

INSPECTION REPORT

WOODLANDS SCHOOL

Basildon

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115228

Headteacher: Mr Andy White

Reporting inspector: Mrs G Kayembe
2901

Dates of inspection: 5 – 8 November 2001

Inspection number: 189434

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 – 16 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Takely End
Basildon
Essex

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Margaret Jones

Date of previous inspection: September 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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2901	Mrs G Kayembe	Registered inspector	English as an additional language	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?
9779	Mrs S Smith	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
16227	Mr H Phillips	Team inspector	Mathematics	
2200	Mr J Stirrup	Team inspector	English	
6432	Mr M Sewter	Team inspector	Science	
8131	Mrs C Goodhill	Team inspector	Modern foreign language	
8501	Mr P Hartwright	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
10666	Mrs P Wheeler	Team inspector	Geography	
1795	Mrs J Sanderson	Team inspector	Special educational needs	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to the pupils?
27662	Miss E Schofield	Team inspector	Religious education	
15208	Mr A Briggs	Team inspector	Music	
8622	Mrs H Housden	Team inspector	Equal opportunities	
			Physical education	
31686	Mrs G Greany	Team inspector	Art and design	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Woodlands School is an oversubscribed comprehensive school in Basildon. There are 1437 boys and girls aged between 11 and 16 on roll making it an above-average sized school. The school roll has increased significantly over the last five or six years. Overall, there are more boys than girls, and this is most noticeable in Year 11 but not particularly marked in other year groups. Pupils' overall attainment when they start at the school is below average. The proportion on the special educational needs register is about average at 17 per cent. The majority of these pupils have learning difficulties but some have emotional and behavioural needs. The proportion with a Statement of Special Educational Need is also average at 2.7 per cent. The school has a designated special needs unit with up to 20 places for pupils with speech and communication needs. Currently, 18 pupils use this facility. About 15 per cent of pupils are eligible for a free school meal. This is average, but does not wholly reflect the level of economic disadvantage experienced by many families. Over 97 per cent of the pupils are of White UK heritage. The few from minority ethnic backgrounds are mostly of African or Caribbean heritage and the tiny proportion with English as an additional language are fluent in English.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Woodlands is a highly successful school with many very good and excellent features. The headteacher provides very strong leadership and sets an exceptionally clear direction for the development of the school. The quality of teaching is good resulting in good learning. The overall achievement of pupils is very good. They make very good progress as they move through the school and reach national standards by the age of 16. Considerable commitment and support from all staff to the promotion of pupils' academic and personal development has resulted in the development of a purposeful and businesslike atmosphere around the school and a culture in which pupils want to succeed, and do succeed. The school's strengths far outweigh its shortcomings. Thus, it provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Leadership and management by the headteacher and key staff are excellent.
- Teaching is good, and much of it is very good or better. This leads to equally good learning.
- Monitoring and support of academic and personal development are very good so that pupils' academic and personal development are very effectively promoted.
- Relationships are very good.
- Governors' roles are very well developed and they provide a very good steer for the strategic development of the school.
- Parents' views of the school are very positive.
- The provision for special educational needs is very good.
- Arrangements for staff development are excellent and very effectively geared towards meeting staff needs in order to help them be more effective in their work with pupils.

What could be improved

- The provision for religious education in order to meet legal requirements and to raise standards of work.
- Able pupils make good progress, but there is scope to improve this to enable them to make the very good progress that lower and average attaining pupils make.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since the last inspection. There has been very good improvement in the GCSE results and the proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C went up by three times as much as the national average between 1996 and 2000. There has been significant improvement in the quality of teaching. The key issues from the last inspection have been effectively tackled in most instances. The school has resolved well the issue of developing strategies to promote greater consistency in the educational provision in different subjects so that there is now little variation between them. Teachers are clear about learning objectives and these are routinely shared with pupils. Statutory requirements are met in the areas identified by the last inspection report as weaknesses, with the exception of the requirement for collective worship. Though not a key issue, the last report identified the need for provision to be improved in religious education. The school has not made sufficient progress in this area.

STANDARDS

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

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

The table shows that pupils' performance in GCSE examinations, based on the average number of points scored by each pupil, has been in line with national standards for the last three years, 1999 to 2001. The proportion of pupils who gain at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C is usually in line with the national average, and above the average of similar types of school. The proportions who gain at least five GCSEs at grades A* to G, or at least one at grades A* to G, are normally above national averages and well above the averages for similar types of school. In most subjects, the percentage of pupils gaining grades A* to C broadly matches national averages. However, results in information and communication technology (ICT), design and technology and geography tend to be below average. In art and design and French, results are above average. Pupils' overall GCSE performance in modern foreign languages is remarkable because almost every pupil is entered, unlike the trend nationally. GCSE results in physical education tend to fluctuate depending on the pupils who opt for the subject, but usually are above average. In 2001, the mathematics results at GCSE improved from below average in the previous year to above average. Results were average in science but below average in English though pupils' progress was good. GCSE results were good in media studies and expressive arts in 2001.

Pupils' performance in the National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds was in line with national averages in English, mathematics and science in 2001. Improvement over the last four or five years has been above the national trends in GCSE examinations and in National Curriculum tests. The school met its targets for 2000 and 2001.

The standards of work seen during the inspection mostly reflect the results of national tests and examinations. Pupils' attainment is broadly average by the time they are 14 and 16 years old. Standards match national expectations in English and science throughout the school, and in mathematics by the age of 14. Standards in mathematics are above average by the age of 16. Pupils' achievements are high, particularly in English and mathematics. Standards are also high in art and design and physical education for 14 and 16-year-olds, and in history by the age of 14 and French by the age of 16. Standards in religious education are lower than expected because too little time is allocated to this subject. Attainment is also below expectations in design and technology, geography, ICT and music for 16-year-olds. The few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as their peers and their overall attainment is broadly average in most areas of the curriculum.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good and often very good, especially for pupils in Years 10 to 11. Pupils display very good enthusiasm for school and enjoy their lessons. Most are very well motivated in lessons. They participate well in activities provided.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The majority of pupils are well behaved in lessons and around school. However, there is a minority whose behaviour is challenging and this is reflected in the high rate of fixed-term exclusions.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships in the school are very good. Pupils make very good progress in their personal development. They get on with one another and are sensitive to the needs of others. Older pupils particularly demonstrate a very clear sense of responsibility.
Attendance	In line with national averages.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is good and as a result pupils make good progress in their learning and enjoy their lessons. Teachers identify clear learning targets and share them with pupils so that pupils know what they are going to learn. There are consistently high expectations from teachers and these help to set challenging work in the majority of cases. Basic skills are effectively taught and the needs of pupils are well met through the teaching, though much more so for lower and average-attainers than the highest-attainers for whom the challenge could at times be greater. The quality of teaching in English and mathematics is very good overall. It is good in science. Teaching is also good in most other subjects. It is very good in modern foreign languages, art and design and history.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good at both key stages, but religious education is not allocated sufficient time and hence requirements for the locally agreed syllabus are not met. Careers provision and provision for extra-curricular activities are very good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	These pupils make very good progress. Provision for their needs is very good though the speech and language unit is currently suffering from the lack of a qualified speech therapist.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language are fluent in it.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. Provision for moral and social development is very good and that for spiritual and cultural development is good. The school promotes the sense of community and self-worth very effectively though the quality of year assemblies and tutor-led reflection periods is variable.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The quality of pastoral care and the arrangements for assessing pupils' progress are very good. The use of assessment to guide planning is good overall, but not used as extensively as possible to support the progress of the highest-attainers.

The school works very effectively in partnership with parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and sets the right tone for the school. There is strong commitment to school improvement. Teamwork is highly developed and delegation of duties very well managed. Senior staff make a strong contribution to the leadership and management of the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. The governors are very knowledgeable about the work of the school and have a very clear strategic overview of its future development. The governing body actively works in the best interests of pupils and staff. Legal responsibilities are satisfactorily fulfilled.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school, including checking the quality of teaching and learning. These are a cornerstone of the school's success.
The strategic use of resources	Very good overall. Good attention is paid to the principles of best value so that best use is made of the school's resources in order to benefit pupils.

The school is well staffed and resourced. The resources for ICT are very good. The school's accommodation is also good.

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 progress that their children are making• That the school is approachable• The school is well led and managed• The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The homework – whilst a few parents felt not enough was provided, many others felt there was too much.

The evidence wholeheartedly supports parents' positive views of the school. However, there is insufficient evidence to support the concerns of a minority about homework. Homework is regularly set and is of good quality. It supports very effectively the work done in class without repeating this work or requiring pupils to finish it at home.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils currently in Years 10 to 11 arrived at the school with attainment that was significantly below average, though recently arrived pupils' attainment is higher. Thus, pupils currently in Years 7 and 8 had broadly average attainment when they began at the school. However, older pupils and those who have taken GCSE examinations in recent years, started at the school with distinctly low attainment. This is particularly the case in literacy where for many year groups the attainment on entry has been well below average. Data on pupils' performance in primary school indicates that there were often very few higher attaining pupils, especially at the time when pupils in Years 10 and 11 took these tests. For example, less than five per cent of pupils in the current Year 11 attained the higher level in the National Curriculum tests. Given these low starting points, pupils' achievements by the time they are 16 years old are very good.
2. Pupils' performance in GCSE examinations, based on the average number of points scored by each pupil, has been in line with national standards for the last three years, 1999 to 2001. The proportion of pupils who gain at least five GCSEs at grades A* to C is usually in line with the national average and above the average of similar types of schools. The proportions who gain at least five GCSEs at grades A* to G or at least one at grades A* to G are normally above national averages and well above the averages of similar types of schools, defined on the basis of eligibility for free school meals. The comparison with similar schools indicates that average and lower-attainers are performing very well and relatively better than high-attainers. This is confirmed by detailed value-added analysis carried out by the school. High attaining pupils achieve good results nonetheless, but there is scope for the school to enable able pupils to achieve as well as other groups.
3. In most subjects, the percentage of pupils gaining grades A* to C in GCSE examinations is broadly in line with national averages. The 2001 GCSE results were below average in English, above average in mathematics and in line with national standards in science. In relation to pupils' prior attainment, the results in English and science were good and very good in mathematics. The results in all three subjects also reflect good improvement since the last inspection.
4. GCSE results in ICT, design and technology and geography tend to be below average with fewer pupils gaining a grade A* to C than nationally. This is particularly the case in ICT where results have been poor for the last couple of years. In art and design and French, results are above average with a high proportion of pupils gaining a grade A* to C. The overall GCSE performance in modern foreign languages (German and French combined) is in line with national averages and this is a remarkable achievement because virtually every pupil is entered, unlike the trend nationally, and achieves a creditable grade. The grades attained are higher than those nationally, and far fewer pupils gain the lowest grade and more gain grades E and F than pupils nationally. GCSE results in physical education tend to fluctuate depending on the pupils who opt for the subject, but usually are above average and reflect good achievement. In 2001, GCSE results were also good in expressive arts and media studies though below average in music. However, the numbers taking music were small hence comparisons with national results are not particularly helpful.

5. In 2000, pupils' performance in the National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds was below the national average in English, but in line with national averages in mathematics and science. In 2001, the results matched national averages in all three subjects. In English, the proportion of pupils who reached the expected level in 2001 was in line with the national average, and this signals very good achievement for most pupils. However, the proportion reaching the higher levels was well below. This reflects the small numbers who started at the school with high attainment. In mathematics, the proportions of pupils reaching the expected level and the higher levels were similar to the proportions nationally in 2001. Again, this signals good achievement. In science, whilst the proportion of those who reached the expected level was average, the proportion gaining a higher level was above average. When compared to the results in similar schools, pupils' overall performance was good. In mathematics, though pupils' performance at the expected level was in line with the average of similar schools, at the higher levels it was well above. Science results were even better with a higher proportion than in similar schools reaching the expected level and a well-above average proportion reaching the higher levels. Though a comparatively high proportion of pupils reached the expected level in English when compared to similar schools, the proportion reaching the higher levels remained well below.
6. Improvement over the last four or five years has been significantly better than the national trend in GCSE examinations and better than national trends in National Curriculum tests, especially in mathematics and science tests for 14-year-olds. The school met its targets for 2000 and 2001.
7. The standards of work seen during the inspection mostly reflect the results of national tests and examinations. Pupils' attainment is broadly average by the time they are 14 and 16 years old. Standards match national expectations in English and science throughout the school, and in mathematics by the age of 14. Standards in mathematics are above average by the age of 16. Pupils' achievements are high, especially in English and mathematics. Pupils make very good progress in English, particularly in Years 7 to 9, and this leads to a significant improvement in spelling, grammar and punctuation. In Years 10 to 11, pupils, especially abler pupils, develop advanced skills in reading and comprehension of texts. Though most lower-attainers have limited analytical skills, they are able to make relevant comments on books they have read and have good recall of the plot and storyline, given their abilities. In mathematics, pupils' numeracy skills are good and they are competent in solving mathematical problems. However, there is scope for abler pupils to make even more progress by better matching work to their needs. In science, pupils develop secure knowledge and understanding of scientific facts and ideas and provide well-argued explanations of scientific phenomenon. Practical skills are sound and pupils successfully plan experimental investigations.
8. Standards in religious education are lower than expected because too little time is allocated to this subject. Attainment is also below expectations in design and technology, geography and music for 16-year-olds. In design and technology, whilst practical skills are well developed, pupils' knowledge and understanding of the design process is limited and the quality of their design work is low. Work in graphics is of a higher standard than in food or resistant materials technology. To a certain extent this is because those opting for food studies or resistant materials technology are lower-attainers. In music, pupils' practical work is of a sound standard but the extent of their theoretical knowledge is of a lower standard. However, the progress pupils make in music is good, and often very good.

9. High standards of work are evident in art and design and physical education, and achievement in both is very good though in physical education abler girls do not achieve as well as they should. In history, pupils reach high standards by the age of 14, and in particular their skills in enquiry are well developed. Progress in history is very good throughout the school. Standards in French are also good, and achievement overall in modern foreign languages is very good.
10. The few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as their peers and their overall attainment is broadly average in most areas of the curriculum. No significant differences were noted in the attainment of boys and girls. Higher-attainers in most subjects are achieving well. However in a number of subjects, such as mathematics, geography, design and technology, ICT and physical education, there is room for their achievement to be improved through better match of work in lessons to these pupils' needs and more finely tuned target setting to gain an increase in the higher grades at GCSE.
11. Since the last inspection, standards achieved by pupils with special educational needs have risen. Pupils make very good progress in improving upon the poor literacy and numeracy skills they so often begin the school with. The proportions of pupils gaining one A* to G and five A* to G grades is now very high when compared with similar schools. Almost all pupils obtain at least one GCSE certificate and many obtain five or more GCSEs at grades A* to G. Considering their very low attainment on entry, this represents very good progress.
12. There has been significant improvement in standards attained since the last inspection and in particular very good improvement in the GCSE results. Overall there is now a much better level of consistency between subjects. At GCSE where some subjects perform at below average levels, it is often a reflection of the low prior attainment of pupils who have chosen the subject for GCSE. This is particularly the case in physical education and music.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

13. The attitudes of pupils to their learning are good and often very good especially for older pupils. They are proud of their school and the reputation it has for high standards. They show great loyalty to their teachers, who they feel work hard on their behalf, and they respond by trying to do their best. The majority of pupils show very good levels of enthusiasm for school and enjoy their lessons, particularly the frequent opportunities they are given for practical work. A few, particularly younger pupils, find it difficult to remain settled for long periods and sometimes ask for help before they have fully explored what they can achieve on their own. Most, however, respond well to lessons that are usually planned with these factors in mind. Pupils' sense of responsibility grows progressively as they move through the school, although generally more quickly in girls than boys. They value the respect shown them through, for example, the way they are consulted about matters affecting them and their education. Pupils respond to these consultations in a mature and responsible manner. Most complete their homework conscientiously and show care in the presentation of their work. A few, mostly boys, are immature and show poor attitudes to work, and this slows the rate at which they learn. Pupils particularly value and respond very well to the many extra-curricular opportunities provided, including the broad range of extra-curricular support given to help them with their work. Across the age range, pupils use the library extensively, both to support learning and for pleasure.

