

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **COMBS MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Stowmarket

LEA area: Suffolk

Unique reference number: 124820

Headteacher: Mrs S L Price

Reporting inspector: Mr D J Thompson  
15640

Dates of inspection: 24<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> September 2001

Inspection number: 188780

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle deemed secondary

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 9 to 13 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Lavenham Way  
Stowmarket  
Suffolk

Postcode: IP19 0JY

Telephone number: 01449 674666

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr A Edwards

Date of previous inspection: May 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
15640	Mr D J Thompson	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? How high are standards? The school's results and pupils' achievements How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9545	Mr K Greateorex	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
11830	Mr J A Banks	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
2330	Mr M H Brice	Team inspector	English Equal opportunities English as an additional language	
1839	Mr M N Edwards	Team inspector	Mathematics Information and communication technology	
19858	Mr J W Follett	Team inspector	Physical education Special educational needs	How well are pupils taught?
23323	Dr J Harvey	Team inspector	Music	
11684	Ms F Le Pla	Team inspector	Religious education	
3691	Mr P A Mason	Team inspector	Art and design Design and technology	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
22785	Dr A McMurdo	Team inspector	Science	
12957	Mr J W Stout	Team inspector	Geography History	

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# REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>7</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?</b>	<b>11</b>
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
<b>HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>29</b>

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Combs Middle School caters for girls and boys in Years 5, 6, 7 and 8. It is an average size middle school with 392 pupils on roll, compared with the national average of 386. The number of pupils entering the school at the beginning of Year 5 has increased during the last five years with the total number on roll changing from 342 to 392, but the school's extensive buildings can easily accommodate them. The catchment area includes a majority of owner-occupied houses and former local authority housing. There has been a recent increase in social priority housing but, overall, the socio-economic circumstances are similar to those seen nationally. The attainment of pupils when they enter the school is close to the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs (18.6%) is at the national average, whereas the percentage with statements (4.0%) is above. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (13.0%) is broadly similar to that seen nationally. Only five pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and there is no pupil for whom English is an additional language.

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

The overall effectiveness of the school is satisfactory. Good leadership has improved the quality of teaching and established very positive pupils' attitudes. Appropriate use of finances, and sound teaching, have enabled pupils to make sound progress and attain at least average standards in most subjects. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

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

- Achieves its aim of providing a caring, welcoming and safe environment in which pupils are encouraged to develop their individual talents.
- Ensures high standards of attitudes and behaviour.
- Enables good progress in art, drama, French, geography, history and physical education, so that pupils achieve better than expected by Year 8.
- Contributes strongly to pupils' personal, social and health development.
- Provides a rich diversity of extra-curricular activities.
- Communicates very effectively with parents and has strong community links.

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

- Standards of attainment, especially in mathematics, information and communication technology (ICT), music and religious education.
- Assessment, to analyse the effect of strategies for improvement, and to let pupils know what they are achieving, which targets they are aiming for and how they can improve.
- Teaching, so that recent improvements are sustained to make the overall quality of teaching better than satisfactory.
- Curriculum planning, so that opportunities for improving ICT skills and developing literacy, numeracy and spiritual education are identified and co-ordinated across a range of subjects.

*The areas for improvement are identified in the school improvement plan and will form the basis of the governors' action plan.*

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

Since the school's previous inspection, in May 1996, attitudes, attainment and progress in Year 5 have improved. The quality of teaching is better and there is a better match of staff to the needs of the curriculum, including a higher proportion of specialist teaching. Subject co-ordinators are more involved in monitoring and supporting teachers, and there is a much improved link between teachers' individual targets and staff training. However, strategies adopted have not yet had a significant impact on raising standards in some subjects.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 6 based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with				<b>Key</b>  well above average    A above average        B average                C below average        D well below average    E
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
End of Key Stage 2 tests	B	D	C	C	

Results in English, in 2000, were similar to those nationally, whereas results in science were above the national average and results in mathematics were below. Taking into account pupils' attainment on entry to the school, this represents achievement in line with expectations for English and better than expected achievement in science. Pupils fell short of expectation in mathematics.

Over the period 1997 to 2000, the school's results improved in all three subjects and this has been recognised by the granting of a 'School Achievement Award'. The school set realistic targets for 2001 which were exceeded in English and science but not achieved in mathematics.

Standards of work seen during the inspection were average overall, with pupils making sound progress. However, pupils make good progress to achieve above average standards by Year 8 in art, drama, French, geography, history and physical education. Attainment by Year 8 is too low in information and communication technology (ICT), music and religious education. Standards of literacy and numeracy are satisfactory overall but there is too little development of skills in subjects other than English and mathematics.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very positive; pupils show great interest and sustain high levels of concentration. They enjoy coming to school and take pride in their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good; virtually all pupils demonstrate high standards of behaviour, although a small number are disruptive in a few lessons.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils work co-operatively, together and with adults. They demonstrate patience, tolerance and understanding of others. Pupils respond well to opportunities to show initiative and take responsibility.
Attendance	In line with the national average; negligible unauthorised absence. Pupils are punctual in coming to school and eager to learn.

Overall, the positive attitudes, behaviour and personal development of pupils are strengths of the school.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 5 – 6	Years 7 – 8
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

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



Teaching has improved since the previous inspection; the proportion of lessons judged to be at least satisfactory has increased from 8 out of 10 to 9 out of 10. Teaching is satisfactory overall in English, mathematics and science, with no significant differences across Years 5 to 8. Pupils with special educational needs receive good teaching. Teachers' knowledge of their subject is mostly secure, and used especially well to promote learning in some subjects, such as art and physical education. Where teachers are not specialists, such as in religious education, pupils' learning is less well supported. Lesson planning is usually good but lesson objectives are not always made clear to pupils. Teachers generally have appropriate expectations of pupils; high expectations are very successfully achieved in drama, but work is sometimes too difficult in English. Almost all teachers have generated a welcoming, secure and enthusiastic atmosphere, but establishing an ethos of positive behaviour is not achieved in a minority of lessons, such as music in Years 7 and 8. Most teachers employ a suitably wide range of teaching styles, to make learning interesting and engage pupils in their work; this is most effective in art, drama, history and geography. Setting of homework is too inconsistent. Overall, teaching results in satisfactory learning.

The teaching of numeracy and literacy across the subjects of the curriculum is just satisfactory. Skills of speaking and listening are developed well in most subjects but writing is less secure. Teaching of numeracy within mathematics is effective but there is insufficient planning to develop numeracy in other subjects. Overall, the school meets the needs of pupils in a satisfactory manner.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. There is a greater range of opportunities for learning than is normally seen. All legally required subjects are taught and learning is effectively extended beyond the minimum through subjects such as drama, French in Year 6 and use of computers in Year 5. Extra-curricular provision is outstanding and there is good coverage of personal, social and health education. Co-ordination of literacy, numeracy and use of computers across subjects is a weakness.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. There is a well organised, high level of support from teaching assistants which promotes progress well.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' moral education is very good, with many effective contributions in subjects such as relationships in PSHE, rules for living in religious education and playing fairly in physical education. Social development is a strength, with co-operative skills being developed well in drama and French. There is good provision for cultural education, especially in art, drama and English. Support for spiritual development is unsatisfactory; most subject co-ordinators have not identified where a contribution to spirituality can be made, and opportunities are missed.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides a welcoming, safe and caring environment. Child protection procedures are effective and systems for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good. There is too little use of assessment to let pupils know how they can improve or to plan the curriculum.

The school works very well with parents. Information provided to parents is of high quality. Reports on pupils' progress are sent out more frequently than in most schools and there are more opportunities for meetings of teachers and parents than are normally seen. The home/school planner is an effective means of communication.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The school is led well and is successful in achieving its aim of providing a secure environment in which all pupils know they have something to offer. There is a clear vision to raise achievement and appropriate strategies are being pursued, but these have not yet had sufficient impact in some areas, such as mathematics.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have a sound understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They are aware of their statutory duties and ensure that the school meets its legal obligations. They are generally supportive of the school's chosen direction but occasionally intervene to shape the way forward.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory, but with too much variation across subjects. There is good use of strategies such as observation of lessons and evaluation of work in some subjects, such as English and art, but too little monitoring in other subjects. There is good practice in analysing examination and test results in a few subjects, but far too little measurement of the effectiveness of strategies for raising achievement overall.
The strategic use of resources	Financial management is thorough and ensures that money is allocated effectively to meet developmental needs. Resources for learning are good, with many improvements since the last inspection, and accommodation is of a very high standard. The number of teachers with specialist subject knowledge has been increased and teachers are matched well to teaching groups.

Overall, the increase in numbers of specialist teachers and the use of accommodation and resources, which are better than normally seen, creates a positive learning environment. Alternative sources of provision are considered when allocating contracts ensuring that best value is obtained.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children like school and behaviour is good.</li> <li>Parents perceive that children are expected to work hard and they make good progress.</li> <li>Parents believe that teaching is good and there is an interesting range of activities outside lessons.</li> <li>The school is led and managed well.</li> <li>The school helps children become mature and responsible.</li> <li>Most parents believe that the school works closely with parents and informs them well.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A few parents would like to be better informed of how their child is getting on.</li> <li>A few parents would like to see better allocation of homework.</li> </ul>

A much larger proportion of parents than normally occurs expressed positive comments, summarised in the left hand column. Inspectors mostly confirm the views of parents. The school is led well, works very closely with parents and provides very good information. Teaching and progress are satisfactory but allocation of homework requires improvement.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

##### **Standards on entry**

1. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school, at the beginning of Year 5, is broadly in line with the national average.

##### **Performance in tests at the end of Year 6**

2. Results in national tests at the end of Year 6 in 2000, based on pupils' average points scores, were in line with the national average overall. Results in English were similar to those nationally, whereas results in science were above the national average and results in mathematics were below. Taking into account pupils' attainment on entry to the school, this represents achievement in line with expectations for English and better than expected achievement in science. Pupils fell short of expectation in mathematics. In comparison with similar schools results were well above average in science, average in English and below average in mathematics.
3. Over the period 1997 to 2000, the school's results improved in all three subjects and this has been recognised by the granting of a 'School Achievement Award'. However, in the year 2001, results deteriorated slightly in English and mathematics and fell back substantially in science. No national comparative data was available at the time of the inspection. However, the school set realistic targets for 2001, based on pupils' previous attainment, which were exceeded in English and science but not achieved in mathematics.
4. At the time of the previous inspection the percentage of pupils reaching Level 4 or above was above the national average. In the year 2000, this was maintained for English, and improved for science, to be well above the national average. Year 2000 results in mathematics were worse than at the time of the previous inspection, as the percentage of pupils achieving at least Level 4 was below that seen nationally. The school has analysed the factors leading to this underachievement and taken appropriate, corrective action, including appointing a full team of specialist mathematicians.

##### **Standards of pupils currently in Years 5 to 8**

5. Pupils' overall attainment is average throughout the school. Pupils do as well as expected nationally, making sound progress. In English and mathematics, pupils maintain expected standards throughout Years 5 to 8. This represents better achievement in pupils' mathematics seen during the inspection than is indicated in national tests. In science, pupils make good progress in Years 5 and 6 to achieve above average standards; progress slows in Years 7 and 8 where standards are in line with those seen nationally.
6. Pupils make good progress to achieve above average standards by Year 8 in art, drama, French, geography, history and physical education. Attainment is consistently strongest in art and drama where pupils in all of Years 5 to 8 achieve above average standards. In geography, history and physical education, pupils achieve average standards by Year 6 and improve to be above average by Year 8. In French, pupils

get a head start by beginning lessons in Year 6, a year earlier than required by the National Curriculum, and maintain slightly above average standards in Years 7 and 8.

7. Pupils attain better than expected standards in information and communication technology (ICT) during Year 5, where use of computers is taught as a separate lesson. Pupils' ICT attainment is below average in all other years where there is little access to computers across subjects. Pupils attain expected standards in music and religious education in Years 5 and 6 but attainment is too low in Years 7 and 8.
8. Attainment in the skills of literacy is average overall, but certain aspects are good. Most pupils listen attentively to their teachers and each other, especially in drama and English. Also, in those subjects and science, they speak with confidence and often display a growing maturity. Strategies for teaching literacy in English are satisfactory but the development of literacy skills in other subjects is too inconsistent. Most pupils respond well to questions, with good recall of facts, and contributions to discussion are usually of appropriate clarity or volume. A few contributions are not sufficiently clear or of adequate volume: this weakness needs to be challenged more consistently. Reading skills are average and not all pupils fully extract meaning from the text if inference is required. Many do, as in reading aloud in history and interpreting data in science; work in making a personal response to poetry shows the ability to form and state opinions and feelings. Many pupils who have special educational needs read well when measured against their earlier attainment. The quality of writing is average, with levels of spelling accuracy starting low and improving through the school, though for some lower attainers, accuracy over quite basic words remains a challenge. Older and higher-attaining pupils are able to write in a variety of styles for different audiences, with many capable of good extended writing in Years 7 and 8, and of writing in poetical forms as opportunities arise.
9. Pupils develop numeracy skills effectively in mathematics but not in other subjects. There are fewer examples of pupils improving their numeracy in most subjects than is normally seen but there are a few satisfactory examples, such as pupils using graphs in geography to record tropical rainfall, and in design and technology - textiles, to display results of a questionnaire related to different aspects of design. Basic marking out and measuring in design contributes to numerical competence.
10. There is no significant difference between the attainment of girls and boys or of pupils of different background and cultural heritage. Learning by different groups of pupils, such as those who are gifted or talented, is in line with national expectations.

