

INSPECTION REPORT

St James' Catholic High School

Cheshire

LEA area: Stockport

Unique reference number: 106142

Headteacher: Mr C.G. Lowry

Reporting inspector: Mr M Chapman
3264

Dates of inspection: 17 – 21 September 2001

Inspection number: 189452

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:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	St James' Way Cheadle Hulme Cheadle Cheshire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Denis Donohue
Date of previous inspection:	September 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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3264	M Chapman	<i>Registered inspector</i>	Geography.	What sort of School is it? The school's results and students' achievements; How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
98995	R Williams	<i>Lay inspector</i>		Pupils attitudes, values and personal development; How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work with partnership with parents?
8390	R Andeersen	<i>Team inspector</i>	English.	
12885	J Hunt	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics.	
8052	K McKenzie	<i>Team inspector</i>	Information and communication technology.	
10941	R Robinson	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology.	
31129	J Pickering	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art.	
20243	D Benstock	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science.	
27082	G Henshall	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages.	
23308	J Morrell	<i>Team inspector</i>	Music.	
30563	J Pentlow	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical Education; Equal Opportunities.	
19152	R Merryfield	<i>Team inspector</i>	History.	
2917	J McMullan	<i>Team inspector</i>		How well are the students taught? How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils or students?
8360	F Peacock	<i>Team inspector</i>	Special educational needs.	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is a mixed comprehensive of 754 pupils, situated on a pleasant, modern site which is wheel-chair friendly. St James' is a voluntary aided Catholic school, and this commitment is made clear in the aims and practice of the school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals just reaches the national average.

There are few pupils of different ethnicity and just (4) pupils for whom English is an additional language. Although the percentage of pupils having some level of special educational needs is below the national average, the percentage of pupils with statements of special educational need is broadly average.

The headteacher and his leadership group are all new appointments, made in the last year. The school was able to fill all teaching vacancies with appropriately qualified staff this year. Pupils join the school with attainment levels that are above average in most subjects.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St James is a good school, in which pupils achieve well. Strong leadership, drawing strength from the school's Catholic ethos ensures that conditions are right for effective learning. Examination results are above average as a result of good quality teaching and well-motivated pupils. The school gives value for money, but teaching costs are too high. The school emphasises the values of family, community and a sense of oneness.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Standards are high, and pupils of all abilities make good progress and achieve well. Particularly good progress is made by pupils in art, mathematics, geography and physical education.
- Teaching is of good quality, and teachers and pupils share a common sense of purpose in their quest for learning.
- Pupils have very good attitudes towards school, and their behaviour is good.
- A high level of concern and care is shown for the growth of individual pupils, both as learners and as competent members of society.
- Art makes an outstanding contribution to the life of the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- A consistent approach to the marking and grading of work needs to be established.
- Spending on teaching staffing is too high, and consequently spending on other resources, especially books, is too low. The length of the school day and the proportion of time teachers spend in classes are below average.
- The gap between boys' and girls' performance in examination results.
- Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school in a consistent and planned manner are just being put in place, and need further development.
- The education of pupils for a diverse society is not yet a consistently planned priority for all subject areas.
- The provision for music, standards of external performance and the quality of teaching in

music.

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 1996, following which there was deterioration in the management of the budget and examination results. A new head teacher was appointed last academic year, following a period of interim management, and a new leadership group was established. The school's results in 2,000 indicate recovery, and although national comparators for 2001 are not yet available, the results for this year show substantial improvements in the proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to C.

A substantial number of new policies and approaches have been introduced by the newly appointed leadership team. Many of these policies are in their infancy, but there are clear signs of improvement. The key issues of the last inspection report have been addressed. Further recommendations contained in the report's text in respect of a more rigorous approach to monitoring and evaluation, and a clear focus on the improvement of teaching and learning, are now being put in place. The quality of teaching has improved significantly, and three quarters of teaching is now good or better. There have been many improvements to the quality and range of the curriculum, most notably in Information and communication technology (ICT), which is now taught well both within ICT lessons and across many areas of the curriculum. The curriculum is now more flexible and provides a wider range of options to suit pupils of differing abilities.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2001
GCSE examinations	A	B	B	A

Key	
<i>well above average</i>	A
<i>above average</i>	B
<i>average</i>	C
<i>below average</i>	
<i>D</i>	
<i>well below average</i>	E

GCSE results in the school reflect high achievement in many subjects as do national tests at the end of Year 9. Despite the absence of national comparators for the 2001 results, the scale of the improvement is clearly significant in many subjects. Particularly high achievement is made by pupils in mathematics, geography, art and physical education. The results are very good in comparison with schools at the same level of disadvantage. The school's own analyses show that pupils do better than their predicted grade. The school has improved in line with the national trend over the last three years. However boys do not achieve as well as girls in examination results. Taking into account the school's high performance, the targets it has set itself should be readily achieved.

Pupils are expected to make rapid progress from their start in school, and most do.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' positive attitudes to their learning are a real strength of the school. Pupils are diligent and keen to learn.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in and out of classrooms is good. There are relatively few examples of misbehaviour, and these almost always take place outside classrooms.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between pupils, and between pupils and staff are happy and productive. Personal development is supported well through close individual knowledge of pupils.
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory. Most pupils attend well, but the school's overall figures are brought down by a small number of poor attenders. Further improvement is needed in this area.

Clear expectations of good behaviour and hard work are prevalent throughout the school. They are supported by a real concern that each individual pupil should realise their full potential.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is of good quality throughout the school. The only unsatisfactory teaching seen was in music. Good quality teaching was observed in all other subjects, with some outstanding lessons in Art. In almost all subjects there was some very good teaching. Both literacy and numeracy are taught well, and all pupils receive appropriate support and challenge. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject, and are committed to passing this on to pupils. Lessons are particularly well planned to include a good range of different activities, which capture the interest of pupils of differing abilities and promote good learning. Independent learning is impaired by inadequate stocks of books.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. There have been significant improvements, particularly in ICT. The opportunity to study a second foreign language and the GNVQ provision are valuable improvements, but further consideration needs to be given to the provision for the gifted and talented.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	This is good. Subject teachers, pastoral and teaching assistants work together to establish good practice and continuity throughout the school.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	There is good support for pupils' personal development. A well-planned PHSE programme includes good guidance for careers, sex and drug awareness education. Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is promoted well through the life of the school and across many areas of the curriculum. However, there is currently no musical performance for parents, and few subject areas play their part in the education of pupils for a diverse society.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides good quality care for its pupils. Teachers know pupils very well and respond to their individual needs. Personal and academic progress is carefully monitored, and procedures for ensuring pupils' health and welfare are now good, having improved since the last inspection.

There is a strong commitment to working in partnership with parents. The curriculum is broad and balanced and is delivered in a way that captures the interest of pupils and meets their individual needs.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good leadership is provided by the head teacher, supported by the assistant and deputy head, and other senior colleagues. The Catholic ethos of the school is used to inspire staff and engender a real sense of commitment to the aims of the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors exercise their responsibilities very well. They have a good knowledge of the school, which informs their actions. Their commitment to the school provides a complementary dimension to the leadership of the head teacher.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The new leadership team has been appointed with a view to establishing more rigorous procedures for evaluating school performance. Useful departmental audits have already taken place, but this is an area for improvement.
The strategic use of resources	Teaching costs are high, but the proportion of time that teachers spend in front of classes is very much below average. This has an adverse effect on the resources available to support pupils' learning.

The good results of the school indicate that the school provides satisfactory value for money, but at present resources are not always best used. The school's level of staffing is high, the accommodation is just satisfactory, but resources for learning, such as the library provision, are inadequate. The head teacher nurtures a strong sense of community in which all members work together towards common aims. There is a strong belief that all should achieve well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The positive ethos of the school. • Pupils' good behaviour. • Teaching in mathematics and geography. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications with parents. • Quality of extra curricular activities.

Inspectors agreed that a strong positive ethos of learning makes a significant contribution to the quality of learning and the standards achieved. The homework planner is used well as a vehicle for communication between parents and teachers, but the marking and grading of work has often been confusing to parents and pupils. Inspectors found that pupils have access to a wide range of extra-curricular activities, but the quality of musical performances is poor, and currently there are no performances for parents.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. There is high achievement in a number of subject areas; a consequence of well-focused teaching strategies and the strong, positive attitudes fostered in the school.
2. Taken across the school, the achievement of individual pupils is above average. In art it is particularly noteworthy, and in subjects such as mathematics, geography and physical education it is well above average. In art, gifted and talented pupils do particularly well with more than twice the national average gaining the highest grades.
3. This above average level of achievement is reflected in the examination results of the school, particularly at GCSE Level, in that they demonstrate the improvement of pupils through their school careers. Starting at levels which are only just above average, they leave school with results that are above and often well above national averages.
4. GCSE results have improved in line with the national trend up to 2000. They hit a low in 1997 and have now recovered. The raw figures for 2001 show a further, considerable improvement. The school's results are very good when compared with similar schools. The overall performance in 2000 was well above average at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE results. Given the starting point of pupils who enter at levels, which are just above average, this constitutes good progress over time.
5. At this stage of the school year, national comparisons for the 2001 results are not available. The comparisons contained in the report and summary are therefore made by reference to the 2000 results, and not the most recent results.
6. The 2001 results showed an across the board improvement in the proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to C and the overall point score. In 2001, 64 per cent of pupils achieved grades A* to C. In the previous year the figure was 54 per cent, which was above the national average. The point score at GCSE, which is the best indicator of overall performance by all pupils, showed a similar improvement. From 43 which is above average, to 45. There is a big difference between the results of boys and girls in both years, although it is broadly in line with national differences. The school has identified this as an issue and a number of departments have taken specific measures to challenge boys' under performance. The issue is not, however, addressed specifically in the school development plan, and this is an important omission. Science is the only subject where this difference is not very marked. Boys' performance is relatively consistent across the subjects. Girls' performance varies more from subject to subject.
7. GCSE results in 2000 were particularly good in art, Geography, mathematics and English. Results in design and technology and religious education were low in relation to the rest of the school. Religious education was inspected separately by a diocesan team. In the case of design technology, inspection evidence indicated that standards are now above average, and the 2001 results show an increase in the proportion gaining grades A* to C.

