

INSPECTION REPORT

NORBURY MANOR HIGH SCHOOL

Thornton Heath, Croydon

LEA area: Croydon

Unique reference number: 101824

Headteacher: Miss C Nicholls

Reporting inspector: John Godwood
18242

Dates of inspection: 5 – 8 November 2001

Inspection number: 189347

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16
Gender of pupils:	Female
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Ms B Washington
Date of previous inspection:	September 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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18242	John Godwood	Registered inspector	Equal opportunities	What sort of school is it? How high are standards; the school's results and pupils' achievements? How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
14214	Gillian Smith	Lay inspector		How high are standards; 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?
3958	Maureen Cawdron	Team inspector	English	
			Drama	
13734	Harold Davies	Team inspector	Geography	
			Religious education	
10391	Val du Plergny	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
18382	Simon Faull	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
			History	
30553	Richard Fuller	Team inspector	Mathematics	
8139	Barbara Johnstone	Team inspector	Music	
1779	David Leonard	Team inspector	Science	
31769	Stephanie Penny	Team inspector	Design and technology	
23030	Caroline Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
1995	Kate Seager	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
10053	Janet Simms	Team inspector	Art and design	
			English as an additional language	

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7 - 11
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	12 - 15
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?	15 - 18
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?	18 - 23
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	23 - 25
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	25 - 26
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	26 - 29
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	30
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	31 - 35
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	36 - 60

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Norbury Manor High School for Girls is a Foundation comprehensive school with 853 pupils aged 11-16. It is over-subscribed and is growing in size. It is a Beacon School, ie a school which has been identified as an example of good practice and which provides professional support to other schools. Most pupils come from North Croydon. Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds, some of which are disadvantaged. Seventy per cent of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with 35 per cent Black Caribbean or Black African and 29 per cent Asian. There are 17 refugees. Two hundred and ninety-nine pupils come from homes where English is not the first language, and 20 are at an early stage of learning English. There is a wide range of home languages, with Gujarati, Urdu, Panjabi and Bengali the most common. Nineteen per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals. One hundred and twenty-one pupils have special educational needs, of whom six have statements. Of 32 pupils with more significant learning needs, most have learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is below average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Norbury Manor High School is a very good school with many excellent features and which is continually improving. The school's aims of valuing each individual and striving for excellence are widely shared and reflected in all its work. Standards are above average and rising and pupils achieve very well; their achievements in GCSE courses are excellent. Pupils' attitudes to school are very good and their personal development is excellent. Teaching is good and is well supported by the school's very good ethos and pupils' very good learning skills. Leadership and management are very good and the headteacher's leadership is excellent, combining high expectations with very good individual support and a high level of strategic planning for continual improvement. The school gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards are above average and improving, and pupils' achievements are very good.
- Pupils' attitudes are very positive and they are eager to learn.
- Pupils are confident and responsible; pupils of all cultures respect each other and form very good relationships.
- Much teaching is very good, characterised by concern for individual pupils and their progress.
- All pupils are encouraged and those in danger of underachieving are given very good support.
- The headteacher promotes excellence through very high expectations and support for individuals.
- The school is continually improving its provision and facilities through entrepreneurial management.
- Art, music, dance and drama provide very good support for pupils' creative development and there is a very good range of extra-curricular activities.
- There is excellent provision for developing pupils' numeracy skills.

What could be improved

- The linking of assessment to national standards, so that pupils and parents have better information on how well pupils are doing and how they can improve.
- The setting of school targets that reflect more accurately what pupils can achieve.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in September 1996. Since then standards have risen in National Curriculum tests and in GCSE examinations. Pupils' behaviour and attendance have improved, as has the level of care. The quality of teaching has risen significantly. The quality of leadership and management has improved and school finances have been turned from a deficit to a surplus. There have been many significant enhancements to the buildings and in the provision for information and communication technology (ICT). There has been good improvement on the key issues identified in the last report. Overall, the improvement since the last inspection is very good.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations. The term 'all schools' includes mixed and single-sex schools; 'similar schools' refers to schools in similar social contexts.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	B	A	B	A*	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

Standards in tests at the end of Year 9 are above the national average and above average for girls. They are well above those in similar schools. GCSE results are above average in most subjects and pupils' GCSE results overall are well above average. This is because very few pupils underachieve, and in 2001 all pupils gained at least five GCSE passes. Results are also well above the average for girls. Compared with similar schools, GCSE results are very high, being in the top five per cent nationally. Standards in Year 9 and GCSE have improved over the last five years in line with the national trend. The school exceeded its GCSE target in 2001, but this was partly because the published target was relatively unchallenging and was not a true reflection of what the school expected pupils to achieve.

In work seen, standards are above average in most subjects at the end of Year 9. They are well above average in art, and are average in modern languages, design and technology, history and physical education. Standards are also above average in most subjects at the end of Year 11. They are well above average in English, ICT, religious education and art. They are below average in design and technology and physical education, though in both these subjects arrangements are now in place to ensure future improvement.

Pupils' achievements in relation to their prior attainment are good or very good in almost all subjects. Taking their performance in all subjects, their achievement is very good overall and excellent in GCSE courses.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are proud to belong to the school and keen to benefit from the increasingly wide range of opportunities available.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. The school has a warm, but disciplined, atmosphere and the overwhelming majority of pupils respond positively to what is expected.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Pupils are polite, confident, mature and sensible. They willingly use their initiative and relish responsibility.
Attendance	Good. The school is scrupulous in monitoring attendance and unauthorised absences are extremely rare. Timekeeping during the school day is good.

This is a genuinely multi-cultural school and pupils respect each other's faiths and feelings. Pupils are able to discuss their values and beliefs without fear of mockery or intimidation. Relationships among pupils and with their teachers are very good and are based upon mutual trust and respect. The school has an excellent work ethic and pupils' enthusiasm and confidence help them to learn and make progress.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11
Quality of teaching	Good	Very good

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

Teaching is good in English, mathematics and science. It is very good in English in Years 10 and 11 and in science in Years 7 to 9. It is at least good in all subjects except history, where it is satisfactory. It is very good in art.

Particular strengths are teachers' high expectations and their evident concern for every individual pupil. Teachers manage pupils very well, with tactful, sensitive handling. In a small number of lessons, the pace is too slow and pupils are not challenged enough. The teaching of literacy is very good and the teaching of numeracy is excellent. The school is particularly successful in meeting the needs of all pupils, through high expectations and a well-designed system to support pupils who might otherwise underachieve. Pupils' learning is enhanced by their high level of interest and confidence and their ability to take responsibility for their learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum meets the needs of all pupils. It makes a good contribution to the standards achieved and prepares pupils well for the next stage of education and adult life.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Additional support is well organised and effective. In some subjects, pupils' targets are not specific enough to support progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils have very good support in class, and, where necessary, specially simplified materials. Their progress also benefits from the help they receive from other pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. There is good provision for pupils' spiritual development and very good support for moral and cultural development. Provision for social development is excellent through many opportunities to work together and take responsibility.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. Staff have a wholehearted and sincere commitment to pupils' welfare.

The school places a strong emphasis on working closely with parents, who hold the school in high regard. Links between home and school are good, though reports need to give more specific information on progress and targets.

The curriculum includes a range of additional courses, including Gujarati and Urdu. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, including very strong music and drama. It is a weakness that pupils can study only one language in Year 9. Pupils have good opportunities to learn and use ICT, but many Year 10 and 11 pupils miss the section of the ICT National Curriculum on measurement and control.

Procedures for monitoring attendance are excellent. Assessment procedures in subjects are good but need to be more closely related to national standards in order to set pupils realistic and specific targets.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher's leadership is excellent, combining high expectations with very good individual support and a high level of strategic planning for continual improvement.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. Governors know the school well and are fully involved in strategic planning and monitoring the school's outcomes.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Examination results and school developments are reviewed regularly and there are good procedures to monitor teaching.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. Finances are managed strategically and there have been many improvements to the accommodation and facilities.

There is a good match between staff qualifications and the subjects they teach. Accommodation and learning resources are good. The school applies the principles of best value through constantly monitoring its activities and seeking the best use of funds to support learning.

The senior management team is particularly successful in creating an ethos in which pupils and staff achieve their best. Governors and staff are innovative in continually improving the school's facilities and developing the curriculum. School organisation is very good and all individuals are valued.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has high expectations of pupils' achievement. • The school is well led and managed. • Children like school. • Good standards are reached and children are helped to make good progress. • Children become mature and are treated with respect in a truly multi-cultural school. • Behaviour and attendance are good and are well supported. • Parents feel comfortable approaching the school with a problem. • The school has improved in recent years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents feel homework setting is erratic and there is too much. • Some parents feel they are not well informed about progress. • Some parents feel that the school does not work closely with parents. • Pupils take two languages in Year 8 but drop to one in Year 9.

Inspectors fully support parents' positive views. In investigating what parents would like to see improved, inspectors found that homework is set appropriately and supports learning. The school does work closely with parents and provides enough information about progress, though reports need to contain clearer information on what pupils can do and how to improve. The arrangements for languages in Year 9 do need to be revised and the school has plans to do this.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is below average overall, though each year group contains a significant proportion of pupils whose attainment is above average. In judging pupils' achievements, therefore, it is necessary to compare the school's standards with those of similar schools.
2. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 were average overall in 2000 and improved to above average in 2001. They were also above the average for girls nationally and were well above the results of similar schools. Standards have improved over the last five years at a similar rate to the national trend. There were some differences between subjects. Mathematics results are average and well above similar schools. Science was below average in 2000, but in 2001 improved to above average and well above similar schools. English was well above average in 2000, but declined a little in 2001 though it remained above average and well above similar schools.
3. In work seen during the inspection, standards at the end of Year 9 are above average in English, science, ICT, geography, religious education and music. They are well above average in art. They are average in mathematics, modern foreign languages, design and technology, history and physical education.
4. GCSE results were above average in 2000 and improved to well above average in 2001. They were also in 2001 well above average for girls and, in both years, very high compared with similar schools. Results had been fairly steady over several years, but there was a significant improvement in 2001 and the overall trend of improvement over the last five years is in line with the national trend. A particular feature is that in 2001 all pupils gained at least five GCSE passes, which was achieved by only five per cent of schools nationally. This statistic has increased each year since 1998 and is a measure of the school's success in providing support for pupils who are likely to underachieve. Standards in most subjects are above average, but because pupils achieve passes in more subjects than is usual, their standards overall are well above average.
5. In work seen during the inspection, standards at the end of Year 11 are well above average in English, ICT, religious education and art. They are above average in mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, geography and music. They are average in history. They are below average in design and technology and physical education, but in both subjects this is due to previous staffing difficulties and standards are now improving.
6. Pupils' achievements at the end of Year 9 are very good in relation to their prior attainment. They continue to achieve very well in Years 10 and 11 and, because all pupils succeed in at least five GCSEs, pupils' achievements at the end of Year 11 are excellent.
7. Pupils' very good achievements are due to a number of factors. The school has very high expectations and has established an ethos that encourages effort and learning. Pupils have very good attitudes and are confident and mature in their approach to work. Teaching is consistently good and often very good, and teachers show a high level of care and support for individual pupils. Finally, the school has an effective network of learning support for pupils with special educational needs and those in danger of

underachieving.

8. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress in line with other pupils in the school. The school has pupils who need support for a wide range of reasons, including pupils with learning difficulties, behavioural difficulties, those learning English, and pupils in danger of underachieving. All these are given co-ordinated support by the learning support department and their very good progress leads to eventual success in GCSE examinations.
9. The needs of pupils whose first language is not English are clearly identified by the learning support department and their progress in English carefully tracked. Where appropriate they receive in-class support, and very good liaison with subject staff means that teachers know the pupils well and provide appropriate work. Pupils feel part of what the rest of the class is doing, and able to succeed in doing similar work. They make very good progress.
10. Pupils from minority ethnic groups who are in danger of underachieving also receive support. This support, together with the very good relationships and learning ethos, means that there are few significant differences in the achievements of pupils from different ethnic groups. The school's own analysis shows that girls from Asian backgrounds gain more higher grades in GCSE examinations than do other pupils. In the past, this was also true in Year 9 National Curriculum tests, but in the most recent tests in 2001 there were no differences between the results of different ethnic groups.
11. The school has identified gifted and talented pupils and has begun to plan to ensure they are fully challenged. These plans are at an early stage, but the inspection found that gifted and talented pupils make good progress.
12. The school significantly exceeded its GCSE targets in 2000 and 2001. This is partly a reflection of its success in ensuring that pupils make very good progress, but is also an indication that the process of setting GCSE targets is not well thought through. The school's published targets are not a true reflection of its very high expectations and leads to targets that are relatively unchallenging. The target for 2002 is significantly lower than pupils are likely to achieve.
13. Standards of literacy are very good overall. Pupils' very good listening and speaking skills are evident in many lessons, although opportunities for speaking at length are not always provided. The majority of pupils are articulate and speak with confidence; more reticent pupils participate in oral work when encouraged to do so or when supported by group discussion. Most use each subject's specialist vocabulary with confidence. The high standards of speaking and listening were given recognition recently when members of the Literary and Debating Club won a public speaking competition on the theme of Black History. Reading skills are usually sound and often very good. Only a few pupils have serious difficulties in reading. Most have a range of research and information retrieval skills, using the Internet competently and making use of reference texts in the library. Standards of writing are good. Most pupils write fluently and accurately, although not always at length. Opportunities to do this are lacking in history. Most pupils plan, organise and express their ideas coherently, and standards of note-making are good in religious education, geography and art. Handwriting and presentation are usually at least satisfactory, and often good.
14. Pupils generally have a good range of numeracy skills, which they are able to use to solve problems. Most 14-year-olds use a calculator competently and carry out mathematical investigations logically. The basic numeracy skills of the lowest-attaining

pupils are improved by setting them specific targets each term. In mathematics GCSE coursework, pupils present work clearly, using diagrams and graphs to best advantage. The school's excellent numeracy policy, directed by the mathematics department, thoroughly co-ordinates the teaching and application of numeracy skills in all subjects. In geography, older pupils use graphical methods and analysis of data in their study of rivers. In science and in design and technology, they learn to rearrange equations and convert units of measurement. Pupils develop their spatial understanding through very good work in art.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

