

INSPECTION REPORT

St Mark's West Essex RC School

Harlow

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115374

Headteacher: David Brunwin

Reporting inspector: Grace Marriott
3674

Dates of inspection: 29th January to 2nd February 2001

Inspection number: 187769

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

© Crown copyright 2001

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Secondary
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 -18
Gender of pupils:	Boys and girls
School address:	Tripton Road Harlow Essex
Postcode:	CM18 6AA
Telephone number:	01279 421267
Fax number:	01279 418220
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. T Austin
Date of previous inspection:	29 th April to 3 rd May 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
3674	Grace Marriott	Registered inspector	English as an Additional Language	How high are standards? How well are pupils taught?
19653	Libby Dickson	Lay inspector		How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
31139	Jill Judson	Team inspector	English	
1503	Terry Browne	Team inspector	Mathematics	How well is the school led and managed?
2396	Michael Davidson	Team inspector	Science	
2501	Raye Alison-Smith	Team inspector	Art	
15051	Lynne Kaufmann	Team inspector	Design and Technology, Information and Communication Technology, Special Educational Needs	
15479	Christopher Land	Team inspector	Geography	
10761	Patrick Willans	Team inspector	History	
4617	Rosalyn Fox	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages (French and German)	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
30264	Lyndon Jones	Team inspector	Music Equal opportunities	
30800	Betty Colley	Team inspector	Physical Education	How well does the school care for its pupils?

The inspection contractor was:

e-Qualitas Ltd, Langshaw, Pastens Road, Limpsfield Chart, Oxted, Surrey, RH8 0RE

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	10
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	13
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	15
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	18
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	19
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	20
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	23
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	24
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	27

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Mark's is a fairly small 11-18 voluntary aided Roman Catholic comprehensive school in Harlow in Essex. The roll is rising and the school is now oversubscribed. It has 757 pupils on roll which is about 200 more than at the last inspection. The school serves six Catholic parishes in the area and also takes a fairly high proportion of children of other faiths. The pupils come from mixed social backgrounds and the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is about average. Most pupils are of white UK heritage with about ten per cent from European, Chinese or Asian backgrounds. Very few children are at an early stage of learning English. About 20 per cent of the pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, with eleven of them having a statement of special educational need. This is broadly average. Attainment on entry was below average but has been improving. This year about eight out of every ten pupils achieved the level most pupils are expected to achieve in the national tests in Year 6. This is above average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St. Mark's is providing its pupils with a sound education. At Key Stage 3 standards are in line with national expectations. At Key Stage 4 standards, though still below average overall, are rising. The improvement in the pupils' attainment when they join the school has not yet had time to have an impact on the results. The teaching is satisfactory with some very good teaching in almost all subjects. The headteacher, senior managers and governors are providing a clear sense of purpose, sensible priorities for development and a strong commitment to higher standards. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards have risen in most subjects and in mathematics, science, design and technology, are now at least comparable with national standards
- Teachers have high expectations for the way in which pupils should work and behave
- The provision for moral and social development is good
- Behaviour, relationships and personal development are all good. Pupils do not regard bullying as an issue and the peer support group is valued
- Standards are above average in music, and at Key Stage 4 they are above average in science and German
- The specialist provision for pupils with special educational needs and for pupils who have English as an additional language is good
- The school looks after its pupils well and the induction arrangements for Year 7 are particularly good
- Pupils have a lot of opportunities to take responsibility

What could be improved

- Standards in English are not as good as those in mathematics and science
- Standards in art and French are unsatisfactory
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is not used enough in other subjects
- The satisfactory and the relatively small amount of unsatisfactory teaching could be raised to the level of the good and very good by more rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and the consistent implementation of school policies
- Assessment and other data need to be better used in tracking attainment and setting targets particularly in relation to the attainment of boys
- The curriculum at Key Stage 4 does not always ensure that the school provides the best range of courses leading to qualifications at 16 or to provide a good basis for sixth form work.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in April 1996. Since then the rate of improvement has been satisfactory and senior managers have a clear view of how the school can continue to improve. Academic standards have improved and even though the results in 1999 and 2000 were apparently not as good as those in 1998, they represent significant achievement for those groups of pupils. On the whole, the pupils did better than the information about their attainment on entry suggested that they would. There has been substantial improvement in mathematics, science, design and technology, geography and music. There has been some improvement in English, physical educational and history but no real improvement in art and French. The

teaching is better than at the last inspection. Learning objectives are better defined and more consistently shared with pupils and the teaching has a stronger focus on achievement. Assessment is better though still not used enough consistently enough in all departments. The roles and responsibilities of middle managers are better defined but there are variations between departments in the way in which they are carried out. The school development plan provides a much more secure foundation for future developments. Training needs are now more systematically identified and linked to school improvement. More vocational courses have been introduced but this has been somewhat piecemeal and issues about progression on to more advanced courses have not been given enough consideration.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			Similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	C	E	D	E
A-levels/AS-levels	E	E*	E	

Key	
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

Key Stage 3 results in English, mathematics and science in 2000 were average compared with national results and those of schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. Pupils are doing better in mathematics and science than in English and girls are doing better than boys across all three subjects but particularly so in English. At GCSE 38 per cent of pupils obtained 5 or more A* to C passes which compares favourably with the 28 per cent at the last inspection, though they are not as good as the national results and well below those of similar schools. In recent years results appear to have been best in 1998 but the groups who took GCSE in 1999 and 2000 achieved better results in terms of how well they had done previously, than the group who took GCSE in 1998. At Key Stage 4 the girls are also doing better than the boys. The 5 A* to C GCSE targets for 2001 are challenging but more realistic than those for 2000 which were too ambitious. Few pupils are achieving A* and A grades except in double science. German and science results were better than the national results, mathematics, ICT and design and technology were broadly average and English, French, geography, and RE were well below average. At A Level the percentage pass rate has fluctuated but with an upward trend overall, though with few higher grade passes. In 2000 there were no A grades and only 3 grade Bs and consequently the average points score is very low. However the results are consistent with what the same pupils achieved at GCSE. Results in GNVQ subjects are encouraging with 7 out of 9 students achieving the advanced business studies and 6 out of 7 the intermediate leisure and tourism qualifications.

The standards of current pupils are above average in music in Key Stage 3, average in mathematics, science, design and technology, geography and PE, they are below average in English, ICT, and history. At Key Stage 4 they are above average in science, history and German, average in mathematics, design and technology and PE, and below average in English. Art is well below average in Key Stage 3 and below at Key Stage 4. In French, pupils are working at a well below average level in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. In the sixth form standards are average in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, geography, IT and art. Pupils' progress and achievement are satisfactory overall and very good in music at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, good in music and German at Key Stage 4 and good in PE in the sixth form. Progress and achievement are not satisfactory in art, French at all stages and ICT at Key Stage 3

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are generally positive about school and work well in lessons.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school; pupils are generally co-operative, friendly and polite.
Personal development	Relationships are good at all levels. Pupils show respect for other people's

and relationships	attitudes and values.
Attendance	Attendance and unauthorised absence are broadly average

The school has put good systems into place for monitoring and promoting good attendance. Pupils value the School Council and through it are given a genuine voice in decision making. Bullying is not seen as a problem; pupils are confident that it will be dealt with and they value the peer support system where pupils are trained to give help and support. Pupils enjoy a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	Aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

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

Teaching is satisfactory overall with notable strengths but also some weaknesses. More than nine out of every ten lessons were satisfactory or better (93%), with half being good (50%) and about one lesson in six very good (15%). All the teaching in English, design and technology, music, geography, history, ICT, PE and GNVQ lessons was at least satisfactory. In English, the emphasis on reading is good and in mathematics, expectations are good and there is a strong focus on learning objectives in Key Stage 4. In the best science lessons teachers explain new ideas clearly and their good questioning during lessons and reviews at the end helps to establish whether pupils really are understanding. Teachers generally have good specialist knowledge and plan lessons carefully. Some good and very good teaching in almost all subjects motivates pupils and encourages them to learn but there is too much variation between subjects and even within subjects. Tracking achievement, target setting, the match of teaching to pupils' individual needs, the use of assessment and homework, and teachers' expectations, which are strengths in some lessons and subjects, are relative weaknesses in others. In general also, in the satisfactory lessons the teachers are doing too much for pupils and not encouraging them to take enough responsibility for their own learning. This means that they do not make as much progress as they could. About one lesson in fourteen was unsatisfactory (7%). Some teaching was unsatisfactory in subjects which were otherwise satisfactory. For example a few mathematics lessons seen were not well-enough planned, so the pace was slow and pupils learnt too little. In a few science lessons objectives were not made clear to pupils. In art and French the overall quality of teaching was not satisfactory mainly because expectations were too low, the pace of work was slow and not enough good work was completed in the time available.

The teaching of literacy is currently particular focus. It is satisfactory in English and the emphasis on key words in other subjects is positive and having an effect in standards, but more could be done to develop reading and writing skills across the curriculum. Numeracy is not yet the focus of whole school work and ICT is not being developed enough across all subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is satisfactory overall with both strengths and some weaknesses.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The specialist teaching provides pupils with very good support planned to meet their needs and to build their confidence. In other lessons the planning to meet individual needs is not as consistently effective.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The school monitors pupils' attainment and progress closely and provides good support. Pupils with English as an additional language frequently do better at GCSE than others.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for moral and social development is good and pupils are expected to have high moral and social standards. Provision for spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. The school aims are very explicit about the need for a spiritual dimension in all its work, but this is not reflected enough in lessons.
How well the school cares	The school provides good care for its pupils. It has a committed and caring

for its pupils	pastoral team. Pupils' progress is better monitored than it was, but this is still too variable between subjects
----------------	--

The partnership with parents is constructive and provides satisfactory supports for pupils' education. In Key Stage 3, limited time for, and access to, ICT affect standards. Vocational courses have extended the Key Stage 4 curriculum but there is no opportunity to move on to intermediate or advanced courses in each area. In science far fewer pupils take double science than do nationally. In the sixth form many groups are very small which makes it more difficult to provide a good educational experience for the students.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and senior management team have a clear sense of priorities and work together well to promote high standards in all areas. The management of departments is more variable.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have a sound knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and support staff in their efforts to improve.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance have both strengths and weaknesses. Further action is needed to secure consistent improvement in all areas.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes sound strategic use of its resources. Financial planning is effective.

Senior managers have established useful target-setting and tracking of individual pupil's performance using information about attainment on entry. This has helped to raise standards overall but its use at departmental level is still too variable. The management of science, design and technology, geography, music and special educational needs is good, but there are still significant weaknesses in art, French and cross-curricular ICT. The school has enough teachers and support staff although, as at the time of the last inspection, there is not enough specialist teaching in art. The accommodation and resources are adequate and the school applies the principles of best value to their management and use. The ICT suites and the improved design and technology area are good, but there are still not enough computers available for use across the curriculum. The library, though well-used, is small and has few books for the size of the school and the age range of its pupils.

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 school has high expectations Their children like school and make good progress The school helps their children to become mature and responsible The school is well led and managed They would find the school easy to approach about any problems 	<p>A minority of parents said that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homework is not set consistently The school does not work closely enough with parents and parents do not receive enough information about progress The range of activities outside lessons is not wide enough

Most parents are satisfied with the education the school is providing and only a small proportion of those who responded made any significant criticisms. In relation to homework the inspection team agreed that there is scope to improve both the quality and the consistency with which homework is set. The school is meeting statutory requirements for keeping parents informed both through reports and meetings. The inspection team agreed with the views of the majority of parents who felt that they are involved and well-informed. The range of extra-curricular activities is satisfactory, but pupils who have to catch school buses are not always able to participate in after-school activities.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Key Stage 3 results in English, mathematics and science in 2000 were average when compared with the national results and the results from schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. This represents significant improvement since the last inspection in all three subjects. Pupils are doing slightly better in mathematics and science than in English. Girls are generally doing better than boys are across all three subjects but particularly so in English.

2. At GCSE 38 per cent of pupils obtained 5 or more A* - C passes. This compares with favourably with 28 per cent achieving 5 or more A* to C passes at the time of the last inspection though they are not as good as the national results and well below those of similar schools. In 2000 96 per cent obtained 5 or more A* - G passes and 70 per cent of pupils obtained at least 1 pass at grade C or above. In recent years the results, both in terms of A* to C grades and points scores were highest in 1998, but the senior managers have analysed the results in detail and tracked the progress of the cohorts who took the examination in 1999 and 2000. The analysis shows that these pupils did better than their attainment on entry suggested that they would. As at Key Stage 3 the girls are doing better than the boys are. In 2000 boys' results were well below the national average and girls' results were below the national average.