8. Achievement was particularly high in art. Pupils' work around the school sets an agenda for all subjects of high expectations and high achievement. Achievement in music, however is unsatisfactory. Improvements are required in the quality of teaching and in the quality of musical productions. Very good achievement is also evident in physical education, but at present the school does not provide a GCSE programme in this subject. Standards observed in business studies were above average.

9. In the core subjects on English, and science the standards reached by the end of Year 11 are above average and in mathematics they are well above average. In English pupils achieve well because of careful planning by teachers and particularly effective development of oral skills. This is reflected in their above average results at GCSE and at the end of Year 9. In mathematics, detailed planning which incorporates a varied range of learning opportunities assists pupils in achieving results that are well above average in GCSE and Year 9. In science, good subject knowledge ensures well-planned lessons, which result in above average work at both levels.

10. Many pupils with special educational needs gain at least one GCSE grade. Certificates of achievement and accreditation in the popular Learning for Living and Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) courses all reflect the good teaching that is going on. There is challenging work for gifted and talented pupils taking place in some departments, but a whole school policy is not yet operational. The school is particularly proud of a number of pupils with physical and learning difficulties who have had outstanding success in sporting events at both regional and national levels.

11. The pupils start in Year 7 with attainment levels that are just above average, and by the end of Year 9 they are achieving results that are well above average. Progress from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 would appear to be less rapid. However, the school's analysis of GCSE results against baseline tests (CATS scores) indicates that pupils' achievement at GCSE is above average in relation to their prior attainment. The reason for the difference is that pupils make particularly good progress in relation to their prior attainment by the age of Year 9, and consolidate this high achievement in the last two years of schooling. The results at GCSE are therefore better than might be expected given the prior attainment at Year 7. Their performance at GCSE is in line with what might be expected from pupils who achieve such high levels by Year 9.

12. Systematic analysis of pupil achievement is being put in place. Departments are now expected to provide an annual report on their performance, and a system of initial testing (CATS scores) is used to identify individual targets for pupils. Within geography, very effective use is being made of this pupil targeting. All pupils knew their targets and their current level. Not all subjects carry out this good practice as yet.

13. For 2001, the school will have the benefit of externally purchased analyses of assessment. Some departments are aware of their relative performance, but not all. No department can identify the relative performance of individual teachers. Better use of data will be essential if the school is to develop its ability to evaluate its performance.

14. The school is achieving above average results, pupils are achieving well, and there is much good work being done. However, standards in music need improving, and the school needs to narrow the gap between boys and girls, and accelerate the progress of pupils even further in the last two years.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

15. The previous inspection found that pupils' attitudes to learning were good. Attitudes are now even better, and are very good. These very positive attitudes are an extremely important factor in pupils' learning and achievement, and are due in great measure to the caring, Christian community, which the school provides for them.

16. Pupils display a genuine enthusiasm in lessons, particularly when teaching is of a high standard. They generally contribute to the lesson's worth by participating fully and concentrating on their tasks. For example, in a Year 8 lesson in art, pupils' excellent behaviour and relationships improved their creativity when they were engaged in observational drawing. Pupils take part in the many clubs and activities the school provides. Pupils show respect for school property, including the buildings and grounds. There is no graffiti and hardly any litter, and there is no damage or vandalism. Because Year 11 students were out of school during the inspection, pupils from Year 10 were asked to take on the Year 11 prefect duties, and they responded eagerly to this voluntary task. Bus prefects are selected and they fulfil this role responsibly. Pupils are currently engaged on a project of grounds improvement, and have created attractive flowerbeds by the school entrance, as part of their key skills project work.

17. Overall, behaviour at the school is good, as it was at the time of the last inspection. The incidence of exclusions is high; but the school uses it as a last resort, and has had to deal with a number of very serious breaches of discipline in the last two years. Exceptionally, these led to permanent and fixed period exclusions for a substantial number of pupils, due to the serious nature of the incidents concerned. Good care is taken to spend time re-integrating previously excluded pupils. The school is investing significant effort and resources to develop and refine its behaviour management systems, and is actively promoting pupil inclusion in a comprehensive and positive way. Specialist support is also available for individual pupils, in school, from the behaviour support team, who deploy a variety of strategies and methods aimed at educational inclusion for pupils with behaviour problems. The school follows the proper procedures in exclusion cases, and parents and governors are fully involved.

18. Bullying is dealt with fairly and firmly at the school. The issues are addressed as soon as pupils arrive in Year 7, at the pastoral care day at Savio House. All Year 7 pupils attend, and bullying and other issues form the subject of case studies and role-play. Bullying is also addressed across the pupil population through the broadly based curriculum for personal social and health education. The school's positive system for behaviour management, which includes a team of senior staff who are always on call, deals sensitively and flexibly with bullies and their victims. Instances of reported bullying are rare.

19. Pupils' personal development is very well handled by the school. The pupils' form tutors and heads of year usually stay with them during their time there. This gives pupils the essential stability they need, especially in their first few years at school. It also leads to very good relationships with their tutors, who acquire a very good knowledge of their pupils, which enables the school to cater for their needs and talents well as they develop. This care and knowledge of its pupils is a major strength of the school. Pupils do respect the feelings, values and beliefs of others, and they understand the impact of their actions. All these issues form part of the good programme of personal, social and health education at the school.

20. Attendance is satisfactory. Most pupils attend regularly and are punctual. However, a small number of pupils have a poor attendance and punctuality record, and this detracts from the good record of most pupils. At the time of the inspection, there were no published attendance targets.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. The quality of teaching is good overall, being good or better in three quarters of lessons observed. It is more consistently good in Year 10, where almost all lessons were good or better. More than a quarter of lessons observed were very good or outstanding. Only three unsatisfactory lessons were seen, and these were all in Music. This is a big improvement since the last inspection. Teaching is of particularly high standard in Art, where all teaching is very good or outstanding, and this in turn results in very good learning and achievement by pupils. Some very good teaching was also seen in almost all other subjects.

22. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject, which enables them to provide accurate and interesting explanations. They show commitment and enthusiasm in their teaching, which helps to promote good attitudes by pupils. A major strength of the teaching in art is the tremendous love of the subject shown by the teachers, together with a great commitment to passing this on to the pupils.

23. Teachers have very good relationships with pupils, supportive, but with high expectations of behaviour and achievement. They care about the progress of all pupils and ensure that the needs of different pupils are met through the teaching. For example, very good teaching in Year 10 physical education (PE) is characterised by very good relationships, which inspire and challenge pupils to achieve highly. Very good encouragement and use of praise in a German lesson in Year 9 led to pupils being highly motivated and making very good progress in developing their vocabulary on illness. Similarly, very encouraging responses to pupils' answers in a Year 8 English lesson on writing retained pupils' interest and the momentum of learning. Teachers manage pupils very well, using effective strategies to maintain the attention and focus of the class. For example, in a Year 8 science lesson, placing boys and girls alternately in groups, and very good intervention by the teacher, promoted very good behaviour and concentration, and resulted in very good learning about atoms and bonding.

24. Teachers plan their lessons carefully to provide a variety of activities, which capture the interest of pupils. They also plan lessons that provide suitable challenge to pupils of all abilities. Outstanding planning of great precision is found in Art, and makes a major contribution to the high standards in that department. Pupils of all abilities make rapid progress in developing their awareness and skills in art. In PE, lessons are adapted very well to meet the particular needs of different groups of pupils. Effective planning is found in mathematics, where teachers plan a good sequence of activities that builds effectively on prior attainment. For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson, pupils made very good progress in a lesson on sequences and pattern that used a mixture of presentation, group work and questioning. Very good planning in modern languages results in lessons which have good pace, cover a range of learning activities, and make good use of games to keep pupils interested and motivated.

25. Pupils of all abilities make good progress in their learning because of teaching which:

- * plans for the needs of different pupils;
- * uses support and intervention to ensure all pupils are learning;
- * uses ability groupings and different approaches to different groups within a lesson.

Also, the newly introduced mentor system is designed to provide each pupil with individual support, should they require it. Although girls achieve more highly than boys in many subjects, no obvious cause for this could be seen in the teaching and learning taking place in the classroom, with boys and girls appearing equally involved in lessons. There is currently no whole school strategy for meeting the needs of talented and gifted pupils, but some departments, such as science, are planning special provision to ensure that these pupils receive sufficient challenge in the lessons. For example, in a science lesson in Year 9, an identified group of able and gifted pupils, briefed by the teacher, worked quickly and accurately as a team, through a series of investigations, planning their approach, drawing their own conclusions, and making rapid progress. The rest of the class made slower, but appropriate, progress through one or two investigations, with the least able provided with effective support.