15. Pupils of all ages have very good attitudes to learning. They come to school in a positive frame of mind and are proud to belong to the school. They are highly motivated and keen to benefit from the increasingly wide range of opportunities available. Relationships among pupils and with their teachers are very good and are based upon mutual trust and respect. Pupils feel confident to ask for help with their work when it is needed. Their enthusiasm for school helps them to learn and make good progress. During a Year 7 Spanish lesson, for example, pupils had great fun learning numbers up to ten to the tune of 'Jingle Bells'. They then followed it up with an energetic game of 'Simple Simon', conducted entirely in Spanish. Every single girl revelled in the games and gained considerable confidence when speaking aloud.
16. Pupils' behaviour during lessons and around the school has improved since the last inspection and is now very good. This is reflected in the fact that there have been no permanent exclusions over the most recent school year. Although there have been 49 fixed-period exclusions, these are an effective sanction in that pupils rarely re-offend. There were more exclusions of Black Caribbean pupils than of pupils from other ethnic groups, but the difference was much less than is found in most schools nationally. The school expects high standards of behaviour and teachers use an effective blend of high expectations and praise. The overwhelming majority of pupils know exactly what is expected and the result is a lively but very harmonious community. Although bullying does occasionally occur, pupils feel confident that such behaviour is dealt with firmly and effectively. The school has a warm, but disciplined, atmosphere and an excellent work ethic. These factors have a very positive impact upon pupils' learning. During the inspection, unsatisfactory behaviour was seen in only a few lessons and it usually arose when the work provided was too easy. While it continues to be very good overall, pupils' behaviour is slightly less positive in Years 7, 8 and 9. For example, during a Year 8 netball lesson in which pupils were learning about different types of passes, some pupils were bored and became increasingly noisy and disruptive.
17. Members of staff have a sincere interest in their pupils and want them to do well. They provide very good examples of how to behave and address the pupils with the respect and consideration they deserve. Pupils, in turn, speak highly of their teachers. Although there is a wide range of nationalities, cultures and languages in the school, pupils are able to discuss their values and beliefs without fear of mockery or intimidation. It is a truly multi-cultural school, and pupils have genuine respect for each other's faiths and feelings. This is a testament to the school's very successful policy for social and educational inclusion. During lessons, pupils collaborate well in small groups or pairs. For example, during a dance lesson, Year 8 pupils introduced aspects of their own culture into their interpretation of the music, and spontaneously clapped when classmates demonstrated their routines.
18. The personal development of pupils is excellent. They are polite, confident, mature and sensible. They are conscientious and can be relied upon to get on with their work both

at home and at school. Through coursework, they become increasingly accustomed to working independently, and they cope well with the many demands that are put upon them. Discussions of racism, prejudice and bullying are key elements of the personal and social education (PSE) lessons, and the underlying message of the entire programme is one of understanding and consideration for all. Even the youngest pupils are mature in their thinking and confidently discuss their values and beliefs. Pupils willingly use their initiative and relish responsibility. They seize opportunities when they arise and are quick to create their own. For example, the school council recently organised an open meeting in which pupils could raise any concerns about bullying or racism. Led by the head girls, pupils chaired the meeting and subsequently reported back to governors. Another group has recently formed the Making a Difference Club, with the intention of improving certain aspects of school life. So far, they have canvassed the entire school for their opinion on school meals, planted shrubs near the office and started to grow and sell herbs in order to raise money for charity. Year 9 monitors undertake a wide range of duties around the school, and some Year 11 pupils become junior or senior prefects. Work experience takes place at the end of Year 10 and this raises pupils' confidence and prepares them well for the world of work. Through the system of personal reviews, which take place twice a year, pupils review their own progress and help to identify their personal and academic targets. This helps pupils to know how they are getting on, though in most subjects pupils need clearer information on how their attainment compares with national standards.

19. Attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now good. The school is scrupulous in monitoring all absences and, when pupils have been away, it is usually because they have been ill or have had a medical appointment. Unauthorised absences are extremely rare. Registration takes place promptly and timekeeping during the school day is good. This helps pupils to make the most of their time at school and underpins their very positive attitudes to learning.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

20. Teaching is good overall and very good in Years 10 and 11. During the inspection, 97 per cent of lessons were satisfactory or better, and three out of every four were good or better. Two out of every five lessons were very good or better, and one in twelve was excellent. The few unsatisfactory lessons were in Years 7 to 9, but teaching is consistently good in all years and in most subjects. Pupils' very good achievements are a result of this consistently good teaching combined with the very high expectations set by the headteacher and staff, and the very good attitudes and mature approach that pupils bring to their learning.
21. Typical features of the good teaching are very good relationships between teachers and pupils and a very strong concern to meet all pupils' needs and ensure that all achieve. This concern is shown in the range of methods that teachers use and the additional support both in and out of lessons given to pupils in need of extra help. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve and manage pupils well, showing respect and tactful handling. In the minority of lessons that are less successful, this is usually due to teaching methods that lead to a slower pace and do not challenge pupils to give of their best. Some temporary teachers need a wider range of teaching strategies to engage all pupils.
22. Pupils' own learning skills are an important factor in their achievement. They are keen to learn, they concentrate well and have the confidence to think for themselves and contribute in lessons. They respond well to tasks set for homework and are able to use resources intelligently to find information and make sense of it. Very importantly, pupils

show respect and support for each other, irrespective of ability or ethnic background.

23. Teaching is good overall in English, mathematics, science, modern languages, design and technology, ICT, geography, religious education, music and physical education. It is very good in art and satisfactory in history. In science it is very good in Years 7 to 9, and in English, modern languages and music it is very good in Years 10 and 11. In physical education it is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11.
24. Most teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well in planning lessons. In many subjects, teachers' own enthusiasm for their subject is effective in motivating pupils. This is particularly true in art, where teachers thoroughly understand the art curriculum and plan extremely well to extend pupils' capabilities. In geography also, lessons are well planned and enthusiastically taught. Good subject knowledge is used skilfully in GCSE history lessons to build on pupils' previous learning by careful questioning and, in science, teachers are particularly effective in consolidating earlier learning before building on it. In design and technology, lessons have clear aims that are shared with pupils, who thus know what is expected and respond positively in return.
25. High expectations and a very clear concern that all pupils achieve are strong features of much teaching. In English, teachers know pupils well and develop imaginative approaches to support weaker pupils. Drama teachers select groups to ensure weaker pupils are supported, and as a result their performance improves. Religious education lessons make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development in a multi-cultural society, because teachers ensure that all pupils are included in discussions and presentations. In most modern language lessons, expectations are high but, occasionally, weak class control and low expectations lead to unsatisfactory learning. In physical education, dance lessons show consistently high expectations, but a few games lessons are not challenging enough, resulting in poor behaviour.
26. Homework is often used well to support learning, such as when pupils do individual or group research in preparation for a lesson. Pupils respond well to this and in one Year 10 PSE lesson, for example, pupils had researched various religious, historical and political aspects of the current world crisis and, as a result, were able to debate the situation with sympathetic understanding of one another's views. In science, mathematics, modern languages and music, homework is used well to consolidate and extend learning. Teachers also offer additional support in many subjects. In mathematics, for example, pupils have individual support during lunchtimes and, in science, teachers provide extra lessons after school. Many extra-curricular activities in ICT and music support learning in those subjects.
27. Marking and assessment are often used very effectively, though in some subjects further developments are needed. In drama, teachers clearly identify the skills pupils are learning and give them constructive feedback. Excellent assessment procedures in art give pupils highly focused targets for improving their work. Music teachers use questioning well to develop pupils' skills in listening and understanding. In mathematics, work is regularly marked and pupils set themselves targets, though these are often not specific enough. In science, geography, modern languages and religious education, while marking is generally careful, teachers need to identify clearer targets for children to improve.
28. Pupils respond well to the good teaching and are confident learners. In English, they feel secure in expressing and developing their own ideas. In mathematics, they have the confidence to discuss mathematical ideas, make their own notes and work both co-

operatively and independently. Pupils learn art very well because they enjoy the subject and respect their teachers. Mutual respect between pupils and teachers also aids progress in design and technology. Geography and religious education develop pupils' research and enquiry skills and their ability to think about issues. Pupils work co-operatively in groups in ICT and make independent choices about the best software to use for a task. In dance lessons, a good balance is established between the teacher's guidance and the pupils' creative effort, which leads to rapid progress.

29. In a minority of lessons, there is less learning because of a lack of pace. This is the case in some mixed-ability Year 7 English lessons and in a few mathematics lessons where oral work is too easy. In science and religious education, teaching occasionally lacks challenge and variety, resulting in slow learning. While teaching in history is satisfactory, lessons are often rather slow and lack variety of method.
30. The teaching of literacy across the school has been a focus at staff meetings for the last four years. Most teachers are conscientious in correcting spelling and grammar and do this with remarkable consistency. In some subjects, such as science, pupils continue to make spelling errors because there is no system for following up the corrections. Teachers aim to extend pupils' vocabulary and encourage the accurate use of subject terminology by means of clear displays of key words. Some teachers provide support for weaker pupils in the form of writing frameworks and models to enable them to write at length.
31. The teaching of numeracy is excellent. The use of numeracy in all subjects is carefully planned, taking full account of what pupils have already learned in mathematics. In art, for example, the spatial aspects of art are very well taught, together with associated vocabulary. In geography there is well-planned teaching of the use of statistical diagrams, map scales and bearings. In science and in design and technology, numeracy requirements, such as rearranging equations and conversion of units, are carefully woven into the teaching.
32. ICT is used extensively in teaching many subjects, although there are variations in how well it is used. The most common applications are to research information, often using the Internet, and to present pupils' work. Such use is planned regularly into history and religious education lessons. In geography, pupils use the department's own websites, from which they find information and import photographs. In art, pupils use ICT well for research and presentation, though its use as a creative tool needs further development. Pupils use ICT in design and technology to analyse data. They do little work on control and computer-aided design and manufacture, though there are plans to develop this. ICT is used in modern foreign languages to draft and improve coursework and pupils extend their use of language through the Internet. Some pupils use a computer-based learning package to develop their literacy and numeracy skills.
33. The school is very successful in meeting the needs of all pupils. The starting point is in the very high expectations set by the headteacher and staff, and their refusal to accept underachievement. The school has established an ethos in which all pupils expect to achieve, and as a result there are few differences between the achievements of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds. The school does, however, monitor standards across ethnic groups and provides a very effective network of support for pupils likely to underachieve. Pupils' achievement is also enhanced by the strong support they show for each other.
34. Pupils with special educational needs and others in need of support are taught well by their subject teachers and by their support teachers. Subject teachers know pupils well

and sometimes create different tasks to match their ability. All teachers consult pupils' individual education plans to aid their lesson preparation. Some of these plans have clear subject-specific targets, but in some subjects the targets need to be made clearer to help pupils make progress. Teachers from the learning support department give pupils well-planned assistance and keep notes on their progress. In the most effective lessons, there is very good joint planning with the class teacher, though this does not always happen. Support teachers provide a wide range of types of support, including in-class support, withdrawal work, individual or group counselling, and home visits. These all make a very valuable contribution to pupils' achievements. Pupils with special educational needs improve their learning skills as they move up the school and their learning is better in Years 10 and 11 than Years 7 to 9.

35. Pupils whose first language is not English learn very well. Their support teachers liaise well with subject staff and know what pupils will be studying. They check whether subject materials are suitable, and often make special resources for their pupils. They have a good understanding of most subjects and have built up a set of resources for pupils at all levels of language learning. Almost all pupils who are learning English study the same work as their peers, carefully adapted for their individual needs. Occasionally, pupils with low levels of English are given individual tasks. In a Year 7 ICT lesson, for example, a pupil's knowledge of English made it impossible for her to understand the information about hedgehogs that pupils were finding from the Internet. The support teacher created an imaginative exercise in desktop publishing, incorporating text and images to form an illustrated dictionary. This task provided a good opportunity to develop both language and ICT skills.

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

36. The school's curriculum has been developed effectively to meet the needs of all pupils. It makes a good contribution to the standards achieved and prepares pupils well for the next stage in their education and for adult life.
37. The range of subjects studied is appropriately broad. In Years 7 to 9, drama and PSE are taught in addition to the subjects of the National Curriculum. In Years 7 and 8 there is a choice of German or Spanish as a second foreign language, but only one foreign language is studied in Year 9. Pupils also study art history and music history in Year 9. Swimming is not currently offered in the physical education curriculum as the local pool has been demolished.
38. In Years 10 and 11, most pupils study nine GCSEs. GCSE options include business studies, physical education, graphic art and ICT, in addition to other subjects continued from Years 7 to 9. There are also vocational courses, such as child development and travel and tourism, and the opportunity to study Urdu and Gujarati after school. Other after-school options include statistics and a second foreign language. A few pupils choose to take more than nine GCSEs, and a number of other pupils are formally disapplied from science and design and technology in order to study subjects that are more relevant to their needs, and to take part in work experience. Some of these pupils take biology instead of a full science course, but are held back because they struggle with the depth of knowledge required. The school has already planned to improve this situation. A well-planned and highly successful Certificate of Achievement course in French stimulates the interest of lower-attaining pupils, culminating in a trip to France when they are required to speak French. The flexibility contained in the GCSE option system is one important reason that there is very little underachievement and pupils' overall achievements in Years 10 and 11 are excellent.