3. There are wide variations in the results between subjects but in general there are few A* and A grades except in double science where 10 out of 72 candidates achieved an A grade and 2 achieved an A*. German and science results were much better than the national results, mathematics, ICT and design and technology results are not significantly different from the national and English, French, geography and RE were much lower. Comparisons between subjects show that that both boys and girls did better in science, design and technology and IT than in other subjects. Both boys and girls did worse in French, art and RE than in their other subjects.

4. At A Level the percentage pass rate has fluctuated, but the overall trend is upwards with the 1998 results above the national pass rate. However the trend in higher grade passes has been downwards. In 2000 there were no A grades and only three grade Bs, two in IT and one in English. Consequently the average points score is very low. Results in GNVQ subjects are encouraging with 7 out of 9 students achieving an advanced business studies and 6 out of 7 obtaining the intermediate leisure and tourism qualification.

5. In the work seen during the inspection standards are above expectations in Key Stage 3 music and average in mathematics, science, design and technology and geography and PE, below average in ICT, history and French and well below in art. At Key Stage 4 they are above average in science, history and German, and as at Key Stage 3 they are average in mathematics, design and technology and PE. They are low in French and below average in art. In the sixth form, standards are average in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, geography, ICT and art.

6. In English, although progress has been made since the last inspection, standards at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 have remained below the national average. However pupils' achievements in lessons were satisfactory and better than their attainment against national standards would suggest. This is mainly because the pupils' oral work is much better than their written work but the introduction of some strategies to improve standards is beginning to take effect. The girls are achieving at a higher level than the boys are.

7. Reading skills develop well and pupils are given opportunities for private reading, reading aloud in class, reading in pairs and in small groups. Pupils in Year 10 read parts of "An Inspector Calls" with enthusiasm and a satisfactory degree of fluency. Speaking and listening skills are satisfactory or better and pupils derive particular benefit from the group work set. The written work seen in Key Stages 3 and 4 was very varied in standard but most of it was below average. Expectations of accuracy, presentation, the development of ideas and of fluency are not demanding enough. More opportunities for imaginative and extended writing are needed. Sixth form work seen was satisfactory or better in Year 13 but not as good in Year 12.

8. In mathematics there is no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls and pupils of different abilities achieve appropriate standards. For example, high-attaining pupils have good algebraic and graphical skills, whilst low-attaining pupils can methodically solve simple linear equations. In the lessons observed, standards of Year 11 work were in line with those expected. Top-set pupils drew the graphs of trigonometric functions and most understood the ideas well. A class of lower-attaining Year 10 pupils were keenly involved in deciding which purchases would provide better value for money. Overall standards are improving because the teaching is effective, work and assessment are well structured and the pupils have positive attitudes.

9. In science achievement at Key Stage 3 is rising. Pupils' written work is often particularly thorough and well organised, showing some of the benefits to science of the national literacy strategy. Pupils' practical skills and their ability to show their findings in tables and graphs, and use their mathematical skills, are better than at the previous inspection. Similarly at Key Stage 4 the current pupils now have a better overall grasp of science, going beyond simple recall of facts to understanding them and the ability to carry out thoughtful investigations. Many pupils know how to use their practical investigations to test hypotheses, and the most able pupils base their predictions on well thought-out scientific reasons. Pupils in Year 12 and Year 13 are progressing satisfactorily, though a few have given up. Those who are persevering enjoy their work, relate confidently to their teachers and are on course to achieve pass grades.

10. In other subjects pupils' progress and their achievement when compared with the standards they were achieving when they joined the school, are at least satisfactory in most subjects. They are very good in music at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, good in music and German at Key Stage 4 and good in PE in the sixth form. Achievement is unsatisfactory in art, French at all stages and in ICT at Key Stage 3.

11. The achievement of pupils with special education needs is good in relation to the targets in their individual education plans. The specialist teaching and support of the learning support assistants help to build skills and self-esteem. As a result pupils who attend the spelling and homework club are confident enough to read prayers in assembly. In other lessons, progress is more variable and too dependent on the skills of the individual teacher. Progress is good in elements of technology and geography but weaker in subjects such as science, English and art. The progress of pupils who have English as an additional language is carefully assessed and tracked as they move through the school. They are making good progress overall and records show that pupils with English as an additional language frequently achieve better GCSE results than other pupils.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

12. Pupils generally show good attitudes to school, and are interested in their lessons. They are attentive to their teachers, co-operate well and quickly engage in any tasks which are set. An

example of their positive approach to learning was seen in a Year 7 music lesson. Here pupils showed a high level of commitment when consolidating their knowledge and experience of playing a keyboard melody rhythmically. During a Year 10 science lesson on inhalation and the structure of the lungs, pupils concentrated hard, showing enjoyment in their learning.

13. In nearly all classes pupils are attentive and responsive, but they are sometimes too passive, and behaviour does vary. In the vast majority of lessons pupils showed good or very good behaviour. During a Year 8 geography lesson, pupils were helpful and polite both to each other and the teacher and responded well to questioning about earthquakes and plate tectonics. Similarly the behaviour in a Year 7 design technology lesson was excellent; pupils were totally engrossed in their work and supported each other well. Sixth form students display mature attitudes to their work. In all lessons seen in the sixth form pupils' attitudes were good or better. This was exemplified in an ICT lesson where Year 13 students talked with enthusiasm and dedication about their projects, showing an impressive sense of responsibility and independence. However, in some lower ability groups in the upper school the behaviour seen during the inspection was unsatisfactory. This mostly took the form of inattentiveness while teachers were talking, too much chatting and reluctance to work. In a particularly poor example of this pupils in a Year 11 French lesson showed little respect for the teacher and refused to speak and write in French. The rudeness seen in such lessons was in strong contrast to that seen in most lessons.

14. Behaviour around the school is predominantly good. Some corridors in the buildings become crowded at lesson changeovers, but pupils are generally sensible at such times. They move around the school in an orderly manner, lining up outside classrooms when asked to. They know that they are expected to arrive promptly to lessons and most try hard to do so. The arrangements during the lunch break work well. In the dining hall they wait their turn patiently and then treat the meal as a social occasion, chatting amicably with their friends and with staff. Pupils consider that bullying seldom occurs, but are confident that any problems are dealt with quickly; they reported to inspectors that they are happy with the school's procedures. The number of fixed period and permanent exclusions is around the average for schools of this size, but has declined over recent years.

15. Pupils develop good relationships with each other and with the majority of the teaching staff. Older pupils help younger ones with reading, promoting positive learning habits. Pupils from ethnic minority groups are well integrated into the life of the school. Pupils show high levels of respect for school property and use equipment with care, putting it away carefully after use. Musical instruments are looked after well, and pupils are trusted around the school buildings during breaktimes. They respond well to the provision made for their personal development. Many involve themselves in the extra-curricular activities which take place at lunchtime and after school. They willingly undertake roles as Year and School Council representatives, and several Year 10 pupils are involved in the school's peer support project. At a meeting of the Young Enterprise scheme, pupils from Year 10 showed great skills of collaboration and independence in determining their next initiative. The head girl and head boy, and their deputies, take their responsibilities seriously. They value the opportunity to make a contribution to the life of the school. In lessons, while pupils show a willingness to learn, many are too dependent on their teachers and lack enough confidence to pose their own questions or undertake their own research.

16. Attendance in the last full school year, at 91.3%, was close to the national average and shows good improvement since the last inspection. Unauthorised absence was also around the national average. However, attendance figures become less satisfactory throughout Years 10 and 11 where a number of pupils have frequent absences, often condoned by parents. During the week of the inspection attendance throughout the whole school was relatively low owing to an unusually high level of illness. Most pupils arrive to school on time and lessons throughout the day begin on time.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

17. The teaching is satisfactory overall with some notable strengths but also some weaknesses. 93 per cent of teaching seen was satisfactory or better, with 50 per cent being good and about 15 per cent very good. 7 per cent of the teaching was unsatisfactory. The slight variations between the year groups are not significant. For example, Year 7 had less teaching that was good but more that was very good than in Year 9. The best teaching was seen in Year 13. The variations in quality between subjects are more significant. All the teaching seen in English, design and technology, music, geography, history, ICT, PE and GNVQ lessons was at least satisfactory.

18. The main difference between the good and the very good teaching lies in the pace and liveliness of the lessons not in the planning or subject knowledge. Teachers generally have good subject specialist knowledge and plan lessons carefully. In the good and very good teaching there are strengths in assessment and in the planning to meet the different needs of pupils. There is also a strong focus on achieving learning objectives, tracking and target setting. All of these factors are helping pupils to understand how to improve their work and thus to raise standards overall.

19. In the core subjects, in English the emphasis on reading is good and in mathematics, expectations are good and there is a strong focus on learning objectives in Key Stage 4. In the best science teaching, explanations of new ideas are clear, with good use made of questions during lessons and reviews at the end to find out whether pupils really are understanding. In the foundation subjects in geography, design and technology, special educational needs and the provision for English as an additional language (EAL) the tracking of pupils' progress is particularly good. In music, assessment, target-setting, the use of ICT and the extra-curricular activities are all helping to raise standards. The pace of work is good in history and pupils enjoy lessons which improves their motivation and in PE the teaching is clearly focused on pupils practising to improve their skills. The examination practice in German helps pupils to achieve good results. In the taught ICT classes the work relates to pupils' own experiences which improves their motivation.

20. There was some very good teaching in almost all subjects but also too much variation between subjects and even within subjects. Aspects of teaching such as teachers' expectations, tracking and target-setting, the use of assessment and homework, which are strengths in some lessons and subjects are also weaknesses in others. In general in the satisfactory lessons the teachers are doing too much for pupils and not encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning.

21. Where the teaching has weaknesses these are not normally enough to make it unsatisfactory overall. In English, expectations for written work are generally not high enough and assessment is not informing planning as much as it could. In mathematics, marking is not consistent enough across the department and this does not give pupils enough guidance on how to improve. In science, objectives for lessons are not explained clearly enough and there is not always enough challenge for the more able pupils. In other subjects where the teaching is satisfactory the work in geography could do more to encourage independent learning and in history it could be better planned to meet the range of needs in the classes. In a few design and technology lessons pupils were not aware of how to develop their thinking and analysis by using their product specification. Most teachers of other subjects lack confidence in ICT and this is reflected in missed opportunities to use ICT in lessons. In PE, the marking does not specifically target improvement and no specific provision is made for non-participants. In the teaching of music there is less emphasis on singing than on other aspects.

22. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good in the withdrawal and extra sessions where pupils have in-class support. It is not as effective, though still satisfactory, where it is wholly the responsibility of the class teacher. This is mainly because the match of work

to the individual needs is not as good. The progress of all pupils with English as an additional language is carefully monitored and, in general, they make good progress often achieving at a higher level than other pupils. The few pupils at an early stage of learning English receive good support and make good progress.

23. The teaching of literacy is currently a focus across the school and the emphasis on vocabulary and key words is having a positive effect on standards, particularly in English, history and design and technology, but more could be done to develop reading and writing skills across the curriculum. Numeracy is not yet the focus of whole-school work and ICT is not being developed enough across all subjects.

24. There was some unsatisfactory teaching in subjects which were otherwise satisfactory. For example, a few mathematics lessons seen were not well-enough planned, so the pace was slow and pupils learnt too little. Also some of the work in books, on display and seen in lessons suggest time is wasted on work which is not demanding enough, for example in making paper dice for probability work. In a few science lessons the lesson objectives were not made clear to pupils, questioning was not used well to find out what pupils know and understand, or to develop their understanding and pupils did not have to take responsibility for their own work. In German the lessons are conducted mainly in English and an important aspect of the learning, the development of listening skills, is neglected with the result that pupils' standards are much lower in this aspect than in reading or writing. They cannot reach a high enough standard in listening to enable them to cope well with an A Level syllabus.

25. In art and French the quality of teaching overall was unsatisfactory mainly because lessons lacked pace, expectations were too low and not enough good work was completed in the time available. In art approximately half the Key Stage 3 lessons and a small number of Key Stage 4 lessons were taken by a non-specialist, temporary, supply teacher which accounted for most of the unsatisfactory teaching. The long-term plans are broadly satisfactory but shorter-term learning objectives are not clearly identified and shared with pupils. Teaching had a positive impact on learning where the teacher demonstrated specific skills or techniques, as happened in Year 11 and Year 13 lessons.

