pairs, in which they share ideas and tasks and this mode of working often provides a context in which boys and girls collaborate on an equal basis. Some Year 8 pupils volunteer to be monitors, exercising a high degree of responsibility and initiative in the role, when they provide valuable assistance to teachers in supporting other pupils and managing lunch-time drop-in sessions.
127. The overall quality of teaching is good and in Key Stage 2 it is very good. Here, teachers exercise high expectations in teaching and requiring good practice and use of correct technical vocabulary, providing challenging tasks on sophisticated software and encouraging pupils to make choices about software and approaches. This encourages positive responses and supports pupils in making good progress in those aspects in which they work and achieving to the maximum extent of which they are capable. The only significant weakness is that opportunities for pupils to benefit from the high quality of teaching are currently very limited, as taught ICT lessons only occur fortnightly during two terms of Year 5. However, the school is aware of the need to increase the number of ICT lessons and is now in a position to do so, following a recent significant improvement in resources.
128. In Key Stage 3, where ICT is not taught as a separate subject, there is a more variable range and quality of teaching in the context of other subjects. The best teaching takes place most consistently in the context of science and art, where the general level is good. In these lessons objectives are clearly stated and work is based well in real tasks, which enhance learning of the subject in which they take place and provide good opportunities to develop ICT capability, when for example, finding information on the water cycle to support work in science. Tasks are planned to be manageable for all, but also to provide an appropriate challenge for those capable of working at higher levels. Strengths overwhelmingly outnumber weaknesses in such lessons, although there is sometimes a need to establish key terms more fully, so that, when for example, using the Internet, pupils are fully aware of the meaning and purposes of such concepts as addresses, filtering and world-wide web. Marking is good in both key stages, encouraging pupils and guiding them on how to improve. The most significant priority for improvement is to extend the currently restricted range of cross-curricular opportunities to work with ICT, in both key stages and here again, the school is developing plans to utilise its recently enhanced availability of resources.
129. Because pupils often work with text and numbers in highly motivating contexts, when using software such as word processors and spreadsheets, the development of literacy and numeracy skills is often supported well. In one Year 8 lesson, for example, work made a significant contribution to the development of literacy skills, when pupils searched the Internet to find relevant information which they then pasted into an extended, structured, piece of word processing. During this work, many pupils, working in pairs, exercised higher level skills in scanning and skimming pages of information and effectively discussed with their partners their choices for extraction.
130. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. All issues that faced the subject have been addressed at least to some extent. Direct teaching of ICT and its use across the curriculum are increasing and this is planned to continue. The very good links that exist with partner institutions, in which pupils spend some of each key stage, enable the co-ordinator to be confident that pupils receive their basic entitlement, even though

some of this is in another school. Detailed planning of the National Curriculum scheme of work now exists and its implementation is addressed in the development plan. Assessment procedures are being put into place, including moderation of teachers' assessments and teacher-moderated pupil self-assessment. The pupil: computer ratio now matches that of similar schools and the balance of stock is now much more up to date and achieves a greater level of standardisation. There is still a need to train many teachers in the use of ICT, but plans to do this within the New Opportunities Funding Scheme, implementation of which had been awaiting the availability of the recently installed network, can now go ahead. Although the need for further improvement remains, the capacity to address this is very good. The co-ordinator has a realistic awareness of what remains to be accomplished and a clear vision of the developing role of the subject in the school. However, the school is now reaching the point where it needs to consider how it will provide technical support, so that staff can confidently apply their developing skills in their teaching while the co-ordinator is able to concentrate fully on the further development of the ICT curriculum.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