### **Progress of pupils with special educational needs**

11. Pupils on the special educational needs register achieve well across the school. They make good progress and this is due to the levels of support they receive, both in withdrawal support and support in class. This is especially true in the development of their literacy and numeracy skills and the support provided as part of the daily literacy lessons.

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

12. The very positive attitudes pupils have to school and their work, the high standards of behaviour, the very good relationships throughout the school, and the high quality opportunities for personal development are major strengths and have a positive effect on the quality of teaching and learning.
13. Virtually all pupils have very positive attitudes to the school and their work. They show great interest in what they are asked to do and apply themselves very well to their

work. Pupils sustain high levels of concentration because almost all teachers plan tasks that challenge and motivate them. They take great pride and enjoyment in producing good work and are keen to share their results with others, as seen in a Year 8 mathematics lesson where much very good work was shared. The maturity of pupils is demonstrated by those in Year 8 who suggested to their teacher that they were able to progress their drama lesson without the need for further direction.

14. Behaviour is very good. When they come to school, in assemblies, at lunchtimes and at playtimes, virtually all pupils show that high standards of behaviour are achieved. This is illustrated well by the exemplary way that the boys organise themselves when playing football on the fields at every opportunity. They act in an extremely mature and sporting manner. Pupils move around the corridors and locker areas in a very orderly manner and have a clear understanding of the standards expected of them. In lessons, behaviour is consistently good; almost all pupils conform to teachers' expectations. However, in a few lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory, a small number of pupils display challenging and disruptive behaviour.
15. The incidence of exclusion has increased but is still low and this is not indicative of an emerging problem. It is an alternative strategy to demonstrate that the incidence of continuously unacceptable behaviour will not be tolerated. During the inspection there was no evidence of bullying or lack of respect for school property.
16. Relationships in the school are very good. Pupils form very constructive relationships with each other and with adults. They work co-operatively together, demonstrating that they will listen with interest to each other and will try to understand the other person's point of view. Pupils show genuine pleasure in the achievements of others, as shown in the applause in an assembly for a girl who had been successful in the County netball trials despite being a year younger than other members. Virtually all pupils act in a mature and responsible way. They consistently demonstrate patience, tolerance and understanding of others.
17. Pupils' personal development is very good. The school continues to provide a wide range of opportunities for the pupils to show initiative and take responsibility, and they demonstrate that the trust is well placed. Virtually all pupils make good progress in their personal, social and emotional development as they perform jobs within the classroom. The meetings of the form representatives with senior staff are very effective in promoting pupils' maturity and initiative. As they progress through the school greater degrees of independence are encouraged. Older pupils act as monitors in a number of activities around the school. They act as mentors for the pupils in Year 5 when they start at the school. As well as assisting with sports clubs they recently helped at the primary school fete. All pupils are involved in raising funds for charities.
18. Attendance continues to be broadly in line with the national average. Unauthorised absence is negligible and below the national average. Virtually all pupils are punctual and many arrive early. They come happily to school, eager and ready to learn, enabling the school to make a prompt and efficient start to the school day.
19. The behaviour of most pupils with special educational needs in one-to-one and small group lessons is good. They relate well to teachers and learning support assistants (LSAs), work enthusiastically and are keen to make progress.
20. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and her team of LSAs provide very good and well-targeted support. A good feature of this is the inclusion of pupils' targets in their planners and the references that support staff make to these to ensure

that pupils know their learning targets and can reflect on the progress they feel they are making towards meeting these targets. Personal relationships are very good, both between pupils and between pupils and adults.

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

21. A key point for development in the previous report was to improve the quality of teaching to match that of the best, by improving short-term lesson planning and by raising expectations. The school embarked on action to tackle this which included; whole staff development of a policy on effective teaching and learning; whole staff training on the key features of successful teaching and learning and some release of subject co-ordinators to monitor the work of their teams. This has been successful and teaching has improved since the previous inspection. This time, the teaching in just over nine in every ten lessons was judged to be satisfactory or better, compared with the previous inspection when it was eight in every ten lessons. In this inspection, in just over half of all lessons the teaching was good or better, compared with almost half of all lessons in the previous inspection. However, one in ten lessons was still unsatisfactory during this inspection. There is little variation in the teaching between Key Stages 2 and 3, mainly because of the now better use of subject specialists to work across all years. Overall, the standard of teaching across the school is satisfactory.
22. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good. The special educational needs staff have a very good understanding of individual pupils' needs. All subject teachers know who the children are who have special educational needs in their classes and are aware of their targets. In most cases they take these targets into account and organise different tasks and materials to meet identified needs. Most support takes place within lessons, with a learning support assistant (LSA) working with an individual or small group of pupils. This support is usually well planned by the subject teacher to enable the LSA to provide good support and help pupils make good progress. This support by LSAs is quite rightly targeted at pupils who have a statement of special educational need. However, when there are other pupils in the class who would benefit from support, LSAs work with the class teacher to provide help. For mathematics and English, which are taught to groups of pupils with similar attainment, this often works well and LSAs are able to extend their support to other pupils who need it. However, in other subjects which are taught in groups covering the full attainment range, for example science, there are times when pupils who would benefit from extra support, do not have access to a LSA and make slower progress.
23. Most teachers have a secure knowledge and understanding of the subject they teach. In art, for instance, all teaching is undertaken by a subject specialist, and pupils' learning, especially in Years 5 and 6, benefits greatly from the good feedback pupils receive from the teacher on how to improve their work even further. In physical education, subject specialists undertake almost all the teaching and this has resulted in better progress, again especially in Years 5 and 6. This is not the case, however, for religious education where too many non-specialist teachers teach one or two groups in the subject with the result that pupils' learning is not moved forward effectively.
24. Whilst the teaching of basic skills overall is just satisfactory, there is considerable variation across subjects. Whilst the skills of speaking and listening within literacy are quite well developed by most subjects, the development of writing skills is still an area for further development. Mathematics teaching is effective in developing numeracy skills but there is a need for most other subjects to plan opportunities for the

development of numeracy within the teaching. The development of information and communication technology (ICT) skills across subjects is inadequate. Pupils in Year 5, where ICT is taught as a timetabled lesson, make good progress, but in all other years the planning, coverage and development of these skills in subjects is poor, with the exception of art and design technology where ICT skills are developed well within the teaching.

25. Teachers' planning is usually good, with detailed schemes of work in all areas. Planning to meet the needs of the National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy within English and mathematics lessons is often good and objectives are effectively shared with pupils to enhance their learning. Planning for individual lessons, however, is often weak in some subject areas. Whilst lesson planning in religious education (RE) and French is often thorough there are times when this planning takes insufficient account of the needs of individual pupils, resulting in slower progress. In some science and music lessons, whilst planning is undertaken, the lesson objectives are not always shared with pupils and the teacher then relies on leading pupils through on a step-by-step approach. This often results in the higher-attaining pupils being held back and making too little progress.
26. Overall, teachers' expectation and the demands they place on their pupils is sound. It is particularly good in drama and science, especially in Years 5 and 6, and this is a key feature of the good progress pupils make in these subjects. In English, the teaching often challenges pupils to try to achieve good standards. There are, however, times when the work is too difficult and they do not learn as rapidly as they could.
27. Teachers generally employ a wide range of teaching styles and strategies to make learning interesting and engage pupils in their work. History, geography, English, drama and art teaching are particularly good examples of this. In these subjects, pupils are actively involved in their learning through a wide range of activities and good use of class and small group discussion
28. Pupils are usually managed well by teachers and very good relationships exist between teachers and pupils. On the rare occasion when pupils are difficult, teachers usually manage this well. For example, in a physical education (PE) lesson where a very small group of Year 6 boys would not co-operate with the teacher, they were managed very effectively to ensure they had a minimal impact on the learning of others in the group. In music, however, the effective management of pupils is a weakness, particularly in Years 7 and 8, with the result that pupils are often not on task and therefore make unsatisfactory progress. In almost all subjects specialist teachers create a warm and secure environment and inject their enthusiasm for their subject into their teaching; as a result pupils enjoy their work and participate keenly. Teaching in drama is epitomised by the way pupils are treated in a very mature and grown up way and this is reflected in the pupil management strategies used which often take the form of negotiation between the pupils and teacher. Pupils respond very well to this and make good progress in their learning.
29. Teachers' use of assessment to aid pupils' learning, particularly by enabling pupils to know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, is weak. Verbal feedback from the teacher is inconsistent but often used well in art, drama and PE where pupils are clearly informed on how their work could be made better. In PE, especially gymnastics lessons, good opportunities are often provided for pupils to comment on the work of others. In science, the procedures and quality of marking is very good and subject teachers moderate this work across the subject to ensure a consistent approach. There is, however, a need to ensure that the results are used

to inform future lesson planning. In English teaching, whereas marking of pupils' work uses praise very effectively to encourage pupils, written comments sometimes lack detail to aid further improvement and the setting of targets to aid progress is not consistently carried out by all teachers. In history, geography and RE, on the other hand, the marking of pupils' work is too infrequent and inconsistent to be effective in helping pupils to make better progress.

30. The setting of homework is variable. Whilst it occurs in many subjects to extend learning, the school's homework timetable in pupils' planners is insufficiently clear. As a result, pupils are often unsure about which subjects they will receive homework for on any given day and the setting of homework is inconsistent.

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

31. The range of learning opportunities the school offers is greater than is usually seen and the curriculum has a number of significant strengths but there are also some aspects that require further improvement.
32. All required subjects are taught and pupils' learning extends beyond the statutory minimum: for instance, French is taught from Year 6, and there is a weekly lesson of drama in all years. The timetable provides suitable teaching arrangements for subjects. Pupils receive some good quality information and communication technology (ICT) experiences but their learning is insufficiently well co-ordinated beyond Year 5. This is the only aspect of the National Curriculum that is not at least adequately planned. A weekly period of religious education (RE) provides full coverage of the Suffolk syllabus. The school places a high value on learning in arts subjects, which are allocated a greater proportion of time than is often seen. The working week is longer than average for the age range and some pupils attend lessons before and after school for additional studies. Some aspects of learning that are taught across different subjects are not sufficiently well co-ordinated, such as literacy, numeracy and ICT.
33. In all years, learning is enriched by a wide range of off-site visits. For example, field visits are made to historical sites, such as castles and country halls, which enable pupils to understand how people lived in past times. In art, gallery visits are made locally and to London, and in science pupils undertake fieldwork at study centres. To cover National Curriculum requirements Year 5 pupils learn to swim at the local pool. Two residential visits, one to Whitby and the other to France, take place in Years 6 and 8, and large numbers participate. The school fully meets its equal opportunity obligations: all pupils who are unable to take part in residential visits receive comparable learning closer to home. Visitors who have particular skills and interests, such as the police and local ministers, come into school to support teachers in presenting topics. Peripatetic music teachers provide a good range of lessons and a schools' librarian comes regularly to teach study skills. These are only a small sample of the wide and diverse provision. The community is involved in the curricular life of the school at an appropriate level including links with members of the voluntary services, churches and charities. These different aspects of the wider curriculum are planned well.
34. Opportunities provided for participation in extra-curricular activities are outstanding. These extend pupils' interests and skills in the arts, sports and through a far larger number of clubs than is usual, such as gardening, web-page writing and cartoon drawing. Many teachers give their time generously and almost every pupil participates. The school's commitment to widening pupils' interests is seen in the



'social activities' lunch club. Pupils who do not readily join activities are invited to play games and develop skills of social interaction. Music is well represented through instrumental groups and a choir. Pupils participate in musical events, including performing at the Snape Maltings Concert Hall and in master-classes with members of the London Symphony Orchestra. Many pupils enjoy drama, including major productions involving large casts, the most recent being 'Streets Ahead'.

