

INSPECTION REPORT

PRESTWICH COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

Prestwich, Manchester

LEA area: Bury

Unique reference number: 105362

Headteacher: Mrs M J Boler

Reporting inspector: Mr J Paddick
10308

Dates of inspection: 30 April - 4 May 2001

Inspection number: 189450

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Heys Road Prestwich Manchester
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs M E Orr
Date of previous inspection:	23 - 26 September 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Prestwich Community High School serves the local area but also takes increasing numbers of pupils from Manchester and Salford. It provides comprehensive education for girls and boys in the age range 11-16. There are 801 pupils on roll and the proportions of boys and girls in each year group vary quite significantly. The number of pupils having English as an additional language is high, and 41 are at an early stage of its acquisition. Most of these pupils are drawn from Pakistani and Indian backgrounds, but there are also a few from Chinese families and a small number of refugees from the Middle East. Numbers of pupils with special educational needs are average. The proportion having statements is just above average. The majority of the statemented pupils need special help in relation to dyslexia or emotional or behavioural problems. An above average proportion of pupils qualifies for free school meals. The profile of pupils' attainment on entry to the school is below average and gradually falling.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school is effective. Pupils have below average standards of attainment on entry in Year 7, yet by Year 11 they leave with GCSE results that are generally average compared to the country as a whole. GCSE results are well above average compared to those achieved in similar schools. Teaching is satisfactory overall but good in Years 10 and 11, especially on GCSE courses. The leadership provided by the headteacher and senior staff is good, and management at all levels is always at least satisfactory. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- GCSE results are well above average compared to those achieved in similar schools.
- Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good.
- Attitudes, behaviour, and personal development of the pupils are good.
- Relationships between pupils and with staff are very good.
- Provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development is good.
- The range and extent of extra-curricular activities is outstanding.
- The way in which the curriculum is enriched by utilising the resources of the community is excellent.

What could be improved

- The satisfactory rather than good quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9.
- Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in mathematics whereas it is good in English and science.
- The teaching of information and communications technology is unsatisfactory.
- Arrangements for the assessment of pupils' work are unsatisfactory.
- The school provides significantly less teaching time than most other secondary schools.
- Lessons are too long for many classes to fully utilise the time available.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in September 1996. Since then improvement has been satisfactory. The school has done well to maintain its broadly average GCSE standards in spite of admitting gradually more challenging intakes. Teaching has improved. There have also been several improvements based on the key issues from the previous inspection. The most notable of these relate to the extension of the buildings, the provision of greater opportunity to study discrete arts subjects in Years 10 and 11, and the general provision for pupils' cultural development. There has been extra funding allocated to resources but there are still some shortages. Far less progress has been made with the assessment of pupils' work and information and communications technology, which are both still unsatisfactory.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on GCSE examination results.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	C	C	D	A

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

The school's Key Stage 3 test results in English, have been average for the last three years. Results in mathematics and science were average in 1998 and 1999 but dropped to below average in 2000. However, the results taken as a whole were well above average for similar schools. In 2000, girls did better than boys in English, marginally better in mathematics and similarly in science. In the current Year 9, standards are below average overall, but this represents satisfactory achievement from Year 7, when the profile of the intake was also below average. Standards in art and music are above average, in English, science, geography and physical education they are average and in all other National Curriculum subjects and religious education they are below average.

The proportion of pupils gaining five GCSE results in the range A*-C has remained steady since the previous inspection. GCSE results in 2000 were average for five A*-C grades, five A*-G grades and above average for one A*-G grade. However, they were below average on the average pupil's point score and slightly undershot the governors' target for A*-C grades. Pupils with English as an additional language did as well at GCSE as other pupils. The GCSE results are fairly accurately reflected in the current work of Year 11, which is broadly average overall, and which represents good achievement from a below average profile of attainment on entry to the school. Current standards in Year 11 are above average in GCSE art, music, history and religious studies, and broadly average in most other GCSE subjects and courses. Standards are below average in information and communications technology, non-examination religious education, and GCSE mathematics. Particular gains are made in listening, speaking, reading and writing as pupils move through the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes to the school and their work are good. They strongly support learning. Pupils are happy at school and are keen to do well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in class and around the school is generally good.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils develop mature attitudes as they move through the school. They relate well to each other and to adults.
Attendance	Satisfactory. In line with the national average. Fewer unauthorised absences than the national average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching has improved since the previous inspection. It is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 and 11. English teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Pupils make good progress in their reading,

listening, writing and speaking. Mathematics teaching is satisfactory throughout the school but more attention still needs to be given to pupils' numerical skills. Science teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is at least satisfactory in all subjects at both key stages, except in information and communications technology (ICT) where it is unsatisfactory. This is because teachers do not plan to use and develop pupils' ICT skills sufficiently in their work in most subjects. Consequently, pupils underachieve in ICT. The strongest teaching is in English, art and music, which is good throughout the school. Teaching meets pupils' needs in a satisfactory manner in Years 7 to 9. The good teaching in Years 10 and 11 gives pupils every chance to do well at GCSE.

During the inspection, 99 per cent of lessons were at least satisfactory, 51 per cent were good or better, but only 4 per cent were very good. Particular strengths in teaching are generally the planning of lessons, clear logical explanations, good questioning techniques to check learning, the management of pupils, and the provision of good quality individual advice. These strengths are characteristics of a large proportion of teaching and underpin good rates of learning in many classes. Weaknesses in some lessons relate to pupils not working to capacity for the full 70 minutes. Pupils often find the lessons too long and they tend to become restless. Some lessons do not fully cater for the wide range of ability in the class. Marking needs to be improved and the use of homework needs to be better organised.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum meets all statutory requirements. Extra-curricular activities and the contribution of the community are excellent. However, the total time allocation for teaching is too low and lessons are too long for many pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Most pupils with special educational needs are successful at GCSE.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The provision is good. These pupils enjoy harmonious relationships with the staff and the other pupils. They approach GCSE with confidence and do as well as the school as a whole.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school provides a good programme for pupils' personal development. The provision for spiritual development is satisfactory overall but requirements for collective worship are not fully met. Provision for pupils' moral development is good, and for their social and cultural development it is very good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Arrangements for pupils' welfare are good. Procedures for promoting good behaviour are very good. However, arrangements for the assessment of pupils' work are unsatisfactory.

Links with parents are satisfactory overall, and they have positive views about the school. However, they do not provide much practical support to the school and its work.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership provided by the headteacher and key staff is good; they expect high standards from staff and pupils. Management is satisfactory. Decisions are made through a good process of full consultation but policies need to be monitored more thoroughly.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil their responsibilities well. They are vigorous and help to shape the direction of the school. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school evaluates its examination performance well but most middle managers do not yet evaluate the quality of teaching and the rate of pupils' learning in their subjects.

The strategic use of resources	Staffing, resources and accommodation are satisfactory overall, although there are some shortcomings. Financial planning is good and control is very good. The school is careful with its finance and applies the principles of best value well.
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PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school • Their children are making good progress • Behaviour in the school is good • Teaching is good • Pupils are expected to work hard and achieve their best • The school is helping their children become mature and responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The setting of homework • Information about pupils' progress • The range of extra-curricular activities

Inspectors agree with most of the parents' positive views. However, the quality of teaching and the rate of pupils' progress in Years 7 to 9, although satisfactory, could be improved. They agree that teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good. Inspectors agree that the setting of homework needs to be strengthened, and that information about pupils' progress should be improved. They do not have any concerns whatsoever about the provision of extra-curricular activities which is excellent, especially given the size of the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with a profile of attainment that is below the national average. By the end of Year 9, standards are still below average overall but they represent satisfactory achievement, especially as pupils' work in English has improved to become broadly average for their age. By the end of Year 11, pupils have achieved well because the standard of their work has risen considerably to become broadly average for their age. This is reflected annually in GCSE results, which are usually average for the country as a whole. Parents are happy about the standards in the school, and they are justified in holding this view.
2. In 2000, the school's results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science, taken together, were below average for the country as a whole. Results in English were average, reflecting the good gains in literacy made by the pupils between Years 7 and 9, but mathematics and science results were below average. Results in 1999 and 1998 were better, as they were average in the three core subjects. Hence, the school's results have not matched the national trend. In 2000, girls did better than boys in English, as was the case nationally, slightly better in mathematics and broadly similarly in science, whereas nationally girls' and boys' results were similar in the latter two subjects. The 2000 results, taken as a whole, were well above average for schools taking their pupils from similar backgrounds, and largely as expected from the nature of the pupils' profile of attainment on entry to the school.
3. The GCSE average point score was below average overall compared with all schools nationally. However, results were average or better in several important categories, for example, the proportion of the year group achieving five or more results in the range A*-C. Girls did better than boys, as was the case nationally, and results were well above average for schools taking their pupils from similar backgrounds. In 2000, 43 per cent of pupils achieved five results in the range A*-C, which was broadly average for the country as a whole. Similarly, the 93 per cent of pupils achieving five GCSE grades in the range A*-G was also average. More pupils achieved at least one graded result than was the case nationally.
4. Within the 2000 GCSE results, there was a considerable variation between subjects. English and science were average for the country as a whole but results in mathematics were lower. Results in drama, geography and history were well above average. In art, food technology and religious studies they were above average. French, statistics, music, and physical education were broadly average. Results in English literature, Spanish, child-development, graphics and textiles were below the national average, and resistant materials were well below.
5. The GCSE results have not risen in line with the national trend but the school has done well to achieve broadly average results each year, from intakes that were significantly below average when they arrived in Year 7. This includes the 2000 results. The school sets itself challenging targets for GCSE, but several were not fully met in 2000, notably, for example, for 48 per cent of pupils to achieve five results graded A*-C. However, this can be attributed to several higher attaining pupils transferring to other schools.
6. Current standards in Year 9 are below average overall but they represent satisfactory achievement between Years 7 and 9. Standards in English and science are average but in mathematics they are below average, largely because pupils' numeracy skills are insufficiently developed. Standards in art and music are above average because pupils are taught well in these subjects. There is average work in geography and physical education. Pupils' work with computers is below average because they are provided with little opportunity to use and develop their skills in the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education so they are underachieving. Standards in history, religious education, modern languages and design and technology subjects are all below average but represent satisfactory achievement.

7. By Year 11, standards rise considerably because the quality of teaching is better than in Years 7 to 9. Work is closely matched to the requirements of GCSE and much is expected of the pupils. Currently, standards are broadly average overall. Standards in English and science are average but in mathematics they are still below average, as they are in Year 9. Work in art, music, and history is above average, as pupils move confidently towards GCSE. Pupils studying GCSE religious studies exhibit above average standards but those taking the compulsory non-examination course are underachieving in the subject because there is insufficient time provided to study the locally agreed syllabus in sufficient depth. Standards in most other subjects, including design and technology subjects overall, are broadly average. However, in information and communication technology, as in Year 9, standards are below average and pupils underachieve because they are provided with insufficient opportunities to use and develop their skills in the subjects of the curriculum.