26. Pupils with special educational needs are well taught and make good progress over time. They improve when work is adapted to their needs. Individual education plans (IEP's) are personal to the pupil concerned and discussed with parents. They give subject teachers a workable profile to use when planning their lessons. Effective strategies are used in all subject areas to help pupils achieve success, but these are not always added to the IEPs. Learning support teachers and assistants make a valuable contribution to the progress of pupils, including those pupils with specific learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Learning assistants play an active role in the classroom, are involved in the planning and teaching of the lesson, and provide clear yet caring attention as and when needed.

27. Pupils with special educational needs relate well to their teachers and support staff, and feel comfortable in the school. The level of additional support they receive contributes significantly to the positive attitudes they display.

28. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and the team of learning support teachers and teaching assistants work closely together. Their work is characterised by teamwork, sharing of good practice and effective monitoring and evaluation. The governors and teaching staff support this philosophy and it has brought about co-operation and understanding in supporting pupils with learning difficulties. The policy and development plans are set out with achievable targets to move the learning support programme forward. Identification and assessment are in place with the stages of the Code of Practice clearly set out. There is guidance to help subject teachers and learning support staff and a series of strategies to encourage pupils to learn.

29. Generally the teaching of key skills is good. Literacy is being taught well across all subjects except music, and there are many examples of good practice, in oral work, in the use of displays of key words and the use of writing frames, which help pupils to make progress in their literacy skills as well as in the subject. Numeracy is well taught as part of the mathematics curriculum, and there is some good promotion of numeracy in geography and history where, for example, the analysis of statistical data forms a regular part of the teaching and learning. Across most areas of the curriculum, pupils are given planned opportunities to develop their collaborative and investigative learning skills. A business studies lesson for Year 10 provided very good opportunities for pupils to work in teams, to

share ideas, negotiate strategy, and take on different roles within the team. This resulted in pupils developing learning skills as well as gaining understanding about supply and demand. There are fewer opportunities for pupils to develop their skills of independent learning. While there are now computers in the library, the stock of books is very small, and is totally inadequate for a school of this size.

30. Some good use of ICT to support pupils' learning was seen in English, history, geography, and business studies. For example in English, word-processing, with imported illustrations is used to produce well presented written work. ICT skills are integrated into the history curriculum, where good use is made of spreadsheets for analysing data. Interactive white boards are used in ICT, history and geography to reinforce learning. There is widespread use of the internet for research. Some use is made of data logging in science, but further use could be made of ICT to enhance learning in this subject.

31. Teachers make effective use of ongoing assessment and there are good examples in geography, history, maths, English and art of pupils being set targets to encourage them to overcome difficulties and reach higher standards. In art, particularly good use is made of both self- and peer group assessment to aid understanding, and the pupils and their teacher work as a team to promote high standards.

32. All subjects are expected to introduce the new school policy on marking this term, and pupils are generally well informed of how they are doing in the different subjects. Pupils know the National Curriculum or GCSE Level they are working at in English, mathematics, ICT, history and geography. However, they are not given this information in science, design and technology, music, or modern foreign languages. This is unsatisfactory. In almost all cases, books are carefully marked, and useful comments are made to help pupils improve. Homework is set regularly and is particularly interesting in history and geography, art. Good use is made of the pupil planners to keep track of homework and keep parents informed.

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

- * The curriculum has appropriate breadth and balance, and is delivered in a challenging and supportive way that promotes positive attitudes and good achievement by all pupils.
- * It is enhanced by a range of extra curricular clubs and good links with the community.
- * The curriculum meets statutory requirements and there is a strong focus on the Catholic nature of the school.
- * Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is promoted well across most subject areas, but more could be done to promote pupils' cultural education.

33. The curriculum has an appropriate balance of subjects across all year groups, and has some flexibility to meet the needs of pupils of differing ability. A second language is now offered to higher attaining pupils from Year 8 onwards, and a small number of pupils in Years 10 and 11 have extra support for literacy and life skills instead of taking a GCSE in a modern language. A GNVQ in Leisure and Tourism has been in place since 1999, and in 2001 GNVQ Part 1 ICT was introduced which is a popular option for those pupils who benefit from taking one less GCSE. Setting has been extended and is now used extensively across the core subjects, and across some foundation subjects, where this can

be accommodated. Most subjects plan well to meet the different needs of pupils within and across different classes, with some subjects planning specific provision for the small group of able and gifted pupils, as well as those with special educational needs. However, there is no effective whole school identification or planning to support able and gifted pupils.

34. Pupils with special educational needs have access to an appropriate curriculum, which has been designed to accommodate their specific needs. There are effective withdrawal sessions to help small groups of pupils with special needs develop basic skills, and to help individual pupils develop their behaviour management skills. The Certificate of Achievement is used to accredit the performance of lower attainers in food technology, English and mathematics. Wheelchair users get good support to help them have access to all areas of the curriculum. For example, they have access to gymnastics, swimming, and games where they play Boccia in a team with other pupils. The school held the first area championships for this sport and has represented the northwest at national competitions.

35. The school makes good provision for supporting pupils with special educational needs. There is a whole school approach for meeting the needs of pupils experiencing difficulties and staff are aware of the learning support systems that are in place. Link meetings with departmental representatives are used to raise awareness of issues and there is good in-class support from a team of learning support teachers and assistants. Early identification is an important part of the school's strategy and close liaison exists with the main feeder primary schools to gather information prior to pupils transferring to their new school. Efficient testing in basic skills takes place in Year 7 and extra help is targeted where needed. Pupils make progress through one-to-one reading, reading with other pupils and computer assisted learning. The good liaison between subject areas and the special needs team has had a positive impact on pupils' learning and this is a great improvement on the last inspection.

36. The schools attitude and approach to equal opportunities is good. It has a new draft policy for the pupils based on the Catholic ethos and aims of the school. Although girls attain higher results than boys in mathematics the proportion varies from year to year and overall it is not significant. In science the policy of sitting girls next to boys is designed to help overcome the difference in attainment. A particularly good example of pupils being fully included in lessons was seen in the Year 10 learning for living and key skills lessons where pupils with special educational needs were accepted by all and encouraged to participate in the mixed ability groups. The physical education department provides the same areas of the curriculum to all pupils, boys study dance and girls study football.

37. The curriculum is delivered in a way that captures the interest of pupils. Good use is made of a range of different teaching and learning styles, and a range of resources and exemplification adds breadth to the topic being studied. Most subjects make good use of visits and clubs to further enrich to curriculum. For example, there is a good range of different sporting clubs taking place on most days. There is particularly good provision in mathematics, where pupils have access to an interesting range of extra-curricular activities, including participation in the Greater Manchester Mathematics Challenge, the Fantasy Football league and Maths on the Metro competition. A numeracy Summer School was run for the first time in 2001. There are after-school homework and revision clubs in mathematics, English and science, and trips abroad linked to Modern Languages activities. Good links have been established with feeder primary schools and with the local Catholic sixth form college, and these help to ensure a smooth transition between phases.

38. The curriculum now meets statutory requirements. ICT provision has been a weakness, but new resources and discreet timetabled provision have meant that this subject now meets statutory requirements. Training in use of the new resources have resulted in many subjects making good use of ICT to support learning in their subject, and to contribute towards pupils' skills and understanding in this area. For example humanities teachers make very good use of interactive white boards to aid learning, and pupils use the internet to develop their understanding of weather patterns. Pupils learn how to use data logging in science, and develop their skills of word-processing in English.

39. There is good support for pupils' skills of literacy within discreet lessons in the English department, and literacy is promoted across most other curriculum areas. Pupils have a literacy passport, but few subjects other than English plan systematically for literacy development. Pupils' numeracy skills are developed within mathematics, and other areas of the curriculum, such as geography, PE and art provide good support in developing these skills. However, some areas of curriculum, such as science and design technology could plan to provide far more support to developing pupils' skills of numeracy, literacy and ICT.

40. Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. There is a well-planned personal health and social education (PHSE) course, which covers a range of appropriate topics, including sex education and drugs education. The careers programme is very well planned and is included in the PHSE programme from Year 9 onwards. All pupils take part in work experience in Year 11, with a good match of job to career interest. Good links with the Careers Service and the schools' partners in Business in Education ensure that pupils have access to individual support and guidance.

41. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development has planned provision through Religious Education lessons, assemblies and form time.

42. Pupils' spiritual development is promoted well through the Catholic ethos of the school, which pervades all aspects of its work. Many opportunities are provided in assemblies and form time for pupils to consider values and beliefs, and to reflect on their own and others' experiences. For example, an assembly provided an opportunity for pupils to reflect on the recent tragedy in New York. Some good provision is also found in some subject areas. For example in art, where there is consideration of the spiritual aspects of Aboriginal art, and in English, the study of poetry provides opportunities for pupils to develop their imagination and express their feelings and emotions.

43. There is good support for pupils' moral development through the everyday life of the school, the very good role models provided by teachers, and the effective approach to managing behaviour. Consideration of moral issues features well in many subjects of the curriculum. In science, for example, pupils explore issues related to sexual reproduction, drugs and pollution. In English, Moral dilemmas and responsibilities are considered in pupils' study of literature such as 'Macbeth' and 'An Inspector Calls'.

44. There is good provision for pupils' social development, and the supportive and respectful relationships between teachers and pupils are a key feature in this aspect of pupils' personal development. Across most areas of the curriculum, pupils are encouraged to develop collaborative and leadership skills. There are good examples are in drama, where younger pupils are currently being encouraged to develop their skills of team building, group responsibility and decision-making. Behaviour support for pupils with special educational needs helps them to develop their social skills. Whole school features

such as the prefect system, also contribute to pupils taking on responsibility and developing leadership skills.

