

# INSPECTION REPORT

**BRAMHALL HIGH SCHOOL**

STOCKPORT

LEA area: STOCKPORT

Unique reference number: 106139

Headteacher: Mr John Peckham

Reporting inspector: Brian Rowe  
1695

Dates of inspection: 10 – 13 December 2001

Inspection number: 188178

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Seal Road Bramhall Stockport
Postcode:	SK7 2JT
Telephone number:	0161 439 8045
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Suzanne Wyatt
Date of previous inspection:	17 May 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1695	Brian Rowe	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? How high are standards? How well is the school led and managed?
8943	Margaret Manning	Lay inspector		How high are standards? (Attitudes, values and personal development) How well does the school care for its students and students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
19874	Joseph Fitzpatrick	Team inspector	English Drama	
30576	Peter Bannon	Team inspector	Mathematics	
20832	Mohindar Galowalia	Team inspector	Science	
3555	Carol Emery	Team inspector	Design and technology	
8070	Joe Haves	Team inspector	History	
31981	Eric Forster	Team inspector	Art	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
24127	Jim Kidd	Team inspector	Modern languages	
30046	Ross Parker	Team inspector	Information and communication technology English as an additional language Equal opportunities	
19915	Peggy Hooton	Team inspector	Geography	
4697	Robert Black	Team inspector	Music	How well are pupils or students taught?
18673	Richard Wilkins	Team inspector	Religious education	
13217	Malcolm Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education Special educational needs	

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Bramhall High is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 – 16 years, situated in an affluent suburb of Stockport. The school draws many pupils from the immediate neighbourhood, but about one-third travel from further afield. Pupils have a wide range of backgrounds, but the proportion from advantaged backgrounds is higher than average. There are 1,472 pupils on roll, much larger than the average sized secondary school. The proportion of boys is similar to that of girls. Approximately 3 per cent of the pupils come from ethnic minority groups, a much lower proportion than average. These pupils come from many different ethnic groups. Five pupils speak English as an additional language, of whom one is at the early stages of learning English. The most common home languages for these pupils are Cantonese and Farsi. The proportion of pupils receiving free school meals is low when compared to the national average. Analysis of pupils' attainment on entry shows that attainment is above the national average. Just over 14 per cent of the students have been placed on the special educational needs register, a lower ratio than in most other secondary schools. Of these, 19 have statements for special educational needs; this is below the national average. The school has been awarded Training School status for the initial training of teachers. As the numbers of pupils have increased over the last few years, the school has accepted pupils from a wider catchment area and the proportion of pupils with special educational needs has risen.

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

**Bramhall High is a good, effective and improving school that provides its pupils with a high quality education. The school is especially successful at providing a relevant curriculum for all of its pupils. By the time pupils reach the age of 16 they attain academic standards that are well above the average for all schools nationally. Standards are average when compared to schools with pupils of a similar background. Pupils enjoy coming to school and have very positive attitudes to learning. They attend regularly; most of them behave well and develop very positive relationships with the teachers and other pupils. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school and the proportion of very good and excellent teaching is very high. Management is good, although there is some variation between subject departments. The headteacher provides very perceptive and innovative leadership that has ensured the school has made good improvement since his appointment five years ago. The school provides good value for money.**

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

- It maintains academic standards that are consistently well above national averages throughout the school.
- Good quality teaching ensures that pupils not only achieve well but also have very good attitudes to the school and their learning.
- A high level of care for pupils promotes their personal development and very positive relationships with adults and each other.
- The school provides a diverse and relevant curriculum that encourages almost all pupils to come to school regularly and succeed in their education.

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

- The structure of senior management responsibilities so that all policies and curriculum initiatives are implemented consistently across all departments.
- The rigour and effectiveness of the systems to monitor and review teaching, learning and the curriculum.
- Use of assessment information to set targets of attainment for all pupils.
- The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) throughout the school.
- Statutory requirements for religious education and daily acts of collective worship.

*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 May 1996 and since that date has made good improvement. Most of the recommendations identified in the last inspection have been successfully addressed, with the exception of providing collective worship and a full provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11. There are improvements in many other important areas. These include continually raising levels of attainment, strengthening leadership and management, improving the quality of teaching and learning, and providing a greater range of curriculum choices. The school has also been successful in gaining Teacher Training school status and this has been an important factor in raising the quality of teaching. A number of building projects have been completed with substantial improvements to accommodation and resources.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	C	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

By the time pupils reach the age of 14 they attain overall standards that are well above the national average. In English and mathematics, attainment is well above average; in science, standards are above average. For the three years prior to 2001, standards remained mostly unchanged. Standards in English and mathematics are especially high and in 2001 the results of the national tests were well above average for similar schools. In science, results compared to similar schools were well below average. Girls out-perform boys, but to a lesser extent than the national trends. Although attainment is average in information and communication technology and geography it is not as good as in most other subjects.

In 2001 examinations, results overall were well above the national average and in line with those of similar schools. Results have improved every year and have been constantly well above the national average. Both boys and girls have performed well, but boys have achieved particularly well in comparison to boys in other schools. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, the achievement of pupils in the GCSE examinations is higher than could be expected based on their prior attainment when measured at the age of 14. This is a good indication that pupils make good progress by the age of 16 and achieve well. The overall trend of adding improvements to pupils' performance is good. Achievement at Key Stage 4 is good or better in all subjects. In art, design and technology, history, physical education, religious education and music the GCSE results are well above the national average. The school has been successful in meeting its academic targets and evidence indicates that pupils achieve well, making better progress than that indicated by their prior attainment. There is capacity to raise attainment even further.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and taking part in the activities it provides.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The proportion of very good and excellent behaviour in lessons far exceeds that which is unsatisfactory. Worse behaviour is related to less effective teaching. Pupils are either bored and not well motivated, or they are not managed well.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. By the time pupils reach Year 11 they have matured considerably.
Attendance	Very good. Well above the national average. Pupils are keen to come to school. Punctuality to school and between lessons is good.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

<b>Teaching of pupils:</b>	<b>Years 7 – 9</b>	<b>Years 10 – 11</b>
Quality of teaching	Good	Good

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

The overall quality of teaching is good throughout the school and is frequently very good and excellent. In all years the teaching in English, mathematics and science is good. Teaching in most other subjects is of a good quality, but less effective teaching was observed in music at Key Stage 3. Teaching in history, geography and physical education is very good at Key Stage 4 and in art and religious education is very good throughout the school. Teaching was excellent in music at Key Stage 4. Teachers have especially good subject knowledge and high expectations of what pupils can achieve. This promotes learning and pupils make good progress in the skills, knowledge and understanding of subjects. A few teachers need further support and training to develop their behavioural management skills to become more effective with the few less motivated pupils. Literacy is taught very well and is helping to raise standards in several subjects. Numeracy is taught well and pupils use their skills to good effect in science, art, design and technology and geography.

The school makes considerable effort to include and meet the needs of all its pupils. There is adequate provision for pupils with special educational needs that ensures they make good progress. In most subjects the higher attaining pupils are sufficiently challenged to achieve the highest possible standards. The achievement for pupils with English as an additional language is good, but The systems to support them are underdeveloped.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
The quality and range of the curriculum	The overall quality of the curriculum is very good. This ensures that all pupils have well planned opportunities to succeed in their education. The curriculum is very well supported by many visits and extra activities. Not all subjects cover aspects of cross-curricular ICT adequately. Statutory requirements are not met in religious education in Years 10 and 11 or for daily collective worship.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. The school provides effective support for pupils with special educational needs.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory, but in need of further development.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. The school provides good opportunities for pupils' personal development. In particular, their social development is excellent. Moral and cultural development is good, but there are insufficient opportunities to promote spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Satisfactory. There is good practice to ensure child protection and pupils' welfare, but further staff training is required. The pastoral system ensures a high level of daily support for pupils. Pupils' progress is reviewed regularly and there are satisfactory systems to monitor and support pupils' academic and personal development.

The majority of parents have positive views about the school and give it a great deal of support. Some have concerns about the behaviour of some pupils. The degree of negativity expressed by those parents who shared their views about the school was not fully borne out during the inspection. Parents receive good information about school life and are always made to feel welcome.



## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher provides perceptive and innovative leadership and gives a clear direction for the school. He is loyally supported by key staff. Many aspects of management have considerably improved since the last inspection, but the roles of senior staff and heads of academic and pastoral teams are in need of development to ensure a greater consistency of practice throughout the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. The governing body is well informed about school issues. Governors understand their responsibility and contribute well to the school's strategic development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. The school has made significant improvements since the last inspection, but it is still in need of further development to make better use of all the information available.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The school usually applies good principles of best value for major spending items. It makes good use of a number of specific grants. Financial planning and control systems are good.

The school has sufficient appropriately qualified staff to teach the curriculum effectively and to meet the needs of pupils, but there is a minimum number of teaching assistants to support pupils with learning difficulties. Overall, learning resources are good, but there is a shortfall in the provision of computers across the school. The accommodation is just adequate for the numbers on roll, but there are too few social areas for pupils at lunch and break times.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school sent out 1470 questionnaires of which 285 (19 per cent) were returned. Approximately 50 parents attended a meeting prior to the inspection to express their views about the school.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children like school.</li> <li>• Children make good progress.</li> <li>• The teaching is good.</li> <li>• The school has high expectations of the pupils.</li> <li>• They feel comfortable in approaching the school with problems.</li> <li>• The school helps children to become mature and responsible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The amount of homework.</li> <li>• Providing more information about their children's progress.</li> <li>• The behaviour of some pupils.</li> <li>• Working more closely with parents.</li> </ul>

The inspection team fully endorses the positive views expressed by parents. They do not agree with the views concerning homework and the information provided about children's progress. In both these aspects they found the provision to be good. The inspectors found the majority of pupils behaved well, although a small minority is disruptive in some lessons. The school welcomes parents and there are many opportunities to work with the school.

## PART B: COMMENTARY

### HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

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

- 1 The attainment of pupils on entry to the school varies between year groups, but overall it is above average when compared with the intake of other comprehensive schools. The school has a lower proportion of pupils with statements for educational need than average and fewer pupils on its register for special educational need. The school has many pupils who are academically very able and, consequently, there is a wide profile of ability in each year group. By the time pupils reach the age of 16, their attainment is well above average when compared with all secondary schools, and average compared with schools who have pupils from a similar background. Pupils make good progress and achieve well as they move through the school.

#### Years 7 to 9

- 2 The 2001 Key Stage 3 tests taken at the age of 14 reveal that the combined average points score<sup>1</sup> for English, mathematics and science is well above the national average. Results over the last few years, previous to 2001, have been sustained at a level well above average and improvements were above the national trend of rising scores. The school found it difficult to raise attainment at Key Stage 3 for a few years and results reached a plateau. In 2001, results improved considerably due to the impact of pupils attending Summer Schools, more monitoring of teaching and learning, and improvements in the way the school uses assessment data to identify areas for development.
- 3 The average points score in 2001 for English and mathematics when compared with all schools is well above average. In science, results were above average. When compared to similar<sup>2</sup> schools the points score for English and mathematics were well above average and for science well below average. The school explains that this wide variation between the subjects is due to inadequate curriculum time allocated to science in Year 8. An analysis of the test results shows that few pupils achieved the higher grades in science. This is partly due to the difficulties teachers face in matching work to the wide range of abilities in the mixed ability classes. During the last few years there have been some differences in the performance of boys and girls in the individual subjects. For example, in English, girls have outperformed boys but to a lesser extent than the national difference. In mathematics, in the national tests, boys have outperformed girls and boys have achieved at a much higher level compared to the national average for boys. In science, there is a similar picture to mathematics. Over the three subjects combined, there is no significant difference between boys and girls. Results from the 2001 tests indicate an improvement in the overall point score and the school recorded its best ever results. During the inspection, the evidence confirmed that the level of attainment now being achieved is similar to that indicated by these results.

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<sup>1</sup> The average points score provides schools with a single statistic to compare the overall grades attained by their pupils with the grades attained by pupils in another school. At Key Stage 3 the Level attained by each pupil, for example, in mathematics, is given a score. A Level 4 = 27 points, a Level 5 = 33 points and so on. Therefore the average points score in mathematics is worked out by adding up all of the points based on the Level attained by pupils and then dividing by the number of pupils who took the test. Therefore, a school whose average points score for mathematics in the end of Key Stage 3 tests is greater than 33 is one whose pupils are performing above that expected for their age. The calculation is similar for the GCSE points score. The only difference is the value of the points assigned to an individual grade, for example, an A\* grade is worth 8 points, A is 7 points, B is 6 points and so on until grade G which is worth 1 point

<sup>2</sup> Schools with less than 5 per cent of pupils entitled to free school meals.

- 4 By the time pupils are at the age 14, attainment is well above expectations in English, mathematics, and art. Attainment is above expectations in science, design and technology, history, modern languages, physical education, religious education and music. Attainment is close to expectations in geography and information and communication technology (ICT). In addition, skills in ICT across subjects are under-developed due to difficulties in obtaining access to computers, a lack of staff confidence and competence in some subjects and unsatisfactory co-ordination of the subject. Pupils' achievement<sup>3</sup> in subjects is due, in part, to their good attitudes to learning and overall good quality of teaching. Overall, pupils' achievement is good in most subjects. However, achievement and progress are satisfactory in science and unsatisfactory in ICT for the reasons already stated. Pupils with special education needs make good progress as a result of the effective support they receive and the targets for improvement they are set. Pupils with English as a second language make good progress.

### Years 10 and 11

- 5 In 2001, the school's total GCSE/GNVQ points score was well above the national average. However, although girls out-perform boys, boys are closer to the average than the girls in relation to national averages. Over the last five years, the trend in the school's average point score per pupil has risen steadily, at a rate that is in line with the national trend. This is attributed to effective teaching, supportive parents and the high level of care for pupils to ensure they all achieve some level of academic success.
- 6 By the time pupils were aged 16, the proportion of them gaining five or more GCSE A\*-C was well above the national average in the 2001 examinations. The proportion gaining five or more A\*-G grades in the same year was above the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving one or more A\*-G grades was average. When the overall points score is compared with similar schools the results over the last two years have been average. The number of pupils gaining five or more A\*-C grades over the last three years has improved steadily from 66.3 per cent in 1998 to 73.1 per cent in 2001, the school's highest ever result. In recent years, the numbers achieving A\* - G grades have remained above the national average and indicate the success of pupils of all ability. The number of pupils gaining at least one GCSE is below average, because a number of pupils are entered for a range of courses that do not count towards GCSE scores. This variety of course provision is a testament to the school's commitment to ensure all pupils are fully included in all aspects of school life. The school has made good progress in raising the attainment of both boys and girls during the last few years and in ensuring pupils of all abilities gain academic and examination success. The school met its GCSE points score target for the Year 2001. Although targets are challenging and based on records of pupils' prior attainment, there is still room for further improvement on the high standards that are achieved.
- 7 Pupils' attainment in English language, as indicated by the 2001 GCSE results, is well above the national and similar school average. The results in English Literature were also well above the national average. This is mostly because pupils have very good literacy skills. The results in English are slightly better than those for mathematics and science. Girls outperform boys but, to a lesser extent than national trends. Literacy skills are well above average and contribute to pupils' good progress in many subjects.

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<sup>3</sup> Achievement reflects the accomplishments of [pupils and](#) students in relation to what might be expected of them in relation to their prior attainment.