14. The behaviour of pupils is good overall and makes a positive contribution to the school as an effective learning environment. The code of conduct is very well known and pupils consider it to be fair. In lessons, they usually respond positively to the high expectations of staff. In almost all lessons, the behaviour of pupils with special educational needs was good or very good. A small minority of pupils, usually boys, find it difficult to behave in a mature and responsible manner all the time. As a result, the number of fixed term exclusions for the last school year, at 213 involving 136 pupils, is more than usually seen. The number of fixed term exclusions has risen for the current school year to date with about one third of them involving pupils with special education needs, usually those with behavioural and emotional difficulties, some of whom have been excluded more than once. The school is well aware of this and is considering how best these pupils' needs can be met. There has been some training of teachers and an LEA advisor visits weekly, but more provision is needed. Most pupils respond well to the support given to improve behaviour when they return from a period of exclusions. This is reflected the relatively low rate of permanent exclusions; three for the last school year.
15. During break and lunchtimes pupils behave well, they usually move around the site sensibly, if sometimes rushing thoughtlessly on stairs. In the dining room they are polite and courteous to staff, socialise well with each other and clear up after themselves when finished. The amount of litter dropped has improved since the last inspection, although litter still results in some unnecessary work for care-taking staff. Pupils usually respect school equipment, property and the work displayed in classrooms and corridors.
16. Relationships throughout are very good and a strength of the school. There are very high levels of mutual respect between pupils and their teachers and this supports learning well. Both boys and girls through the age range are very confident about sharing concerns, those that are personal as well as about work. Relationships amongst pupils are very constructive and based on high levels of respect and goodwill to one another. Pupils help and support one another, and feel able to express their own views and listen with tolerance and respect to those of others. There is little bullying and pupils feel that once made known to staff it is dealt with quickly and effectively. In Year 7, pupils have a very good understanding of the procedures they must follow if they see bullying and have no hesitation in making sure that staff are told of any such problems. The few pupils from minority ethnic groups and those receiving support from the speech and language unit on site are very well integrated into the school community.
17. Pupils respond well to the many opportunities that are planned for their personal development. Although many start at the school with poorly developed social skills, they make very good progress in their personal development and emerge at the end of Year 11 as mature and responsible young people. The regular residential visits and day trips have a positive impact on pupils' personal development, as do the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and opportunities to be involved in Trident Gold. As pupils move through the school they become increasingly confident and well organised. Their sense of being part of a community grows and they make an increasing contribution to that community. For example, pupils in Years 10 and 11 help and support younger ones with paired reading and mentoring. Others have been working in a hospice. A group of disaffected pupils successfully engaged in a project to paint a mural in an underpass. Across the age range pupils particularly value the opportunities offered by a very well organised school council to make their views known to the school. They readily

contribute their suggestions for improvement. The school council has been instrumental in suggesting action to successfully reduce the amount of litter reported at the time of the last inspection.

18. Levels of attendance for the last school year are satisfactory and in line with the average for similar schools at 91.6 per cent. This compares very favourably with rates achieved for other schools locally. In Year 7, pupils attend very well, however, levels in subsequent years decline and by Year 11 are below 90 per cent. A small number of pupils in Years 10 to 11 who have persistently poor attendance make a significant contribution to the absence figures. There is usually a good response to the support given to provide some of these pupils with acceptable alternative education; for example by attending college courses arranged on a part-time basis or by attending school for specific days or lessons negotiated between home and the school. These arrangements generally work well. In some cases parents condone unnecessary absences, particularly for older pupils, and this results in them not doing as well as they are able. A minority of parents take their children on holiday during the school year, occasionally in the period before the National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds or GCSE examinations in Year 11. This has an adverse impact on standards they achieve. Although the length of fixed-term exclusions is kept to a minimum, it reduces levels of attendance across all year groups. A few pupils do not come to school when they should, and some absent themselves from lessons after registration. They are usually identified during regular checks made by the school. The large majority of pupils arrive promptly for the start of the school day. Of those who are late after registration, some do not book in as required, making it necessary for the attendance officer to check on absentees each morning to ensure an accurate record of those present in the school. The majority of pupils move between lessons with a sense of purpose, a few do not, arriving later than their peers. This often results in the lessons starting late.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

19. The quality of teaching is good overall and in almost a third of lessons seen it was very good or excellent. Almost all lessons seen were satisfactory or better with over two-thirds being good or better. Teaching in English, mathematics, art and design, history and modern foreign languages is very good overall. It is good in science. The overall quality of teaching is good in all other subjects except religious education, where it is satisfactory. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching seen was largely due to lack of subject expertise when teachers were teaching outside their subject. Very occasionally it was due to weaknesses in management of pupils. There has been good improvement since the last inspection in the quality of the teaching.
20. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use it well to help develop pupils' understanding of key subject ideas. Planning is almost invariably good with clear identification of intended learning outcomes; this was an issue in the last inspection. These expected outcomes are shared with pupils who, as a result, know what they are expected to learn. The school has worked hard in developing this aspect of teaching and also in developing teachers' skill in using whole class sessions at the beginning to introduce the lesson, and again at the end to assess and summarise for pupils what they have learned. As a result of these focuses, the vast majority of lessons are structured well and pupils leave lessons with a clear idea of what they have, or should have, learned.

21. Tasks are carefully developed and in most lessons pupils are actively involved through well designed activities. In a few lessons, there is less active involvement of pupils and as a result their learning does not advance as well. Pupils themselves are aware of this factor and say that they feel they learn most when they are engaged in practical activities or discussions. There are some very good examples in history of group work and group discussions. There is scope in other subjects, such as English and geography, for some teachers to make more use of such activities. Work in most lessons is challenging and particularly so in modern foreign languages where pupils often make remarkable progress and also relish the level of challenge. High expectations ensure that lessons are pitched at a good level for the majority of pupils in the lesson. However, the use of different tasks for pupils of varying ability is not particularly well developed and this is especially so in mathematics, design and technology and physical education. In mathematics the rigor of tasks, the fact that lessons are very well structured and pupils taken through them at a good pace, results in good progress. In English, the work provided for pupils is often exciting and presented in an interesting and lively way, hence engaging their interest very effectively. Overall, the tasks in the vast majority of lessons are well thought out and inspire pupils to put creative and intellectual effort into their work.
22. Very good relationships and discipline contribute well to the existence of orderly classrooms where pupils are very well focused on their work. Resources are well used, and there is often relevant use of ICT. Pupils' work is marked effectively and written comments are usually helpful. Homework tasks are relevant and support the work done in class. Teachers adhere well to the homework timetable.
23. Basic skills of literacy and numeracy are well taught in English and mathematics respectively, and in other subjects. Good attention is paid to developing technical and subject specific vocabulary. In history and geography, attention to promoting pupils' writing is particularly good. In design and technology, the overuse of worksheets noted in the last inspection has been replaced by more appropriate use of writing frames to help pupils with their research and design work, though pupils' presentation of work remains an issue. There are also good opportunities for writing in science. Numeracy skills are effectively developed in most subjects, particularly in ICT and science.
24. The quality of teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs is very good and an important factor in the very good progress made by pupils with special educational needs. Teaching is often very good in low attaining sets, where the majority of pupils tend to have special educational needs, and all teaching is at least satisfactory. Teaching is very good in all lessons taught by specialist teachers. Teachers plan lessons very carefully making very good use of assessment. In Year 7 English lessons, pupils are placed in three groups and activities and materials well tailored to their needs. For example, in one lesson, one group moved to writing a 'Harry Potter' diary, whilst another group continued with a comprehension passage and language work that would enable them to move to the diary task in the next lesson. Teachers make their high expectations clear to the pupils, together with reassurance that the standards are achievable. There is an emphasis right from Year 7 on well presented and organised written work, often word processed, which helps pupils to complete GCSE coursework well. In modern foreign languages, teachers have carefully modified the curriculum and

syllabus to make best use in lessons of those areas where pupils do well, for example, oral work.

25. Pupils benefit from the help of learning support assistants (LSAs), who are well trained and know them very well. The learning development department tries to focus support as widely as possible in Years 7, 8 and 9, and succeeds in fulfilling most needs. In Years 10 and 11, support is given mainly to pupils with statements. LSAs are effectively used in lessons. For example, in a Year 7 design and technology lesson, the LSA helped pupils put on protective clothing and ensured that a hearing impaired pupil was seated at the front, as the radio link was less useful in a practical lesson. When necessary she repeated instructions, enabling him to work safely with the rest of the class. All teachers are aware of pupils' individual educational plans and some incorporate them most successfully in lesson planning.

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

26. The quality and range of the curriculum are good overall and all pupils benefit from the learning opportunities offered. The curriculum for pupils aged 11 to 14 and 14 to 16 offers a good range of subjects. Lessons in drama in Years 7 and 8, performing arts in Year 9, and two modern foreign languages are provided, in addition to the usual core and foundation subjects for pupils in Years 7 to 9. For pupils in Years 10 and 11, the school has adapted the curriculum effectively to meet their learning needs. Pupils may follow several paths according to their abilities and interests. All study English language (usually literature as well), mathematics, double or single science, a modern foreign language and physical education, and a range of optional subjects. They may choose academic subjects or decide on options that give them additional English and mathematics lessons. It is possible to study a pre-vocational course, ASDAN. The range of optional subjects is good: both history and geography may be chosen. Drama, ICT, media studies, a second foreign language, and a performing arts course are available. Not all pupils study design and technology, but those who do not have been formally disappplied. Where pupils are grouped by ability, the arrangements for grouping are well considered and work effectively.
27. Religious education is included within the programme for personal and social development (PSE) which all pupils study, but the time spent teaching religious education is very low and does not permit adequate coverage of the Essex Agreed Syllabus. Hence, the curriculum does not meet statutory requirements for religious education at either key stage. The PSE course includes statutory topics such as sex education and drug abuse and provision for these is well planned and supported by a variety of resources.
28. There are no discrete ICT lessons in either key stage, though pupils in Years 10 to 11 can choose to follow a GCSE course in ICT. All subjects are required to teach some element, or elements, of ICT and there is a planned approach to the coverage of the National Curriculum for ICT through subjects. Although there is more work to be done in promoting further use of ICT in some areas, such as in science and design and technology, the overall provision is very good and pupils have ready and frequent access to computers throughout the working day as well as out of hours. For example,

pupils can log onto the school's network from home and access work done in school earlier in the day. The school's literacy and numeracy strategies are in place and effectively used to promote pupils' skills. The school holds the Basic Skills quality mark. Activities such as regular summer schools for literacy and numeracy make a good contribution to pupils' learning.

29. Pupils' personal development is enhanced through the 'Drop A Day' which occurs eight times a year. The curriculum is suspended in favour of an in-depth study on a particular theme or topic. This might be focused on personal development such as the recent Year 8 'Realising Confidence Conference' which emphasised different ways to learn and the need to work constructively with others. Parents and governors join pupils in many of the activities on these days.
30. Pupils with special educational needs are very well provided for through the learning development department and the speech and language unit. In Years 7 to 9, they benefit from a generous number of LSAs in most subjects. Individual LSA support is continued in Years 10 and 11, where it is deemed necessary. The curriculum support option for older pupils offers very good provision for those who need to consolidate basic learning skills. Pupils with special educational needs have very good access to computers to practise and improve skills in literacy and numeracy. The requirements of Statements of Special Educational Need are fully met except for some pupils in the speech and language unit as there is currently no speech therapist.
31. Provision of extra-curricular activities is very good. All aspects of school life are covered, from residential courses to school clubs and study trips abroad. Pupils have gone cycling in Holland and stayed with families in Japan. There is a very well attended summer school for Year 6 pupils intending to join in September. The school very successfully shares all its activities widely through stories and photographs in its newsletter. The speech and language unit supervises its own pupils on residential courses, making it possible for them to stay overnight and join in all activities.
32. From Year 9 onwards, careers and vocational education is systematically and thoroughly organised. When pupils begin to choose option subjects, they attend a two-day 'World of Work' programme involving 16 or so organisations, based on work observations, presentation and related school activities. A computer information service complements this further. In Year 10, pupils begin to focus more closely on careers and higher education opportunities, starting with a careers convention. The school works very hard to raise aspirations to university courses and arranges 'taster' days and courses at Reading and Cambridge Universities. Special educational needs pupils benefit from the close links the school has with local colleges. These links help staff to arrange support at college for these pupils. All pupils have a 'work experience' placement for three weeks. The school's programme encourages pupils to research their preferences thoroughly and whilst being realistic, aim to fulfil their potential.
33. The school's links with the community are strong. As a result it benefits from sponsorship, working with Business Mentors, and working visits, for example to Langdon Hills Conservation Centre. Close curricular and pastoral links with local primary schools ensure that Year 7 pupils settle in quickly and happily. There are

valuable links with the local colleges which guarantee pupils at the school a place on an appropriate course. Part of the food technology course is now taught at Thurrock College, where the pupils have the benefit of commercial catering facilities and expertise.

34. The school succeeds in providing a very wide range of stimulating experiences in all areas of the curriculum.
35. Overall, the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. There is a focus on the three R's of respect for self, respect for others and respect for the environment. Provision for moral and social development is very good and many pupils support the attitudes and values that the school promotes. Provision for spiritual and cultural development is good. In the majority of school assemblies and in the tutor-led Thought for the Day, despite the wealth of resources, statutory requirements for an act of collective worship are not met. A clear framework is in place but delivery is inconsistent.
36. The school places a high value on each individual pupil and creates an atmosphere where pupils' sense of self-worth is very effectively promoted. This is largely due to the strong commitment teachers have to the personal and academic development of pupils. Pupils' ideas, feelings and views are valued and in many aspects of the curriculum they are provided with opportunities to consider issues and ideas beyond the material. Religious education makes some contribution to pupils' spiritual development through the module of work on belief in Year 10 and the history department makes a significant and impressive contribution through reflection on war and death in the trip to a First World War battlefield. In performing arts, the essence of self worth is promoted through drama and in dance the pathos of the homeless is conveyed to the audience. Although there is no specific planned provision for spiritual development in English, there is a spiritual dimension to some of the poetry read and in other modules of work. Spiritual uses of African masks are studied in textiles but opportunities to encourage pupils to ponder the natural wonders of the world are not exploited sufficiently in science. The strong sense of community within the school further promotes spirituality because it inspires pupils to think about and care for others within the community.
37. Provision for the moral development of pupils is very good and there is a very clear code of conduct in the 'Rights and Responsibilities' policy. There is a strong moral code throughout the school which manifests itself in such things as the 'honesty in action' advertisement in Woodlands Weekly where pupils are praised for handing in lost items. English, PSE, history and performing arts contribute well to the development of moral values and there is a good ethos in the mathematics department, especially in the counselling of pupils. Very good opportunities are provided for debate on moral issues, such as racism, war and the care of the environment, in many subjects.
38. There are many opportunities for social development through the extensive extra-curricular programmes including an activities week and a range of curriculum enrichment activities such as Saturday extension workshops and study weekends in modern foreign languages. There are regular opportunities for pupils to work in a collaborative manner in art, English, science, mathematics, geography, modern foreign languages, PSE, performing arts and physical education. Valuable opportunities to take responsibility are offered to pupils including acting as librarians, prefects, duty pupil and members of the School Council. Pupils are provided with very good opportunities to serve the community through the Trident schemes, Banner project and fund-raising schemes.

39. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good, but opportunities to teach pupils about the cultural diversity in contemporary Britain are missed. English, art, history, modern foreign languages, performing arts, PSE and religious education all contribute well to cultural development. In design and technology, Year 7 pupils study the effects of religious belief on diet. The school celebrates the richness of other cultures in One World Week and through exchanges, visiting artists, and many trips, the furthest one being to Japan. The five Year 10 pupils whose work experience was carried out in Germany last year, is a salient example of good provision for the cultural development of pupils. The school holds the International Schools Award for its international links with pupils and staff in schools in other countries, including links which promote staff development.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

40. The overall pastoral care that pupils receive is very good. Teachers know individual pupils well and respond to them in a very positive and supportive way. They are aware of specific needs of individuals, such as those with special educational needs. Very positive relationships throughout the school ensure that pupils thrive in a secure environment where they are confident that they will receive help and support when needed. The PSE programme makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development.
41. Concern for the health, safety and welfare of pupils at the school is a high priority and standards achieved are generally good. There is a trained member of staff with designated responsibility for child protection and the school has suitable procedures in place. All staff are well briefed on the procedures for child protection and the school liaises effectively with local support agencies. A suitable health and safety policy provides broad guidelines for what is required. The member of staff with overall responsibility for health and safety has been appointed recently and is shortly to be trained for this role. There are suitable arrangements to deal with first aid emergencies and prescribed medicines, and there are regular fire drills. There are suitable assessments of risk for school trips, and regular inspections of premises and testing of portable electrical appliances. Members of staff are usually well aware of health and safety requirements, however, formal procedures for risk assessment in subjects and around the premises are not fully in place.
42. The school places a high priority on monitoring and improving levels of attendance, and procedures in place for these are good. This is reflected in the time given to monitoring by the senior management team. A comprehensive range of strategies is used to monitor and improve attendance. These strategies include the following: there is a full-time attendance officer, who carries out home visits if necessary; individual form tutors and heads of year monitor individual pupils, promptly following up any trends or patterns; the school telephones home on the first day of absence; there are regular and random truancy checks during the school day. These strategies have a positive impact on pupils' attendance. However, procedures for reporting late to school are not fully effective and many pupils do not register themselves late when arriving after registration. They are picked up effectively by the attendance officer who does a class-by-class attendance check when pupils have gone to their first lesson. The school has chosen to remain with a manual rather than computerised registration system as senior staff feel this provides a more personal approach to checking attendance and punctuality.

43. There are very good procedures to monitor behaviour and promote high standards. The behaviour policy and procedures are very clear and pupils are very well acquainted with the code of conduct. Rewards and sanctions are consistently well used, resulting in pupils feeling that they are dealt with fairly. Most pupils starting in Year 7 are very well motivated by the rewards system and as they mature, most show an increasing desire to achieve well for its own sake. This is usually well developed for pupils in Years 10 to 11. The school follows guidelines well in dealing with exclusions. Governors are suitably involved in the process, and the school places great emphasis on the need for parents to come into the school to discuss and agree ways to support improved standards of behaviour. Pupils are only excluded when their behaviour warrants it and even then the length of fixed term exclusions is kept to an absolute minimum, usually only one or two days. This has not, however, resulted in a reduction in the number of pupils being excluded on a fixed term basis, though it does result in relatively few permanent exclusions. There are well-known and effective arrangements for dealing with bullying. Pupils are well briefed about what to do and they are confident about telling staff if they suspect another pupil is being bullied. This results in very few such incidents and pupils being confident that they will be dealt with well. Behaviour management strategies used in lessons are very effective and contribute very well to pupils' learning.
44. The educational and personal support and guidance for pupils are very good as is the monitoring of academic performance and personal development. Personal development is very well supported through the PSE programme and the provision for citizenship, which is developing very well. There are very good opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility and these make a significant contribution to their personal development. Pupils are prepared well for making choices in Year 9 and effectively planned careers guidance helps them to make considered decisions about what to do when they leave school. Good liaison with primary schools establishes both the academic and pastoral needs of individual Year 6 pupils well. Subsequent careful planning ensures these are provided for effectively in the popular summer school held for pupils about to join Year 7. These arrangements, together with formal induction procedures, mean they settle quickly and happily into the school when they start in September.
45. There is very good tracking and monitoring of pupils' progress. The school diligently monitors the rate of achievement made by individual pupils across subjects in order to identify any inconsistencies, and takes action where required. Through the regular academic reviews, in which parents are also invited to participate, pupils receive very good guidance and support for academic and personal development. In addition, form tutors and heads of year keep a rigorous check on pupils' progress, both academic and in relation to personal development, and provide timely and substantial help where needed. As a result of all this support and guidance, pupils have a very good understanding of their own learning and know the National Curriculum levels they are working within and their own personal targets. There is very good provision for out-of-hours study such as homework clubs, summer schools and revision clubs.
46. The school has very well planned and clearly communicated assessment procedures that are usually followed well in individual subjects and are monitored closely by the senior management team. In all but religious education and ICT procedures meet the required standards. Assessment is usually well used to inform and guide curricular planning. There is detailed analysis, including by gender, of pupils' performance in national tests and examinations. The information is used well to set targets and to take action where weaknesses are identified. There are too few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds for the school to carry out specific analysis by ethnicity, but individual

tracking of pupils is rigorous enough to ensure that these pupils are not underachieving. The school has identified its most able pupils and there is an annual project for them. However, on a day-to-day basis, the most able pupils are sometimes not stretched enough in some subjects and targets set for them are not always as challenging as they might be. Overall, though, the school's provision for personal and academic development is very good and makes a substantial difference to pupils' academic achievement.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

47. The large majority of parents are very pleased with what the school provides and achieves. They feel the school is well led and managed, and that staff are very approachable when there is need to discuss problems or concerns. They consider the teaching to be good, that their children are expected to work hard and they make good progress. Parents are appreciative of the extensive range of well-planned extra curricular activities and they feel the school is helping their children to become mature and responsible. The evidence of inspection wholeheartedly supports these positive views. Some parents are concerned about homework, with most who provided comments about this feeling that their children have too much work to do at home. Evidence during inspection shows that the amount of work given in each year group is about right and similar to what is expected in most other schools.
48. The school has established a very positive partnership with the large majority of its parents and keeps them very well informed. There is effective communication with prospective parents, ensuring they become familiar with the school and its staff in advance of their children starting in Year 7. During the autumn term parents of pupils in Year 7 receive a very useful 'settling in' report and the opportunity to discuss concerns with form tutors. The prospectus and governors' annual report to parents provide a comprehensive range of information. The school publishes a newsletter for parents each week, providing good information about current news and events together with diary dates. Parents have very good access to the head teacher, who is available for an hour each morning before school, to discuss problems or concerns. The school provides parents with useful pamphlets about how to support their children with the work they do at home; in addition there is a very good range of information evenings, for example about work experience, course work, options and careers amongst others. Pupils' planners ensure parents are able to keep themselves suitably informed about their children's homework timetables and work set. The planners also include many of the school's policies and procedures as well as providing an effective means of two-way communication with form tutors where this is needed. The school contacts parents at an early stage where there is any cause for concern about their children. They are also told when their children deserve praise.
49. The large majority of parents value the information provided about the progress their children make. There are formal consultations each year when they receive written progress reports and have the opportunity to discuss them with relevant staff. The school makes a generous time allowance of 10 minutes with every subject teacher to enable parents fully to discuss how their children are getting on and to receive a verbal evaluation of relative strengths and areas needing improvement in each subject. Information about progress for the 10 to 15 per cent of parents who do not attend consultations, and who receive a written report only, is satisfactory but provides less specific information about what their children know, understand and can do. Reports provide a very good evaluation of pupils' personal development and their attitudes to work. Targets set for subjects of the curriculum are often too general to inform parents what it is their children need to do to improve their work. However, there is an

opportunity for parents to discuss these targets with teachers in greater depth during academic reviews. An evaluation of effort, progress and coursework is clearly stated. The school does not meet its obligation to report on progress made in religious education. Information about their children's testing at by the age of 14 is suitably communicated. In addition to annual progress reports parents receive an interim summary report and an evaluation of where individual pupils deserve praise or are causing concern. Annual work reviews are held each year and parents are asked to attend these interviews that take about half an hour. The school provides more opportunities for parents to find out about how well their children are doing than is formally required.

50. Parents have a positive impact on their children's learning through their involvement with the school. Attendance at information events and consultations about progress shows high levels of interest. They regularly contribute their views, through the school's consultation process, on matters of policy, for example about homework, induction arrangements, progress reporting and parents' evenings, amongst others; and these views are given suitable consideration in school development planning. Attendance at events involving their children is high, and the family learning sessions for ICT each Wednesday evening are heavily over-subscribed. The home/school agreement is well written to support an effective partnership between home and school and is used well as a working document, being revisited with parents each year. The large majority of parents respond well when the school contacts them about concerns regarding aspects of their children's work and support staff in trying to find a way forward. A few parents, particularly of pupils in Year 11, do not support the work of the school sufficiently well by ensuring that their children attend regularly.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

51. The headteacher provides excellent leadership. He sets a very clear direction for development and places a high priority on meeting the needs of pupils. The last report stated that the headteacher had a 'powerful vision' and this still pertains today. The senior management team provides outstanding leadership and management. Staff work very well together as a team and with the headteacher. Delegation of duties is very good so that each member of the team is working to their strength but also has the opportunity to develop new skills. Leadership and management of the majority of departments are at least good and often very good.
52. Monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school are excellent. An advanced skills teacher and a senior teacher have the responsibility to observe teaching and learning throughout the school and to observe every teacher over the course of the year. In addition, there is further monitoring by the headteacher, senior staff and heads of department. Books and homework diaries (contact books) are regularly monitored and there are regular questionnaires to pupils. The monitoring of performance data is extremely thorough and is overall outstanding in depth and rigour. Every department produces a report on GCSE and, where relevant, National Curriculum test results and teachers analyse their own individual examination results. It is clear that the excellent focus on monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school has had a very positive influence on the quality of teaching and on the improvements in pupils' attainment since the last inspection.
53. The school development plan is clearly focused on the school's key priorities and has a very good focus on activities which will contribute to raising achievement. The process

of development planning is very well established and all areas of the school have their own development plans to supplement the whole school one.

54. Governors' roles are clear and they have a good working knowledge of the school. They receive a very good level of information so that they are very well informed. Governors perform their roles well and have a very good idea of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Committee structures are very well organised and used very well to support governors' work. Many governors are actively involved in school life and assist the school through, for example, meeting parents whose children are not attending regularly or are misbehaving. However, several statutory requirements are not met and hence the extent to which governors fulfil their responsibilities is only satisfactory.
55. Overall, financial management is very good. The school spends an above average amount per pupil, but then it tends to spend all it has and little in the last two years has been carried forward. Governors and the headteacher believe that the money should be spent on the pupils in the school. In addition, the school is good at bidding successfully for external or additional funds. The presence of a speech and language unit also raises the school's level of spending in comparison to schools nationally. Governors are fully involved in setting the school's budget and monitoring the spending. Best value principles are well taken into account, for example, the move to employing cleaning staff instead of using contract staff came about as a result of a cost-benefit analysis. There are regular consultations with parents and pupils in order to inform decisions made. The headteacher is very clear also about putting money where it most benefits pupils' learning i.e. resources, particularly ICT resources, support staff, quality teachers and high quality professional development activities.
56. The head of the special educational needs department leads a large team effectively and works closely with the head of the speech and language unit and her staff. Though in every other respect the special needs area is well staffed, there is currently no speech therapist in post in the speech and language unit. The training of staff and the time assigned to planning of lessons and resources enhances the quality of support considerably. Since the last inspection, the department has maintained its standards. It was recognised then as a strength of the school and it continues to be a strength.
57. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is at least good in almost all areas. Most subjects are suitably staffed with well-qualified teachers. The number of lessons taught by non-specialists is few; where they occur the school makes good use of staff with suitable previous experience. With the exception of religious education, there are sufficient and well qualified staff to meet the needs of all subjects. An increasing number of pupils on the school roll, some retirements and several teachers moving on because of promotion have resulted in the need to recruit more than 30 teachers during the last two years. A high proportion of them have been newly qualified teachers (NQTs). The school has exacting recruitment criteria to ensure those appointed are well equipped to meet identified needs. The excellent induction and support arrangements for NQTs enable them rapidly to become effective members of their teaching teams. Trainee teachers are similarly well supported. There is generous support from suitably qualified teaching assistants and technicians who are effectively deployed. Throughout the school teamwork is very well developed ensuring common goals and targets are pursued efficiently. Staff morale is high and absence kept to a minimum. Continuous professional development is given high priority and performance is evaluated at all levels on a regular basis. Informal and formal support is given generously and members of staff are usually confident to discuss their developing needs with their line manager. The school's arrangements for performance

management are excellent and the professional development of staff is matched well to targets set in the school's development plan. Suitably qualified and experienced administration and maintenance staff provide good support for the work of the school.

58. ICT resources are very good with a pupil-computer ratio of 5:1 compared to the national average of 7:1. Use of ICT and related equipment is very good. The school has a pleasant learning resources centre, with library and computer facilities and it is open during out-of-school hours. Spending on learning resources and on staff development is good indicating that these are important priorities. In most subjects the quantity and quality of resources are good. However, in music there are too many broken instruments.
59. The school's accommodation is good overall, though the school is now pretty full with over 1400 pupils. Subjects are suited together and there are enough teaching rooms as well as good external grounds. There is a brand new computer suite which is both attractive and innovative in design. The school has a programme for refurbishment and redecoration, but some parts of the school are in need of redecoration. In science particularly some of the laboratories are in urgent need of refurbishment. In art there is insufficient storage and shelving. Spending on building/grounds maintenance and improvement though is in line with national averages, however, the school is on a widely spread-out site with three separate buildings thus it may be more costly to maintain than most other schools.
60. The school uses its resources efficiently and effectively, however, one area where there is room for improvement is in the use of time. For example, a number of lessons begin late due to the late arrival of pupils. The tutor period at the end of the day is not always used effectively.
61. Overall, given the high achievements of pupils and the very good attention given to pupils' academic and personal development, the school provides very good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

62. In order to improve the school's educational provision and raise standards even further the headteacher, senior staff and governors should:

(1) Improve the provision for religious education by:

- increasing the teaching time for religious education;
- giving religious education a place on the curriculum in its own right, i.e. taking it out of PSE;
- working towards religious education as a viable GCSE subject;
- improving the staffing for religious education so that it is taught by specialists.