8. Pupils' competence in literacy develops as they move through the school, and the skills that they acquire assist them in making generally good progress in all subjects, especially in Years 10 and 11. The emphasis on the development of literacy skills in most subjects of the curriculum is invaluable in promoting these good levels of progress. Numeracy skills are below average throughout the school. However, although there is no organised programme to develop them, pupils are provided with suitable opportunities to use and extend them in many subjects, promoting further development in different contexts.

9. Pupils with special educational needs usually reach the standards which their teachers expect of them, and many do better than expected. For example, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-G in five or more subjects at GCSE in 2000 was well above the average for schools taking their pupils from similar backgrounds. This represents a positive outcome for pupils with special educational needs. In their mainstream lessons most pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9 and good progress in Years 10 and 11. Pupils with English as an additional language make good progress; their achievements are reflected in their GCSE results, which in 2000 were similar to those of the other pupils in the school. Pupils at an early stage of acquisition of English make good progress as a result of the good quality individual support and teaching that they receive.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

10. Pupils' attitudes towards the school are good. Their behaviour in lessons and around the school is generally good, and they make good progress in their personal development. Their attendance is in line with the national average and satisfactory.

11. Good standards of behaviour in lessons and around school have been maintained since the previous inspection. Parents are happy about this aspect of the school's work, which allows teaching and learning to proceed without disruption. Occasionally a few pupils fail to exercise self-discipline but this tends to occur when the school's positive behaviour policy is not consistently or rigorously applied. Pupils' conduct is almost always orderly, and relationships between pupils of all ethnic groups are harmonious. Teachers deal effectively with the occasional instances of bullying or racist remarks. Since the previous inspection, the number of fixed period exclusions has more than doubled, but the nature of the school's population has become more challenging. However, since last year, a substantial decrease has been achieved so that currently the number is in keeping with that of similar schools.

12. The attitudes of pupils with special educational needs are generally good. Those with learning difficulties respond well to the support they are given. They take a pride in their written work. The pupils with behavioural needs respond well to the short term targets, daily contracts and pastoral support plans. They represent a challenge to the school but where lessons are well planned and taught they respond appropriately. They recognise that the school has their well being at heart and major conflicts are rare.

13. Pupils enjoy their experiences at school, and almost all of them value the education that they receive and the support and guidance offered by their teachers. Those older pupils, who take up the offer of mentoring, appreciate the way they are encouraged and helped to achieve better GCSE results. A very substantial number of pupils take part in the various activities that are arranged. Out of school trips, especially abroad,

are particularly popular. Most pupils want to do well and try hard, and they also respond well to the way in which the school recognises and rewards their efforts. Very few pupils do not value their time in school.

14. Pupils work very well together, and become increasingly mature and responsible as a result of the experiences offered to them. Parents recognise this as a strong feature of the school's work. For example, through the programme for personal social and health education, pupils develop good personal and interpersonal awareness. They represent each other on the school council, and some are involved in a local community council. They develop a sense of care and sensitivity for others by taking part in extended community service. Some older pupils are appointed to be prefects, and all Year 11 pupils take on a pastoral care role for those in Year 7.

15. Attendance has been broadly average for the past three years and is slightly better this year so far. Whilst most pupils have a good record of attendance, a few persistent absentees significantly affect the whole school figures. Family holidays account for almost all of the remaining unnecessary absence. Only a very few pupils arrive late without good reason, and pupils' punctuality is another indicator of their enthusiasm for school.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

16. The quality of teaching has improved greatly since the previous inspection, when only 87 per cent of lessons were satisfactory or better. Teaching is now satisfactory overall in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Altogether, 120 lessons were observed during the inspection. In 99 per cent of them, teaching was at least satisfactory. In 51 per cent of lessons, teaching was judged to be good or better, and in 4 per cent it was very good. However, the proportion of good and very good teaching is below average for the country as a whole. The only unsatisfactory teaching observed was in science. The quality of teaching and its effect were carefully evaluated, not only from lesson observations but also from a careful scrutiny of pupils' work. Teachers have had training on important elements of their work in classrooms; this has been effective in raising their awareness and has a beneficial impact on their work. Parents are satisfied with the quality of teaching in the school, and to a large extent their views are justified. The good overall quality of teaching in Years 10 and 11 is the main factor promoting the good progress of the majority of pupils as they prepare for GCSE. However, in Years 7 to 9, teaching should be improved further.

17. In Years 7 to 9, teaching is at least satisfactory in all subjects except information and communications technology (ICT), where it is unsatisfactory. It is good in drama, geography, music and art. Although the teaching of basic skills in ICT lessons is satisfactory, the teaching of the subject is unsatisfactory overall because computers are not being used sufficiently in other subjects, as intended by the National Curriculum. Hence, pupils underachieve in ICT. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach are usually good, and they manage the pupils in their classes well. Relationships are good. Pupils' skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening are promoted effectively. Teachers' expectations of pupils are usually appropriate but sometimes the whole class is given the same work, even though the attainment levels of the pupils are very different. Hence, the highest attaining pupils sometimes underachieve. In some of the lessons, which are satisfactory overall, teachers and pupils find that 70 minutes is too long; in the second half of the lesson, the pace of work often slackens and some of the pupils are not fully engaged.

18. Teaching is good in Years 10 and 11. It is good in English, science, history, modern languages, art, drama and music. It is good on the GCSE course in religious studies but satisfactory on the non-examination compulsory course. Teaching is satisfactory in all other National Curriculum subjects, except ICT, where it is unsatisfactory. As in Years 7 to 9, the teaching of basic skills in ICT is satisfactory but teachers do not arrange for pupils to use computers sufficiently in most subjects, preventing them from developing and using their skills in different contexts. Hence, pupils underachieve in ICT. Teachers' subject knowledge is good, their expectations of pupils are high, and they prepare them well for GCSE. Lessons are planned effectively and pupils are managed well. Explanations are clear, relationships are good, and the quality of individual advice and help is often high. Consequently, pupils work hard, acquire skills, knowledge and understanding at a good rate, and generally do well in their examinations at the end of Year 11.

19. Some parents express concern about homework. Their concerns are justified because the use of homework is not properly co-ordinated. Although it is an effective element in plans for learning, it is not set frequently or regularly enough in some subjects. There are instances of homework just being 'finishing off', when work has been started in class. This often results in the higher attaining pupils, who have almost completed the work before they leave the classroom, having little to do at home. The lack of a homework timetable results in very variable demands on pupils, especially in Years 10 and 11 when GCSE coursework is being produced.

20. A weakness in the teaching of many subjects is marking, especially in Key Stage 3. Although much of the pupils' work is marked helpfully, some is not marked at all. Often marking is rather mechanistic and does not tell pupils what is wrong or how to correct it. Pupils have great difficulty in trying to understand how they are doing in their studies because teachers use different systems of grading, even in the same subject. Teachers rarely use National Curriculum levels in the planning of work or in marking it. Marking is better in Years 10 and 11 because teachers often share GCSE grade criteria with pupils and indicate the quality of their work in relation to them.

21. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is always at least satisfactory and is sometimes good. Teachers are provided with written individual education plans, which help them to focus on pupils' priorities. Although these plans include targets related to personal development, study skills and literacy, they would be of still greater value if they were to include targets relating to numerical competence. The development of an effective team of classroom assistants since the previous inspection has been beneficial. They work well with teachers but should be more fully involved in the planning and evaluation of the lessons, in which the pupils for whom they have a responsibility are learning, so that rates of progress towards individual targets can be accurately assessed. Work with pupils with special educational needs in mathematics is often constrained by a lack of suitable resources and equipment, which reduces the potential pace of learning.

22. The school works closely with Bury's Curriculum and Language Access Service (CLAS) to provide good levels of teaching and support for pupils who have English as an additional language, and as a result their progress is generally good. The large majority can pursue the normal school curriculum with no more support from teachers than other pupils. The small numbers at an early stage of mastering English are taught well. The CLAS co-ordinator is vigorous and knowledgeable and ensures that the pupils make good progress. She has ensured that teachers have good advice, and provides appropriate support for pupils with a minimum of fuss.

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

23. The curricular provision is good within the well below average amount of teaching time provided for the pupils. It is broad, balanced and relevant and provides equally for boys and girls and pupils of all abilities, reflecting the school's strength in equal opportunities. In Years 7 to 11, the curriculum includes all the National Curriculum subjects as well as religious education, drama and personal and social education (PSE).

24. The total teaching time is well below the 25 hours per week found in most secondary schools. This constrains the improvement of standards. The actual time allocations for mathematics, religious education and option subjects in Years 10 and 11 are below average. In mathematics this restricts the progress of pupils with average and below average attainment and in religious education it limits the coverage of the Agreed Syllabus. The 70-minute lessons are too long for some subjects; for example, modern languages and music, causing a significant number of pupils to lose concentration.

25. The quality and range of learning opportunities are satisfactory overall. They are good in art, drama, music and physical education but unsatisfactory in information and communication technology (ICT). In the

majority of subjects the statutory requirement to enhance pupils' learning using information technology is not fully met. The arrangements for developing pupils' numeracy and literacy skills are developing and are broadly satisfactory.

26. In Year 9, all pupils take Spanish in addition to French, an improvement since the previous inspection. In Years 10 and 11, all pupils take English literature and the majority take dual award science. In addition to a modern language and design technology, most pupils take both a humanities subject and an expressive art subject thus ensuring a balanced education. This is a distinct improvement since the previous inspection. GNVQ courses in business and leisure and tourism provide relevant vocational education for some pupils. Complementary studies consist of physical, personal, religious and careers education and include community service for all pupils.

27. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. They have full access to the National Curriculum subjects. Special provision is made for pupils with learning difficulties by having a 'paired reading' system three days each week in which the team of support assistants works with them. This is valuable but its methodology needs to be reviewed. In Years 10 and 11, some of these pupils follow an alternative curriculum course that leads to accreditation other than GCSE. There is also valuable provision in the supported self-study lessons. However, attention needs to be given to the improvement of special educational needs pupils' mathematical skills, especially in Years 7 to 9. The school has begun to identify gifted and talented pupils but provision for them to reach their full potential is still very patchy.

28. The provision of extra-curricular activities is outstanding. For the last four years, the school has received the Education Extra Distinction Award for its provision of additional opportunities that offer challenge and enrichment outside the classroom. The provision of extra-curricular sport is very good. There are school teams in ten sports, providing pupils with the opportunity to compete at local and regional level. These, together with inter form competitions, ensure a high participation rate. There are also annual sports trips abroad. Many subjects provide extra support for GCSE coursework. The annual drama productions and musical performances involve over 100 pupils. Pupils can join a recorder ensemble, a band, and a choir that performs locally and abroad. There is a wide range of clubs, and trips are arranged locally, nationally and abroad for educational and recreational purposes.