- 8 The percentage of pupils in mathematics achieving GCSE grades A\* to C is well above the national average, and that for similar schools. Boys have performed better than girls have during the last three years. Numeracy skills are well above average and used very well to support pupils' knowledge and understanding in many subjects. In science, the attainment of pupils as indicated by GCSE examination results is well above average by Year 11. This is because teachers have high expectations for their examination success, preparing them very well through good practical experiences. Standards seen during the inspection matched the level of attainment indicated by the examination results. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls.
- 9 In most subjects, the achievement of pupils in their GCSE examinations is higher than could be expected based on their prior attainment when measured at the age of 14. This is a good indication that pupils make good progress in Years 10 and 11 and achieve well. The overall trend of adding improvements to pupils' performance is good. In design and technology, history, geography, physical education, music, art and religious education achievement at Years 10 and 11 is very good due to very effective teaching.
- 10 Economics is chosen as an option at GCSE by significantly more boys than girls. In the 2001 examination, boys attained better than the national average overall, though the percentage of grades A\* to C was in line with the national average. Girls attained grades well above the national average. This reflects the attitudes to work in class where boys spend too little time on their work and are satisfied with a superficial grasp of concepts. A successful GNVQ manufacturing course is offered as an option within the design and technology curriculum. Pupils gain success to a higher level than in many other examination subjects they follow.
- 11 Pupils with special educational needs make good progress with the support of class teachers and education assistants. Both boys and girls improve their handwriting, spelling, literacy and numeracy. Pupils' progress has improved since the time of the last report, as have the links made with departments.
- 12 Pupils for whom English is an additional language achieve well. One boy who arrived recently speaking no English was well supported by his head of year so that he was able to cope in lessons. After only two months his strong mathematical skills were apparent in lessons and he managed his German as well as his peers. Another boy with English as an additional language who left last year achieved five GCSE passes, four of which were above C grade.
- 13 The school has worked hard to eliminate the different rates of achievement between boys and girls and different groups of pupils and has been largely successful. However, girls tend to dominate the higher sets in mathematics and modern foreign languages. In information and communication technology both boys and girls develop sophisticated database projects for the GCSE examination and boys in Years 7 to 9 demonstrate exceptional maturity in religious studies. In national tests, boys and girls reached similar standards - unlike the national trend. In GCSE examinations, girls are still ahead of boys, but by much less than the national average.

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

- 14 Overall, pupils' attitudes to school are very good. They enjoy coming to school and taking part in the activities it provides. They are very well involved in the extra-curricular sporting and musical groups and clubs which large numbers attend. Many Year 10 girls arrived at school early during the inspection to go on a visit to the

Clothes Show in Birmingham related to their topic work. In lessons they can become very involved as when some Year 9 pupils were taught about artificial resuscitation and were totally engrossed. In Year 10, pupils listened very attentively and appreciated each other's work in composing music for a special occasion.

- 15 Behaviour at school is good. Some parents answering the pre-inspection questionnaire showed a significant level of concern about this, but almost all pupils do behave well. Parents can be reassured that the proportion of very good and excellent behaviour seen in lessons far exceeds that which is unsatisfactory. Where pupils do not behave well, it is related to less effective teaching, either because they are bored and not well motivated or because they are not managed well. For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson most pupils worked well, but some boys, up to six at a time, talked idly and wasted the teacher's time trying to control them. In a Year 8 English lesson, there was considerable disorder when pupils moved into groups and the teacher did not apply the school's policy on discipline well enough. Behaviour around the site is normally good, but pupils leave an unnecessary amount of litter around every day after break-times that other people have to clean up. Otherwise, they respect the property and do not cause damage. Pupils moving around in the narrower corridors and staircases can sometimes be a little thoughtless, but there is no deliberate unpleasantness. The rate of exclusion is fairly high, but is usually for short periods and is appropriately used. There is a small amount of bullying, but this is not thought to be a problem in school. Most pupils feel that it is well sorted out and very few parents showed specific concerns.
- 16 Pupils' personal development is very good. By the time they reach Year 11 they have matured considerably and can be trusted to act as advisers to pupils new to the school in Year 7 through the PALS<sup>4</sup> group. Pupils enjoy their responsibilities around the school, such as helping in the library, and the Year 8 pupils take their duties as receptionists very seriously. Pupils in Year 10 say they appreciate being given more freedom and responsibility as they move up the school. Two Year 11 girls have set up a sign-language group on their own initiative and some younger pupils have shown great commitment in learning to sign through this group so that they can communicate with a deaf pupil. Year 11 pupils showed considerable sensitivity in questioning a visitor from the police force when they tried to test out the implications of police powers and define their own rights. They have very good relationships with each other and with their teachers, and work together well, for example, to raise money for charities. Pupils who have attended anger management courses relate well to the adults who participate and support them.
- 17 Attendance at school is very good, being well above that of secondary schools nationally. It is high in all year groups. The level of unauthorised absence is low. Pupils arrive at school punctually and lessons get off to a good start. Such good levels of attendance have a positive effect on the standards pupils achieve in their school work. High levels of attendance have been maintained since the last inspection.
- 18 Pupils who are learning English as an additional language demonstrate positive attitudes. They work hard to master the new skills and the new environment and they develop positive relationships. Pupils throughout the school show positive attitudes towards those who arrive while they are learning English. They are thoughtful and friendly, helping them in lessons and providing 'buddy' support.
- 19 The school's approach to adapting the curriculum to reduce the risk of exclusion is having a marked effect on pupils' attitudes. One girl explained that a programme, which involved a work placement in Year 10, had completely changed her approach

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<sup>4</sup> Year 11 pupils are assigned to support and care for a Year 7 pupil.

to learning. She was now interested in school and had realistic ambitions, and she worked hard to balance a college course and her remaining GCSE options. Another was motivated by her regret over wasted time to counsel younger pupils in a circle discussion. Even pupils who find it difficult to conform to the school's behavioural norms are willing to confront their attitudes and concerns in group discussion. Some are learning how to cope with genuine praise because they are working well in some lessons.

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

- 20 The high quality of teaching is a strength of the school and has contributed to raising standards since the last inspection. During the inspection, teaching was good overall throughout the school. The quality of teaching was good in 32 per cent of lessons seen, very good in 31 per cent, excellent in 13 per cent and in 20 per cent it was satisfactory. Only 3 per cent of lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory and two lessons at Key Stage 3 were poor. Consequently, this represents a good profile of teaching. The good teaching has a direct impact upon the pupils' learning, ensuring that they acquire the knowledge and skills to develop their understanding of key concepts successfully in each of the subjects. The teaching also ensures that pupils perform well in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 and the GCSE examinations.
- 21 Teaching in most subjects is good, and it is very good in art, physical and religious education in all years. Teaching is also very good in, geography and history in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is unsatisfactory overall in music at Key Stage 3, although it was excellent in Key Stage 4. The proportion of excellent and very good teaching is much higher than in most schools. Many examples of excellent teaching were seen throughout the school. Examples of very good teaching were seen in most subjects at both key stages. Teaching has improved since the last inspection, partly as a result of the school's involvement as a teacher training school.
- 22 The quality of teaching literacy skills is very good in many subjects throughout the school. The school has made a good start in implementing the national Key Stage 3 strategy. In English, pupils are taught in broadly based ability groups from Year 7 onwards and so standards of literacy vary between classes, but standards are above average. Pupils apply their literacy skills well in other subjects, when required. Literacy skills are actively developed in many subjects through a wide variety of strategies. Many teachers have a secure understanding of the school's literacy strategy and use it well. They plan thoroughly, identifying clearly how expectations for different abilities are to be covered. The quality of teaching in numeracy across the curriculum is often good, but not as well developed as that of literacy. Pupils use numeracy effectively in many subjects. For example, in science, art, geography and design and technology, pupils show very good skills.
- 23 In the best lessons the teachers demonstrate that their subject knowledge is generally very good and the pupils respond with an enthusiasm for their work. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' attitudes to learning and in most lessons the pupils are very clear about what they have to do. Lesson introductions are often particularly effective, with the aims of the lesson being well shared with the pupils. Target words are well displayed and in both the introduction to the lessons and in the concluding part, the teacher will often use very effective questioning to ensure that pupils understand these key words.
- 24 Relationships between pupils and teachers are very good and are based upon a mutual respect, which develops good confidence in the pupils. In the best lessons, teachers encourage and enable all pupils to do their best. Most teachers also have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and calmly manage the pupils very well in

class. Behaviour is generally good and where there is any misbehaviour most of the teachers deal with the problems effectively. However, a few teachers do not have the skills to deal with disruptive behaviour and would benefit from further support and training. In some music lessons at Years 7 to 9, poor behaviour had a detrimental effect upon the pupils' learning and progress.

- 25 Planning is good. It is always a characteristic of the successful lessons that good planning encourages pupils to develop their thinking and independent skills. Good planning also ensures that pupils with special educational needs are well targeted and work is usually effectively matched to promote successful learning. Sometimes, however, these pupils can become frustrated because they are intimidated by lesson targets, which seem distant, and are not adapted for their individual needs. In some lessons, in information and communication technology, for example, some pupils with special educational needs had to enter too much text before they could start on the formatting task.
- 26 Teachers use resources well in promoting a good range of teaching styles. Pupils' work is generally marked regularly and assessments of pupils' progress are made. However, in some subjects, there is insufficient ongoing assessment so that higher attaining pupils are not targeted for developing more challenging skills. Similarly marking is variable and there is not always enough feedback to pupils for them to be fully aware of their own progress within the subject. The use of homework is generally good and used well to extend the work done in lessons.
- 27 Teachers are generally very aware of the need to include all pupils all of the time. In design and technology, teachers have successfully broken tasks down into shorter sections and held on to the attention of boys who previously lacked motivation. This contrasts with geography and information and communication technology where low attaining boys are sometimes intimidated by the scale of some tasks, even though the individual segments would be quite accessible to them. In history, clear efforts to show that the work of all pupils is valued have contributed to the involvement of both boys and girls, as well pupils from minority ethnic groups. In music, computer technology has been used to enable less confident musicians to work alongside their very talented classmates, and in geography the higher attainers are very well challenged.
- 28 The teaching of pupils with special educational needs who are withdrawn from lessons for additional support is very good. Support assistants are very effectively deployed and they have clear roles, their time being used to maximum benefit. The learning support centre has a very caring, responsive ethos and pupils enjoy their learning. Pupils within the support centre are relaxed and communicate easily when asked about their work. Approximately 60 pupils are withdrawn from lessons for support and their work indicates that appropriately high expectations are made of them. At times, there is insufficient learning support in classrooms as was the case for some lessons in English, mathematics, music and ICT. In these lessons the rate of progress of pupils was not as good as it should have been.
- 29 Specialist teaching for pupils who are learning English as an additional language is provided by the bi-lingual support service, though this is not always immediately available. Currently, there are no specially trained staff in the school. Pupils at an early stage of learning the language are withdrawn from some English lessons for intensive support. Beyond this, subject teachers are supported by a good flow of information from the heads of year, and show ingenuity and sensitivity when they develop techniques to ensure that pupils feel included and able to learn.

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

- 30 The overall quality of the curriculum is very good and ensures that all pupils have well planned opportunities to succeed in their education. All pupils have access to the subjects of the National Curriculum in Years 7 to 9. Lessons are delivered in a suitable range of mixed ability forms and groups set by ability in a fortnightly timetable. Time allocated to subjects, within the 24½ hour taught week, is in line with national recommendations. The time allocated to music and religious education, which was an issue in the previous inspection, has been resolved. In geography, the schemes of work have been revised to enhance the range of cultures studied. All pupils follow a foundation studies programme that includes well planned personal, social and health education (PSHE), citizenship and information and communication technology (ICT). However, time for ICT is insufficient, coverage across other subjects is uneven and uncoordinated and pupils' entitlement cannot be guaranteed. New and enhanced curriculum provision for ICT is already a priority area within the school development plan.
- 31 For one week a year the curriculum is suspended and all Year 7 to 9 pupils take part in the imaginative and well planned 'Widening Our World' programme. This provides wide-ranging experience of new ways of working and awareness of life beyond school. It promotes personal initiative, responsibility, enterprise and self-awareness. Among the opportunities provided, pupils work with sixth form drama students to produce a contemporary fairy tale. They work as a team with a local bank in a business simulation exercise, compete against each other in problem-solving tasks and discuss their feelings following real life drama presentations of social issues such as 'joyriding'.
- 32 In Years 10 and 11, pupils choose from an appropriate range of courses leading to GCSE qualifications. The majority of pupils take up to nine GCSE subjects. All pupils are entered for English language, English literature, mathematics and science (which is a dual award), a modern foreign language, a technology subject and two further subjects from a free option choice. The option choice also includes vocational manufacturing or business GNVQ as an alternative to GCSE. The option choice system has improved since the previous report. In Year 10 all pupils follow a foundation studies module programme of careers, ICT, PSHE and religious studies. In Year 11 all pupils follow an amended programme of ICT, PSHE, parenting and religious studies. The entitlement to technology and modern foreign languages, which was an issue from the previous inspection, has been resolved. The provision for religious studies is unsatisfactory because the time allocation, while improved since the previous inspection, is inadequate and the programme does not cover the agreed syllabus.
- 33 Different tasks to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs are provided in many subjects such as history, but in science at Years 10 and 11 the wide range of mixed abilities and lack of differentiated approach hinders progress. Lower achievers in history, for whom GCSE would be unsuitable, are successfully entered for Certificate of Achievement awards. In science, some lower attaining pupils are entered for a single science award as well as a science achievement award. Pupils who are learning English as an additional language have access to the full curriculum.
- 34 Curriculum provision for ICT is just satisfactory in Years 10 to 11. It is part of the well planned foundation studies programme delivering a broad experience, but it is one that is not pursued in depth. There is excellent practice in music, where lower ability pupils gain confidence from their use of computer-based equipment, and in graphics and art. Many pupils use computers to word-process their coursework, but this is



generally an unplanned response. In science, mathematics, art, history, modern foreign languages, food and textiles, geography and in PSHE, access to computers is restricted as the ICT suites are in use. The school does not audit the provision across the school, to inform itself of what access pupils have or have not.

- 35 For one week a year the curriculum is suspended and all Year 10 pupils take part in the well organised 'Challenge Week'. Pupils are faced with a programme of demanding physical activities such as cycling, rock climbing and water sport events, competitive problem solving tasks set by local businesses, community action where they work to improve the local environment or work with young people with disabilities. Desk-top publishing skills are developed in reporting, writing, editing and in the production of a daily newspaper, recording pupils' achievements. Every pupil is also provided with one day in college on a structured course. Some external activities require parental funding and for those where this may prove difficult the school has funds to ensure everyone is included.
- 36 For those identified by the pastoral team as at risk of disaffection or in danger of exclusion there is a very good, innovative alternative curriculum provided in the student support centre. The programme successfully mixes school, college and work experience, keeps pupils motivated and leads to accreditation in a range of awards including GCSE. The centre has a good record of pupils going on to college or work. The student support centre is another example of the school's determination to provide a relevant education and include all pupils.
- 37 There are very good strategies for teaching literacy skills. This results in standards of speaking and listening being well above average. The National Literacy Strategy is now running in school helping pupils to develop basic concepts about language and this results in standards of reading being well above average. The school provides extra 'catch up' sessions in both English and mathematics for pupils in Year 7 who have not met their target level. Depending on individual need, the school provides a range of additional opportunities for the small number of pupils where English is not their first language, including early morning pre-school tuition in reading, some class support and some extra lessons. There are good strategies in place for the teaching of numeracy skills across the curriculum. It is particularly good in mathematics and has strengths in geography, science, design and technology and in art where the Golden Section is considered. The school has recently adopted a draft whole-school numeracy policy, which has yet to make an impact in areas such as religious education where there is no subject policy. The new Professional Development Centre on site has a positive influence on improving the effective delivery of numeracy through the use of video recording of good teaching practice.
- 38 There is excellent provision of a very wide range of extra curriculum opportunities. It is notably strong in physical education with rugby, girls' and boys' hockey, football, boys' fitness gym training and badminton among the many sports provided after school. During the inspection week, pupils were also provided with a very wide range of activities including a trip to the Clothes Show for those taking GCSE textiles, several choirs and different musical events, school play rehearsals, stage lighting training, ICT extension work and anger management training. Popular lunchtime sessions and a graphics club are well attended by both boys and girls, enhancing their learning in design and technology. Foreign visits to the battlefields of Europe, cultural centres, where pupils also perform their music, and residential language and exchange links enrich music, history, geography and language courses.
- 39 The quality of personal, social and health education (PSHE) which is taught within foundation studies across all year groups is very good. The school governors have agreed a policy for sex education. Several modules make effective use of drama workshops to deliver the sex education programme, awareness of bullying and how

to deal with it, and other social issues such as drug abuse. The school has made good progress with citizenship, which is now in place in Years 7 to 9, but has not yet ensured sufficiently secure planning for its incorporation in following years from 2002.