39. There are currently limited opportunities for studying two modern foreign languages. In the GCSE options, too few pupils chose a second language to make the subject viable in school time, and, instead, the school offers a second language after school. There are currently 14 pupils in Year 11 and none in Year 10. The study of only one language in Year 9 is unpopular with some parents. Future plans for the current Year 8 include the study of two languages in Year 9, with the option to continue at GCSE level.
40. There have been improvements to the curriculum since the last inspection. The National Curriculum requirements for design and technology are now fulfilled in Years 10 and 11. The planning to ensure that each year's work builds appropriately on the previous year has improved and is now good, both within subjects and with primary schools. There have been major developments in the ICT curriculum. Extensive use is made of ICT in many subjects, most commonly for research and presentation of work. However, pupils in Years 10 and 11 who do not take GCSE ICT miss the section of the National Curriculum on using computers to measure and control events.
41. The teaching of literacy is very well provided for. Many subject departments have given the improvement of literacy a great deal of consideration. In modern languages, for example, dictionary skills are promoted, and the emphasis on learning grammar helps pupils to understand the correct use of tenses. In design and technology, key literacy points are identified in lesson plans. A computer-based learning programme is used twice a week before school to help a small group of pupils with serious literacy problems. A successful summer school was held for Year 6 pupils with weak literacy, to help them overcome difficulties in literacy they might face on joining the school. English teachers are considering ways of introducing the National Literacy Strategy, but this is not yet embedded in teachers' planning.
42. The arrangements for teaching numeracy within all subjects are excellent. Pupils' numeracy skills are built up from what they already know when they transfer to the school. Some have experienced the support of a summer school, with teaching shared by primary and secondary teachers. All teachers have copies of a skills book, and hence use consistent methods of teaching the mathematical topics that are needed in other subjects. Numeracy skills are carefully planned into the teaching of all subjects, and full account is taken of what pupils have learned in mathematics lessons. In art, for example, spatial aspects, together with associated vocabulary, build upon pupils' mathematical knowledge of shape and space. The teaching of statistical diagrams, map scales and bearings is planned well in geography lessons and older pupils use graphical methods and analysis of data in their study of rivers. In science and in design and technology, mathematical topics such as rearranging equations and conversion of units are carefully woven into the teaching. Even in subjects where there are fewer opportunities to use numeracy, such as French, the planning is good. In addition, form tutors have a pack of activities to give pupils extra practice using number.
43. A very active approach is taken to ensuring that all pupils have equal opportunities to learn and succeed, irrespective of their background or ability. This is central to the school's aims, which are clearly communicated and openly discussed, and are understood and shared by pupils. There is regular monitoring of how pupils from different ethnic groups fare in examination results, attendance, rewards and punishments. This monitoring has led to the very effective arrangements for supporting pupils who are likely to underachieve. There is little difference in the achievements of pupils from different ethnic groups, particularly in most recent results, though the school remains alert. There are many opportunities for pupils to study, compare and discuss a wide range of different cultures, so that they have a healthy understanding of what it

means to live in a multi-cultural society. Pupils show great respect for one another's cultures and often work and socialise together in mixed ethnic groups. The school buildings are not at present designed to admit physically disabled pupils, though there are intentions to rectify this. Plans to provide extension activities for gifted and talented pupils are at an early stage, but show good potential.

44. The school has an imaginative and effective approach to pupils who have special educational needs or are in need of extra support for other reasons. A number of pupils enter the school with a range of overlapping needs, including learning difficulties, behavioural difficulties, English as an additional language, or being likely to underachieve. In order to meet all these needs flexibly and efficiently, a range of provision is co-ordinated within the learning support department. The provision includes additional support for learning or behaviour, help with English and specific support for Afro-Caribbean or Asian pupils, as well home-school liaison and individual mentoring. There are very good systems for identifying pupils who need support and tracking their progress. Through effective co-ordination, each girl is supported by just one teacher, who is best suited to meet her needs. This co-ordination also gives more pupils in more classes access to specialist help and makes the most efficient use of the staff. The statements and individual education plans of pupils who are on the register of special educational needs are properly completed.
45. Where appropriate, pupils with English as an additional language do the same work as other pupils, because of very good support from teachers in class. Where necessary, support teachers produce special materials in simpler language. Pupils' progress becomes more rapid as they move up the school, partly because the learning support department keeps them on the register and maintains an interest in their progress. Pupils' progress is also enhanced by the very good relationships they enjoy with other pupils, who often help them with language in class.
46. The learning support department also co-ordinates the programme for gifted and talented pupils. This has only recently been started and is part of the Excellence in Cities initiative. There are good procedures for identifying gifted and talented pupils and appropriate plans to provide individual programmes to extend and widen pupils' experiences and monitor their progress. The plans have good potential, but it is too early to judge their impact on standards.
47. The provision of extra-curricular activities is very good. It includes a much improved and popular range of sporting activities such as basketball, netball and table tennis, and innovative dance clubs that celebrate pupils' own and other cultures. Pupils also compete in inter-form and inter-school competitions and have access to club facilities in the local area. They can work towards the Duke of Edinburgh award and Junior Sports Leader award. Pupils have many opportunities within the expressive arts. Music and drama are both very strong and make a positive contribution to pupils' creative development. For example, the special choir performed in the Millennium Dome. Other clubs such as chess, computers and graphic art add to pupils' experiences. In addition, many subjects offer support sessions for homework and extended study. A multi-cultural support group and 'drop-in' counselling session offer pupils support in their personal development. There are trips abroad to Greece and France and an outdoor adventure trip for pupils in Year 8. The Making a Difference Club gives pupils an opportunity to use their initiative and contribute to school improvement.
48. Provision for pupils' personal development in PSE lessons is very good. This is a well-planned programme, which fulfils the school's aim to promote pupils' personal and moral development. It includes sex and drugs education, as well as careers education

and guidance. Visiting speakers make a strong contribution. The programme is responsive to pupils' ideas: for example, a unit on personal finance has been included at their request. Citizenship is being taught this year for the first time to pupils in Year 10. In Years 7 to 9, PSE is taught by form tutors, while in Years 10 and 11 a specialist team has been created to complement the work of tutors. Most lessons are based on discussion and pupils frequently contribute their own well-researched presentations. Many pupils agreed that they value PSE as an opportunity to exchange ideas on topics that are important to them, to explore their own views and to express themselves in a secure environment.

49. Careers education and guidance are good. Careers lessons start in Year 7. Good use is made of local businesses and professions. For example, the school's own work experience programme includes a breakfast meeting where Year 10 pupils are introduced to a range of employers. Work experience placements are considered very carefully in an effort to match them to pupils' interests. Pupils are encouraged to use the careers section in the learning resource centre and are offered advice from the careers service. They participate in mock interviews with local college representatives when they visit specially organised careers events.
50. The school makes good use of the local community for work experience and for pupils' personal development. Recent opportunities include visits to factories such as 'The Body Shop' to learn about ICT skills in the work place. Representatives from local industry are invited into the school to attend workshops in key employment skills. Business partners also support individual pupils in a carefully planned mentoring scheme. Links with local companies have led to the school being supplied with a number of computers and associated furniture. The school intends to make business links a focus of further development.
51. The school has very good links with its partner schools, particularly at primary level. These ensure that the transition from one stage of education to the next is as smooth as possible. There has, for example, been a joint project to compare the teaching methods used in primary and secondary schools. Departments are active in ensuring good subject links with primary school teachers, so that the pupils feel comfortable and well informed when they arrive at the school. The school is shortly to host a co-ordination meeting for ten local primary schools. There are good links with post-16 colleges, and representatives are invited into school to talk to pupils and take part in workshops.
52. The school makes very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, both implicitly within subjects, and through other learning opportunities.
53. Spiritual development is well supported. The school meets the statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship, in that all assemblies, whether of the whole school, a year group, or a tutor group, include time for reflection on the theme of the week. Frequently this is in the form of a prayer and in some cases pupils themselves compose their own prayers. In religious education lessons, pupils are provided with frequent opportunities to acquire insight into the values of major world faiths, and to reflect on fundamental issues. In art, pupils consider questions about the nature of creativity. In English, the study of poetry and other forms of literature raises questions of a spiritual nature, and in drama there is a clear focus on concentration, reflection and the need for empathy.
54. There is very good provision for moral development. The school's ethos statement emphasises tolerance and respect for others. This is reinforced by staff in their

interactions with pupils, and by many discussions in, for example, PSE, drama and English. In geography, pupils consider moral questions associated with the globalisation of trade and the inequality of resources in the world. Most assembly themes have a moral content. Pupils clearly are able to distinguish right from wrong and have strong views on important moral issues such as racism, prejudice and intolerance.

55. The provision for pupils' social development is excellent. Pupils show concern for others and are encouraged to organise fund-raising for a range of charities. Pupils have many opportunities to exercise responsibility: there are two head girls who chair the school council, senior and junior prefects, form captains and library monitors. Potential head girls make an application and give a presentation to a group of senior staff and a governor: a procedure that prepares them well for future interviews. The Year 10 work experience provides another context in which pupils can develop social skills, as well as learn about working life. Many subjects, notably drama and modern languages, provide opportunities for pupils to work together collaboratively. Some older pupils train to be peer mentors and mediators, both of which are challenging opportunities for personal development.
56. The school makes very good provision for pupils' cultural development. The subjects of music, drama, dance, modern languages, history and English all make a good contribution to pupils' knowledge of their own and other cultures. There is a very strong contribution from art: western cultural traditions are taught, but pupils also use other cultures for artistic inspiration, as in some very striking, large three-dimensional portraits on display in the school. Many cultural events take place outside the classroom: school productions, drama workshops, choirs and orchestras, a dance group, a 'Readathon', visits and talks by visiting speakers. Pupils from minority ethnic cultures have many opportunities to learn about and celebrate their own culture. These include classes in Gujarati and Urdu. Both parents and pupils recognise and value the multi-cultural nature of the school and the opportunity it offers for pupils of all ethnic groups to learn from each other and to work in harmony.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

57. The procedures for ensuring pupils' welfare are very good. Pupils of all ages say that they feel well looked after during the school day and that their teachers value them highly. This leads to mutually high regard, which forms the cornerstone of the school's successful system of care and social inclusion. Pupils and staff are united by a strong sense of school identity. They share a determination to make the most of every opportunity and to achieve their best. The result is a happy and lively, yet disciplined school. Through the very good links with contributing primary schools, incoming Year 7 girls receive a warm welcome. Junior prefects help during the Year 6 induction day and provide a familiar face to new pupils once they arrive in Year 7. This helps to ensure that pupils settle down quickly once they arrive.
58. Members of staff have a sincere commitment to pupils' welfare and provide very good pastoral support. They are familiar with child protection, and the procedures are very good. Routine health and safety procedures are good and statutory requirements are met. There are very good arrangements for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development. Pupils generally have the same tutor throughout their time in school and therefore get to know them very well. Form tutors keep a close check on pupils' attendance, punctuality and personal planners. As well as encouraging a basic work ethic, this also helps to keep tutors in touch with any personal problems. Form tutors work closely with the head of year and there are very good links with other members of

staff, including the multi-lingual teaching staff, special needs co-ordinator and educational psychologist. Good teamwork contributes to pupils' welfare and their academic achievement.

59. Some pupils are supported by a personal mentor. This support is generally offered to pupils who have personal problems, who want to leave school before their exams, or who are at risk of underachieving. In addition, however, some pupils refer themselves if they feel in need of support with their studies. Mentors come from a variety of sources including the school staff, parents, local industry and through the Excellence in Cities initiative. There are also less formal 'drop-in' sessions run by the behaviour support teacher and the multi-lingual home-school liaison teacher. Pupils appreciate the individual help they receive through these schemes and the contribution they make towards helping them progress.
60. Procedures for promoting good behaviour have improved since the last inspection and are very good. Members of staff have very high expectations and are good role models. Pupils have a very clear idea of what is, and what is not, acceptable. The majority are motivated by the positive ethos and the rewards system, while for those who behave inappropriately there is a flexible system of sanctions, which is organised to suit the individual misdemeanour. Pupils report that bullying is rare. Procedures to deal with bullying are effective and parents and pupils are confident that any such behaviour is dealt with very firmly. Although there are many different nationalities and cultures within the school, racial harmony is very good and racist incidents are rare.
61. The systems for monitoring and promoting attendance have improved since the last inspection and are excellent. They have led to a level of attendance that has been above the national average for the last two years. Pupils with intermittent attendance or poor punctuality are monitored closely and may be offered mentoring. The high priority that the school places on good attendance is an important factor in pupils' outstanding achievements in GCSE. Teachers log attendance at the start of every lesson and spot checks are made to identify any pupils who truant during the school day. The school thus monitors individual attendance closely and emerging trends are quickly identified. Parents are contacted on the first day of absence and the number of unauthorised absences has fallen to almost zero. Any pupil whose attendance gives cause for concern is reported to her head of year, who holds weekly meetings with the education welfare officer. This liaison is effective and is backed by a variety of incentive schemes, including certificates for outstandingly good attendance and the opportunity to go on trips to nearby theme parks. Parents appreciate the high level of care the school takes over attendance.
62. Procedures for assessing pupils' progress have significantly improved since the last inspection, when weaknesses were seen in marking and in the use of assessment to match teaching tasks to pupils' needs. Most aspects of assessment are now adequate and the procedures are still being developed. Further improvements are needed, however, to ensure pupils' attainment is monitored against national standards and they know clearly what to do to make further progress.
63. Assessment procedures within individual subjects are generally good. A school marking policy is now used consistently and is understood by pupils and many parents. Assessment is particularly good in art, in which there is careful target setting for each lesson and homework. In most subjects, tests at the end of each section of work are used to assess pupils' attainment. However, younger pupils in many subjects, including mathematics, geography and physical education, are not generally informed where they stand in relation to the levels of the National Curriculum. Science has a good system

for tracking pupils' progress, but is not yet using it effectively to identify and support underachieving pupils. In design and technology, assessments are shared with GCSE pupils to help them improve coursework, but are not used effectively enough to monitor the progress of individual pupils in Years 7 to 9. Parents and pupils are invited to a meeting with the form tutor twice a year, in which progress is reviewed and pupils are set targets. Most parents appreciate these meetings, but pupils' targets currently lack specific objectives for progressing in each subject.

64. Assessment information is used satisfactorily in most subjects to plan future lessons. In physical education and modern foreign languages, this is often done informally when teachers modify their planning as a result of pupils' response to a previous lesson. In preparation for GCSE mathematics examinations, test performance is carefully analysed and used to focus on each pupil's needs and areas of common difficulty.
65. The school maintains a central database of pupils' results from National Curriculum and other tests. Considerable efforts have been made to collect pupils' records from primary schools. Teachers are given records of pupils in their classes, but not all teachers are skilled in interpreting the information. The database does not yet include regular assessments in each subject linked to national standards, though it is planned to collect these on a half-termly basis. The school has appropriate plans to increase the information available, and to use it to improve the monitoring of progress, setting of targets and provision of information for parents. To achieve this it will be necessary to increase the expertise in up-to-date techniques for analysing data. The school currently monitors the results of national tests and examinations and checks on the progress of the different ethnic groups. The results are helpful, but would be even more so if better techniques were used.
66. There are very good procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs and those in need of additional support, and for tracking their progress. Pupils have individual education plans, with targets that are based on test results and information drawn from a wide range of teachers and support staff. It is also intended that subject departments should add specific targets for the subject, but this is not always done and needs to be checked when the individual education plans are reviewed. Pupils' progress is effectively monitored through records kept by learning support teachers, and at meetings of the learning support department.
67. Assessment of pupils with English as an additional language is good. Each pupil's level of English is assessed carefully and checked against the National Curriculum. Learning support teachers keep detailed records of progress in English and in other subjects. As pupils make progress in English, the learning support department continues to keep an overview of their further development. This includes tracking the successes in GCSE examinations of many pupils who arrived with little English and subsequently made very good progress.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

68. The school places great emphasis on working closely with parents and sees a strong partnership between home and school as fundamental to its continuing drive to raise standards. The school is over-subscribed and receives more than three times as many applications as it has places. Parents hold the school in high regard and the majority support their children well in their studies. Links between home and school are good and the parents of around four out of five pupils attend consultation evenings. A similar number come along to the target-setting meetings. Almost all parents of pupils with special educational needs attend their child's annual review. Parental support plays an

important part in encouraging children to work hard and achieve a good standard of work.