35. Pupils are suitably encouraged to use technical terms in English, geography, music and physical education, where a comparison was made between flowing physical activity and a well-constructed sentence. Use of ICT to develop literacy is not as frequent as normally found but is sometimes used in English and science, and used well in art, to gain knowledge about various artists. In subjects such as geography, history and religious education, opportunities for extended writing are not as numerous as normally seen. Overall, support for improving literacy needs to be built more specifically into the planning of all subjects.
36. Provision of opportunities to develop numeracy in mathematics is good, enhanced by the use of the National Numeracy Strategy in all classes. This provides very clear objectives for each lesson. Its use is making a positive contribution to improving standards. Planning for numeracy in other subjects is unsatisfactory as there are fewer identified opportunities to develop numeracy than are normally seen. Currently, there is no school policy for numeracy across the school and planning is scheduled to take place next year.
37. The grouping of pupils of similar attainment, so that they are taught together in English and mathematics from Year 5 onwards, ensures that teaching is well matched to individual needs. All pupils with special educational needs have good access to the whole curriculum. The small number of occasions when a few pupils are withdrawn from lessons are planned well so that pupils follow the same subjects as others. There is some careful matching of tasks to pupils' needs, in particular in history and science, to ensure pupils make good progress. LSAs often provide intensive support, enabling pupils to understand the work and consolidate their literacy and numeracy skills. Support in class is matched well to those pupils who need it and to subject areas where pupils' weaker literacy skills would otherwise be a barrier to learning.
38. The paired reading scheme which operates twice weekly for Year 6, and is planned for Year 5 from October 2001, using Year 8 pupils who have had training, is also very effective, not only in raising targeted pupils' reading skills, but also in providing good opportunities for the Year 8 pupils to take some responsibility and make a significant contribution to the life of the school.
39. There is good provision for pupils who are gifted or talented. Projects and master-classes extend pupils in mathematics and science. Pupils with particular talents in music and drama take leading roles in concerts. Those talented in sports represent the district and county in teams and individual events.
40. A well-planned personal, social and health education (PSHE) course in all years enables pupils to develop the knowledge and understanding of issues that are important to their individual development. Topics such as forming relationships, healthy living, and preparing for change, enable pupils to be well informed about making choices. Drugs and sex education is covered appropriately. The PSHE programme already anticipates many of the aspects of citizenship that will be required in courses from September 2002. The world of work is effectively included

in the PSHE programme with good emphasis on rights and options when pupils reach age 13.

41. Strategies that ensure there is a smooth transition in learning when pupils transfer between schools are better than usually seen. Teachers of different subjects meet termly to plan schemes of work and co-ordinate standards across the phases. Year 4 pupils visit the school and experience some lessons. Work begun in primary schools is brought to Combs on transfer and this is further developed in Year 5. Good examples of successful continuation work across two schools were observed during the inspection. In collaboration with local upper school staff, teachers at Combs are extending 'bridging projects' so that the curriculum is more continuous between Years 8 and 9. A good start has been made.

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

42. There is no school policy for the teaching of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Few subjects refer to the contributions they make to these areas in their handbooks but RE is an exception of good quality. Some subjects make good contributions to these aspects of pupils' development, but in others, provision is much weaker.
43. Spiritual development is satisfactory. The school's positive ethos and the effective relationships throughout the school make good contributions to pupils' spiritual development. However, teachers have not made sufficient use of guidance contained in National Curriculum subject documentation: too often, opportunities for spiritual development are missed. Some, but not all assemblies encourage pupils to reflect on their own values and beliefs about life. There is some good practice: for example, in religious education there is good provision. Through questions such as 'Who am I?', 'What will I be?' and 'What do I believe?', pupils recognise that values and attitudes influence them and form part of their personal identity. In art, pupils are encouraged to reflect on the work of artists and consider their own responses to the ideas and meanings they observe.
44. Moral development is much stronger across subjects than spiritual development and provision is very good, despite the lack of co-ordination. PSHE makes a strong contribution through themes such as relationships, personal responsibility and care for the environment. In religious education, pupils discuss rules for living, and in physical education playing fairly is taught and practised. Outside lessons there are very good examples of moral development, such as fund-raising activities for causes chosen by the pupils, for example NCH Action for Children and Help the Aged. Staff set a good moral example to pupils by treating them fairly in accordance with the school codes.
45. Social development is a strength and there are many examples of very good provision within subjects and in the wider life of the school. Drama promotes co-operative skills of working together very well and many pupils from across all years participate in school performances. Group and paired work in many subjects promotes social skills, such as in French where pupils listen to each other practise vocabulary. Social development within the community is demonstrated when pupils entertain blind and partially-sighted residents and give concerts to the elderly.
46. Cultural development is good overall and very good in art, drama and English lessons. Pupils are introduced to a wide range of works by artists, playwrights and authors from historical and contemporary periods, as well as creating expressive works of their own. The varied range of visits, referred to above, enables pupils to

experience performances by nationally recognised musicians and actors and to visit national art collections. Although not specifically planned or co-ordinated, pupils have good experiences of the life and culture of non-western nations; for example, in art pupils study Indian and aboriginal images. Music covers a good range of songs from Africa, India, and South America. In religious education, pupils study Islam and Judaism in depth, although not eastern religions.

47. The previous inspection report stated that the curriculum was broad and generally well-balanced but it criticised provision for modern foreign languages and the timetable structure. Modifications have considerably strengthened the curriculum and its organisation. Extra-curricular provision and the range of visits have improved still further.

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

48. The school provides high quality support and guidance, and very effectively promotes the welfare, health and safety of the pupils in a warm, caring and secure environment. This atmosphere encourages pupils to develop as individuals with high aspirations. All staff show great concern for the wellbeing of pupils and a range of measures exists to promote their development. Teachers know the pupils well, are sensitive to their needs and consistently monitor pupils' personal development and their ability to cope on a day-to-day basis. The school is proud of the support and guidance provided by the staff, particularly those involved in its 'line of care'.
49. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are unsatisfactory. The assessment policy is not sufficiently thorough or comprehensive, resulting in too many inconsistencies across the school. There are examples of satisfactory practice, such as in English and science, where targets are identified in exercise books and teachers inform pupils when they are achieved. Pupils value this and are able to identify that it is helpful to them. Pupils are also appreciative of approaches in mathematics, where they are told how well they are achieving their learning objectives, and in art, where the teacher explains very clearly what is done well and how it can be improved. In most subjects, however, pupils are not clear about their strengths or how to get better. In information and communication technology, for example, there is a good system of recording what pupils have learnt in Year 5, but no effective system of recording development of skills across the curriculum in Years 6, 7 and 8. In several other subjects, such as history, geography, design and technology and physical education, there is no structured system of letting pupils know what are the criteria for achievement or the extent to which the criteria are achieved.
50. The use of assessment information to guide planning is unsatisfactory. There is some sound practice in mathematics, where pupils' work on standardised, national tests is analysed to identify any weaker areas of understanding so that they can be overcome. Satisfactory practice in English includes an analysis of pupils' writing choices in national tests, and this has led to improved teaching of non-narrative writing for specific purposes. In the majority of subjects there is little evidence of systematic or co-ordinated analysis of pupils' work to determine the effectiveness of teaching strategies or to identify and fill gaps in understanding.
51. The headteacher carries out an analysis of assessment data, including results in Year 6 national tests. This is discussed with subject co-ordinators and is successful in identifying how well subject teams have done in their drive to raise standards. Teachers also receive useful information on test results and teacher assessments across all subjects, enabling them to compare their subject performance with that of

others. Overall, however, there is too little use of assessment information to set targets for individual pupils or teaching groups, making it difficult for pupils or teachers to know whether they are achieving well enough. Monitoring of pupils' performance is, therefore, unsatisfactory. A new assessment co-ordinator has been appointed very recently and has a key role to play in obtaining a more consistent approach.

52. The school's assessment procedures for pupils with special educational needs are good. There are good systems for identifying and assessing pupils which start with good liaison between the school and the contributory primary schools and the main upper school. After pupils transfer to Combs Middle School further diagnostic tests are undertaken and results used to review individual education plans, set future targets and identify any further support required.
53. Pupils on the special educational needs register have individual education plans (IEPs) which are reviewed regularly by all staff, and learning support assistants (LSAs) are involved well in this review process. The Annual Review procedures comply with the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice requirements, both in the timing of reviews and the reporting on progress towards targets. Targets are invariably specific, and pupils' progress is tracked well. All staff are provided with information on pupils' targets and in many subjects these are used well to inform lesson planning.
54. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO), her teaching colleagues and the team of LSAs work hard to ensure that the individual needs of all pupils with statements of special educational need are catered for. However, there are two pupils with statements which indicate they require speech therapy. Despite the school's best efforts, this service is no longer available from the local authority. As a result these pupils' needs are not being fully met.
55. The school has very effective systems to monitor and promote attendance. Registers are marked speedily, correctly and efficiently at the start of the school day and after lunch. All absences are properly noted and contact made with parents to explain the absence. Attendance figures are properly aggregated and emerging patterns of absence are noted for follow up. There was little unauthorised absence recorded last year. The very effective systems only result in average levels of attendance. This is mainly because of the significant minority of parents who took holidays during term time.
56. The headteacher and other staff provide very good role models in promoting high standards of good behaviour. Procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour are in place. The consequences of unacceptable behaviour have been made clear and are understood by all pupils. The policy is consistently applied by all members of staff who pre-empt incidents of possible misbehaviour with firm, calm intervention, thus maintaining good control.
57. Child protection issues continue to be handled effectively. All members of staff are aware of the need for vigilance and the steps to take if suspicions are aroused. Health and safety is promoted effectively in the school. Potential hazards are identified and remedial action taken as necessary. All staff members are safety conscious and watch for the security of the children. They work hard to create a secure environment in which the wellbeing of pupils is promoted effectively.

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

58. Parents are extremely supportive of the school and confirm that it has many strong features. Virtually all those responding to the questionnaire agree that their children like school and are making good progress. They believe that the school expects their children to work hard and they would feel comfortable about approaching the school with a problem. They feel that the school is led and managed well and the teaching is good. They also believe that the school is helping their children to become mature and responsible. Many parents are delighted with the quality of the drama productions
59. A few parents tend to disagree with the amount of work to be completed at home and others do not feel that the school works closely with them. Inspectors support the view that the setting of homework requires improvement.
60. Information to parents is of high quality overall. The school prospectus is clear and comprehensive; it gives parents a good overview of the school's values and its curriculum. Consultation meetings with parents are held each term; they coincide with interim and end of year reports. This is more frequent than in most schools. Reports to parents provide much good information about what their children know and can do. There is also much very good information about areas for improvement and future targets. The home school planner has been revised and, in many cases, is being used very effectively to increase the quality of communication between the school and parents. The efforts by the school to involve parents in their children's learning are not always reciprocated, as shown by the inconsistent completion of the home/school planners. These were seen to be used effectively in lessons but were not countersigned by parents to confirm that they were aware of the requirements.
61. Parents and other adults are encouraged to involve themselves in the life of the school and many respond enthusiastically in a wide range of activities. They help with particular activities including history, science, the library and on residential visits. Parents are very supportive of the work that their children are expected to do at home. There is an active Combs Middle School Association that, in addition to raising substantial amounts of finance in support of the school, also helps out in other practical ways around the school. The school values highly the contributions made by parents that materially enhance their children's learning and personal development.
62. The school's involvement of parents of pupils with special educational needs is good. Information about pupils' progress is provided regularly and parents are encouraged to attend review meetings and actively support their children's learning. There are regular opportunities for parents to discuss their children's progress at meetings during the year and the SENCO has a weekly drop-in time for parents who wish to discuss any issues with her.

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

63. The school is led well. The headteacher and deputy headteacher are highly regarded by parents, governors, staff and pupils. The school aims to provide a welcoming, secure and caring environment in which every pupil feels special and knows that they have something to offer. This is achieved very successfully; parents and pupils are highly aware of the aim and are confident that all teachers work hard to ensure that every pupil feels happy and is valued.
64. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school, centred on raising standards within a supportive environment. She has worked well with the management team to identify

and introduce appropriate strategies for improving learning and achievement, although these have not yet had sufficient impact in some subjects. For instance, in mathematics, recent strategies include the appointment of a new head of department and team of specialist teachers, support from an external adviser, observations of teaching to support improvement and more careful lesson planning. These all have good potential for raising standards but, at the time of the inspection, the most recent mathematics results in national tests were still below the national average and standards in Years 5 and 6 too low.