29. The school provides a good programme of PSE. The course is generally well planned and includes citizenship, study skills, health education, drugs education, careers education and aspects of sex education. Some aspects of sex education are taught in religious education and science. PSE is taught by a team of staff and involves visiting speakers and drama groups. The careers education and guidance programme is good. The programme includes work shadowing in Year 8 and 'industry days' in Year 9. There is a practical focus on further education, training and employment. All pupils are offered a mock interview with an employer and an interview with the LEA careers adviser. A programme of work experience for pupils in Year 11 has been suspended but all pupils experience work in their community service in nursery and primary schools and residential homes.

30. The organisation of community links is very strong, and they make an excellent contribution to pupils' learning. Outside agencies supply many visiting speakers, and there are very good links with local sports clubs, which provide coaching for the pupils. Local employers support and sponsor many events, for example, the design and production of the Prestwich Carnival logo and the Young Enterprise scheme. There is a clear focus on improving and protecting the environment through a very strong link with the World Wildlife Fund. Pupils have been involved in competitions to improve Prestwich village and the Metrolink station, and the school council meets with local people to discuss common issues of concern. Year 8 pupils experience an 'earth summit', when they work with visitors to consider the global issues of the effect of economic development on the environment. Local professional people enrich the teaching of drama and art, and innovative features of the curriculum are theme days where pupils work alongside professionals, for example, from a circus.

31. The relationships with partner institutions are very good and promote the progression of pupils' learning. Induction days are held for both Year 5 and 6 pupils, and a 'bridging project' on the topic of a bicycle is in place. Other curricular links with primary schools include sports and drama activities. There are also very good links with the providers of the next phase of education.

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

32. The school's provision for pupils' personal development is good overall. There is very good provision for pupils' social and cultural development, good provision for their moral development and satisfactory provision for their spiritual development. The attention the school pays to pupils' development has a significant impact on them, and they mostly develop into responsible and thoughtful young people.

33. The school offers pupils many opportunities to take responsibility. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. The pupils' year and school councils have a real impact on their own school and the community. They are involved in such matters as improvements to the school environment, dining arrangements, and interview procedures for new staff. Involvement in very real decision-making groups helps pupils to learn not only about their rights within society but also their responsibilities to each other and to the groups of which they are a part.

34. All pupils have the opportunity to carry out community service; they visit schools and other institutions such as homes for elderly people. The excellent range of extra-curricular activities which include drama, music and sport, give a very high number of pupils the opportunity to take up an interest and meet socially with other pupils and staff. Many subjects include opportunities to discuss social issues relevant not only to pupils' own surroundings and community but also the wider world. Personal, social and health education lessons give many opportunities for debate and group work. Most pupils respond with interest and enthusiasm to these planned opportunities.

35. Since the previous inspection, there has been a considerable increase in the range of opportunities to broaden pupils' understanding not only of their own culture but also of the richness of cultural diversity in their school and beyond. The school recognises the celebrations of a variety of ethnic groups. For example, pupils celebrated the Chinese New Year in assemblies and activities across the school. The school has a cultural trail, which includes a Japanese garden designed by pupils after the exchange-visit of a Japanese teacher. A multi-ethnic mural, designed and produced by pupils, brightens the art and design corridor. A school and community party, which involved around 800 people from the local community, was held to celebrate Eid.

36. Religious education, art and design, food technology, textiles and expressive arts make a particularly strong contribution to pupils' cultural development and multi-cultural awareness. In religious education, pupils are taught about the major world faiths in a sensitive and meaningful manner so that they are encouraged to appreciate and respect diversity. There are frequent visits to local art galleries and museums and artists are invited into school to work with pupils. Pupils study art from a wide range of different cultures such as African, Egyptian and Aztec. In expressive arts and music, pupils explore and perform the music and dance from a variety of world cultures both in school and in the wider community.

37. The school has a well-established set of values that help to promote good behaviour and positive attitudes. These are seen in practice in the conduct and example set by staff. Pupils are involved in drawing up the school's positive behaviour policy and they make a contribution to decisions on the rewards and sanctions used. Assemblies promote clear moral messages in keeping with the ethos of the school. Many subjects offer the chance to discuss moral issues both within pupils' direct experience and in the wider world. For example, the 'earth summit' in which Year 8 pupils took part included debate on moral issues relating to the environment.

38. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory overall. Many of the planned assemblies make a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual development and many appreciate the opportunity to think more deeply and reflect on spiritual, social and moral issues. The quality of the collective act of worship carried out in form groups is variable and dependent on individual teacher's interpretations of

the theme for the week. In some classes the requirements for a daily collective act of worship are not met, as was the case at the previous inspection. In most school and year-group assemblies, values of a broadly Christian nature are shared with pupils, and there is recognition of the breadth of cultural diversity in the school. Opportunity for reflection is usually included but there is rarely any music. From time to time, pupils lead assemblies, for example on topics such as Amnesty International, harvest and fair trade.

39. Religious education offers well-structured opportunities to reflect on the nature of belief and its impact on life, whilst geography gives opportunity to reflect on the plight of asylum seekers. After listening to a young pupil talk about his experiences, pupils wrote with empathy and compassion about his circumstances; they were keen to welcome him into their school and to offer practical support. In Year 11 drama, pupils portray death and redemption with sensitivity in their performances of planned ceremonies. However, although there are policies on the need to promote spiritual development, in some subjects such as English and science, a lack of specific planning results in missed opportunities.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

40. Procedures for child protection, health and safety are in place. Pupils' behaviour and personal development are closely monitored and effectively supported. The monitoring and promotion of attendance are satisfactory.

41. Parents are satisfied with the quality of pastoral care and say that the school helps their children to become mature and responsible. They are justified in holding these views because the school makes appropriate arrangements for the general welfare of pupils. Procedures for child protection are designed to ensure that all members of staff are aware of their responsibility and that confidentiality is safeguarded, an improvement since the previous inspection. Arrangements for health and safety are effectively managed and sufficient adults are qualified to provide first aid.

42. There are very good arrangements for new pupils to transfer from primary schools, and a 'buddying' system, with Year 11 pupils, contributes very well to their integration, sense of safety and confidence. Relationships between adults and pupils are mutually respectful, trusting and constructive, and pupils understand clearly what is expected of them and what they can expect from their teachers. Consequently, an environment exists that is conducive to learning and in which pupils feel secure, supported and valued.

43. Pupils' behaviour is closely monitored and most teachers apply the school's positive discipline policy consistently. In just a few lessons, it is not applied effectively and the disruptive behaviour that is allowed to continue wastes lesson time and adversely affects pupils' progress. This was mentioned at the time of the previous inspection but the situation has improved considerably. Effective strategies are now in place to support pupils who require correction or improvement in their attitudes and behaviour.

44. The school cares for pupils with special educational needs well. Outside agencies such as the Behavioural Support Service speak highly of the school's commitment to these pupils. The members of the community who act as pupils' mentors are pleased to be part of the team that has such an evident concern for their welfare. The major new initiative to support pupils in danger of being excluded is highly commendable but its future success will depend on the availability of further resources.

45. There are continuous checks on individual pupil and tutor group attendance. An attendance officer attempts to make home contact on the first day of pupils' absences; this system is improving relationships with parents and is helping to reduce absence. The school now benefits from a greater time allocation from the education welfare officer, providing further opportunity to reduce unnecessary absence.

46. The school successfully makes considerable efforts to motivate pupils. Recognition and rewards are awarded for effort, good work, behaviour and attendance, and these are regarded positively by the large majority of pupils. The school provides many opportunities that contribute to pupils' personal development. They include responsibility roles, representation on the school council, community service, extra curricular

activities and local and foreign visits. Pupils are also invited to contribute to major decision making processes in school and the review of some of its policies.

47. At the annual tutoring day, pupils and teachers discuss progress and agree action plans for improvement but they are not sufficiently specific to the subjects they study. Pupils say they are very useful occasions and would prefer more than one per year. However, only pupils in Years 10 and 11 say that they are clear about their predicted examination results, strengths and weaknesses and specific improvement needs. Extra help is available to pupils if they need it. After school homework sessions are arranged and good guidance is given about revision and preparation for examinations. Mentoring is offered to those pupils who have the desire to achieve five or more GCSE grades in the range A*-C. Pupils say that the advice and guidance that they receive about subject options, careers and further education are most helpful. The programme for personal, social and health education effectively contributes to pupils' awareness and understanding of the values of a healthy lifestyle.

Assessment

48. The assessment and monitoring of pupils' academic performance is unsatisfactory. A key issue at the previous inspection was 'to improve the quality of learning by ensuring that assessment is developed still further to inform planning and match learning tasks to the needs of the pupils'. There has been unsatisfactory progress on this issue, and many of the shortcomings identified still remain. Following the previous inspection, a new system was developed, but it has recently been suspended, because it was felt that it gave unreliable results. The school is in the process of trying to develop another system but practice across the subject areas is now inconsistent and unsatisfactory.

49. Procedures for assessing attainment and progress are unsatisfactory, and do not take account of the National Curriculum levels in a number of subjects in Years 7 to 9. These include English, mathematics, history, religious education, modern languages and information and communication technology. This means that the school cannot reliably track pupils' attainment or progress in these subjects. In addition, pupils often do not know how well they are doing, or what they need to do to improve. Target setting is not used in all subjects, and pupil self-assessment is in the early stages of development, though it is being used in the expressive arts area.

50. Assessment information is used to inform curriculum planning in Years 10 and 11, and there is a suitable awareness of how well pupils are doing on their GCSE courses. However, in Years 7 to 9, this is not the case, and further development is needed for assessment to be effective in improving planning and helping to raise standards.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

51. Parents hold positive views about the school. The partnership with parents is satisfactory overall but many give insufficient support to the work of the school and their children's efforts. The situation was similar at the time of the previous inspection.

52. Parents are generally pleased with the school and believe that it provides their children with a good education. They believe that the school is well led and managed and that teaching is good. They are pleased with pupils' progress and behaviour. However, some are not happy about homework, information about their children's progress and the provision of extra-curricular activities. Parents' positive views are largely accurate. Inspectors share their concerns about homework and information about pupils' progress but not about the quality of the extra-curricular programme, which is excellent, especially as the school is below average in size.

53. All the appropriate links with parents of pupils with special educational needs are in place. Parents of pupils with full educational statements are invited to annual reviews, and appreciate the school's provision for

their children. Interviews for parents and children are arranged to smooth the transfer of all pupils with special educational needs transferring to Prestwich Community High School at the end of Year 6.

54. The general information provided for parents is satisfactory overall. Reports and various publications give a more than adequate view of the life and aims of the school. However, annual school reports, although complying with requirements, do not in every subject clearly describe what pupils know, understand and can do. Pupils' strengths, weaknesses and targets for improvement are not always clear and subject-specific. Parents' evenings and the tutoring day are valued and contribute well to their understanding of pupils' progress. However, although the number of parents that attend parents' consultation meetings with teachers is improving, it is not as large as seen at many schools. Similarly, parents' support for public performances is not high and only modest numbers support the efforts of the parent and teacher association.