(Paragraphs: 8, 27, 57, 167-173)

(2) Develop and implement strategies to further raise the achievement of most able pupils by:

- developing different levels of work for pupils of differing ability in the same class, particularly in design and technology, mathematics and physical education;
- raising expectations of able girls in physical education;

- providing opportunities for extended projects in ICT for abler pupils;
- making use of assessment data and information to set challenging targets for more able pupils.
(Paragraphs: 7, 21, 46, 95, 100, 117, 121, 123, 137-139, 165)

In addition to the key issues identified above the school should also include the following areas for development in the action plan:

- improve the quality of assemblies and reflection periods; (Paragraphs: 35)
- ensure that risk assessments are properly undertaken; (Paragraphs: 41)
- make better use of the tutor periods at the end of the day; (Paragraphs: 60)
- improve punctuality to lessons; (Paragraphs: 18, 42, 60, 95)
- work towards reducing the number of fixed term exclusions; (Paragraphs: 14, 43)
- improve the accommodation in science; (Paragraphs: 59, 104)
- provide pupils with more opportunities to learn about the cultural diversity of British society; (Paragraphs: 39)
- improve GCSE results in ICT. (Paragraphs: 4, 136, 138)

THE SPEECH AND LANGUAGE UNIT

63. The Speech and Language unit has places for 20 pupils, and 18 are currently filled; all have Statements of Special Educational Need. Pupils are very well integrated into the mainstream school. As a result of this and the very good teaching, they make very good progress.
64. On entry to the unit, pupils have considerable speech and language difficulties that may mean they cannot communicate easily or they have difficulty in processing and understanding language. Their attainment on entry is below average, sometimes very much below. There is provision in the unit for a speech therapist to work four days per week during term. The post is currently vacant, despite attempts by the LEA and Health Authority, who jointly fund the post, to fill it. This means that some Statements of Special Educational Need, those which require regular speech therapy sessions, are not completely fulfilled. The school has done its utmost to provide for the needs of these pupils. A qualified speech therapist spent two weeks in school this term assessing all pupils and, where necessary, organising specific programmes. This will be repeated after Christmas if no appointment has been made. Parents are aware of the situation as the unit maintains close contact with them.
65. Despite the lack of speech therapy, all the pupils in the unit are able to follow all lessons and join in the activities they wish. They benefit from individual programmes carried out in tutor times or school breaks. Pupils in Years 7 and 9 were observed in English, mathematics, science and geography lessons. They were well supported in all by LSAs and the subject teachers. When questions were asked, pupils were often able to answer correctly and clearly, though usually briefly. In lessons, LSAs are careful to try and ensure that pupils do some work on their own. By the end of year 9, they are able to participate in all subjects with at least basic understanding. Written work is well presented. Its accuracy varies but the writing is organised. Ideas are rarely developed at any length or to any depth.

66. In Years 10 and 11, pupils continue to have individual support and also tuition if necessary. They follow a full GCSE programme, including a foreign language, but can choose the Curriculum Support option and the ASDAN course. These two options provide additional literacy and numeracy lessons as well as life skills and vocational opportunities. In a Year 10 Curriculum Support class, the teacher and LSAs were able to work at the level needed by the pupils. In a topic on understanding train timetables, pupils practised basic arithmetic skills and learnt the conventions of layout at their own speed. Constant reinforcement in different ways is a feature of the very good teaching frequently seen. Resources are good and used well. When one pupil had finished an exercise, he was able to move to a computer to practise on 'Successmaker'. In Year 11, pupils enjoyed and participated fully in a lesson on Diet and Health. The teacher established a spirit of collaboration that included everyone present – pupils, supporting teachers and LSAs. Pupils work hard on building up their portfolios and benefit from frequent and varied visits outside school. At the end of Year 11, pupils reach standards in line with their own abilities. All leave with at least one GCSE certificate, and most with more than one. A few pupils achieve one or more A* to C grades. Their achievement is very good.
67. Unit pupils receive the same good pastoral care as others, and in addition staff try hard to adapt provision to pupils' individual needs and circumstances. For example, unit pupils often do not live locally. Work experience placements are sought for them near their own homes, which is not only more convenient but offers them greater independence. The head of the unit works closely with the head of learning development. This ensures that teachers, LSAs and resources are all used most effectively and that pupils are very well integrated into the main school. New initiatives are monitored and evaluated. For example, pupils' individual educational plans have recently been computerised, which relieves senior teachers of administration, but the computer programme has narrowed the descriptions and targets available. The head of the unit is seeking ways to overcome this. The organisation of teaching and support staff ensures that adequate time is available for joint planning and preparation of lessons. All in the unit are committed to its aims and work very hard to achieve them.
68. The unit's small office and classroom, both pleasant and well finished, are shared with the learning development department. With the expansion of both departments, it has become cramped. At break times in particular, it is very crowded, and, on occasions, confidentiality is difficult to maintain.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	178
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	60

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	10	45	67	51	5	0	0
Percentage	6	25	38	28	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. [When the total number is substantially less than 100, add] Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than one [two, three, etc] percentage point[s]. [Where the total is close to or greater than 100, use only the first sentence.]

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1437
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	216

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	245
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	39

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

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	Unauthorised absence
%	%

School data	8.1
National comparative data	7.7

School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	142	149	291

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	78	86	98
	Girls	119	96	103
	Total	197	182	201
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (46)	63 (66)	69 (60)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	14 (11)	43 (38)	37 (20)
	National	32 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	73	87	101
	Girls	118	97	110
	Total	191	184	211
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	66 (69)	63 (58)	73 (58)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	25 (27)	33 (29)	36 (18)
	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)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	142	108	250

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	47	140	140
	Girls	66	101	106
	Total	113	241	246
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	45.2 (45.6)	96.4 (96)	98.4 (98)
	National	47.2 (47.4)	88.9 (90.6)	94.6 (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	37.1 (38)
	National	38.1 (38.4)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	12
Black – African heritage	7
Black – other	1
Indian	3
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	4
White	1405
Any other minority ethnic group	4

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	2	0
Black – African heritage	1	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	1	0
White	212	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	88.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.2

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	34
Total aggregate hours worked per week	968

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	69.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.6
Key Stage 4	20.0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2001
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	£
Total income	4136512
Total expenditure	4185250
Expenditure per pupil	2913
Balance brought forward from previous year	-27900
Balance carried forward to next year	-20838

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	22
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	34

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1437
Number of questionnaires returned	387

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	56	6	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	49	47	2	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	37	51	6	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	48	15	4	1
The teaching is good.	43	51	1	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	40	47	10	1	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	54	41	4	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	72	27	0	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	39	47	10	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	54	40	3	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	44	50	3	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	50	44	2	0	3

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths:

- The very good teaching which has a positive impact on pupils' learning
- The imaginative and challenging curriculum provided for pupils
- The positive attitudes towards work displayed by pupils

Areas for improvement:

- Increase opportunities for pupils to read and consider factual materials and use them to help them to extend the range and variety of their written work
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to take control of classroom activities and become independent learners

70. A significant number of pupils begin at the school with attainment that is well below average in all areas of language and literacy. By the time pupils reach the ages of 14 and 16, attainment in all aspects of English is in line with national averages and achievement is very good. This is reflected in the results of 2001 national tests for 14-year-olds with the large majority of pupils reaching the nationally expected level. A below average number of pupils reached the higher levels, however. Standards in these tests have improved since last year, and are better than at the time of the last inspection.
71. Standards in English language and literature at the age of 16 are average, though standards in external examinations for these subjects were below national averages in 2000 and 2001. Standards overall in Years 10 to 11 have improved since the time of the last inspection. Significant factors in this improvement are very good teaching, and the challenging and imaginative curriculum on offer. Homework is used in a positive manner to reinforce the learning which takes place in lessons. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress in the subject.
72. By the age of 14, pupils are good listeners. They listen well to their teachers and most pupils respond with enthusiasm to teachers' questions. Pupils enjoy working in groups where they listen to, and respect, the opinions of others. They are prepared to modify their ideas after considering alternative viewpoints. Teachers provide pupils with regular opportunities to engage in listening and speaking skills. A very good example of this occurred in a Year 9 lesson when, after studying poetry from the First World War, pupils debated the morality of war and considered recent political events. Many of the ablest pupils in this class expressed their ideas and opinions confidently and articulately. A number of average and lower attaining pupils speak confidently in social situations, they are less secure when speaking in a formal manner.
73. Reading skills are well promoted within the department and teachers provide pupils with frequent opportunities to read and explore a wide range of literature, including poems, plays, and novels from other times, cultures and traditions. Teachers' very good questioning enables pupils to develop good reading comprehension skills and effectively promotes their skills in interpreting texts. Whilst pupils engage in the occasional study of factual materials this aspect of reading is underdeveloped. Many pupils have good reading habits, they borrow books from public libraries and often receive books as gifts. As a result, they make very good progress in developing advanced reading skills, such as appreciating the writers' use of language and reading for inference and deduction. In

contrast to this a number of pupils read only at school. Whilst this enables them to develop good technical skills, they are not always able to appreciate and comprehend to sufficient depth the material in the books they read. The department addresses this issue through paired reading activities and study groups for reading outside the timetable.

74. The very good modules of work produced by the department have a very positive impact on pupils' learning and enable them to produce letters, diary entries, character studies and newspaper reports of sound quality. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to explore factual materials and to use them to write for a wider range of audiences. Many average and higher attaining pupils write at length with few or no mistakes. Lower attaining pupils have problems with producing extended written work and putting together well structured sentences. They continue to make basic errors in spelling and grammar. Teachers promote good learning by giving pupils regular opportunities to re-draft their work in order to improve it. Pupils often word-process their work and produce well presented topics and projects. The good and often very good learning which takes place in lessons is very much influenced by pupils' positive approach to learning, and their ability to work with sustained concentration.
75. Pupils continue to make very good progress in English as they progress through Years 10 to 11, though some lower attaining pupils find it difficult to fully respond to the increased demands of the GCSE syllabus. It is for this reason that attainment by the time pupils are 16 is average.
76. Pupils in Years 10 to 11 make very good progress in their oral skills and many respond well to the internally assessed speaking and listening element of their GCSE studies. As part of these studies pupils speak on a number challenging contemporary issues and discuss the concepts and ideas presented in the books they read. Whilst many pupils thrive on this type of activity a number of pupils continue to have problems in structuring their ideas, and speaking at length to an audience of their friends.
77. Pupils' reading skills by the time they are 16 are satisfactory. A number of higher attaining pupils display advanced reading skills and many pupils in Years 10 to 11 develop sound, and often good, critical and analytical reading skills. Many pupils rise well to the challenge of reading demanding texts for GCSE and make perceptive insights into the novels, poems and plays they read. However, a number of lower-attainers find it difficult to read more deeply into the text or fully appreciate the writer's use of language. Nonetheless, given their abilities, these pupils make very good progress in developing comprehension skills.
78. Pupils' written work at 16 shows good improvement from their work at the age of 14. Those in Year 10 develop good note taking skills and the ability to respond to comprehension type activities. Very good learning takes place as pupils move on into Year 11. Pupils become more confident in their knowledge about the texts they read, and are, in the main, able to transfer this knowledge into satisfactory written work for their coursework files. In the best work, higher attaining pupils write detailed and extended essays of good quality making a strong personal response to the questions asked. They write, using relevant quotations from the text, about the psychological nature of characters in books or plays, their relationships with others, and what can be deduced from what they say and do. Average attaining pupils have a clear understanding of character and story, but are less secure in their ability to draw comparison between different texts and genre. Their written work indicates that they rely too much on the opinions gathered from study notes and too often re-tell parts of the story. Low attaining pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of character and storyline,

but fall into the trap of writing down everything they know about the novel or play they have read, rather than focusing on the question being asked.

79. The quality of teaching in both key stages is very good. All lessons are well planned and lesson aims are shared with pupils so they know what they are expected to learn. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils and use well-focused questions to ensure that they all make an active contribution in lessons. Lessons are brisk and purposeful, and the final part of the lesson is very well used to share and celebrate what pupils have learned. Time and resources are used extremely well in lessons and learning support staff make a very valuable contribution to the learning of pupils with special educational needs. Where teaching is very good, as it was in over half of lessons, teachers display a real personal enthusiasm for the work in hand. This contributes to a highly motivating and rigorous working environment where pupils work willingly and with purpose.
80. There is a good range of policies in place to support teaching in the classroom, and the modular scheme of work in Years 7 to 9 provides a challenging and imaginative range of activities on a given text or topic. The department utilises a good range of assessment and recording procedures, which clearly identify individual targets for improvement in all areas of the curriculum. A good range of extra-curricular activities is provided, including regular visits to the theatre, public speaking, mock trials and a reading review club. Teachers give up a great deal of their own time in order to run a number of extra-curricular study groups to help raise standards of attainment.
81. Leadership and management are exemplary. The subject is directed by a well informed and forward thinking manager who has a clear vision for improvement in the subject and leads by her own very good practice. There is a very high level of commitment by all members of the department, with a very strong team spirit.

Literacy

82. Literacy across the curriculum is now more actively promoted than at the time of the last inspection. A member of the senior management team is responsible for its development, and this aspect of the curriculum has a clear focus in the school development plan. All teachers have taken part in whole school in-service training for the subject, with it now having a prominent place in all department handbooks.
83. All departments have a display of key words in their subject in or near classrooms in order to promote pupils' vocabulary. In most subjects regular opportunities are provided for pupils to discuss and talk about the work they are involved in. Whilst many pupils articulate their ideas and opinions in a confident manner, particularly when engaged in small group activities, a number of pupils still find it difficult to talk at length in a structured and logical manner when engaged in formal situations. Emphasis is placed on the use of appropriate vocabulary and the development of technical language. Teachers often highlight key words to be used in individual lessons on the board and draw pupils' attention to them. The focus on key words makes a positive contribution to pupils' reading skills. The standard of reading is average. Regular opportunities are provided in most subjects for pupils to contribute to the reading of texts.
84. Pupils display satisfactory note-taking skills in many subjects. Many subjects also make effective use of writing frames to support pupils' written work. These help pupils to structure their writing well and to write in more detail and at length. Geography and history lessons have specifically targeted the use of literacy, and pupils produce good extended written work in these subjects. This work includes letters to local authorities about concerns for the local environment, and letters home from soldiers serving at the

front during the First World War. Regular opportunities are provided, principally in English, for pupils to re-draft their work in order to improve it. Teachers effectively follow the whole school marking scheme and highlight pupils' errors in their basic English skills.