- 40 Careers education is good. Since the previous report, experienced staff have been appointed and inset provided for form tutors who deliver part of the programme in Years 8, 9 and 11. There is a well planned programme including work experience, visiting speakers and strong links with the local careers service and colleges. It is well supported by members of the senior management team who contribute their expertise in Year 10. Volunteer pupils help in the careers library at lunchtime monitoring usage.
- 41 The community makes a very good contribution to learning. Parents contribute as Faculty Friends. There are working links with many local bodies including the Neighbourhood Health Strategy, Rotary International and the Police Youth Forum. Many local organisations support the 'WOW' and 'Challenge Week' activities. In a recent Year 10 active-citizenship 'Living History' project, pupils have visited the elderly to record and make comparisons with their experiences at the same age.
- 42 There are very good constructive relationships with partner institutions. There are strong curriculum links between design technology and local primary schools whose pupils attend practical lessons in the school and in mathematics and sport where there are enrichment links. Induction days and liaison from members of the Year 7 pastoral team help to ease the transition from primary school. Primary pupils' subject records are provided for curriculum planning in Year 7. Local colleges participate in the 'Challenge Week' programme and contribute to the alternative curriculum and careers guidance. A notable feature of the links with colleges, and the care that the school demonstrates, is the 16+ Compact. This is an agreement between the school and pupils who have moved on to local further education courses. Staff visit regularly to provide help and guidance. The school has shown initiative in an innovative Comenius Internet newspaper project on Citizenship with several European partners. The quality of curriculum provision has been recognised in the recent award of Teaching Training status. The school works in partnership with Universities for the training of teachers and there is a Professional Development unit on site.

### Educational inclusion

- 43 The school has a carefully planned approach to reducing the chances of any pupils being excluded from teaching and learning opportunities. Pastoral teams and the special educational needs team are very skilled in identifying the factors which may lead to exclusion. A very well managed centre has been established to support pupils who find it hard to adjust their behaviour to the demands of a busy, working classroom. Expert staff have been recruited to support teachers and pupils to manage behaviour. The systematic approach to overcoming behaviour crises and reducing the amount of disruption to learning they can cause is proving to be effective.
- 44 An alternative curriculum is available for some pupils in Years 10 and 11. It offers more relevant options for those pupils who require personal skills and experience rather than academic qualifications when they are seeking work. This is linked with an effective programme that helps them to cope with the exam commitments that they have. As a result, the examinations become an ambition rather than a threat. Additionally the school has built a curriculum that provides a very wide range of choice - of subjects studied, working styles and extra curricular activities. The choice of foods available at lunchtime is another facet of the school's successfully inclusive approach.

- 45 Underpinning this is a very effective network of personal care and support, and a commitment to developing good practice. The great majority of teachers are now examining their own practice to ensure no pupils are excluded from learning. This is having a beneficial effect in a large number of lessons.
- 46 Positive efforts to promote inclusion have created some innovative curriculum features. A totally free option choice at the end of Year 9 has created some unplanned gender imbalance within groups. The classroom curriculum is supplemented by an excellent array of responsibilities and extra-curricular activities planned to cater for interests from sign language to martial arts. The alternative curriculum acknowledges that GCSE examinations will not meet everyone's needs, and the student support centre sets out to tackle the causes of exclusion and to put in place steps towards a more settled approach to learning.

*The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development*

- 47 The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Within that context, however, its provision for their spiritual development is unsatisfactory. It has not addressed a key issue of the previous inspection concerning its statutory responsibility to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
- 48 Pupils attend one year assembly a week and on other mornings meet in their tutor groups. Assemblies play an important part in reinforcing the moral and social values of the school. They do not, however, possess any of the characteristics of worship and most are lacking in any Christian, religious or spiritual content. They provide only very occasional opportunities for reflection. Form tutor time is used solely for pastoral and administrative purposes and does not contribute to pupils' spiritual development.
- 49 There is no whole school approach to pupils' spiritual development in the classroom and where there is good practice in lessons it is as a result of individual departmental initiative. This is the case, for example, in English, where pupils have good chances to explore the human condition and emotions through prose, poetry and drama. Dance also enables pupils to explore and express their identity and feelings. Art uses the beauty and mystery of the natural world as a stimulus for creative work. Geography makes them aware of the value of the life of all sentient creatures through the plight of animals in the rainforest. Religious education makes an excellent contribution to pupils' spiritual development through exploration of the sacred, prayer and worship. Otherwise, subjects largely miss opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual awareness.
- 50 The school makes good provision for pupils' moral development. It has clear values, based on respect and caring for the individual, which are shared by pupils, teachers and parents alike. Teachers provide very good role models for pupils. Most pupils know right from wrong and behave well. Pupils in all years give practical expression to the values of caring in taking the lead in fund raising for a wide range of charities. During the inspection this was well in evidence in a Year 10 special assembly that celebrated pupils' achievements in raising funds for charities as diverse as cancer care, guide dogs for the blind and food for a local hostel for the homeless.
- 51 Pupils are given good opportunities to explore moral issues in the foundation studies programme, such as those relating to substance abuse and relationships. Some other subjects also present pupils with moral issues. For example, geography and design and technology confront them with ethical issues relating to the environment. In English, pupils explore moral issues arising from relationships, and in drama the

moral consequences of actions. Physical education emphasises moral behaviour in competition. History and religious education challenge them with the issues surrounding prejudice and anti-Semitism.

- 52 The schools' provision for pupils' social development has significantly improved since the previous inspection and is now excellent. A very well planned system of merits and credits does much to raise pupils' self-esteem, through public recognition of their academic and personal achievements and their service to the school and wider community. Pupils are given excellent opportunities to develop their social and leadership skills, through the Year 10 Challenge Week, the Years 7 to 9 Widening Our World Week, through residential field work, the Duke of Edinburgh Scheme and the very wide range of sports clubs and teams.
- 53 They are given excellent opportunities to learn to take responsibility and show initiative in the daily life of the school. The year and school councils give pupils real opportunities for taking responsibility that extend to financial decision making. The school plans systematically to ensure that pupils in all years have structured opportunities for taking responsibility, in Year 7 for the environment, in Year 8 for marketing and fund raising, in Year 9 for hospitality and entertainment, in Year 10 for community, and in Year 11 for outreach. Year 11 pupils are trained by the Beacon counselling service to mentor Year 7 pupils, and provided with a mentoring base that they staff. Year 10 and 11 pupils organise after-school sign-language classes and put their skills to good effect in the local community.
- 54 Most subjects provide pupils with very good opportunities for developing skills of collaborative working in lessons through paired and small group work. Social issues are addressed in the foundation studies programme, and in a number of other subjects. For example, Year 10 pupils explore social change through the Living History project, exploring issues with senior citizens in a residential home. In religious education, they explore coming-of-age rites in different faiths, and in ICT the social impact of technological change.
- 55 The school's provision for pupils' cultural development has improved since the previous inspection and is good overall. Pupils now have very good opportunities to develop an appreciation of their cultural heritage and skills in the creative and expressive arts, through excellent provision for music, regular concerts and school productions, and visits to concerts, theatres and other centres of cultural interest.
- 56 Pupils' understanding of other European cultures is enhanced through a very wide range of recreational and academic residential visits abroad, through exchange links and through the innovative Comenius curriculum project linking them through the Internet with their peers in a number of European countries.
- 57 Some subjects promote pupils' understanding of cultures other than Western European. For example, religious education introduces them to the major world faiths, geography to issues of globalism, and design and technology to dress from other cultures. Teachers do not routinely capitalise on the experiences which pupils who are learning English as an additional language bring with them to the school. Consequently, they miss some opportunities to enhance all pupils' awareness of different cultures and societies. In general, the school has not done enough since the previous inspection to promote pupils' understanding of the contribution of cultures other than the Western European to the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century civilisation, or their appreciation of the multicultural diversity and richness of contemporary British society and its implications for their adult lives.

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

- 58 Pupils are well looked after and no health and safety concerns requiring immediate attention were identified during the inspection. The person who is named as being responsible for child protection has not yet had training as she is new to the post. Other pastoral staff in school have been trained in child protection issues. Although child protection procedures are mentioned in the staff handbook, there is little evidence to show that all staff have been made fully aware of the proper procedures. The school does not have an adequate policy laying down procedures for staff to follow for the health and safety of its pupils and no records are kept of risk assessment. Staff are diligent and very careful to ensure that there is no danger to pupils going out to the school buses at the end of the day. Proper care is taken of their first aid and medical needs. Lunchtime supervisors are on duty in the areas where the pupils eat to keep a watchful eye on them but they have not had any training, for example, in how to manage pupils. Pupils are very well supported through the pastoral system and parents feel that their children are happy in school.
- 59 The school has good procedures for monitoring attendance and unexplained absence is followed up within a reasonable time by the form tutors. There is no complacency about attendance, even though it is very good. Form tutors are rigorous in demanding explanations if pupils are even a minute late at the start of school. Punctuality is one of the criteria used in the monitoring form in Year 7 towards the achievement of half-termly class rewards for the best class in the year group and this is a strong incentive for them to come to school on time. The school is particularly keen that pupils do not go on holiday with their parents during term time during Years 10 and 11 when they are working towards their GCSE's and will rarely authorise this.
- 60 The school monitors pupils' behaviour very closely and has very good procedures to reward good behaviour and to discourage anything that is unacceptable. There is a very efficient system for removing pupils who are preventing the learning of others from the class. These pupils are very well supported so that they are not deprived of their own right to an education. The school does not hesitate to exclude pupils if they have disobeyed the clear rules laid down, such as swearing at a teacher. Usually exclusion is for a very short time and pupils are very well supported when they return, after consultation with their parents. The school runs very good anger management courses with the help of a behavioural support worker and this is a great help to individual pupils so that they can cope with their potentially volatile behaviour. Heads of year are very much involved in guiding pupils in this way. Less strong is the presence around site of teachers discouraging pupils from making litter or from being disorderly in some narrow corridors and staircases. Pupils who behave well get praise postcards home and they value such rewards as well as the credits and merits they receive. Not many pupils feel that bullying is a problem in school, but they know that they can use the 'bully-beater' boxes around the site or go to their form tutor if they are worried.
- 61 Pupils are very well supported in their personal development and form tutors monitor this closely. They are evidently comfortable about going to the pastoral office with any concerns at all and Year 7 have the additional help of the PALS in Year 11. Form tutors check pupils' journals regularly to make sure they have done their homework and to see any comments other teachers may have made. Personal, health and social and social education lessons are used well to guide pupils. Sex education lessons, for example, which start in Year 7 are run by dedicated staff who reassure the pupils that everyone develops at a different rate. They get them to discuss by sensitive questioning what to expect as they go through puberty. Pupils are well supported in their personal skills as was seen in a Year 9 lesson on achievement and progress. The school also takes pupils' views into account, for example, regarding the provision of the unisex toilet block, making sure that they are happy with the arrangements.

- 62 There is a strong system of support for pupils who are learning English as an alternative language. The head of year maintains frequent contact with the parents. Through these meetings and conversations the school shares information collected from class teachers and keeps parents informed of the progress that their child is making. The head of year and the form tutor monitor social integration carefully and find ways to support a newcomer who is finding it difficult to settle in.
- 63 Pupils with special educational needs are supported well. Links with feeder primary schools are very good and detailed records for pupils with special educational needs are received in the term before they arrive. This information allows the learning support centre, assisted by the English and mathematics departments, to provide appropriate work for the pupils. The progress pupils make is easy to follow in their books. The monitoring of pupils' performances is very good but record keeping systems for tracking progress over a longer period are not as well organised.
- 64 The arrangements to care for pupils are clearly focused on social inclusion. Pupils who are thought to be at risk from exclusion are offered an alternative curriculum. Others who cannot adapt to the conventions of a classroom are offered help to manage their own behaviour. These are sensitive situations that the school addresses very well. Underpinning both of these approaches are close links with the pastoral teams to ensure that the additional help does not itself lead to social isolation.

### Assessment

- 65 The systems for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are satisfactory. The school is moving towards a more systematic approach to internal monitoring and uses a variety of data to gauge performance, benefiting also from statistics provided by the local authority. In order to encourage self-evaluation and to develop professional enquiry within departments, the school has appointed three directors of learning who are effective in providing data for subject departments and who establish systems for the regular sampling of pupils' work. However, there is no formal whole-school assessment policy and the common marking scheme is not used consistently across all departments.
- 66 The use of assessment to inform curricular planning is good. Because the school has recognised that the formal academic curriculum is not suited to all of its pupils, it has established vocational courses and also an alternative curriculum in the upper-school years. Pupils involved in this initiative speak highly of it and believe that it meets their needs and aspirations, especially since it also allows them access to work experience, college courses and formal GCSE classes
- 67 The procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic progress are satisfactory, but are not consistently applied across all subjects. There are several departments - geography, English, history, Science and technology for example - where the monitoring of pupils' performance is extensive and where the methods used to track individual and group progress are quite sophisticated. However, heads of department would appreciate a forum to share good practice, as not all are fully conversant with how data may be used to raise attainment. In this regard, pupil target-setting is underdeveloped and does not happen in every subject, but there have been substantial improvements since the last inspection.

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

- 68 Most parents hold positive views about the school and these have been maintained since the last inspection. In many ways they are pleased with what the school does for their children. However, they do have fairly strong feelings about some aspects of the school. A significant number of parents answering the questionnaire are unhappy about behaviour in school and similarly they are not happy about the homework their children receive. A number do not feel very happy about the information they receive about their children's progress and also they do not feel the school works closely with them. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting were more positive, but a few still expressed concerns about the standards of behaviour in school. The inspection findings support parents' positive views, but find that behaviour is generally good, although a small number of pupils are disruptive in some lessons. The use of homework is good, but teachers do not always stick to the timetable.
- 69 Parents do get very good quality information from the school in the form of the prospectus and the report of the governors' annual meeting. These documents go into considerable detail about school statistics over the years on such things as exclusion rates and attendance. The school consults parents via discussion groups that give parents the opportunity to find out more about what the school does for their children and to influence what goes on. Also, several sessions are held each year to inform parents about curriculum matters and other important aspects of their child's education. Regular newsletters are sent out which are interesting and informative about school events. The headteacher took the opportunity in a recent letter to apologise for the inconvenience caused to parents by the unforeseen disruption to the building programme at the start of term. It is quite understandable that parents feel aggrieved and frustrated in such circumstances, even if the situation was not in the school's control. Parents do have opportunities to talk to their children's teachers each year and many attend the consultation evenings arranged for them. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are included well in their annual reviews. Pupils' annual reports to parents contain all that is required, such as the levels that their children are working at, although the comments on what they need to do in order to improve are too general.
- 70 Parents of pupils with special needs are kept well informed of pupils' attainment and progress and good liaison occurs whenever it is necessary so that appropriate support is provided. Advice is given to parents regarding suitable software so that it can be installed at home. Some parents write supportively to the special educational needs unit expressing appreciation of the support and care given to their children.
- 71 The school maintains close links with the parents of pupils who are learning English as an additional language. However, there are no established procedures to provide translations should the need arise.
- 72 The school makes early contact with parents if pupils seem to require additional support such as the alternative curriculum. Parents are kept well informed and are invited to contribute to decisions about the most appropriate support for the child.
- 73 Parents support their children well in school in a variety of ways. They make sure they attend regularly and their homework is done. They are conscientious in signing their children's journals. Volunteers help in school, particularly during 'Wow Week' and in paper recycling sessions for the benefit of the pupils. Money is raised through social events such as the Christmas Fair.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