55. Many parents arrange family holidays in term time, consequently reducing their children's opportunities for learning. Parents offer little practical support to the school such as participating in running or supervising extra curricular activities. Despite the best efforts of the school, the good relationships that exist have not developed into a thoroughly effective partnership.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Governors

56. The governing body works hard and conscientiously, supported by a suitable number of sub committees, which deal with much of the detail of the work. These meet regularly and feed in information and advice to the full group. All records are in order and are of good quality. Governors understand the school's strengths and weaknesses well, and are instrumental in assisting the headteacher in shaping its direction. They are active and probing, often seeking further information before making decisions. School policies are agreed only after full consultation with the staff but, although they are reviewed regularly, many of them are insufficiently monitored to be fully effective. The governing body sets challenging but achievable targets in terms of GCSE examination results, again after consultation with the staff. It monitors these targets carefully, as it does spending, and understands how the school is doing compared to others nationally. The group fulfils almost all its statutory duties, except those relating to the provision of a daily act of collective worship, which was also the case at the time of the previous inspection.

Senior Management

57. The leadership provided by the headteacher and the senior management team is good. They lead by example, expect high standards from staff and pupils, and are effective in their roles, linking well with governors, middle managers, more junior staff, parents and the community. Decision-making involves staff at all levels and often also involves the pupils. Staff morale is high. It is to the credit of this group and the staff as a whole that GCSE results have been maintained at broadly average levels for the last four years even though the academic profile of the pupils on entry to the school is below average and declining.

58. Management at this level is satisfactory overall. The school has made satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection but some important weaknesses identified then still remain. These relate to the use of information and communication technology and the improvement of assessment, which are both vital elements in the raising of standards. However, good progress has been made with several of the other key issues, especially providing better accommodation for some subjects and ensuring that the cultural provision in the education programme is improved.

59. The school policies are reviewed regularly through discussion at all levels. Most of them are active documents and underpin the work of the school. However, there is a need to monitor them regularly and evaluate their success because currently a few of them are not fully being put into practice. Examples are policies for collective worship, homework, and information and communications technology.

Middle management

60. Management at the next level is satisfactory rather than good because most heads of subject do not yet monitor the quality of teaching and learning in the lessons for which they are responsible. However, a strong lead by the expressive arts and design and technology faculties is beginning to provide the school with good practice in this aspect of management. In terms of general organisation and administration, the work of middle managers is often good, but the organisation of information and communication technology is unsatisfactory. Heads of year carry out their responsibilities well, ensuring that their teams of form tutors give good support to their pupils' welfare. The middle managers as a group are at the hub of decision-making processes and every day organisation. They provide the school with considerable stability and play their part in fostering good team spirit and morale.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

61. Staffing is adequate. There is a sufficient number of suitably qualified and experienced staff to support teaching and the smooth running of the school on a daily basis. The training for staff is satisfactorily linked to priorities identified in the school development plan. Teachers are becoming more confident in the use of information technology skills, but not yet to the extent where these are integral to pupils' day-to-day learning in each subject area.

62. The accommodation is only just adequate for the number of pupils on roll. There have been improvements in the areas where physical education, design and technology, music and science are taught, since the previous inspection. A new library and learning resource centre has been provided but subject departments do not yet exploit it well enough. The new student support centre is beginning to play a crucial role in the life of the school. Outdoor facilities for physical education are still unsatisfactory because of the poor condition of playing field, which does not belong to the school. The doubling up of teaching rooms in English and mathematics for dining purposes at lunchtime continues to be unsatisfactory because teachers have to move resources and pupils' work to allow meals to be served.

63. Overall, the quantity and quality of learning resources have improved since the previous inspection. However, there is still a shortage of modern computers and practical equipment for mathematics. This is limiting pupils' progress, especially in information and communication technology.

Efficiency

64. Systems for financial planning are good. The various sections of the budget are planned carefully each year, using fairly accurate historical data. Spending is monitored with precision, and any variances from original intentions are investigated thoroughly. The recent audit report shows that systems of financial control and administration are good. The bursar ensures that specific grants are allocated to named budget holders, and that they are only spent on their intended purpose. The principles of best value are applied well.

65. The school prudently funds its development plan when money becomes available because there has been a history of financial constraint, which has in the past affected such important areas as resources for learning. The school now receives broadly average funding compared with similar schools but this is only due to successful bids for external funding. Development planning would benefit from stronger links between subject plans, whole school planning and the budget.

66. The school office staff are welcoming and helpful. They have well defined roles and provide good quality administrative and financial support to the school, keeping the necessary flows of information and documents running efficiently. Caretaking staff work hard and effectively to ensure that the school benefits from clean rooms, corridors and outside areas. Ancillary staff provide good quality support.

67. Overall funding is currently average, the education programme is of a good standard, pupils do well, especially at GCSE, and so the school is effective. It gives good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

68. In order to improve further the quality of educational provision and the standards achieved in the school the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) Improve the current satisfactory quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9.
 - Monitor lessons to ensure that pupils are learning quickly enough.
 - Ensure that lesson time is being used fully by all pupils.

- Ensure that marking shows pupils the standards they are reaching and indicates clearly what they should do to improve.
 - Provide suitable work for all pupils in lessons where the range of attainment is wide.
- (2) Improve the current satisfactory levels of pupils' achievement in mathematics to the good levels evident by the end of Key Stage 4 in the other two core subjects, English and science.
- Improve on the current satisfactory quality of mathematics teaching.
 - Improve pupils' numerical skills with a coherent plan to cover all subjects.
 - Carefully monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching with particular reference to pupils' progress.
- (3) Raise standards and improve teaching in information and communications technology (ICT).
- Provide pupils with a full entitlement to ICT in all of their subjects.
 - Monitor and evaluate the quality of the entitlement.
- (4) Improve the current unsatisfactory arrangements for assessment.
- Link schemes of work to projected rates of progress through the National Curriculum.
 - Provide pupils with subject-specific targets relating to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades.
 - Provide pupils with a system of marking and assessment which is common across the curriculum, and which clearly informs them how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
 - Use the system to chart individual pupils' progress as they move through the school, compare it with their targets, and identify underachievers quickly.
- (5) Consider increasing the total amount of teaching time in the week to match the average found across the country.
Consider alternatives to the 70-minute lessons so that time may be used better than it is at present in the teaching of some subjects.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	120
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	53

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0	5	47	47	1	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y 7 – Y 11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	801	
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	193	

Special educational needs	Y 7 – Y 11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	24	
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	156	

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	163

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	35
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	32

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	91.4
National comparative data	91

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.8
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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	90	73	163

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	52	54	46
	Girls	55	47	36
	Total	107	101	82
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	66 (63)	62 (58)	51 (50)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	22 (24)	31 (28)	22 (20)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	49	61	51
	Girls	56	47	40
	Total	105	108	91
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	65 (57)	67 (66)	57 (57)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	25 (17)	32 (30)	20 (23)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	84	69	153

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	32	74	80
	Girls	34	68	69
	Total	66	142	149
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	43 (43)	93 (92)	97 (97)
	National	47 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	34.9 (35.2)
	National	38.0 (38.4)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	40	100
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	4
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	9
Indian	37
Pakistani	101
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	16
White	619
Any other minority ethnic group	8

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	1	
Black – African heritage	3	
Black – other		
Indian	5	
Pakistani	8	
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	28	1
Other minority ethnic groups	2	

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y 7 – Y 11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	43.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y 7 – Y 11

Total number of education support staff	22
Total aggregate hours worked per week	473

Deployment of teachers: Y 7 – Y 11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.4
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Average teaching group size: Y 7 – Y 11

Key Stage 2	N/A
Key Stage 3	25.3
Key Stage 4	22.7

Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	1917412
Total expenditure	1935212
Expenditure per pupil	2423
Balance brought forward from previous year	32839
Balance carried forward to next year	15039

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	801
Number of questionnaires returned	255

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	38.1	53.4	6.4	1.7	0.4
My child is making good progress in school.	44.4	47.1	6.4	0.8	1.3
Behaviour in the school is good.	37.2	49.6	6.0	1.7	5.5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28.6	50.4	15.1	5.1	0.8
The teaching is good.	33.8	54.8	5.1	0.8	5.5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	29.5	49.6	15.0	3.8	2.1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47.4	41.0	6.4	2.6	2.6
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	58.1	37.2	2.1	1.3	1.3
The school works closely with parents.	30.0	43.5	12.0	4.7	9.8
The school is well led and managed.	39.7	43.2	4.7	2.1	10.3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	44.0	43.2	7.7	2.1	3.0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	30.8	41.1	9.4	5.5	13.2

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

ENGLISH

69. Over the last three years, boys and girls have consistently reached standards in the national tests at age 14, which are close to average, and well above those achieved in schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds. In 2000, the National Curriculum test results in English were better than in mathematics and science.

70. GCSE results in 2000 were average in terms of A*-C grades and similar to 1998 after a dip in 1999. They were average compared to results in other subjects. Pupils with English as an additional language did marginally better in GCSE English than the other pupils in the year group. In English literature, results were below the national average between 1998 and 2000. Overall, girls continue to perform better than boys, as they do nationally.

71. Standards in Year 9 are currently average but they represent good achievement in relation to pupils' relatively low levels of attainment on entry to the school. As a result of the department's emphasis on basic skills, pupils of all levels of attainment take care in both the presentation and accuracy of their written work. Lower attaining pupils can write simple but interesting stories, descriptions, interview questions and diary entries. Higher attaining pupils show a growing confidence in using complex sentences and are able to attempt successfully a much wider range of writing, including good quality creative pieces, play scripts, letters, advertisements and newspaper articles. Although they readily recognise and understand the technical terms, such as simile and metaphor, used when writing and talking about language, many pupils have difficulty analysing and commenting effectively on their use. In many cases, it is under-developed critical skills that prevent more pupils from achieving the higher levels in the end of Key Stage 3 tests.

72. Standards in Year 11 are broadly average, reflect the previous GCSE results, and represent good achievement from the relatively low starting point in Year 7. There is a general improvement in the accuracy of pupils' extended writing in particular, compared to standards in Year 9. Coursework folders and books show a wide variety of writing, discursive and argumentative, creative and original, as well as responses to Shakespeare and other literature and media texts. The quality of the writing varies considerably between the fluent, lively and mature, written by those who have a good vocabulary and the ability to develop argument and ideas, and the simple, less technically accurate, largely narrative style of the lower attaining pupils. Pupils in the higher sets often make useful notes in their lessons, unprompted by their teachers, and respond imaginatively to literature. However, many pupils of all abilities have difficulty responding critically to it and place an undue emphasis on plot and character, occasionally seeing them as real events and people, rather than investigating the writers' themes, purpose and style.

73. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and, because of clear guidance and help from teachers and classroom assistants, many are able to produce writing of a sufficient standard to be entered for GCSE English.

74. Reading comprehension varies considerably over both key stages but it is average overall. By the end of Year 9, pupils can follow instructions, such as those in external examination papers, and can make some inferences and predictions based on their reading of a good range of fiction, media and other non-media texts. The variety of poetry texts available has increased considerably since the previous inspection, and all pupils are given regular opportunities to read for enjoyment and to seek information, both in lessons and for homework, and to read aloud in class. Most boys and girls volunteer readily and are listened to, and encouraged if necessary by other pupils. Teachers monitor their personal reading carefully to ensure that they are all making progress. Higher attaining pupils in Year 11 read fluently, widely and with good understanding.

75. Standards of speaking and listening for both boys and girls are higher than in reading and writing. Most pupils, of all ages and ability, speak confidently and are able to use talk to solve problems, negotiate, share and extend ideas and consolidate their learning. A significant strength of pupils' group work is that relationships are good, and they listen carefully to each other and make positive and constructive criticism, which enables them to develop and improve their skills.

76. Most pupils have positive attitudes and, because they are co-operative in lessons, generally conscientious about the quality and handing in of work and want to succeed, they are effective learners by the time they reach Year 11. There are some opportunities for them to develop as independent learners but these are frequently limited owing to the department's poor access to computer facilities. Pupils' progress in learning is well monitored by teachers, though there is some inconsistency in the usefulness of their written comments when marking and the quality of short-term targets for improvement. Comments on written work are generally more helpful in Years 10 and 11.

77. Teaching is good overall: it is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Good lessons are characterised by a variety of teaching styles and activities which make it possible for all pupils to become fully engaged, class management which creates a supportive, purposeful and enjoyable work atmosphere, and carefully structured unit and lesson planning. In those lessons with some shortcomings, pupils' learning objectives are not made clear, and there is sometimes a lack of challenge for the most able when all pupils are given identical tasks.

78. The acting head of department manages the subject satisfactorily and offers clear direction and motivation to an experienced, conscientious and hard-working team. The department is well organised and resourced: communication is good, responsibilities are appropriately delegated and there is an awareness of current educational initiatives. A programme of monitoring involving lesson observations, marking and pupils' work is being developed but is yet to be fully implemented. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Book resources are now good and the department's shared work schemes clearly promote variety, continuity and progression in pupils' learning. However, GCSE literature results remain a concern, and opportunities for pupils to use computers to improve their research, reading and writing skills are not well developed.

Drama

79. Drama is a particular strength of the school both as an academic subject and an extra-curricular activity. All pupils take the subject in Years 7 to 9 and can then opt to study it for GCSE. By Year 11, standards are well above the national average because teaching is good overall, and in Years 10 and 11, it is very good. Pupils study a broad and challenging curriculum in which they investigate a wide range of situations including important social, moral and cultural issues. In a Year 11 lesson, they were preparing very effective and thoughtful group presentations on 'ceremony and sacred places'. Acting skills and the knowledge of stagecraft are well developed and pupils are able to work together very effectively in order to explore, create and improve their ideas and skills from a given stimulus. They present confidently, use body language to interpret and persuade; they use voice, tone, movement, space, sound, lighting, props and costume imaginatively to convey feelings and involve the audience, and modify their interpretations through group discussions. A particular strength is pupils' ability to evaluate objectively both their own and others' performances, using the examination board's assessment criteria, and to make valuable, constructive suggestions for improvement.

Key skills: Literacy across the curriculum

80. Standards of literacy in the school are satisfactory, and are improving as a result of the impetus provided by the English department, and teachers' awareness of literacy's important role in the raising of standards across the curriculum. Literacy is the key focus of the special educational needs department, but its book and computer resources are inadequate. In most subjects, key subject words are written down or displayed to assist pupils in spelling and using them, and in some, science for example, frameworks are provided for those who need them to help their structuring of writing and to ensure that it is relevant. Orally, most pupils are good, and though some subjects, such as drama and art, give them the opportunity to evaluate and discuss

their own performances, this is not yet common practice. However, some very impressive presentations were delivered during the inspection by Year 8 pupils in their 'earth summit' project in geography. What is still lacking is regularity and consistency in marking within and across departments, particularly of incorrect spelling, and the development of reading, both in lessons and in morning registration time. Additionally, the important contributions, which the librarian and the learning resource centre can make to literacy, have not yet been fully considered.

MATHEMATICS

81. In 2000, results in national tests for 14 year olds were below the national average. However, they were well above average compared to similar schools. The results were not as good as those in the two previous years but they accurately reflected the wider ability spread, and higher proportion of lower-attaining pupils, in the year group. Overall, results have improved over the past three years, although at a slower rate than the national trend. Results in GCSE examinations were below the national average at grades A*-C but similar to it at grades A*-G. This is creditable considering that the school enters a larger proportion of pupils for GCSE than most schools. Also commendable was the proportion of A* and A grades. This was similar to the national average. Taken over the past three years, results have shown little change. This represents improvement considering pupils' prior attainment and the increasing number of lower-attaining pupils in successive year groups. The relative performance of boys and girls fluctuates from year to year, accurately reflecting the uneven distribution of their abilities within the year groups. Pupils do not achieve as well as in English and science, an underlying factor being their below average numerical skills.

82. Evidence from the inspection, including observation of lessons, scrutiny of work and discussion with pupils, shows standards of work to be below average throughout the school. Overall, this represents satisfactory achievement in all year groups taking into account pupils' below average attainment on entry. Higher-attaining pupils achieve well. They are encouraged to transfer and apply their knowledge and understanding of fundamental mathematical principles to all aspects of the work. Evidence of this was seen in pupils' course work when algebraic formulae were generated to satisfy hypotheses. Average and lower-attaining pupils achieve satisfactorily but could do better. Their computational skills and mental agility are weak and have not improved significantly since the previous inspection. Too often calculators are used for simple operations that could be done mentally. The need for improvement of pupils' numerical skills is recognised by the school and teachers are beginning to target this. Such provision is as yet inconsistent. It needs to feature as an integral and regular part of the curriculum in mathematics. The use of information technology skills is minimal and so opportunities to aid pupils' understanding of basic concepts in number and geometry are being missed. The size of some classes is large and this, combined with a smaller allocation of teaching time than most schools in Years 10 and 11, also hinders progress.

83. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily although not to optimum potential. Provision is unsatisfactory because difficulties with numeracy are not clearly identified in pupils' individual education plans. In addition, the approach to teaching is often too theoretical for them. There are too few opportunities for lower-attaining pupils to consolidate their understanding through practical experience. The school does not have sufficient resources to support this aspect of mathematics.

84. Overall, pupils' attitudes are good. Most listen attentively and sustain concentration and effort for seventy minutes. Lower-attaining pupils display poor retention of knowledge and so find its application at a later date difficult. By the time pupils reach Year 11, the majority of them are keen to achieve as highly as they can in GCSE. In the earlier years some pupils are less well motivated. Higher-attaining pupils are more ambitious but others tend to have lower aspirations, sometimes due to lack of confidence rooted in difficulties experienced in the very early stages of education. Pupils' behaviour is generally good but a small element of challenging behaviour in some classes diminishes rates of progress. Most pupils comply with teachers' expectations relating to the presentation of written work. At best, this shows how answers have been arrived at, and assists teachers to identify errors and lack of understanding. However, the absence of a consistent marking system makes it difficult for pupils to know how well they are progressing in relation to targets set by

the school and nationally. Homework is used satisfactorily to complement classwork, and provides opportunities for independent work.

85. Overall, teaching is satisfactory throughout the school. This leads to satisfactory gains in knowledge and acquisition of skills for most pupils. Teaching has improved since the previous inspection, especially in Years 7 to 9, where a significant minority of lessons was unsatisfactory. The match of work to pupils' specific needs is better, and the pace of work has improved. Teaching was satisfactory or better in all lessons seen. Good lessons were distributed fairly evenly throughout the year groups. It was noticeable that in these lessons the teachers engaged in more interactive teaching by involving the pupils in dialogue and using their contributions to develop the lesson. Pupils gained in confidence because learning was planned in incremental steps. A good example, supported by practical work, was a Year 7 lesson on area and space. By the end of it pupils had a good visual concept of volume and could describe in technical language how to find the volume of compound shapes. Teachers are aware of pupils with special talents in mathematics and respond appropriately, for instance, in Year 8, two pupils are successfully working with GCSE material. These pupils are receiving good support at the same time as enjoying the benefits of working alongside their peer group. Teaching in mathematics could be further improved through a more consistent approach to the development of numerical skills and greater use of practical and investigative work to underpin understanding. Pupils also need regular feedback on their performance, related to known standards, so that they can measure their progress against short-term goals.

86. The mathematics department is being managed satisfactorily. However, there is currently insufficient attention given to the evaluative monitoring of teaching and learning. Urgent attention needs to be given to the inclusion of a numeracy strategy in the curriculum for Years 7 to 9.

Key skills: numeracy across the curriculum

87. The school has implemented a policy to engage all subject departments in the promotion of numeracy. Teachers aim to develop computational, graphical and statistical skills within the context of their work. Overall, these skills are sufficiently well supported as to be adequate to meet pupils' immediate needs, for instance in geography and science. Good examples were also seen in design and technology where pupils successfully made and sold confectionery, costing out ingredients and working to a profit margin, and in foreign languages where pupils used interesting practical materials to complement oral work on number sequences. However, there is insufficient attention given to the sequential development of pupils' numerical skills.

SCIENCE

88. The results in the 2000 national tests in science at the end of Year 9 were below the national average for all schools but broadly average for schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds. There has been a small decline in the results over the past two years. Boys and girls perform equally well. In 2000, the proportion of pupils achieving A*-C in GCSE double science was above average compared to all schools. Virtually all pupils achieved A*-G grades which is similar to the national picture. The results for the small number of pupils studying single award science were below average. Overall results have remained steady for the past few years even though the level of attainment of pupils on entry to the school has declined. In 2000, boys did better than girls but in the previous year both performed similarly. GCSE results in science were similar to English but better than mathematics.

89. Standards of work of Year 9 pupils are broadly average and represent satisfactory achievement. Standards in investigative science are above average at the end of Year 9. All pupils, whether high or low attainers, are competent in practical skills and grasp the main requirements of good investigation. They can predict the outcome of their experiments and understand the need for fair tests, the importance of repeating observations and how to evaluate the reliability of their results. Standards of work in physics, chemistry and biology are broadly average. The higher attainers can remember scientific facts and can understand scientific concepts in some detail. Low attainers find it difficult to remember much of the science knowledge they have

been taught. Pupils are now achieving better than last year's national tests might suggest due to improved teaching which focuses more clearly on the National Curriculum test requirements. There is a focus on improving literacy in the science department and the effects of this were seen by the correct use of scientific vocabulary and language in most classes, though often not the correct spelling of scientific words. Most pupils showed that they could apply mathematics and carry out the calculations needed in their science lessons.