85. All these strategies and activities have a beneficial impact on the development of pupils' literacy.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths:

- The quality of teaching and learning
- The leadership and management of the department
- The achievement of pupils
- The improvement since the last inspection

Areas for improvement:

- The provision for different work for higher-attainers
- Numeracy strategy fully implemented
- The reduction in the loss of time as pupils move from one site to another

87. There has been very good progress since the last inspection and standards have continued to rise at a very good rate. There is now very good analysis and use of data to help improve pupils' standards of work. As a result the progress that pupils now make is very good and this is much better than at the time of the last inspection.
88. The 2000 GCSE results were above national averages with respect to the proportions of pupils gaining a grade A* to G, but below with respect to the A* to C. In 2000, mathematics results were not as good as other subjects in the school. The results for 2001 were much better and this is attributable to improved provision as a result of close analysis of data on pupils' performance. Attention to coursework has also improved, and more pupils managed to gain a C grade in the 2001 GCSE examinations as a result. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C in 2001 was above the national average and well above the average of similar types of schools, signalling very good progress. The trend of improvement since the last inspection has been good. There is no significant difference between boys and girls.
89. In 2000, the results of National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds were broadly in line with national averages and the averages found in similar types of schools. However, fewer pupils reached the highest levels, Levels 7 and 8 than schools nationally. School analysis indicates that girls made better progress between taking national tests at the age of 11 and the tests at the age of 14, although boys' performance was better. The results in 2001 were broadly similar, with a slightly smaller proportion reaching at least Level 5, the level expected of 14-year-olds, but a higher proportion reaching at least Level 6. Girls again made more progress than boys between Years 7 and 9. There has been very good improvement in the results of National Curriculum tests since the last inspection, with the school trend being much better than the national trend.
90. The standards seen in lessons, and from an examination of pupils' work, mostly reflect the most recent national test and examination results, though standards of current Year 9 pupils show further improvement in their performance at the highest levels. Overall, attainment is broadly in line with national averages by the time pupils are in Year 9 and

above average by Year 11. Pupils achieve very well throughout the school and there is significant and measurable improvement by the time they take their GCSEs. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported so that they are able to keep up with others in the same group. They achieve well. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds also achieve well and many are in the higher ability groups.

91. In both key stages, pupils have well developed skills in numeracy and competently carry out mental arithmetic problems. By the time they are in Years 10 and 11, able pupils demonstrate very good skills in algebra and successfully solve complex algebraic equations. Skills in dealing with algebra in lower ability groups are appropriate. Younger pupils, particularly in Year 9, are developing their skills in manipulating algebraic expressions well. There is good focus on helping pupils to develop their capacity to interpret and solve mathematical problems. As a result most pupils know how to approach a new problem and can make decisions on what needs to be done to find a solution.
92. The use of numeracy in subjects is good. Particularly good use is made in subjects such as science, ICT and geography.
93. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. All teaching seen was at least satisfactory and the vast majority was at least good. Teachers form very good relationships with pupils which results in high levels of motivation and good behaviour from pupils in lessons. The methods used for teaching are good also. For example in a Year 8 lesson, the teacher used good strategies to consolidate pupils' understanding of place value by successfully using a dice game to produce high or low numbers through strategic recording. The method used gave pupils good opportunities to explore for themselves the mathematical ideas surrounding probability. Similarly a Year 10 lesson, which was very well structured and outstandingly taught, enabled pupils to make excellent progress in understanding how to solve algebraic equations. Excellent explanation and activities in a Year 11 lesson helped pupils to make significant progress in understanding how the formula for calculating the circumference of a circle is related to the formula for calculating its area. Teachers use well structured questions to probe pupils' knowledge and understanding. In a Year 7 lesson, good questioning determined pupils' understanding of addition of simple fractions before developing their ideas on equivalent fractions through a good logical sequence of steps. More able pupils were suitably challenged with an extension task to apply their skills in multiplication. Overall, in all lessons, there is very good structure to the lesson and teaching systematically builds pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills. For example in a Year 10 lesson, pupils were given carefully graded problems which ensured they successfully improved their problem-solving skills and gained in confidence. This was especially so for lower-attainers in the group.
94. The quality of pupils' learning is significantly enhanced in low ability groups by the smaller number of pupils allocated to the set and by good planning and well developed tasks that match their needs well. Least able pupils, including those identified as having special educational needs, respond confidently to questions and tasks which are well matched to their needs and presented in a sensitive yet challenging way by teachers. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, the use of meaningful 'problems' enabled pupils to apply their numeracy skills successfully and gain a secure understanding of improper fractions and mixed numbers. In a Year 9 lesson, good recap of previous work, clear learning objectives and effective use of questions and discussion enabled less able pupils in this group to make steady progress in their understanding of fractions as they worked out the probability of likely outcomes of various events and represented them as fractions. A lesson with the lowest ability group in Year 8 included very good use of an

overhead projector, use of praise and encouragement, well targeted questions and carefully chosen examples. These features enabled the pupils, the majority of whom are on the special educational needs register, to gain a good knowledge, given their ability, of parallel and perpendicular lines, right angles and the number of degrees in quarter, half and full turns.

95. Teaching of pupils in high ability sets is also good. As a result of good lesson planning and clear presentation and discussion of progressive examples, pupils in the top set in Year 8 made good progress in their knowledge and understanding of arithmetic sequences. They successfully devised statements to express the 'nth term' in a given sequence of numbers. However, whilst pupils in top sets are suitably stretched and challenged, in other sets those at the upper ability end within that set are given the same work as others. Extension work is provided for them, but not work which is different and hence better matched to their needs. Thus, often these pupils will complete simple and relatively easy work for them along with the rest of the class before moving onto extension work. Very occasionally there is a loss of pace in lessons. In a significant minority of lessons, teaching time is lost when pupils change from one lesson to another during the morning sessions.
96. The head of department provides very good leadership. There is very good monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department and very well established teamwork. Information from monitoring activities, including the analysis of examination and test results, is very effectively used to effect change.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths:

- Achievement of pupils is good throughout the school
- Teaching and the planning of lessons are largely good
- Pupils enjoy science, are enthusiastic and work well together in practical lessons
- Assessment and the recording of what pupils can do are good
- Opportunities in lessons for moral and social development are very good

Areas for improvement:

- Increase the use of ICT to include work in data logging
- Improve the quality and level of resources and accommodation
- Provide more opportunities for spiritual and cultural development within the science curriculum
- Develop appropriate material for gifted and talented children in the lower school

98. Overall, most pupils reach the standards expected nationally by the end of Year 9. Standards have improved in recent years and pupils make good progress. In 2001, the proportion of pupils attaining the expected level in the National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds was in line with national averages and above those of similar schools. Pupils' performance at the higher levels was above average and well above the average of similar types of schools. Girls did better than boys at both the expected and the higher levels in 2001. However, there has been no discernible trend in recent years in terms of the relative performances of boys and girls, and often there is very little difference in their attainment. Pupils did better in the tests in science than they did in English and results were similar to those in mathematics.

99. Achievement throughout Years 7 to 9 is good for all pupils. In work seen during the inspection, 14-year-olds showed secure knowledge and understanding of scientific facts and ideas. For example, pupils in Year 7 successfully identify sources and types of energy from everyday examples of energy changes. Most pupils' skills in investigative and experimental work are sound. Pupils in Year 8 demonstrated effective practical skills when they separated mixtures during an investigation to find out which kind of salted peanuts (confectionery) contained the least salt. In this and other lessons, low attaining pupils were well supported in their work.
100. By the end of Year 11, most pupils achieve well in lessons and GCSE examinations. They study either double or single award science. A relatively large proportion of pupils study single science, considerably more than the proportion nationally. Following an exceptionally successful year in 1998, the proportion of pupils gaining A* to C in double award science declined but, in 2001, has again settled at above the national average. In 2001 girls did better than boys, and with a greater difference than is the case nationally. For pupils doing single award science the results are varied. Most pupils achieve at least what they should and the proportion attaining grades A* to G is above the national average, however, the proportion gaining A* to C is below. Overall, lower and average-attainers, including those with special educational needs, achieve very good results in comparison to their prior attainment. Able pupils make good progress, though not quite as good as others.
101. By the age of 16, pupils demonstrate standards which are in line with national averages. Their knowledge and understanding of scientific principles are sound. For example, Year 11 pupils identify alkanes and alkenes correctly and explain knowledgeably the pattern of carbon and hydrogen bonding in these molecules. Pupils in another group successfully describe the properties of metals and non-metals and their place in the periodic table. In practical work, pupils apply themselves well and report results thoughtfully and accurately, effectively deepening their understanding of principles and processes in science. For example, Year 10 pupils successfully extended their knowledge and understanding of the rate of chemical reactions by timing and collecting the gas produced from the reaction of a metal with an acid.
102. With a few exceptions, the quality of teaching is good and often very good, with some excellent practice in the lower school. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of science, which they use well with pupils. They organise and prepare individual lessons conscientiously often with detailed plans and lesson notes. Pupils with special educational needs are monitored and helped very well by learning support assistants, who are well briefed beforehand and have good knowledge and understanding of the science concepts to be developed in lessons. As a consequence these pupils make very good progress. In all lessons, aims and intended outcomes are displayed and made known to pupils so that they clearly know what they are expected to learn. A good range of teaching and learning methods is used and homework is largely well thought out and relevant, and clearly extends pupils' learning. Whole class questioning is regular and effective, and the pace of lessons is generally good. This helps to maintain pupils' interest and overall the very good relationships between teachers and pupils contribute to pupils' very good behaviour and enthusiasm for science. In very good and excellent lessons, pupils are challenged very well and made to think for themselves. This was particularly well demonstrated when pupils were planning investigations related to separating mixtures, photosynthesis and making chemical compounds. Pupils enjoy practical work and they generally stay on task, working collaboratively when required to do so and with good concentration.
103. Teachers mark pupils' books and other work well, often using praise and supportive and

informative comments to help pupils see where there is room for improvement. However, the work of some pupils is not always completed on time. There are links with out-of-school activities such as visits to museums, industry and other outside events. The quality of pupils' work on display throughout the science laboratories is good and some is excellent.

104. Progress since the last inspection has been good. A new head of department has been appointed since the previous inspection. He is experienced and brings a clear vision for the future development of the department. Along with the acquisition of other new staff the department has made some changes which support learning well. As a result standards have improved at both key stages. Department documentation is well organised and up-to-date. The development and frequent sharing of good practice has assisted teachers in working more closely together, and improved the quality of teaching. The tracking and recording of pupils' progress are good and information on pupils' performance is used well to group pupils by ability, to set individual targets, and to inform planning for teaching and learning. Teachers and technicians are familiar with safe working practice and daily routines reflect this. Some laboratories have been refurbished and a modest increase in technician time and management has increased opportunities for investigations in the lower school and has made a positive impact on the quality of pupils' work. However, with 10 laboratories, on two sites, the quality of accommodation varies from very good to unsatisfactory. Five rooms have been refurbished in as many years but the remainder are unsatisfactory particularly in the general level of services. In spite of good displays of pupils' work, these rooms are unattractive and unwelcoming and some apparatus and equipment is old and worn out. There is also little space for teachers and technicians to work or to store resources properly. Poor resources impact badly on the learning of pupils, and on the morale of staff. Only recently has the amount of funding for resources become satisfactory.
105. Activity in science is well supported by three qualified and very experienced technicians. Teachers and technicians are developing the skills of using computers effectively for administration and lesson preparation but there is insufficient use of computers for automatic logging of data. Tables and graphs in pupils' books are too often drawn by hand. Written work is of a good standard generally with examples of creative, imaginative and extended writing.

ART AND DESIGN

106. Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is **very good**. Art is a very successful subject in the school.

Strengths:

- High quality teaching allows all pupils to make very good progress
- Pupils have a positive attitude to art reflected in displays of work around the school
- Carefully planned projects encourage pupils to develop a wide range of skills

Areas for improvement:

- Target high-achievers to gain top grades
- Improve the use of questioning in lessons to assess pupils' progress
- Improve the environment by providing storage and shelving to store resources

107. Standards at the age of 14 are slightly above average for most pupils with some reaching very high standards. GCSE results have improved dramatically since the last inspection. In 1996 the A* to C pass rate was significantly below average at 36 per cent. This rose to 70 per cent in 2001 and was above the national average. Art results at GCSE are among the highest in the school with boys achieving as well as girls. However, there are still relatively few top grades, A* or A, and the most able pupils now need to be targeted to achieve more of these top grades. Pupils with special educational needs are identified in most lessons and make good progress. The very good results and very good quality of learning in the department reflect the quality of teaching and enthusiasm of the art team. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been very good.
108. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 make very good progress. Their work is regularly assessed, so that they know what is expected of them and how to improve. Pupils work creatively using a good variety of media and techniques including printmaking, painting, clay work, sculpture and collage. Greek art is used to inspire pupils and making Greek pots from clay promotes their knowledge and understanding of art from another culture. Studies of the human figure linked to classical sculpture lead to a project making creative sculptural pieces of good quality. Pupils use sketchbooks very effectively to build skills and record their observations from the age of 11 for homework. This use of homework supports and extends what is learnt at school.
109. Pupils working towards GCSE build successfully on prior learning and the majority produce work of good quality and develop good skills through carefully planned projects. For example, a project on still-life drawing using a wide range of media, enabled pupils to build up a very good portfolio illustrating their skills in drawing. Another skills based lesson, teaching texture by drawing unseen objects in a bag, encouraged lively experimentation and independent learning.
110. The quality of teaching in the department is very good overall with some excellent teaching observed in individual lessons. Teachers' planning includes clear learning goals and progress is sustained through regular marking of class work and homework. In most lessons pupils' understanding is assessed by effective questioning. However, this is not the case in all lessons and is an area for improvement. Lessons are well-structured and expectations are high for all pupils. There is regular use of praise for good work which helps to motivate them. Pupils have a very positive attitude to art. Very good classroom management encourages high standards of behaviour and allows all pupils to progress without distraction or disruption.

111. Many initiatives to raise attainment have been successfully implemented since the last inspection. Programmes of study are well-planned by members of the department. The standard of work is more consistent, with very good displays of work in all classrooms and around the school. These displays are imaginative and colourful and help to communicate to pupils the high standards expected of them. They also help to celebrate pupils' achievements and contribute much to the spiritual and cultural quality of the school's environment. Target setting and mentoring of individual pupils have also helped to raise standards. Tracking pupils from Years 7 to 9 using National Curriculum criteria is not, however, used sufficiently to improve target setting at GCSE particularly for the more able pupils. Reference is regularly made to the work of other artists and cultures. Links with the community have been effectively established through the artist in residence scheme. A group of disaffected pupils became very involved in, and enthusiastic about, a project to decorate a subway in Basildon. This has led to a project to design banners for the town centre. ICT is being developed successfully and used primarily with pupils in Year 9 to experiment with digital imagery. Resources are adequate but there is insufficient technician time to help to maintain equipment and organise resources. Accommodation is still not ideal as a number of lessons have to be taught outside specialist areas whilst numbers at GCSE are steadily growing. Rooms would benefit from some refurbishment particularly shelving and storage space.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- Design and technology subjects are taught by a well-qualified, caring and hard-working team
- Pupils make good progress as a result of good teaching

Areas for improvement:

- Improve planning of lessons in all areas of design and technology to provide work that is suited to the different abilities of pupils in the same class, especially higher attaining pupils
- Increase the opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
- Include more reference to the work of designers and craftspeople in this country and others

113. According to the 2001 teacher assessments of the work of pupils in Year 9, standards were below the national expectations. These low standards are confirmed through examination of these pupils' work. Girls worked at a standard nearer to the national level than boys. The GCSE grades in 2001 at A* to C were below the national average though they represent an improvement on results in 2000 which were well below the national average. Results for graphics are better than either for resistant materials or food and broadly average. The introduction of a graphics course two years ago has had a positive effect on results overall in design and technology. Food results have remained stable but below the national average, whilst there has been a gradual improvement in results in resistant materials but they also remain below the national average. There has overall been a gradual rising trend since the last inspection.
114. The standards of work of pupils currently in Year 9 are average. Pupils in Year 9 show sound understanding of computer-aided design by changing two-dimensional shapes into three-dimensional objects using an appropriate graphics programs. High attaining

pupils show a good use of ICT in coursework in graphics and other areas to present results of surveys and to carry out research on the Internet. The acquisition of skills is the main focus during Years 7 to 9 and pupils demonstrate increasing control and depth of understanding in their use of wood, metal, plastics, fabric and food as they progress through the course. High attaining pupils demonstrate their confidence in using a sewing machine to create appliqué and machine embroidered cushion covers. Although pupils using resistant materials can make a pewter key fob, the skills involved in designing the fob and its box are poor. Overall, pupils' practical skills are better developed in Years 7 to 9 than their knowledge and skills in design work.