26. In French, even though most teachers manage classes well, speak French for much of the lesson and use established routines, they do not always build systematically on what has been taught before. Planning was sketchy in some lessons. In one Year 7 lesson, for example, the teacher arrived at the planned conclusion just over half way through the hour and had to fill in with additional, unprepared work. In a better Year 7 lesson, the activity related directly to the pupils' interests and the game they played helped them to learn the work well. The unsatisfactory teaching results in unsatisfactory learning for all but the most able and most motivated pupils. Despite their generally positive attitudes and desire to do well, most pupils cannot remember the learning from one lesson to the next.

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

27. The curriculum is satisfactory overall but with strengths and some weaknesses. In Key Stage 3, the curriculum meets statutory requirements in all but two respects. It is broadened by the addition of drama, and a second foreign language in Year 9 for the highest attaining pupils. The amount of time available is slightly lower than the national average in subjects such as history and geography but this is not significantly affecting standards. In German, however, pupils have only one hour a week in Year 9, which is not enough to give them a secure foundation in the language before they have to make their Key Stage 4 choices. Similarly in ICT limited time and irregular access to the subject over the key stage is affecting standards. Statutory requirements are not

met because there is not enough ICT being taught within subjects and because National Curriculum requirements, with regard to the teaching of control within design and technology, are not met in Year 9.

28. In Key Stage 4, in addition to the compulsory subjects, pupils are offered a variety of choices. These includes an increased range of vocational courses such as hospitality and catering, health and social care and business education for those who would benefit from them. These are good courses in themselves but the introduction of new courses has been somewhat piecemeal with the result that pupils cannot easily move on from foundation to intermediate or advanced courses. The school is unusual in that more pupils take the single science GCSE than the double science which is the reverse of the national position. Single science does not provide a good foundation for advanced study, which makes it difficult for pupils to continue with science in the sixth form. The time allocation is low in English, where pupils take two GCSE examinations.

29. St Mark's is the only Catholic school in West Essex, and the governing body is keen to continue to provide a comprehensive Catholic education for sixth form students, including those with special educational needs. This is achieved by running a number of very small teaching groups which in the past could be taught together in Years 12 and 13. The changes at A Level have made it impossible to do this. Numbers in chemistry, physics, biology, mathematics, music, art, RE, economics and PE are small with larger groups in English, sociology, design and realisation, geography, history and ICT. There is no sixth form provision for modern foreign languages. The educational value of very small groups is limited because students in these groups do not have the chance to discuss and explore ideas to the same extent as those in larger groups.

30. Vocational courses have been introduced into the sixth form but it has not been easy to sustain a good range of courses at all levels. Business studies is taught at Advanced level GNVQ but there is no intermediate level which makes it difficult for pupils on the foundation course in Key Stage 4 to move to the next level unless they leave school. However the school has recognised this issue and is working with the local college to improve the range of courses on offer. Pupils taking the intermediate GNVQ course in leisure & tourism can move on to the advanced course at the college and pupils can take a link course in theatre studies at the college. The school has made a satisfactory start to introducing key skills but the limited ICT provision is having the same negative impact on progress in the sixth form as it is in other years.

31. The school makes satisfactory provision for extra-curricular activities. Strengths include a wide variety of sporting fixtures ranging from mixed hockey to girls' football. There is very strong provision in music including a lunchtime jazz club and a variety of high quality concerts. There is a good joint Year 7 and 8 residential trip to Bude, a history trip to First World War battlefields and a geography trip to Bradwell. Inspectors attended a very interesting board meeting for a company called 'Young Enterprise Europe', run by a small group of Key Stage 4 pupils. They discussed issues such as the marketing and advertising of their product. However, in modern foreign languages, there have been no residential visits or exchanges to either to France or Germany and no day trips to France for many years.

32. The provision for personal, social and health education is satisfactory overall and good in Key Stage 3. The coverage of drugs and sex education is appropriate and education for citizenship is being introduced in the next academic year. Since the last inspection, a team of specialist teachers has been established and appropriate schemes of work support the teaching effectively. They are particularly detailed in Key Stage 3. In Year 7 pupils are given appropriate opportunities to discuss the health issues arising from smoking and in Year 8 they reflect on the growing traffic problems in their area and ways of combating them. Members of the community, including the community policeman and visitors from companies such as Kleine Beecham, contribute effectively to the programme. Close liaison between the three co-ordinators ensures consistency across the three key stages. Although there is some informal monitoring of the provision this is not

rigorous enough at present to ensure that the good practice seen in some lessons is extended to all.

33. Careers education is good. There is a good careers library with a computer based job finder and an up-to-date range of careers literature. There are good links with the careers service. There is a well-structured careers programme leading to the ASDAN Career Planning Level 2 qualification in Years 10 and 11. Many pupils are involved in the Young Enterprise scheme. The Trident work experience programme in Year 10 is a good learning experience with all but a very few pupils successfully placed with local companies.

34. Since the last inspection the curriculum has improved in a number of areas. In physical education, for example, the over-emphasis on games at the expense of other aspects of PE has been rectified. Planning has improved in areas such as science, geography, history, physical education, design technology and information technology at Key Stage 3. Curriculum planning is now very good in music. It is less satisfactory in art and French where recommendations about identifying clear learning objectives have not been implemented. This means that pupils are not making enough progress in these subjects. The school has recently made literacy a whole-school priority and this is beginning to have an impact on standards. A similar approach to numeracy is planned but has not yet started.

35. The policy for equal opportunities is effective and reflects the school's mission statement, to promote Catholic values rooted in the Gospel message of respect for every individual. The policy for special educational needs is detailed and reports to governors indicate that the LEA has monitored and approved the school's judgements about special educational needs. The provision for pupils with English as an additional language is good and targeted to meeting specific needs.

36. Through the School Council, pupils have a voice in decision-making which is heard and heeded. Pupils are praised for what is done well. The "star pupils" noticeboard celebrates the contribution of pupils to a wide range of community activities, including raising money to make and deliver hampers to the elderly, winning the Year 7 Christmas card design competition, excellent effort in English lessons, and outstanding athletic performance in regional competitions.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

37. Spiritual development is satisfactory. Most opportunities for developing pupils' spiritual awareness are provided through religious education lessons and some assemblies. During the inspection a Year 7 assembly sensitively and effectively explored the theme of 'reflection'. In a Year 8 assembly, pupils quietly thought about and prayed for victims of the Indian earthquake, responding with appropriate understanding and respect. Assemblies are held once a week for each year group, with tutor group meetings on the other days. Tutor groups do not consistently provide pupils with adequate opportunities to reflect on values and beliefs, and the act of reflection or prayer is sometimes perfunctory. There are examples of pupils being exposed to experiences that encourage some reflection. For example, for a number of years the history department has taken Year 10 pupils to visit the site of World War 1 trenches at the Western Front. This clearly enables them to consider the impact and human cost of war. However, even though such spiritual experiences occur in the school curriculum, they are not built into daily lessons as an integral part of learning and opportunities are missed in areas such as science and mathematics.

38. As was the case at the last inspection, provision for pupils' moral education is good. Most teachers are good role models in their commitment to their work and their responsibility for pupils. Their frequent use of praise and encouragement rather than negative criticism helps to create a positive learning climate. Moral themes are clearly presented in assemblies and in some personal and social education lessons. English and science provide opportunities for pupils to consider issues such as genetic engineering and abortion. In a geography lesson on life in developing

countries, Year 8 pupils discussed the moral aspect of personal interdependence. Pupils are encouraged to share resources and care for each other. These caring attitudes are encouraged and channelled through the peer support group made up of Year 10 pupils. The group gives advice and support to pupils in all years on a whole range of issues, and is held in high regard throughout the school. This service helps to make pupils confident of having someone to turn to should a problem arise.

39. Pupils have good opportunities to develop their social skills in lessons, for example through paired and group work. Most teachers expect pupils to respect each other's work, and to work safely and responsibly. The paired reading between younger and older pupils helps to instil positive social attitudes. Pupils' achievements are celebrated each week on the 'star pupils' board; the annual Celebration of Excellence is a formal occasion, held to recognise the work of the school and the success of individuals. Pupils have opportunities to exercise responsibility as representatives on the year and School Council. These roles allow them to express their views and to contribute to the wider aspects of school life. The School Council is currently negotiating with the local council over the installation of a zebra crossing outside the school. Wide-ranging charity work, including support for families affected by the Chernobyl disaster and the sponsorship of young people in developing countries, helps to raise pupils' awareness of other people's circumstances. Years 7 and 8 have the opportunity of going on a residential visit for pupils which helps to develop confidence and teamwork.

40. The cultural development of pupils is satisfactory. They have opportunities to take part in concerts and go on theatre trips, such as the recent Year 9 visit to the Globe Theatre. In food technology they have scope to research and make food from different countries, and in English they read a wide range of texts from various cultures. The study of world faiths, life in other countries and music from around the world provides further opportunities to develop multi-cultural awareness. However, the ethnic and cultural diversity of the school population and local community is not recognised enough, either in the curriculum or the display around the school. This was also the case at the time of the previous inspection.

41. The school has developed good links with the community, business and industry through its various activities. It has created good relationships with its feeder primary schools and this ensures a smooth transition from primary to secondary education.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

42. Overall the school provides good care for its pupils. The committed and caring pastoral team give pupils skilled and caring support. They feel secure in school and are confident in approaching their form teacher, other pastoral staff or subject teachers when they have a problem. The school has good arrangements for helping pupils settle into the school in Year 7.

43. There are effective procedures for child protection. Teachers are aware of the issues and there are good arrangements for instructing new teachers about procedures. A senior teacher is the named person for child protection.

44. The school has good procedures for promoting good behaviour. There is an emphasis on positive behaviour in the school's policy. Rewards and sanctions are consistently applied and pupils are well aware of the code of conduct. Form tutors are central to all pastoral and academic matters concerning their form members and all teachers are expected to give feedback to keep form tutors informed. On the whole this system works well.

45. The majority of teachers have good relationships with pupils and handle behaviour in the classroom skilfully. The majority of pupils respond well to the expectation of good behaviour. They

appreciate the awards system and see the necessity for sanctions. Inappropriate behaviour is dealt with by following clear procedures. On the relatively rare occasions where there were behaviour problems the teaching was not meeting the pupils' needs. Exclusion is used as the ultimate sanction; this is usually a short fixed-term exclusion, usually one day. Internal exclusion, or isolation from lessons, is used to remove disruptive pupils from lessons. This usually consists of a detention lasting an hour.

46. The school's anti-bullying policy covers issues of gender and ethnicity. Discrimination is handled sensitively in assemblies and in PSHE. Pupils say that bullying is not an issue and that any potential problems are taken seriously and dealt with promptly. Pupils interviewed said they would report incidents and would talk to their form tutor or another teacher or to the peer support group. Relationships in school are good regardless of age, gender, religion or ethnicity.

47. Procedures for eliminating oppressive behaviour are good. The strong moral ethos of the school helps to counteract anti-social behaviour. Spiritual support within the school also assists pupils who use the services provided. Pupils' with special educational needs have assistance, with behavioural problems and other issues, from the Roman Catholic Children's Society, both in and outside school.

48. The pastoral team, through individual interviews, set academic and behaviour targets for pupils through form tutors. This starts before the pupil joins the school in Year 7. It continues with interviews and guidance prior to the start of the GCSE course, and similarly on entry to the sixth form. At the day to day level the contact book, which is also a homework diary, is the main means of communication between parents and the school. Other communications include newsletters and regular reports home. These are currently being amended to comply with the new orders of the National Curriculum.

49. The school's procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are good. Attendance is closely monitored by form tutors and the Heads of Lower and Upper School. They meet regularly with the Education Welfare Officer follow up any pupils with a poor attendance or punctuality record. Termly and annual certificates are used to encourage good attendance. The school is concerned by the effect of parent-condoned absence on progress. Where there are known problems or a history of poor or irregular attendance, parents are telephoned on the first day of a pupil's absence. Computerised attendance records assist both form tutor and the head of year to follow up absence. Truancy is followed up rapidly and is easily detected because registers are taken in lessons.