45. Pupils' cultural development is satisfactory overall, being very good in a few areas of the curriculum, but only satisfactory or weak in the others. It is very good in art, where pupils in Year 9 and 10 makes annual visits to Venice, Sienna and Rome, as well as to the Tate, National, and National Portrait Galleries in London. Pupils' work is also exhibited in Stockport Art Gallery. The department makes good use of the Artists in Residence scheme, and pupils consider and interpret works of art displaying a wide range of different cultures and beliefs. It is very good in geography, for example where particular efforts are made to challenge stereotypical images of different societies and cultures. Some provision for pupils' cultural development is made in English and modern languages, but while there is exploration of values and beliefs of past societies in history, the syllabus in Years 7 to 9 has too heavily focuses on English and European history. Opportunities to promote pupils' cultural development are missed in mathematics, science, design technology, and PE.

46. Overall, the curriculum provided by the school gives good support to the intellectual and personal development of all its pupils. However, there is a weakness in the provision for pupils' cultural development, particularly their understanding and appreciation of other cultures and the contribution that other cultures have made, for example to science and mathematics.

47. There are also some minor deficiencies of the curriculum, which need be addressed. These are:

- * The length of the taught week falls short of the average, and DfES recommended minimum of 25 hours.
- * The 45 and 50 minute periods are rather short for teaching practical subjects such as science, design technology and physical education, and the double periods are rather long. The variable length of the periods also means that some subjects end up with more curriculum time than others.
- * All subjects need to take planned responsibility for delivering cross- curricular skills, such as literacy, numeracy and ICT, and for promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and particularly their cultural development.
- * The school currently puts on no musical performances

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

48. Procedures for child protection and for ensuring pupils' welfare, at the school, are good, generally. They have improved since the last inspection, and staff are now well trained in first aid and child protection matters. In common with the previous inspection, it was found that the Christian aims of the school provide a strong focus for caring.

49. Although there is evidence of some very good practice in formal health and safety risk assessment, at the school, such as for school trips and science laboratory procedures, this is not always applied consistently across all departments and subjects.

50. Pupils' academic performance and personal development are monitored well, particularly in the classroom, and this has been maintained since the last inspection. A new marking policy has just been introduced, and although many pupils are aware of what they have attained academically; there are still some who are unsure. Monitoring of the work experience programme for Year 11 students is very thorough, and considerable effort and care goes into these placements. Form tutors, the head of year, and another senior

member of staff are all involved in supervising work experience. Personal development is well catered for, and the school's very good pastoral care system ensures that teachers have a very good knowledge of all their pupils, and are able to relate with them well and attend to their needs.

51. There is good educational and personal support for pupils. It was found to be good at the previous inspection, and this provision has been strengthened through the use of counsellors. Pupils are able to discuss problems of a personal nature with the 'Making it Back' drugs counsellor and the specialist member of the behaviour support team. This facility supplements the existing form tutor and head of year pastoral care system. The school chaplain fulfils a valuable role in supporting pupils' religious and personal development.

52. Procedures for monitoring attendance are satisfactory, generally, and are better than at the last inspection. There is a very good partnership with the educational welfare service, which has a base at the school. There is a part time clerical officer who makes first day contact with the parents of the worst attending pupils; but the time spent on this aspect of monitoring is limited, as she has other duties. Heads of year and form tutors monitor attendance carefully, and the head teacher is also closely involved. Pupils with 100 per cent attendance for the year are awarded a certificate. However, there are no individual pupil, form, or whole school targets published currently.

53. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are good, and have been maintained since the last inspection. The school has high expectations for behaviour, and in general, pupils respond very positively to this. There are satisfactory procedures for monitoring bullying, which occurs rarely at the school. Pupils are all aware of the school's intolerance of such poor behaviour, which has been made more evident by the recent exclusion of some pupils for serious misbehaviour, including violence. All the staff carefully monitor the school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies, and referrals are made in appropriate cases to the behaviour support team. They apply a variety of methods to correct and improve behaviour in order to ensure that such pupils are dealt with inclusively whenever possible.

54. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are unsatisfactory overall and there is inconsistency in approach and effectiveness. For example, in the modern languages department, Year 10 marking has lacked grading, no National Curriculum Levels are quoted for Year 9, and the old grading system is used in Years 7 to 9. Neither is there any consistent provision to ensure pupils are aware of their progress and attainment. Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic progress are, generally satisfactory, and there are some good examples of pupils being set targets for improvement.

55. Procedures for supporting pupils' personal development are good. This was also found at the last inspection, and the school's Christian aims are put to good effect at this crucial time for its pupils. They are encouraged to take responsibility and to learn independently in the safe and caring environment provided by the school.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

56. The school has maintained its good reputation with parents found during the last inspection. Parents and carers have a positive view of the school, and this was expressed by the excellent response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, and at the parents' meeting.

57. There are satisfactory links with parents, and the effective parent teacher association makes a significant contribution to the life of the school by running social events, helping out at open evenings and fund raising.

58. Before the inspection a number of parents indicated they would like more information from the school about their children's progress, and that they did not feel the school worked sufficiently closely with them. The inspection found that the quality of information provided for parents is generally satisfactory. However, advance curricular information and clearer reporting of pupils' progress in their annual reports would better inform parents. Despite the fact that the school's pupils come from a very wide area, there is a good level of contact with parents. Form tutors and heads of year maintain a good level of contact by phone, letter and through the heads of year report books and pupil planners. All these methods of contact are very well supervised by form tutors and heads of year, and there is real contact and dialogue with parents as a result. Homework is used well by the school to develop pupils and to encourage research and independent learning, and this also involves parents, through the pupil planners, in making a good contribution to their children's learning. Pupils were frequently observed referring to planners, and parents commented that they regularly signed them and almost always received an appropriate response from teachers to any comments made in the planner.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

59. This is a well managed school. The leadership of the school, which comprises head teacher, a deputy and an assistant head teacher, has a shared vision, which is focused on school improvement and the implementation of the school's aims. They call for the teaching of the whole child in a Christian context, and emphasise peace, love, justice and reconciliation. Inspection evidence confirms the school's statement that it is a strong community in which adults and children are encouraged to share a common philosophy.

60. The head leads by example. He is able to inspire staff and students with his strong belief in their capability. It is indicative of his open and involved approach

that he has established an office in the centre of the school, adjacent to the dining hall and library which has large windows. He is a visible presence in the school. Pupils are encouraged to see their achievement within the context of the family of St James, in which all can play a part. Their willingness to learn and their often high achievement is thus a direct consequence of the management and leadership provided by the head teacher and his governing body.

61. This leadership team is supported by a very good governing body which combines a good knowledge of the school with an ability to take effective action where that is required, for example over the budgetary deficit, and matters of policy.

62. During the first year of his appointment the head teacher has undertaken a careful review of the school's strengths and weaknesses. This review highlighted the need to improve the overall monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum. It also indicated the need to ensure that senior management roles were directly aligned with the school's strategic direction. School improvement, and self-evaluation had to be clearly identified with specific postholders as their key responsibility.

63. The priorities set by the school in its planning are clear and straight forward. All the priorities are set in the overall context of raising achievement where the target is that on all current national comparisons the school's results would be rated good or better. The method set out is to establish a more effective management structure, introduce a process of self review, raise achievement at Key Stage 4 and implement the Key Stage 3 strategy. The plan is costed in terms of time and resources. In some subjects, such as history, success is identified in terms of pupils' achievement. However, a number of the whole school and subject success indicators confine themselves to the completion of the activity rather than the impact on pupils. For example there is no indication in the school development plan of the school's plans or targets for addressing boys' under performance.

64. The school had relatively few difficulties in staffing for the beginning of this year. Parents commented that in the previous year there had been problems of staffing in mathematics. These have now been resolved. The selection of new staff is particularly thorough, with a high level of involvement by governors. There is a strong sense of collective endeavour to common aims amongst teaching and non-teaching staff at all levels.

65. Historically, the school has directed a far larger than average proportion of its resources to the budget for teaching staff, than in most comparable schools. This has meant that the resourcing of the school in other areas is below what would normally be expected. Specific grants, such as the standards fund, are being used in a thought out way but overall the strategic use of resources is unsatisfactory. This can be seen most strikingly in the library, where the amount of stock is far lower than would normally be seen in a secondary school of this size. It is also evident in the shortage of resources such as textbooks in other subjects such as science where there are too few textbooks, many of which are out of date.

66. The pressure on the budget is accentuated by the deployment of the teaching force. The teaching time is 24 hours and 10 minutes, although many schools now provide 25 hours. The proportion of teachers' time spent in front of classes (the contact ratio) is at the bottom of the range for secondary schools in England (the bottom of the lowest quartile range). Teachers have been rewarded for taking on additional duties with a combination of monetary reward and less teaching time. This has created an expensive and top-heavy staffing structure. It is also the case that while the school is led well by the

leadership group of three people, there is also a notional senior management team of seven, some of whom do not attend meetings, citing union action as the reason.

67. The head teacher has employed external consultants to identify a more cost-effective management structure. The roles of head, deputy and assistant head are clear and aligned to the school's priorities in this model. The quality of teaching in the school is good and pupils' achievement reflects this. However, the current staff deployments are not giving the school value for money. The recommendations and the process of the review meet the principles of best value, and this process will need to be applied elsewhere.

68. The new responsibilities for the deputy and assistant head teacher were just commencing at the time of the inspection. One is taking responsibility for the production of the appropriate monitoring data on pupil performance. The other is implementing a series of planned reviews and audits. Audits have already been undertaken in geography, music and drama. The impact of these audits could be observed in geography and history, where there was clearly a common understanding of existing strengths and areas for improvement in the two departments and the leadership group. In music, inspection evidence revealed areas of concern, which paralleled those of the leadership group in most respects, but requires firm action.