131. Pupils study French as their modern foreign language starting in Year 6 although they are not required to study a foreign language before the start of Key Stage 3.
132. When pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8 attainment is broadly in line with that expected of pupils of the same age. The previous inspection reported that achievement was unsatisfactory in years 7 and 8. Attainment has clearly risen since that time and inspection evidence suggests that standards are still rising quickly. The decision to teach French in Year 6 is a contributory factor in this improvement, but good teaching and pupils improved behaviour and attitudes to work are more important. There are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls, or across the four aspects of the subject. Because there is greater emphasis on speaking in many of the lessons, this is marginally the strongest of the aspects. There are no significant differences across different levels of attainment. For example, higher attaining pupils and those with special educational needs attain good standards in relation to their prior ability and make good progress. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils can answer questions, in a basic way, about such topics as the days and months of the year, numbers, classroom objects and greetings. This provides a very good base for work in Key Stage 3.
133. By the end of Year 8, when pupils leave the school, they are able to speak and write about such things as the weather, the clothes people wear, their daily routine and their school timetables. Pupils listen carefully to the teacher and to other pupils when they are speaking and, the vast majority of pupils learn the basic vocabulary necessary to understand the teacher's instructions in French and to respond appropriately. Pupils are confident speakers and try hard with pronunciation. Most are able to make responses and to carry out short conversations in pairs or with the teacher. Higher attaining pupils are able to carry out longer conversations and to vary their use of language to suit different situations. Higher attaining pupils in a Year 7 class, for example, were able to hold good conversations with partners about their likes and dislikes in school subjects, about leisure activities and about their families and pets. There is no specific reading course in French, but pupils have sufficient opportunities for practice through the commercially produced course in use which is supplemented by good materials produced by the teacher. The majority of pupils are competent readers of simple texts usually to find the answers to questions. In their written work pupils progress from copying and writing single words and short phrases to writing some sentences from memory. Higher attaining pupils are able to write short

paragraphs with correct gender for nouns, with agreement of adjectives and correct punctuation. Correct spelling is not a strength of the majority of written work.

134. The quality of teaching is good. A strong feature of all of the teaching is very good pupil control that is achieved without fuss and with good humour. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection that reported 'shortcomings in teaching.' The school and the subject co-ordinator have worked hard to improve pupils attitudes to work. Previously pupils were said to be uncooperative and had unsatisfactory attitudes. Pupils attitudes to work are now good and their behaviour in class is very good. There are very good relationships between pupils and with their teachers. These are the major contributory factors in raising attainment. In class, both teacher and pupils make good use of French and there is very little English spoken in most lessons. This means that pupils make the most of opportunities to really practise and develop their language skills in 'real' situations. In lessons the teacher has high expectations of pupils both when they are speaking and writing and pupils try hard with their work to 'get it right.' The teacher has good teaching strategies which may include imaginative use of the overhead projector, pair and group work, writing and listening tasks, skilled use of question and answer techniques as well as music and mime. These are an important factor in maintaining pupils interest and concentration over 70-minute periods.
135. The subject makes a good contribution to both literacy and numeracy. In most lessons there is some element of grammar or punctuation that contributes to literacy development. An interesting feature of many lessons is 'The Carol Vordeman' session where pupils show their skill in basic arithmetic, with all processes completed in French, and this makes a contribution to numeracy above that which is often found in the subject. The subject makes a satisfactory contribution to information technology. Pupils use computers to produce a number of pieces of work that include a variety of fonts and sizes of print as well as some use of pictures. Year 8 pupils, for instance, produce good quality menus for their imaginary restaurant. The new computer centre is now operational and the subject co-ordinator is looking to further develop the use of information technology in French.
136. Many of the 70-minute lessons are too long for pupils of this age to sustain concentration and they tend to 'run out of steam' from time to time in spite of the efforts of the teacher and the pupils. There are good procedures in place for measuring pupils attainment and progress. The data provided is being used to check on such issues as progress of girls and boys and whether progress is uniform across classes. The use of assessment for discussing pupils individual strengths and weaknesses or for setting individual targets is not yet developed. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils moral, social and cultural development. There is a strong moral dimension in lessons and pupils are taught right from wrong. There is also a social element in most lessons where pupils have opportunities to listen to others, work together in pairs and groups and to share and take turns. The school choir also sings in French and performs at the local Festival Of Languages. There is an after school French Club which is developing well. Each year there is a school trip to France and this provides very good social, personal and cultural development.
137. The subject was a key issue for improvement in the previous report, which drew attention to low standards, poor pupil attitudes, unsatisfactory teaching, limited resources and lack of assessment. The senior management of the school and the subject co-ordinator have shown outstanding leadership in addressing all these issues and in bringing the subject to a

position where standards are rising rapidly. The subject has made excellent progress since the previous report.