115. Standards of work seen are below average in Years 10 to 11. By the time they are in Year 11, pupils demonstrate sound practical skills. For example, in a food lesson, Year 11 pupils showed confidence when preparing a hand-held snack they had devised so that it was nutritious and suitable for busy people. Although practical work is well done the presentation of course work and the standard of spelling are low. The quality of design and written work in general is below average and poorly presented throughout the department but is improved by the use of computers.
116. Achievement and progress are good throughout the school and for all pupils including those special educational needs when standards of prior attainment are taken into account. However, progress in design work is not as good as in the development of practical skills.
117. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall across all departments at both key stages with excellent teaching and learning in graphics. Teaching is generally well managed to ensure that pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, achieve well. Effective teaching ensures that, in most lessons, lower attaining pupils are given support and that high attaining pupils are challenged to evaluate and modify their work independently. However, this is sometimes not so effectively managed. The situation in these cases is exacerbated by the lack of development of materials or activities to meet the differing needs of different groups of pupils in the same class. In one Year 9 lesson, the teacher merely expected lower attaining pupils to achieve less and to work more slowly. In another lesson, those who finished early wasted time because no extension activities had been planned. Strengths of the teaching include good subject knowledge and skills. The confident way in which teachers demonstrate practical techniques enables pupils to have good models to follow. In graphics, homework is used effectively to consolidate learning and marking clearly points out to pupils how they can improve but these are not consistently developed across all areas of design and technology. Subject specific vocabulary is used across the whole area but has a higher profile in some areas where key words are on display and word banks are available to help pupils with written work. In the best examples, teachers insist on pupils using these words when answering questions. For example words used to describe the texture, taste and appearance of food are displayed in the food technology rooms and in a graphics lesson emphasis was placed on understanding and using the correct words when talking about ergonomics, scale and work plane. These strategies have a beneficial impact on pupils' literacy.
118. Some teachers evaluate work and review progress effectively to consolidate learning and raise pupils' self-esteem. However, these are not implemented consistently across all areas. Pupils learn well due to their good attitude in lessons. They listen intently, and answer questions enthusiastically. The majority work with interest and concentration and as a result of good relationships feel they can ask questions freely and are unfailingly answered with patience and good humour creating a pleasant working atmosphere throughout the design and technology area.

119. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. A hard working team has addressed but not resolved most issues that were raised in the last report. Monitoring, evaluation and assessment of pupils are very good and used effectively to inform curricular planning and to set targets for pupil achievement. Schemes of work have been revised and the introduction of graphics two years ago has broadened the curriculum. ICT is used more widely now and the very recent improved provision for general school use has improved access for pupils to the computers in the design and technology department. Design frames have replaced the previously prevalent worksheets but there is still insufficient focus on the development of design work and standards of presentation remain generally low. With an increasing awareness of learning needs, lesson planning has improved and most lessons have effective planning that promotes good learning but there is often a lack of challenge for the higher attaining pupils. Where displays are stimulating they include lists of key words, examples of pupils' work, examples of work by established designers and craftspeople, here and abroad, and information about exhibitions and museums. Many rooms do not use display to full advantage. Since these issues remain, leadership and management are satisfactory.

GEOGRAPHY

120. Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

Strengths:

- Teaching is good and pays particular attention to the teaching of basic skills
- The department offers good opportunities for fieldwork and local study and has good links with the local community
- The organisation and range of resource, including ICT resources, are good

Areas for improvement:

- Raise attainment at GCSE, particularly for higher attaining pupils
- Improve the use of assessment to identify the strengths and weaknesses of pupils in geography to guide planning in the subject

121. In 2001, the GCSE results were below the national average both in terms of A* to C grades and the average points scores, though an improvement on results in 2000. Girls outperformed boys by a wider margin than nationally though almost twice as many boys as girls took the geography GCSE. This reversed the situation in the previous year when boys did better and girls' results were worse in geography than in any other subject in the school. Since the last inspection in 1996, with one exception, 1999, results have remained fairly static and are out of step with the national trend which has been steadily rising over these years. Pupils do less well in the higher A* to B grades than nationally but get fewer of the lowest F or G grades than nationally.
122. In work seen within the school, attainment at the age of 14 is in line with the national expectations. Pupils have satisfactory oral and listening skills and most, including those with special educational needs, write well enough to describe geographical patterns or processes in simply constructed sentences using appropriate geographical vocabulary. Higher-attainers write more extensively, as was seen in in-depth studies of Antarctica and Japan in Years 8 and 9. However, most of the writing seen was descriptive though there were some examples of simple evaluation in writing about the effects of the building of the Aswan Dam in Year 8 and an analysis of Toyota's choice of Burnaston for the location of its factory. Most pupils develop appropriate geographical skills, for example, they successfully locate places on maps and draw sketch maps and

diagrams using the correct symbols. Fieldwork and enquiry skills are good as are ICT skills. Pupils competently find information from a variety of sources, including the Internet, to answer geographical questions. They use simple graphs to analyse data. Presentation skills are also satisfactory. Most pupils have a basic knowledge and understanding of the patterns and processes they have studied. Higher-attainers have a broader knowledge and understanding of these. Overall pupils' knowledge of geographical facts is better than their understanding of geographical concepts.

123. At the age of 16, pupils' attainment is below the national average. Pupils who follow the GCSE course increase their knowledge and understanding of geographical processes at a steady rate. A sample of pupils' work showed a good understanding of the development of coastal landforms, for example. All know and understand that the interaction between humans and the environment can lead to problems. They know what sustainable development is and pursue suitable lines of enquiry. However, examples of extended written work, including the use of appropriate diagrams with explanations of geographical physical processes, were few. Nor were there enough examples of essay answers which used the higher skills of evaluation and analysis. Most pupils have satisfactory fieldwork and mapping skills, and coursework seen suggests that standards here are in line with national averages. The department offers good opportunities for fieldwork and local study and has good links with the local community.
124. Pupils arrive at the school with low levels of literacy and few skills in the subject. In Years 7 to 9 they make good progress. Achievement in terms of prior attainment is even better for lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs because teachers' expectations are well matched to these pupils needs. Suitable learning opportunities, together with well focused support, enable them to achieve very well. In Years 10 to 11, pupils make satisfactory progress, and lower-attainers continue to do better. There is some underachievement by higher-attainers and this is demonstrated by the failure of enough pupils to attain the higher grades in GCSE.
125. Overall the quality of teaching and learning is good. In the best lessons confident lesson management and good relationships promoted a positive interest in pupils and a good sense of purpose. Lesson planning focuses well on pupils' learning needs and a variety of short well-targeted tasks are usually provided. These suitably challenge pupils and lead to effective learning taking place. Teachers develop pupils' basic skills of literacy very well and put particular emphasis on teaching geographical vocabulary. Those pupils with special educational needs are supported well in lessons and support teachers liaise effectively with mainstream teachers. ICT is an integral part of the geography curriculum. In the minority of lessons where teaching was less successful, there was a lack of pace and pupils were insufficiently challenged.
126. Since the last inspection standards at GCSE have not improved. Strategies are not yet in place to identify the reasons for the failure to improve results at GCSE to reach national averages. National curriculum assessment data used to grade pupils in geography at the end of Year 9 is not being used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of pupils in the subject, or to guide planning and set GCSE targets.

HISTORY

127. Overall, the quality of provision in history is **very good**. Teaching is good and pupils make good progress.

Strengths:

- Teaching is very good and sets high expectations for pupils
- A good range of historical source material is used to promote progress in this key area of learning
- Assessment takes place regularly, is clearly structured and informs planning

Areas for improvement:

- Improve the basic vocabulary and spelling of lower attaining pupils and their use of dictionaries

128. Pupils enter the school with attainment in English, which requires similar skills to those used in history, that is below the national average and with very varied experience of the study of history. By the age of 14, attainment in history is above the national average and pupils make very good progress during the key stage. They make particularly good progress in their use and interpretation of source material, which is a key historical skill. Attainment in 2001, by the age of 14, judged on the basis of assessments carried out by teachers, was above the national average for pupils of this age. The percentage of pupils attaining the higher level was close to the national average. There has been an increase since the previous inspection in the percentage of pupils attaining at the expected level and overall an increase in the percentage attaining the higher level. In 2001 the attainment of girls was higher than that of boys and the difference between them was greater than that seen nationally.
129. In GCSE examinations in 2000, the percentage of pupils who attained a grade A* to C was close to the national average while the percentage attaining A* to G was above the national average. The percentage of boys who attained A* to C and A* to G in 2000 was higher than that of girls which is a reversal of the national situation. In 2001 there was a rise in the percentage of pupils attaining A* to C. These results signal good achievement. There has been a considerable increase in the percentage of pupils attaining A* to C and A*- A since the previous inspection. Attainment based on evidence seen during the course of the inspection is in line with that found nationally and progress is good. Pupils make particularly good progress in using a large volume of historical material in their evaluations of the history they study and in making their own notes.
130. By the age of 14, pupils across the ability range understand the importance of historical source materials and use them confidently, although lower attaining pupils have difficulty in using detailed information from these sources to fully justify their opinions. Across the attainment range pupils develop well their use of other historical skills such as an understanding of the causes and effects of historical situations. They have clear understanding and recall of the periods and themes which they study, for example pupils showed good recall and understanding of the factory system in the nineteenth century and the way it exploited child workers and caused poor living and social conditions for those in the recently industrialised towns. Pupils use a wide range of writing skills, including writing from the point of view of someone living in the past, develop a good specialised historical vocabulary and record their knowledge and understanding using a range of methods such as charts, diagrams and notes. Research skills are good and pupils make effective use of ICT. For example, pupils researching the causes of the Reformation used spreadsheets to organise and select the information they had gathered.
131. Pupils in Years 10 to 11 make good use of discussion to modify and clarify their own ideas and understanding, for example pupils studying the Treaty of Versailles used discussion to extend their understanding of the point of view of the three main allies. They have satisfactory knowledge and recall of the historical facts, situations and personalities they study and use their research skills to extend their knowledge and understanding, although lower attaining pupils take an uncritical attitude to the material

they have researched. Pupils studying the history of the USA in the 1930s used their researched information on the life of Franklin D Roosevelt to increase their understanding of the “new deal”. Pupils use an extensive range of historical source material with increasing confidence and perceptiveness and all pupils develop effective note-making skills. Higher attaining and average pupils present detailed and closely argued points of view in their course work. All pupils develop their range of specialised historical vocabulary and spell it correctly, although the basic general vocabulary of lower attaining pupils is rather limited and they do not use dictionaries to extend or check it.

132. All teaching seen in both key stages was at least good and a significant minority was very good. Teachers plan their lessons well and have clear objectives for what they want their pupils to learn. These plans are shared with pupils who know what is expected of them. Teachers make good use of questioning and discussion to make pupils think and to support them in coming to their own conclusions. Pupils respond well by participating thoughtfully and enthusiastically and by trying very hard to contribute informed views. They are given good opportunities to review their knowledge and understanding through discussions. Pupils are occasionally surprised by how effectively they are able to participate. In both key stages teachers make good use of an extensive range of historical source material to extend pupils’ understanding and judgements of situations and historical figures, encouraging them to take a critical view of all aspects of a situation. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils, refusing to ‘spoon feed’ them with ideas or materials. As a result, pupils make good progress, especially in Years 10 to 11, in becoming independent learners who can carry out their own research and make their own notes. The pace of lessons is nearly always very brisk and pupils work hard to complete the work set. The pace of lessons is occasionally too brisk and some pupils are not able to work quickly enough. Although teachers generally make good use of the summing-up session at the ends of lessons in order to assess pupils’ progress and emphasise important learning points, this sometimes becomes rather rushed and pupils do not then gain full benefit from it.
133. The leadership and management by the relatively recently appointed head of department is good. A thorough and detailed scheme of work is in place. Assessment is regular and well structured, and there are a good range of assessment tasks. Good use is made of assessment information to plan the curriculum and good additional support is offered to pupils as a result of assessment, for example in the period leading up to their GCSEs. The identification of pupils’ weaknesses in the section of the examination paper devoted to the use of source material has led to a considerable emphasis being placed on this skill throughout both key stages. This represents good progress since the previous inspection, when assessment practice was reported as being in need of development. The number of historical visits which can be made is limited by considerations of time and cost, and there is a limited but appropriate programme of visits to places of historical interest, including to places abroad. The accommodation for history is very good and teachers make the most of it by the use of attractive displays of pupils’ work.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

134. Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is **good**. The cross-curricular use of ICT is **very good**.

Strengths:

- The wide range of opportunities and ready access for pupils to make use of computers

- Teachers' and technicians' knowledge of ICT
- The availability of accommodation and learning resources
- The use of time, support staff and resources

Areas for improvement:

- Map coverage against the National Curriculum and the schemes of work for all years
 - Further develop the monitoring of topics taught in subjects across the curriculum
 - Assess pupils' work more frequently
 - Improve the quality and quantity of pupils' work in Years 10 to 11
135. Considerable upgrading and extension of the ICT facility has taken place since the last inspection and particularly during the last year. Together with the appointment of a new co-ordinator, experienced staff and considerable enthusiasm, the department is well placed to maximise achievement in all years.
136. ICT is widely used across the curriculum in both key stages. This provides pupils with many opportunities to structure, manipulate and improve their work in most subjects. However, the results for GCSE ICT were below the national average in 2000 and well below in 2001. The results were also well below those for all other GCSE subjects. Both boys' and girls' results are well below the national average.
137. On entry to the school, pupils have previously encountered a variety of ICT programs in the primary school and at home. By Year 9, attainment is in line with national expectations and pupils' achievement is good. Many demonstrate good familiarity with word-processing, spreadsheet, graphics, desktop publishing and presentation programs. Advances in knowledge skills and understanding effectively take place through nearly all subjects, and particularly good use is made of computers in subjects such as English, mathematics, art, geography, history, media studies and modern foreign languages. However, not all pupils have had similar opportunities and few have created their own extended ICT projects. Most pupils use presentation software to communicate information and ideas well and are very proficient in finding information using computers.
138. About half of the pupils in Years 10 and 11 choose to study the GCSE ICT course. The others rely on continued input from subjects. Many of the computers are available for pupils' use during the lunch break and at other times. Attainment during Year 10 and 11 lessons, and in the written work seen, is below the national average in terms of the quality and quantity of work. There is the capacity for higher achievement in the production of GCSE coursework. For example Year 11 pupils were starting a module of work on databases for the first time during the inspection week whereas it is normal for pupils to encounter databases much earlier in their learning of ICT. Pupils with special educational needs sometimes make very good progress because the use of the computer improves the presentation of their work. A few able pupils develop a special interest in the use of ICT and obtain higher grades in tests and examinations. The display of key words and the use of a spelling checker improve literacy skills well. Numeracy is also effectively improved by the used spreadsheets in both key stages. Some Year 11 pupils use the more advanced spreadsheet functions such as maximum, minimum, vertical look up, and conditional formatting commands.
139. Overall, the curriculum provides a wide range of ICT experiences through the teaching of ICT by most departments. However the acquisition of skills has not, with all pupils, been delivered consistently so older pupils have gaps in their knowledge of ICT applications. In addition, the science department is not making a sufficient contribution to the development of pupils' skills in data logging, and the design and technology

department is not involved enough in teaching control technology. Most pupils become very involved in the process of creating their own work. They enjoy printing the best examples and should be given more opportunities to produce high quality projects. Some teachers inform the pupils of the National Curriculum target level achieved so that they are aware of their progress on a national scale. This provides additional motivation for their learning. Pupils with special educational needs learn as much from their peers as they do in lessons. In classes where there are a substantial number of pupils with special educational needs, learning support assistants provide valuable help. As a result, pupils' learning is increased and concentration is improved. Able pupils are identified but could benefit from a more structured delivery of extension work.