69. The SENCO teaches half a timetable of PE. This should be reviewed in order to ensure that sufficient time be allocated for the administration of special needs throughout the school. The accommodation is generally adequate, although improvements are desirable in physical education, which suffers inadequate playing fields and hall, music, special needs and design technology. Accommodation for the special needs department is in the main body of the school, but both office and teaching rooms are some distance apart. The main teaching room is also the entrance to the technology office. The lack of soundproofing in the special needs office raises the issue of confidentiality when reviews are taking place.

70. This is a well-led school with clear direction for further improvement.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

71. This is a successful school. In order to continue to improve and to raise levels of attainment even further, the governors, headteacher and teaching staff, with the support of the local education authority (LEA), should:

- Establish a consistent approach to the marking and grading of work so that pupils and parents know the level pupils' are working at in all subjects;
- review the balance of spending between staffing and other resources (for example the small stock of books in the library), the length of the school day, and the proportion of time teachers spend in classes;
- raise the performance of boys, particularly at GCSE Level;
- establish consistent and planned arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school;
- make the education of pupils for a diverse society a consistently planned priority for all subject areas;
- raise the standard of provision for music, standards of external performance, and the quality of teaching in music.

Minor issues

72. There are some minor issues for the school to consider. Although they were not regarded as serious enough to be key issues for the school, nevertheless the inspection team believes that the governing body should consider:

- establishing an operational policy for gifted and talented pupils;
- analysing assessment information so that all subjects are aware of their relative performance, and where possible of individual classes;
- reviewing the timing of lessons and improving the delivery of cross curricular issues;
- greater administrative support, particularly as regards attendance;
- improving the facilities for physical education and the accommodation for music, special needs and design technology;
- the provision of PE as a GCSE subject.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	128
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	2	31	59	33	3	0	0
Percentage	2	26	46	24	2	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7–Y13
Number of pupils on the school's roll	754
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	78

Special educational needs	Y7–Y13
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	19
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	89

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	12

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.5
National comparative data	7.7

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 (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	77	76	153

National Curriculum Test/Task Results	English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	49	56	50
	Girls	63	65	58
	Total	112	121	108
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	73 (80)	79 (75)	71 (67)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	33 (27)	52 (62)	34 (33)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments	English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	38	52	46
	Girls	57	61	57
	Total	95	113	103
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	62 (77)	74 (73)	67 (67)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	28 (30)	45 (38)	28 (33)
	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 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	75	70	145

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	37	70	71
	Girls	42	66	68
	Total	79	136	139
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	54 (54)	94 (90)	96 (94)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	43
	National	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	0
	National	N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	2
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	743
Any other minority ethnic group	7

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	1	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	45	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7–Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	46
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.4: 1

Education support staff: Y7–Y13

Total number of education support staff	16
Total aggregate hours worked per week	233

Deployment of teachers: Y7–Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	0.71
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Average teaching group size: Y7–Y13

Key Stage 2	0
Key Stage 3	460
Key Stage 4	294

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	1895503.00
Total expenditure	1882938.00
Expenditure per pupil	2498.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	16466.00
Balance carried forward to next year	29031.00

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	19.1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	20.4

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1.0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1.0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out
Number of questionnaires returned

754
382

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40.0	52.0	7.0	1.0	1.0
My child is making good progress in school.	42.0	46.0	5.0	1.0	6.0
Behaviour in the school is good.	29.0	55.0	8.0	2.0	6.0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24.0	48.0	11.0	6.0	11.0
The teaching is good.	32.0	54.0	6.0	1.0	7.0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25.0	46.0	18.0	3.0	8.0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	45.0	42.0	7.0	3.0	3.0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	62.0	34.0	2.0	1.0	1.0
The school works closely with parents.	25.0	49.0	17.0	3.0	6.0
The school is well led and managed.	36.0	47.0	5.0	2.0	11.0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43.0	46.0	5.0	1.0	6.0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	19.0	42.0	19.0	5.0	15.0

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

ENGLISH

73. The quality of provision for English is good.

Key strengths of the subject include:

- very good management, administration, leadership and communication;
- team of skilful, committed, hard-working and effective teachers;
- good relationships with, and classroom management of pupils;
- range and quality of work to support pupils' literacy development;
- steadily improving results, with standards above the national average, at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE.
- Good planning and work to implement the Key Stage 3 curriculum strategy.

Areas for improvement include:

- Developing a manageable system for tracking individual pupils' progress;
- More consistent implementation of the policy on gifted and talented pupils;
- Making fuller use of published assessment information to establish standards against which pupils' future achievements can be measured;
- Monitoring more systematically the setting and appropriateness of homework;
- Increasing the representation of writers from other cultures in book stock, teaching materials and curriculum plans;
- Ensuring that more lessons than at present allow pupils to reflect on and take greater independence for their own learning.

74. In 2000, pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 was well above nationally expected standards. Overall performance was slightly improved from the previous year and sustained the above-average standards of the preceding three years. Results were above average for all schools and well above average for similar schools. In 2000, the proportions of pupils achieving GCSE grades A*-C in both English and English literature were above average, while the proportion achieving A*-C in drama was average. While girls' performance in both English examinations exceeded that of boys by a margin broadly similar to that found nationally, boys' attainments in drama reversed the national pattern by surpassing those of girls. Pupils entered for GCSE English in 2000 did significantly better than in the average of all their other GCSE subjects, while those taking English literature and drama did significantly worse. The school's GCSE results for 2001 demonstrate a significant scale of improvement from 2000 in both English and drama, while those for literature remain broadly in line with those of the preceding year.

75. Standards of attainment are above average at the end of Year 9. Pupils speak clearly and accurately, and in many lessons are keen to volunteer answers. They always listen well, and their work in drama helps to develop their capacity to act upon what they hear. Reading aloud is also clear, accurate, and done with confidence. Pupils in a Year 8 lesson demonstrated how their improving skills of skimming and scanning a text enabled them to extract information efficiently. Levels of comprehension are good. In both oral work and reading there is no significant difference between the achievements of boys and girls. This becomes evident in written work. All pupils take care over the presentation of work and the standard of writing is generally good. In all years, pupils make good use of re-drafting to improve the accuracy of their writing and the expression of ideas. More able pupils use a wide range of interesting vocabulary appropriately, can organise information

writing effectively and produce moving and evocative pieces. All pupils write thoughtfully and their work is mostly grammatically correct. In Years 8 and 9, they show that they can vary written style to suit a range of purposes and audiences. Slower workers in all years tend to use a written style very close to speech, to find organising thoughts and ideas difficult and use a restricted vocabulary. Girls' work is mainly of a higher standard than that of boys. Pupils with special educational needs are well provided for, particularly when supported in class, and so they do well. They contribute readily to class oral activities and can write satisfactorily, within limitations.

76. Pupils also achieve well at the end of Year 11. Their oral work benefits from their growing maturity and confidence as learners. Drama activity particularly fosters pupils' ability to work collaboratively and reach decisions by consensus. They read aloud well, sometimes without sufficient expression, but always with attention to meaning. Pupils have good levels of understanding and recall and most show good analytical skills. The most able pupils in a Year 10 lesson on a drama text for GCSE - well supported by their teacher's enthusiasm and detailed knowledge - were familiar with deducing and inferring evidence from the text and were beginning to evaluate their own reading. Writing again shows girls on average producing better quality work than boys, who often take insufficient care over grammar and punctuation. Paragraphing is a persistent problem for many in both years, and some Year 10 work shows lapses in the appropriate use of standard language. While less able pupils write in a straightforward, sometimes simplistic style, they can often write well for effect and respond to literature in detail. The best writing in both years demonstrates excellent responses to literature, fluent and confident handling of complex ideas by boys and girls, and regular careful redrafting using information and communication technology to improve the layout and effectiveness of the work. Those with special educational needs exceed expectations because of the good levels of support they receive.

77. Pupils' achievement in all years is good. This is partly because of their own levels of prior attainment, but also the result of teachers' careful planning and use of appropriate teaching methods. Even when pupils are grouped according to ability, however, there is need to provide for the range of pupils' learning needs within each group. Most pupils enter the school in Year 7 with levels of attainment higher than national comparisons and leave it with results that reflect their better-than-average achievement. This indicates that they maintain good rates of progress overall. Good progress is the result of diligent teaching combined with pupils' own positive attitudes towards learning. A Year 8 lesson on grammar, for example, showed pupils responding well to their teacher's high expectations of them, and to the challenge provided by the activity because of their interest and close attentiveness. Year 10 pupils of lower ability worked very hard on activities relating to a drama text because they had enjoyed reading it and were gaining in confidence and knowledge as the lesson progressed.

78. The quality of teaching and learning in all years is good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and of their pupils. Their high expectations of pupils' behaviour were evident in all lessons, and were justified. Class-control is firm, and all the more effective for it being unobtrusive. An example of good learning was observed in a Year 9 poetry lesson where pupils developed their analytical reading skills well and increased their working vocabulary. This was a result of the teacher's expertise and enthusiasm for a topic, which proved infectious and powerfully motivated the whole class. All lessons are carefully planned and well structured. They follow the common pattern of introduction followed by a series of short interrelated activities and end with a recapitulation of what has been achieved. Lively teaching approaches stimulate pupils' interest, irrespective of their levels of prior

attainment: this was clear in a Year 7 lesson on autobiography, where the teacher had also broken the process of writing down into small steps that all could master. Consistent and regular marking of pupils' work usually combines encouragement with targets, and teachers try to talk to pupils about work they have done. This all helps their motivation. Occasionally, teachers talk too much and leave pupils insufficient time to reflect on their learning, but working relationships with pupils are always good. In all years teachers give appropriate attention to the teaching of basic language skills and to extending pupils' vocabulary. A Year 10 lesson on a drama text was particularly well organised in that the teaching was shared with a learning support teacher. Each helped to emphasise or rephrase key points made by the other, and a range of short activities sustained pupils' attention and involvement. As a result, they all had equal access to learning, and the homework set gave them opportunity to consolidate it. Real advances in understanding of character and motivation were made by even the slowest learners.