50. The procedures for keeping a check of pupils' progress and using the information in planning the curriculum, which was a key issue at the last inspection, have improved. They are satisfactory overall but still too variable between individual departments. The design and technology and music departments have well developed arrangements for tracking the progress of the pupils, regularly telling them how well they are doing in terms of National Curriculum expectations, and for setting them targets for the next stage of their learning. This is leading to higher standards. In the core subjects, the systems in science and mathematics have improved since the last inspection and are now sound. This has contributed to the improved standards. However, the arrangements in English are not as good and, crucially, not enough is done to address boys' under-achievement by using information on their progress to match the curriculum and resources to their needs. Other subjects have satisfactory arrangements, except for art and French, and in these subjects the lack of secure procedures is not helping to raise standards. At the whole-school level, good use is made of information such as National Curriculum test results and other data to maintain a check on pupils' progress and set targets for the Year 9 tests and for GCSE. This information is readily available for staff to use when a pupil is a cause for concern to highlight areas of success and those where improvement is needed.

51. The school's day-to-day arrangements for pupils' welfare are satisfactory. Safe working practices were observed in all subjects but formal arrangements for health and safety checks are inconsistent, with a variety of approaches.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

52. Since the last inspection the school has maintained a constructive partnership with parents. In their response to the questionnaire and in the meeting held before the inspection, parents expressed positive views about the school. They feel that the school provides a good level of care and are confident about approaching the school if they have any concerns. Most report that their children like coming to school. Several parents expressed some degree of dissatisfaction about the school's provision for homework. The inspection team's view is that the provision for homework is satisfactory overall, though there is inconsistency in the amount that is set between subjects.

53. The induction process for Year 7 pupils is well organised and effective. Prospective pupils and their parents have many formal and informal opportunities to visit the school. A large number of parents and grandparents attend the Year 7 induction mass. A home-school agreement with parents, sets out clearly the shared expectations. The vast majority of parents support the school and their children's education by attending consultation meetings with teachers. The school makes personal contact with those who do not attend, to arrange alternative times to discuss their children's progress. Curriculum evenings, such as the Year 9 options meeting and sixth form information evening are well supported. Most parents have little direct involvement with the work in school, the Friends of St Mark's Association provides good support through organising fundraising activities and helping with teas at parents' evenings.

54. Overall the quality of information provided for parents is satisfactory. The prospectus gives parents useful information about the organisation and activities of the school, as do the well-written, half-termly newsletters. Annual reports on pupils' progress meet statutory requirements. However the information in these reports could be presented more helpfully to parents. For example there is inconsistency in the categories used by subject departments to report pupils' progress and attainment. Some make reference to National Curriculum grades, while others state assessment results. This variation is not helpful in giving parents a clear picture of their child's academic performance across the curriculum.

55. The contribution of parents to children's learning, at school and at home is satisfactory. Parents are encouraged to become involved in their children's work at home through the homework diary. Most sign the homework diaries, which are regularly checked by form tutors, but more effective use could be made of these in the lower school to achieve better ongoing communication between home and school. The school contacts parents quickly by telephone to alert them to concerns or give praise where it is due.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED

56. Under the leadership of the headteacher, who is well supported by the senior management team, the standards of achievement and the quality of teaching have been improved since the last inspection. The school is popular with parents. The headteacher and the governors promote broad aims that are in line with the school's clear mission statement. These aims include raising expectations for achievement, improving the quality of education, and the school's ability to evaluate its work effectively, expanding the sixth form and improving the school environment. Overall, the leadership of the senior management and the governors is sound.

57. The governing body satisfactorily carries out its statutory responsibilities. Governors have a sound knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they support staff in their efforts to improve. They make visits to the school but these are not systematically planned, and receive reports from departments. They can join any of the main governor committees or others formed for specific purposes. Governors monitor what goes on in the school rather more than taking a leading role. For example they are not formally involved in the process of school development planning, nor have they taken a lead in the introduction of performance management. However, they monitor progress in relation to academic targets, through the annual examination audit, and they generally shape the strategic direction of the school. Governors have strongly supported the school in terms of the long-term vision for the sixth form and for the school's distinct role in the community.

58. A key issue from the last inspection was to clarify the roles and structure of middle management to enable middle managers to be more effective and efficient. A structure has been developed with a senior management team of five and an extended senior management group of eight staff with pastoral and curriculum responsibilities. Meetings of this group are expanded each half term to include other heads of departments. The headteacher recognises the need to develop further the clarity and extent of the roles of middle managers, to improve their effectiveness. Where middle management is strong, the departments function and develop well. At present there are particular strengths in design and technology, science, music and special educational needs. However, in some other areas, the management is not strong and the senior management support and monitoring have not been effective enough to bring about significant improvement.

59. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance have strengths and some weaknesses, and more action is needed to secure consistent improvement in all areas. The senior managers monitor the standards being achieved through the analysis of data, including the use of value-added assessment information. This process continues to be extended, for example through the increasing use of baseline information. The school has established useful target-setting and tracking of individual pupil performance. There are plans to introduce a formal cycle of departmental review on an annual basis. Internal monitoring and evaluation procedures have been prepared for this review of both curricular and pastoral provision. The regular monitoring of books and contact book checks is a good feature of the current arrangements. This can, for example, pick up weaknesses in the provision of homework or in the quality of teachers' marking. However, the school has yet to establish rigorous classroom observation by senior managers to support improvement in the overall quality of teaching. The senior management team aims to introduce regular classroom observation as part of performance management. Given the wide variations between departments, such planned developments are important.

60. The school has identified good priorities for development, covering the main areas of the curriculum, the learning culture and the environment. The school development plan is comprehensive and detailed, and represents a sound basis for improvement. A key issue at the previous inspection was to improve the quality of development planning. In response there is now greater use of clear costings, time and success criteria. The plan appropriately incorporates other key issues, since most of these continue to need attention. There are specific whole-school targets, for example in attendance and attainment. The quality and effectiveness of departmental development planning vary. It is valuable that the department targets have to be aligned with the three whole-school priorities. However, within departments, the understanding and management of these developments range from good to unsatisfactory. The school's senior management needs to be rigorous in ensuring that all department plans are implemented.

61. The management of special educational needs is very good. It has vision, good communication systems and effective relationships with all staff to that ensure special needs has central consideration in planning. Since the previous inspection, good improvements have been made to recording systems, and to monitoring pupils' work and their personal development. The

accommodation is good but cramped, which hinders independent learning. Resources for special needs are adequate and enriched by the homemade resources that support subject vocabulary in particular. There are good links with the librarian and the library has a range of appropriate books. Computers are used well by the department, but there is a lack of programmes for independent learning and no computer link to the central school records.

62. The school has adequate numbers of teachers and support staff to meet the needs of the curriculum although, as at the time of the last inspection, it does not have adequate specialist teaching in art. Good provision has been made to support newly qualified teachers. The induction programme is well planned and includes regular meetings and observations of teaching. Staff feel they are well supported by the teacher with overall responsibility for their induction. However at departmental level the quality of support is more variable, good in some departments but weaker in others. The in-service training programme for all staff is better planned than at the time of the last inspection. Staff are generally up-to-date and familiar with curriculum developments except in information technology where the use of computers in different subjects across the curriculum is underdeveloped. There is an urgent need for training that enables teachers to recognise the potential, and then plan suitable work, for pupils. Several whole staff training days have been devoted to departmental subject development and to issues that apply to all staff, for example to look at the way literacy is taught across the curriculum and the achievement of boys. Training is appropriately linked to the school development plan but the value of the training, the effect on pupils' learning and on standards, has not been closely monitored in order to maximise the impact.

63. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory, with some notable strengths as well as weaknesses. Since the last inspection the number of computers in the school has been increased but there are still too few computers in classrooms for use across the curriculum. The information technology suites and improved accommodation for design technology are particular strengths.

64. Several subjects are short of equipment, for example televisions and recording equipment in English and drama and film and video equipment in history. The library is small and has few books for the size and the age range of the pupils in the school. However, the available space is well used during lessons, at lunch times and after school as a study area. The school is unable to fund a full-time librarian and therefore the library is frequently unsupervised. This results in a considerable loss of books, bought from a restricted allowance.

65. The planned programme of interior redecoration had to be postponed because of a shortage of funds. The poor accommodation in both the modern foreign languages and physical education departments is having a negative impact on pupils' attitudes and learning. The pupil and staff toilets are also in a very poor condition.

66. Overall the school makes sound use of its resources. Financial planning is effective and in general the school applies the principles of best value to its management and use of resources. As at the last inspection, the teaching of very small groups in the sixth form is costly both in terms of finance and the quality of the educational experience. However, the governing body is fully aware of these issues. Retaining the 11-18 school is a priority and the governors have made an increase in the sixth form roll as a major target. The deputy headteacher with responsibility for financial management has the good support of administrative staff and several governors who have substantial financial expertise. The school has made sensible reserves for contingencies, especially given the nature of the building and uncertainties about funding of the sixth form, and has planned financially for the changing roll over the years. Budget amounts reflect curriculum and staffing projections, and development planning has improved since the last inspection in relation to costs and success criteria. Improvement projects such as the successful development of the design and technology area have been costed and approved by the governing body.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The headteacher, staff and governors should continue their drive for higher standards by:

- 1) Raising standards in English across the school at least to the level of mathematics and science;
Paragraphs 1, 67, 85, 86
- 2) Improving the currently unsatisfactory standards in art and French;
Paragraphs 3, 5, 10, 11, 107, 143, 145
- 3) Extending the use of information and communication technology in almost all other subjects to ensure that National Curriculum requirements are met;
Paragraphs 73, 95, 104, 115, 123, 131
- 4) Raising the quality of the satisfactory and the relatively small amount of unsatisfactory teaching to the level of the best by more rigorous monitoring of teaching and the consistent implementation of school policies;
Paragraph 59
- 5) Making better use of assessment and other data to track attainment and set targets for achievement, particularly in relation to matching the work to all pupils' needs and raising the attainment of boys;
Paragraphs 20, 21, 72, 129, 130, 131
- 6) Improving the curriculum planning at Key Stage 4 to make sure that it is providing the best range of courses leading to qualifications at 16 and providing a good basis for sixth form work.
Paragraphs 28, 29, 30

In addition the governors should consider including in their action plan the following less significant issues:

Monitoring the arrangements for collective worship to ensure consistent implementation in tutor groups;
Paragraph 37

Providing a more systematic schedule for the governors' monitoring.
Paragraph 57

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	143
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	46

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
	15	50	28	7		

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	679	78
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	81	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	11	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	144	7

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	65

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	17
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	26

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.0
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.7
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 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year		Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2000	63	64	127
National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	29	34	46	
	Girls	43	41	38	
	Total	72	75	84	
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	57(54)	67 (65)	58 (64)	
	National	64 (63)	67 (62)	69 (65)	
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	18 (18)	39 (38)	22 (24)	
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)	

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	25	41	25	
	Girls	38	42	27	
	Total	63	83	52	
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	50 ((n/a)	65 (60)	41(32)	
	National	64(64)	66 (64)	62 (60)	
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	26	25	17	
	National	31(31)	39 (37)	29 (38)	

Percentages in brackets refer to 1999.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	51	45	96

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	15	45	49
	Girls	19	44	45
	Total	34	89	94
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	35(41)	93(87)	98(96)
	National	47.4(46.6)	90.6(90.9)	95.6(95.8)

Percentages in brackets refer to 1999.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	31
	National	38.4

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	7
	National	N/A

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	19	21	40

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	11.2	8.3	9.6	1.1	1.4	1.2
National	17.7	18.6	18.2	2.6	2.9	2.7

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	9
	National	N/A

International Baccalaureate	Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the	School	N/A

percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied

National

76.5

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	0
Indian	2
Pakistani	9
Bangladeshi	6
Chinese	18
White	707
Any other minority ethnic group	13

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi	1	
Chinese		
White	50	1
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	47.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	184

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78%
---	-----

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.5
Key Stage 4	17.9

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
----------------	-----------

Total income	1968947
Total expenditure	1963189
Expenditure per pupil	2735
Balance brought forward from previous year	92960
Balance carried forward to next year	98718

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	757
Number of questionnaires returned	201

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	48	46	4	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	48	44	5	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	34	57	5	1	1
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	32	50	14	2	0
The teaching is good.	32	50	14	2	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	36	45	15	3	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	62	36	1	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	68	36	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	36	46	12	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	61	34	4	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	50	42	4	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	36	38	14	1	9

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

ENGLISH

67. Progress has been made since the last inspection, but standards of attainment at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are still below the national average. In particular, numbers of pupils attaining Level 6 at the end of Year 9 and pupils attaining the highest GCSE grades are limited. The difference in achievement between boys and girls is marked. The more restricted entry for English Literature GCSE produces slightly better results than those for English. The strategies being introduced to improve standards are beginning to take effect, but the department needs to develop these further to raise standards and address the progress of boys and the extension of the more able. A Level candidates have achieved a consistent pass rate but with few of the highest grades.