65. Leadership is at least satisfactory in most subject areas. Many co-ordinators are working hard to ensure their department runs smoothly and provide clear advice in their subject documentation. Most subject teams contribute strongly to achieving the school's aim. This is especially effective in areas such as drama, art and personal, social and health education, where pupils' personal development is very strongly supported. There is an increasing understanding of the need to raise standards through sharply-focused strategies, such as improving teaching and learning, but there is too much variation in the pursuit of rigorous methods across subjects. For example, there is effective observation of lessons and feedback to teachers in English, and good use of an external adviser to evaluate work in art. However, there has been too little monitoring of teaching and analysis of assessment to suggest improvement in design and technology and information and communication technology. Co-ordinators of some subjects, such as religious education and physical education, have not yet observed lessons. The school has made satisfactory progress in performance management. Team leaders have been allocated to all teachers and objectives agreed. Some teachers have been monitored and their achievements reviewed.
66. The school has identified appropriate priorities for development, such as improving teaching and learning, increasing the use of computers and making better use of assessment. Strategies to support the priorities are at different stages of implementation and all need further work in order to have a greater impact on standards. For example, staff training on teaching and monitoring of lessons has raised the quality of teaching since the previous inspection, but further improvement is needed. There has been a substantial increase in the provision of computers, and a programme of training in their use has been started, but this has not yet led to sufficient use of computers to support learning. Use of assessment has been getting better but the improvement plan for assessment is sketchy and much further work is required.
67. The governing body is very supportive of the school. Governors have been involved in training, such as that on literacy and special educational needs, and make effective use of documentation, such as the local education authority's guide to the law for governors. This enables them to have a sound understanding of their work and to fulfil their statutory duties well. Good quality information from the school's leadership team, both written and spoken, enables the governors to be supportive of the strategic direction taken by the school. The governors play a key role in holding the school to account in terms of finance, and intervene when they believe it to be necessary; for example, on recent decisions on the distribution of the school's Achievement Award funding. However, they are only beginning to develop a 'critical friend' approach in other areas where the use of probing questioning is at an early stage.
68. There is a good system of supporting educational priorities through financial planning. Improvement plans for all aspects of the school are used well as part of a bidding process for funding. This ensures that money is allocated effectively to meet

development needs and is increasingly encouraging staff to focus on how standards can be raised. There is a large surplus from the previous financial year of £76,000, which is considerably greater than is normally seen in a school of this size. However, this is mainly the result of detailed forward planning, including predicting costings whilst awaiting estimates. The bulk of the surplus is earmarked for appropriate spending, such as upgrading the school's computerised management systems, further increasing the number of computers available to pupils and ensuring that staffing levels do not deteriorate. Alternative sources of provision are considered when allocating contracts, such as for catering and grounds maintenance, ensuring that best value is obtained. The school is currently negotiating with Lavenham Park Community Association and considering the use of a football foundation grant to produce an all-weather pitch within the grounds. National Opportunities Funding is being used to improve staff confidence and competence in using computers; training has only just begun and has not yet had sufficient impact on teaching pupils. However, the school has a strong determination and a clear view of what it wants to achieve in this area; interactive whiteboards, projectors and laptop computers are all being considered for future development.

69. Teachers are matched well to teaching groups. This is an improvement since the previous inspection when there were too few specialist teachers and some non-specialists were inadequately supported. The number of specialist teachers has been increased; most teachers are now effective in delivering the curriculum. The number of support staff has been increased and these are deployed effectively.
70. Accommodation is very good. The school is welcoming and spacious. There are sufficient, permanent classrooms and high quality specialist areas, such as laboratories and design and technology areas. The inclusion of a first-rate drama studio is much better than normally seen and there are good music facilities, including practice rooms. There is no sports hall but this is not unusual for a school of this size. Good use is made of the dining area for physical education lessons.
71. Resources for learning are good. There have been many improvements since the previous inspection, such as purchases of textbooks for religious education and in-school production of effective materials in French. The construction of a new room, housing computers, has greatly improved provision, and the school has appropriate plans for further improvement. The library is well stocked and there is easy access for pupils.
72. The leadership of the special educational needs provision in the school is very good. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) is a very experienced teacher who deploys her staff effectively. She provides very good advice and guidance to all colleagues on developing and producing material to meet the needs of pupils. Teachers are starting to take advantage of this advice.
73. The provision of a special educational needs base in a central part of the school provides both a room for working with small groups of pupils, as well as a central base for housing teaching resources and pupil records. The provision of individual learning programmes using ICT is currently underdeveloped. However, as a result of the local Upper School's newly acquired status as a technology college, there are plans for the school to benefit from the provision of four computers, SuccessMaker software and appropriate training.

74. Funding for pupils with special educational needs is used appropriately. Learning support assistants and the SENCO are provided with very good professional development opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge.

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

75. In order to improve further, the school should:

- (1) Raise standards of attainment, especially in mathematics, information and communication technology, music and religious education by referring to comments in the subject sections of this report.

(Paras: 86, 131, 146, 161)

- (2) Develop assessment further by:

- ensuring that all teachers inform pupils of their strengths, weaknesses and how to improve;
- using assessment analysis to determine where improvements in teaching and in the curriculum are needed; and
- developing better systems of monitoring pupils' progress and setting challenging targets for pupils and teachers.

(Paras: 29, 49, 50, 51)

- (3) Increase the proportion of high quality teaching and eradicate unsatisfactory teaching by:

- identifying and sharing good practice;
- ensuring that monitoring of teaching provides a clear analysis of teachers' strengths, areas for development and specific targets for improvement;
- further supporting the small minority of teachers having difficulty in managing pupils' behaviour; and
- assessing pupils' needs accurately so that learning objectives provide appropriate challenge.

(Paras: 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30)

- (4) Further improve curriculum planning by:

- identifying opportunities for improving literacy, numeracy and ICT skills across a range of subjects;
- identifying opportunities for developing spiritual education across a range of subjects; and
- ensuring that provision in subjects for literacy, numeracy, ICT and spiritual education enables pupils to experience a full curriculum.

(Paras: 32, 35, 36, 42, 43)



## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	93
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	24

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	1	8	37	34	9	0	0
Percentage	1	9	42	38	10	0	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

	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils on the school's roll	392
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	42

#### Special educational needs

	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	11
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	73

#### English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

#### Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	16
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	28

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.9
National comparative data	5.9

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	0.4

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	50	61	111

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	42	33	49
	Girls	50	40	58
	Total	92	73	107
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	83 (57)	66 (58)	96 (77)
	National	75 (70)	72 (69)	85 (78)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	39	33	39
	Girls	46	37	48
	Total	85	70	87
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	75 (56)	62 (59)	77 (77)
	National	70 (68)	72 (69)	79 (75)

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

### Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	
Indian	2
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	
White	382
Any other minority ethnic group	5

### Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

## Teachers and classes

### Qualified teachers and classes: Y5 – Y8

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	22.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.7

### Education support staff: Y5 – Y8

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	158

### Deployment of teachers: Y5 – Y8

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.5%
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### Average teaching group size: Y5 – Y8

Key Stage 2	22.8
Key Stage 3	24.4

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	987,148
Total expenditure	956,789
Expenditure per pupil	2,441
Balance brought forward from previous year	45,976
Balance carried forward to next year	76,335

## Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	7
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	11

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

Number of questionnaires sent out	373
Number of questionnaires returned	92

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	53	2	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	42	53	3	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	16	68	10	0	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	15	60	17	5	2
The teaching is good.	32	63	0	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	43	42	12	2	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	63	26	5	5	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	52	47	0	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	28	51	14	4	2
The school is well led and managed.	43	48	5	3	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	42	49	4	2	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	33	50	4	1	12

NB: figures are rounded to the nearest percentage point and, therefore, may not add up to 100.

## **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 satisfactory.

#### **Strengths**

- Results in line with national averages with an improving trend.
- Satisfactory progress from Years 5 to 8.
- A well-planned curriculum that provides good coverage of all National Curriculum requirements.
- Sound teaching that includes some good features.
- Work that normally challenges pupils to do better.
- Good classroom management that includes all pupils and ensures and maintains good behaviour and relationships.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Better preparation and greater integration of the new Key Stage 3 literacy materials
- Further improvement in planning for different aspects of English.
- Increased emphasis on improving the basic skills and standards of written English.
- Greater access to and more frequent use of computers to aid learning.
- More development of assessment to ensure greater consistency of best practice.

76. Pupils currently enter the school with levels of attainment in English that are in line with the national average for reading, but with many having weaknesses in some of the basic skills in writing. Pupils have good attitudes to work and receive sound teaching, enabling them to make steady progress.
77. By Year 6, when pupils take the National Curriculum English tests, results are a little above the national average. Pupils' results in writing, although above the national average, remain below their scores for speaking, listening and reading. The levels of attainment across the three areas of English differ with levels in speaking, listening and reading above those of writing, where there are too many inaccuracies in the spelling and copying of both basic and more demanding words. There is sound progress made to increase accuracy by work on revision and testing of spellings but even more emphasis is needed in lessons on correct copying of words and accurate spelling if results are to be improved. Focus on spellings, related to pupils' current work, is also required to raise standards. Overall, girls and boys perform similarly, with girls being close to the national average for girls whereas boys are a little above the national average for boys, an unusual feature which reflects well on boys' attitudes. There are no significant variations in attainment by the few pupils of different ethnicity. Overall, pupils make steady progress so that by Year 8 most are on track to achieve typical national standards and, in the case of many of the school's higher attainers, are performing above this.
78. Teaching overall is sound, with no unsatisfactory lessons, and some being good. Where lessons are most successful there is good preparation and skilled use of suitable materials and methods to maximise learning. Good efforts are made to include all pupils in the work of the lesson, and question and answer sessions are conducted well. The good attitudes of the pupils are fostered and used to help their independence of organisation and learning. In the sound lessons, there are many effective features, such as the use of praise and the clear setting out of objectives for the lesson, in terms of both

work and behaviour, but the choice of materials is less suitable. The pace of progress and levels of challenge are less well maintained than in the better lessons. For example clarity of speech is not always checked. In all lessons, pupils are managed well and good efforts are made to value pupils and maintain good relationships. This reflects well the good ethos in the school.

79. Teachers usually have a sound knowledge of the subject and their expectations of pupils are generally appropriate. Lesson planning, both in the departmental schemes of work and by teachers in individual lessons, is usually good, often with more than one task per lesson, sound pace and an appropriate use of resources, including overhead projection transparencies. The very recent introduction of the Key Stage 3 strategy for literacy, however, has meant that some new materials are being used and these are not yet fully and successfully incorporated into the course and lesson structures. During the inspection this situation resulted in occasions in a few lessons when the materials were not best suited to the levels of ability of the pupils or were not integrated into the overall purpose of the lesson. In these cases the pace and success of learning was adversely affected. The effectiveness of the lessons overall remained sound, but evidence from the previous work by pupils indicated that the pace of work and learning in other lessons had been better. The improvement of pupils' reading skills is strongly encouraged by use of a good range of books which feature texts from a variety of cultures, as well as by the maintenance of reading records. Personal reading for pleasure is also strongly encouraged and time for quiet reading is given in tutor group sessions.
80. Pupils are given good oral feedback on their work in lessons, with many of the comments being challenging yet encouraging, a feature being praise for good work. At times the degree of praise is overdone, with insufficient emphasis on how work could be improved. Pupils' writing is marked regularly. In some cases helpful written comments are made which are quite lengthy, giving pupils advice about how to improve their work and setting targets to achieve, but this is an area that needs development to ensure greater consistency of use by all teachers. There is also an appropriate use of homework. The National Curriculum assessment of pupils' work is soundly organised and internally moderated, but the teacher assessments are sometimes lower than the results achieved in tests, indicating inaccuracy.
81. Throughout the school, virtually all pupils show interest in their work, and most commit themselves to do well. Those who do answer questions, or make inputs to discussion often show accurate recall from previous lessons and have the confidence to share ideas, opinions and feelings, such as when responding in Year 6 to work on poetry by Ted Hughes. Pupils often experience a sense of reward and enjoyment, such as when working on "Danny" in another Year 6 lesson. They work together effectively, such as in work in groups during a Year 7 lesson on "The Cay". They virtually always behave well and sustain concentration, although the concentration and pace of work of a few pupils can waver towards the end of a sixty-minute lesson. In the opportunities offered for pupils to develop responsibility for their learning, they respond well, as seen in the work on persuasive writing in Year 8. Overall, pupils have good relationships with each other and with their teachers
82. Subject leadership is good with worthwhile improvements having been planned and implemented since the previous inspection. Understanding of the English Programme has been improved. Years 5 and 6 teachers meet with sufficient frequency and their meetings are properly conducted, but there are too few in Years 7 and 8 and insufficient whole-team meetings to enable close co-ordination. The curriculum is mostly very well planned, with a range of well-organised materials used, to meet statutory requirements. A wide range of types of reading and writing is covered for stimulus and in practice, with poetry being both read and written. Work in English provides some opportunities for

pupils' development in the relevant use of information technology for word-processing and aspects of desk top publishing but these are currently too limited although CD-ROMs are used for project work. There are some worthwhile developments in the monitoring of pupils' progress, which still needs further consistency of implementation. The contribution that the work and approach of the department makes to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Books are used to provide planned coverage of work from other cultures. Resources are satisfactory and well organised; accommodation overall is adequate. The environment in the classrooms is generally good and encouraging, with some good display which features pupils' work.