79. Leadership and management of the English team are very good. Only the head of department has been in post longer than three years. Within that period, a strong spirit of collaboration has been developed, a comprehensive handbook created and work begun on regularly evaluating and supporting the work of the team. There is a strong sense of shared values and a commitment to raising pupils' levels of attainment. Communications are good, both formally and informally. The team makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and social growth, though the dimension of other cultures remains relatively underdeveloped.

80. Standards in English have improved since the previous inspection, at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. The department has thoroughly revised its Key Stage 3 curriculum in the light of the new English Framework and the introduction of the National Literary Strategy into Years 7- 9. The amount of work undertaken has been extensive, and is very well done. Teaching is now well grounded on skills-based learning objectives, which provide a clear structure for teaching, learning, and assessment. The department has made a major contribution to the planning for and implementation of literacy work across the school, as well as focusing attention well on pupils' language acquisition and development in its own planning and practice.

Literacy

81. Pupils' standards of literacy are good, and do not impede their access to the curriculum. Although pupils are usually clear and competent speakers who can express their views and ideas clearly, in several subjects they do not have sufficient opportunity to speak at any length. In art, science, design and technology, mathematics, English and information and communication technology, in particular, their oral skills are fostered. Pupils listen well and attentively in all years to both peers and teachers. Reading for information and research is actively promoted in geography and history, and in modern foreign languages pupils have opportunity to practise reading aloud. Key subject words are appropriately emphasised in mathematics, English, history, physical education, and information and communication technology. Other than in English, close attention is paid to the development of pupils' writing in science, geography and history: some good examples of extended or descriptive writing were observed in the last two subject areas.

82. Provision for the development of whole-school literacy is good. An audit has been carried out and several whole-staff training sessions held. In the action plan produced around Easter, two departments (history and geography) were targeted for specific training and been provided with appropriate materials. The results of this are already visible in practice. In addition, two extra literacy lessons have been added to the

timetables of pupils not starting a second modern foreign language in Year 8. A cross-curricular working party is monitoring the implementation of these initiatives.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths:

- well above average levels of attainment;
- overall very good progress and achievement by the majority of pupils;
- very good attitudes and behaviour of pupils;
- mainly good and frequently very good teaching;
- very well managed department with staff working well as a team.

Areas for improvement:

- use of information and communications technology to support teaching and learning requires further development.

84. Pupils do well in mathematics and performance in examination results is significantly higher than the school average.

85. By the end of Years 9 and 11, the attainment of the majority of pupils is well above the national average. Since the pupils enter the school with above average levels of attainment overall, they are making good progress over time and achieving very well.

86. There is a firm trend of improvement particularly amongst higher attainers. For example the proportion of pupils achieving higher levels at the end of Year 9 has been steadily rising above national averages. In 2000, the percentage of GCSE candidates gaining A and A* grades was more than double the national average. The percentage of pupils achieving grades A* to C has risen over each of the last three years. In 2001 the school achieved its best ever GCSE results in mathematics when 65 per cent of the candidates achieved grades in the range A* to C. However the percentage of pupils achieving grades in the range A* to G was disappointing with 3 per cent of the candidates failing to achieve a grade in this range. Although the performance of girls was better than the boys in 2000, in most years the difference is not significant at either key stage, but in most years, a higher proportion of girls than boys obtain the highest grades of A* and A in the GCSE examination.

87. In mathematics lessons and in work seen, although overall the attainment covers a wide range, it is well above average for the majority of the pupils throughout both key stages. Pupils in the top sets in each of the years attain very high standards. The majority of pupils have a good understanding of the different aspects of mathematics, and are able to use and apply mathematics. They are confident in using number and algebra, and in dealing with shape, space and measures. For example, pupils in a top Year 9 set showed high levels of attainment when dealing with number sequences and expressing them in algebraic form. They were able to identify the general terms and express these algebraically for more complex functions. Another high attaining Year 10 class showed a good understanding of the properties of straight lines, and pupils, both as a group and on an individual basis, were able to sketch simple functions and use these to solve pairs of simultaneous equations. On the other hand, a lower attaining Year 7 group contained some pupils who were having some difficulties in handling numbers. Although some pupils in the group had a secure understanding of place value and were able to order the numbers on the basis of their size, others in the group were not and showed a lack of understanding of the basic principles involved.

88. Teaching is good and frequently very good. All lessons are planned in detail and each contains an appropriate range of learning approaches and activities, for individual, small group and whole class work. Aims of each of the lessons are shared with the pupils and this leads to pupils feeling involved in their learning. The group work frequently contains a lively and interesting presentation by the teacher, and several of the lessons observed were well supported by a good range of resources, including prepared overhead projector transparencies and handouts. Teachers involve pupils by using frequent questions. Pupils are encouraged to develop and explain their solutions rather than giving restricted or one-word answers. In a number of lessons seen, pupils were required to develop their solution to a problem on the white board for the rest of the class. The pace in lessons is well matched to the pupil groups. Pupils are managed effectively and, with minor exceptions, standards of discipline are very high. All teachers set homework on a regular basis, and this is marked accurately, with appropriate teacher comments, and returned to the pupils. All teachers keep good records of individual pupils' progress. There is a need, however, to ensure that the recently introduced arrangements for assessing pupils' work are consistently interpreted by members of staff and clearly understood by all of the pupils. This aids their learning. The good teaching promotes and encourages very good attitudes and behaviour of the pupils, and this in turn promotes good progress. Only in a minority of lessons do a few pupils become restless, are distracted and fail to make further progress with the task that has been set for them. There are a few pupils absent from most of the classes. The majority of pupils show a high level of confidence when answering the questions during aspects of the group work and are frequently keen and eager to develop their own solutions on the white-board for the rest of the group. Very supportive relationships have been developed between pupils and with the teacher which encourage the good learning seen in lessons. A number of pupils in classes show a level of enjoyment in undertaking the mathematics work and quote it as their favourite subject.

89. The mathematics curriculum is appropriate. Detailed schemes of work have been devised and agreed which work well in supporting pupils' learning. However there is less detail for Years 10 and 11, and at present, there is only limited evidence of the use of ICT to support teaching and learning in mathematics. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities associated with the work in mathematics. Currently pupils at the school are entered in the Greater Manchester Mathematics Challenge, the Fantasy Football League, Maths on the Metro Competition, and participate in Number Day activities. A numeracy summer school was run for the first time in 2001. Revision classes are held after school for pupils who are preparing for the national tests and assessments at the end of Year 9, and for Year 11 pupils preparing for the GCSE examination. High quality revision booklets are available to support this work. Links with the main primary feeder schools are well developed, with visits being made to the school by the mathematics teachers and prospective pupils, together with their parents being invited into the school.

90. Management of the department is very effective. The teachers involved meet on a regular basis and are working well as a team. Although monitoring and evaluation procedures at a school level are in the process of development, aspects of these are already in place within the department. Lesson observations are undertaken by the head of the department and regular reviews of the work of the department take place. Exercise books are monitored and discussions are held with individual teachers to set future targets and to agree personal development needs. Overall the mathematics teachers are well qualified and have a secure and detailed knowledge of the subject requirements. A newly qualified teacher in the department is being well supported. The main rooms used for the mathematics teaching are of good quality. They are suited, and the significant use of appropriate display materials in these rooms helps provide a physical focus for

mathematics in the school. However poor acoustics in these rooms allows activities from one room to be clearly heard from another.

91. The department has made good progress since the last inspection in 1996. Standards have risen. By the end of Year 9 a higher proportion of pupils now achieve expected or higher levels. Although GCSE results declined after the last inspection they have subsequently improved. The department achieved its highest GCSE results in 2001. Overall, very good progress is now being made by the majority of pupils. Attitudes and behaviour of pupils continue to be very good, and teaching is also frequently very good. The arrangements for supporting pupils with special educational needs, which was identified as a weakness at the time of the last inspection have now improved. There continues to be a need to identify and make further use of appropriate information and communications technology.

Numeracy

92. Standards in numeracy of the majority of pupils in the school are good. Mainly as a consequence of national initiatives, pupils are entering the school with more highly developed numerical skills and increased confidence when dealing with problems involving number. Number skills are further developed in the school as part of many mathematics lessons. Lessons are structured to include starter activities, which regularly involve the pupils in undertaking mental arithmetic exercises. These are frequently devised not only to further develop pupils' skills and confidence when handling number, but also to be enjoyable for the pupils to undertake.

93. Good use is now being made of numeracy in a range of subjects. At the time of the last inspection only restricted use of number was being made in science. Pupils now make good use of number in this subject when using graphs, charts and tables. Very good use is also being made in geography to support work with statistical data, pie charts and graphs. History, modern foreign languages, physical education and art also include pupils in activities involving the use of number. Pupils in these subjects are involved in a greater range of activities that require the use of number than is normally seen in schools. Opportunities for use have been identified in some schemes of work. In most subjects pupils show confidence and good levels of attainment when dealing with number. Although the use is more restricted in some subjects including design and technology there is no evidence of a lack of numeracy skills impeding the progress of pupils in any subject.