69. The views of parents expressed in the pre-inspection questionnaire and the parents' meeting indicate that they value almost all aspects of the school's work. There were few specific concerns, though some parents would like to receive more information about the progress their child is making. The inspection found that the overall level of information provided is good, and compares well with what is done in other schools. All parents receive written information each term about how their daughter is getting on in each subject, and this is accompanied by an opportunity to discuss future targets with either the form tutor or individual subject teachers. In addition to the annual consultation meeting and the target-setting meetings, parents are able to approach staff at any time to discuss their child's progress, and they indicate that they feel comfortable in doing so. The headteacher also holds a parents' surgery each week. There is a very readable termly newsletter. Parents of pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 receive detailed guides to each subject and there is a very useful study guide for Years 10 and 11, in which parents are clearly advised on how they can provide help at home. The school therefore puts parents in a good position to provide help and support. Pupils' annual reports, however, do need to be more specific about how pupils are getting on in relation to national standards, and what it is that they need to do in order to improve. The school prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents provide much useful information, but the annual report does not include the school's targets for GCSE performance.
70. Parents' involvement in the day-to-day life of the school is good and they encourage their children to work hard and do their best. Although there is no parent teacher association, the school has compiled a list of volunteers and this is used when help is needed. Parents encourage their daughters to attend regularly and very few take family holidays during the term. Pupils' personal planners provide the main channel of communication between home and school and are used to good effect. Parents are asked to sign their children's personal planners each week and form tutors monitor whether or not this happens.
71. Parents of pupils with special educational needs have a copy of their child's individual education plan and are appropriately involved in review meetings. The school maintains good contact with the parents of pupils whose first language is not English, and uses interpreters as necessary to inform them of their daughters' progress. Part of the role of the multi-lingual home-school liaison teacher is to keep parents informed about what their children are doing in school. The learning support department arranges home visits as necessary.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

72. The leadership and management of the headteacher and key staff are very good and are very important factors in pupils' standards of academic and personal development. The leadership of the headteacher in particular is excellent, and she is well supported by the senior management team. The school has very clear aims, expressed in the school motto 'Progress to Excellence' and in the school's ethos statement, which stresses the value of each individual pupil and member of staff, and their potential to succeed. These aims are reflected in all the school's work and are known and shared not only by staff but also by the great majority of pupils. The school sets very high expectations for what can be achieved, which, combined with the good support given to individual pupils and staff, leads to strong motivation and levels of confidence. The school's success is enhanced by very good strategic planning for improvement, which not only leads to

better provision, but also reinforces the culture of effort and success. Pupils perceive that both they and their school are progressing.

73. The governing body is very effective in guiding the direction of the school and monitoring its progress. Governors are very committed to the school, are well informed and make sure they are trained to fulfil their responsibilities. They are fully involved in the school's developments, having taken a full day's conference to discuss strategic direction. Each of the governors' committees takes responsibility for one section of the school development plan and monitors progress at every committee meeting. Through regular reports from each committee, the full governing body oversees the work of the school. Governors know the school well and are also very supportive of the many innovations with which the school is involved. They regularly take part in reviewing school policies. The governing body fulfils almost all its statutory responsibilities, except that it has not formally set the school's targets for GCSE performance or reported these to parents in the annual report.
74. The school is efficiently administered. There are thorough and up-to-date policies on all aspects of the school. Subject handbooks and guidance for teachers are well written. There are comprehensive staff and governor handbooks. The school development plan is a very thorough and comprehensive document, which is firmly founded on the school's aims, is well known by all governors, teachers and non-teaching staff, and forms the basis of all school planning. The school development plan supports continual improvement in the standards reached by pupils, the quality of the buildings and facilities, and the school's involvement in a wide range of national initiatives. While the school is innovating on many fronts, coherence is maintained because these reinforce each other and build on the school's strengths.
75. The school has recently become a Beacon School, that is a school identified as an example of good practice and which provides professional support to other schools. Plans are at an early stage, but include the development of further links with local primary schools and provision of support on a range of management procedures. It is also intended to make use of the school's expertise in teaching literacy and numeracy and to develop further the opportunities for gifted and talented pupils. These plans link well with the school's existing priorities for development.
76. Progress in the implementation of the school development plan is carefully reviewed and there is a high degree of evaluation, with evaluation reports routinely written on all new activities. Pupils are regularly consulted and are themselves involved in some evaluation processes, such as a review with the governors of the equal opportunities policy and the very thorough survey of school meals carried out by the Making a Difference Club. Aspects of teaching, such as lesson planning, marking and homework, are monitored by heads of department, and overseen by the deputy and assistant headteachers, through a well-established system of line management. The headteacher observes all teachers teaching at least annually and it is planned to introduce a system of departmental review, in which heads of department will observe lessons. There has been good improvement in the monitoring and support of teaching since the last inspection.
77. The leadership and management of subjects are good in science, design and technology, ICT and music. Management is very good in mathematics, religious education and art. It is satisfactory in modern languages and history. There are currently acting heads of department in English, geography and physical education, who are managing these subjects well.

78. The management of the learning support department is very good, with excellent systems for identifying and tracking pupils in need of additional support and co-ordinating the work of the learning support teachers. It is a major school aim to ensure that pupils do not underachieve and the department is given the full support of the senior management team through regular meetings between the head of department, a deputy headteacher and an assistant headteacher. Staff are deployed as efficiently and effectively as possible so that many pupils are supported, each in a co-ordinated way. The learning support staff, including those supporting pupils whose first language is not English, are well qualified and take deserved pride in seeing their pupils develop so well.
79. There is very good support for teaching and non-teaching staff. The induction of new staff and newly qualified teachers is very good, with a thorough programme of briefing sessions and good informal support. The school has gained the Investors in People award, and professional development is very well organised for both teaching and non-teaching staff. Performance management is well established and quality time is given to meetings between teachers and their managers to discuss their development. The school's ethos, which is to value each individual, offer support and expect continual improvement, underpins the processes for staff as well as pupils. The head and senior staff are very aware that through valuing and supporting teachers, a contribution can be made to easing the current national crisis in recruitment and retention. For similar reasons the school is exploring the possibility of becoming a centre for school-centred initial teacher training, and it is already a good provider of initial teacher training. All teachers received computer training in the year preceding the inspection, though new teachers now need to be given the same opportunity.
80. Test and examination results are analysed and the school's performance is compared with other schools, both nationally and in the borough. The school monitors results, attendance, rewards and exclusions according to pupils' ethnic backgrounds, and uses these data to evaluate its equal opportunities policy. This monitoring leads to appropriate action, such as the establishment of the support network for pupils in danger of underachieving. Some of the techniques of analysing examination results need updating in line with the latest practice, and more thorough procedures are needed to set appropriately challenging GCSE targets, which are at present set unrealistically low and are greatly exceeded by pupils' actual results.
81. The systems of financial management are very good and the strategic use of financial resources by the headteacher, bursar and governors to improve the school is excellent. Four years ago the school was in deficit. Since then, not only has the deficit been turned into a surplus, but there have been several major developments to the buildings, learning resources have been improved and the number of computers available for pupil use has been brought up to a high level. The school's basic budget is below average for London schools, but it generates significant additional income through letting the buildings and bidding for specific grants. The surplus at the end of the 2000/1 financial year was £91,000, nearly four per cent of the budget. Through judicious spending on educational resources, this will be reduced by the end of 2001/2 to £27,000. Financial planning is closely linked to school priorities through the school development plan. The construction of a three-year budget plan permits future implications of financial decisions to be considered. Very good use is made of best value principles, not only by seeking quotations, but also by comparing the school's performance and expenditure with other schools, and through consultation with pupils and parents. In this way, the school has developed better value services for personnel, catering and insurance. In relation to pupils' very good achievements, the school gives very good value for money.
82. The school makes good use of new technology for administrative purposes. Pupil

information is stored on computer and used for administration and monitoring attendance. A computer database of assessment information is being established, but as yet not all staff have access to this to check on pupils' progress. ICT is used very effectively to administer school finances and to present good quality reports to senior staff and governors. Senior staff use email to communicate and the Internet is used as a source of data by which the school can compare itself with other schools.

83. There is a good match between the qualifications and experience of the teaching and support staff and the subjects they teach. The school has had difficulties recruiting teachers and at the time of the inspection there were a number of teachers from overseas on short-term contracts, as well as three acting heads of department. The headteacher is committed to ensuring that all teachers are qualified to teach their subject and temporary teachers receive very good support in the school. There is a conscious effort to retain good teachers by providing them with support and professional development.
84. The accommodation has been improved since the last inspection and is now of good quality. The school is increasingly popular and this has necessitated a significant amount of new building. New facilities include two food technology classrooms, a sports hall, a music block and a drama studio. These improvements are of high quality and have helped to raise morale and create a sense of success, as well as giving extra space. Maintenance staff work hard to keep the buildings clean and well maintained. Pupils look after the school, and the learning environment is enhanced by many imaginative and well-presented displays of pupils' work. There are some shortcomings within the accommodation for physical education, though these do not impose direct limitations on the teaching of the curriculum. Problems with the underground drainage mean that the playing fields are often not safe to use after wet weather. In addition, the school has plans to refurbish the changing rooms, which are in a poor state of repair and are too small to accommodate large groups.
85. The level of learning resources is good and significantly better than at the last inspection. Resources are very good in modern foreign languages and ICT. There is an excellent ratio of computers to pupils. The equipment is modern, fast and well maintained. In mathematics there is a good supply of textbooks for use in class and at home. There are, however, a few weaknesses. In design and technology there is a lack of some modern equipment and specialist textbooks. The subjects that do not have their own computers occasionally find difficulty in getting access to the ICT suites.
86. The library has also been improved, to create an attractive learning resource centre. The learning resource centre makes a significant contribution to pupils' independent learning skills in encouraging them to use reading materials and ICT resources. A full-time centre manager has a good knowledge of the resources and helps pupils in their research. The manager is ably assisted by a group of pupils who take turns to act as librarians and help other pupils. The centre is open throughout the day and after school. It is well used by subject departments. Money has been spent on new book stock, as well as other learning materials. There is an adequate number of computers and CD-ROMs. There is a good borrowing rate of books. A new computer system is being developed, which will give information about pupils' reading habits and enable pupils to search for information on specific topics.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

87. The school is already performing very well and is continually developing. In order to raise standards further, the governors and senior management team should:

- (1) Further improve assessment procedures by:
 - linking assessments to national standards, so that pupils have a clear idea of where they stand and how to progress;*
(Paragraphs 62, 63, 65, 103, 110, 124, 129, 179)
 - giving parents clearer information on what pupils have learned and what they need to improve;
(Paragraphs 63, 69)
 - providing staff with access to the school assessment database and training on how to use it.
(Paragraphs 65, 82)

- (2) Improve the setting and monitoring of school targets by:
 - up-dating the techniques used to monitor the progress of groups of pupils and to set whole school targets;*
(Paragraphs 12, 65, 80)
 - making sure that governors approve the school targets and inform parents in their annual report.
(Paragraphs 69, 73)

In addition to the above issues for action, the school should give consideration to:

- using the planned introduction of department reviews to share good practice in ensuring all lessons include challenging activities and have good pace;
(Paragraphs 29, 76, 93, 101, 110, 134, 173, 178)
- reviewing the arrangements for pupils to study two modern languages in Years 9, 10 and 11;*
(Paragraphs 39, 159)
- ensuring all pupils cover the full National Curriculum in ICT in Years 10 and 11;
(Paragraphs 40, 141)
- improving the girls' changing rooms* and the playing fields.
(Paragraphs 84, 175)

** These issues are already included in school planning*

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	159
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	58

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	13	49	59	33	5	0	0
Percentage	8	31	37	21	3	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	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	853
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	162

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	6
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	121

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	299

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	22
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	26

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0

National comparative data	7.7
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National comparative data	1.1
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Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2001	0	158

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	123	115	117
	Total	123	115	117
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (80)	73 (68)	74 (49)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	25 (42)	47 (36)	42 (21)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	125	129	87
	Total	125	129	87
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	79 (65)	82 (62)	55 (55)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	41 (25)	44 (38)	28 (26)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	0	143	143

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	84	143	143
	Total	84	143	143
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	59 (58)	100 (96)	100 (100)
	National	49.8 (47.4)	86.6 (90.6)	94.5 (95.6)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	47.5 (43.5)
	National	39.1 (38.4)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	185
Black – African heritage	51
Black – other	65
Indian	139
Pakistani	90
Bangladeshi	13
Chinese	5
White	217
Any other minority ethnic group	88

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	48.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.5

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	7.2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	155

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	23

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	16.0
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	13.3
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	4
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	22	
Black – African heritage	2	
Black – other	4	
Indian	2	
Pakistani	3	
Bangladeshi	0	
Chinese	0	
White	15	
Other minority ethnic groups	1	

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

Financial information

Financial year	2000/1
	£
Total income	2452269
Total expenditure	2485859
Expenditure per pupil	3035
Balance brought forward from previous year	125081
Balance carried forward to next year	91491

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	853
Number of questionnaires returned	233

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	54	40	4	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	53	41	3	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	52	41	4	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	43	44	10	2	1
The teaching is good.	47	46	4	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	40	44	11	1	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	51	40	4	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	73	25	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	42	43	10	1	4
The school is well led and managed.	60	35	1	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	54	39	2	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	44	39	7	3	8

Other issues raised by parents

Parents' views are generally very positive. They believe pupils reach good standards and that teachers make a big effort to support their progress. Behaviour and attendance are good. Pupils are treated with respect and it is a truly multi-cultural school. The buildings and facilities, behaviour and the school's reputation have all improved in recent years.

Parents are concerned that pupils can take only one foreign language in Year 9. Some parents feel that communication between school and home could be improved. Some parents believe that the amount of homework set is inconsistent. Some are displeased with the quality and price of school meals.

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 **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards are well above average and very high compared with similar schools.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in Years 10 to 11, and very good progress overall.
- Good and often very good teaching encourages a personal response to literature.
- Pupils want to do well and teachers enable them to succeed.
- Very good relationships between teachers and pupils enhance learning.