68. Standards of achievement observed in lessons ranged from good to unsatisfactory. Overall, however, pupils' achievement in lessons was broadly satisfactory and better than their attainment against national standards would suggest. This is mainly because their oral work is much better than their written work.

69. Reading skills, in general, develop well and pupils are given opportunities for private reading, reading aloud in class, reading in pairs and in small groups. Pupils in Year 10 read "An Inspector Calls" with enthusiasm and a satisfactory degree of fluency. Speaking and listening skills are satisfactory or better and pupils derive particular benefit from the group tasks. Group discussions in a Year 8 class about characters in Roald Dahl's "Boy", and in a Year 9 class about the murder of King Duncan in "Macbeth" were animated and showed understanding.

70. The written work seen in Key Stages 3 and 4 was very varied in standard but most of it was below average which explains the below average examination standards. The department needs to be more demanding in its expectations of accuracy, presentation, the development of ideas and of fluency. More opportunities for imaginative and extended writing are needed. Sixth form work seen was satisfactory or better in Year 13 but underdeveloped in Year 12.

71. Overall, the teaching was satisfactory in all key stages with some good practice. Teachers have good subject knowledge and prepare thoroughly. Schemes of work have been re-written to incorporate curriculum changes and they offer clear guidelines, but the teachers tended to interpret the schemes narrowly, reflecting the relative lack of teaching experience within the department. Attention needs to be given to the range and appropriateness of materials used across the ability range in Key Stages 3 and 4

72. Lessons seen had a clear and consistent structure and were carefully planned. At times however, the pace flagged and they lacked some rigour, excitement and extension. Pupils are not given enough responsibility for their own learning, especially in the sixth form. The best assessment practice seen was thorough and constructive, offering useful advice for improvement, but there was little evidence that assessment is being used to inform planning and to set targets for pupils. The use of performance data, such as examination results and value-added measures, is at a relatively early stage of development within the department.

73. The range of materials and activities offered satisfies the requirements of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 with the exception of the use of ICT and the provision of drama. Both of these elements need to be planned into the schemes of work to provide equality of opportunity for all pupils. At Key Stage 4 GCSE requirements are met although within relatively limited curriculum time. The department makes a valuable contribution to the social and cultural development of pupils throughout the school. Moral issues such as abortion and smoking are also touched on in GCSE course work.

74. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They are attentive, if somewhat passive, and understand the expectation of good behaviour. Relationships between pupils, and between pupils and teachers, are good and lessons are conducted in a calm and orderly fashion. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language are well supported. A learning support assistant was able to give valuable one-to-one help in a Year 7 literacy lesson and in a Year 8 group reading session.

75. This is a relatively recently appointed department with the exception of two senior members of staff. Day-to-day management and organisation are good and communication within the department is effective. Support for a trainee teacher, a newly qualified teacher and for other new staff is good and has been well received. The departmental handbook sets out the aims of the department and the schemes of work clearly. It now needs to be extended to include examination results and analysis, the departmental development plan, responsibilities within the department and available resources. Development planning needs to focus more sharply on the issue of standards. Performance management within the department and providing a link with senior management will be a positive force but is not yet fully in place.

76. There have been some improvements in standards since the last inspection but there is much still to be done. However, the department has the capacity to improve further and the determination to do so.

Literacy

77. The English department has initiated a literacy lesson for Year 7 pupils as part of their progression from primary school. This has been linked to with the "Telling Tales" theme used in other lessons and provides some useful support in basic skills. The next stage in developing this aspect of the curriculum should be to look closely at the activities and revise them where needed to provide more challenge and interest. In a lesson on direct speech pupils spent too much time drawing the cartoon. The selection of words for the speech bubbles was of secondary interest and importance.

78. The development and implementation of a school literacy policy is incomplete. Some initial work has been done in departments but this has not yet been incorporated fully into schemes of work. The identification of key words is written into departmental documentation but reference to them in lessons is variable. Some good practice was seen in history, English and science and this is beginning to have a positive impact on standards, but overall there is a need to extend the definition and understanding of literacy within curriculum areas and across the curriculum. Departments need to consider their marking policies and the development, through their schemes of work, of reading, writing and speaking skills.

Drama

79. Drama is an optional GCSE subject with one group in Year 10 and one in Year 11. Examination standards are good both within the school context and when measured against national standards. In 1999 61% of candidates achieved grades A* - C and although the 50% achieved in 2000 was lower than predicted, Drama results were above average within the school. In lessons observed standards of achievement were satisfactory. Pupils showed an understanding of techniques such as focusing, shaping and freeze frame. Group work was well organised and the majority of pupils were enthusiastic contributors to the activities set.

80. The quality of teaching seen during the inspection was satisfactory or better. There was clear planning and exposition, positive support and encouragement and good use made of assessment information to target help for pupils of all abilities though within a somewhat limited

range of activities. Examination requirements are observed carefully but there was limited extension beyond the confines of the syllabus. Pupils would benefit from greater access to warm-up activities, movement, voice work and more wide ranging improvisations. This is particularly important as there is insufficient development of drama skills in Key Stage 3.

81. Most pupils clearly enjoy their learning. They co-operate well in small groups and learn to listen to each other and to agree outcomes. However, a small minority of pupils found it difficult to settle to the tasks in hand and to maintain concentration for an extended period. In some of the small groups an uneven contribution to the work hindered the progress of all concerned.

82. Drama at Key Stage 4 makes a significant contribution to the social development of pupils and to their cultural awareness. The opportunity for pupils to participate in school productions would extend this further. Accommodation, facilities and resources are unsatisfactory and limit the learning opportunities currently available to pupils. The planned refurbishment should address these shortcomings.

MATHEMATICS

83. Pupils achieve satisfactory standards in mathematics and teaching is almost all satisfactory or good. Standards and teaching have improved since the last inspection. In lessons the pupils behave well and display positive attitudes. The mathematics department is effective.

84. Key Stage 3 results in 2000 were in line with the national averages for all schools and for similar schools. Results have risen broadly in line with the national trend in the last five years, and in 2000 pupils did better in mathematics than in English and science. There are no significant differences between the achievement of boys and girls, and the standards are appropriate for pupils of high, middle and low ability. This was reflected in the recorded work of pupils and in lessons. For example in a Year 9 top-set lesson, the pupils made a good start to trigonometry, rapidly learning a formal method for using sine, cosine and tangent. In another lesson, lower-attaining pupils worked well at investigating area and perimeter, benefiting from the practical approach. Recorded work suggested that lower-attaining pupils spend a lot of time on topics such as symmetry, co-ordinates and statistics, and less regular time on number work, limiting their quick recall and calculation skills.

85. GCSE mathematics results have improved since the last inspection. In 2000, the proportion of A* to C grades was close to the national average for all schools and for similar schools. Pupils did better in mathematics than in English and many other subjects. There have been no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls. Scrutiny of recorded work suggested that pupils of different abilities achieve appropriate standards. For example, high-attaining pupils have good algebraic and graphical skills, whilst low-attaining pupils can methodically solve simple linear equations. In the lessons observed, standards of Year 11 work were in line with those expected. For example, top-set pupils drew the graphs of trigonometric functions and most understood the ideas well. A class of lower-attaining Year 10 pupils were keenly involved in which purchases would provide better value for money; they were further motivated when the teacher introduced two different sized bars of chocolate as visual aids. Overall standards are improving because the teaching is effective, work and assessment are well structured and the pupils have positive attitudes.

86. Results at A Level have been better in the years since the last inspection. Pupil numbers each year are small and varied, as is their ability. Thus it is not possible to make a meaningful judgement about overall standards. During the inspection a small group of Year 12 pupils were making satisfactory progress in statistics. When introduced to the binomial distribution, some

competently drew on ideas learnt in pure mathematics. Currently there is just one Year 13 A Level pupil who makes sound progress through one-to-one teaching. Such a number in a class is an issue for the school, both in terms of the cost and the quality of the learning experience available.

87. The teaching seen was satisfactory overall, with roughly half judged good and half satisfactory. This matched the quality of learning, with pupils making at least sound progress and showing interest in almost all lessons. For example in a low ability Key Stage 3 class, lively teaching engaged pupils in discussing the properties of different solid shapes and then drawing and constructing prisms. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Most lessons involved clear explanations to which the pupils paid careful attention. Teachers managed classroom activities in a firm but fair way, ensuring that pupils concentrated on their work and behaved appropriately. Lessons were well organised, and pupils worked quietly and steadily on the exercises they were set. The better lessons in Key Stage 3 started with brisk, effective mental mathematics, for example with pupils suggesting calculations to arrive at a given large number, or making use of prepared charts of numbers. There are good relationships between teachers and pupils, and touches of humour characterised many lessons. In Key Stage 4, teachers had clear objectives for lessons from the modular examination scheme.

88. However, a few lessons seen were not well-enough planned, so the pace was slow and pupils learnt too little. Work in books, on display and seen in lessons suggest time is wasted in colouring or construction tasks, for example in making paper dice for probability work. Too many pupils present scrappy work in their books, but in many lessons the teachers' board work was untidy. The marking of written work is inconsistent. Some teachers leave books unmarked for too long or provide superficial feedback to pupils, but others check work regularly and provide constructive comments.

89. The mathematics curriculum is satisfactory overall, with some good but other weaker features. The work in Key Stage 3 tends to follow the content of text books, limiting some of the work, but in Key Stage 4 the clearly defined modules and assessments contribute to the progress being made. The use of ability sets in all years and work that is matched to pupils' abilities are particular strengths. However, the scheme of work for Years 7 and 8 is in need of review as the department has not yet properly responded to Curriculum 2000.

90. The department has made little progress towards its targets for numeracy, literacy and the use of computers in mathematics. In lessons, teachers were aware of key words, but these were sometimes given no attention, and there was little planned discussion to help pupils learn. The use of computers within mathematics is currently unsatisfactory, although there is some use of the program LOGO and spreadsheets.

91. Numeracy across the curriculum is not yet implemented as intended. The school does not have a numeracy policy to provide a clear framework and guidance for teachers. However, there is good practice in some individual subjects. For example, in design technology and in science pupils are expected to measure precisely, to tabulate information and to draw graphs; in history and geography, pupils effectively interpret real data and graphs. Within mathematics lessons, especially given the above-average time available, teaching has yet to build on the skills that pupils are now bringing at the age of 11.

92. There are strengths in the overall leadership and management of mathematics, but also areas to improve. The department is a cohesive team of teachers who respect the leadership provided. The teachers share ideas informally and the pupils, whatever their ability or background, get a good deal from mathematics. However, the scheme of work, the handbook and the development plan continue to be weaknesses, as at the last inspection, and this hinders further improvement. Although these weaknesses exist, whole-school management has not ensured they

are addressed. However, teaching and standards have improved since the last inspection and the department has the opportunity to build further on these achievements.

SCIENCE

93. Results in the national tests taken by 14 year olds at the end of Year 9 have improved since the last inspection. In 2000, the school's results for level 5 and above were the same as the national, though not as good at level 6 and above and therefore, the 2000 results were below the national average overall, though in line with that for similar schools. Taking the past three years together, the school's results for 14 year olds were below the national average, and equally so for both boys and girls.

94. Pupils currently in Year 9 are reaching average standards, with some reaching standards well above these, though a minority are below average. In their written work and in lessons, pupils are developing a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of National Curriculum science. They understand how to carry out investigations to test predictions, know how to conduct a fair test and most present their measurements and conclusions clearly. This is an improvement on the position previously reported. The trend of achievement at Key Stage 3 is rising, with pupils now joining the school who have had a better grounding in science. Their written work is often particularly thorough and well organised, showing some of the benefits to science of the national literacy strategy. This is helped by teachers making it clear to pupils what their expectations are for good science report writing. Pupils' practical skills and their ability to show their findings in tables and graphs, and use their mathematical skills, are better than at the previous inspection. However, pupils throughout the school still are not using ICT in science.