- 74 The previous inspection report was critical about several aspects of the school's management, especially the systems for longer term strategic planning and for review and monitoring. These aspects have now been addressed and the quality of management in the school is good. The headteacher has improved the management through very perceptive, innovative and creative leadership. He has a clear vision for the future of the school and is determined to ensure a continual improvement to the quality of education provided for the pupils. The school has a clear set of aims and objectives expressed in published documents. The school is mostly successful in implementing its aims to ensure the educational and personal progress of its pupils. Senior staff have given a clear lead in creating a fully inclusive ethos for the school. They have created systems aimed at finding ways to intervene early with pupils who are at risk of not achieving well so as to reduce the chance of exclusion. The school has made considerable efforts to provide an environment that caters for the needs of all its pupils.
- 75 The school is well served by a hard working and dedicated senior management team. Since the last inspection, there have been good improvements in many important aspects of school life. The senior management team is mostly aware of the weaknesses that have to be addressed and these are recorded in the school's plan for improvement. The school has been successful in gaining the prestigious accreditation of teacher training school status. This initiative is managed well and is having a positive impact on school development.
- 76 The management structure is now far more effective than at the time of the previous inspection and the school has established clearer roles and delegation within the senior and middle management teams. However, there is room to develop this even further. The line-management role of senior staff does not have sufficient rigour to ensure that all agreed school policies are implemented consistently throughout the school. Senior staff have a high level of commitment to many curriculum initiatives and, therefore, cannot sufficiently support and monitor subject departments and other whole-school developments. The work of all academic and pastoral managers is supported through a regular structure of meetings that ensures good communication. However, the academic heads of department do not have a regular forum where it is possible to share their good practice and expertise. The services manager, although very effective, has been delegated a substantial amount of responsibility that the school would find difficult to replace with one appointment.
- 77 Most of the heads of department are efficient and have ensured that good improvements have taken place within their departments, although departmental management needs to be strengthened in information and communication technology. The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory in music at Key Stage 3 and management strategies have not yet been effective in improving this aspect of the provision for music. The contribution of the heads of department is not supported by sufficiently robust line management systems. The quality of their work varies and is in part dependent on the effectiveness of monitoring procedures and the use made of performance data to set precise targets of achievement for groups and individual pupils.
- 78 At the time of the previous inspection the communication systems between the governors and senior managers were judged to be good and this aspect has been developed even further. Consequently, the governors are now aware of their responsibilities to meet all statutory requirements and for the overall performance of the school. However, they do not comply with all curriculum requirements in providing an act of collective daily worship and religious education at Key Stage 4. In addition, risk assessments are not always sufficiently recorded. The governing body has a strategic view of the school's development due to the active involvement of a few governors who are regularly in school. Governors are confident about fulfilling



their role. They are committed to the school's improvement and work hard in well-organised committee structures to ensure continuous development. The governors are well informed about the school's successes and areas for development.

- 79 The governors maintain close monitoring of finances and make informed decisions based on accurate budget information. The chair of finances works closely with the deputy head with responsibility for finances to keep track of all expenditure. Senior managers and governors are clear about the cost of developments and the identified targets in the development plan.
- 80 The school usually applies best value principles effectively, but this issue was adversely commented upon in a recent audit report. The governors have taken on a loan in order to trigger additional grants. This is a calculated risk intended to bring further benefits to the school's development.
- 81 The quality of the school's development planning and the systems for monitoring have improved considerably since the last inspection and are good in many departments. The extensive school development plan has been written after a process of review, involving the staff, parents and the governors. The plan identifies appropriate targets to raise attainment based on regular review procedures. The planning is linked to staff appraisal and their training needs. The school is in a good position to maintain the current high level of pupil achievement and secure further improvements.
- 82 Management of special educational needs in the school is good. Documentation on statements and individual education plans is kept well up to date. Liaison with feeder primary schools is thorough and provides useful information. The learning support team is well organised and assistants have clearly designated roles. Pupils who have come to the school while they were learning English as an additional language have been well supported. However, there are no established procedures or clear lines of responsibility to ensure that this would happen in the future.

### Staffing

- 83 There is an effective strategy for appraisal and performance management and provision is good. The school has adopted the local authority's policy for performance management and has provided training for all teaching staff. So far, however, performance management has not been extended to non-teaching staff, although the school has plans to introduce it for them in 2002.
- 84 All teachers are encouraged to keep their own professional development portfolios and they use these to plan future in-service training. The school takes care to ensure that a balance is maintained between training needs and the school's overall development plan. The assistant head teacher responsible for performance management provides good support for all teaching staff in meeting their curricular and pastoral responsibilities. The provision now is significantly improved since the last inspection.
- 85 The arrangements for the induction of staff new to the school are very good and they have been effectively improved since the last inspection. Newly qualified teachers have a clear programme of activities. For example, they have received recent training in behaviour management. A well-established mentoring programme ensures they have access to whole school and departmental support. They have appropriate opportunities to attend local authority training courses and they complete three formal assessments so that their progress can be monitored and supported. Other new staff have good access to appropriate training and mentoring support. On occasion, newly qualified teachers lose their protected non-teaching periods to cover

for absent colleagues. However, over the year the school endeavours to ensure the balance is redressed.

- 86 The staff is well qualified to teach the curriculum and all subject departments have sufficient teachers with appropriate subject qualifications. There has been significant staff turnover during the last two years. This has resulted in the recruitment of a number of younger members of staff and has produced a good balance between them and more experienced colleagues. One result of this is that a number of younger teachers have gained significant levels of promotion in the school. This has had a positive impact upon the good standards achieved by pupils. The number of learning support staff employed is just satisfactory. They are appropriately trained and qualified and make a good contribution to the learning of pupils with special educational needs. Overall, staffing provision is good and has been maintained effectively since the last inspection.

### Initial Teacher Training

- 87 The school gained national status as a Training School in April 2000. As a result, it supports the training of over 40 student teachers from two university departments during the school year. In addition, it is a growing centre for research into teaching skills and is currently planning courses for mature adults returning to teaching after significant periods of employment in other careers.
- 88 The overall provision for initial teacher training is very good. A wide range of activities provides significant levels of support for student teachers. All students are attached to professional mentors, attend training activities and their progress is carefully monitored. The mentoring of students is accurate with effective targets being set. This ensures students have opportunities to evaluate their progress over time. The school is well aware of the implications of having significant numbers of students working in different departments. It monitors the match between students and different class groups to ensure there is an even distribution over the school year. The school recognises the clear benefits that students bring to the departments and works hard to ensure they are fully integrated. For example, in the History department, students attend all meetings and work closely with staff to plan lessons, receiving very good support from the head of department and colleagues.
- 89 The newly appointed manager of the Professional Development Centre has a clear view of priorities and is developing a good range of procedures to support students. Currently, however, his teaching load makes it difficult for him to provide full support for students and staff in the classroom. Overall, the school is a very effective provider of Initial Teacher Training and this is a significant improvement in provision since the last inspection.

### Accommodation

- 90 Accommodation in school is satisfactory and is sufficient to allow the curriculum to be taught effectively in most areas. However, in science the state of some rooms, especially the mobile accommodation, has a detrimental effect on pupils' learning. In some areas, particularly where there has been new building since the last inspection or where they are refurbished, such as in music, drama and mathematics, the accommodation is good. Much of the older part of the school is quite shabby. Pupils' social areas are inadequate and the space for them to eat in the warm and dry at lunchtime is severely limited.

### Resources

- 91 The overall provision for, and access to, resources in the school are good. Appropriate resources are available for pupils of differing abilities and interests. The library is well stocked with a range of curriculum based reference books as well as fiction and non-fiction books. Pupils make good use of the library to develop a range of literacy skills. They use the computers based in the library to develop and improve their work and for independent learning in GCSE and GNVQ coursework.
- 92 The provision of information technology has improved since the previous inspection, but is still inadequate to support learning across the whole curriculum. The school is aware of this and is endeavouring to improve the situation. It is identified within the school development plan priorities.

Value for money

- 93 Taking into account:
- the progress made by pupils and the high standards achieved;
  - the improvements since the previous inspection;
  - the good quality of teaching and learning;
  - the arrangements for personal development;
  - the behaviour and attitudes of the pupils; and
  - the leadership and management;

the school is judged to give good value for money.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

94 In order to further improve the standards of education, the governors, headteacher and staff, should:

**1 strengthen senior management responsibilities to ensure that all policies and curriculum initiatives are implemented consistently across all departments by:**

- developing the strategic and monitoring roles of senior staff;
- delegating clear responsibilities to heads of departments;
- clarifying and strengthening the line management role of key staff;
- creating a structure in which heads of department and pastoral groups can share good practice and achieve greater consistency of practice throughout the school;

(paragraphs 75 - 77)

**2 develop the rigour and effectiveness of the systems for monitoring and reviewing teaching, learning and the curriculum by:**

- ensuring senior managers have sufficient time both to undertake rigorous monitoring and also to follow up the quality of the implementation of all agreed policies and practice;
- supporting heads of academic departments and pastoral teams to develop and implement regular review and monitoring systems;
- devising a time table for the systematic review of departments and curriculum initiatives;

(paragraphs 76 and 77)

**3 improve the use made of assessment data and information to set targets of achievement for all pupils across the curriculum by:**

- ensuring the good practice that exists in several departments is shared and adopted in all subjects;
- ensuring that all pupils receive diagnostic feedback on their performance that is consistently used to set targets in all subjects;
- providing training for heads of department on the use of performance data to raise attainment;
- involve pupils more in the assessment of their own performance;

(paragraphs 65 - 67)

**4 improve the provision for ICT throughout the school by:**

- defining and clarifying the responsibilities of senior managers, subject managers and teaching staff in relation to ICT;
- auditing the current provision for each pupil in each subject in each key stage;
- identifying any gaps in provision and ensuring they are filled;
- involving all those who manage aspects of ICT to write a prioritised development plan;
- develop regular review and monitoring of ICT across the curriculum;
- ensuring all departments have adequate access to computers;

(paragraphs 160 - 165)

**5 meet statutory requirements by:**

- providing a daily act of collective worship;
- making provision for the agreed syllabus for religious education to be taught to pupils at Key Stage 4  
(paragraphs 78 and 188 - 200)

**OTHER ISSUES WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BY THE SCHOOL**

Governors may consider including the following less important issues in their action plan:

- there are a small number of pupils who behave badly and are disruptive in lessons and some staff require further support and training to develop their skills to cope with these pupils;
- the school is socially and educationally inclusive, but more teacher assistant support could be considered for pupils with special educational needs;
- continue to develop the social areas for pupils which currently are inadequate;
- improve the recording procedures and documentation for health and safety and child protection arrangements.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	168
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	58

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Number	21	53	53	34	5	2	0
Percentage	13.0	31.0	32.0	20.0	3	1	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1472
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	64

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	19
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	210

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	5

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	33
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	30

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.5
National comparative data	8.1

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.1

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	130	150	280

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	104	102	97
	Girls	139	135	128
	Total	243	237	225
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	87 (85)	85 (80)	80 (76)
	National	64 (66)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	66 (47)	66 (60)	43 (43)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	94	106	102
	Girls	136	131	131
	Total	230	237	233
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	84 (86)	87 (78)	85 (71)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	34 (47)	59 (46)	44 (40)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	148	138	286

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	106	139	141
	Girls	102	135	135
	Total	208	274	276
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	73 (66)	96 (97)	97 (97)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	45 (45)
	National	39 (38.4)

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

### **Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	1
Indian	9
Pakistani	8
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	10
White	1422
Any other minority ethnic group	16

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

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	4	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	1	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	1	0
Chinese	2	0
White	118	1
Other minority ethnic groups	3	0

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

### **Teachers and classes**

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	85.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.1

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

Total number of education support staff	18
Total aggregate hours worked per week	527

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

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.6
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	24.9
Key Stage 4	21.7

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### **Financial information**

Financial year	2001
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	£
Total income	3,689,118
Total expenditure	3,672,470
Expenditure per pupil	2,514
Balance brought forward from previous year	104,405
Balance carried forward to next year	121,053

### **Recruitment of teachers**

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	24.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	21.6

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*



## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

19.4%

Number of questionnaires sent out

1470

Number of questionnaires returned

285

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	39	52	7	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	40	54	4	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	13	55	20	4	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	53	20	7	2
The teaching is good.	25	62	6	0	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	19	50	24	5	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	42	8	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	52	44	3	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	26	51	15	4	4
The school is well led and managed.	33	48	9	2	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	35	55	5	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	44	10	3	9

### Other issues raised by parents

Most parents demonstrated very positive attitudes towards the school, but the poor behaviour of a small minority of pupils is seen as a real problem.

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

**ENGLISH**

Overall, the quality of provision in English is good.

**Strengths**

- Good teaching is leading to high standards of work in both key stages.
- The inclusion of pupils of all levels of ability and prior attainment.
  
- Very good leadership and a team approach ensures the department is improving.
- A detailed scheme of work supports well planned lessons.
- Improvement of pupils' work in Years 7 to 9.

**Areas for improvement**

- Develop a programme for gifted and talented pupils.
- The writing of weaker pupils.

- 95 In both 2000 and 2001 the school's results in the national tests for pupils aged 14 have been well above the national average. Compared with results in similar schools, the school's results were above average in 2000 and well above average in 2001. In the GCSE examinations for pupils at the end of Year 11, the school's results in 2000 and 2001 have been well above the national average in comparison with results in all schools and above the average in comparison with the results in schools with a similar intake of pupils. Standards have risen since the last inspection in line with the national trend.
- 96 Inspection evidence indicates that standards are generally well above the national average. Pupils enter the school with above average levels of attainment in English. They make good progress in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4: on the local education authority's (LEA) measure of improvement between the end of Year 6 and the end of Year 11, the school achieves a score above the LEA average. Girls enter the school with standards in English slightly lower than those of boys, but achieve more added value than boys. Boys and girls achieve standards that are well above the national average. Boys, however, achieve more of the higher grades than girls do.
- 97 The needs of pupils with special educational needs are identified early, using the evidence provided by primary schools. In addition, the department administers standardised tests in reading and spelling to pupils in Year 7, the results of which help to identify pupils' needs more precisely. Every lesson plan includes the specific needs of all pupils with special educational needs. The one pupil at an early stage of English language acquisition is withdrawn from English to receive intensive tuition in English language. In lessons, teachers meet the needs of pupils from a wide range of ethnic and social backgrounds carefully and sensitively. In addition, the department has produced support materials to help weaker pupils improve in spelling and writing. The department also conducts 'catch up' lessons for selected pupils in Year 7 who achieved below the expected Level 4 in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2.
- 98 General standards of speaking and listening are well above average. Pupils are unusually articulate and willing to make contributions to whole class discussions and small group work, often at considerable length. They listen well in class and can give a clear account of their ideas. They show a good command of vocabulary and speak fluently and accurately. Some of the best teaching is characterised by lively, vigorous exchanges between pupils and their teachers.