Areas for improvement

- The pace in some lessons in Years 7 to 9 is rather slow.
- The objectives of the National Literacy Strategy need to be more firmly embedded in departmental practice.

88. Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were above average and well above results in similar schools. They were average when compared with girls' results nationally. There has been an improving trend in the last four years, albeit with some fluctuations, including a slight dip in 2001. When compared with pupils' attainment on entry to the school, which is below average, the results represent very good achievement by the end of Year 9.
89. In 2001, GCSE English results were well above average, above the national average for girls, and very high compared with similar schools. These results represent outstanding achievement in Years 10 to 11. There is a similar picture in the results for GCSE English literature. There has been a rising trend since 1998 in both GCSE English and English literature results, which have been consistently above average.
90. In the work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 are also above average. Pupils listen well and talk with confidence, although rarely at length in the lessons observed. Most read aloud fluently, with good understanding, although the comprehension of weaker pupils is restricted by poor vocabulary. Most pupils are beginning to develop analytical skills in their response to literature, and can comment perceptively on character and theme. Pupils in top sets in Year 9 show an ability to analyse the way writers create atmosphere. Many write fluently and accurately, developing their ideas at length. There is a great deal of lively original writing. Very good progress is seen as pupils respond to teachers' increasing demands, and benefit from the methods used to help them overcome difficulties. Pupils in top sets extend their private reading and take on the challenge of more demanding texts. Most pupils with special educational needs make steady progress, often as a result of good support in class. Their writing improves after careful re-drafting. Pupils whose first language is not English make good progress: many become more confident as a result of support both from their teachers and from other pupils in group work. There is no significant difference in the standards reached by the different ethnic groups in the school.

91. By the age of 16 standards are well above average. Pupils are active listeners, attentive to their teachers and responsive to each other in class discussions. Many are articulate speakers, answering questions thoughtfully and expressing their own opinions and ideas confidently. Many pupils show a good personal response to literature. They write detailed comparative analyses of the texts studied, with good technical control. Many in lower sets are able to write engaging personal narrative. There is much original writing of a high standard and pupils make imaginative use of ICT. The outstanding progress seen is partly the result of sound planning and thorough teaching: pupils are well prepared for their examinations. It is also in part due to the excellent attitudes shown by the pupils themselves. Pupils enjoy work in English. They come to school prepared to work hard and show a high level of application and concentration.
92. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, and is frequently very good. Teachers have high expectations of pupils of all abilities, who extend their skills and deepen their understanding in many different ways. In a very good lesson with a Year 10 class studying poems from other cultures, the teacher's lively, humorous approach and skilful questioning enabled pupils to explore accent, dialect and language used in a social context, and then to recognise the techniques used in a poem written in dialect. Good classroom management is a feature of many lessons: there is no disruption to learning and teachers deal with poor behaviour tactfully and firmly. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their pupils' individual strengths and weaknesses, and develop imaginative approaches to support weaker pupils. Very good relationships in class create an atmosphere in which pupils feel secure in expressing and developing their own ideas. This is of particular benefit to pupils whose first language is not English.
93. Work in English is being well managed until the new head of department takes up post. The ethos of collaboration within the department and concern for all pupils is being maintained. At present there is no formal monitoring of teaching, although a great deal takes place informally. Future developments should focus on embedding the National Literacy Strategy objectives into teachers' planning in Years 7 to 9. In practice this will also help to overcome the loss of pace in lessons that sometimes occurs, particularly in the mixed ability classes in Year 7.
94. Since the last inspection, results have improved and better use is now made of records of pupils' assessments. A recent development has been that all Year 11 pupils have been entered early for GCSE English, in November of the examination year, so that they can concentrate on the GCSE literature studies for the rest of the year. It is too early to judge the impact of this arrangement. Overall this is a successful department, committed to raising standards and to continual improvement.

Drama

Overall, the quality of provision in drama is **good**.

Strengths

- Good and often very good teaching enables pupils to develop a sound range of drama skills.
- Drama makes a very important contribution to pupils' personal development.

Areas for improvement

- Examination results in GCSE drama have declined over the last few years.

95. Standards in drama are average at the age of 14, and frequently higher, but GCSE drama results have declined over the last few years and are now below the national average. This is partly a reflection of the prior attainment of the pupils who choose to study GCSE drama from the options on offer.
96. In Years 7 to 9, pupils develop basic drama skills. They have particular strengths in the use of movement to express mood or emotion, in group collaboration and in evaluative skills. Concentration and control improve as a result of specifically designed units in the course. The reflection that takes place at the end of lessons and as part of homework is valuable in contributing to pupils' learning and their personal development. By the end of Year 9 pupils have acquired a familiarity with the terminology of drama, although they are not always comfortable using it. By the age of 16, pupils taking GCSE drama have improved their skills in group work, but do not always use their drama skills to full effect in their improvisations. Standards are below average but represent good achievement for pupils taking this subject. Consideration should be given to ways of improving the results at age 16 so that they reflect more closely the full range of abilities of pupils in the school.
97. Teaching of drama is good overall and much is very good. Pupils' learning is improved by teachers' very good subject knowledge and by well-managed lessons in which teachers clearly identify the skills pupils are developing. A real strength is the constructive feedback given in class, in which pupils as well as the teacher are involved. Teachers select groups carefully to ensure that weaker pupils are well supported; their performance improves as a consequence.
98. There is a wide range of learning opportunities outside lessons. School productions are of a high standard and there is a flourishing drama club. Other activities include workshops led by A-level students from a nearby drama school, visits from theatre companies, and a useful link with the local theatre, which generates work experience placements. Drama makes a valuable contribution both to pupils' personal development and to the cultural life of the school.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Strengths

- Pupils achieve very well, gaining GCSE results that are above average overall.
- Very good relationships between pupils and teachers ensure that pupils are confident when discussing their work.
- The excellent school numeracy policy is effectively implemented.
- Meticulous record keeping is used well to improve teaching and learning.
- The department is efficiently managed, with a focus that results in improvement.

Areas for improvement

- Better monitoring is needed to ensure that the standard of teaching is consistently high and that all pupils learn at a good pace.
- Pupils are not given a clear enough indication of the standard of their work in relation to national standards.

99. Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were average overall in 2000 and 2001. However, the proportion of girls achieving Level 5 and above rose significantly in 2001 and is above average. The standard of work seen is in line with test results. Standards attained at primary school are appropriately identified as starting points for the development of algebraic skills and spatial concepts and for extending techniques for handling data. Pupils generally have a good range of numeracy skills, which they can apply to problems. These include calculations of probability; a topic which is understood well because pupils carry out practical work to help them appreciate the concepts. Most 14-year-olds have a good understanding of the properties of common geometric shapes; they use a calculator competently and carry out mathematical investigations logically.
100. Standards in GCSE mathematics are above average. Virtually all pupils enjoy success in the examinations and they generally do slightly better than in their other subjects. The proportion achieving top grades, A* and A, is below that achieved nationally. However, the current work of many high-attaining 16-year-olds, in their study of equations, algebraic fractions, trigonometry and probability, is of this highest standard. Talented pupils have the opportunity to follow a GCSE statistics course after school and those choosing to enter the examination are successful. Some lower-attaining pupils, including a number with special educational needs, do not currently receive enough support through marking and in target setting to achieve as well as they might. Coursework is completed particularly well by the majority of pupils; they progress in a logical manner, clearly presenting work using diagrams and graphs to best advantage. In relation to their prior attainment, pupils' achievements are very good in all year groups.
101. The quality of teaching is good overall. It is never less than satisfactory and is sometimes very good or excellent. Pupils learn well, and when teaching is very good, they learn particularly rapidly. In the most effective teaching, very good use is made of resources such as individual white boards to engage all pupils in mental activities and overhead projector transparencies to illustrate spatial and graphical topics. The pace at which pupils learn in the best lessons results from excellent planning, in which good questioning and a wide range of examples are combined with effective homework. The work is closely related to pupils' own experiences and examination requirements.

These features were clearly evident in a lesson for older pupils, in which the study of moving averages was related to household quarterly bills. Although typically the pace of lessons is appropriate to maximise learning, there are occasions when higher-attaining pupils could achieve more. This occurs, for example, when mental arithmetic tasks are undemanding, or the main objective of the lesson is lost in considering specific examples. Pupils' work is almost always thoroughly and constructively marked. Frequent, regular assessment of pupils' attainment at the end of topics is often meticulously analysed to identify aspects that need further attention, and individual pupils who are experiencing difficulties. Pupils also set themselves targets after assessments; this is an excellent procedure, but many, including lower-attainers and those with special educational needs, require more guidance to identify their targets for improvement.

102. Pupils' very good progress is partly due to their excellent attitude towards studying mathematics. They are confident in oral and written work because, from the age of 11, they are successfully encouraged to discuss mathematical ideas. In addition, they soon develop confidence in making their own notes, learning from the excellent examples given by their teachers. Typically they respond to good teaching with eagerness, enthusiasm and enjoyment. Pupils from all ethnic backgrounds learn rapidly by working co-operatively in pairs and by being good listeners as well as good participants. Lower-attaining 15-year-olds were observed working totally independently on numbers and their factors, enabling the teacher to give individual advice and support as required. The teaching of data-handling observed in two classes of older pupils was uninspiring, with a lack of discussion and too much emphasis on routine tasks; nevertheless the pupils were still very co-operative.
103. The very good leadership and teamwork in mathematics have been effective in achieving significant improvement since the last inspection and maintaining high standards. Pupils' learning is very well supported by the wide range of learning materials used in class, together with excellent books of examples used for home study. The language that teachers use is suitably matched to pupils' standards of literacy. Pupils have access to additional individual support from teachers during lunchtimes; this excellent facility is used to advantage, but not all of those advised to attend make it a priority. The proposed provision of a suite of computers within the mathematics department would overcome the restrictions currently experienced in accessing ICT. The school's excellent numeracy policy, directed by the mathematics department, thoroughly co-ordinates the teaching and application of numeracy skills in all subjects. Termly targets in basic numeracy skills are set and monitored for the lowest-attainers. Pupils enjoy mathematics in a stimulating environment; the mathematics suite is rich in the display of pupils' work, puzzles, posters and challenges. The teachers use departmental meetings, informal discussions and a weekly departmental bulletin to determine policy and share good practice. Monitoring of the work of the department, including the observation of lessons, significantly enhances standards. For example, detailed analysis of the use of computers in teaching mathematics, class-by-class completion of homework records and a comprehensive survey of pupils' views about mathematics lessons have been completed recently and have led to improvements being made. Assessment of pupils' work is typically very rigorous, but further attention is needed to link this to national standards.

SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils behave very well and are eager to learn; they enjoy science lessons.
- Teachers build well on pupils' existing knowledge.
- The department is well led; staff work well together as a team committed to further raising pupils' attainment.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of marking varies and often does not give targets to help pupils to improve.
- Some lessons do not include extension work that challenges all pupils.
- Assessment is not used effectively to identify and support underachieving pupils.

104. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their attainment is below average. They achieve very well through Years 7 to 9 so that their attainment in lessons and other work seen during the inspection is above average by Year 9. Their very good achievement begins at an early stage in Year 7, when they start to make predictions about the outcomes of simple experiments, such as finding out the effect of increasing the load on an elastic band. Higher-attaining pupils draw out conclusions from their results and comment on their accuracy. By Year 9, about two-thirds of pupils can use their scientific knowledge to work out how to separate mixtures of three or more components. Some of the others require help before accurately describing how to separate a mixture of salt and sand. All pupils handle laboratory equipment carefully and safely. Results of recent National Curriculum tests reflect pupils' attainment in lessons. In 2001 the results were above average and very high in comparison with similar schools. Although past results have fluctuated from year to year, those for 2001 were significantly better than in the previous year, particularly at the higher levels.

105. There was a similar pattern in GCSE results at the end of Year 11. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher A* to C grades was above average and well above the average in similar schools. This was better than in the previous year, particularly for the proportion gaining A* and A grades. A particular strength was that all pupils in the year group gained a grade. The results represent very good progress for these pupils in relation to their National Curriculum test results two years earlier.

106. The great majority of pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11, and their attainment in lessons and written work matches recent GCSE results. Although overall attainment in lessons and written work is above average in Years 10 and 11, the attainment of some pupils (about one in eight of the total in these years) is not as high as it should be; their progress is held back because they are studying an inappropriate biology course rather than covering the full range of National Curriculum science. Although the focus of their work is on biology, they still struggle to cope with the depth of knowledge required, for example having difficulty in recalling the main principles of respiration and photosynthesis. The department recognises that this is unsatisfactory and is already addressing the issue.

107. The progress of pupils with special educational needs and those learning to speak English is similar to that of other pupils. No evidence was seen during the inspection that the progress of any one group of pupils is different to that of any other group. All

work together very well, usually in ethnically mixed groups.

108. Most pupils write well as a result of teachers encouraging them to do so through correction of their work; however, some pupils fail to learn from the advice given. Pupils have good numerical skills because they are developed from an early stage in Year 7; for example in using line graphs to express the relationship between temperature and time as water is heated. However, pupils' use of ICT skills in science is less well developed because as the science teachers are newly appointed, they have not yet been fully trained in using computers in their lessons.
109. Teaching and learning in science are very good in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 and 11. During the inspection about half of all lessons seen were very good and the rest were either good or satisfactory. In Years 7 to 9 all the lessons were at least good. Features of science teaching that help pupils to achieve very well are consolidation of earlier learning before building upon it, clear explanation of what pupils are expected to do and demonstration by teachers that they care about the progress of each individual. In a Year 7 lesson, the teacher first reviewed pupils' understanding of the word 'property' before asking them to plan an investigation into the properties of cotton thread, making clear that in doing so pupils were expected to take into account the need for 'fair testing'. Learning was very good and all pupils were quickly able to draw up workable plans. In a Year 11 lesson, the teacher demonstrated interest in each pupil's progress by giving individual support and advice as they investigated how object shape and liquid viscosity affect the rate of sinking. Again, learning in this lesson was very good; by the end all had obtained accurate results and many had begun to suggest reasons for the differences observed.
110. Teachers also provide extra lessons after school to help pupils consolidate their learning or make further progress (in the week of the inspection about one fifth of Year 10 pupils attended these lessons). Pupils respond well to the care shown by their teachers, for example by taking pride in their written work so that they have an accurate record to help them learn for tests. Homework is also used well to consolidate learning from lessons; for example in Year 8 pupils were asked to make their own choice of animals before describing ways in which they are adapted to their environment. Teaching and learning are less good in a few lessons, when teachers do not provide sufficient challenge for all pupils, particularly higher-attaining ones in Years 10 and 11, or because temporary teachers do not maintain pupils' interest with a sufficiently varied approach. In these lessons some pupils 'switch off' and the pace of their learning is slower, resulting in attainment being lower than it should be. The quality of teachers' day-to-day marking varies, but often does not focus clearly enough on learning targets to help pupils improve their science.
111. A new head of department is providing good leadership with a clear vision for future development. Although the department is almost entirely new, teachers are already working well together as a team committed to further raising pupils' attainment. The department has a good system for recording attainment and tracking pupils' progress, but is not yet using it effectively to identify and support underachieving pupils. Although the laboratory technicians provide a very efficient service in support of teaching, they have insufficient time to do so within their normal working hours. Teachers work hard in organising excellent displays of pupils' work, showing others the standards to which they should aspire.
112. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. GCSE and National Curriculum test results are higher and teaching is good or better in a higher proportion of lessons than was the case at the last inspection. Assessment information is now

used more effectively, though there is room for further improvement in this area.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- There are excellent relationships in the department which lead to a sense of enjoyment and achievement.
- Standards have been very high in recent GCSE exams – 100 per cent A*-C in 2000 – and pupils have achieved very well.
- The quality of teaching is very good overall, with many excellent lessons.
- The subject provides excellent personal development for pupils.