95. The achievements of pupils with special educational needs, those who speak English as an additional language and the most able pupils in each class are generally satisfactory, though the most able pupils in some classes are not always challenged enough.

96. GCSE results have improved markedly since the last inspection. In 2000, as in 1999, the results in double award science, the examination taken by the minority of 16 year olds, were well above the national average for grades A*-C. Pupils Both boys and girls did better in double science in 2000 than in their other subjects with boys doing markedly better than in their other subjects. The results in GCSE single award science, the examination taken by 60 per cent of the pupils in 2000, also were well above the national average for grades A*-C. Girls did not do quite as well in science as in their other subjects, while boys did better. Nationally, eight out of every ten pupils have the opportunity to achieve two GCSE passes in science, whereas only about half this proportion take double science at St. Mark's. The option system does not allow enough pupils to take double science.

97. The work of present Year 11 pupils shows that many are on course to achieve above average GCSE results which is consistent with their results in the Year 9 tests. The GCSE module test results of the most able pupils, are reaching the highest GCSE standards. In lessons, their written work is of outstanding quality both in presentation and detail. These and other pupils demonstrate secure understanding of such topics as chemical equations and the function of the placenta. Some of the less able pupils in Year 10, while progressing satisfactorily, have not yet mastered some of the work, for example the blood system. Compared to the last inspection, the current pupils now have a better overall grasp of science, going beyond simple recall of facts to understanding them and carrying out thoughtful investigations. Many pupils know how to use their practical investigations to test hypotheses, and the most able pupils base their predictions on well thought-out scientific reasons.

98. Pupils with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language are progressing satisfactorily. Some pupils whose needs relate to emotional and

behavioural difficulties are often able to rise to the challenge presented by practical work and do well. In some classes, not enough is always expected of the most able pupils who are given the same work as are others and so do not progress as far and as fast as they could. Overall, however, when compared with results in national tests at aged 14, most pupils make satisfactory progress during their GCSE course.

99. In 2000 the pass rate at A Level was broadly in line with the national average in biology, chemistry and physics taken together, but the number taking each subject is too low for meaningful subject comparisons. The pupils generally achieved results which were consistent with their achievement at GCSE. Pupils in the present Year 12 and Year 13 are progressing satisfactorily, though a few have given up and have ceased to attend classes. Those who are persevering enjoy their work, relate confidently to their teachers and are on course to achieve pass grades.

100. The quality of the teaching observed during the inspection was satisfactory overall with about two out of every ten lessons being good and a one in every ten unsatisfactory. There were no significant differences between the key stages. Judged by the impact it has had on pupils' achievements and on their learning, teaching is now better than at the time of the last inspection, though there still are weaknesses that prevent some pupils from achieving as well as they could.

101. Strengths in teaching outweigh weaknesses and this is why, overall, pupils' learning and achievements are usually at least satisfactory and occasionally good. In the best teaching, explanations of new ideas are clear, with good use made of questions to find out whether pupils really are understanding. Resources help to bring the subject alive, but even here too little is done to show the relevance of their science lessons to pupils' wider experiences now and in the future. Classes are busy, orderly and friendly, and have a sustained focus on work, with the resulting good use of time. Equipment for practical work is ready, teachers working hard with the technician to ensure that investigations can get underway promptly. Some practical investigations are opened so that pupils can move on, but this is too infrequently the case. Lessons are planned in such a way that learning builds up step by step, though objectives for learning could sometimes be more sharply focused on defining gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. Careful attention to individual pupils who may be having difficulties in grasping ideas is a further strength. Marking of pupils' work in some classes is particularly thorough and helpful. Homework relates well to what has been learnt in the lesson. The homework support materials, either bought or made by the school, are evidence of the commitment of the department to raising standards further. Use of the recently purchased textbooks supports learning during lessons.

102. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good and in the few unsatisfactory lessons, lesson plans show the objectives, but these are not always made clear enough to pupils. Some lessons finish without any worthwhile attempt to find out what pupils have actually learnt. The less good teaching does not always challenge the more able pupils sufficiently, the questioning is not probing enough to find out what pupils know and understand. Pupils are not encouraged to think and question for themselves and investigations are not consistently based on thoroughly discussed hypotheses. Occasionally, pupils have to wait for others to finish before they can move on. However, this does not lead to unsatisfactory behaviour because pupils are well behaved in the laboratories. They are mainly keen to learn, work well together, and use and share resources very sensibly. Some of the weaknesses, for example the lack of challenge and the limited involvement of pupils, were noted in the last inspection.

103. The head of department has been effective in raising standards and in bringing about good improvement since the last inspection. Under her energetic leadership the subject is well placed to continue its improvement and more still needs to be done, especially in relation to weaknesses in teaching and the lack of use of ICT which is a significant weakness. The curriculum as a whole is better matched to the National Curriculum and assessment has improved. In the light of the improved quality of the Key Stage 4 curriculum and the results obtained at GCSE, the school

should review the relatively limited access of pupils to double award GCSE.

ART AND DESIGN

104. The results of teacher assessments in 2000 show that just over half of Year 9 pupils attained standards in line with or above expectations but there was not enough work from these pupils to confirm the accuracy of the assessments. The standard of work of the current Year 9 is well below these levels and the expected level for their age. They are not making enough progress, their achievement is unsatisfactory and not as good as the standards they are achieving in other subjects.

105. The samples of work provided by the school mostly contained examples of poorly presented, unfinished work with little evidence of systematic teaching of skills. Pupils' critical and analytical skills were underdeveloped which limits their ability to refine and modify their work and enjoy the satisfaction of seeing it improve. Discussions with pupils revealed a very limited awareness and appreciation of work by different artists. Though keen to talk about their work, most lacked the technical vocabulary and the experience of exploring and testing out ideas and expressing opinions. In this respect pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development were undervalued and not developed.

106. A small number of pupils each year take the GCSE in art and the results have been below average. In 2000, the results were below both the national average and the average for similar schools. Pupils generally perform less well in art than in their other subjects. Several pupils who began the course dropped out before the examination. Attainment of pupils in the Year 11 class is below average, though some demonstrate higher standards in their practical work than in their research and investigation. As at the time of the last inspection many began the course with poor work habits and an insecure foundation from which to develop. For example, the quality of sketchbooks is poor. Investigative and research skills have not been progressively taught and developed at Key Stage 3 and not enough account is taken of this in Year 10. As a result pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory as most of them are not prepared for the rigours of an examination course and are unlikely to do as well as they could.

107. Those who are achieving well have an unshakeable interest and commitment. They maintain a good work rate and can work independently. For example a higher-attaining pupil experimented with layers of water colour paint and tried different types of paper and surfaces before beginning his final piece of work. Another pupil, looking at the work of Kandinski commented on the use of geometric shapes and patterns. Visual references had been well used by a number of pupils but generally they did not look more deeply into the contextual factors that had influenced the work.

108. Few students go on to take an A Level in art and comparing their results against national averages is not appropriate. Attainment of students currently on the course is below average and their achievement unsatisfactory. They joined the course with above average GCSE results but their progress to date has been slow and their work is lacking the depth and intellectual rigour required at this level. The groups are too small and students do not benefit from the lively discussions and challenging contributions that being part of a larger group can bring. Attending a life drawing class at the local sixth form college is a positive step towards addressing some of the gaps in provision and is helping to raise the standard of drawing.

109. Overall the quality of teaching seen and the impact of teaching over the longer term are unsatisfactory, leading to unsatisfactory learning and underachievement. Approximately half the Key Stage 3 lessons and a small number of Key Stage 4 lessons were taken by a non-specialist, temporary supply teacher. This accounted for much, though not all of the unsatisfactory teaching. The long-term plans are broadly satisfactory and teaching had a positive impact on learning where

the teacher demonstrated a particular skill or technique, as happened in Year 11 and Year 13 lessons. Pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are not, however, progressively developed. In lessons shorter-term learning objectives were not clearly identified and shared with pupils. As a result, lessons lacked pace, purpose and direction and not enough high quality work was completed in the available time. Despite this, most pupils were patient, worked from books or from memory, and showed remarkable tolerance, with only a few showing signs of disaffection. Expectations of teachers and pupils were too low and led to underachievement, particularly in years 7-9.

110. The management of the subject is not satisfactory. Most of the weaknesses highlighted in this report were noted in the previous report and as at the time of the last inspection many pupils have been taught by several staff including non specialist teachers. Standards are too low and need to be improved. The underachievement of pupils and weakness in teaching require urgent and rigorous monitoring.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

111. At the end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessment is in line with national expectations. Work seen supports the teachers' assessment at the end of Key Stage 3. When designing, pupils undertake research, sketch initial ideas and select a final product to make. Tasks to develop skills and product analysis are strong features of learning. In Years 7, 8 and 9 all modules constrain the pupils' opportunities for decision-making. There is no specific assignment which allows them total freedom of choice in designing a solution to a problem. This misses the opportunity to test their capability in this respect and prepare them for the challenges of GCSE.

112. At Key Stage 4 pupils select a single material to study for the GCSE. In 2000 results were just above national averages. An important factor influencing grades at GCSE is the percentage of pupils entered for the examination. It is ten percent above the national entry figures and shows that all pupils are given equal opportunities in design and technology. The pupils' results in design and technology are generally better than in other subjects. Girls' results are higher than boys, which is in line with the national trend. Girls show better design and thinking skills and get better results for their design portfolio than the boys do. Work seen in lessons and pupils' folders in Key Stage 4 is good. Very good teaching, access to the GCSE marking criteria and high quality displays of pupils' work are helping to raise aspirations and improve standards. In the sixth form the numbers taking A Level are too small to make comparisons with the national figures valid. In recent years all pupils have passed, though with few high grades.

113. Pupils discuss harmoniously in groups and also research and share ideas. This helps to strengthen their knowledge and understanding and reflect on their contributions to the group work. In GNVQ pupils planned a healthy meal as a group. They were investigating a range of dietary needs including those of diabetics and vegetarians. The result was interesting for the group as they all managed to contribute from their experiences, which raised their self-esteem and extended their learning. Good organisational skills and a sense of responsibility are qualities nurtured in the department. The well-organised work areas encourage pupils' independence during practical sessions.

114. Teaching across the subject is very good overall with a small amount of excellent teaching and some satisfactory teaching. Teachers have very good subject expertise and share their skills through effective demonstrations and meticulous planning. For example, in Year 8 textiles, pupils were challenged to complete a range of textiles projects over a nine-week module. The projects required pupils to use a template, patterns and computer-controlled embroidery equipment, as well as attempting the extension task to complete a mini project on natural fibres. The diversity of the module inspired enthusiasm. Homework was used to extend knowledge and improve standards. The work was planned to challenge the more able and yet support the lower attainers. In a very

good A Level lesson the challenging questioning was prompting pupils to think constructively about all aspects of design relevant to their final projects. Basic skills of literacy and numeracy are consistently well taught. In Years 7 and 8 this includes ICT, but in Year 9 computer-aided design and manufacture is missing. Teachers consistently expect pupils to show self-discipline, to behave well and to be well organised. This allows optimum time for learning and raising standards. The assessment process and good marking enable teachers to track pupils' work and help them and their pupils to take appropriate action.

115. A minority of lessons had features that failed to engage pupils in their learning. In these lessons pupils were not aware of how to develop their thinking and analysis by using their product specification. Opportunities to use ICT and involve pupils actively in a risk assessment of their work area were also missed.

116. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. The head of department has provided very good leadership. Examination results have improved. Making skills are now firmly embedded at Key Stage 3, raising the standard of pupils' designing and making skills. Graphics has been re-introduced but it is at a very early stage of development. A rigorous review of schemes of work is targeting the development of essential skills for the design and make process. However, at the start of Year 7 it is difficult for teachers to plan a coherent link with primary school design and technology, because they have not yet established a means of identifying what the pupils already know. The revamp of the design and technology block has not included food technology and textiles which remain outdated in design for the delivery of the National Curriculum.

GEOGRAPHY

117. Pupils' attainment at the end of both key stages is below average but standards are improving as a result of the developments in the department. The impact of these has not yet had time to have a positive effect on the standards at the end of Key Stage 3 and GCSE results. The work seen in Years 7 and 8 is of a relatively higher standard than in Year 9 and are closer to the national expectations. At Key Stage 4 GCSE results in 2000 were well below average but the work seen during the inspection was much closer to this. In the sixth form, standards at A Level are close to national expectations.