- 99 Standards of reading are well above average. There is a good emphasis on literature and the reading of appropriate fiction in all year groups. Each class in Years 7 to 9 studies a class reading book and almost all pupils in Years 10 and 11 are entered for GCSE English Literature as well as GCSE English. Pupils in class read aloud fluently and accurately and show a good understanding of what they read. In Years 7 to 9, they begin to develop their understanding of how authors achieve their effects. In addition to analysing literary texts and poems, they also learn to analyse media texts and advertisements with a good level of sophistication. In Years 10 and 11, there is more intense analysis of plays, novels and poems and by this stage pupils show a good command of relevant technical terms.
- 100 Standards of writing are also well above average. Most pupils in Years 7 to 9 can write continuous prose in their own words. Pupils in all years also write in a wide variety of styles: stories, letters, play scripts, newspaper articles, plot summaries, notes and analytical writing. Some weaker writers produce rather short, scrappy pieces or undeveloped notes on the literary texts they are studying. Higher attaining pupils achieve high standards and have a well developed vocabulary and good control of the conventions of spelling and punctuation. They often write at good length. Many pupils word-process their writing and produce attractive title pages using either their own computers at home or those in the school. The improvement in writing between the end of Year 6 and the end of Year 11 is higher than that achieved in speaking and listening or in reading. This is because a higher proportion of pupils enter the school with standards below the national average in writing yet achieve standards by the end of each key stage that are well above average.
- 101 The standard of teaching is generally good and there is a significant proportion of very good and excellent teaching. This is the major factor contributing to the high standards achieved by pupils. Lessons are carefully planned and well structured; objectives are clearly set out and there is good use of support materials such as worksheets or video films. Teachers have high expectations and good subject knowledge. There are good question and answer sessions with teachers drawing from the pupils' confident, extended answers on the topics under discussion. Teachers are good at helping both boys and girls to develop their initial responses and refine their understanding. They often build up key terms and vocabulary on the board which pupils make use of when they tackle writing activities. Pupils at Stage 5 on the register of special educational needs regularly receive helpful guidance from well qualified learning support assistants. Some teachers make very good use of overhead projectors as a teaching tool when analysing texts or advertisements. In one good lesson, Year 11 GCSE pupils showed a sensitive response to the language and images used in two contrasting death scenes taken from William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. Guided by the teacher, they highlighted key words and emotive terms and were able to demonstrate the different emotional impacts the scenes made on the reader. The teacher drew out their responses skilfully, asking individuals to repeat points at times for the benefit of the whole class and reinforcing points that were well made and relevant. Pupils were encouraged to work things out for themselves, developing good powers of independent thinking. Pupils visibly grew in confidence in the course of the lesson and most, including several with special educational needs, made good progress. The overall standard of teaching is better now than at the time of the last inspection.
- 102 Teaching is assisted by the good quality of assessment data the department collects and records for each pupil. Information, including that received from feeder primary schools, is carefully analysed and teachers use the results to group and teach the pupils. Marking is thorough and is frequently carried out in dialogue with individual pupils. Targets are set for pupils and this rigorous system of assessment and the

intimate knowledge teachers develop of the strengths and weaknesses of individual pupils combine to help teachers and pupils drive up standards.

- 103 Pupils for the most part have good attitudes to the subject and enjoy their English lessons. Most listen with good levels of attention, are eager to answer questions and take part willingly in whole class discussions and group work. On occasions, a few pupils engage in chattering or time wasting and fail to pay proper attention. This is more likely to occur at transitional points in the lesson, especially when pupils are moving from speaking and reading activities to writing. In one lesson that was only satisfactory, the teacher's management of time was poor and pupils were asked to begin a demanding writing activity only a few minutes before the end of the lesson. Instead a large proportion began to pack their bags and get ready to leave. Although standards of behaviour in class are generally good, in the one lesson that was unsatisfactory pupils' behaviour was poor. Homework is regularly allocated at the end of lessons, including some requiring pupils to carry out their own investigations.
- 104 The subject has a good range of textbooks and sets of readers. There are also good collections of fiction, clearly classified by genre, in the well organised school library. Pupils borrow books regularly from the library and some are allowed to read their own books from home. Pupils also retrieve information from the internet and CD-ROMs both in school and at home. The department is very well led and some good ideas and practices have been introduced. The relatively large number of teachers involved in the subject operate as a team. Teaching and the approach taken to the subject are well guided by a detailed and comprehensive handbook and scheme of work. Recent initiatives have included a more structured approach to teaching and learning in Key Stage 3, which is helping to raise pupils' standards in Years 7 to 9. Two top 'extension' classes have been created in Years 10 and 11, and although there is often appropriate matching of tasks and materials to pupils' abilities in lessons, the department has not yet identified and made special provision for pupils who are gifted and talented. There are two clusters of suitable rooms as well as satisfactory storage facilities. Rooms and the adjacent corridor areas have a suitable subject flavour with displays of posters and many examples of pupils' writing.
- 105 Across the curriculum, the general standard of speaking and listening, reading and writing is good. The National Literacy Strategy, which has been introduced in Years 7 to 9, is having a positive impact on the use of display to promote learning and in the promotion of the display and use of key words in each subject. In some subjects, such as science, key words are widely displayed, but they are not sufficiently reinforced in the course of lessons. However, in most lessons teachers make copious and appropriate references to key words and terms.

## **Drama**

Overall, the quality of provision in drama is good.

#### Strengths

- There is a detailed handbook and clearly articulated philosophy of the subject.
- Teaching is good.

#### Areas for improvement

- Set targets for individual pupils.
- Raise standards to a level above the national expectation.
- Use the subject to develop more creative writing by pupils.

- 106 Standards are in line with national expectations both at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11. Pupils have a mature attitude to the subject throughout the school. They develop their ability to speak and listen both in and out of role as well as their powers of social observation and empathy. The subject makes a positive contribution to the moral and social development of the pupils. There is a good take-up of the subject at GCSE level, with two groups of around 20 pupils in each of Years 10 and 11. In the GCSE examinations in 2000, the school's results were higher than results nationally. In 2001, results were a little lower than the national average and LEA analysis indicates that pupils' progression in drama was lower than national expectations. In lessons, pupils attain standards that are in line with national expectations or slightly above that level. There is no significant difference in the standards attained by boys or girls, but significantly more girls than boys opt for the subject at GCSE.
- 107 Teaching is good. Teachers are skilful in presenting classes with interesting contexts in which they are required to improvise scenes and sketches. Pupils generally work hard at devising and performing their improvised scenes as well as at evaluating their own and others' efforts. They show a good level of commitment to the subject, taking it seriously and making satisfactory progress; pupils with special educational needs generally make good progress relative to their prior attainment. Teachers make useful interventions to help groups of pupils to remain focused on their work and to stimulate further creative efforts. The written work of pupils varies quite widely in quality, but is overall of a sound standard. It is well and thoroughly marked with suggestions about how improvements might be made; in Years 10 and 11 there is a proper insistence that pupils develop their skills of analysis. Pupils produce some imaginative writing as well as pieces evaluating their own and others' work. More use could be made of drama to help pupils develop their ability to create imaginative prose. The department has only just begun to make use of assessment data and does not consistently set individual targets for improvement.
- 108 The subject is well supported by a detailed scheme of work and guidance notes that help to maintain a consistent teaching approach. Accommodation and resources are above average in quality. The subject makes a valuable contribution to the curriculum from which all pupils, especially those who opt for it in Key Stage 4, derive considerable benefits.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Overall, the quality of provision for mathematics is good.

## Strengths

- Results in both National Curriculum tests and in GCSE examinations in recent years have been consistently well above the national averages.
- Standards of attainment in lessons are well above national expectations.
- Teaching is usually good and it is often very good or excellent.
- The attitude of pupils towards mathematics is very good in most lessons.
- Leadership and management are good.

## Areas for development

- Occasionally, teaching is unsatisfactory or poor.
- The attitudes and behaviour of a minority of pupils are unsatisfactory when teaching is less than satisfactory.
- The very good practice of the majority of teachers needs to be shared throughout the department.

- 109 Results in mathematics obtained in National Curriculum tests by pupils at the end of Year 9 have been consistently above the national average in recent years. In 2001, results were well above those of similar schools. They were in line with those in English within the school and well above those in science. Overall, there is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. Standards in lessons reflect these results. The pupils enter the school with above average attainment and end with standards that are well above; this represents good progress up to Year 9. Standards of numeracy across the curriculum are usually very good.
- 110 Results in GCSE examinations obtained by pupils at the age of 16 have been consistently well above the national averages in recent years. In 2001, the proportions of pupils gaining A\*-B and A\*-C grades were well above national expectation and, overall, pupils of all abilities performed at about three-quarters of a grade higher than pupils nationally. The results were better than those of similar schools and of most other subjects within the school. There was no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Standards in lessons reflect these results and indicate good progress through to Year 11. Standards of numeracy are at least good.
- 111 By the end of Year 9, pupils attain well above national expectations. The very best pupils solve quadratic equations confidently. They use graphical calculators effectively to plot curves and understand clearly where the solutions to the equations lie on the graph. They easily relate graph work to algebra and work at levels at or approaching exceptional performance. In an excellent lesson, the teacher's use of her own arms to illustrate the curve, and precise body movements to move the curve across the horizontal axis, greatly helped the pupils realise how changing formulae affected the position of the graphs.
- 112 The school's middle attaining pupils work at standards well above the national average. Even when pupils entered the school with attainment above the national average, this represents good progress. They define prime numbers accurately and understand the inverse relationship between factors and multiples. These pupils also demonstrate not only a good appreciation of the inverse relationships between square numbers and square roots, but also understand the relationship between cube roots and cube numbers. They use calculators with confidence and know why the cube root of 216 is six. In an excellent lesson on types of numbers, the teacher's use of a Martian invasion as the setting made the worksheets very appealing to the pupils.
- 113 Some of the weakest pupils in Year 9 used algebraic ideas to find the missing numbers in boxes in pyramids. In an outstanding lesson, the teacher skilfully used

diagrams with boxes of numbers, comprising three on the base, then two on the layer above and finally one on the top. Some of the numbers were deliberately missing. This initially helped pupils add and subtract to ensure that each number in a box was the result of adding the two numbers in the boxes on either side in the layer below. As the questions became more difficult, pupils used the symbol of a coloured spot to represent missing numbers and by the end of the lesson formed algebraic equations and solved them accurately. Pupils with special educational needs made good progress in this and other lessons to attain standards almost in line with national averages. Considering the ability of the weakest pupils this represents good achievement compared to their attainment on entering the school. The department's commitment to including all pupils ensures that they make good progress.

- 114 By the end of Year 11, higher attaining pupils find the missing sides and angles in complicated triangles after a systematic study of the information given in the questions. After careful guidance from the teacher in an excellent lesson on trigonometry, pupils formulated their own rules to help them decide which formula they needed to use in any given problem. The pupils demonstrated very good levels of understanding of each formula during paired discussion. This represents standards well above the national average, a considerable achievement for a class that does not contain the very highest attaining pupils in Year 11.
- 115 Pupils of average ability in Year 11 show the ability to seek out numeric trends when attempting to construct an open-topped tray of maximum volume from a square sheet of paper. They follow the very good guidance from the teacher who skilfully sets out clear activities to start the pupils on the investigation. Most of these pupils also demonstrated high levels of understanding in making notes and stating publicly what they had learned during the lesson. They show levels of attainment and confidence above the national average. This represents good progress compared to prior performance. The lowest attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, also maintain their good progress through Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 11 they use a variety of graphs appropriately, understand the uses of different types of averages and are well aware of inverse relationships such as those between factors and multiples.
- 116 The attitudes of pupils towards mathematics are usually good or better. They are often very good or excellent, particularly where teaching is stimulating. In the best lessons, pupils discuss mathematics in pairs. They speak confidently to the class when explaining their methods. Most pupils are very willing to come to the board to assist the teacher demonstrate to the class. As classes and as individuals they usually have very good relationships with teachers. During a very good lesson with the most able pupils in Year 10, the teacher imaginatively used the idea of knots tied in elastic bands to demonstrate enlargement. By also involving a pupil at the board, the teacher skilfully motivated pupils to use smaller elastic bands to learn about enlargement by working on paper. Occasionally, on the rare occasions where teaching is unsatisfactory or poor, the attitudes of a minority of pupils are unsatisfactory. Such behaviour is typified by lapses of concentration and disturbing others by turning round and indulging in prolonged idle chatter.
- 117 Teaching is usually good and it is often very good or excellent. All teachers work very hard for their pupils and do their best to devise activities by which all pupils will achieve their potential. They are by nature very good at including all pupils, even when some pupils misbehave. They ensure that the few pupils with English as an additional language are given equal opportunities to progress. Most have high expectations of both academic and behavioural standards. Teachers use resources extremely well to enhance learning and are demanding of all pupils in asking them to explain their reasoning. The very best teaching is typified by the sharing of learning objectives with pupils. It also involves the very good use of resources and smooth

transitions between sharply timed activities to achieve the learning objectives. Teachers usually implement the techniques of the numeracy strategy framework successfully. In lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory or poor, teachers do not focus sufficiently on what pupils are doing at different stages of the lesson and what the learning is. In these lessons, skills in managing pupils are underdeveloped.

- 118 Teachers are good at using homework to enhance and consolidate learning. They mark work promptly and often give good advice about how to improve their mathematics. Teachers are also good at judging how well pupils are learning during lessons. Despite this, there is insufficient use of the newly developed system for tracking the progress of pupils at regular intervals throughout school and in setting targets that they know and understand.
- 119 Leadership and management are good. The head of department has instilled a good team spirit amongst the teachers and has led the way in encouraging the very good standard of teaching typified by the imaginative use of learning resources. He is very well supported by a strong team of teachers, the majority of whom are very able, despite their varying levels of experience. There is insufficient emphasis in the department, however, on sharing the very good practice in teaching that exists across the entire department. While there has been some very good work done by some teachers in developing schemes of work for Year 7, in line with the new framework for mathematics, this practice is insufficiently developed throughout the school. Accommodation is good. Almost all of the lessons take place in a new suite of classrooms. The rooms are carpeted and generally attractive. They are good learning environments with impressive displays of pupils' work and information about famous mathematicians.
- 120 Since the last inspection, results in mathematics throughout the school have been maintained at standards well above the national average. Standards of numeracy have improved to be good throughout the school, particularly in mathematics, science, geography, design and technology and art. Pupils enter the school with attainment above average. However, entry attainment level in mathematics has declined slightly since the last inspection and improved teaching has been responsible for maintaining high standards. Overall, this represents a good improvement since the last inspection.

## SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is good

Strengths
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- Pupils' attainment is above average at 14 years of age and well above average at 16. They achieve particularly well during Years 10 and 11.
- Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Teachers' knowledge of biology, chemistry and physics is a particular strength.
- The curriculum is good and caters for the needs of all pupils.
- The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good. The information is used effectively to monitor pupils' progress, tackle any underachievement and group pupils in Years 9 to 11.
- Good management and leadership of science ensure effective teaching and learning and cohesive working of a very large department.

#### Areas for improvement

- Attainment by the age of 14 is not as high as it should be.
- Planning and sharing with pupils what it is that they are to learn in terms of specific skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Developing the use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- Matching different tasks to the full ability range in mixed ability classes.
- Some laboratories require refurbishment.
- Pupils do not make enough visits. This was also noted in the last inspection.

- 121 The 2001 test results taken by pupils at the age of 14 indicate that standards in science are above average. Evidence of direct observation during the inspection supports this picture. During the last inspection, standards were also found to be above average. Attainment has consistently risen since 1999. The extent of this rise was greater in 2001 than in 2000. However, a greater rise in standards nationally in 2001 has caused the schools' comparative performance to be above average instead of being well above average as it was during the last few years. Pupils' 2001 performance compared with similar schools is well below average. Pupils have achieved much better in English and mathematics than in science, an issue the department is working hard to address. The school has concluded that part of the reason for the standards in science was a shortfall in the amount of lesson time allocated to science in Year 8. This shortfall has now been rectified. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls at this age.
- 122 GCSE results indicate that the standards of 16-year-olds in science are well above average. About a quarter of pupils attain grades A\*/A. Evidence from observing lessons and scrutinising work reflects a similar picture. The last inspection found standards to be above average and these high standards have been maintained during the recent years. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls.
- 123 Pupils with special educational needs in all year groups make good progress because of successfully working in mixed ability groups when carrying out investigations. No pupils with English as an additional language were observed. Teachers ensure all pupils can take part fully in lessons.
- 124 Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good and consequently learning is also good. This contributes positively to pupils' overall achievement. The pupils enter the school with above-average attainment in science and good teaching maintains their progress. Teaching and learning are often very good. In one very good Year 9 lesson, the teacher's demonstration of the range of sound waves from infrasound to ultrasound using a cathode ray oscilloscope, and explanation of associated vocabulary such as amplitude, frequency, hertz, provided intellectual stimulus and substantially increased pupils' knowledge and understanding of sound. The monitoring of the variations in the hearing range of humans, followed by a thoughtful discussion, extended pupils' knowledge and understanding of the hearing ranges of humans and animals, and

how it ranges from infra- to ultra-sound. In a very good Year 7 lesson, the use of water and sugar followed by an experiment using peas and split lentils promoted pupils' understanding of what happens when substances dissolve. In another very good lesson Year 7 lesson, pupils explored how a change in mass affects the extension of a spring. They carried out the experiment and then the class participated in drawing a line graph on the board. They understood the linear relationship and learnt how to make informed predictions.