Music

138. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils attainment is in line with national expectations. In Year 5 pupils perform accurately and confidently showing an awareness of phrasing. They listen carefully to play their own instrumental part in time with others when playing together as a class and achieve a good standard of performance. They can improvise both melodically and rhythmically on instruments. In Year 6 pupils show very good knowledge and understanding of instruments in the orchestra and can use a CD-ROM effectively to access pictures and sounds of the instruments. The quality of singing is very good. Pupils sing enthusiastically in unison and with good expression but their ability to sing in parts is underdeveloped.
139. By the end of Year 8 pupils achieve well in lessons and the majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. Higher attaining pupils in Year 8 are achieving in line with national expectations for the end of Key Stage 3 in performing and composing. Pupils in Year 7 show good knowledge and understanding of music notation and can apply this in practical work. Some pupils have difficulty in maintaining a steady pulse when practising their part on their own or with a partner and use inappropriate fingering when playing melodies on keyboards. Pupils in Year 8 can compose songs successfully using a verse and chorus structure by developing a melody line and suitable accompaniment from a chord pattern. In group performances they play their own part accurately and fit it in with an awareness of other performers. In a Year 8 lesson a group of pupils had used computer software to record their chord pattern and bass line. They used this as a backing to their song and were then more able to focus on their singing and playing other instruments. Most pupils perform confidently and with good control. In a listening activity most pupils could distinguish between major and minor chords confidently and accurately. They have a good knowledge and understanding of musical vocabulary.
140. Generally pupils show good attitudes and their behaviour is very good. They work co-operatively in pairs and in groups on composing tasks and when sharing instruments. They use instruments responsibly and show great care when getting them out and putting them away. They listen well to each others responses to questions and to performances by other members of the class.
141. The quality of teaching is good overall with some very good features. In lessons observed the teacher made very good use of open and closed questioning which helped to reinforce pupils learning and develop further knowledge and understanding. High expectations resulted in pupils being challenged and making good progress with their composing and ensemble skills. Very good management and insistence on high standards of behaviour resulted in pupils sustaining concentration and staying on task. Lessons were well organised so that pupils could work and learn effectively together. However, there were missed opportunities to include listening activities that would have developed pupils aural skills more effectively.
142. Extra-curricular provision is good and has a positive effect on developing pupils performing skills. The school provides lessons on a wider range of instruments than at the time of the last inspection and the number of pupils learning has increased. The range of activities on offer during lunch-time and after school has widened to cater for the needs of more pupils and now includes choir, brass trio, theory club, Samba drumming and Japanese drumming. As yet there are no group activities in which woodwind or string players can participate.

Pupils receiving instrumental lessons are encouraged to use their instruments in class music lessons.

143. Accommodation is adequate at the moment though there are no practice rooms for small group work. The department is adequately resourced with percussion instruments, keyboards and a computer with music sequencing software. However, there are insufficient instruments representing the different cultures of world music to deliver this aspect of the music curriculum effectively. The department also lacks good quality equipment for recording and playing back pupils work.
144. Since the last inspection a new subject co-ordinator has been appointed. New schemes of work have been introduced which have contributed to the higher standards being achieved, particularly in Year 8. There are more opportunities for pupils to improvise and keyboard and percussion techniques are more developed. Effective assessment procedures are in place with clear criteria for assessing pupils work and assessments are used to review and revise schemes of work. Response to the previous inspection report has been good.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