90. In Years 10 and 11, pupils make good progress in their GCSE courses and achieve well. This improvement from Year 9 is due to the careful teaching of the syllabus and improved assessment. Standards of work of Year 11 pupils are broadly average overall. Higher attaining pupils have a good knowledge of scientific formula, can process results of experiments efficiently, and have a sound grasp of scientific concepts and processes. Effective teaching enables lower attaining pupils to remember scientific facts through carefully structured lessons with a focus on the knowledge to be learned. There is less investigative and other practical work so that pupils' skills in this area, while still satisfactory, do not develop as well as earlier. Pupils do not use information and communications technology (ICT) frequently enough to help their learning in science and so their ability to record and analyse information by this means remains undeveloped.

91. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in both key stages due to the careful focused teaching and additional support they receive. Girls and boys are now achieving equally due to a conscious effort on the part of staff to encourage both groups and this is an improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils who have English as an additional language achieve just as well as other pupils due in part to the clarity of teachers' expositions and the personal attention that they receive.

92. Behaviour is good overall in science lessons for all year groups. Pupils are attentive, do not waste time and persevere at the tasks set. They co-operate well with each other in practical work and generally have good relationships with their teachers. They ask and answer questions readily and carry out practical tasks sensibly and safely. The standard of presentation of work in exercise books is good. It only slips from a generally high standard when not marked regularly. In the very few lessons, where behaviour was not of the best, this was due to lack of variety in the lesson content, activities which did not capture the pupils' imagination and involve them, and some lack of mutual respect. The consequence was underachievement.

93. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall for pupils in Years 7 to 9, with over a third of lessons observed being good. One lesson was unsatisfactory because the teacher did not vary the lesson content, and the pupils became bored and restless. In the majority of lessons teachers give clear instructions and explanations and they are good at drawing out answers from pupils through questioning. Lessons are well planned and all materials and equipment are to hand. Most lessons proceed at a satisfactory pace and the time is used well. The better lessons are ones where the pupils are practically engaged. Pupils with special educational needs in Year 8 were very successful in making their own indicator from red cabbage and using it to test acids, alkalis and variety of household substances. This was due to carefully structured teaching of interesting content within good firm relationships. However, some lessons lack clear targets shared with the pupils at the beginning and checked at the end. Pupils' work is marked inconsistently with a variety of systems and variable thoroughness. This results in a lowering of the standard of presentation for some pupils, the persistence of errors, and the lack of a clear understanding by pupils of their progress. The weakest lessons are ones lacking variety with a lack of involvement of pupils in activities and very occasionally a breakdown of relationships.

94. Teaching and learning are good overall for pupils in Years 10 and 11. No lessons were unsatisfactory, three quarters were good or better, with one being very good. Teachers are confident in their knowledge and understanding, generally manage pupils well, set adequate homework and use time well. Testing and the use of trial examination papers help pupils to know how well they are doing. Good lessons show competence and flair. In a Year 11 class, pupils created their own set of biological questions and answers and then competed in teams with prizes for the most successful. This turned what might have been a lacklustre revision session into one where everyone was working, involved and enjoying learning. Pupils with special educational needs are particularly well taught with carefully structured, short, interesting activities with clear targets ensuring good progress.

95. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory, with efficient management of materials, equipment, safety and the departmental budget, with the help of the hardworking technicians. ICT equipment is lacking and development of the use of this remains a priority as it was at the time of the last inspection. There is a lack of monitoring of lessons, exercise books, the setting of homework and marking. Improving the unsatisfactory assessment of pupils' work also needs attention.

ART AND DESIGN

96. GCSE results in 2000 were above average at A*-C and at A*-G grades when compared with all schools. In 1998 and 1999 they were also above average. Results in art and design are consistently better than results in most other subjects in the school.

97. Standards are currently above average in Year 9. Pupils can draw and paint well, and they make good constructions in three dimensions in wire, paper and clay. Their knowledge of the art of other cultures has improved since the previous inspection, and they now have a good grasp of African, Egyptian and Oceanic art. Opportunities to use information and communication technology, however, are limited. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, because of the encouraging manner of the teachers and the good match of materials and methods to their needs.

98. In Year 11, standards are also above average. Pupils draw and paint with increased confidence, and some good landscapes can be seen, expressing atmospheric effects, such as the warm glow of evening light. Pupils also produce interesting ceramic pieces that show a good grasp of surface decoration. High attainers use sketchbooks well, to research and develop ideas, which are rich and varied in the materials and methods used. Low attainers use oil pastel in a bold and vigorous way in their portrait work. Average attainers produce striking self-portraits in charcoal and chalk which show a confidence in using the materials. Achievement in all years is good, because of the good quality of teaching.

99. Pupils in all year groups respond well to the subject, and are positive in lessons. They show a willingness to use and enjoy the wide range of materials on offer, working with application and care. They value their own work and that of others, and present their homework carefully. They are willing to discuss it with each other in class when asked to do so by the teachers; this helps them to form and express opinions about art, an improvement since the last inspection.

100. Teaching in all years is good. In Years 7 to 9, all teaching observed was at least satisfactory, and three quarters of lessons were good or better. A significant strength of the teaching is the use of clear demonstrations that show pupils what they have to do to succeed. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on making masks, the teacher gave a good demonstration of how to roll and cut clay. This created good levels of interest and pupils understood clearly what they were expected to do. Teachers are very encouraging, and this helps to support good rates of learning amongst low attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. In Years 10 and 11, all lessons seen were good or better. Very good coaching for GCSE on an individual basis is a particular strength of the teaching. This was evident in a lesson where pupils were working in a wide range of activities, including modelling in clay and making sculptures in wire and plastic, helping to create a positive atmosphere where very good rates of learning were fostered.

101. Leadership and management in art and design are good. Teaching quality is monitored and developed through observation and discussion. There has been a good level of improvement since the last inspection. To improve provision further, information and communication technology should be more widely used to provide pupils with a further dimension for their work throughout the school.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

102. GCSE results in design and technology subjects in 2000 were below the national average for A*-C and A*-G grades overall. Results in food technology were above the national average, graphics and textiles were below average and resistant materials were well below. Girls did better than boys, as was the case nationally. Over the last three years, results in food technology, graphics and textiles have improved but there has been a decline in resistant materials. Overall, pupils do less well in design and technology subjects than in their other GCSE courses.

103. Standards in Year 9 are currently below average; this represents satisfactory achievement overall from pupils' relatively low starting points in Year 7, but girls are outperforming boys. Although there is

insufficient use of computers, pupils often show good development of ideas and a range of presentational techniques in their design folders, for example, neat, well annotated drawings in a Year 9 pop-up card project. Lower attaining pupils' work is often characterised by poor presentational skills, brief answers to questions, weak development of ideas, incompleteness, and spelling and grammatical errors. Pupils with special educational needs make generally satisfactory progress, especially in practical work.

104. Standards in Year 11 are broadly average, taking an overall view of pupils' work in textiles, food technology, graphics and resistant materials. This represents satisfactory achievement overall, even though work in resistant materials is inferior to that in textiles, graphics and food technology. There is more above average work in the latter three areas than in resistant materials, where classes contain a majority of boys. Higher attaining pupils often incorporate a good range of ideas their work in food and textiles, using colour and cultural influences to good effect. An example of this is evident in work in jewellery. In food technology, higher attainers exhibit good practical skills and evaluate their work effectively. In graphics and food technology, they often use computers well to enhance their GCSE coursework. Lower attaining pupils' work is characterised by lack of research, poorer presentational techniques and insufficient evaluation. Information communication technology is used more effectively in GCSE courses than in Years 7 to 9.

105. Pupils respond well to their teachers. They work well together and enjoy their lessons. These positive attitudes contribute significantly to their rate of learning.

106. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. All lessons observed were at least satisfactory, and just less than half were good. Teachers often use their good subject knowledge and skills effectively to explain processes clearly and demonstrate in a way that fully holds the pupils' attention. They manage their classes well and provide good quality support and guidance to individual pupils as they are working. Weaknesses in some lessons relate to insufficient urgency, the use of strategies inappropriate to pupils' needs or pupils not being kept focused on their tasks.

107. The management of the department is satisfactory and relationships between staff are good. Teaching and learning are monitored but this work needs a sharper focus relating to the rates of progress made by the pupils. Improvements made since the last inspection include better GCSE results, except in resistant materials, the production of new schemes of work, improved levels of resources, the refurbishment of food and textiles areas and the provision of technician support. However, assessment procedures now need to be strengthened in order that pupils may understand the quality of the work that they produce, and know how to improve it. Control technology and pneumatics still need to be incorporated into the planning of work for Years 7 to 9.

GEOGRAPHY

108. GCSE results have improved considerably since the previous inspection. In 2000, geography was one of the most successful subjects, and the GCSE results were well above average in terms of A* to C and A* to G grades. All the pupils who were entered obtained a pass grade, and there was no significant difference between the results of boys and girls.

109. Pupils' current standards in Year 9, in samples of work and in lessons, are average. In relation to standards at the beginning of Year 7 they represent good achievement. The good progress made is the result of good teaching and learning. Pupils quickly develop their geographical knowledge, skills and understanding of places, patterns and processes. In Year 9, higher attaining pupils understand the impact of tourism on National Parks in Britain and Kenya. They can explain their ideas on sustainable development in extended writing. Average and below average pupils can present similar written work in tabular form and describe their ideas. Map reading skills are covered well in Year 7 but there is no provision for consolidating and extending them until Year 10. Fieldwork techniques included in Years 7 and 8 are not developed in Year 9.

110. Year 11 pupils' standards of work are average. Higher attaining pupils can explain the pattern of agriculture in the British Isles and extend their knowledge to a world scale, increasing their understanding of

the location of types of farming to natural regions. Lower attaining pupils write in less detail and sometimes do not complete their work. The underachievement of some boys in Year 10, identified through the good use of assessment, is being tackled with some success. Hence, the quality of teaching and learning ensures that most pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

111. Classroom assistants are effective in ensuring that pupils with statements of educational need make good progress. This occurred, for example, in a Year 11 revision lesson on natural disasters. A pupil whose first language is not English made good progress using technical language relating to climate and vegetation with specialist help.

112. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally good, and have a positive impact on standards. There is some incomplete work in Years 10 and 11. However, pupils generally respond well to good marking, and many redraft their GCSE coursework on Chester and Castleton to gain higher marks. However, the length of lessons sometimes causes pupils to lose concentration, and time is not always used as productively as it might be.