- 125 Overall, teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11. A significant number of lessons were very good or better. The good teaching and learning lead to pupils' good achievement. Most lessons motivate pupils to learn well. Very good or better lessons contribute to a high level of thrill and enjoyment. For example, a 'PowerPoint' presentation on astronomy stimulated the whole class intellectually. The teacher set very high expectations of behaviour, routines in class and the quality of work. Groups of pupils in turn gave presentations to the class. They showed knowledge and understanding which were well above average, for example of the orbiting of communication satellites and of weather and spy satellites. They displayed superb confidence and co-operation.
- 126 Teachers' several strengths contribute to overall good teaching and learning in all areas of science. Their subject expertise is a particular strength. Lessons are well structured and organised. Teachers' expositions, demonstrations and explanations are good. They set high expectations of work and behaviour and the resulting relationships are good. Good use is made of lesson time and resources. However, learning is not as effective as it could be by enhancing planning and sharing with pupils so that they understand what it is that they are to learn in terms of specific skills, knowledge and understanding. Frequently, teachers tell pupils what to do instead of what to learn and this is not always an effective strategy to develop pupils' learning. At times, teachers do not match tasks to the full range of pupils' abilities in the mixed ability classes. Some teachers do not use questioning effectively to diagnose and address pupils' misconceptions. For example, Year 7 pupils show a good awareness of fair testing, but, in their enthusiasm, they continue to say that it involves keeping all things the same even when, for example, they are varying the temperature to test if it affects the dissolving of sugar.
- 127 Leadership and management of the subject are good. This ensures good teaching and learning and cohesive working of a very large department. All staff are committed to raising standards further and reflect to find ways and means to do so. For example, *Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education* has been introduced to provide an exciting curriculum for pupils in Year 7. From June 2002, the school is introducing a co-operative project on water pollution for primary pupils in Year 6 and Bramhall pupils in Year 7. The overall curriculum is good. The provision of double science caters for the needs of most pupils in the school. A recently introduced single science/certificate of achievement caters for the needs of a minority of pupils who find double science too difficult. However, the failure to enrich the curriculum through visits is still a weakness noted in the last inspection. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are effective. There is good use of assessment information to group pupils, provide a 'home pack' for underachievers in Year 8 and for modifying the curriculum. Laboratory support staff make a good contribution to the smooth running of the department.
- 128 The development of pupils' numeracy skills in science is good. The use and development of literacy skills is satisfactory, but the use of information and communication technology skills is unsatisfactory.
- 129 While overall accommodation is satisfactory, some laboratories require substantial refurbishment. Pupils taught in classrooms in other departments do not receive the

same access to laboratory facilities as others in their year group who are taught in a laboratory.

## ART AND DESIGN

Art and Design is a very good department providing pupils with skills of craftsmanship and with a good knowledge of artists and their work. It is a strength of the school, consistently achieving very high standards. Provision for art and design is very good overall.

### Strengths

- The quality of teaching is very good.
- The high standards achieved in craft skills are applied creatively to all aspects of art and design.
- Pupils express their opinions about art confidently.

### Areas for improvement

- Increased access to computers.
- Opportunities to work with artists-in-residence.
- Opportunities for pupils in Years 7 to 9 to visit art galleries.

130 In recent assessment tests taken at the end of Year 9, almost all pupils achieved to the level expected and beyond, with girls achieving more of the higher levels. In the 2000 GCSE examinations the percentage of pupils, both boys and girls, achieving grades A\* to C was significantly above the national average. In the most recent examination, results continue to be above average, extending the department's record of high achievement over many years.

131 Standards by the end of Year 9 are above average. Pupils arrive with an average level of experience and skill in art. They quickly gain knowledge and skill in the essential elements of line, tone, colour, and texture in two-dimensional drawing, printing and painting tasks, in three-dimensional *papier-mâché* sculpture and in delightful well-crafted ceramic modelling. This is due to teaching that is never less than satisfactory, mainly very good and at times excellent. Teaching is particularly notable in the regular good-quality demonstrations of craft skills which are instrumental in establishing high standards of skill, such as when Year 7 were given very clear instruction in how to mix paint and how to control the brush in order to paint well. These skills are reinforced by the exposure of pupils to the good-quality exemplar work that is displayed in all studios. By the age of 14, pupils' attainment is well above average, indicating very good progress. They are able to identify a range of artists from the good knowledge that teachers impart about art, the good learning resources available in the studios and in the library and from their homework private research tasks. In these many use the Internet. They employ this knowledge- there was a good example in a detailed sketchbook study of the drawings of Escher - to enhance their own work. Pupils' understanding of moral issues is raised in discussion, such as when Year 9 pupils were considering the paintings of Picasso from the Spanish Civil War and pupils were able to make connections with images of contemporary conflict. Pupils in some groups are able to use computers very creatively, scanning in designs and incorporating and manipulating text to produce better than average graphic package designs for their age. Not all pupils have access to these facilities, however, and some pupils do not develop these skills. Pupils' attitude to art is good. The behaviour of the majority is good and if poor behaviour occurs it is managed well.

132 Standards by the end of Year 11 continue to be above average. Pupils build on their previous abilities and make good progress, with the result that their attainment is well above average. Their knowledge of art is extended in visits to art galleries. In

addition to much of the European and North American painting to which pupils are introduced, they also gain knowledge of art of other cultures. For example, pupils in Year 11 successfully re-interpret and develop Aztec imagery in their own imaginative ceramic modelling. Pupils use their computer word-processing skills to support their investigations into artists' lives and work, but computer resources are insufficient for them to develop a strong creative use of computers. Teachers generally have high expectations and pupils respond positively. When expectations are not demanding enough, pupils coast and at best make satisfactory progress. Pupils are generally managed well with the result that they apply themselves diligently to the task, make good progress and achieve a quantity and quality of work that are above average. Time deadlines for tasks are effective in establishing a sense of urgency. Feedback to individual pupils, plenary group review in lessons and written reports by teachers give pupils a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Graded displays of previous examination work also identify targets to be aimed for.

- 133 There are no significant differences in standards demonstrated by boys or girls in any year group. Pupils of different ability levels and those with special educational needs learn well and make good progress due to the close individual attention to personal needs. In one example, a pupil with severe learning difficulties, whose work was celebrated in display, was fully integrated into classroom painting activities.
- 134 Literacy is given a high profile in almost all lessons with the result that pupils at both stages use an appropriate art vocabulary when they speak. They write about what they see, confidently expressing personal opinions and judgements, and in Year 9 use words themselves to make pictures. Teachers' frequent reference to new art words and their meanings reinforces the key words displayed in all studios. Numeracy is adequately addressed in the well-considered scheme of work with the result that pupils use and develop measuring skills in practical design exercises. They have a sound knowledge of the rules of perspective and use number shapes imaginatively in accurately measured repeat patterns.
- 135 Leadership is very good. High standards have been consistently achieved at both key stages. There has been good progress since the previous report. A new graphic option has been introduced, pupils are now introduced to the art of other cultures and make reference to the work of designers as well as of artists. Ability tests, used to monitor pupils' performance, have been introduced in Year 7. The very high standards seen during the inspection are likely to be even better when pupils in Years 7 to 9 visit art galleries, to broaden their knowledge of contemporary or historical art, when all pupils have access to computers to generate creative art and design, and when there are opportunities to work with artists-in-residence.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is good, with examples of very good provision in graphics.

### Strengths

- High standards of attainment.

- Hardworking, committed teachers.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils and between pupils themselves.
- Planning and organisation of lessons.
- Mature, sensible behaviour of pupils in practical rooms.
- Individual support given by teachers to pupils to help them to improve.

#### Areas for Improvement

- Further develop the assessment of pupils' work so that it is directly related to the National Curriculum assessment criteria for design and technology.
- Develop the requirement for ICT in food and textiles.

- 136 The teachers' assessments of standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2001 are well above the national average. The work seen during the inspection in this key stage indicates that standards are above average. The department is aware of the need to develop its assessment procedures further in Years 7 to 9. It is introducing moderation meetings and folders of pupils' work which identify levels of attainment more accurately across the areas of design and technology.
- 137 Pupils gain a very good foundation in a range of practical skills and are able to use a variety of tools and small and large equipment appropriate to the material they are working with. They develop a good knowledge of materials in relation to functions and properties and are able to identify the correct material for making a given product. For example, in a Year 8 resistant materials lesson, pupils were able to explain why they were using a combination of wood and soft steel for constructing a 'balancing toy'. Pupils show a growing awareness of the design process and by the end of Year 9 can work effectively from a design brief, develop a specification and model and make quality products. They also have a growing confidence and competence in using information and communication technology (ICT), particularly in graphics. The further consistent development of their ICT skills is hindered in food and textiles because of the lack of computers.
- 138 The GCSE results of pupils in 2001 are well above the national average in all materials, with boys attaining better than girls. Results in graphics, resistant materials and electronics have made consistent improvement over the past three years with textiles improving significantly since 1999 and food from 2000 to 2001. The work seen during the inspection is of high standard and very high in electronics and graphics. The application of the skills, knowledge and understanding pupils have gained in Years 7, 8 and 9 are further developed in Year 10 and Year 11, enabling pupils to develop ideas, research their projects thoroughly and analyse their findings effectively. Pupils display high levels of skill in graphics, including using third angle oblique, isometric and perspective drawing. Coupled with a pride in their work and a desire to do well, their skills result in very high standards of coursework. Pupils' evaluative skills and use of a range of techniques are good and are used particularly well in graphics and textiles. The choice of course to study at 14 to 16 shows an encouraging number of girls and boys choosing to study what have been traditionally male or female dominated areas. For example, the GCSE food groups in Year 10 and Year 11 have a number of boys in them.
- 139 Overall, in lessons pupils make good and in some areas very good progress. Most able pupils make very good progress, managing their learning effectively. They work independently solving problems, investigating alternative solutions and modifying work in the light of their findings. This is particularly strong in Year 11. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well and in line with expectations. Boys often achieve better than girls and pupils from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds achieve well.

- 140 The quality of teaching overall is good, with some examples of very good teaching. Hardworking, committed teachers share their very good knowledge and expertise with pupils, enabling them to learn effectively. Pupils develop a depth of understanding of design and technology so that they achieve high standards in this subject. Teachers plan and organise their lesson well and secure good behaviour. This positive approach ensures safe practice in practical rooms supporting the good development of a range of practical skills. In the best lessons, teachers give clear instructions and share the objectives for learning with the pupils. These careful strategies, together with the use of probing questioning, check and deepen pupils' understanding. In a lesson with Year 9 pupils on constructing a circuit board, the questioning by the teacher helped pupils to develop investigative and problem-solving skills and processes to find a solution to the problem. In Years 10 and 11, pupils become more independent and take responsibility for planning and organising their work. They move from one activity to another without reference to the teacher. This was evident in a Year 10 food lesson when after observing a demonstration pupils moved quickly to the task and were able to proceed effectively with the minimum of help from the teacher. Teachers use a range of teaching strategies to develop co-operation between pupils, including working in pairs and in teams and encouraging pupils to support each other. This results in a very good classroom environment, which develops and celebrates learning and success. The relationships between teacher and pupils and between pupils themselves build confidence and encourage pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding and to voice their views and opinions without fear of ridicule. The development and use of technical language and literacy skills are good. Individual teacher support for pupils is very good, but teachers use a limited range of resources and stimulus materials, particularly in Years 7 and 8, to widen the experiences and sustain the learning of some lower attaining pupils. Overall, teachers ensure that all pupils have equal opportunities to succeed in their lessons.
- 141 The assessment of pupils against the course objectives in Years 10 and 11 is consistently applied by staff and this enables pupils to succeed. In Years 7, 8 and 9, assessments at the end of units are monitored, and pupils' performance is tracked by the head of department. The assessment criteria, however, are not specified in the plans and are not related to National Curriculum criteria. This produces inaccuracies in teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 and limits the extent to which they can be used to promote improvement in pupils' learning. Marking is carried out regularly and comments give information to pupils on how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The use of ICT in pupils' work is underdeveloped in food and textiles due to the lack of computers, but there are plans to improve access in these areas, enabling pupils to cover this element of the design and technology curriculum adequately.
- 142 Leadership and management of the department are good. Clear direction is given by the head of department and there is a shared commitment by all staff to high expectations and to the raising of attainment for all pupils. There are clear strategies for further improvement, and the head of department is aware of the strengths and areas of development within the department. The monitoring of teaching is too informal and as the department is split into three areas this creates difficulties supporting all teachers and in the sharing of good practice.
- 143 Good progress has been made since the previous inspection with consistent improvements in standards of attainment. The curriculum time allocated to the subject in Key Stage 3 is now in line with recommendations for design and technology in both key stages. The accommodation has been improved partly due to the commitment by the head of department and teaching staff. They involve themselves actively in the upgrading and refurbishment of the accommodation, providing a good learning environment for the pupils.

## GEOGRAPHY

Overall, provision for geography is good and helps pupils to understand important issues facing the world today.

### Strengths

- High standards of attainment at GCSE, representing a learning partnership between teachers and pupils.
- Computerised monitoring of pupils' progress and target setting leading to analysis of standards.
- Teachers' expert subject knowledge and use of resources that develop pupils' own geographical knowledge.

### Areas for development

- Planning approaches in Years 7 to 9 to meet the needs of higher attaining pupils and those with learning problems.
- Sharing teaching and learning strategies to guarantee a consistent, lively experience for all pupils, with more 'hands-on' activities.
- Monitoring teaching and learning in order to ensure consistent standards.
- Increased use of ICT.

- 144 Overall standards of work seen during the inspection are high because the teaching is good. Achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11 where pupils are ambitious and teaching is constantly focused on raising attainment. Emphasis on key terminology and ways of recording knowledge contribute to these standards so that pupils' learning is also good overall. Therefore, pupils' achievement when they reach Year 11 is good in relation to their standards when they began in Year 7.
- 145 Based on the results of national tests, attainment of pupils at the age of 14 is a little above expectations and has risen slightly in recent years. The picture when judged on work seen during the inspection is similar. Given pupils' attainment on entry to the school this represents satisfactory achievement. There is a dip in attainment in Year 8, where a small group of restless boys is difficult to motivate. The head of department is aware of the need to raise standards and ensures that all teachers know the pattern of progress of their pupils and expected National Curriculum levels. There is detailed guidance for marking to these levels and some teachers involve pupils in reviewing and updating their own progress chart. Day-to-day marking supports this approach and pupils can explain how it helps them to improve. This is very good practice and works well where teachers target specific skills and involve pupils in learning. Educational assistants enable pupils with special educational needs to make good progress, though the amount of provision generally falls short of need in many classes. In some lessons, lower attaining pupils have specific writing guidance and higher attaining pupils are given an extra task, but this is not consistent practice.
- 146 By the end of Year 9, pupils have a good knowledge and understanding about the creation of landscapes and coasts, climatic change and earth movement. They understand how physical geography, natural resources and human intervention affect prosperity and poverty across a range of countries including Britain, Europe, Africa and South America. They respect the skills and way of life of other communities. This moral sensitivity was evident in a Year 9 lesson studying the symbiotic relationship between rainforest communities and their environment. Having collected information from a video, pupils said 'They know how to treat the forest'; 'They have all they need'; 'Just because their life is different from ours, is no reason to criticise them'.