118. Pupils are now making mainly good progress through the school because schemes of work have been suitably modified and assessment is more focused on raising standards and meeting particular needs. Pupils' use of geographical skills is a particular strength. They consolidate their oral and written skills and, in particular, are able to extract information from a variety of resources. In Year 7, pupils are able to use latitude and longitude to locate places in the atlas. In Year 8 they can offer clear explanations for the location of and the reasons for earthquakes and by Year 9, they can extract information from a variety of sources to explain the problems of economic development in different countries. In Year 10 charts and cross-sections are produced to describe the landscapes of Switzerland. Pupils with special educational needs and students in the sixth form make consistently good progress.

119. Pupils are punctual, settle down quickly in lessons, are interested in their work and respond well to their teachers. Levels of concentration and attention are good throughout. Pupils are courteous, helpful and show respect, they are responsible mainly work hard and co-operate well with each other.

120. The teaching seen was good overall. In Key Stage 3 it was always at least satisfactory and much was good. It was always good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Teachers are well qualified, and have a depth of knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm which is passed on well to pupils. Oral work is helped by the good use of questioning techniques to elicit from pupils what

they already know. In particular teachers are patient in encouraging participation by lower-attaining pupils.

121. Lessons are planned and managed well, using a variety of resources to stimulate interest. Most lessons were taught as a whole class but sometimes contained elements of group work. For example in a Year 8 lesson on the Mystery game, the task allowed pupils of different abilities the chance to contribute to the lesson with confidence and interest. However there are relatively few opportunities for extended independent learning for more able pupils, especially at Key Stage 3. Lessons are well structured and usually move at a good pace, but pupils are not always made aware of the specific targets for each lesson. Most pupils show confidence in the presentation of their work. Marking is consistent and comments at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form indicate to pupils how their work can be improved. Reports to parents are helpful and informative. Fieldwork throughout the school is well organized and the tasks set are appropriate to the range of abilities in the class. Recent changes to the schemes of work offer good opportunities for higher-attaining pupils at GCSE and in the sixth form for sufficiently challenging work

122. Geography is well managed and the head of department offers a clear sense of direction. All issues raised in the last report have been dealt with successfully. Pupils grasp of scale and physical processes has improved. Resources for classroom and fieldwork now use current data and the pace of work in lessons is better. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Planning, development and monitoring is effective and the members of the department work well together. Day-to-day assessment procedures are good and pupils' progress is assessed against explicit criteria and against the National Curriculum. Opportunities are now taken to inform pupils at frequent intervals of the progress they are making, the National Curriculum levels they have achieved and the targets they need to work towards. Schemes of work show logical progression and are regularly monitored. The resources available are satisfactory. However, some need replacement and ICT is not integrated into the schemes of work which is a weakness.

HISTORY

123. The results of the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 for 2000 were below the national average. The results for GCSE in 2000 show the students achieving above the school average though not the national average. Six of the eight 'A' level entrants gained a pass grade.

124. The evidence of pupils' work and lessons observed shows the current Year 9 also working below national expectations though the most able showed understanding of the need to evaluate and interpret evidence. Most pupils' letters to Parliament protesting about living conditions in the nineteenth century did not have the length and structure to meet the lesson objectives. Pupils lacked the literacy skills to translate what they could do orally in lessons into finished written work. Pupils in Year 7 however, are showing an improvement which reflects their better standards on entry to the school. For example they are able to write sustained accounts of the key elements of the history they are studying.

125. During the inspection some very good work was seen from the pupils in Key Stage 4. This was at its best in the Year 11 option group. Their thoughtful and perceptive evaluation of sources about the First World War was complemented by observations made during the visit to the war sites of Northern France, and pupils' reading of the war poets. Sixth form pupils in the 'A' level groups were making satisfactory progress overall in the light of what they had achieved at GCSE. Some pupils, though, have still to make the transition to the demands of study at this level. For example, in essay work seen on German foreign policy 1890-1914, they needed to go beyond the recounting of details to presenting a sustained argument in response to a direct question.

126. Overall teaching was satisfactory and much of it was good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, good awareness of expected outcomes and good classroom presence. They mark

books regularly and feed back grades and advice to pupils. Teaching was most effective with the Year 11 option group where a clear focus on the outcomes was linked to a good pace, a variety of activities, good artefacts and video resources, and excellent involvement of the pupils. Pupils' attitudes in lessons were positive throughout and when in the best lessons they were actively involved in their learning they were clearly making progress. In group work in Year 8 on the Plague pupils worked effectively in (and moved between) groups with a minimum of fuss. In Year 11 pupils volunteered to perform a courtroom role-play to exemplify various aspects of the evidence.

127. In a few lessons the match of work to the needs of the whole class was not as good as in most lessons and pupils who finished the tasks early needed to have extended work set. In some Year 9 and Year 10 classes a few pupils found the materials difficult to understand. Some of the satisfactory teaching was sometimes too teacher directed, as in a Year 13 class learning about anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany, when opportunities were missed to engage the students in considering some of the ideas and materials on offer.

128. Developments in assessment have been made since the last inspection, although pupils in Key Stage 3 do not find it easy to understand the information about the National Curriculum statements (level descriptors) that determine their attainment levels. The way their work is assessed does not help pupils to set their own targets and understand what they should do to improve their work

129. Improvements since the last inspection include more informative reports for parents in Key Stage 4, clear learning objectives spelled out in schemes of work and lesson plans, and systematic assessment of pupils' work in relation to these expected outcomes. These developments provide a sound base for developing more pupil-friendly strategies for self-evaluation, with clearly understood targets set for higher achievement. This is particularly necessary in Key Stage 3, where achievement is still below national expectations.

130. Although the department uses a good range of appropriate resources, ICT is not used enough, nor is enough use made of textbooks. The planned visits provide good support for the curriculum. These include the local history investigation and the extended visit to the battle sites of World War I. The recent initiative on literacy has already proved beneficial through in-service training for the department. It has prompted more planned involvement of students in their own learning. This development, combined with a more rigorous monitoring and assessment system, should have a positive effect on pupils' achievement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

131. The school policy states that ICT is taught through skill modules that are part of the Key Stage 3 design and technology programme, and that pupils will practise and hone those skills across the curriculum. However at present with the exception of music and design and technology, subjects are not giving pupils the opportunity to do this and are thus the school is not meeting statutory requirements.

132. Teacher assessment shows that standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are below national expectations. A rigorous review of the schemes of work has ensured that the basic skills are taught in the limited time available, but pupils do not have the opportunity to use computers in all subjects which limits the use of ICT and depresses standards.

133. Overall at Key Stage 4, standards in 2000 were just below national averages for A*-C grades but above for A*-G. Girls do particularly well in ICT, they exceed the national average and achieve higher grades than the boys. The number of pupils entered for GCSE is much higher than the national average and pupils' results are significantly better than in the other subjects they take. Standards at sixth form were in line with national averages.

134. At the start of Key Stage 3 ICT is part of the rotation of design and technology subjects and the disjointed nature of the course hampers learning and progress. However, the modules taught challenge and motivate pupils. They encourage independent activities where discovery and fun are key elements of learning. In Year 7 pupils were challenged to design a school web page. The room buzzed with excitement as pupils searched the Internet to examine the web pages of local schools, including their own primary schools. This approach fired pupils' imagination and ideas. Many enthusiasts spend lunch times in the computer rooms and library where they practise skills and develop understanding. In Key Stage 3, pupils use a wide range of programmes to develop their use of spreadsheets, databases, and desk top publishing, e-mail, the Internet and report writing, but do not have enough opportunity to use and develop further their skills in other subjects.

135. The curriculum in Key Stage 4 is better structured and learning improves. Pupils opt for GCSE Information Studies. They generally work well and most make good use of the case study materials, their personal experiences and opportunities such as the visit to discover how a theatre works as a business. The variety of approach meets the needs of all, but some course materials are too complex for the lower-attaining pupils. Year 11 have a mature attitude to their work. They are committed to their studies and access to the examination mark scheme enables pupils to focus on work they need to improve.

136. Standards of work and folders seen in the sixth form are good. Students progress rapidly through their AS/A2 level course. They are highly motivated and articulate. They explain their system designs in detail and identify what they have learned from design faults in previous projects. Students have selected challenging problems to solve, for example working with the head of sixth form to design an assessment and recording system. The reality of the problem chosen and the quality of thinking and planning required are having a huge impact on raising standards. Good computer skills are also being developed on the key skills course.

137. Pupils who attain at a lower level in other subjects make good progress in ICT, because the quality of their computer work equals that of other pupils which raises self-esteem and confidence. Pupils with English as a second language work consistently to improve their computer skills, but there are no dual texts or programs to support their mother tongue.

138. Teaching in the department is good overall with some which is very good. The specialist teachers share their skills and enthusiasm to create a good environment that stimulates learning. Detailed planning, clear objectives and a brisk pace demands positive results from pupils. The choice of relevant and purposeful topics motivates pupils to learn. For example teaching them how to use spreadsheets through a pocket money topic gave all pupils a chance to use personal experience and collect first hand data from friends in order to complete their task. Pupils know how to improve their work because they receive good feedback and the marking of their work helps their understanding. Where teaching was satisfactory rather than good progress was slower because the match of work to the ability of the pupils was not as good. A minority of Year 10 pupils allow their concentration to drift which affects their learning and their attitude made it harder for the teacher to establish what they knew and consolidate understanding.

139. Non-specialist teaching is unsatisfactory, because with the exception of music and design and technology, very little takes place! Teachers are often frustrated at the limited access to computers in their own areas and the need for subject specific training in the use of computers. In some cases computers are in place but not used, as in English. The lack of a clear planning for what computer skills could be taught where, does not help staff to identify the part their teaching can play in developing the use of ICT as a basic skill.

140. Progress from the previous report has been sound. Strengths are, the improved hardware,

which is still below national average, the planned approach to networking the school and improved provision in the sixth form. Computer control was highlighted as an issue; this is now in place in Years 7 and 8 but is still missing from Year 9. The whole school provision plus monitoring and tracking of ICT remains an issue. Management of the ICT courses is good but cross-curricular work is unsatisfactory overall because of the problems of access, time and continuity. There is also a lack of a whole school management approach to the co-ordination of ICT.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

141. The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were below those reported nationally. The standard of work of pupils currently in Year 9 is also below national expectations for this stage of the course. Higher-attaining pupils write extended paragraphs about their holidays with considerable support. They use past and present tenses and occasionally describe the weather using the imperfect tense. Lower-attaining pupils have difficulty recalling numbers up to twenty and are hesitant when answering the teacher with one-word answers.

142. GCSE results have fluctuated considerably since the last inspection, reaching a high proportion of A* - C passes in 1998 with a small number of entries and falling in 2000 to a very low proportion of A* -C passes when compared with national averages with two thirds of the cohort entered for the examination. Pupils, particularly the girls, did worse in French than in most other subjects although the girls performed better than boys in line with national trends did. There is no A Level French in the sixth form.

143. The evidence of pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that attainment in the current Year 11 is well below national expectations. Higher-attaining pupils do best when writing, with support, passages in preparation for examinations using past, present and future tenses. They prepare oral work well but are at the stage of reading their work rather than speaking from memory. Lower-attaining pupils are considerably weaker and spend much of their time copying support sheets rather than producing the language for themselves. They cannot recall previous vocabulary and structures and have a poor base of knowledge on which to build new learning.

144. When compared to their earlier attainment, pupils, including those with special educational needs, underachieve in French. On entry to the school, Year 7 pupils are of average ability but by the end of the year, they attain standards that are below national expectations. This is mainly because the course has been diluted and is delivered over two years rather than one. By the end of Year 9, pupils are almost a year behind the national expectation for an average 14 year old. In many lessons, although teachers know their pupils well, they do not provide adequate support for those with learning difficulties, which means that they are constantly falling behind the rest of the class.

145. Teaching is unsatisfactory at both key stages. Most teachers have good classroom management and use established routines well. They speak French for much of the lesson and enable pupils to understand what is going on by using mime, the whiteboard or the overhead projector for visual support. Very occasionally, they provide activities that relate directly to the pupils' interests and ensure that they are fully involved in the learning. This was seen in a Year 7 lesson where pupils learnt the work well by playing a game in which they matched pictures and phrases on sporting activities. The main weaknesses are in the continuity, pace and timing of lessons. Teachers do not always build systematically on what has been taught before. Planning was sketchy for some lessons. In one, a Year 7 lesson, for example, the teacher arrived at the planned conclusion just over half way through the hour and had to fill in with additional, unprepared work. Not enough time is spent presenting and practising new vocabulary and structures to enable pupils to memorise them before they are tested.