SCIENCE

94. Provision for science is good.

Strengths:

- Standards of attainment above the national average.
- Good progress in gaining scientific knowledge and understanding from age 11.
- Very good attitudes and behaviour.
- Good teaching, especially planning and expectations.
- Teachers' knowledge of, and support for pupils' needs.
- Quality of marking.

Areas For Improvement:

- Strategies to ensure full participation by all pupils in class discussion.

- Opportunities for pupils to use ICT in science.
- Extent of work provided for the most capable pupils.

95. Attainment of pupils in Year 9, in 2000, was above the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining Level 5, or greater, and also the proportion gaining Level 6 or greater was above the average for all maintained schools, and in schools with a similar pupil intake. There has been an upward trend in performance over the past four years, and the most recent results in 2001, show a significant further increase over the previous year. Girls perform more highly than boys. Pupils have achieved well since their entry into the school in Year 7.

96. The attainment of pupils in Year 11 was above the national average in 2000, and the proportion of pupils gaining grade A* - C in double award science has risen even further in 2001. The percentage of grades A* - C in 2000 was well above the average in schools with similar prior attainment in the national Key Stage 3 tests. Again, girls' performance is higher than that of boys. The standards achieved in national tests and GCSE by both boys and girls were above average in each case.

97. In the work seen in lessons, and from pupils' written work over years 7–9, standards reflect those found in the national tests. For example, most pupils in a Year 9 mixed ability group, studying life processes, demonstrated a good understanding of the role of lung structure in breathing and appreciated very clearly the effect of smoking on gas exchanges. Similarly, the depth of knowledge and understanding of complex concepts such as the behaviour of waves, comparing light and sound refraction, is clearly well developed by many pupils. This is shown in the detailed descriptions recorded in the written work of Year 11 pupils, who were on work experience during the week of inspection.

98. Pupils show good standards of literacy in their work in science. There is appropriate use of scientific terminology, descriptions are sophisticated and diagrams are neatly drawn. The standard of numeracy is good, with pupils demonstrating confident use of number, accurate interpretation of graphs, and precise measurement. The standard of information and communication technology in science is satisfactory, often reflecting skills developed in other areas of the curriculum, with data logging being taught within the department.

99. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is in line with others of similar ability. In some, but not all groups, there is sufficient additional adult support, and teachers use various approaches to help pupils individually to progress. Pupils with higher ability make good progress with their work, and they are beginning to extend their talents to more challenging problems and tasks in order to further increase their achievement.

100. The overall attitudes, behaviour and personal development of pupils in science are very good. Behaviour in class is exceptionally good, with high respect shown for teachers, other pupils and property. Pupils work well together and support each other. They listen well, and respect each other's views with considerable maturity. Attitudes to the subject are good. They learn with interest and carry out tasks willingly irrespective of their inherent enthusiasm for the topic. The great majority of pupils listen carefully in lessons, but are less inclined to respond to teachers' questions or to be forthcoming with searching questions of their own to clarify or extend their learning. Participation in class discussion is notably limited on occasions. Every effort is made however, to present written work neatly, and homework is completed with exemplary reliability.

101. Teaching in the science department is good. Lessons are well planned, with clear continuity from previous work, and a varied range of activities in a typical lesson. Several lessons have planned use of information technology, including data logging analysis of experimental results. The range of opportunities for using computers in science is limited by the available equipment, but is being developed. Teachers have high expectations, and the depth of knowledge and skills imparted makes high demands on pupils' capabilities. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory, and the support of additional specialist staff in some classes is good. Teachers manage pupils well. Good behaviour is demanded, but equally excellent support, encouragement, and help is given to all pupils so that they show confidence in their understanding. In this way, an excellent learning environment is created.

102. Pupils' work is marked effectively, despite the application of the assessment policy being confusing. Teachers write detailed advice to pupils on how to improve their work. However, some pupils still remain unsure as to their current and potential National Curriculum Level or GCSE grade. Good use is often made of the relatively short teaching period, with a brisk pace being necessary to complete work. This pressure can influence the time allocated to effective participation in discussion or ensuring full understanding by all pupils in the group. Conversely, double periods can be too long to maintain interest, especially for younger pupils. Opportunities are provided for extending the learning of more able pupils. However, there are insufficient opportunities to set searching and demanding problems or tasks to really challenge the most able. Work is well matched for the majority, but sometimes unnecessarily straightforward for higher attaining pupils, and their learning suffers.

103. The leadership and management of the science department are satisfactory. Good schemes of work are being developed to ensure the new National Curriculum requirements are met. Teachers' work has been monitored through annual observations of lessons, review of lesson plans, and regular team meetings. The teachers work hard as a team, and have a strong shared commitment to raising the pupils' achievement. Assessment of pupils has been routinely carried out, but the use of assessment data in identifying under achievement, identifying performance in relation to national expectations, and curriculum planning, is only just developing.

104. The time allocation for science is below that found in many schools. Textbook resources are unsatisfactory. Only pupils in top sets of Year 11 are issued books to study at home. Other textbook resources in frequent use are of poor quality, well out of date, and inappropriate. Very few pupils have the resources to consolidate their understanding outside the classroom, and this may have an adverse impact on attainment and progress. Accommodation for science is good, with large laboratories and good display. Storage and preparation facilities are good. Staff represent expertise in all three sciences, and have a range of experience. Technicians are well qualified and support is very good.

105. Since the last inspection, standards have risen significantly, the curriculum has been developed, and there is an increased range of opportunities. Marking has improved in quality of comment and correction and attitudes of pupils have continued to be very good.

ART AND DESIGN

106. Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is high. It is a very effective department, providing an outstanding and rich learning experience for all of its pupils.

Strengths:

- the quality of the teaching, the relationships between teachers and pupils, assessment and the broad curriculum.

Areas for improvement:

- insufficient opportunities for pupils to work with ICT.

107. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 show that more than 90 per cent of all pupils are meeting or exceeding national expectations, with the girls performing slightly better than the boys. These results represent a significant improvement since the last inspection. The year 2000 GCSE results for those pupils aged 16, were well above the national average and reflect the steady improvement since the last inspection. The girls' results were particularly good with almost 90 per cent gaining a pass between A* and C. They outperformed the boys whose results were level with the national average. Every pupil was awarded a pass between A* and G, which is above the national average. Gifted and talented pupils did particularly well, with more than twice the national average gaining the highest grades. The GCSE results in 2001 were especially good, with more than ninety per cent of all pupils gaining a pass between A* and C, the best results in the school by some distance.

108. The work seen in school during inspection week indicates that these high standards are being maintained. The pupils' design skills and understanding of colour are particularly high. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 have produced very good work including: curtains designed and printed in class; sculpture constructed from paper, card, plaster-of-Paris and papier-mâché, many based on the pupils' study of Surrealism, South American Indians and other non-European art and artists; and well conceived paintings and drawings using the colours of the Fauvist painters Henri Matisse, André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck. Those pupils in Years 10 and 11, who have opted to follow the GCSE courses, continue to develop their knowledge and understanding of art, while refining their practical skills to a high level. Signs and prints of particularly high quality, based on observational drawing and influenced by Greek, Roman and Islamic art, are much in evidence. Work based on observational drawings of everyday objects, portrayed in the manner of Picasso's synthetic Cubism and his paintings of musicians, reflect the enjoyment and pleasure the pupils experience in researching and producing their work.

109. The achievement of pupils in art is exceptional. Many pupils enter the school having had varied and often limited previous experience of art and design. By the time they reach the age of 13, their work is well above national expectations and they continue their rapid progress until the age of 16, when they receive public recognition in their outstanding examination results. Pupils who have special educational needs make very good progress in art, thanks to the care and attention they receive from their teachers and support assistants who are familiar with their individual needs.

110. The quality of teaching and learning in the art department is very good and has improved significantly since the last inspection. There are occasions when the teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11 is excellent. For example, in a particularly good lesson, the teacher gathered her pupils, together with their homework, around a large table and after repeating the homework requirements, she led a very well considered discussion on the merits of the pupils' work. The pupils, in turn, chose pieces of their classmates' homework and explained carefully and thoughtfully why they felt it was good and how closely it met the requirements. As well as improving their speaking and listening skills, this activity encouraged tolerance and appreciation of the work of others, as

well as generating pride in their own work, and provided increased opportunities for learning. In another lesson, pupils were introduced to drawing self-portraits. The teacher used great skill in explaining the possibilities offered by using a pencil in a variety of ways. She then referred to drawings by a range of artists including the French impressionist, Edgar Degas, to illustrate some of the possibilities offered by portraiture. The practical session that followed led to the entire class making rapid gains in observational and technical skills as well as a keen insight into the work of Degas.

111. A particular feature of the department is the quality of the teachers' planning which ensures that all pupils, from the naturally talented and most able, to those who feel they have little natural ability in art, have an equal opportunity to develop their aesthetic awareness and technical skills. The pupils are confident in the knowledge that their teachers are interested in their welfare and development. The teachers' expectations generate industry, enthusiasm and healthy competition in the pupils, who are keen to make progress and do well. The pupils also recognise their teachers' genuine feel for their subject and the depth and reliability of their knowledge. From the early days of Year 7, the pupils begin to build good relationships with their teachers, based on mutual respect and trust. Some indication of the pupils' regard for the subject can be gained from the undamaged condition of the work displayed around the department and in the public areas of the school.