- 147 Pupils use terminology with accuracy and confidence and make judgements about tourism and migration, for example. They have well-developed numerical and graphical skills. A Year 8 class were very confident in explaining median, mean and mode in connection with average weather patterns. The lack of embedded fieldwork or information communication technology (ICT) for every pupil limits independent enquiry work, though there are practical activities outdoors. Newly planned lessons in ICT and further training for teachers represent renewed commitment to what was also an issue at the previous inspection.
- 148 Attainment at GCSE in 2001 was well above average, maintaining an upward trend. Boys and girls succeeded equally at the highest grades. No pupil gained a grade lower than E, because teachers systematically monitor progress and make sure they challenge pupils. Standards based on work seen during the inspection are at average levels, but pupils are outperforming predictions based on their prior attainment. Altogether pupils' achievement is very good because they know their grades and recognise the characteristics of high level answers. Emphasis on key terminology, techniques for sorting information, writing conventions to help with constructing extended answers exemplify the rigorous teaching that equips pupils well for examinations. There is some concern in school about the relatively low proportion of pupils choosing GCSE geography. The department's discussions with pupils have led to the inclusion of more relevant topics like the global fashion industry, world sport and global crime into schemes of work - a positive response to the previous inspection.
- 149 In Years 10 and 11 pupils gain deeper knowledge of glaciation, ecosystems, settlement and tourism, expressed in mature coursework and enriched by five days of fieldwork in the Lake District. They are efficient note-takers, interweave text with graphical illustrations, conduct investigations by collecting data in a variety of ways and interpreting it into reasoned conclusions. Lack of planned ICT opportunities for data processing and evaluation of Internet material is limiting pupils' progress. It is a learning vehicle, which can be liberating as well as challenging. For example, a lower attaining pupil, initially lacking confidence in compiling a revision package about 'push/pull' factors affecting Sao Paulo was proud to download information after reviewing recommended websites.
- 150 The geography team of teachers is strong in experience and specialist knowledge, and skilful with audio-visual resources. Teaching and learning are good overall. During the inspection three-quarters of lessons were good or better, including half that were very good or excellent. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is very good and focuses sharply on key terminology and detailed preparation for writing, anticipating needs of specific pupils. For example, pupils in separate Year 10 and 11 groups (studying Nairobi and rainforest ecology respectively) made notes of information and key phrases from a video using a guide sheet. They supplemented their findings during class discussion and then listed those conventional phrases that signal reasons and illustrations. In this way all pupils gain confidence and very good learning is the result.
- 151 In Years 7 to 9 there is less consistency of approach. Pupils learn more effectively in those lessons which weave a clear pathway from aims at the start to achievements at the end, moving rapidly through frequent changes of activity via short-term goals, where tasks challenge pupils to re-interpret knowledge. This style is particularly 'boy-friendly'. All teachers are conscious of trying to include every pupil in discussions, particularly those with limited concentration.
- 152 Since the previous inspection leadership has evolved satisfactorily. There is a clear view of appropriate priorities and good support for colleagues, including teachers in



training. However, the department has not firmly established regular systems to rigorously monitor teaching and learning and share good practice leading to consistency in teaching .

## HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is good.

### Strengths

- The high quality of teaching ensures pupils achieve high standards, especially by the end of Year 11.
- Good leadership and management leading to higher expectations are raising standards in the department.
- The department uses assessment information effectively to set challenging targets for all pupils.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes towards their learning.

### Areas for improvement

- Develop research and enquiry based learning skills.
- Make greater use of ICT.
- Provide a greater range and variety of opportunities for learning in Years 7 to 9.

153 In 2001, the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 and GCSE examination results show pupils' attainment is well above national averages. Evidence from the inspection, including the quality of work seen in lessons, confirms these results at both key stages. Pupils' achievement is good. They enter in Year 7 with standards that match national expectations and make good progress as they move through Years 7 to 9. Pupils with special educational needs in Years 7 to 9 also make good progress because of the support they receive from their teachers. Pupils continue to progress extremely well, so that their achievement is very good by the end of Year 11. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress because they are fully included in all class work and discussion. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boy and girls. Based on previous examination results and other assessment data of pupils' attainment, the history department has set realistic and sufficiently challenging targets for improvement through to 2004.

154 Pupils in Years 7 to 9 benefit from a good standard of teaching. In some lessons, teaching is very good and at times excellent. Most pupils respond positively to the teaching and their learning progresses at a good pace. The pupils in Year 7 make good use of resource material to study ancient Rome. They identify why the army was so successful. In response to skilful questioning one pupil thoughtfully suggested 'all factors contribute in their own way'. In another lesson, pupils identified factors that civilised Roman society, for example good hygiene, laws and taxation. Pupils have a little more difficulty identifying uncivilised behaviour, which leads to an interesting discussion on the merits of slavery. Good use is made of documents and pupils rapidly learn how to compare one historical source with another. In Year 8, an investigation into the *Gunpowder Plot* provides good opportunities for pupils to consider 'motive'. Appropriate technical language is introduced by the teacher and pupils consider such words as 'conspiracy.' In another lesson, pupils consolidate their understanding of chronology well by sequencing the story of the *Spanish Armada*. In Year 9, striking images from a slave ship promote a lively debate upon human cruelty, morality and the reliability of evidence. Here, particularly skilful questioning and the teacher's very good subject knowledge ensure that pupils gain valuable insights into a dramatic episode and improve their historical skills in doing so.

- 155 The strengths of teaching at Years 7 to 9 also include the careful management of behaviour and the good inclusion of all pupils in learning through specific tasks for pupils of all ability. Where teaching is excellent, a particular quality is the equal value given to all responses, the challenging activities planned and the way teachers build up pupils' confidence. These factors promote effective learning because pupils are constantly encouraged to do their best. On occasion, the pace of lessons is too slow and activities do not rotate sufficiently often enough to maintain a high level of interest. This then leads to some inattentive behaviour from a small minority of pupils.
- 156 Pupils in Years 9 to 11 benefit from a very good standard of teaching. The consistently very good teaching is a major factor in the very high standards being achieved. This results in the positive attitudes most pupils display. Many take real responsibility for their learning and most are capable of working independently, thinking clearly and working hard. The pupils in Year 10 show a good understanding of rival political views held during the 1932 American presidential election. They understand the influences behind these and recognise the impact of home and overseas events. For example, they assess the impact of the *Wall Street Crash* on the credibility of the Republicans and detect how events in Germany and Russia were used to attack the Democrats. Where teaching is particularly good, pupils benefit from clear explanations and vivid examples. Skilful questioning makes them think clearly and analyse evidence carefully. In Year 11, pupils have good background knowledge of 20<sup>th</sup> century European history. They use this effectively to interrogate different sources of evidence concerning Hitler's policies in the 1930's. Pupils demonstrate very good skills in analysing cause and effect. They are able to identify links between diverse events when considering motive and then thoughtfully discuss such concepts as opportunism and intention.
- 157 There are numerous strengths in the standard of teaching at Years 9 to 11, with a diversity of style and considerable expertise. A particular strength is the active promotion of thinking skills, using historical concepts and evidence. When this occurs, learning is a genuine partnership, all pupils are fully included and ideas bounce around the room. On occasion, genuine enthusiasm for history leads to too much direction by the teacher and pupils are not sufficiently challenged to extend their understanding. However, for many occasions there are high levels of appropriate challenge planned. Pupils respond to the challenge very positively, demonstrating an excellent rapport with staff.
- 158 The school offers a good curriculum in history, which is enhanced in Years 10 and 11 by visiting speakers and a residential visit to the battlefield sites of France and Belgium. However, there is insufficient use made of ICT. Most pupils are entered for a GCSE examination in Modern World History and a small number follow the Certificate of Achievement in History. Throughout the school all classes are mixed ability and this works well, ensuring very good inclusion for pupils, while maintaining high standards of achievement. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, for example, in the way the department promotes collaborative work. Assessment procedures are very good. A substantial portfolio of work is retained; this is carefully marked to provide clear examples of levelled work. Very good use is made of assessment information to provide appropriate tasks for pupils of differing ability and help older pupils identify targets for improvement. This informs reports to parents, which clearly state what has been learnt.
- 159 The head of history provides good leadership and is well supported by an able and experienced group of teachers. The department is well organised and has sufficient resources. In recent years the numbers of pupils choosing history at Years 10 and 11 has doubled and the subject attracts the full range of ability. There are useful developments emerging to monitor teaching. Student teachers in the department are

very well supported and able to make a full contribution while in school. Overall, there has been good progress on many fronts since the last inspection and the high standards have been maintained.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is unsatisfactory.

### **Strengths**

- Good teaching promotes very good achievement in GCSE examinations.
- There are uncoordinated examples of good practice.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Low standards of attainment in Years 7 to 9.
- Clarification of how each senior manager, subject department leader and class teacher can ensure all pupils develop their skills in ICT.
- Arrangements to audit the current provision and identify any gaps to be filled to guarantee that all pupils have equal access to each of the different aspects of ICT as they progress through the school.
- The process whereby all partners in the provision of ICT collaborate to produce a prioritised development plan.
- Regular review and monitoring across the curriculum.

160 By the time pupils reach the age of 14, standards are in line with the national average, as they were at the last inspection. However, by this age most pupils are reaching higher standards in their other subjects. By the age of 16 standards are above expectations and the attainment of pupils taking GCSE examinations in ICT is well above the national average. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

161 Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are taught ICT skills in very short units within the foundation studies course so topics can only be covered superficially. In Year 7, pupils learn to retrieve information from encyclopaedias or the Internet and can present that information for their own purposes. In a realistic marketing project for a Macdonald's restaurant, Year 8 pupils can enter and manipulate data in a spreadsheet by using formulae. By Year 9, pupils are able to write a formal report on the benefits and the effects that ICT can have behind the scenes in a large leisure centre. The standards achieved in these short courses are in line with national expectations.

162 Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. The lessons are carefully planned to include all pupils, so that none feel disadvantaged because they are less familiar with using computers. Behaviour is well managed so that pupils enjoy their work and build their skills steadily. The great majority of pupils achieve the targets set for each lesson. However, pupils' competence is not clearly identified, either as they enter the school, or from lesson to lesson. As a result, some higher attaining pupils learn more slowly than they should as they cover ground that is already familiar, or they are not challenged to demonstrate higher levels of skill. Additionally, when preparing their report on the leisure centre, some pupils with special educational needs become frustrated. They are intimidated by the amount of text they have to enter before they can start on the key task of creating the best format for the job. Other pupils chat for too long and make less progress than they could because they do not have a specific target for each lesson. This is because the lesson targets are not adapted to individual needs.

163 Almost a quarter of pupils aged 14 to 16 follow the GCSE examination course, where standards are steadily improving. Here pupils are highly motivated and well taught.

They are challenged with astute questioning to refine their thinking, for example, when they develop an effective database to solve specific business problems. As a result, both boys and girls, including those who have special educational needs, can achieve very high standards. These pupils also study the basic skills of ICT within foundation studies. Although this course gives a satisfactory grounding in the skills, applications and the effects of ICT, GCSE pupils endure some duplication so that they do not extend their skills effectively. Work rates are less intense in the foundation course, despite the award of a certificate of achievement, but pupils do deploy their skills as effective learners to gain a broad competence in ICT. Where projects extend over several lessons in Years 9 to 11, some pupils work less effectively than they should because they do not have appropriate short-term targets.

- 164 Outside the taught courses in ICT, pupils experience a good range of different experiences, which have improved considerably since the last report. Some, such as word processing in English or graphics in design and technology, are available to everyone. Some activities, including composition in music and drawing in art, make powerful use of computers. In Year 9, for example, pupils exploring the work of Cézanne can create graphic designs well beyond expectation – sufficient to draw spontaneous applause from classmates. Other experiences are too dependent on the availability of resources at the right time and the confidence of teachers to make use of them, so they are not available to all pupils. Nor are they monitored to identify the contribution that they make to developing pupils' all round ICT skills. Most older pupils use computers when they do examination course work and both the music and physical education departments have created their own very helpful websites where pupils can access guidance on course work and even e-mail their homework. Each of these developments makes a valuable contribution to pupils' learning in ICT, but they are neither co-ordinated nor audited at present and this was a criticism in the last report.
- 165 There is no coherent view of how ICT facilities in the school should develop in the longer term and management of the subject is, therefore, unsatisfactory. The quality of resources for ICT is also inconsistent, though considerably improved since the last inspection. Three recently refurbished computer rooms provide a pleasant learning environment. At times, though, the network system works slowly and is unreliable for sustained Internet use. The facilities for music are very advanced and the computer-aided design and manufacture equipment adds realism to the Year 8 system for producing models of Postman Pat's van. Other computers are outdated and those in the special educational needs department are inadequate so that some effective teaching programmes are not available. The library has an up-to-date network which is available throughout the day, but the way pupils use it is not part of any coherent plan, nor is it adequately monitored to identify what skills pupils may have developed.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is good.

### **Strengths**

- The quality of teaching is good overall. Teachers use a wide range of methods to meet their pupils' learning needs. Every pupil, therefore, has opportunities to achieve some form of personal success.
- Teachers have profound knowledge of the foreign languages and use them very well in lessons. They encourage their pupils to speak French and German as much as possible.

- The department is very well led and comprises staff who share a vision for the effective teaching of modern languages. They care deeply for the welfare of their pupils and work hard to produce resources which challenge youngsters to higher levels of achievement.
- Pupils respond positively to the teaching. They behave maturely, approach their studies with interest and work sensibly in pairs and in groups.

#### Areas for improvement

- While improving the performance of boys in both French and German, it is still well below that of girls.
- The department's arrangements to monitor teaching and learning are not yet formalised.
- The department's strategies for the assessment of pupils' progress are inconsistent.
- The use of ICT in teaching is underdeveloped.

- 166 At the end of Year 9, standards in both French and German are above average and the achievement of pupils, including those with special educational needs, is good. Pupils with higher capabilities learn new words and phrases quickly and can use them accurately in written exercises. Those who find much of the work difficult, struggle to ask questions of their classmates and their range of vocabulary is weak. However, because teachers use the foreign languages extensively, the oral skills of most pupils are a strong feature; both boys and girls have the confidence to experiment in French and German and their pronunciation is good.
- 167 In 2000, girls' GCSE results in French were well above average and boys' results were above average. In 2001, there was a slight increase in the percentage of higher grades awarded, and although girls outperformed boys again, the gap closed markedly. In German, results in 2001 showed a significant improvement on the disappointing results of the previous year, but girls gained a larger proportion of higher grades. Standards of work seen during the inspection mirrored the rising trend in examination performance and confirmed the improving picture. Most pupils have an extensive vocabulary and by the end of Year 11 they can also elicit correct information from cassettes of native speakers of French using the language at speed. Moreover, pupils in high sets for German speak with fluency and their writing is grammatically correct. Pupils in lower sets write at a more basic level, but the majority are not afraid to complete sentences using the perfect tense.
- 168 The quality of teaching is a major strength of the department and is characterised by extensive use of the foreign languages, high levels of challenge and expectation, and methods which are designed to include everyone in what the area has to offer. During the inspection, teaching was never less than satisfactory. It was good overall and in 40 per cent of lessons it was very good or excellent. From the very beginning, teachers insist that their pupils speak the foreign language and thus assist pupils to increase their own fluency. In an excellent Year 7 lesson, for example, the teacher's use of methods relevant to the Talk project was most effective in encouraging pupils to speak spontaneously in French. Moreover, relations between teachers and pupils are strong and they serve to ensure that pupils are not afraid to make mistakes and are, therefore, willing to make oral responses. In a very good Year 9 French lesson, pupils were able to join two, three and four phrases together to plan a rendezvous with friends because the teacher, in turn, was not afraid to introduce new phrases at a rapid pace. Teachers know their pupils well and are aware of exactly how they learn. They, therefore, use a variety of methods to engage the learning needs of all, irrespective of capability. A Year 10 German lesson, for example, was conducted entirely in the foreign language and comprised a matching exercise, a reading comprehension, a listening assignment, a maze test, a 'true or false' quiz and a text with jumbled-up sentences. It is hardly surprising that, by the end of the lesson, all pupils could speak with confidence about the different activities to be found in a modern town. Teachers introduce their charges to increasingly more difficult assignments, question them relentlessly, but also transmit that they have the highest

expectations of what they can do. A Year 11 French class was required to complete a particularly difficult listening comprehension, yet because the teacher gave them every opportunity to interact in pairs, and because he gave them good advice on examination technique, the results were very secure and the pupils themselves were astounded at what they had achieved. A key feature of the teaching in both subjects, and in all years, is the recognition that boys can achieve as well as girls; in all sessions observed, teachers attempted, with good success, to involve boys in all aspects of the lessons. Their improved performance at GCSE, in both French and German, is a testament to these efforts.