83. Since the previous inspection, standards in English have fluctuated above and below the national average but they are currently a little above in Years 5 and 6 and at least in line by Year 8. The last three years have seen a clearly improving trend. The good skills of pupils in listening and speaking have been maintained: standards in reading continue to be satisfactory or better. In writing, there has been an improvement in the extended writing of the older pupils which is now often of good quality, but standards of spelling continue to be a weakness, particularly in Years 7 and 8. Computers are still under-used. Pupils continue to enjoy many of their English lessons and teaching remains satisfactory. The English curriculum is still well led and organised and the team meets with reasonable regularity. Good developments have been made in the planning of the courses and work has been made more challenging. Work on monitoring the progress of pupils has been improved but some of the procedures, such as target-setting, still need further development and consistency of implementation. Overall, progress since the previous inspection has been sound, with some good aspects such as the well-planned monitoring of teaching.

## MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is satisfactory.

### Strengths

- Well balanced curriculum incorporating the National Numeracy Strategy in all classes.
- Specialist teaching team well qualified in mathematics and committed to improvement.
- Good range of strategies for raising standards.
- Significant improvements since the previous inspection.

### Areas for improvement

- Attainment in the national tests taken at age 11.
- Teaching and learning.
- Making explicit to pupils the criteria that enables them to reach higher levels of attainment.

84. Pupils enter the school with standards close to national averages and make steady progress during the first two years. Their numerical skills are good. Many know their tables and can recall them quickly. They can explain how to work out more complicated multiplications, often using rectangles or grids to separate out tens and units. They all take an active part in the short, starter activities to lessons and use the 'show me' boards effectively to provide quick answers to mental problems. In a Year 6 lesson, pairs of pupils turned up two cards from a deck of cards. The person who gave the correct answer to the product of the two card values kept the cards. This short introductory game delighted the pupils. They consolidated their number knowledge and improved their speed at calculating with small numbers. Later, during the main part of the same lesson, pupils wrote quick solutions on their white boards for the probability of obtaining four heads with a single toss of four coins. By the end

of the lesson several pupils were attempting to explain what happens when 100 coins are tossed; pupils' mathematical thinking was extended as a result of very good teaching. Not all pupils are yet confident to draw fractions as parts of a whole and label them correctly. Several have difficulty understanding how two fractions can be equivalent with different numerators and denominators. Where tables are not known, pupils make good use of prepared table squares to speed up their calculating power. Standards in Years 5 and 6 are satisfactory in other areas of mathematics.

85. Steady progress is also maintained with older pupils. By age 13, their numerical skills are extended, and mental mathematics 'starters' to lessons include quick responses to percentage and fractional calculations along with, for example, squaring and square rooting of numbers less than one. Pupils with special educational needs receive good support in lessons from teaching assistants and make steady progress during their time at the school. All pupils use calculators efficiently: most understand their advantages and disadvantages. Older pupils use graphic calculators successfully to create number sequences; several are skilled at thinking out algebraic forms for the  $n$ th term in a sequence. Not all pupils are yet confident with aspects of measuring areas of triangles and rectangles or knowing the names for some regular quadrilaterals. Pupils' skills and competences with computers are well developed in mathematics; they can enter data into spreadsheets and perform calculations correctly using Excel.
86. Results in the National tests at age 11 in 2000 for mathematics are below expectations and, although the trend over recent years shows improvement, there is a slight drop in the test results in 2001. These results are still below expectations when compared with similar schools. There is some improvement for pupils obtaining Level 5 and above, and these are in line with national expectations. Teacher assessments largely mirror these results. Standards of pupils currently in the school are better, with pupils making steady progress to achieve in line with the national average.
87. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching in almost all lessons is at least satisfactory and there are several examples of teaching and learning of the highest quality. In a very small minority of lessons, teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. The planning for and teaching of basic skills are good, and teachers know, understand and enjoy their subject. The majority of pupils learn quickly and with understanding. Where teaching and learning is at its best, high expectations are established at the beginning of the lesson and subsequent tasks demand and obtain very good work. Learning is intense, and pupils enjoy and respond well to the practical and mental activities set. There is excitement in the room as they find correct solutions to difficult problems. Pupils' progress is very good and by the end of the lesson, the teacher's summary and questioning reveal that a great deal has been learnt. Where teaching and learning is unsatisfactory, time is wasted because pupils are not sure what to do, and they learn little. However in a few lessons, which are otherwise satisfactory, there is a common weaker feature which leads to many pupils not making as much progress as they should. In these lessons, the teacher does not make clear to pupils what is expected; they are not sure whether to get on with their practical work, write out their solutions or take part in a question and answer dialogue with the teacher. They lose concentration and underachieve.
88. In a well-taught, Year 8 lesson, the teacher set a range of mental mathematics, starter problems as the introduction; pupils were challenged to find, quickly, in their heads, the answers to examples such as: - 'the negative root of 400', and 'zero point three all squared'. When checking, at the end of the test, the teacher insisted on pupils using correct mathematical vocabulary. The lesson continued with an equally



demanding challenge of producing and extending sequences using a graphic calculator. This effectively encouraged good learning.

89. Pupils' attitudes towards mathematics are very good. Most enjoy their lessons and are proud to talk about their achievements. They quickly become involved in lessons and are good at explaining their mathematical thinking to others in the class. The best learning in lessons varies from calm enquiry to excited jubilation and cries of delight when success is achieved.
90. Leadership and management are good. The recently appointed head of department has made important improvements; a team of specialist teachers now teach the subject and the National Numeracy Strategy is well underway. There is a range of strategies for improving results but these have not yet had sufficient impact. Bridging units of work, which are begun at Combs Middle and continue at the Upper School, ease transfer from Year 8 to Year 9. The curriculum meets legal requirements and is well balanced with regard to the different areas of mathematics. Assessment procedures are accurate and satisfactory, including innovative ideas for involving pupils in expressing and recording their feelings about mathematics but there is more to be done to improve assessment. Pupils do not have a clear picture of where they are in relation to the statutorily reported levels of the National Curriculum; they confuse targets for improvement with the key objectives of the National Numeracy Framework. More importantly, they do not know what is expected of them in order to improve and reach higher levels of attainment in mathematics, however this is measured. The department has made a good start on monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. Lesson observations have identified improvements which need to be made, but these have not yet been put into place by some teachers.
91. The school has made good improvements since the previous inspection in many respects, but standards in national tests have fallen. There is now a strong specialist mathematics teaching team and the curricular changes, including the adoption of the National Numeracy Strategy, are making a difference to pupils' experience. Numeracy is good in mathematics and plans are secure to co-ordinate numeracy across the curriculum next year.

## SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is satisfactory.

### Strengths

- Excellent planning and schemes of work.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge.
- There is good use of ICT to reinforce learning.
- External links enrich the curriculum.
- Good use is made of excellent teaching spaces and resources.

### Areas for improvement

- Meeting individual needs of pupils by making better use of assessment.
- Monitoring the use of the praise and sanction system to ensure that all pupils benefit.
- Improving further the development of independent learning, particularly in practical work.

92. Pupils enjoy a broad and balanced education in science throughout the school. Pupils make good progress in Years 5 and 6, resulting in the attainment of satisfactory standards by Year 8.

93. Standards are above what is typically seen in Years 5 and 6. Pupils enter Year 5 at a starting point in line with the national average and make good progress. They quickly develop their investigational skills through well-structured planning sheets. They are also expected to describe their ideas using scientific terms and, in this way, develop a confidence and understanding in the science that underpins the practical work they are doing. For example, Year 5 pupils were able to make sophisticated predictions about changes of state of water and ice and demonstrate a good understanding of fair tests. In Year 6, in a topic called Kitchen Chemistry, pupils had meaningful conversations about reversible and irreversible reactions. The work in science contributes positively to achievement in literacy and ICT. Good use is made of a variety of reading and writing activities that reinforce the accurate use of language. ICT resources are used effectively; Year 5 pupils, for example, prepared a starter sheet on a water topic that included word processing, the use of clip art and information retrieval.
94. In Years 7 and 8, progress slows so that standards are in line with those typically seen. Pupils continue to develop their investigational skills when working on investigations, where excellent guidance sheets and writing frames help them focus on different aspects of their work. However, skills are not developed sufficiently in other practical work that frequently features in their lessons and where similar support is not available. Pupils continue to develop their ability to describe their ideas; for example, Year 8 pupils were able to describe how the physical phenomenon of insulation might affect animal behaviour in the cold. This discussion led to a planning activity that included predictions. Provision for the gifted scientists within each group is too limited. They undertake broadly similar activities but are expected to operate at a higher level during the activity. So, for example, in a Year 8 lesson on diffusion, the more able were dealing with the idea of molecules whereas the rest of the class was talking in terms of particles. The ad hoc nature of this work means that the gifted scientists do not make the progress they might through Years 7 and 8. Work in science continues to reinforce literacy and ICT; writing skills develop well in science and there are a number of ICT activities that reinforce learning. For example, Year 8 pupils make their own database on the properties of materials. Pupils do not develop their numeracy skills sufficiently in science. Although pupils have the opportunity to use measuring equipment and draw graphs as part of their investigative work, other opportunities to promote numeracy are missed; for example, results could be quantified in a diffusion of potassium manganate experiment by the simple use of a stopwatch.
95. Results in national tests at the end of Year 6, in 2000, were above the national average. As pupils entered the school broadly in line with the national average, this represents better than expected achievement. However, standards in science fell back in 2001 when pupils' average points score in Year 6 tests deteriorated. No national comparative data was available at the time of the inspection. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls in the tests. Gifted and talented pupils did well by achieving Level 6.
96. Teaching is broadly satisfactory overall, but with some good teaching and a small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. The better teaching is characterised by a teacher's good subject knowledge combining with good planning to lead pupils towards clearly stated objectives. Good classroom management enables all pupils to engage in the ideas and the practical work to make progress. The good teaching is also characterised by a brisk pace, with frequent time reminders and changes of activity; pupils are clear about the activity they are doing and how it fits into the 'big picture'. Where teaching is less than satisfactory the pupils are being asked to work

on each activity without seeing it as part of a series. Each part of the lesson is seen as an end in itself. The teacher controls the start of the next activity so that, in the end, the more able within the group waste time, having finished the required tasks, and the less able get frustrated because they are asked to go at a speed that is too fast for them. In these situations the teacher can become engrossed in small groups and fail to meet the needs of a substantial number of other pupils. Teachers' high expectations regarding written work, behaviour and safety were seen throughout the age range, but on a few occasions these were missing and there was clearly a decrease in learning. In the majority of lessons there was good use of written work to record the ideas that the pupils generated in discussion or the results they got from practical work.

97. The response of pupils in Years 5 and 6 to their science lessons is good. They speak highly of science and come enthusiastically to their lessons. In Years 7 and 8 the response is generally good, though a few pupils disrupt lessons when they are not engaged in appropriate tasks. The merit and sanction system is used throughout the year groups and, when fully embraced by the teacher, has a positive effect on pupils' response and learning. However, some teachers make more effective use of the system than others and there is too little monitoring to establish good practice and make sure that all pupils benefit from the same approach. The response of pupils to their science is greatly enhanced by the excellent links the department makes with the wider community, such as through the Mid Suffolk Countryside Rangers, the school's own conservation area and links with other subjects such as drama.
98. The management of the science department is generally good. Systems are in place for effective planning and co-ordination across all the teachers of science, three of whom teach other subjects. All teachers feel well supported. There is a programme of classroom observation, work sampling and team marking of investigative work. Liaison with feeder schools and the upper schools is good. Transfer tasks are being trialled so that skills related to interpreting data and applying knowledge can be practised at the end of Year 8 and at the upper school. The monitoring of teaching has not identified good practice sufficiently so that all science teachers can benefit. For example, where effective methods are used to meet pupils' needs they have not been shared with other teachers.
99. Progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. There are now well-structured ways for staff to review pupil progress but this information is still not used sufficiently to inform the teaching that each individual child receives. Non-specialist teachers are well supported and meet the needs of the curriculum well. Teaching is now better, results have improved and the response of pupils, particularly in Year 5 has improved.

## ART AND DESIGN

Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is good.

### Strengths

- Good standards are attained in a wide range of media.
- Teaching develops pupils' imagination and visual responses very well.
- Artists' work is effectively used to develop pupils' understanding.
- Impressive levels of confidence are shown by pupils when tackling new ideas or media.
- ICT skills are developed exceptionally well to create and transform visual images.
- Artwork of pupils is widely displayed in the art room and around the school.