140. The departmental staff are very experienced in the use of ICT. This is apparent in the teaching where staff use their expertise to create situations where the pupils enjoy learning through the use of computers. Support staff make a major contribution to the development and maintenance of the extensive school network. In addition some are able to help pupils directly with their work. Much of the work challenges and inspires pupils so that they are encouraged to explore further possibilities. For example the teaching encourages the evaluation of web sites. The great majority of pupils are attentive and behave well. In only one lesson did some pupils with special educational needs lose concentration and not stay on task.
141. All observed teaching was at least satisfactory and in the case of lessons in Years 8 and 9 it was very good. Planning is particularly effective in gaining the interest of the pupils. Lessons are well structured and often based on pre-prepared ICT material displayed on large monitors and also available on pupils' screens. On some occasions greater urgency could be encouraged by having a precise finishing target and test objective for a lesson. Pupils often gain considerable satisfaction when designing their own work and realising that the computer can add a new dimension to their creativity. Homework is set regularly. Many pupils have computers and printers at home and there are numerous opportunities for using the school facilities. An area of rapid development is the accessing of pupils' and teachers files by means of their computers at home. Many teachers encourage the use of the Internet as a research tool but pupils sometimes need more guidance when printing information.
142. Comprehensive records are maintained showing each pupils' prior attainment. At intervals, pupils' work is assessed during Years 7 to 9 and given a National Curriculum level. However the assessment process is not sufficiently frequent to provide much additional motivation for pupils. The assessment information is analysed in detail providing targets for individual pupils, classes and teachers. GCSE targets for individual pupils are predicted although these targets have not recently provided accurate results.
143. The ICT co-ordinator is new in the post since September 2001 and is very committed to improving the examination results of the pupils and their overall ICT capability. The work of the department is shared very effectively by teaching and technical staff. The senior management team, the departmental co-ordinator and the staff have developed the department and whole school ICT facility by careful financial management so that the work of the department can move ahead more rapidly. The school is used by a well-known computer company and other organisations as an example of what can be achieved. The department is involved in innovative curricular initiatives such as the development of school teaching material that can be downloaded at all terminals or at home. The department is also involved in providing more accurate mapping and monitoring of cross-curricular work for both key stages. Departmental documentation is comprehensive with detailed schemes of work.

144. The number of computers available for pupil use is above the national average. The computers are located in most departmental areas as well as in the multimedia centre so pupils have very good access and every opportunity to achieve well. An exception to this is the science department although enhanced ICT provision is planned for this area. The accommodation is very good. Many teachers have considerable expertise but few are qualified in ICT. However, since the last inspection, there has been an extensive programme of training within the school and several teachers have travelled abroad to study ICT systems in other schools.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths:

- Rigorous teaching
- Standards reached by pupils of all ability levels are very good given their prior attainment
- Curricular provision for modern foreign languages (MFL) is very good
- The department is very well managed

Areas for development:

- Ensure all teachers use the foreign language extensively in lessons
- Implement a programme of reading for pleasure programme
- Develop opportunities for pupils' use of the foreign language for their own purposes

146. GCSE results in both French and German have improved substantially since the last inspection and the percentage of pupils achieving grades A* to C is now broadly in line with the national average for all maintained schools. French results have been above the national average in recent years. The number of pupils achieving A*/A grades has been rising at a very good rate in both languages and MFL is now one of the highest achieving departments in the school. The difference between the results of boys and girls fluctuates but in 2001 the gap was 35 per cent in French and 49 per cent in German in favour of girls: both considerably above the national average.
147. In Years 7 to 9 standards are broadly in line with the national average, with top sets above. Pupils have frequent exposure to taped material in the foreign language and many can reply to teachers' questions with confidence and accuracy. They are able to initiate dialogue when working in pairs but are not yet given sufficient opportunity to use the foreign language for their own purposes. Reading skills need developing through the introduction of a systematic extended reading programme. In Year 7 the copywriting of most pupils is careful and accurate and by Year 9 higher and average-attainers are using tenses other than the present in French and subordinate clauses with a good understanding of word order in German. Creative writing is encouraged, for example through the Easter egg competition - providing an impressive display in the corridor.
148. In Years 10 to 11 standards are again broadly in line with the national average, with top sets above - in a few cases substantially so. Higher attaining pupils can talk in paragraphs rather than sentences, as in a Year 11 French class where they described a recent shopping trip with panache, and in Year 11 German coursework they demonstrate an impressive command of modal verbs.
149. All pupils sit the GCSE examination in an MFL and, given the below average levels of literacy of many when they arrive at the school, the results obtained by pupils of all ability levels are remarkable. This department offers excellent value added. Pupils with

special educational needs make especially good progress due to rigorous and empathetic teaching which produces very good motivation. This was especially noticeable in a Year 10 German lesson. These pupils achieve higher grades than they would in most schools with more Es and Fs than Gs and Us.

150. The overall quality of teaching is very good. It is always satisfactory, usually good and was very good or excellent in one third of the lessons observed during the inspection. Teaching in Years 10 to 11 is particularly good. All the teachers are competent linguists, indeed four are native speakers, but not all are using the foreign language sufficiently in the classroom either as a medium of instruction or for routine classroom interaction. This is holding back pupils' listening skills. Lessons are well prepared and are delivered briskly with the use of appropriate resources, mainly the tape-recorder, the overhead projector and flash-cards. Stimulating presentation evokes an enthusiastic response from pupils and carefully graded tasks in many lessons maximise the learning potential. Most teachers give plenty of praise and encouragement and nearly all enjoy a very good relationship with their pupils. Expectations are uniformly high at both key stages and for all ability levels, with a highly productive learning atmosphere prevalent in classrooms. Pupils concentrate well and show perseverance when faced with challenging tasks. Better lessons are delivered at a very fast pace with an energy and enthusiasm which sweeps the pupils along. In these lessons pupils are constantly encouraged to improve their performance, and imaginative resources, such as real food in a Year 11 German lesson and dramatic computer graphics to revise the weather in a Year 10 French lesson, ensure that learning becomes an exciting adventure. The less successful lessons are characterised by one or more of the following: extensive use of English, a leisurely pace with insufficient content, limited use of available teaching aids.
151. Provision for MFL is very good, with all pupils studying both French and German in Years 8 and 9. The numbers in Year 11 who have chosen to take both languages to GCSE level is at the national average. This exceptionally large department is very well managed and all the MFL teachers operate as a well-knit team. Frequent team-teaching enables good practice to be shared and the presence of an advanced skills teacher provides an excellent role-model in classroom practice. There are good quality modern textbooks. Good extra-curricular opportunities include work experience in Germany, and the excellent displays of pupils' work, much of it attractively word-processed, enhance the learning environment.
152. The department has made considerable progress since the last inspection, particularly in examination results and the sharing of good practice. Issues still to be tackled are providing more opportunities for independent reading and pupils' spontaneous use of the foreign language.

MUSIC

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

Strengths:

- Very good pupil teacher relationships
- Specialist teachers have good subject knowledge
- Good curriculum planning
- Good provision of extra-curricular activities

Areas for improvement:

- Improve the standards and take-up are below average in Years 10 to 11

- Increase the amount of singing in lessons and the opportunities for composing and performing music
 - Improve the poor quality of some classroom instruments
154. Teacher assessments show that by the end of Year 9 the attainment of the majority of pupils is above national expectations. Girls performed better than boys. In 2000 GCSE examinations the proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades A* to C was well below average. In 2001 GCSE results, the proportion of A* to C grades achieved was twice that of 2000 but remained below the national average. All pupils gained grades within A* to G which is above the national average. The small number of candidates entered for GCSE, however, makes comparison with national figures unhelpful.
155. Inspection evidence shows standards at the end of Year 9 to be average. A small minority of pupils are achieving beyond national expectations. Girls generally perform better than boys. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 gain practical experience of the basic concepts through a well-planned series of topics devised by the teachers. The majority of pupils know how to compose short melodies by carefully selecting and manipulating appropriate 'voices' on the electronic keyboards. Most understand the basic elements of music such as tempo, timbre and structure and incorporate them into their simple compositions, performing their pieces with confidence. In a Year 7 lesson two girls created a short melodic ostinato piece successfully demonstrating the use of staccato and legato styles. Lower ability pupils cannot always sustain concentration for long spells at the keyboards or when listening to music. In Year 9 music is taught as part of the performing arts course this results in pupils experiencing a large proportion of low-level musical tasks. Year 9 pupils do not have a wide enough technical vocabulary, which prevents them from describing musically the work they create. Most Year 9 pupils do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of music to develop, refine or notate their ideas. Some cannot demonstrate a secure sense of rhythm when trying to maintain a simple rhythm to a steady pulse, as was seen in one lesson when pupils tried to create rhythmical chants.
156. There is a wide variation in pupils' ability and previous musical knowledge when they arrive at Woodlands, but the new music scheme and enthusiastic teaching is giving them a common base to develop. As a result of good lesson planning and good teaching all pupils make very good progress. Pupils with special educational needs are presented with appropriately challenging work and achieve good standards in relation to their previous levels of attainment. Contributions to literacy skills are well developed with constant reference to key words and simple musical vocabulary during lessons. Classroom performances are regularly recorded to ensure there is evidence of progress in performing and composing. There is insufficient singing in lessons and in curriculum planning.
157. Standards in Years 10 to 11 are below average. Pupils following the GCSE syllabus have a wide range of prior experience. Entries at GCSE are low for the size of school. The use of sequencers and music software enables compositions to be of a good standard. Two Year 11 boys produced exciting and complex pieces of modern raga music with carefully structured musical shape and sensitive attention to detail. However, pupils' theoretical knowledge is generally of a lower standard than their practical work. Higher ability pupils are able to recognise the music of some historical periods and styles. They can confidently follow and use traditional notation and understand how to accurately notate their own music as was demonstrated by two Year 11 boys who notated their duet and then followed the score when performing. It was not possible to observe any Year 10 lessons, but standards of written work indicate that the pupils are achieving in line with expectations for this stage in their GCSE course.

158. Teaching is good overall. It is generally good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 to 11 and as a result the pupils make good progress in their learning and enjoy the lessons. The staff team are enthusiastic and the specialist teachers have good subject knowledge, which they effectively pass on to the pupils. There is an appropriate practical focus in lessons and pupils are well supported in developing their musical skills and knowledge. Expectations are appropriate for the ability of the individual pupils. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and through their patience and understanding teachers bring out the best in pupils' attitudes and behaviour, which helps their learning. Feedback to pupils during practical sessions is good. Speaking and listening are taught well. Lessons are well planned with a good variety of activities. They have good openings with clear learning objectives and usually end with a summary to reinforce learning. Whole class question and answer sessions at the start of lessons work well and assist the recall of information from the previous lesson. The use of non-specialist staff in Year 9, where pupils follow an integrated performing arts course, often means that lessons are lacking musicality and can only be satisfactory at best. Homework is used effectively to develop the pupils' writing and research skills and to enhance class work.
159. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection. The accommodation for the subject has been greatly improved by the addition of a new teaching room and several practice rooms. There has been significant improvement in the ICT resources including computer compatible keyboards. However, there are a large number of broken classroom instruments, which restrict access to the variety of sound sources required to ensure high quality musical activities. Instrumental and vocal lessons offered are of a good standard and take up is increasing. There is also a wide menu of extra curricular activities including choirs, bands and other ensembles and a growing number of pupils are getting involved with music making activities. The variable quality of teaching reported in the last inspection has been addressed and is now satisfactory or better in all lessons. The quality of pupils' performances has improved and more opportunities exist for pupils to appraise their own work. The time allocation for the subject in Year 9 has improved but is still barely adequate. There are still too few opportunities to compose and perform music at a suitable level in Year 9. However, the focus on discrete musical activities within the performing arts course has increased and further development is planned.
160. The new head of department has sound management skills, and through the very good guidance of the head of performing arts she is already having a positive impact on standards. A newly qualified teacher who is also having a positive effect on standards assists her. They work well together and have a clear, shared vision for the future of the subject within the performing arts department.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- Standards are above average
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good
- The majority of pupils have positive attitudes
- Leadership of the department is excellent
- The quality and breadth of the curriculum and extra-curricular activities are good

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that assessment makes closer reference to standards in the National Curriculum
 - Raise expectations of the most able girls in order to improve their standards of work
162. GCSE examination results, among the best in the school, were better in 2001 than in 2000, when they were below national averages. Results fluctuate from above, to below national averages, depending on the ability of pupils and the rigour with which their progress is monitored. The standard of school teams, such as netball, football and athletics, is good and a significant minority of pupils excel in their chosen sport. More boys than girls reach the highest standard and this is mainly because too few demands are made on girls. Standards have improved from the time of the last inspection, as teaching is now good, rather than satisfactory. The school was awarded 'Sportmark' in 2001 in recognition of its good curricular and extra-curricular provision, and the quality of staff expertise.
163. Standards are above average at ages 14 and 16, and the overall achievement of pupils, including pupils with special educational needs, is good. Standards during the inspection at age 14 were higher than teachers' assessments. Basic skills in games are generally good in Year 9 and pupils can transfer these skills effectively into a full game. Most pupils know the rules of a variety of games such as rugby and badminton and a few are competent referees and umpires. In gymnastics, girls show good body management, clarity of shape, and understanding of movement principles. Knowledge of health related fitness is sound and the majority of pupils understand the principles of warm up. Pupils with special educational needs know the names of some of the muscles of the body and higher attaining pupils use technical terms, such as, 'inversion' to describe movements. The standard of planning and evaluating skills varies between good in gymnastics, to satisfactory in games, and this is due to inconsistencies in the teaching of these aspects. Pupils make steady gains in most lessons except in the few instances where behaviour is unsatisfactory. Although the majority of pupils' behaviour is good, minorities of boys in Years 9 and 10 show disrespect for their teammates.
164. At age 16, the majority of pupils have successfully built on the knowledge, understanding and skills learnt in earlier years. In badminton, high attaining boys execute a backhand overhead clear, powerfully and accurately, and consistently using space intelligently. Girls of average ability show knowledge and understanding of zone defending in netball and can re-group effectively when the ball is intercepted. Pupils on the examination course are making good progress. The standard of their written work has risen sharply as a result of more rigorous monitoring and testing.
165. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Basic skills are taught effectively, enabling pupils to progress on to higher level tactics and techniques. Generally good pupil management ensures a safe, secure environment in which teaching and learning can profitably take place. A strong emphasis on giving pupils the opportunities to decide how to approach their own warm ups, to take on different roles and to share good ideas helps develop and maintain pupils' interest, concentration and motivation. Teachers' high expectations have resulted in consistently good participation of pupils in lessons. Pupils' behaviour and attitude, particularly girls, has markedly improved and the standard of kit is very good. Teachers' feedback to pupils in lessons is effective but opportunities are missed to link informal assessment to National Curriculum levels. Younger pupils are insufficiently aware of what they have to do reach a higher level. Although setting of pupils according to ability works well for the majority of pupils, tasks set in theory lessons are insufficiently matched to the needs of higher and lower attaining pupils. In the best lessons, very good class management, pupil/teacher

relationships and excellent teaching strategies strengthen teaching. In a Year 7 lesson seen, boys played a full game of rugby to a very high standard, with fearless rucks, deft 'dummy' passes, and well timed tackles. The only unsatisfactory lesson seen was mainly due to weak pupil management.