146. As a result of this unsatisfactory teaching, learning is also unsatisfactory for all but the most able and most motivated pupils. Despite their generally positive attitudes and desire to do well, most pupils cannot remember the learning from one lesson to the next. There are pupils in Year 11 with little recall of previous learning attempting exercises that they find extremely difficult and which do nothing either to enhance their personal esteem or to increase their knowledge and skills. These pupils behaved very badly during the inspection and refused to co-operate with the teacher.

147. The department is located in a suite of three rooms and two anterooms. Although adequate in terms of space, the area is dismal and untidy, crowded with extremely old resources and unnecessary furniture. It provides an uninspiring learning environment. Much of the display is old and worn and, with the exception of the course work on display celebrating the high achievement of some of last year's pupils, does little either to support the learning or celebrate achievement. There have been no visits, exchanges or day trips to France for many years and as a result, there is no opportunity for pupils to see why they are learning the language. Since the French and German departments operate independently, teachers are professionally isolated and have few opportunities to discuss modern languages issues outside the confines of this small department. Experienced teachers have attended little in-service training in recent years and although the head of department monitors teaching informally, this is not being done in a way that ensures that the best features of the teaching are identified and built on, nor that are weaknesses eliminated. There are no foreign language assistants and few support teachers were seen in French lessons.

148. Many of the issues identified in the last inspection report have not been addressed. The departmental development plans focus on improving pupils' attitudes rather than improving teaching methodology as recommended by the last report. Little work has been done on the schemes of work to address the issues relating to pace and challenge. As a result of these shortcomings, improvement since the last inspection, together with overall management of this subject area, is judged to be unsatisfactory.

German

149. The standard of work of pupils currently in Year 9 is above national expectations for this stage of a second language course. Pupils achieve well. They begin learning German by talking about subjects such as football clubs, which engages their interests from the very beginning. After four months of learning, higher-attaining pupils write about their daily routine fluently using a variety of present tense verbs. Lower-attaining pupils have some problems with copying correctly but give accurate descriptions of people using a range of adjectives.

150. GCSE results have improved in German over the past three years and were above national averages in 2000 with about the same proportion of the cohort entering for the examination as nationally. Pupils did better in German than in most of their other subjects although there were no A* or A grades. Girls performed better than boys in line with national trends did.

151. From analysis of the work and lessons observed, attainment at Key Stage 4 is similarly high. Speaking, reading and writing skills are very well developed but listening skills are weaker because the lessons are being delivered almost entirely in English. This means that although pupils are well prepared for examinations and attain high standards, they do not have enough opportunities to deal with unpredictable situations.

152. Teaching in German is satisfactory overall with considerable strengths and one significant weakness. The teaching is extremely focused and challenging and enables pupils both to remember the work being taught and to have the confidence to reproduce it in front of the class. The teacher has identified what has to be taught, teaches it well, gives pupils enough time to practise it and then tests it in a way that ensures success. Lessons are well prepared and structured and every minute is used to best advantage. There are high expectations both of

behaviour and of performance. Homework plays an important role in ensuring that pupils continue learning long after the lesson has finished. Work is regularly given and is marked well with good feedback provided for each individual pupil. A significant strength of the teaching is the opportunity provided for pupils to assess one another's work at a whole class level and the way in which they advise one another on how to improve.

153. As a result of the teaching approach, pupils make good progress in developing their speaking, reading and writing skills and meet the teacher's clearly defined objectives in every respect. However, the significant weakness relates to the teacher's use of German in lessons. Despite the teacher's competent, fluent German, lessons are conducted mainly in English and an important aspect of the learning, the development of listening skills, is neglected. Pupils are not developing the skill they will need in later life to enable them to function adequately in a German environment and cannot reach a high enough standard in listening to enable them to cope well with an A Level syllabus.

154. Management of the subject is satisfactory and the subject leader has a real determination to succeed. However there is not enough documentation in place to ensure adequate progression should this teacher decide to move on. The condition of the accommodation in German is poor and the teacher is extremely isolated since he works alone with no formal attachment to the French department. The time allowance at Key Stage 3 is one of the reasons why the teaching has become so centred on English. With only one hour per week there is very little time to ensure that pupils succeed in the language before choosing their options for Key Stage 4. In consequence, few pupils choose to study German in Key Stage 4 and there is no A Level German in the sixth form.

MUSIC

155. At Key Stage 3, the requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met. Standards achieved by pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 are broadly in line with national expectations and are rising overall. Pupils make very good progress in class, and co-operate well in small-group activities. They quickly organise themselves into effective working groups, using a variety of notation systems to conserve and refine their chosen musical ideas. They value the high-quality percussion and keyboard instruments, which they treat with considerable respect. They enjoy performing their compositions to the class, and regularly engage in target-setting to improve the quality of their work. Pupils with special educational needs are well-integrated. In one Year 7 lesson, a pupil with an individual educational plan sensitively played a low and high pitched bongo drum to co-ordinate the skilful playing of keyboard improvisations by two classmates.

156. At the end of Key Stage 4, the majority of pupils who opt for music GCSE achieve in line with national expectations. Within Key Stage 4, Year 10 pupils are making the best progress, as a result of the positive impact of consistently high standards of teaching during Key Stage 3. In a Year 10 lesson, a pupil effectively used an information technology software package to explore gamelan sounds and rhythms, deriving considerable satisfaction from organising his musical ideas beat by beat, before playing them back in real time and developing them further.

157. At AS level, the number of students is far too small to make valid national comparisons, but they are making very good progress. In a Year 13 lesson a student was putting the finishing touches to a high-quality composition portfolio, including a well-structured string quartet. Later in the day, during a lunchtime string ensemble club, the student had the pleasure of hearing the first rehearsal of the composition, which was well played by a quartet of pupils and teachers.

158. The teaching of class music across all key stages is very effective, promoting good standards. The variability in the quality and expertise of the teaching reported at the last Ofsted inspection has been totally eradicated. The wide range of effective teaching techniques encourages high achievement and good progress. All lessons are meticulously planned. In a Year 8 lesson exploring Indian music, the teacher expertly performed an improvisation of a chosen raga on two different recorders. This stimulated the pupils to continue their own exploration of their musical ideas. One pupil confidently explained to the class using technical language how he was using a 16 beat tal to organise the rhythms he was playing on his drum to accompany the teacher. Whilst there is a greater emphasis on instrumental work rather than singing in class, the recent engaging of a visiting vocal teacher is helping the development of vocal work in the department. Music makes a significant contribution to the social and cultural development of the pupils.

159. The head of department and one of the school's deputy heads organise an impressive range of extra-curricular activities throughout the week, enthusiastically attended by growing numbers of young musicians. In addition to Year 7 and school choirs, there are a number of instrumental ensembles, all of which contribute to the annual carol and summer concerts, as well as assemblies, presentation evenings and open days. Part of this provision is within the Tuesday evening Music School for the local community, which is run separately on behalf of the Essex Music Service. 71 St Mark's pupils attend, of whom 10 are learning two or more instruments. Eleven teachers cover a wide range of instruments as well as theory and vocal tuition. A jazz band rehearsal of "That Old Black Magic" catered for a wide range of musical competence. Pupils played with evident enjoyment, with a good balance between fun and extending their instrumental skills. Overall, the extra-curricular activities and instrumental, theory and vocal lessons make a significant contribution to the musical achievements of the pupils at the school.

160. The department is well led. Since the last inspection, the departmental handbook, policies and schemes of work have all been updated to take account of the demands of the new National Curriculum. An ambitious development plan has substantial implications for future resourcing. Assessment of progress and achievement are particularly effective in making clear to pupils what they have to do to improve, and also in informing future curricular planning. Homework is well-integrated into the classroom projects. However, no formal procedures are yet in place for the observation of lessons within the department.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

161. The teacher assessments in PE at the end of Year 9 were at the national average. The work seen during the inspection was consistent with the teacher assessments. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their standards are below average. Their progress and achievement are satisfactory. For example, in a Year 7 lesson pupils learned to build up basic skills in gymnastics, which they united in straightforward sequences on basic apparatus. By Year 9 skills were more developed in a gymnastics class, where pupils worked at about the national average. Most pupils achieved balances; higher-attaining pupils used partner-assisted flight with extension and co-ordination in their sequences of movement. Lower-attaining pupils achieved sequences on one level with little change in direction and little variety to movements.

162. GCSE results in physical education have fluctuated since the last inspection. In 2000, the results were below the results for maintained secondary schools. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C fell, and the proportion gaining at least a grade G has remained the same. Pupils did worse in physical education than they did in their other subjects and boys did better than girls. Standards are average at the end of Year 11. Pupils approach the practical work confidently and do well in activities such as badminton. For example, in a Year 11 badminton lesson, high attaining pupils understood the principles of forward and back doubles play; they managed the overhead shot and smashes and all pupils managed a rally though few used the space to place shots

effectively. Pupils do less well in theory work, where there is less interest; pupils generally view the subject as essentially practical.

163. In the sixth form A Level physical education has been introduced into the curriculum this year. Observation in lessons and of work done indicates that students' attainment is above national targets. Very good attitudes enhance learning.

164. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily because of the efforts of the physical education department. Teachers are clear in their explanations and give information and instructions in small, easily understood sections. This assists the learning of all pupils but particularly lower-attainers. Pupils did not achieve well in lessons where demonstrations were too brief, or practice time was too constrained to allow consolidation of an aspect of an activity. Where this occurred low attaining pupils did not achieve objectives.

165. Overall the teaching observed was satisfactory. It was most effective in Year 10 where the teachers have a clear focus on the examination syllabus requirements and the criteria for success. In most lessons teachers have good subject knowledge and give clear direction. They question pupils to check the extent of their understanding. For example, in a Year 10 fitness lesson the teacher provided opportunities for pupils to record achievements and measuring improvement. They used these as targets to assist learning. Pupils understood how to record sets of results after exercise so that they were aware of achievement and improvement.

166. Pupils respond well to challenging teaching. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, they contributed well to the variety of teaching methods and learned by brainstorming, answering questions and discussing in a good-humoured, relaxed atmosphere where learning was a pleasurable experience. Teaching was satisfactory overall and was producing satisfactory learning. Pupils were, on some occasions, encouraged to organise groupings. They were given opportunities to initiate warm-up activities or direct tasks which assisted learning. Examples of literacy were evident in most lessons where key words were a feature; several lessons started with objectives made clear on marker boards. Examples of numeracy were found in several lessons where recording, timing and counting was used. Targeting in the marking of GCSE work would assist pupils in theory lessons. Pupils are sometimes inattentive in lessons that are insufficiently targeted, where they are not fully involved or where there are no clear expectations for behaviour. Other weaknesses observed in some lessons related to the lack of planned work for non-participating pupils who were not effectively involved in the lesson and learned nothing.

167. Curriculum opportunities are offered by the wide provision of activities. A good extra-curricular programme supports this. Activities, at lunchtime and after school, were particularly well attended by pupils who responded positively to opportunities to develop their interests. This programme also includes team matches. The school has strong teams in several activities and these perform well in local competitions.

168. The department is well organised. Evaluation of the subject and its performance are an integral part of the department's curriculum planning and teachers record the strengths and weaknesses of their pupils and use the data to assist with this. In Key Stage 4 the curriculum has been led by examination performance, the requirements of the syllabus and pupil choice. For example the introduction of mixed gymnastics at Key Stage 4 has been as a result of these criteria. Procedures for assessment, recording and reporting are appropriate. Accommodation is satisfactory but indoor facilities are not clean enough. Outdoor facilities lack sufficient full size pitches to accommodate visiting teams and several matches are played away. There is no full sized hockey pitch so experience of outdoor games is limited. The school benefits from a large, and well equipped, sports hall, gymnasium and fitness room as well as outdoor courts for netball, basketball and tennis.

169. The improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Games still play a major, but not dominating, role in the curriculum. The programme has been enhanced with the inclusion of more activities and better planning; it follows the new orders of the national curriculum. The time allocated to each activity is balanced to conform to this.