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of pupils that achieve A* grades in GCSE is lower than average.
- ICT is used well for research and presentation, but not sufficiently as a creative tool.

113. Pupils enter the school with art skills that are below average for girls, including weaker-than-average spatial awareness. The department anticipates these weaknesses accurately and has devised a very good curriculum, with projects that begin to address them from the start of Year 7. The excellent teaching of these projects leads to pupils' very rapid progress in the key skills of drawing and colour work. These skills quickly enable most pupils to achieve much better standards in art than would be expected. Pupils thus derive a sense of fulfilment, achievement and pleasure from realising that their developing skills soon enable them to draw well, particularly from direct observation. Current Year 7 work, for example, on drawing cubic shapes, develops perspective and other spatial skills very effectively. The Year 9 portraits project, practising proportionality in the style of Post-Impressionism, is also a very good example of this focus. Pupils enjoy lessons and want to do well, often spending additional free time in the department to refine their skills. They also make excellent progress in the historical and critical aspects of the subject. This element of the curriculum is reinforced through the art history module in Year 9. By the end of Year 9, therefore, the expected range of practical skills, knowledge and understanding is thoroughly well developed and pupils are well above average in all aspects of art. Some pupils reach exceptional standards in two-dimensional work. Three-dimensional work is less impressive but is still of a high standard. Pupils of all abilities, including pupils with special needs, are included in this unusually high rate of progress. These pupils' practical work is mostly indistinguishable from their peers'. The department's very good use of ICT, particularly desktop publishing and word-processing, also reduces the adverse impact of lower-attaining pupils' poorer handwriting and spelling, and their work is as well presented as others'. It also helps pupils whose first language is not English. Pupils from all ethnic backgrounds make equally good progress. These high levels of attainment by Year 9 represent excellent achievement in relation to pupils' attainment on entry.

114. GCSE results in recent years have been well above average and well above girls' results nationally. Pupils choose art and design or graphics/art at GCSE. From both disciplines in 2000, all pupils gained A*-C grades. This represents outstanding achievement for many pupils, given their entry levels when they started in the school. Results were similar in 2001, with only a handful of pupils not attaining A*-C in graphics. Even these pupils' grades represented very good achievement, as some pupils had special educational needs, while others had only recently arrived in the school. Within

this very high attainment, a very large proportion of pupils attained A or B grades, but fewer than average gained A*s. Attainment in the current Year 11 is similarly well above average and represents very good achievement in relation to pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9. Pupils' very good two-dimensional skills from their earlier experience in Years 7 to 9 are used effectively in Years 10 and 11 to produce work of a very high technical standard in drawing and painting. This is underpinned by well-interpreted research work, reflecting pupils' individual interests. Some of these projects include excellent examples of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds using art from their own cultures as a basis for their creative work. Pupils use visits to museums and galleries very imaginatively in their work. Year 11 pupils, for example, had created six-foot-tall relief 'self-portraits' in black, white and grey, many of which were displayed to striking effect around the school. These typify the range of skills that pupils use to very impressive effect. Pupils apply their creativity and imagination very well in a wide variety of well-researched, well-prepared ideas, which are realised in an interesting range of media.

115. All pupils learn very well in art in all years. Their enjoyment is palpable in almost all lessons. Their behaviour is excellent because they respect and value the excellent relationships they enjoy with their teachers, often speaking of this pleasure openly.
116. Teaching is very good and often excellent; it is this quality of teaching that characterises the department. The enthusiasm and delight which teachers themselves feel about their subject transmit infectiously to pupils, who equally take delight in responding. Teachers' own high level of subject skill and range of expertise are accompanied by extremely high expectations of pupils' behaviour and commitment to the subject. Teachers thoroughly understand the nature of the art curriculum and plan unusually well to extend pupils' capabilities. Much of this planning is achieved through excellent assessment procedures, which give individual pupils highly focused advice on how to improve their work. Each piece of coursework and homework is marked rigorously, setting specific, achievable targets for the next piece. Pupils respond excellently, incorporating the advice into what they do next. Pupils' progress is very well monitored through their targets, through high quality one-to-one help in lessons and highly effective plenary sessions. These sessions give opportunities for evaluation and reflection on learning, which consolidate and reinforce pupils' understanding. They also provide opportunities for pupils' work to be valued in a public forum. The department contributes very well to pupils' literacy and numeracy and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Very good plans for all these areas underpin the department's work, but where they are used by non-specialist art teachers, the teaching does not inspire pupils to nearly the same degree, though it is always satisfactory. The main challenge for teachers now is to find ways of extending the very highest-attaining pupils to A* achievement. This will require ways of creating a freer, less prescriptive response earlier on in their GCSE work from these few pupils, whilst not compromising the excellent effects of the current teaching on the majority of pupils' achievements.
117. The department is very much improved since the last inspection. Standards in Years 7 to 9 in particular have improved significantly. Drawing skills are much better because teachers' expectations are now very high. The range of three-dimensional work is now satisfactory. Design is now appropriately included in teaching plans. Current assessment methods are an excellent mechanism for providing lower-attaining pupils with targets that are well matched to their needs, enabling them to achieve well. Very good departmental management has secured these considerable improvements. Computers are also now used well for research and presentation. Their use now needs to be extended to include more creative applications, using ICT as a tool for pupils' creativity.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Pupils' achievements by the end of Year 9 are good and they make very good progress in Years 7 and 8.
- Pupils are skilled in designing and making.
- Teachers and pupils work hard together to maintain a positive working atmosphere in lessons.
- Good teaching promotes active participation in class work and homework.
- The new head of department is providing effective leadership and a clear sense of direction.

Areas for improvement

- Standards at the end of Year 11 are below average, because pupils lack subject knowledge.
- The quality of sketching is poor, and often hinders pupils from expressing themselves adequately on paper.
- Assessment information should be used more effectively to monitor the progress of individual pupils in Years 7 to 9.

118. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 at below average standards and their achievement by the end of Year 9 is good. Standards at the end of Year 11 are below average, as they were at the time of the last inspection. In 2001, pupils generally did less well in GCSE design and technology than they did in their other subjects. This is because the department has suffered from serious staffing difficulties in recent years that have resulted in poor examination preparation, with specific weaknesses in pupils' knowledge and understanding.

119. The staffing situation has now improved and the new head of department has already taken great strides to rectify the situation. Standards in Year 10 are broadly average and are much higher than those in Year 11; this is because Year 11 pupils have not had a balanced preparation of theory and practice during earlier years. The achievement of pupils in Year 10 is good, but Year 11 pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory. They do not yet have the specialist knowledge to attain higher grades in GCSE. Year 11 pupils could not, for example, identify specific types of wood or man-made board for their project coursework. This is in stark contrast to pupils in Year 7, who understand the different materials with their properties and uses. The quality of sketching and graphical communication in the resistant materials course in Year 11 is particularly poor and hinders pupils' ability to express their ideas. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are now learning well. There are no significant differences in the standards reached by pupils from different ethnic backgrounds.

120. Pupils are skilled in designing and making. In one Year 8 project, for example, pupils produced menu cards utilising mechanical 'pop ups', and in another, they designed and made cushions using batik, tie-dyeing and embroidery. Pupils use safe working practices and are appropriately skilled in the use of machine and hand-tools, including accurate use of coping saws to produce, for example, name badges in Year 7 and mechanical souvenirs in Year 9. The quality of sketching and graphical communication is below average, though it varies from very good to very poor. Pupils are still often unable to use graphical skills to express themselves adequately on paper.

121. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. This is in part due to the practical nature of the course, but also derives from the individual attention they receive and new worksheets that have been specifically designed to meet their needs.
122. The new head of department has quickly introduced new teaching plans, which are being reviewed throughout the year. These broadly follow national guidelines and ensure that all pupils cover a broad range of specialist subject knowledge by the end of Year 9. The new plans are detailed and include work on electronics and computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM). They build carefully upon pupils' previous knowledge.
123. Teaching is good, and often very good, in all year groups. As a result, pupils are now learning well. Teachers have high expectations for all their pupils in terms of behaviour and academic progress. They manage pupils well and there is mutual respect between pupils and teachers. Lessons are carefully planned and have clear aims that are shared with pupils. Thus pupils know what is expected of them and respond positively in return. Rooms have attractive displays and examples of pupils' work. These are used to inspire pupils and to demonstrate techniques or possible outcomes. Technological vocabulary is used extremely well, which helps to support the school's literacy policy. Mathematical skills are encouraged throughout, with an emphasis on the practical application of number and accurate measurement. In a Year 9 wood lesson, for example, pupils accurately measured softwood for comb joints, and, in a Year 10 food lesson, pupils estimated weights and used a spreadsheet to calculate the cost of their recipes. Pupils make good use of ICT to aid their design and presentation of work, including a database in Year 10 for a plastic-based gift project. Excellent resources for pupils are provided in terms of 'help' and 'how to' sheets to support food technology. However, Year 11 pupils have in previous years not had enough experience of CAD/CAM.
124. Assessment of pupils' work is hindered by the quality of past records, but these are now being made more accurate and complete. Samples of work are being collected against which standards can be judged. The assessment information needs to be used more effectively in Years 7 to 9 to monitor the progress of individual pupils. In Years 10 and 11, assessments are shared with pupils and this helps them to focus on individual aspects of their coursework. All staff in the department demonstrate very good subject expertise and show high levels of commitment to improving standards. The new head of department is providing effective leadership and giving a clear sense of direction.
125. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory overall. The rooms and facilities have been greatly improved, and provide a central learning base. Resources are much better, but the limited amount of CAD/CAM equipment needs replacing, and not all areas have appropriate machinery. Staffing difficulties have until recently hindered the raising of standards, but there has been an enormous improvement over the last six months. Some gifted and talented pupils are disapplying from GCSE design and technology, and this affects the range of ability of pupils studying graphic products. There remains a lack of technical support for food and textiles, and more up-to-date textbooks are needed.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **good**.

Strengths

- Pupils in Years 7 to 9 make very good progress and achieve above average standards.
- Pupils develop good enquiry and independent learning skills.
- Geography makes an important contribution to pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.
- Good leadership and effective classroom management create a positive learning environment in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- There are not enough opportunities for practical fieldwork in Years 7 to 9.
- Assessment is not used to set pupils clear targets for improving their work.
- The low time allocation in Years 7 to 9 means that some topics are not covered in depth.

126. GCSE results in 2000 were above average for girls for grades A* to C and A* to G. From 1998 to 2000 results followed an upward trend, which was maintained in 2001. Standards of work seen at the end of Year 11 are also above average. Pupils are achieving well in relation to their attainment at the end of Year 9. Pupils have good, and higher-attainers very good, field study skills. They are able to gather, analyse, represent data and reach decisions about their findings. Some good examples were seen in pupils' work on the channel geometry and flow patterns of the River Mole. Most have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the water cycle and factors influencing river flooding. Pupils use computers confidently and effectively to access information, analyse data and present their conclusions. They use a range of graphical and statistical methods well to develop their geographical understanding. Pupils with special educational needs make progress at a similar rate to their peers in all year groups. Listening and writing skills are very good and help to raise attainment.

127. By the end of Year 9, standards overall are above average and better than at the time of the last inspection, when they were average. This represents very good achievement in relation to pupils' attainment on entry to the school. There is no significant variation in attainment between pupils of different ethnic background. By the age of 14, pupils show good research and independent learning skills, working, for example, on the indicators that distinguish more and less economically developed countries. Pupils use computers well to find information, analyse it and present their conclusions. Most pupils are well aware of the important relationships between human and physical phenomena. Mapping, graphical and numerical skills are well developed and are used effectively to develop knowledge and understanding of the themes covered. Scrutiny of work indicates a good knowledge of the British Isles and its context in Europe, the climate of Europe and indicators of development. As in the GCSE classes, listening skills are good and most pupils write accurately, though some have weak spelling and sentence construction skills.

128. Teaching is good. All teaching seen was at least satisfactory and a high percentage was good or better. Some excellent practice was also observed. Lessons are well planned and enthusiastically taught, helped by teachers' secure subject knowledge. Teachers' expectations are high and the pace of most lessons is good, resulting in good learning opportunities for pupils. Pupils' ability to sustain concentration, work extremely positively, make good notes and revise them thoroughly, results in very good learning in Years 7 to 9 and good learning in the GCSE groups. Pupils are encouraged to think about geographical issues. A very good example was seen in a lesson on the growth of a less economically developed country, and in research on flooding in Bangladesh. Resources are good and are used effectively to increase pupils' knowledge and understanding. Good classroom management further encourages pupils to learn. Attention is given to ensuring that all pupils' needs are known and met, whatever their ability or ethnic background.
129. Most of the weaknesses identified in the last report have been tackled and rectified. The range of teaching methods is wider and pupils have better skills in answering specific geographical questions. The curriculum is well matched to all pupils' needs. Assessment procedures are good, and satisfactory use is made of data to plan lessons and to judge pupils' progress, but pupils are not given sufficiently clear short and long-term targets to help them improve. National Curriculum levels are not used enough to assist pupils assess how they are achieving in relation to their peers. Opportunities for pupils to develop practical and field study skills have deteriorated since the last inspection, when they were described as excellent. Too few opportunities are currently provided in Years 7 to 9. The recently appointed acting head of department has effectively reviewed the teaching programmes and identified priorities for development. Time allocated to the subject in Years 7 to 9 is low and pupils have only one lesson per week. This results in problems of continuity and in some themes being 'skimmed' rather than covered in depth.

HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers use their secure subject knowledge to good effect.
- Curriculum planning has improved and includes topics that are relevant to pupils.
- Learning is enhanced by good accommodation and learning resources.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to their learning.

Areas for improvement

- In some lessons, the pace is slow and the range of approaches is too narrow.
- Too much written work consists of short answers to questions from textbooks or worksheets.
- In some lessons, pupils need more support to accomplish their tasks.

130. In 2000 and 2001, GCSE results were below average for girls, although pupils' results in history were similar to their results in other subjects and all achieved a pass grade. Numbers taking GCSE history were small and standards achieved therefore depended on the particular pupils in the class. In relation to their attainment at the end of Year 9, most pupils achieved well. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Years 10 and 11 are average and pupils' achievement is good in relation to their attainment at the end of Year 9. Pupils from all ethnic backgrounds make similar progress.

131. In Years 10 and 11 pupils use a range of sources (usually from textbooks) to respond to GCSE questions and they handle factual responses well. They can describe the information contained in a historical source and, with help, they can judge the reliability of the source. Less frequently, they are able to evaluate its usefulness in constructing an account of the past. Pupils in a Year 10 class on the Depression and the New Deal were able to draw on their previous knowledge to interpret the information contained in original sources. Pupils are well prepared to answer GCSE questions.
132. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are average. Pupils' achievement is good given their prior attainment on entry to the school. By the end of Year 9 the majority understand and can talk about chronology. For instance, in a Year 9 class, pupils were able to talk about the Industrial Revolution and put it into the correct time frame. They extract information from historical sources and are beginning to select appropriate sources of evidence to support an argument. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils were selecting sources about the treatment of children in the Industrial Revolution. Too much written work relies on short answers to questions in textbooks or worksheets. This limits the opportunities for pupils of all abilities, and particularly the higher-attainers, to develop their skills of enquiry and to link their knowledge of different periods together to show change over time. The recently introduced assessment tasks at the end of Year 9 provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their skills of independent research, as in a piece of work on the role of women in World War One. Pupils had researched well and gathered relevant sources, although there was a tendency to quote from them rather than commenting on their usefulness to historians.
133. Teaching and learning are satisfactory throughout Years 7 to 11. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and lessons are thoroughly planned, both individually and as part of a series. Very secure subject knowledge was evident in GCSE classes in Years 10 and 11 where the teacher very skilfully asked pupils questions about previous work on the USA as an introduction to the lesson. He involved all pupils in answering questions and used the responses to build up a clear outline of the work that had been previously covered.
134. The pace in lessons is frequently somewhat slow, and although introductions are clear and helpful, they often last for twenty minutes or more. Sometimes teachers do not use a wide enough range of approaches within lessons and as a result pupils are forced to work in the same way for too long. A contrast to this was seen in a Year 9 lesson in which pupils used ICT to gather information. They worked collaboratively and gained considerably from the discussion with each other on what information to include.
135. In some lessons, pupils, particularly the lower-attainers, would benefit from more support in undertaking tasks. This was evident in two Year 7 classes where pupils were asked to draw a pictogram showing the story of Romulus and Remus. In one class pupils were shown an example of a completed pictogram and given suggestions as to how the first image might be represented. These pupils made markedly more progress than pupils in the other class, who had only a verbal explanation of the task to go on.

136. Pupils' learning is enhanced by good resources, including 16 computers in one of the classrooms. There are sufficient textbooks, and GCSE pupils are encouraged to annotate their textbooks with notes in pencil, which will subsequently help them with their revision.
137. Pupils take great pride and care in their work. This is particularly evident in GCSE classes, where pupils' work is meticulously laid out and presented. Some pupils have carefully annotated their work to highlight key points or add improvements. Year 10 pupils are very motivated, enjoy the subject and have a strong view that they are improving.
138. Learning is also enhanced by a range of fieldwork activities, including visits to Rochester Castle and the Imperial War Museum. Display is used well in the classrooms and around the school, and during the inspection there was an impressive display in the hall of key events from the previous Millennium.
139. The history department is led satisfactorily and managed effectively. Teachers' planning documents have been carefully structured to ensure that the National Curriculum can be covered within the slightly low time allocation for the subject. The head of department has given considerable thought to developing units and selecting GCSE options that will be relevant to pupils. Examples include the Black Peoples of the Americas unit and the recent Black History project. Resources are carefully considered and displayed to celebrate the cultural diversity within the school. The departmental development plan has clearly-identified priorities, which are manageable and achievable. The plan would be strengthened by a clearer focus on the learning outcomes that are intended for pupils.
140. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. There is a greater emphasis on the use of evidence in Year 9 and a substantial piece of investigational work has been added in each half term of that year. A completely new Year 9 assessment scheme was introduced last year. ICT is used much more extensively, aided by the very good facilities available.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- There are high levels of commitment to the use of ICT.
- Pupils respond positively.
- The school has an excellent computer network.
- ICT is used extensively in many subjects.

Areas for improvement

- Many pupils in Years 10 and 11 miss out one section of the ICT National Curriculum.
- Annual reports on progress in ICT are not provided for all pupils in Years 10 and 11.

141. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are above average, and pupils achieve very well in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. In Years 10 and 11, standards in GCSE courses (business studies, office studies, ICT) are well above average overall. In business studies, pupils achieve well above girls nationally. The majority of pupils

taking business studies also gain a GCSE in information studies in the same amount of teaching time. Results in GCSE ICT are in line with those of girls nationally. Given that pupils studying GCSE ICT usually start the course from a lower base than those taking business studies, achievement is very good in all GCSE courses. Pupils who do not take a GCSE course take a 10-week module within their PSE programme and receive a certificate. Good standards are achieved in this course, partly as a result of the skills that pupils gain in ICT lessons in Years 7 to 9, in GCSE courses, and in using ICT in other subjects. A weakness in provision is that only those pupils who take GCSE ICT study the whole of the ICT National Curriculum for Years 10 and 11. The aspects that are not covered are the use of ICT to measure, control and automate events.

142. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9. In GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are good, and often very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which is used well in planning programmes of work and in lessons. Teachers outline clearly the objectives of the lesson, review previous work and explain the purpose of tasks and how to achieve them. In a Year 7 lesson, pupils were asked to design a fact sheet on hedgehogs for primary pupils. The teacher provided a very clear structure for the pupils by providing a model of how the fact sheet might be presented. The pupils discussed the model as a starting point, evaluated it and suggested improvements and then designed their own sheets. The clear structure enabled pupils to succeed in the task, and many showed a very clear sense of the audience for whom they were designing.
143. Careful selection and ordering of learning activities enable pupils to make good progress during lessons. In a Year 10 business studies lesson, pupils were learning about the advantages and disadvantages of running a business as a franchise. In small groups, they discussed the advantages and disadvantages of different types of franchise. They worked well and quickly produced a report for the class. The reports were shared and recorded on the whiteboard by a pupil. Pupils then used the Internet to research different franchises and evaluate them. Throughout, pupils made independent choices about the appropriate types of software to use for different tasks. The choice of activities and their sequence challenged their thinking and enabled difficult concepts to be understood and applied, so that very good progress was made during the lesson.
144. Pupils are very enthusiastic about their work and persevere to produce work of good quality. In GCSE classes teachers set very clear standards for the layout, presentation and organisation of work. Pupils maintain carefully organised portfolios of work. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. Teachers treat pupils with respect and pupils behave very well. In a Year 11 business studies class, the teacher led a lively debate on the relative merits of named brands and economy brands. Pupils took a very active role in the discussion and felt sufficiently confident to challenge the stance of the teacher. This was done with great maturity and good humour.
145. Pupils' attitudes to their learning are strongly influenced by the evident commitment of their teachers. They value highly the many extra-curricular opportunities and recognise how much these support their learning. A Year 7 pupil talked about how attending the ICT club had helped her keyboard skills, which in turn made learning in lessons easier.
146. The use of ICT in other subjects is extensive although there are variations in the manner and amount of use in different subjects. The most common uses are for research, often from the Internet, and presentation of work using word processing and desktop publishing. In geography, for example, pupils very effectively applied skills in importing and annotating photographs to their coursework on the River Nile. The department has also developed its own websites, which pupils use frequently. The head of religious

education has built opportunities into lessons for pupils to use the Internet and CD-ROMs to widen their experience and knowledge. In art, pupils use ICT well for research and presentation, but its use needs to be extended to include more creative applications. In design and technology, there is good use of ICT to find and analyse information. There is very little work on control and computer aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM), although there are plans to develop this. ICT is often used in modern foreign languages for drafting and improving coursework, and the Internet is used to extend pupils' language. The school has recently installed an electronic whiteboard for use in language teaching. A computer-based learning package is used by some pupils in English and mathematics to aid their literacy and numeracy development. In history, pupils use ICT to draft and present research work and use a number of CD-ROMs to identify and select relevant source material for enquiry work.

147. The leadership of the department is good. The head of ICT provides clear, purposeful and energetic leadership and is well supported by her team. The department is extremely well organised, with clear policies, including one on use of the Internet. Planning documents clearly set out the teaching programmes for each year. The ICT development plan sets out appropriate priorities although these focus on activities rather than desired learning outcomes for the pupils.
148. Progress since the last inspection has been good overall. There is now better coverage of the National Curriculum though it is still not complete for many pupils in Years 10 and 11. There has been a considerable increase in the use of ICT in other subjects. The high standards noted in the last report have been sustained and improved. There has been considerable investment in ICT, and there is now one computer for every four pupils, which is significantly better than the national average. A full-time technician has been appointed, and has played a major role in the development of ICT. All teaching staff completed ICT training in the year preceding the inspection. This has been significant in developing teachers' confidence and competence in the use of ICT in their subjects.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and very well in Years 10 and 11.
- A high proportion of teaching is very good, with extensive use of the foreign language by highly committed teachers.
- Pupils in Years 10 and 11 develop good study skills; they use their notes, dictionaries and websites effectively to improve their coursework.

Areas for improvement

- In a small proportion of lessons, teachers use too much English and expect too little of the lower-attaining pupils, and very occasionally of the higher-attaining pupils, so that progress is slow.

149. Pupils are taught French and either German or Spanish in Years 7 and 8. They study one of these languages from Year 9. Spanish has been introduced relatively recently and is taught in Years 7 to 10.
150. Standards overall are above the national average for girls by Year 11; pupils' achievement is very good in relation to their prior attainment. By Year 9, standards overall are broadly average, and generally higher in German and Spanish; pupils' achievement is good.
151. GCSE results have improved significantly since the last inspection. In the last two years, all pupils taking French and German gained a pass grade, and results were above average overall. The proportion of girls gaining grades A*-C was above average in French and well above average in German. Results of pupils from different ethnic backgrounds were broadly similar. A few pupils take GCSE in a community language and the results are very good.
152. The standard of work seen matches the examination results. Girls in the top Year 11 French and German sets attain above, and often well above average standards. This is mainly due to very good, well-paced and varied teaching, teachers' high expectations, and lessons conducted predominantly in the foreign language. Pupils sustain a conversation with confidence, an improvement since the last inspection. They write from memory using a wide variety of structures and accurate vocabulary. Standards in Year 10 Spanish are above average. Pupils in the middle and lower sets work with less accuracy, but they achieve well in relation to their general literacy skills. They understand and use a varied vocabulary with a satisfactory range of structures. In the lowest GCSE sets, pupils understand simple language and achieve well in GCSE work. However, they recall little in the way of vocabulary or phrases and rely heavily on translation into English, largely because they and the teacher use too much English.
153. In Years 10 and 11, small numbers of girls with very low literacy skills prepare for a French Certificate of Achievement in one hour a week, as well as an additional module that leads to tasks completed in French during a visit to France. This well-planned course stimulates pupils' interest and enables them to maintain a basic level of French. Skilful teaching, well planned and matched to their learning needs, with the use of well-chosen resources, enables them to make very good progress. They cope very well with lessons conducted mainly in French. They read, understand, speak and write simple sentences.
154. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average. This represents good achievement, because pupils' attainment in literacy on entry to the school is below average overall. Standards have been rising and, over the last three years, at least two-thirds of pupils

have reached the expected standard by the end of Year 9. Standards seen in lessons are similar to these results. Pupils learn two languages in Years 7 and 8 in the time usually allocated to one subject. As a result, they start Year 9 having spent less time on their first language than is normal, but they make good progress due to good or very good teaching. Listening and understanding are the strongest skills, as most teachers do a high proportion of their teaching in the foreign language. By Year 9, in French and German, many of the higher and average-attainers use at least two tenses confidently from memory. In a mixed ability Year 9 Spanish class, pupils were reading magazine articles about a pop star with good understanding and good skills of scanning the text to gather information.

155. Teaching is good overall, with a high proportion of very good teaching in all three languages. Teaching is nearly always satisfactory and is occasionally excellent in Spanish. In consequence, the quality of learning is good overall, often very good and occasionally excellent. Teachers are sound linguists, and most are strong linguists, able to teach two languages to GCSE. They are experienced, know their pupils well and are keen to help all to succeed. In the very good lessons, to support their high expectations of all pupils, teachers use mime, gesture, games and songs to enable pupils to understand and speak the foreign language most of the time. A few teachers are particularly energetic and involve all pupils in fun activities conducted at a lively pace. Lessons also include pair work and more serious sessions to learn grammar and consolidate learning through written tasks. In such lessons pupils cannot avoid making good or very good progress, as every minute of the hour is well used.
156. Achievement is greatly helped by regular homework that reinforces the lesson, up-to-date marking and teachers' very good knowledge of the needs of individual pupils. Marking is generally careful and the departmental scheme is consistently applied. Many teachers include encouraging comments, but comments showing pupils how to improve their work are not consistently used. Teachers' accurate assessment of pupils' work helps them to adapt their questions and language to enable each pupil to succeed. They involve each pupil in the lessons. They check that pupils with special needs and those with English as an additional language are keeping up, and monitor their writing regularly. One teacher boosted the confidence of a girl for whom English was an additional language, but who spoke French well, by asking her to demonstrate role plays.
157. Occasionally teaching is unsatisfactory. This occurs when the teacher's expectations are too low and class control weak. As a result, pupils become restive and talkative, time is lost and too much English is used. Occasionally, planned tasks are abandoned and the lesson's aims not met. Errors of pronunciation and understanding are not corrected sufficiently rigorously and pupils make too little progress.
158. Pupils' attitudes are mostly good or very good. They participate with obvious enjoyment in singing and games that promote confident and accurate use of language. Good relationships and classroom management are the norm and result in good behaviour and sustained attention. Pupils co-operate well in pair and group work, mixing well across ethnic groups. Through asking questions and indicating where to find information, teachers help pupils to develop independent learning skills, especially in Years 10 and 11, where most use dictionaries and web sites effectively. Pupils are trained from Year 7 to record new words regularly in their vocabulary books and refer to them when reading, listening and writing.
159. For the last two years, there have not been enough pupils choosing two foreign languages at GCSE level to make a viable class in school time. As a result, pupils

cannot study a second language in regular school hours after Year 8. Some parents and several pupils regret this situation, especially as the teaching methods make most language lessons enjoyable. Pupils have not reached a sufficient level in their second language for it to be a useful tool. About 14 girls in Year 11 study French after school twice a week, in addition to German as their first language. They are progressing at a good pace in French and are likely to reach quite good GCSE grades. Mixed age classes in Gujarati and Urdu are also offered twice a week after school. Numbers fluctuate and about 25 were there in the inspection week, with more at the Urdu class. The girls learn to read, write the script and widen their understanding and spoken language; in many cases this progress helps them to speak with members of their family and enhances their appreciation of their culture. A good atmosphere in both classes encourages participation. Some will enter a GCSE examination.