### Areas for improvement

- Increasing opportunities for developing drawing skills to record and refine ideas.
- Using sketchbooks more to record and collect visual information.

100. In art, standards are good, particularly in work that develops pupils' imagination and personal expression. Pupils' experience in art, craft and design is far wider than is usually seen in this age range.
101. In Years 5 and 6, standards are above average. Pupils develop a sound level of skill in recording from observation, such as when they draw shells in Year 5, or groups of objects in Year 6. They develop strong capability in exploring and then expressing ideas from a theme, such as when looking at how Egyptian artists portrayed animals, or how letters can be formed into a word so that it conveys its meaning visually. Standards are above average when pupils make a personal response having studied the work of artists, or art movements. This is seen in Year 6 when they explore pattern, having studied the work of Kandinski. They know the names of a good range of artists who worked within the art movements studied. Pupils have good technical skills when using art materials; for example, when mixing and applying paint, printmaking and manipulating three-dimensional media, such as wire and clay. They develop above average capability in using ICT to scan visual images and recreate them using built-in keyboard functions.
102. In Years 7 and 8, standards remain above average and progress is more rapid than usually seen. In some aspects of work standards are high; for example when pupils explore ideas and express outcomes that reflect personal imagination. This is especially the case when they use an artist or art movement as a starting point. Pupils gain a good depth of understanding of the ideas and conventions of artists. For example, in Year 8, when they study cubism, pupils understand that abstract artists attempted to portray images from more than one viewpoint, and they apply this method of representation to their figure drawings confidently. They are able to identify artists who worked in a cubist style, such as Braque, Gris, Léger and Picasso. They readily work on different scales, such as in Year 7 when they collaborate in pairs on large paintings inspired by Street Art. Pupils' work shows considerable strength when it involves colour, pattern and texture. Their skills in working with three-dimensional media are soundly developed. The only aspect where standards are a little below average is in careful, analytical drawing. This is because of the wide range of media and activities in which pupils participate; they have too few opportunities to develop line and tonal skills. Pupils demonstrate very good standards when applying ICT knowledge and understanding to visual compositions. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress across Years 5 to 8. In all years, gifted pupils extend their visual and technical capability very well, especially girls.

103. Pupils work with enthusiasm. They apply themselves very well in an art room that provides well-organised resources and displays that stimulate the imagination. These, together with consistently good teaching, are factors that enable pupils to work with a greater level of independence than is normally seen within this age range. Art and design make very good contributions to pupils' personal development.
104. Teaching is of consistently good quality. In lessons in which pupils were encouraged to talk to the class about their own work, a high level of teaching skill was observed. For example, when pupils in Year 5 were encouraged to speak about fantastic sea creatures they had made in clay, they gained insights into the thoughts and feelings of others. This form of critical evaluation promoted the concepts being taught very effectively. Learning is well planned, and clear objectives are set. The one-hour period is used very well and learning progresses at a suitably rapid pace. This includes, on occasions, having pupils working on more than one activity so that resources can be used efficiently. The high level of teacher interaction with pupils means that they receive good feedback, so that pupils know what they have to do improve their work. Feedback is supported by the use of helpful written comments. Homework is set quite frequently and much requires personal research or the further development of ideas. Some keen pupils undertake additional work, but more pupils, especially those who are gifted, could benefit from homework that extends observational drawing skills. The incorporation of ICT into teaching in all years is creating exciting learning opportunities for visual exploration, rarely offered at this age. This is seen in work, for example, where pupils use digitised pictures of themselves to create pop art images in the style of Andy Warhol in Year 7 and cloning of images to create compositions in Year 8.
105. Art and design is very effectively managed as a one-teacher subject. Planning and the organisation of resources are of a high order. Visits to galleries are used to extend pupils' experiences very well. The subject makes a strong contribution to the cultural development of pupils and to the life of the school.
106. Since the previous inspection, good standards have been maintained. Pupils now have a secure knowledge of the work of different artists, all year groups engage in three-dimensional activities and ICT has developed as an important strength.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is satisfactory.

### Strengths

- Pupils have a good knowledge of how to tackle design activities.
- They have good capability in controlling devices and events using ICT.
- Pupils use a good range of materials and processes.
- Resources and accommodation are appropriate for the age range.
- Pupils with learning difficulties are supported well.

### Areas for further development

- Subject leadership provides insufficiently clear direction to teachers.
- Schemes of work do not build well enough on pupils' earlier experiences in the subject.
- Pupils' knowledge of materials is too limited before they start their designs in Years 7 and 8.
- Practical work in card and resistant materials (wood and fibre board) is not finished to a sufficiently high standard in Years 7 and 8.
- Assessment fails to provide sufficiently-detailed feedback to pupils on how to improve.

107. Standards are only just satisfactory in design and technology by Year 8. Pupils have a good understanding of design methods and computer control, but their potential in making quality products is not sufficiently realised. During the inspection, the subject co-ordinator was absent on sickness leave. A wide range of completed practical work was only available for scrutiny from textiles units.
108. In Years 5 and 6, standards in design and technology are broadly satisfactory. Pupils soundly apply the structured approach they are taught to their designing. They have a good understanding of how to write a design brief, and they can analyse the needs of users to develop a design specification at an appropriate level. They demonstrate average graphic skills in setting out their design ideas. Pupils have an appropriate basic knowledge of the different materials and tools they use. Their understanding of mechanical principles is well developed, such as in designing a moving toy using levers in Year 5, or a fairground ride in Year 6. Making skills are of an average standard.
109. In Years 7 and 8, standards are only just average. Pupils demonstrate good competence in analysing a design situation and can produce a brief and specification in appropriate detail. Their research, leading to possible design ideas, is too restricted because, usually, they only refer to second-hand sources, such as magazines or the Internet. They rarely examine actual products and therefore have insufficient knowledge of alternative constructions or the qualities of suitable materials before they develop their final designs. Pupils planning textile products for teenagers in Year 7 benefit from looking at, and handling, a number of bags made in different materials before they begin designing. However, this approach is not the norm. Skills in recording ideas using graphic techniques, are average, but few pupils show high-level skills. Pupils have a very good understanding of how to conduct surveys of peoples' opinions. In Year 8 food technology, when studying the batch production of biscuits, they use questionnaires well, and many present their findings very clearly using computer graphics. Pupils' construction skills are generally satisfactory but the finish they achieve in resistant materials is below the standard usually seen, such as boxes for different purposes in Year 7, and a novelty, moving product in Year 8. Pupils have a good understanding of using computers to control mechanisms and events, such as motors and traffic lights. Pupils with special educational needs make steady progress and often benefit from a good level of support from a learning support assistant. The work of gifted pupils, although often above average, is often not extended sufficiently.
110. Pupils show good attitudes when designing or making products using materials. They are diligent when working in design folders, and show good involvement when using tools and equipment. The subject benefits pupils' personal development when they make individual choices. This was seen, for instance, when they were researching and applying images on the theme of conservation to the design of ties or scarves in Year 8. However, the choices they make are often visual rather than technical.
111. Teaching is generally satisfactory: it enables pupils to make steady progress overall. However, there is unevenness in the teaching of different aspects of design and technology. This is reflected in the standards that pupils attain, such as in planning, researching, recording design ideas and working in different materials, as identified above. Work in individual lessons is planned well: teachers ensure that materials and resources are ready at the start of lessons so that learning time is used efficiently. Teaching design methodology is very well structured and pupils' learning enables them to work with a sound level of independence by Year 8. This is seen in folders

when pupils develop briefs and specifications for clothing accessories, food products and mechanisms. However, resources for research are too restricted: pupils rarely benefit from examining and handling a wide range of products. This restricts their learning about the way different items are constructed and the nature of materials used. The workshop for resistant materials fails to provide a sufficiently stimulating environment; the lack of display means that pupils are not exposed to the results of high-quality products that have been made by their peers. During the inspection some lessons were taught by supply teachers. They coped adequately with basic work. Most of pupils' designing is marked with ticks and stickers, and there are some helpful comments. Praise and encouragement are given widely but feedback is not given in the form of grades or levels using criteria that would assist pupils to know how they can improve.

112. Subject leadership is unsatisfactory. Planning is detailed; however, it does not assist the different teachers to have a sufficiently clear picture of how units of work fit together and provide the progressive development of pupils' designing and making skills. Pupils spend too much time undertaking repetitive planning and designing procedures in different units without extending their skills sufficiently. The monitoring of standards is a weakness and the current subject improvement plan fails to address the school's priority for monitoring and evaluation. Assessments are not kept centrally so that pupils' progress can be readily analysed. Subject management has ensured that activities take place in safe facilities. Design and technology makes a strong contribution to the development of pupils' capability in ICT.
113. Since the previous inspection, standards have remained broadly similar. Weaknesses that were identified in 1996 have not been tackled sufficiently thoroughly to ensure improvement. Pupils still lack knowledge of materials and access to resources to help develop design ideas. Making skills are still too variable. The use of ICT for control has continued to develop strongly. Management and communication within the subject are now weaknesses.

## **DRAMA**

The school provides lessons in drama for all pupils, and the high standards gained make a good contribution to the ethos of the school.

### **Strengths**

- The successful role of the subject in aiding the development of pupils' interpersonal skills and good attitudes.
- The good quality of challenge in the work and the well above average standards of attainment reached.
- The high quality of teaching that leads to a positive and mature response from pupils.
- The good quality of planning, even though it is yet to be formalised.
- The opportunities for pupils to take part in productions, both in and beyond the school.
- The effective use of accommodation.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Display of technical terms and their greater use in lessons
- Further development of the good use of lighting and sound for effects in lessons
- The formalisation of the co-ordination and planning of the subject

114. The standards attained in drama are above average in all years, and the achievement by Year 8 is well above that normally found.

115. The teaching is very good with good management through clear expectation of, and insistence on, high standards of behaviour. The teacher's interest in and commitment to the subject is made clear to the pupils, and shapes the good quality of their responses. Ideas, experiences, suggestions and criticisms are shared with pupils who are encouraged to involve themselves fully in ways of improving their work. Throughout their time in the school, pupils are thus helped to gain a sense of responsibility for their actions and their learning. Strong emphasis is placed on relationships and the need to work with different groups of people. Great efforts are made to include all pupils in the learning activities.
116. The planning for the subject by the specialist teacher for his own lessons is good, with a high level of consistency and purpose gained between warm-up activities and the main focus of the lesson. The levels of the tasks set are suitable but challenging. This planning is yet to be formalised to support other teachers, but oral advice from the co-ordinator is helpful. The resources for the subject are very good, with a drama studio that is of a good size and well equipped with blackout and lighting so that atmosphere can be created to enhance the pupils' work. Good use is made of these resources, and further developments are in hand. The department provides good opportunities for pupils to take part in drama activities within and beyond the school with support from several enthusiastic members of the school staff. Such activities have, in the past, gained national recognition for the work of the school
117. Pupils respond very well to their drama lessons, behaving well and co-operating well with the teacher. They give the work their interest, commit themselves to improving their skills and gain enjoyment from their achievements. They learn to work in a variety of groupings and to take increasing responsibility for their learning and the activities of the various groups in which they are placed. Pupils in Year 8 behave maturely in negotiating with the teacher over aspects of their learning and performance.
118. Since the previous inspection, standards in drama have improved from group work being satisfactory to good and improvisation being confident to well above average. Pupils still work together very convincingly to develop characters and situations, and the overall provision for drama has improved considerably.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is good.

### **Strengths**

- Pupils make good progress to achieve above average standards.
- Good teaching improves pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils work hard.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Assessment, to help teachers and pupils set targets.
- Planning, to develop literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.
- More guidance and support for teachers, especially in Years 5 and 6.

119. Pupils make good progress in their first two years at the school; by the end of Year 6 they reach standards which are similar to those normally seen. They have a sound knowledge of their local area and are beginning to understand the importance of changes taking place in their environment. They can use resources provided by their teachers to answer questions about places. They are beginning to develop their enquiry skills, for example when measuring and recording the weather. The gifted



and talented pupils also make good progress. Describing and beginning to explain the formation of river features gives them a good understanding of how their landscape is changing. Pupils with special educational needs take a full part in the lessons, and finish their work as successfully as others in the class.

120. Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 7 and 8, and reach standards a little better than average. They have a good knowledge of the places they study, including countries at different levels of development such as France and Brazil. They can explain patterns of earthquakes and volcanoes around the world, which is valuable in helping them to gain an understanding of important landscape processes. Talented pupils go further. They can explain some difficult ideas, such as the reasons for the distinctive character of the regions of France. Work in geography helps the pupils to develop their literary skills. Their project work on earthquakes and volcanoes contains written work in which they make good use of difficult vocabulary. Pupils have opportunities to use ICT in research and in the presentation of topic work, but not enough, resulting in too little development of these skills.
121. The main reason pupils make good progress in geography, is the high standard of teaching. Lessons are carefully planned and managed and enable pupils to get on with interesting and engaging activities. For example, in a Year 5 lesson, the teacher chose an activity to compare possible sites for a village. She explained the ideas carefully, so all pupils understood the importance of the features of the landscape. Few pupils needed extra help, but where necessary, it was provided sympathetically and patiently. As a result, all pupils made good progress in developing mapping skills, and could justify their choice of location. In another lesson in Year 7, the teacher also used a map activity to plot the stages in the exploitation of the Amazon rain forests. He chose a simple exercise so that all pupils could quickly grasp the idea. It was also challenging, because it made pupils think very carefully about the conflicting demands on the forest. Pupils tackled the activity with enthusiasm and gained a good understanding of how people can unknowingly damage an environment. An important strength in lessons is the enthusiasm of the teachers. In a Year 8 lesson on earthquakes, the teacher used data downloaded from the Internet immediately before the lesson. This created an atmosphere of excitement and interest and gave the pupils an understanding that earthquakes are happening all the time and, therefore, are important and relevant.
122. The attitude of pupils to their learning is good. They are attentive to the teacher and most are very well behaved. On very rare occasions small groups of younger boys do not concentrate and disrupt the learning of others in the class. But most pupils try hard and clearly take a pride in their work. This was particularly evident in individual work on earthquakes, which formed part of a classroom display.
123. The co-ordinator manages the subject effectively. He has correctly identified the importance of continually reviewing the scheme of work, ensuring that it remains interesting and relevant to pupils. The subject teachers work together well, and there is a shared willingness to provide high-quality teaching and learning. Teachers make good use of the resources available, although there is some shortage of up to date textbooks, particularly for pupils in Years 7 and 8.
124. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection. Monitoring of teaching to identify strengths has revealed important areas for development. Increased use of specialist teachers and support for non-specialists have improved the quality of teaching overall. This means that pupils are now reaching higher standards in their knowledge and understanding of the subject.

## HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is good.

### Strengths

- Pupils make good progress to achieve above average standards.
- Good teaching improves pupils' knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils enjoy their work.

### Areas for improvement

- Assessment, to help teachers and pupils plan further work.
- More use of computers in lessons.
- More guidance for teachers.

125. Pupils make good progress in Years 5 and 6. They gain a sound knowledge and understanding of Ancient Egypt, life in Tudor times, and of the Victorian period. By the time they reach the end of Year 6 they attain average standards. They know about aspects of life in the periods studied, and are beginning to gain a sound understanding of important people and events of the time. More able pupils have a good understanding of changes which occurred in history, for example in the growth of towns during the Industrial Revolution. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in history; this helps them with their individual learning targets.
126. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 build successfully on the work in the first two years, so that by the end of Year 8, they reach standards a little higher than the average. They have good knowledge and understanding of further periods of history including the Roman Empire and the Medieval world. For example, they have a good understanding of the importance of the Roman army in building and keeping an empire. They make good use of a range of sources, including both text and illustration. More able pupils can compare and evaluate sources, and can discuss confidently the usefulness and reliability of historical sources. For example, pupils in Year 7 are able to comment on the validity of an account of a medieval battle, written shortly after the event. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress and are particularly keen to take part in class activities such as reading to the rest of the class. This helps them to achieve their learning targets.
127. Teaching is consistently good in history: this is the main reason why pupils do well. Lessons are carefully organised and include interesting and worthwhile activities which match the abilities of pupils. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, the teacher chose a video about life in a Victorian school. Pupils could make comparisons between their own lives and those of children in the Victorian period. They were very quiet and attentive during the video, and enthusiastic during the class discussion that followed. The teacher questioned the pupils well, so they gained a good understanding of the way people behaved. She provided a help sheet for the less confident pupils, so that everyone could cope with the final written task. Similarly, in a Year 7 lesson about Medieval Britain, the teacher explained knowledgeably the design of castles. He combined this successfully with the information in the textbooks. The pupils responded well, reading confidently and trying hard throughout the lesson. As a result, they all gained a clear understanding of how castle design changed over the years.
128. All the teachers insist upon a high standard of behaviour, and pupils respond well. Their attitude to their work is good, and most work hard throughout the lesson. However, a small number of boys in Year 6 do not always concentrate and try to

disrupt others. Teachers deal firmly and effectively with this when it occurs. The high standard of presentation and neatness in pupils' exercise books is a clear sign they care about their work and take a pride in doing well.

129. History teaching is co-ordinated effectively by the subject leader. He has a clear understanding of the subject requirements, and is making appropriate changes to the schemes of work, ensuring that the history studied remains relevant to pupils growing up in the present day. He recognises the need to provide support for his colleagues to maintain high standards of teaching.
130. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection, particularly in improving the quality of teaching in Years 5 and 6. This, and the increasing use of more specialist teachers, has helped pupils make better progress, and reach higher levels of attainment.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Strengths**

- Good progress in Year 5 in the central, taught course.
- High achievement in some subjects.
- Pupils' attitudes and enthusiasm.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Standards of attainment.
- Curriculum planning and co-ordination.
- Teaching programmes to ensure National Curriculum coverage.
- Assessment procedures.

131. Good progress is made in Year 5, where ICT is taught as a timetabled subject and pupils acquire a range of competencies across the required components of the National Curriculum. They use word processing, data handling and graphic packages effectively. Most are confident to access stored information using CD-ROMs, and use this to enhance the work in other subjects. However, access to computers is more variable in Year 6 and, by age 11, standards are below those expected. A similar picture occurs in Years 7 and 8: by age 13, standards overall are again below expectations. However, several departments make very good use of computers to contribute to the information and communication aspects of the National Curriculum. For example, in art, pupils can scan their chosen image and alter this using shape and colour changes. They use the digital camera effectively to create 'pop art' and by age 13 can create unique compositions using images from a variety of sources. This represents a high level of achievement for many pupils, and standards are above national expectations in this area of work. In science, computers are used to write up research projects, using text and clip art images. They use data based lines of enquiry to explore properties of materials and can link up data logging equipment to record their experimental results. In mathematics lessons, many pupils are proficient at entering data and performing complex calculations, using spreadsheet software. In food technology, pupils enhance their work effectively, using both spreadsheets and graphics, with good use of captions. In design and technology, they simulate traffic light sequences using computer-generated flowcharts and rectify faults in the operations.

132. Teacher assessment systems for measuring standards in ICT across the curriculum are not fully in place and are unsatisfactory. Plans are being established for a more rigorous assessment system in conjunction with key curricular subjects.
133. Teaching and learning in the Year 5 lessons are good. The planning of lessons and teachers' knowledge of ICT are good. Introductions to lessons are crisp and learning objectives are made clear. Individual support is of high quality and enables all pupils to make good progress. Teaching methods and organisation of the class are effective and ensure, by the end of the lesson, that pupils can see and celebrate the progress they have made. Explanation of how well pupils are doing is part of the lesson and clearly shows the standards they are achieving. It also explains what further skills are required to reach national expectations. Planning appropriate courses in ICT across all curricular subjects is much too variable. Despite the good practice in several subjects, and a start on defining subject responsibilities, teaching across the curriculum is unsatisfactory.
134. Pupils' attitudes are excellent. They respect the equipment and are very enthusiastic about using computers. The lunchtime clubs are well subscribed and pupils do not want to stop their computer work for afternoon school registration. Many use computers at home, for example to write letters as part of an English assignment.
135. Leadership is good and there is a strong commitment to improve. However, the capacity to improve is adversely affected by the lack of a clearly defined ICT teaching team. The school has identified the importance of improving ICT as a priority in the school improvement plan. The co-ordinator has made a good start in planning for the whole school curriculum and assessment of ICT, but the loss of the central course after Year 5 makes it difficult to ensure continuity and progress in teaching and learning of the National Curriculum. Whilst a portfolio of assessed work is kept for staff use, pupils have little idea of where they are in relation to the National Curriculum Programmes of Study or what they have to do to improve in order to attain higher levels. Their work is not annotated or displayed in exemplar form. Staff competences vary. Many have very good ICT skills and use them well in teaching their subjects. The school has identified those subjects where skills need to be enhanced, and training is currently being provided.
136. Progress since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory. There has been insufficient improvement in establishing a co-ordinated, comprehensive curriculum and a teaching programme across the curriculum. The assessment procedures are not fully in place. There has been considerable improvement both in the quality of computers and the programmes the school uses. Although the current ratio of pupils to computers is 10:1, this is below the national average. Plans are in place to improve this by the purchase of standalone machines and laptops.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

### French

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

#### Strengths

- Pupils achieve above average standards.
- The good relationships between teachers and pupils.
- The positive attitude of the pupils.
- The good conditions for learning that these two features make.
- The careful way that teachers prepare their lessons and use the resources they have.

#### Areas for improvement

- To find ways of helping pupils to speak French routinely in lessons.
- To develop a wider range of teaching and learning styles, including the use of ICT, to sustain purpose and interest in all lessons.
- To use the information gained from assessment more systematically to match teaching to pupils' needs.

137. In modern foreign languages, pupils benefit from a broad curricular experience. They work hard and behave well, and so they make good progress in language learning.
138. Pupils begin French in Year 6, a year before required by the National Curriculum, and so they have a head start on most schools by the end of Year 6. This is a considerable advantage, as most pupils make good progress that is sustained through the rest of their time at the school. In their first year, pupils concentrate on listening and speaking skills. Standards by the end of Key Stage 2 are above the norm, because of their early start. Most can understand and say a reasonable range of basic, familiar language covered so far: for example, to speak about themselves and where they live. The most able already show considerable confidence in using French, and pupils with special educational needs speak with reasonable pronunciation.
139. In Years 7 and 8, pupils build steadily on the advantage they have gained in their first year. So, by the end of Year 8, most achieve standards a little above those normally seen in all skills, developing reading and writing alongside their listening and speaking skills. Most middle and high attainers can talk and write at some length about events in the past, present and future, the most able with good levels of accuracy, while others cope with short dialogues and passages, but with some inaccuracies. Low attainers manage short dialogues and write words and simple sentences but often need prompts to support them. There are differences between the progress of boys and girls in some lessons but there is not a significant pattern. Some able pupils are not sufficiently stretched. The extra support provided helps pupils with special educational needs to make good progress but, when it is not available, they sometimes struggle to keep up. Overall, pupils make reasonable progress and achieve broadly what can be expected in the time available. French contributes strongly to developing pupils' literacy skills through the emphasis on accuracy and correct sentence structure. However, numeracy and information technology skills receive little attention.
140. On balance, teaching is satisfactory. There are some good features but also occasional weaknesses. The best lessons contain a logical sequence of tasks; teachers provide a good model of accurate pronunciation and lead on to tasks which

give pupils the chance to practise speaking intensively. When this is set up with clear guidance, as in a Year 8 lesson on the perfect tense, pupils keep practising in pairs with sustained concentration. They settle well to the task and gain considerable confidence to speak with good pronunciation. Teachers set the tone at the beginning of the lesson, so pupils know that they are expected to behave sensibly; almost all do and are keen to learn. Pupils' positive attitudes and generally good behaviour contribute greatly to the pace of learning. Pupils respond well to the lively activities, particularly when they are actively involved or can use pictures and words on cards as prompts for speaking, as in a Year 6 lesson on classroom phrases. The pace of learning slows in some lessons when the teacher's use of French is too hard for pupils to understand. When tasks are not clear or interesting enough, lessons lose momentum and, in a few cases, a few challenging pupils behave immaturely and distract others. Pupils have too few opportunities to use French for a real purpose or routinely in the classroom.

141. French is carefully organised and co-ordinated. The residential visit to France in Year 8 is popular and contributes strongly to the pupils' social and cultural understanding, as well as giving them the chance to use their French for real, which is also supported by having a French language assistant this year. Development plans for the subject cover most of the areas that need improving, including the use of information and communications technology.
142. The languages department has made reasonable progress since the previous inspection: accommodation and assessment procedures have improved and progress is better.

## MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision in music is unsatisfactory.

### Strengths

- Pupils achieve satisfactory standards by Year 6.
- A wide range of extra-curricular opportunities is offered.

### Areas for improvement

- Standards in Years 7 and 8.
- Assessment, to identify and meet pupils' needs.
- Pupils' skills of analysis so that they know how to improve.
- Teaching, so that pupils behave better and work harder.