166. The new head of department has made an excellent start and has made some effective changes to schemes of work, assessment, and departmental procedures. Both curricular and extra-curricular provision is good, but take-up by boys is better than by girls, preventing girls from getting the full benefit of the opportunities the school provides. Teachers work with enthusiasm and determination to raise standards and priorities for improvement are accurately identified. Progress since the last inspection has been good, largely as a consequence of improved monitoring, evaluating and guidance of the work of the department by senior management.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

167. Overall, the provision for religious education is **unsatisfactory**. It has good features but is hampered by too much teaching by non-specialists and lack of sufficient curriculum time and status in the school's curriculum.

Strengths:

- Strong leadership and management
- Wide variety of resources including use of ICT and the Internet
- Good relationships between teachers and pupils

Areas for improvement

- Raise the status of the subject within the school by making religious education a 'stand-alone' subject
 - Increase curriculum time, which is currently well below the local and national recommendation, making it impossible to deliver the Essex Agreed Syllabus
 - Meet the statutory requirement to inform parents of pupils' progress in religious education
 - Work towards religious education as a viable GCSE examination subject in the future
168. There is no GCSE examination group in Years 10 and 11 as at the last inspection. Overall, in relation to work seen in the classroom and from the scrutiny of pupils' written work, standards are below national and Essex Agreed Syllabus expectations by the time pupils are 14 and 16 years old. Despite the hard work of the head of department, standards have not risen since the last inspection. This is attributable to the lack of specialist teachers, wide variation in teachers' subject knowledge and pupils receiving only six to eight religious education lessons a year delivered through personal and social education. There is no noticeable difference between the standards of boys and girls.
169. Fourteen-year-olds do not reach the standards expected in the Essex Agreed Syllabus and lack of time is the major contributory factor. Pupils are good at researching primary and secondary sources of information via the 'Aspects of Religion' CD-ROM and from the Internet, but many are less good at using it effectively. For example, they often produce pages of downloaded information unselectively, with little work in their own words and with limited understanding. Pupils are skilful at presenting their learning by the use of PowerPoint, flash cards, drama, OHP and pupil-to-pupil question and answer sessions but are less accomplished in written work. Year 9 pupils know a little about the origins of Buddhism and can recall a few basic facts but are unable to verbalise what Buddhists believe and have little understanding of what it means to be Buddhist. Empathy is missing, as is the case in the study of Christianity in Year 7 and Islam in Year 8.
170. Pupils have usually made some progress by the end of the six to eight lessons but the acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding is slow in terms of the expectation of the Essex Agreed Syllabus. Pupils start from a very low knowledge base on entry. Any gains in knowledge pupils make are often cancelled out by the length of time, up to a year, before religious education is taught again. This lack of continuity in time and teaching severely hampers progress and leads to poor recall of previous learning by most pupils. Pupils of low prior attainment make satisfactory progress, despite the lack of support staff, owing to the good support given by both teachers and peers. For instance these pupils are fully involved in Year 9 group presentations on Buddhism. In Years 10 to 11, pupils show some understanding of moral issues such as euthanasia

and human rights, and the impact of people like Martin Luther King and Gandhi as examples of belief in practice. Most pupils had strong opinions on certain issues such as racism but were less secure in giving reasons.

171. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. It is usually satisfactory or better, and it was good in half the lessons observed during the inspection, with one unsatisfactory and one very good lesson. A team of eight teachers has grown to 13 recently owing to the temporary redeployment of teachers to cover a maternity leave. Only the head of department and one other teacher have religious education qualifications. All other staff are non-specialists and their lack of subject knowledge often limits pupils' progress. Lessons are well planned and the best lessons delivered briskly, using a wide variety of resources, which captivate pupils and maintain their interest. The Credo ("I believe") Year 10 pupil resource pack, produced by the head of department, is a good example of innovative teaching resources. It was seen used to excellent effect in a module on morality. Teachers engage pupils well with their work so that most pupils, including the lower attaining pupils, who sometimes find the work difficult, become enthusiastic and co-operative. Relationships between teachers and pupils, and pupil to pupil, are good and aid learning. Pupils listen carefully to the teacher and each other as seen in presentations on Buddhism in Year 9 when pupils graded the work. Work is well matched to the needs of most pupils. A supported, self-study project is the major component of every religious education module for Years 7, 8 and 9 and pupils are good independent learners. Marking, following the school effort and attainment grades, is inconsistent and there is no formal assessment other than pupils' self-evaluation at the end of a module. Homework is set regularly to enhance what has been learned in lessons. Higher attaining pupils are offered extension exercises as part of homework but little in class, despite clear identification of these pupils. The values of the school are firmly embedded in religious education lessons but there is too little religious education being taught. An additional impact of low curricular time is that it limits the contribution the subject can make to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
172. Leadership of this department is excellent and the head of department leads by her own high standards, giving tremendous support to the many teachers delivering religious education. As part of the temporary redeployment of teachers, the head of department is currently teaching little religious education. This is a serious setback for the department. There is good support between staff who work with enthusiasm, endeavour to raise standards and appreciate the excellent support material available to them. The extensive schemes of work contain some wonderful ideas, but there is no time to deliver them. Priorities for improvement are identified and well documented but teaching and learning are not monitored closely enough to enable the department to identify and deal with weaknesses. There is only one subject room but colourful, stimulating and inspiring displays, including artefacts, enrich this working environment. Adequate funding, to further enhance resources and broaden aspects of learning, is needed in parallel with the increase in curriculum time. Pupils' progress in religious education is not reported to parents and is a breach of the statutory requirements. Limited time prevents the subject being taught with rigour, depth and breadth. Given the commitment to raising standards, the positive ethos and energetic leadership of the head of department, the capacity for improvement is there, but dependent on the school management and governors making available the necessary curricular time.
173. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory with two statutory requirements still not being met; namely the insufficient curriculum time allocated to religious education and the lack of reports to parents informing them of pupils' progress.

PERFORMING ARTS

174. Overall the quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths:

- Very good pupil teacher relationships throughout the department
- High quality specialist teachers with secure subject knowledge
- Pupils enjoyment and willingness to learn

Areas for improvement:

- Improve the quality of non-specialist teaching
- Make sufficient use of ICT within lessons

175. The performing arts department is a flourishing, exciting aspect of school life. The subject has a very positive impact on the ethos and atmosphere of the school by fostering pupils' self esteem, awareness and respect for others. This is established through the very good relationships in lessons and the excellent schemes of work. All pupils in Year 9 study the course and value it highly. Within the course pupils study the integrated areas of music, drama and dance. Music and drama are also taught as discrete subject in Years 7 and 8. In Years 10 to 11 pupils can opt for GCSE courses in expressive arts, music or drama.
176. Standards in expressive arts in Years 10 to 11 are above average. In 2001 all 11 pupils gained the higher grades of A* to C. There has been a steady rise in results since the course started in 1997. All pupils make very good progress. In 2000 standards in drama were above average. In 2001 standards fell to below average compared to national expectations. Standards in music are reported separately.
177. The performing arts department is very well led and managed. The new head of department has ensured that schemes of work are comprehensive and effectively planned. Assessment procedures are clear and assessment information is well used to set targets and provide detailed feedback to pupils. All pupils know where they are in relation to their own achievement. Teaching in performing arts is specifically geared to making pupils aware of, and progressively responsible for, their own learning. The head of department is instrumental in making those principles underpin practice in the subject. Teachers delivering elements outside their own expertise would benefit from additional support. There is insufficient use of ICT in lessons. More access to audiovisual equipment is required to assist with appraising and assessing pupils' performances.
178. Accommodation has improved significantly since the last inspection. The extra-curricular contribution of performing arts to the enjoyment and achievement of pupils is very good. The department provides an invaluable dimension to the cultural life of the school. The involvement and appreciation of pupils, parents, governors and the local community is a particular strength.

Drama

179. In Years 7 and 8, drama is taught as a discrete subject and as part of the performing arts programme in Year 9. By Year 9, standards of work are good. Pupils quickly develop their skills in the subject. They are able to use technical language and respond to the conventions of a drama classroom. All pupils relate actions to the text they are working with and the majority speak expressively. They make good use of gesture, expression and space. In a lesson exploring 'gang fights' two Year 9 boys showed particular confidence performing in front of their peers.
180. The quality of teaching and learning for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is good. Teachers know their pupils well and provide work for pupils with special educational needs that is usually challenging and at an appropriate level. Relationships are always very good. Pupils collaborate well, including in mixed gender groups, and take responsibility for their work. This is because teachers ensure that the work is well matched to pupils' needs and make sure that all pupils are included in the lesson so that they are able to experience success and celebrate their own achievements. There is some embarrassment from a minority of Year 9 boys when difficult skills are attempted, with some self-conscious and immature behaviour at times.
181. In Years 10 to 11, drama is offered as a GCSE option and standards of work are good. In Year 10 most pupils use their imagination in devising dramatic presentations, have a sound knowledge of the range of dramatic techniques and are developing a good understanding of the relationship between performers and audience. Pupils devise, improvise and present their work with conviction and absorption, as was seen in one Year 10 lesson dealing with improvisation about racism within a detention centre. Several girls demonstrated a good understanding of emotion and tension and portrayed this well in small groups. In Year 11, pupils are able to make accurate assessments of their own developing work, so their sketches illustrating story lines developed from 'a talk in the park' were constantly refined. They have been carefully taught to see opportunities to integrate mime, tableaux and freeze-frame whilst performing with confidence. In one Year 11 lesson, small groups of pupils learned about sub-text through exploring what characters said and comparing this with what they were actually thinking. Two Year 11 girls gave a carefully rehearsed performance that displayed sensitivity, depth and real understanding of the characters they were portraying. The rest of the group listened with captivation and obvious respect for the performance. They then eagerly appraised and analysed the piece by effectively utilising technical language.
182. In Years 10 to 11 teaching and learning are good due to the teachers' enthusiasm, expertise and high expectations, which lead to sustained learning. Tasks set are achievable by all pupils, with opportunities for the more able pupils to develop their skills to a higher standard. Teachers keep a sharp focus on the skills which pupils need to master, how they will be assessed, and ensure that tasks are constantly challenging. The pupils enjoy the practical activities and participate willingly. They are able to assess their own and others' work and use this evaluation to improve their work. Their attitude to the subject and general behaviour in lessons is excellent.

Dance

183. As a prelude to offering dance at GCSE level a discrete dance experience with specialist tuition has been established within the performing arts course in Year 9. There is an appropriate practical focus in lessons and pupils are well supported in developing their dance skills and knowledge. In Year 7 most girls and some boys can work in groups, planning and performing motifs with imagination and interpretation. In one lesson seen pupils performed well-controlled, imaginative and challenging sequences of movements on the theme of 'help and rescue'. Their work on alignment and posture incorporated good use of slide, reach and jump skills to help portray their intentions, thus enabling pupils to develop their skills in these areas.
184. Dance teaching is characterised by good knowledge and understanding of the subject and this is used to plan lessons effectively. Pupils demonstrate interest and enthusiasm and enjoy the opportunities to be creative in suggesting routines and step sequences. In good lessons teachers build pupils' confidence with effective use of praise as they circulate well to ensure that they are working hard. They manage time and change of activity crisply to maintain good pace. In one lesson the teaching was not as effective as it could have been partly due to technical problems with equipment. Therefore pupils did not make as much progress as expected.

MEDIA STUDIES

185. Whilst it was only possible to observe two periods of media studies during the period of the inspection, these lessons, plus a scrutiny of a limited amount of coursework, teachers planning documents, and results in national examinations indicate that attainment in the subject is good. Standards in the subject have improved since the last inspection.
186. The provision for media studies is **good**.

Strengths:

- The subject knowledge of the members of the department
- The good accommodation and range of resources available in the department, including very good access to computers
- The pupils' very positive attitudes towards the subject
- The good leadership and management of the subject

Areas for development:

- Widen the range of media studies topics and projects, so as to increase the range of options open to pupils
187. Most pupils start the course with a limited knowledge of the world of media. Whilst the quality of work varies considerably, evidence from the scrutiny of work of completed Year 11 project files indicates that pupils achieve well, over the two years of the course, and make good progress in relation to their prior attainment.
188. In those lessons observed pupils could be seen to be extending their learning in a number of aspects of media studies. In one lesson pupils displayed a clear understanding of the world of newspapers, their content and layout, their use of persuasive language and their production. This knowledge was used to good effect as they worked towards the creation of their own newspapers. The good progress made in this lesson was very much influenced by the positive attitudes that pupils displayed

towards their work and the teacher's specialist knowledge, with all the activities for the lesson already being pre-loaded into computers.

189. In the second of the two lessons observed pupils had an effective understanding of the potential impact of violent computer games on young people, and were working towards the production of a project of this issue. Pupils displayed good computer skills in this lesson, and worked with sustained concentration and effort. Learning in the lesson was very much influenced by the opportunity for pupils to take control of the activities they were involved in and become independent learners.
190. Whilst it is not possible to make a secure judgement on the standard of teaching in media studies on the basis of two lessons, those lessons observed were well planned and organised. They provided for pupils to utilise the skills they had learned to be consolidated by using them in a different context. Teachers had high expectations of pupils and provided them with a good range of challenging activities.
191. The good accommodation and use of resources, in particular the use of computers, is a significant factor in the good learning which takes place in lessons, with pupils producing high quality graphics, and accessing the world-wide Web in order to find information for their project work.
192. The subject is well led and managed by a very knowledgeable and enthusiastic co-ordinator who has put into place a policy and detailed scheme of work in the two years she has been in post. She is aware of the need to extend the range of project materials in order to increase the range of options in the subject and is addressing this issue in the department development plan.