160. The head of department is relatively new in post and has made a sound start. Several improvements are still in the planning stage. Monitoring of teaching is just beginning. Resources are very good and are selected carefully. The department is trying, with some success, to encourage pupils to read longer texts and books, as advised in the last inspection. A few teachers use up-to-date texts from magazines, and pupils are keen to understand these. The head of department has removed dated stock from the library and added new books that are aimed at younger readers and should encourage wider reading. The number of planned visits abroad has increased. Systems are in place to extend gifted linguists. The department is well monitored and supported by senior managers. The department's use of ICT and of authentic recordings has increased significantly since the last inspection. It now has a specialist computer room, which pupils use in lessons and at lunchtime to do coursework and work on language programs. Spanish is now taught. These measures and the significant rise in achievement constitute good improvement since the last inspection.

MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision in music is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards are above average in all year groups.
- Teaching is good, and very good in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils have positive attitudes towards the subject.
- There is very good provision for extra-curricular activities and instrumental lessons.
- The quality of singing in the school choirs is high.

Areas for improvement

- ICT is not used to support learning in Years 7 to 9.

161. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average and pupils' achievement is good in relation to their attainment on entering the school. At the end of Year 11, standards are also above average, with a small minority of pupils attaining well above. Pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good. Standards in all year groups have improved since the last inspection. In 2000, five pupils took the GCSE examination and all achieved higher grades. In 2001, nine pupils took the examination and results were above average. There is a good take-up rate for the subject in the current Years 10 and 11.

162. Pupils who are in the school choirs achieve high standards of vocal performance. Pupils with special educational needs and those whose first language is not English

make good progress, as do pupils from all ethnic backgrounds. The more musically able make very good progress, both in lessons and in extra-curricular activities.

163. In Years 7 to 9, pupils show skill in singing, creating short compositions, listening and in appraising music. However, there are a few pupils whose skills in playing keyboards are not well developed. Year 9 pupils write a song in groups, with a melody and simple accompaniment. They perform their final version with confidence, with many compositions showing a good understanding of the use of pitch, rhythm and words. Pupils in Year 7 know how to write music using a graphic score. In one lesson, they listened to part of a piece by Benjamin Britten, identified some of the musical elements and understood how symbols were used to record the sounds. Year 9 pupils show good listening skills. In one lesson, they accurately identified the orchestral instruments used in part of Dvorak's New World Symphony, and used appropriate musical vocabulary to describe what they heard. In a Year 8 lesson, pupils practised part of a twelve bar blues sequence. They played their different parts well and showed some skill when adding their own short phrase.
164. Year 10 and 11 pupils are confident performers, both vocally and instrumentally. They show a good knowledge of musical elements and basic chord structures. Pupils who sing in the choirs have very good vocal ensemble performing skills. Year 10 pupils appreciate the skill required for instrumental ensemble playing. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils practised a section of music by Mozart on keyboards. They made very good progress when rehearsing together. They then listened to the same piece played by a string orchestra and understood the way the different parts fitted together to form a successful ensemble performance. By Year 11, pupils can write short compositions well in a range of styles. They use ICT satisfactorily to assist in creating and notating them. They make very good progress in understanding how composers use compositional techniques. A small number of talented pupils have very good skills in all aspects of music.
165. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is very good, and in one lesson it was excellent. The overall standard of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and use their own musical skills effectively to aid pupils' learning. They use questioning well to extend pupils' understanding and are very good at developing pupils' vocal, listening and appraising skills. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, excellent teaching resulted in pupils gaining a clearer understanding of how to judge the century in which a piece of music was written. Pupils listened to the opening of a Bach prelude. They then heard short extracts, by two different composers, which used Bach's arpeggio idea. By asking suitable questions the teacher developed pupils' confidence and ability to identify the key features in the contrasting pieces and thus determine the historical period more accurately. ICT is used satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11, but there is currently no use of ICT in Years 7 to 9. The school is aware of this and is addressing the issue. Attention is paid to the development of pupils' literacy skills. The fortnightly lesson for Year 9 pupils in music history enables them to gain a wider knowledge of the musical repertoire. Homework is used well to extend pupils' learning. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities. These involve over 150 pupils. There are many different rehearsal groups, including three choirs and a concert band. The high standard of singing in the choirs has been appreciated both in and out of school. The senior choir and special choir show great skill in singing in parts from memory. They convey the emotions of the songs with feeling. Pupils have given performances at the Millennium Dome and at Fairfield Hall. Regular concerts are held in school. A successful production of 'Me and My Girl' has taken place this year.

166. Pupils' attitudes are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Music makes a very good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are very responsive to extra-curricular provision. Over 100 pupils receive vocal and instrumental lessons given by peripatetic teachers. These teachers make a valuable contribution to the work of the department. Members of the senior choir and special choir show an excellent approach to rehearsals. They sing with great enjoyment and are proud to belong.
167. The leadership of the subject is good. The head of department is new to the school, but has already identified areas for improvement. He is ably assisted by a colleague. Both work well together as a team. The accommodation is very good. Resources are good and are used well by pupils.
168. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Pupils' attainment has improved in all year groups, although there is a slight weakness in keyboard playing by a few pupils. Teaching has also improved. The department has satisfactorily addressed the weaknesses in planning documents and assessment procedures that were identified the last inspection. Assessment procedures are being developed further in order to enable pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The revised courses in Years 10 and 11 are improving motivation and participation.
- The standard of dance in Years 7 to 9 is above average.
- Extra-curricular activities are popular and leading to greater interest in physical education.
- Tests at the end of each activity are used effectively to improve teaching.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers' expectations of behaviour and achievement need to be more consistent in order to raise the standards of all pupils.
- The range of tasks in some lessons does not challenge all levels of ability.
- Pupils' skills in planning and evaluating are not developed equally well by all teachers.
- The changing rooms and playing fields are of poor quality.

169. Standards reached in Year 9 are average overall and pupils' achievements are good in relation to their attainment on joining the school. Dance is a strength, with many pupils in Years 7 and 8 producing work that is above average, both in quality and in understanding of choreography. Many pupils achieve well in dance: they interpret the music with flair and imagination and use influences from their own culture to enrich their compositions. The games skills of a significant minority of pupils are below average. In basketball, which has only recently been introduced, pupils have a basic grasp of the skills, but find it difficult to move with the ball. They have poor spatial awareness, often crowding the ball and therefore making it difficult to consolidate skills in a competitive situation. On several occasions, unchallenging tasks and pupils' poor behaviour led to achievement that was unsatisfactory for potentially capable pupils. In netball, a few of the pupils have good ball skills and understand basic rules. Their use of strategies and tactics are less well developed. Pupils demonstrate good knowledge of techniques and rules in their written tests at the end of each unit of work. Their ability to evaluate their own work, and confidence in using technical vocabulary when speaking, is less good.

170. At the end of Year 11 pupils are not meeting expected standards overall. Their skill level in games is below average. They have a limited understanding of tactics and strategies in basketball, but achieve well considering the amount of time they have been playing the sport. Asian girls in particular have ball skills that are less well developed. Spatial awareness is also a weakness for the majority of pupils. In netball, many have the knowledge and ability, but do not achieve well because they lack the self-discipline to practise in order to refine their skills. In badminton, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. They can maintain a rally but have a limited range of shots. Many are slow to anticipate the flight of the shuttle and often hit with a square stance. Pupils in the new Year 11 programme have made a good start in gaining a basic understanding of yoga, aerobics and self defence. Pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall.
171. GCSE physical education has been introduced this year as an optional subject and pupils in Year 10 have made a good start. They have a good knowledge of the theory and their practical work is good. There is evidence of independent research in homework assignments.
172. Teaching and learning are good, and the new acting head of department is raising standards. The poor skills and attitudes of some pupils are the product of previous teaching and are now improving. The best teaching is in Years 7 and 8. In dance lessons, teachers are consistent in their expectations of high standards of work and they continually encourage the pupils to strive for better performance appropriate to their ability. A good example of this was seen in a Year 8 dance lesson, where all pupils made rapid progress because of a good balance between the teacher's direction and the pupils' own creative efforts. The enthusiasm for their work was infectious and they created complex sequences of movement that reflected elements of their individual cultures as well as modern dance ideas. Teachers always let pupils know what they will be expected to do by the end of the lesson. They use a variety of methods that are successful in developing practical skills, but are not all equally successful in developing pupils' skills in planning and evaluating work. Question and answer sessions are mostly used effectively to assess pupils' knowledge and to provoke thought. Lessons nearly always progress logically and with sufficient time to consolidate skills before moving on to the next stage.
173. There are unsatisfactory elements in the teaching of games. The work does not always challenge or meet the needs of all of the pupils within the group, especially those with behavioural difficulties. As a result, some pupils, often talented games players, become bored, disruptive and sometimes rude to the teacher and their peers. A greater range of management strategies is needed to maintain discipline on these occasions. Pupils are generally encouraging to each other, particularly to those who are less able. The new programme in Year 11 that includes yoga, aerobics and self-defence has had a positive effect on attendance and enthusiasm for physical education. In the best lessons there is mutual respect and shared enthusiasm between teachers and pupils, which makes a considerable impact on the quality of work, especially in Years 7 to 9. This is also evident in the popular extra-curricular programme, where pupils enjoy team and individual success in inter-form and inter-school competitions in sports such as basketball, football and netball. Trips to outdoor adventure facilities and dance performances are also popular.
174. Marking of GCSE theoretical work is mostly constructive, but is not yet linked to the school policy. End-of-module tests are used effectively to measure pupils' performance and knowledge of rules and techniques. The results are also analysed to find areas of strength and weakness in the teaching and make improvements. National Curriculum levels have been introduced, but as pupils are not given a level on entry to the school it

is difficult to track their progress from Year 7 accurately.

175. There is an acting head of department in post for one year, whose enthusiasm and expertise have already made a positive impact on pupils' standards, quality of kit, extra-curricular activities, option choices and attendance in lessons, especially in Years 10 and 11. A strong emphasis on teamwork is beginning to have an effect on teaching methods, but there is still work to do to ensure consistency in the approach to discipline and choice of task to suit pupils' abilities. The development plan is clearly focused on raising standards and is supported effectively by the senior management team. The new multi-purpose hall is a valuable addition to the indoor facilities. The condition and size of the changing rooms remain inadequate, as they were at the time of the last inspection, though the school has plans to refurbish them. The playing fields still suffer from problems with underground drainage, and are often not a safe teaching area after wet weather.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards are above average in Year 9 and well above average by the end of Year 11.
- Teaching is good and there is very good commitment and capacity for further improvement.
- Religious education makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development.
- Pupils' experiences are widened by visits from members of faith communities.
- Leadership of the subject is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Targets on reports and in pupils' books are not precise enough.
- Monitoring of teaching is needed to share good practice and raise standards even further.
- The range of visits to places of worship is limited.

176. In the short GCSE course, results in 2000 were well above the national average for girls. Similar results were achieved in 2001. Standards of work seen by the end of Year 11 are also well above average. Pupils achieve well in relation to their attainment at the end of Year 9. Girls possess very good computer skills and are able to access information confidently from the Internet. Pupils display good knowledge and understanding of God's purpose in relation to Jesus' birth, life and death, and Islamic and Christian responses to marriage and divorce. Most pupils listen well to the teacher and each other and many offer perceptive comments and opinions on sensitive issues. They effectively carry out independent and collaborative enquiry tasks.
177. By the end of Year 9, standards are above the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. This represents very good achievement in relation to prior attainment on entry in Year 7. Pupils display good knowledge of the faiths covered and an understanding of how religious belief influences the lives of believers. They have a good and sometimes very good understanding of the basic principles of Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. Pupils produce good notes and speak confidently in lessons. Pupils with special educational needs make as much progress as others in all years. There are no significant differences in the standards reached by pupils from different ethnic backgrounds.
178. Teaching is good overall. It is always satisfactory and is frequently good or very good. Combined with very positive attitudes from pupils, who sustain concentration and revise

well for tests and examinations, this leads to very good progress in the lower school and good progress in the GCSE course. Most lessons are carefully planned, with a good range of methods to involve pupils in their learning. Lessons make a very significant contribution to pupils' personal development. In lessons on home worship in Hinduism and the role of women in Islam, for example, pupils became much more aware of cultural and religious similarities and differences. Teachers often use interesting and inventive ideas, as in the lessons on Puja and in the examination of potential problems faced by devout Muslim women in a multi-cultural society. Teachers know individual pupils well and make sure that all are fully included in discussions and presentations. Pupils are given appropriate opportunities to develop their thinking and enquiry skills. In a very small number of lessons, the pace is sometimes slow and pupils are not sufficiently challenged.

179. The subject is led and managed very well and there is a commitment and capacity from all teachers to improve standards even further. New national subject levels are being tried out in Year 8, to give pupils information on how their attainment matches national standards. As from 2003, pupils currently in Year 10 will receive a full GCSE qualification. Since the last inspection, considerable improvement has been made in ensuring that pupils not only learn about world faiths, but also understand the influence of religious faith on believers' lives. Monitoring of teaching and learning is not currently undertaken within the department to ensure that good and very good practice is shared. Targets on reports and in pupils' books are not precise enough to inform pupils how to improve their work. The range of visits to widen pupils' experience is limited.