145. Attainment is above national expectation at the end of Key 2 and for pupils in Year 8. Generally good standards of performance are illustrated by the successes of many teams and individuals in a wide range of games and activities at local, area and county levels. Boys and girls achieve similar high standards whether taught together or separately.
146. At the end of Key Stage 2, pupils have good understanding of the reasons for warming up before and cooling down after strenuous exercise. They use technical terms appropriately and are well able to use stopwatches and record times and distances accurately. They handle equipment sensibly and safely. Levels of physical co-ordination and agility are above average and general standards of fitness are good, particularly in Year 5. Pupils recognise the importance of understanding techniques if they are to improve performance in athletics, circuit training, dance and games. Understanding develops quickly because they listen to explanations carefully and observe demonstrations very attentively. Pupils recognise ways of improving their own performances and can suggest how others may improve theirs, for example when practising shuttle runs in the gym. A significant strength is their ability to recognise and applaud each other's achievements at all levels of attainment so that all gain in confidence and skill. At the end of lessons, pupils are able to explain what they have learned and enjoyed and why.
147. Skills introduced in Key Stage 2 are developed further in Years 7 and 8. Pupils are confident in planning, rehearsing and modifying complex sequences of movement as was evident in a class of Year 7 boys preparing to perform a Maori war dance. Although confident, pupils are never complacent and recognise when standards could be higher. A Year 8 class practising rugby skills were dissatisfied with their performance in the first half of a lesson and by sustained concentration achieved high standards in the remaining time.
148. In all year groups, pupils are very enthusiastic in lessons and an unusually high proportion take part in clubs and activities at other times. Pupils work hard, concentrate and behave very well so that, at all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, they make good progress. Although many are highly competitive, for example in rugby, they practise fair play and are never reckless of their own safety or that of others. The good quality of learning is closely linked to the confidence that pupils have in each other and in their teachers.
149. Teaching is never less than good and is often very good. Teachers share a wide range of specialist skills. They have good knowledge of individual pupils strengths and weaknesses and encourage all to enjoy their work and improve their skills and understanding. They

have very high expectations of pupils effort, attainment and behaviour. Teachers make good use of questions, both to encourage thinking and to test understanding. They plan lessons well and conduct them at a purposeful pace. They are skilful in encouraging confident progress by reducing the learning of complicated techniques to the achievement of a series of small steps. Pupils appreciate the generous amounts of time that teachers give to out-of-school activities.

150. Since the time of the previous report, the school, together with others in the town, has adopted an effective, common system of recording pupils progress and achievement. A jumping pit and throwing area have been developed, and improved liaison with the upper school has removed difficulties linked to the sharing of some outdoor facilities. The increased proportion of teaching undertaken by specialist staff now contributes to more consistently good standards of teaching and learning. The continuing development of the subject benefits from energetic leadership and very good levels of collaboration by all the teachers involved.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

151. Pupils attainment in religious education at the end of Key Stage 2 and by the end of Year 8 is in line with that expected in the Worcestershire Locally Agreed Syllabus. By the end of Key Stage 2 pupils have developed sound knowledge and understanding of important aspects of Christianity and understand some features of other religions. For example they appreciate the role of the family in Christianity and know about the significance of the Quran in Islam. By the end of Year 8 pupils reflect on deeper questions such as the existence of God perceptively. They have developed individual views about the story of creation and have a feel for underlying values and rules for living. They are aware of the rights and wrongs of controversial issues such as drug-taking and of Christian views about these.
152. Pupils have a very positive attitude to religious education and generally behave very well. They join in paired and whole-class discussion with interest and respect other pupils viewpoints. Pupils are mature and serious about fundamental and potentially controversial issues and they write intelligently about these.
153. The quality of teaching and learning in both key stages is good. Teachers have a satisfactory knowledge of the subject overall and plan lessons effectively. They present lessons in an interesting and challenging way and use resources well. For example, in a Year 7 lesson dealing with the main festivals of Judaism, the teacher stimulated and encouraged the pupils in a very positive way to make excellent models of Sukhot houses. This combined with the teachers artefacts and good rapport with the class deepened their knowledge and understanding of an aspect of Judaism. Teachers manage pupils effectively. In the best lessons, the style of questions probes pupils knowledge effectively and generates fruitful whole-class and group discussions. In most lessons teachers develop a brisk and purposeful pace and there is a good balance of activities. The sensitive questioning by the teacher on issues promotes good opportunities for whole-class and paired discussion and for individual writing. For example, in a very good Year 8 lesson on the Christian attitude to drug taking, the pupils gained significant insights into the pitfalls of taking drugs and of Christian views on the issue
154. There have been significant improvements in provision for religious education since the previous inspection. The school has implemented the Agreed Syllabus for religious education, pupils standards of attainment are higher and the quality of teaching and learning is better. The display of pupils work in religious education around the school is well presented, interesting and of high quality. The subject is co-ordinated effectively and

with enthusiasm. There is close and useful contact with neighbouring schools, the co-ordinator chairing the local liaison group for religious education. There is a continuing need for further in-service training for staff to maintain and extend the progress made.