- 169 Pupils respond positively to the teaching of modern languages. They behave well and speak most highly of their teachers. They enjoy the many opportunities to work in pairs and in groups and are willing to learn from each other. They recognise the progress they are making, but would benefit from a greater consistency in the marking of their work. Teachers are now looking at strategies to ensure a more cohesive approach to the assessment of pupils' work, in order that they can offer more regular advice on how their pupils may improve their standards further and, therefore, set realistic yet challenging targets for future performance.
- 170 The department is very well led and is staffed by a team of talented, industrious and committed teachers. They give freely of their time to organise trips to Dieppe in France and Bad Salzig in Germany, as well as taking part in the German exchange. Accommodation is barely satisfactory and, although teachers work hard to enhance the appearance of the classrooms by a display of pupils' work and, in one classroom, by models, the fabric of the area is less than satisfactory and is in need of refurbishment. Further development of ICT and also a more formalised approach to the monitoring of teaching and learning, and to the sharing of good practice, will serve to augment the department's already very good capacity for improvement.
- 171 The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection, but is to be commended on its efforts over the past two years. Teaching is better, results, particularly in German, have improved and positive pupil response is now a strong feature. The department is now well placed for future development.

## MUSIC

The overall provision in music is satisfactory, despite the considerable variation in the quality of teaching.

### Strengths

- Attainment in the GCSE examinations is well above average.
- The standard of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is excellent.
- In most lessons, pupils behave extremely well and are motivated to learn.
- The provision for ICT within the curriculum is very good.
- There are many pupils supporting the school's ensembles.

- The department is led with real vision and enthusiasm.

What needs to be improved

- The consistency of teaching and learning throughout the department in Years 7 to 9.

- 172 The attainment of the pupils taking the GCSE examination at the end of Year 11 is well above average. The number of pupils studying music in Years 10 and 11 was very small for a number of years, but has risen steadily within the last three years. Results continue to be well above the national average and the five A\* in 2001, out of 15 entries, represents very good success. Standards in the present Years 10 and 11 indicate further likely successes in the examination course.
- 173 In Years 7 to 9, many pupils are working to a high standard, but there is an overall inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning that is a cause for concern. Where pupils are doing well they are working at a level above expectation and this is because of the very good quality of teaching that they enjoy. Where the pupils are doing less well and achievement is unsatisfactory it is because of ineffective teaching. This lack of effectiveness is apparent in the low level of attentiveness displayed by the pupils and the distinct lack of motivation and organisation in group-work. Teachers do not maintain enough discipline in some lessons in Years 7 to 9, which shows in pupils' off-task talking and lack of involvement in the learning.
- 174 There is little specific information about pupils' attainment available on entry to the school in Year 7, other than for those learning musical instruments. The standards of work evident during the inspection indicates that the achievement of two-thirds of the pupils in Years 7 to 9 is very good and for one-third it is unsatisfactory due to ineffective teaching. By the end of Year 8 many pupils are able to work effectively together in groups. Using keyboards and other instruments they are able to build musical materials like broken chords and ground bass into a well structured set of variations. By the end of Year 9 the pupils who are achieving well use similar resources with considerable imagination in making music for a short sequence from a film script. Many pupils are able to use a computer program most competently in their compositions around the same topic. This expertise is unusual in Key Stage 3 and is evidence of the very good aspects of some of the teaching and learning at this key stage. In both key stages, pupils with special educational needs generally made good progress and were well involved in the lessons. The department's planning frequently targets pupils with special educational needs and additional support material is often prepared for them.
- 175 The overall standard of teaching across the whole department is inconsistent and, therefore, unsatisfactory. In three-quarters of the lessons seen, it was good, very good or even excellent. In too many lessons in Years 7 to 9 it was unsatisfactory. There were many lessons with very good teaching that was the outcome of superb teacher-pupil relationships and very good departmental planning. There is much evidence of very good subject knowledge and technical command on the part of these teachers, which is recognised by the pupils. Where the work is of good quality the teachers' expectations are very high and pupils are challenged to work at a high level, both in the amount and the quality of their work. Introductions to successful lessons are clear, with good examples to inspire the pupils in their tasks. It is a characteristic of the good and better lessons that when the pupils are working in groups the teachers are constantly moving around the groups and making constructive comments to the pupils, which helps them to refine their work.
- 176 Where teaching was unsatisfactory there was a poor classroom environment for learning and weak teacher/class relationships were strained. Attitudes were not as good and there were examples of poor behaviour that were detrimental to the learning of the class. This poor behaviour was not always picked up immediately by

the teacher, who too often appeared to be remote and not involved with the pupils. Achievement of these classes was much lower because introductions to lessons did not deal enough with the musical issues of the tasks. Comments to the groups displayed a lack of teacher involvement in the processes that the pupils were being expected to carry out.

- 177 Assessment is sometimes very good and departmental planning for assessment shows considerable thought about how it should be done. Marking schemes are well displayed for the pupils. At its best, assessment was of a very high quality with real involvement of the pupils in the process. They could constructively discuss the work of their peers, with some sure knowledge of musical terminology. The teachers' feedback to pupils, with marks and levels, was very clear and helpful. Sometimes, however, there was no purposeful involvement of the pupils and even no meaningful teacher assessment.
- 178 Facilities for using technology, and in particular information and communication technology, in Years 10 and 11 are excellent. They are of an extraordinarily high standard. Much of this equipment is new, but the competency with which it is used by pupils, particularly those in Year 10, is very impressive indeed. The very good quality of musical composition by these pupils reflects not only the very good equipment, but also the excellently well-informed teaching, which is of the highest quality. A departmental website has been developed and is used in Years 10 and 11 teaching both as a resource bank and as a communication facility.
- 179 The overall day-to-day management of the department is very good. It is very well organised and there are many opportunities for pupils to take part in musical activities. Just over 10 per cent of the pupils learn a musical instrument with the visiting instrumental teachers. Observation of a number of lessons by these staff confirmed that their teaching is the backbone of the many excellent ensembles. The senior wind band, the school's flagship ensemble, made a very successful concert tour to Paris earlier this year. All the ensembles and the choir are enthusiastically supported by the pupils in large numbers and perform frequently in and out of school. The department is led with real vision and enthusiasm.
- 180 Improvements since the last inspection are good. The new accommodation makes a bright and positive environment for music and the display is attractive and purposeful. These factors have a marked influence upon the effectiveness of the teaching and learning. The impressive resources for music technology are used with enthusiasm and considerable competency by the pupils. Almost all the issues within the last report have been addressed. There is now adequate timetable provision for delivery of the music curriculum and the number of pupils studying music in Years 10 and 11 has risen from eight, at the time of the last report, to over 40. This is a most impressive improvement. However, the issue of under-performance by a significant number of pupils in Years 7 to 9 remains unresolved.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is very good.

### **Strengths**

- Very good leadership and teaching ensures that pupils achieve very high standards.
- Excellent GCSE results.
- The pupils' enthusiastic attitudes to learning and positive response in class.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Arrangements for assessment.
- Drainage of the sports pitches.



- 181 By the age of 14 boys and girls attain well at a standard that is above national expectations. At times, girls' attainment in dance is excellent. They make excellent progress in partner routines, showing improvement in both the complexity and quality of performance. In these lessons, co-operation and collaboration between pupils occurs spontaneously and are very impressive, as they work to improve standards. Girls perform good gymnastic sequences, showing developed group balances that they link imaginatively with floor movements. Year 8 girls make good use of basic strokes in badminton and progress well in using them in competition. Most boys play rugby well. They understand and demonstrate good techniques of line out, scrum and tackling so that play is of a very high standard.
- 182 By the age of 16 attainment in the core lessons is very good. A large group of pupils take a GCSE course and results are excellent, having been significantly above the national average for the last four years. In 2001, results were an impressive 40 per cent above average. Boys have good theoretical knowledge and participate well in discussions. Carefully set homework ensures that they arrive fully prepared to lessons and their observations are both well-informed and articulate. In one Year 10 lesson, several were able to recall infamous drugs-related incidents in sport. Many pupils, boys and girls, use information and communication technology (ICT) very effectively to produce their homework.
- 183 In practical activities, girls have very good badminton skills. Racket techniques enable them to apply different strokes confidently. They analyse performances well, expressing opinions and giving detailed, accurate observations to each other. Girls also progress well in dance, acquiring and refining quite complicated routines. Very good ball control in soccer enables boys to retain possession over long periods during games. In Years 7 to 9, boys, girls and pupils with special educational needs make good progress and in Years 10 to 11, very good progress. Pupils with special educational needs are always very well integrated into lessons and are often used to demonstrate particular skills.
- 184 Overall, the quality of teaching is very good and often excellent. Where it is best, lessons are prepared in detail, have very clear objectives and proceed with pace and purpose. Teachers expect much from pupils who, given responsibility for their learning, always respond enthusiastically. Where pupils are asked to co-operate or collaborate they do so easily and effectively. When teaching styles are sufficiently varied and give pupils opportunities to plan and evaluate their activities, this ensures that high quality work occurs.
- 185 ICT is increasingly used for administration and makes an increasingly significant contribution to the subject. A website carries detailed information about many aspects of the department ranging from its aims and objectives, games fixtures, results and details of homework for the GCSE Course. It is useful both to parents and pupils in a whole variety of ways. Pupils who are absent from school can catch up on homework assignments by using the Internet.
- 186 Leadership in the department is very good. Teachers work together as a team. Documentation is excellent and lesson schemes, prepared in considerable detail, are very well recorded and relate to the National Curriculum. Since the previous inspection, recommended changes to the curriculum have all been implemented and the disparities between the progression of boys and girls have been removed. Assessment of pupils' work and progress is efficient, but lacks sufficiently clear criteria, so that pupils cannot set attainment targets for themselves. Facilities are very good, with the exception of the playing fields that are very poorly drained.

- 187 Extra-curricular provision is very good. The school organises many teams and clubs for both boys and girls. Pupils have plenty of opportunities to play competitive sport and many play at district and county level. In recent years two pupils, one boy and one girl, have represented England Schools. Since the last inspection the department has ensured good improvements.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, provision for religious education is unsatisfactory.

### Strengths

- The quality of teaching is very good in all years.
- Standards at GCSE Full Course examination level are very high.
- Standards at age 14 are high in relation to the expectations of the agreed syllabus.

### Areas for improvement

- Insufficient time is allocated to teaching the agreed syllabus to pupils aged 14 to 16 years.
- Pupils' attainment at age 16 is poor in relation to the expectations of the agreed syllabus.

- 188 The school has a statutory responsibility to make appropriate provision for all pupils to study religious education in accordance with the requirements of the agreed syllabus for Stockport. It makes such provision in Years 7 to 9. At Years 9 to 11, pupils can opt to study for the GCSE Full Course examination and small numbers do so. Some elements of the agreed syllabus are taught to all pupils within the framework of the Foundation Studies programme, but most of the syllabus is not covered and provision does not meet statutory requirements.
- 189 In the 2001 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining grade A\*-C passes was well above national norms for the subject. Over time, standards have been consistently above national averages and there has been a trend towards improvement that has exceeded the national trend towards improvement in the subject.
- 190 In work seen during the inspection, the attainment of pupils at age 14 was above the expectations of the agreed syllabus for their age. They have a good knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of religion, of the place of Christianity and other principal religions in the country, of their distinctive features and of how their adherents' lives are shaped by their beliefs. They have a good grasp of religious language and concepts, and well-developed skills in applying religious insights to their own experience and that of others. They have a very good understanding of the spiritual dimension of human experience.
- 191 In work seen during the inspection, the attainment of pupils studying for the GCSE Full Course examination was well above expectations for age 16. However, the attainment of pupils pursuing the agreed syllabus was well below its expectations for age 16. They have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of some aspects of Hinduism, Christian teaching on materialism and religious responses to ethical issues. However, their knowledge and understanding of most areas of the syllabus, for example Christian teaching on the existence and nature of God, the meaning of Jesus' life, the role of the Church and the significance of the Bible, are very poor.
- 192 Most pupils achieve well at the age of 14 years. Both boys and girls make good progress in lessons and over time. Boys are encouraged to achieve well by clear short-term targets. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve well because of work that is well matched to their needs and caring and supportive teaching.

Pupils progress, for example, from relatively simple descriptive and explanatory work at age 11 on the life and teaching of Jesus, to being able at age 14 to grasp and evaluate the highly abstract arguments of Aquinas, Ludwig Feuerbach and William Paley on the existence of God.

- 193 Pupils pursuing the GCSE examination course achieve very well at age 16. However, pupils achieve poorly at age 16 in their study of the agreed syllabus. This is not a reflection of the quality of teaching or of pupils' attitudes towards the subject, both of which are very good. It is because the time allocated to teaching the agreed syllabus at Key Stage 4 is wholly inadequate and pupils, therefore, cannot study it in the breadth and depth necessary and achieve appropriately. Most of the syllabus is not taught, and where it is, it is in insufficient depth.
- 194 The quality of teaching is very good overall and excellent in nearly a half of lessons. Where teaching is strongest, teachers have an excellent grasp of their subject and very high expectations of pupils. They know clearly what they wish them to learn, routinely share their aims with them and review how far they achieved them at the end of lessons. They plan their lessons very well to achieve their aims and engage and hold pupils' interest through a wide variety of enjoyable and challenging activities and tasks that are well matched to their individual needs.
- 195 For example, Year 9 pupils made excellent gains in understanding the experience of Jews in the Holocaust because the teacher planned very well to enable them to empathise with the plight of the victims. Excellent use was made of powerful visual images of the Holocaust to challenge the pupils to make a personal response to the issues, while their understanding was extended through skilled questioning in whole class discussion and individual completion of 'Living Graphs' of the experience of the Jews in the photographs.
- 196 Year 10 GCSE pupils made excellent gains in understanding the concept of Jesus as saviour in St. Mark's Gospel. This was because the teacher led them step by step through whole class, paired and individual activities to grasp the complex Old Testament background necessary to an understanding of the nature of miracles, and their teaching about the person of Jesus revealed in his power over the natural order. The message of Jesus' power to save was brought alive through examples of personal crisis in popular television drama.
- 197 Year 7 pupils gained an excellent understanding of the spiritual nature of prayer because the teacher created a place of meditation in the classroom through imaginative use of artefacts, symbols, lighting and projected text. This gave them the opportunity to experience and make a personal response to guided meditation. Other Year 7 pupils achieved a very good understanding of the nature of discipleship because the teacher made imaginative use of contemporary job descriptions to illuminate the nature of the work that Jesus' first followers were called to do.
- 198 Teachers create a secure ethos in the classroom in which pupils, including those of minority ethnic backgrounds, feel able to take risks in their learning and make personal responses to religious and ethical questions. The teachers set meaningful homework that extends learning in class and mark work conscientiously and supportively. This good teaching is underpinned by very good relationships based on mutual respect and caring.
- 199 Where teaching is less secure, learning would be enhanced for the whole class by additional support for pupils with special needs. Marking does not always help pupils to understand clearly enough how to raise the levels of their attainment.

- 200 The head of department exercises very effective leadership and day-to-day management of the subject in those areas of provision that are within her remit to address. Since the previous inspection, there has been an increase in the number of specialist teachers, the quality of teaching has significantly improved and attainment in the GCSE examination has risen. However, the school and its governing body have not done enough to address the issue of the previous report concerning provision for teaching the agreed syllabus in Years 10 and 11. The school needs to meet its statutory responsibility if standards of attainment are to be further raised.