113. Teaching has improved since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently satisfactory or better. During the inspection, it was good or better in half of the lessons seen. Taking into account the samples of pupils' work and rates of progress, teaching overall is satisfactory: it is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Where teaching is good or better it challenges pupils to solve problems and generates a high level of interest and rapid learning. Otherwise satisfactory teaching often lacks pace and has weaknesses in lesson structure. The use of information and communication technology to enhance pupils' learning is unsatisfactory.

114. The leadership of the subject is satisfactory. The new head of department is establishing a number of good procedures for the monitoring of pupils' progress and new features in the curriculum, for example, the recent 'earth summit'. Year 8 pupils had a valuable full day, working with staff and visitors to consider some of the global issues relating to economic development and the effects of climatic change. Teachers are committed to raising standards and have the capacity to achieve this. However, the quality of teaching and learning are not yet being monitored, and development planning is insufficiently detailed.

HISTORY

115. GCSE results have improved considerably since the previous inspection. In 2000, they were well above average and all pupils gained at least a G grade. Pupils' achievements in history were slightly better than in their other subjects. Since 1998, results have been above average and the comparative performance of boys and girls has fluctuated from year to year.

116. Standards of the present Year 9 pupils' work are close to, but below average for their age. This represents satisfactory achievement since Year 7, and is the result of satisfactory teaching. Pupils have a sound capacity to locate events accurately in a historical timeframe. They have a sound knowledge of the key features of British and world history and understand the causes and results of changes brought about by events such as the First World War. All pupils readily use a reasonable range of sources to select information for their investigations but few are able to assess its usefulness and reliability, and the work of lower attainers tends to be limited to description. Pupils' understanding of why there can be different interpretations of the same event is limited because they lack experience in using this historical skill. Higher attainers write well but they do not evaluate their work sufficiently. Average pupils have a reasonable knowledge and understanding of events, and they can write with empathy about the lives of the people they study. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because their needs are recognised by teachers, who adapt their lessons to provide the right level of challenge. The work of classroom assistants is instrumental in guiding this good progress.

117. History is becoming a more popular choice at GCSE. Standards of Year 11 pupils' work are above average. Higher attainers use their detailed knowledge and understanding well in writing at length. They

support their ideas well with appropriate evidence from sources of evidence, which they also evaluate. Average attainers' work is often detailed but they are less successful in analysing their sources of evidence. Lower attainers receive good support from teachers in planning their essays though they do not always use their knowledge effectively. Their spelling and punctuation are also weak. Good teaching and positive attitudes to learning of the vast majority of pupils result in the good progress and achievement in Years 10 and 11.

118. Pupils enjoy history. They respond well to their teachers and generally sustain their interest and concentration well in lessons. This is because most lessons are well planned to include a variety of interesting learning activities. Most pupils readily ask and answer questions and are prepared to read aloud for the class. They naturally help each other with tasks in lessons and appreciate each other's efforts. Behaviour in most lessons is good.

119. Evidence from lesson observations and pupils' written work indicates that the overall quality of the teaching is satisfactory, and that in Years 10 and 11 it is good. Lessons are well planned to teach all the historical skills other than interpretations, and use a good variety of interesting activities, which sustain pupils' interest and concentration for seventy minutes. Most lessons meet the pupils' needs, though in Years 7 to 9, higher attainers are sometimes not sufficiently stretched. Pupils are given regular opportunities to take part in historical investigations and present their findings in a variety of ways, including extended writing. This feature of learning has improved since the previous inspection. In some good lessons, teachers emphasise the importance of listening skills, to good effect. However, insufficient opportunities are provided for pupils to use computers in their learning and there is little contribution to the development of numeracy skills. Marking of work is regular, but in Years 7 to 9, it is far too variable in quality. Pupils are not made aware of the standards that their work represents. Homework is given, but not according to a regular pattern, and is sometimes merely the completion of work begun in class.

120. Subject management is generally satisfactory. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. All of the weaknesses identified at that time have been resolved, and examination results have improved. However, teaching is not monitored, which is a weakness. In Years 7 to 9, pupils should be stretched more to reach the higher levels of the National Curriculum, and the quality and consistency of marking improved. The results of the assessment of pupils work in Years 7 to 9 should be analysed and the information used in curriculum planning in order to further improve standards.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

121. The overall standard of Year 9 pupils' work is below average and they are underachieving. This finding is similar to that reported at the time of the previous inspection in 1996. Pupils learn to use computer applications such as word-processors, spreadsheets and databases in ICT lessons in Years 7, 8 and 9. In these lessons, the pupils' basic skills develop to an average and satisfactory standard; however, their skills are not applied or extended in the other subjects of the curriculum in the way that the school intends. Beyond Year 7, pupils spend much of their time revising work that they have learned previously.

122. The standard of Year 11 pupils' work is again below average. Although pupils do not take courses leading to GCSE in information technology, all take a basic computer literacy course (RSA CLAIT) over Years 10 and 11. Only a minority of the pupils achieved a Stage 1 pass in 2000, although virtually all pupils achieved a partial pass. No lessons for Years 10 and 11 could be seen during the inspection because the pupils were taking the CLAIT tests. However, their folios of written work in ICT show that, although pupils consolidate and practise the basic skills learned in the earlier years, they are underachieving because their knowledge and skills are not applied sufficiently in the other subjects of the curriculum. This was also found at the time of the previous inspection.

123. Overall, the teaching and learning of ICT are unsatisfactory and pupils fail to make the progress that they should. Pupils do not become independent users of ICT because they are not taught to apply their existing knowledge and skills to enhance their learning: they learn skills that they do not use. The teaching of

ICT is unsatisfactory in most subjects. However, the teaching in all of the basic skills lessons in Years 7, 8 and 9 was satisfactory: the ICT teachers' subject knowledge is good and lessons are disciplined and purposeful. However, a weakness of these basic skill lessons is that the planning of the work does not cater adequately for the full range of attainment in the mixed-ability classes. Though there is plenty of challenge for the more advanced pupils, the slower ones often struggle with the work. Pupils are expected to follow complicated series of instructions and, whilst a good proportion of them do succeed, some others are unclear about what they are doing. Some pupils also tend to lose concentration long before the end of the long, 70-minute lessons. However, they behave well, have good attitudes and want to succeed. Extra-curricular computer club sessions at lunchtime and after school are popular. Pupils' folios show that their work is regularly marked though more written comments could help them further to improve their standards.

124. The management of ICT is unsatisfactory. Though some training has been provided for teachers, insufficient overall progress has been made to improve teaching and to raise standards since the time of the previous inspection. Teaching and pupils' learning of information technology are not monitored, either in ICT lessons or in other subjects. The co-ordination of ICT across the other subjects is ineffective. Although the teachers assess the standards achieved at the end of Year 9, as required, the planning of the curriculum does not provide a satisfactory basis for the assessment. Additionally, the curriculum is not planned according to the latest version of the National Curriculum, due to be in place by August, 2000. The timetabling of the basic skills lessons is also unsatisfactory and this adversely affects pupils' progress. Although Year 7 pupils have one lesson a week, Year 8 and Year 9 pupils have only one lesson each fortnight, which means that the continuity of their experience is unsatisfactory. The resources are inadequate: the computer workrooms do not have enough computers for pupils to work individually, and some machines are out of date.

Key skills: Information and communications technology across the curriculum

125. The teaching of information technology in other subjects is unsatisfactory overall and, in many cases, does not adequately cover the National Curriculum programmes of study for the subjects concerned. This is the main reason for the pupils' underachievement. The pupils have the basic skills necessary to support the work which should be done in other subjects but the teaching and standards in Years 7, 8 and 9 are unsatisfactory in English, mathematics, science, art and design, design and technology, geography, history, music and religious education. However, standards are above average in modern languages and the language teachers make good and effective use of the internet and of e-mail to enable pupils to correspond with schoolchildren in other European countries. Progress is being made in using ICT equipment to raise standards of literacy amongst pupils with special educational needs. In Years 10 and 11, standards are below average in all subjects except design and technology, in which they are average. Pupils regularly use word-processing, spreadsheets and desk-top publishing in their GCSE coursework.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

126. In 2000, the proportion of pupils achieving GCSE grades A*-C in French was average for the country as a whole. The proportion of boys and girls who gained A* and A grades was above average. A large increase in numbers entered for GCSE in 2000 accounts for the slight dip in results compared with the previous two years.

127. Standards of work are similar to those found at the previous inspection. In Year 9, standards are currently just below average; this contrasts with teachers' assessments in 2000, which suggest that standards were better the year before. Achievement over the three years is satisfactory. A revised scheme of work and new course materials in Year 7 ensure that pupils get off to a good start, developing listening, speaking, reading and writing skills equally well so that they progress fairly quickly. However, the rate at which they learn slows considerably in Year 9 because there is not the same emphasis in teacher's planning on progression, and there is some imbalance in the opportunities provided to develop each skill. Writing is

relatively strong because pupils have regular practice. High attainers can write accounts of past and future weekend activities while average attainers can write a paragraph about their daily routine. Pupils develop their listening skills, though to a fairly low level. Speaking is weak because pupils do not get enough practice. Some high attainers speak in sentences with good pronunciation but most pupils lack confidence and responses are brief. Pupils do some reading but there are few opportunities for them to develop their reading skills beyond worksheets. They have opportunities for activities relating to information and communications technology (ICT), including Internet research, which enhance their learning and improve their competence in ICT generally.

128. Standards of work in Year 11 are average and closely match GCSE results. Good teaching ensures that pupils achieve well. They learn much new vocabulary and build up their knowledge of structures, including different tenses. Writing is strong and speaking improves considerably because it is practised regularly. High attainers write fluently and often imaginatively on subjects such as their ideal future job and speak confidently about prepared topics. Pupils listen to tapes and read texts, including poems. Boys progress at a similar rate to girls. In response to good teaching, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress to age 14 and good progress to age 16.

129. Pupils have good attitudes overall. They enjoy being involved actively in the lesson, for example in games and group work, but they lose interest when the work offers little challenge. Even well motivated pupils sometimes find the length of lessons too long. Work is usually well presented and GCSE pupils take much pride in the presentation of their coursework. Homework is generally completed on time. Behaviour is good. Shortages of textbooks and reading materials hinder pupils' independent learning.

130. Teaching in French is satisfactory in Years 7 - 9 and consistently good in Years 10 and 11. Lessons are orderly because teachers manage pupils well and relationships are good. Teachers speak French fluently, though frequently miss opportunities to use the foreign language in the classroom. Planning is good in Years 10 and 11. It is less effective in Year 9 because there is insufficient stress on progression and at times the level of work is undemanding and does not cater for the range of ability within a set. Teachers do not always make the best use of the full 70 minutes. Marking is not rigorous enough and assessment is unsatisfactory. National Curriculum levels assigned are not reliable and are not shared with pupils until year 9, so they do not know how well they are doing or what they need to do to progress to the next level.

Spanish

131. In 2000, GCSE results in Spanish in the range A*-C were reasonably close to but below average and similar to 1998, recovering from the fall to below average in 1999. At the previous inspection, results were clearly below average.