143. Standards in music in Years 5 and 6 are broadly satisfactory but there are marked weaknesses in Years 7 and 8 in the standards achieved by pupils, in their attitudes and behaviour in lessons, and in teaching. There has not been sufficient improvement since the previous inspection.
144. Pupils enter the school with standards of attainment just about average for their age, though with significant weaknesses in performance. By Year 6, pupils are still just about the level expected. Performing skills are the weakest area, and these have been identified in the school improvement plan. Many pupils experience difficulty in repeating phrases on instruments with consistent accuracy. A substantial minority also finds it difficult even to speak rap in rhythm over a pulse if they have to maintain that pulse themselves. Composing is stronger; many pupils can compose effective pieces of music for group performance, which indicates that they listen carefully to their own musical ideas and appraise them effectively. Compositions are almost

always short; comparatively few pupils can develop their ideas into more extended pieces. The weakest performers, because they cannot repeat musical phrases accurately, find their composing limited by this. Overall, however, pupils make satisfactory progress between the ages of nine and eleven.

145. In Years 7 and 8 the picture is not so positive. Pupils' standards of attainment in Year 8 are below expectation and their progress across the key stage is unsatisfactory. Pupils in Year 7 are able to construct short pieces for gamelan, but many pupils in Year 8 cannot confidently perform a Blues chord sequence. The notable exception is a small group of boys who have received instrumental tuition outside school. Pupils do not have sufficient performing skills for them to attempt this work successfully. Listening and appraising in Year 7 are satisfactory. This contributes to effective composing, with pupils showing aural discrimination in their choice of sounds; for example, in combining orchestral percussion and electronic sources to create music on the theme of 'A Space Journey'. However, in Year 8, pupils do not listen carefully to their own work, nor to the teacher's instructions; this adversely affects their progress.
146. Overall, the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory. Though it is generally satisfactory in Years 5 and 6, there are weaknesses in lesson planning, assessment and management of pupils in Years 7 and 8. Pupils rarely understand what they are expected to do in lessons because teaching focuses on activities to be undertaken rather than outcomes expected of pupils. Lessons do not consistently begin with checks on what pupils can remember from previous work, so that new work is often built on incomplete understanding, though when their understanding is checked, as in a Year 5 lesson, pupils make better progress. In Years 7 and 8, only the most skilled and keenest pupils maintain concentration. Many others, particularly in Year 8, quickly become inattentive. Lessons in Year 7 and Year 8 often continue against a background of low-level chatter which is not about the task in hand and is not quelled firmly enough. Group work is sometimes more successful because all the available space is used and pupils can concentrate more easily. One-to-one support for individual pupils, particularly those of lower ability, is often good. Literacy is effectively promoted through the teaching of relevant subject vocabulary, and pupils are expected to introduce themselves when recording their work on tape, which they do clearly and even with some humour.
147. Assessment is not sufficiently rigorous and is not used enough to focus planning for lessons. Pupils' skills are not evaluated when they arrive in the school, and the curriculum, while relevant and covering the National Curriculum appropriately, is not adjusted to meet the specific needs of each year group.
148. Resources and accommodation are satisfactory, with appropriate provision of practice rooms. However, because keyboards have to be plugged in round the edge of the room, pupils are too crowded together when they are using them. They lose concentration because they cannot hear themselves play against the noise of all the others.
149. The breadth of extra-curricular activities is good for the size of the school. There have been some imaginative projects, including a performance at Snape Maltings, a visit to 'The Flying Dutchman' and Year 5 projects with the London Symphony Orchestra. The instrumental staff make a good contribution to the development of the performing and social skills of those pupils who take lessons with them.

150. At the previous inspection the music department had a number of areas of weakness. Broad planning was good but planning for individual lessons lacked detailed learning objectives and precise assessment criteria. This is still true. Moreover, standards of attainment have declined in Years 7 and 8. However, there have been some improvements, particularly the provision of good quality keyboards which gives better access to technology. A broader and more multi-cultural curriculum is now offered, and children no longer sit on the floor to work! Traditions of musical performance continue to flourish.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Pupils achieve good standards in a wide range of activities.
- Teaching is good.
- Extra-curricular activities are extensive.
- Pupils are enthusiastic.

### Areas for improvement

- Assessment to let pupils know how to improve and to plan future lessons.
- Monitoring and evaluation of teaching.

151. By Year 6, almost all pupils have developed skills and knowledge to a level which is comparable with what would be expected for pupils of that age. Many pupils are developing good gymnastics and hockey skills, and, in Year 5, a large proportion of pupils are competent swimmers and well on their way to reaching end of Year 6 minimum swimming requirements. Pupils are starting to become more confident in observing each other's performances, especially in gymnastics, and provide good suggestions on how the performance might be further improved.
152. Progress continues across Years 7 and 8 so that, by the end of Year 8, there are many competent performers in a range of sports and, overall, pupils are attaining at a level which is slightly above the national average. Pupils are starting to develop a good knowledge and understanding of fitness and health, many can identify the major muscle groups in their body, know why they need to warm up before exercise, and can suggest appropriate activities to do this.
153. Overall the standard of teaching across all years in the school is good. Teachers' subject knowledge is generally good and the two subject specialists undertake almost all of the teaching. Their enthusiasm for physical education fosters and retains pupils' interest in the subject. They set suitably high expectations, especially of acceptable behaviour and levels of concentration. They support pupils well, have a good deal of enthusiasm for the subject and employ some effective teaching methods. The school makes good use of the two qualified swimming instructors provided at the local leisure centre. They work hard enabling pupils to make good progress; for example, good use was made of floats in Year 5 swimming lessons to isolate arms or leg action so that pupils could work on refining their swimming technique. In main games activities, like hockey, skills are taught well and activities are used effectively to build up the skills and then put them into a small-sided game. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very positive; this is a particular strength of the subject's provision. Pupils with special educational needs are supported well and encouraged strongly so that they make good progress, as do the more able and talented pupils. Teachers make good use of more able pupils to



demonstrate a particular teaching point to the rest of the class. However, the procedures for assessing pupils' performance and the use of this assessment information to further plan the curriculum is an area in need of development.

154. On the whole, pupils display very positive attitudes to their work. They are able to respond accurately to teachers' questioning and they display good, collaborative skills. Pupils have very positive attitudes to their lessons and to the extra-curricular opportunities that the subject provides. They work with enthusiasm and their behaviour is good. When off-task behaviour does very occasionally occur it is swiftly and appropriately dealt with.
155. The curriculum offers pupils the opportunity to experience a wide range of activities. The two main subject teachers give of their time generously and, together with other colleagues and with good parental support, offer a very good programme of extra-curricular activities, accessible to all regardless of ability, and with a high level of pupil involvement. This has led to some very good achievements by school teams and individuals in a wide range of local, district, and county level competitions. There are also good opportunities for a larger number of pupils to take part in inter-form sports competitions.
156. The subject co-ordinator works hard for the benefit of the pupils in the school and leads by example. He gives good support to colleagues teaching physical education, especially the other subject specialist. They work very well as a team, striving to provide as many opportunities as possible for pupils to achieve well in the subject. Outdoor facilities are very good and resources for learning are good. However, the indoor accommodation, a hall which has other demands on its use, is very restrictive for any activity beyond the teaching of dance and gymnastics. This does curtail the further development of other areas of the curriculum, especially for older pupils.
157. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection. The level of pupil attainment has slightly improved; pupils now make good progress at both key stages, and the standard of teaching is equally good at both key stages.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is satisfactory.

### Strengths

- Pupils achieve satisfactory standards in Years 5 and 6.
- Teachers have good working relationships with pupils.
- Pupils enjoy the subject.
- The subject provides good opportunities for pupils' personal development.
- There is strong leadership of the subject.

### Areas for improvement

- Standards of attainment in Years 7 and 8, so that they are in line with the expectations of the agreed syllabus.
- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the religions they are teaching.
- Pace and challenge in some lessons.
- The quality of marking and assessment in the subject.
- Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning.

158. Pupils benefit from a course which offers many opportunities for their personal development and there is satisfactory teaching.
159. By the end of Year 6, pupils attain standards that are in line with the expectations of the Suffolk Agreed Syllabus. Pupils have a sound knowledge of the key features of the religions they have studied. By the end of Year 5, pupils can describe the main features of a church and they know about some of the ways in which Christians worship. In lessons, pupils in Year 5 are able to identify the communities that they belong to and describe the things that bind them together. In their work on Judaism, pupils in Year 6 can describe the ways in which Jewish people celebrate Shabbat and explain why it is important to them. Pupils are able to reflect on their own experience and recognise what influences their own lives. In their work on rules for living, pupils in Year 6 are able to give their own ideas about important rules in their own lives and consider which of the Ten Commandments has the most importance for them.
160. By the end of Year 8, standards are unsatisfactory because they are below the expectations of the agreed syllabus. In lessons on the topic 'Who am I? What shall I be?', pupils in Years 7 show satisfactory standards of attainment in the way they are able to identify and discuss issues and influences in their own lives. However, evidence from written work and discussions with pupils indicates that their knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of the religions studied is below what is expected for their age. In their work on Islam, pupils in Year 8 are able to describe the main events in the life of Muhammad but have little understanding of why his life and teaching are so important to Muslims. In Years 7 and 8, pupils make unsatisfactory progress in deepening and extending their knowledge of the faiths studied and understanding the ways in which people's beliefs may influence their behaviour.
161. Across all years, pupils with special educational needs make steady progress. Gifted pupils do not make as much progress as they could because they are not developing their understanding of the important beliefs and concepts on which religions such as Islam are based.
162. Teaching is sound overall, but a lack of subject knowledge results in too little progress in Year 8. A strength of the teaching lies in the very good relationships with pupils. Teachers successfully create an atmosphere of mutual respect so that pupils feel confident to share their ideas and experiences with the rest of the class, for example in talking about the influence of family and friends in their own lives. Teachers use questioning sensitively and well to help pupils share and explain their ideas. This was particularly effective in a Year 5 lesson when careful use of questioning ensured that all pupils' views on what would make a happy school community were listened to. Praise is used well to encourage even the least confident pupils to try to answer some difficult questions. Teachers work hard to use pupils' own experiences as the starting point for many topics and this helps them make progress in reflecting on their own beliefs and values. When the teaching and learning are less effective, the pace of the lesson is too slow and the work does not challenge the pupils to think in real depth about the topics being covered. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils were asked to work in groups to create rules for living that would be necessary on a desert island, but they were not challenged to explain why they had decided on their particular rule, or think about others that might be important. In Year 8, in particular, teachers' lack of depth of subject knowledge is a weakness. Teachers do not cover the material in sufficient depth to enable pupils to make enough progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of the topic. For example, in the work on Islam, teachers had not explored the key beliefs of the religion in sufficient detail to help pupils gain an understanding of why the life and

teaching of Muhammad is so important to members of the faith community. Across all years, planning does not take sufficient account of the needs of individual pupils and, as a result, the most able pupils in particular make too little progress. Homework is rarely set: this means that valuable opportunities for pupils to extend and enrich their learning are lost. Marking of pupils' work sometimes gives encouragement but, across all years, there are too few comments about how standards can be improved.

163. Pupils show interest in the subject and have positive attitudes to their work. They are keen to ask and answer questions as well as share ideas with the rest of the class. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils were willing to tell the rest of the class which of the Ten Commandments they considered most important to them and talk about why. Pupils work well on the tasks they are set, such as creating a time line of the main events in the life of Muhammad. They listen well to each other and show a good sense of mutual respect for others' beliefs and feelings.
164. The curriculum appropriately focuses on an in-depth study of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, in line with the requirements of the agreed syllabus and the local pyramid agreement, but the thematic units do not provide pupils with enough opportunities to broaden their knowledge through learning about other faiths such as Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. Through regular opportunities for pupils to consider moral issues such as 'rules for living', and think about their personal response to questions such as 'Who am I? What will I be?', the subject provides good opportunities for spiritual moral and social development.
165. The subject is led and managed soundly. The recently appointed co-ordinator has worked hard to move the subject forward in a short space of time. Schemes of work are currently being rewritten using the Suffolk 'Themes and Schemes' programme. This is ensuring that there is a detailed scheme of work for non-specialist teachers to follow. Although there have been many recent developments in the subject, there are several aspects that are in need of attention. In particular, there are no procedures in place for assessing pupils' work in the subject. This means that teachers have little information on pupils' progress in religious education to help them with planning lessons and setting targets for improvement. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning are unsatisfactory.
166. In recent months, the school has made rapid progress in addressing some of the weaknesses identified at the time of the previous inspection. Standards and progress in Years 5 and 6 have improved. Teachers now have detailed guidance on the units of work they teach. However, insufficient progress has been made in improving standards in Year 8. Marking and assessment practices and the monitoring of teaching and learning remain unsatisfactory