132. All pupils begin Spanish as a second language in Year 9. Standards of work are below average overall which, given the limited time, represents satisfactory achievement. Pupils develop all the skills to some extent because they are practised regularly. Most progress is made in writing.

133. Standards of work in Year 11 are average and are a little higher than in recent GCSE results because the class includes more high attaining dual linguists than usual. Writing continues to be strong because pupils quickly learn to use different tenses appropriately and they build up a good understanding of structures, which enables them to write at some length, for example about a past holiday. They speak with increasing confidence and accuracy and are well prepared for the GCSE speaking test. They develop their comprehension skills well because they have good opportunities to read a variety of texts and to hear Spanish spoken on tape and by the teacher. Pupils achieve well because they are well motivated and teaching is good.

134. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are good overall. This is especially so in the GCSE groups where pupils enjoy their lessons; they work hard and maintain a good pace for the full 70 minutes because they are keen to do well. Behaviour is good.

135. Teaching in Spanish is satisfactory in Year 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Planning for progression over time is good. Lessons are well prepared and include a variety of resources and activities that give practice in each skill. However, in Year 9, the work does not cater for the full range of attainment in middle sets and expectations for some pupils are too low. Teachers speak Spanish consistently with GCSE classes, but do so less in Year 9.

136. Management of modern languages is satisfactory and the head of department works hard to ensure the smooth day to day running of the area. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. However, teaching and learning need to be monitored formally in order to raise standards further and to ensure policies are applied consistently.

MUSIC

137. GCSE results in music were broadly average in 2000. Nine out of 13 pupils who took the examination gained grade C or better. Over the last three years, GCSE results have consistently improved, and are now better than in many other subjects.

138. Standards are above average in Year 9. They are often above average in performing and appraising and a little above average in composing. This represents good achievement. In Year 9, pupils can use electronic keyboards and classroom instruments with some competence, for both performance and composition, building effectively on their keyboard and instrumental skills. Good use is made of vocal work, and attainment in singing is above average. However, pupils have few opportunities to use computers. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

139. By Year 11, standards are above average in composing, performing, and appraising. This represents good achievement. Pupils of relatively low attainment often achieve well in aural work. This is due to the emphasis the teachers put on language skills and the acquisition of technical vocabulary. Such emphasis helps pupils to describe and analyse the music they hear. In Year 11, pupils' compositions display competence in work derived from various styles and sources. In Years 10 and 11, pupils successfully use information and communication technology for an assortment of musical tasks, and also to help to ensure good standards of presentation. Pupils are conversant with a range of musical techniques, and individual instrumental skills are used appropriately in both performance and composition. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because they are supported with work to reinforce classroom tasks.

140. Pupils' attitudes in music lessons are generally good. They are usually interested and attentive, and respond well to challenging work. However, just occasionally, they lose focus towards the end of the lesson. This is because, for some pupils in Years 7 and 8, lessons are rather long. Pupils work well individually and with enthusiasm in instrumental groups. They clearly enjoy playing their compositions and respond by listening attentively to the work of others. Independent learning skills are satisfactory.

141. Teaching is good overall; it is always at least satisfactory and often good. Teachers' knowledge of music is good, and they use their musical skills to advantage in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities. Teaching is characterised by enthusiasm, solid preparation, suitable teaching styles, interesting activities and sound organisation. However, homework is occasional and insufficiently used. The instrumental teaching in brass, woodwind and string instruments, provided for nearly 40 pupils, is satisfactory. Pupils are provided with opportunities to explore both their own culture and non-Western cultures in classroom projects and in school concerts, an example being Asian dance. Assessment procedures are good, and they are used successfully to fine tune the work offered to pupils. Teachers are aware of the requirements of GCSE in terms of the components of performing, composing and appraising, but they do not analyse the assessment of pupils' work by component to quantify their strengths and weaknesses.

142. The department is well managed and teaching is monitored for quality. However, there is insufficient provision of instruments and computers, and the level of provision of instrumental lessons is below that normally found in secondary schools of this size. The wide range of extra-curricular activities often involves large numbers of pupils, who enthusiastically commit time and effort to them. Pupils' performing and

composing work is regularly celebrated in the school and in the community, within the calendar of musical events. Such opportunities for performance have a strong impact on the cultural and social development of pupils; they also do much for the ethos of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

143. The 2000 GCSE results were broadly average but pupils did not achieve as well in physical education as they did in most of their other subjects. The results have fluctuated considerably in recent years mainly in response to changes in staffing. In 1999, the results were well below average whereas for many years prior to this they had been above average. Although the numbers of girls taking GCSE has been small, their results have been consistently better than those of the boys.

144. In Years 9 and 11, pupils attain average standards overall, which is similar to the findings of the previous inspection. This represents satisfactory achievement. By Year 9, pupils know the basic principles of sprinting, jumping and throwing and can perform these indoor athletic events competently. Girls attain average standards in rounders. Pupils' ability to analyse and comment on their own and others' performance is weaker because they have limited opportunities to do so. Pupils know how to warm up but are less certain of what they need to do to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

145. By Year 11, pupils taking the GCSE course have a clear understanding of how to maintain overall fitness. The strongest element in the GCSE is pupils' practical performance in the major games of basketball, soccer, netball and hockey. Some pupils reach high standards in their GCSE coursework, both in the quality of their investigations and the standard of their writing. Numbers of boys and girls are now more evenly balanced and the difference in their performance less evident.

146. Higher attaining pupils, including those identified as gifted and talented, benefit from the challenge offered in the very good range of extra-curricular activities. Many pupils attain district or county standard in trampolining, athletics, netball, basketball and soccer. However, there are few activities planned to extend and challenge them in lessons. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to other pupils. Teachers are fully aware of their needs and provide suitable equipment and activities in practical lessons.

147. Pupils' positive attitudes to physical education have been maintained since the previous inspection. They come in smart, safe school kit and levels of participation are high. They enjoy lessons and are willing to work hard. Behaviour is good. Pupils have a healthy approach to competition and over half of them take part in extra-curricular activities. However, the intermittent attendance and unreliable completion of homework of a minority of pupils have a negative effect on their work in GCSE.

148. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Teaching observed was good in around one quarter of lessons, which is not as good as at the time of the previous inspection. This was due to the nature of the activities observed during the inspection, which were based around measurement of standard indoor-athletic events. The major strength of the teaching is the very good management of the pupils. Teachers expect and achieve high standards of discipline. They do this in a firm, fair manner and often with a sense of fun and good humour. In response to clear demonstrations and explanations from teachers who know their subject well, pupils reinforce their understanding, for example of jumping and throwing skills in athletics. There is good attention to safety. In the best lessons, learning takes place at a brisk pace when the teacher moves pupils effectively through a series of demonstrations, explanations and practices. However, teachers miss opportunities for pupils to benefit from further guidance on performance that could be provided by their fellow pupils. In some GCSE lessons the teacher constantly questions pupils and ensures that they make links between the theory and the practical work. In lessons which were no better than satisfactory, inappropriate organisation resulted in low levels of physical activity over 70 minutes, missed opportunities for evaluation, limited challenge for higher-attaining pupils and few opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers' marking of GCSE work is thorough and gives useful guidance to pupils on what to do to improve, but it does not indicate how their work matches GCSE criteria and grades.

149. Leadership and management of the subject is satisfactory overall. The head of department is highly committed and, with the support of the newly appointed second in department, is poised to make further improvements. The focus for development needs to be on monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning, and improving assessment procedures, to set specific targets for pupils and to inform changes to the curriculum and teaching. Since the previous inspection the curriculum provided for boys has improved and is now well-balanced overall. The all-weather area is currently being refurbished, but the outdoor fields, which do not belong to the school, are uneven and the grass is not cut often enough.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

150. GCSE results have improved since 1998 when they were close to, but below average. Results in 2000 were above average and similar to those gained in 1999 when girls out-performed boys, although the gap between them was smaller than that found in most other schools. Pupils' results in religious studies were better than in most of their other subjects.

151. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall standards are close to, but below average. In relation to their levels of attainment when they begin Year 7, this represents satisfactory achievement. Most pupils have a good capacity to recognise the impact that religious belief has on the members of the faith communities, which they study, because teachers deal well with this aspect of their learning. The well designed introductory programme of study helps them to understand the way in which human beings need and use systems of belief to help them make sense of life. Pupils have a sound knowledge and understanding of the main features of the life and teaching of Jesus. However, their knowledge and understanding of the key features of belief and practice in Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and the other major world faiths is more patchy and lacks the detail required by the locally agreed syllabus. Higher attainers and average pupils use personal research to write at length on topics. They can express personal opinions on religious issues but these are less well supported by appropriate evidence in the case of average pupils. The work of lower attainers and those who have special educational needs is sometimes incomplete because teaching has not been sufficiently well adapted to meet their needs.

152. In Year 11, standards of work of the pupils following the GCSE examination course are above average and represent good achievement because of good teaching and because the pupils have positive attitudes to their learning. They rapidly develop a detailed knowledge and understanding of belief and practice in Judaism and Islam, which in Year 11 they use well in essays and course work. Standards of work in compulsory religious education are below average because there is insufficient time to deal with the agreed syllabus in the required depth, which was also the case at the time of the previous inspection. However, pupils know about the ways in which society uses different types of punishment for crimes, and the views of the major faith communities on this issue. All pupils can express personal opinions on the topics which they study but the work does not stretch higher attainers sufficiently and so they do not achieve as well as they should. Pupils with special educational needs make generally satisfactory progress but the work is seldom specially adapted for them and they rely on individual support from their teachers.

153. Most pupils have positive attitudes towards the subject, and behaviour in lessons is generally good. They are curious to find out about people whose life experiences are different from their own, and those who are committed to their own beliefs are interested in and respect the views of others. There is a good take-up for the subject in examination classes in Years 10 and 11 and the number of boys who choose to study religious education is increasing.

154. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. It is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and in compulsory religious education in Years 10 and 11. The teaching in examination classes in Years 10 and 11 is good. Other than in examination classes, the subject has to rely on a significant proportion of non-specialist teachers. Their subject knowledge is adequate and they are well supported by the subject manager so that they enable pupils to make satisfactory progress. Teachers use a sound range of learning activities and make good use of audio-visual resources and religious objects to support pupils' learning. Lesson planning is generally satisfactory but, in some lessons, the pace of learning drops towards the end because pupils are

unable to sustain their levels of concentration. Pupils' work is regularly marked but the marking tends to focus on the efforts made by the pupils, rather than showing them what they need to do to improve.

155. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory, largely because of the rise in examination results. Subject management and leadership is satisfactory but there is still insufficient monitoring of lessons. More time needs to be provided to allow the agreed syllabus to be studied in the required depth. Assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 are unsatisfactory and are insufficiently closely linked to the expectations of the syllabus.