112. The curriculum in art is particularly broad and balanced, with good provision for two and three-dimensional processes, including painting and drawing, printmaking, fabric printing, and mixed media sculpture. The pupils' have regular opportunities to look at and appreciate a wide-range of European and non-European art and artists. Although schemes of work are thorough, they allow class teachers the freedom to develop their particular skills and interests. The schemes of work do lack details of the use of information and communications technology in art. As at the time of the previous inspection, there are few opportunities for pupils to generate and manipulate imagery by using computers, scanners or digital cameras. This situation is likely to improve, due to the department having recently received funding for hardware and software, while the teachers are in the process of being trained in its use. The methods of marking and assessing the pupils' work are thorough and innovative. They make it clear to pupils how well they are doing and how they might improve their work, at the same time as identifying areas in the curriculum which need modification.

113. The management of the subject is very good, with the head of department providing strong leadership for pupils and teachers alike. She sets the tone for the department and sees it as every pupil's right to experience the spiritual and cultural life of today, as well as gaining a clear understanding of the subject she genuinely loves. She has a clear, firm vision of the future direction for the subject, although there is some lack of detail in long term development planning. There has been an improvement in the staffing of the art department since the last inspection and all of the teachers are now specialist art teachers. Their industry and shared commitment to succeed are major factors in the improved quality of art education in the school. The accommodation is new, purpose built and much improved, although a small number of classes continue to be taught in non-specialist rooms, well away from the art department. The lack of storage space for work, particularly sculpture and claywork, remains problematic. The resources for learning are good, well used and particularly well cared for.

114. The department has made very good progress since the last inspection. Pupils' attainment by the age of 13 was in line with national expectations, and slightly above average by the age of 16. Both are now well above average. Pupils' progress was good and is now exceptional. Teaching was satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11; both are now very good and occasionally excellent. The accommodation was unsatisfactory but is now good. The art department is a strength of the school.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

115. Overall, the quality of provision is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Standards of attainment are at national average at age 16 and rising.
- Progress and achievement is good between the ages of 14 and 16.
- Special needs pupils are well integrated into lessons and produce work similar to their peers.
- Good quality teaching overall, with very well planned lessons.
- Very good attitudes and behaviour from pupils.

Areas For Further Improvement:

- The staffing provisions at years 11 to 14 needs consideration as a number of non-specialist teachers are working in design and technology.
- Increased emphasis needs to be given to the teaching of numeracy in the curriculum overall.
- The cultural and multi-cultural aspects of design and technology need attention.
- The opportunities to use ICT, particularly at ages 11 to 14, to be increased.
- The schemes of work for graphics and resistant materials need to be more detailed.
- The department needs to continue to develop assessment systems.
- The accommodation needs improvement, particularly the area used for resistant materials.

116. When pupils enter the school at the age of 11, they have limited experience of designing and making activities, and standards are varied. They make satisfactory progress thereafter and standards are as expected nationally at the age of 14, and above average at the age of 16.

117. In 2000, in the statutory teacher assessments at the age of 14, were below the nationally reported average. Almost 50 per cent of the pupils were judged to reach the national expectation, Level 5 and above, compared with sixty six per cent of pupils nationally. GCSE results in 2000 were at national average in design and technology at grades A*-C. The results for A*-G grades were also at the national average. The results for 2000 were below those for 1999. Recent results in 2001 show pupils' attainment to be an improvement on 2000. Pupils perform better in design and technology than in many of the other subjects that they study. Girls perform better than boys do, as is the picture nationally. Stereotypical choices at the age of 14 are beginning to be removed in this department, with boys studying food, and girls studying resistant materials.

118. Standards in work seen during the inspection in years 7 to 9 are generally at national average, above the results indicated by statutory assessment at age 14. In textiles, they use a range of basic construction skills and surface decoration techniques to make good quality holdall bags, multi-cultural masks and juggling balls. Making skills are used effectively to produce a satisfactory range of products such as upside-down cake, healthy snacks, and breads. While a few pupils are able to use computer-aided design in a limited way, the use of information and communication technology is not widespread. Pupils with special needs make products that are similar to those of other pupils. Pupils can evaluate their work, although lower attainers' evaluations are basic and they need lots of guidance from the teacher.

119. Standards of work seen between the ages of 14 and 16 are at national average. All pupils are encouraged to develop their own ideas in the different areas of technology.

Higher-attaining pupils are attaining above average standards. In their coursework, higher-attaining pupils can design and produce graphical work of a high standard to present their own individual ideas. They research well and information is used selectively in the design and making of products. Projects on a Child's Toy, Computer Desk and Low Cost Frozen Meals for One, show sections of coursework that are well developed and presented, with good use of information and communication technology, such as word processing of questionnaires and pie and bar charts to illustrate results. The pupils are able to evaluate their work very well, with detailed analysis. Middle ability pupils attainment is satisfactory although their graphical skills and knowledge is not of such a high order. Pupils with special educational needs, with good teacher guidance, achieve making/practical work of a similar standard to that of other pupils in the different areas of technology.

120. Pupils make sound progress in the lessons and achieve satisfactorily at ages 11 to 14. Progress and achievement between the ages of 14 and 16 leading to GCSE is good overall. However, progress for a small number of pupils between the ages of 11 and 14 is affected by curricular organisation. Some pupils have limited time in different material areas. In addition to this, pupils have had a number of different non-specialist teachers working in design and technology in recent times. Pupils learn a range of skills, including how to handle various hand and machine tools safely for a purpose, as in the Year 7 resistant materials lesson on using coping saw and different drills. Pupils of all abilities progress in their understanding of health and safety in the workrooms. Pupils come into lessons wanting to do well and are prepared to work hard. Teachers build on this. They encourage individual ideas from pupils and put a lot of effort into pupils realising them. This is a great motivating force for pupils. Pupils with special educational needs are fully involved in lessons.

121. Since the last inspection, there have been improvements to the accommodation, although the area used for resistant materials is rundown and in need of improvement. Standards of attainment are still above average overall, although there is work to be carried out to improve the pupils' attainment at the age of 14. Work on computer-aided design has started and while ICT is found in pupils' GCSE coursework work at 16, pupils at 11 to 14 are not using ICT sufficiently.

122. The quality of teaching by subject specialists is good, as at the last inspection. The teaching of non-specialist staff was satisfactory and often good. The teachers know their pupils very well and plan to meet their range of needs, including those pupils with special educational needs. Teachers' planning is good, and often very good. In practical lessons on food and resistant materials, no time is wasted and the range of activities ensures that students stay focussed on their work. In the Year 9 graphics lesson on precision drawing for the Signature Project, good questioning kept pupils thinking and helps them to link what they already know with new work. Pupils have good listening skills. Good technical support in the department plays a valuable part in ensuring that resources are available for the time available to the subject. Learning is good in lessons. The basic skills of literacy and information and communication technology are taught satisfactorily, but the teaching of numeracy is at an embryonic stage. Cross-departmental monitoring of pupil's practical skills at age 11 to 14 is rudimentary. Pupils' work is well displayed to stimulate thought on the topics that are undertaken, in graphics, textiles and food.

123. Leadership of the department is satisfactory and well carried out. Staff share a commitment to raise standards. However staff are not being best deployed at Key Stage 3. At present non-specialist staff are teaching design and technology in the 11 to 14 age range. There are sufficient staff, and the department has a similar if not better number of

specialist staff than other technology departments. New arrangements for the 11 to 14 curricular organisation for design and technology would mean pupils had better opportunities for more coherent experiences.

GEOGRAPHY

124. Overall, the quality of provision in geography is very good.

Strengths:

- High achievement of pupils.
- Good use of information technology to support learning.
- Pupils are challenged in a supportive learning environment.

Areas for improvement:

- Further development of individualised programmes of learning.
- An explicit audit of the different learning styles offered to pupils.

125. Geography is a high achieving department. The high achievement of pupils is reflected in their examination results, and can be seen in the progress they make in their lessons. The carefully planned teaching programme ensures that the pupils' potential is identified and developed well. Overall there is an enthusiasm for geography that is shared by teachers and pupils.

126. The pupils enter at year 7 with levels of attainment that are just above average. This is more evident in their literacy and numeracy than in their grasp of geographical terms. Around 15 per cent of pupils arrive at the school able to make use of six figure grid references. The department uses simple tests to identify their starting point. However, more thought could be given to the follow up of these tests, as some pupils are already ready to fly. Notwithstanding this, by the end of Year 9, the work of pupils shows that standards have risen rapidly, and by the end of Year 11, results at GCSE have been consistently above average over the last three years. In 2000 the average grade achieved was a B with 78 per cent of pupils achieving grades A* to C. In 2001 the proportion achieving A* to C had increased to 82 per cent. The national average in 2000 was 58 per cent of pupils at this level, so results then were well above average.

127. Results at the end of year 9 indicate 63 per cent of pupils achieving Level 5 or better, which is above average.

128. Boys' performance in GCSE was similar to that of girls when measured by point score. At the end of Year 9, girls outperformed boys to a greater extent than nationally. The department has modified its curriculum to combat under performance by boys. They have introduced more practical fieldwork, and confidence-building exercises leading to written assessments. Pupils are given the opportunity to find out answers using ICT, or other sources, report them orally, then record them in note form before being presented with the challenge of writing an elaborated written response.

129. Pupils are very positive about geography. This is a response to the enthusiasm for the subject shown by both teachers. The department provides many opportunities to develop their understanding of geography through effective use of ICT, and fieldwork. A number of lessons involved pupils exploring specific web sites for information. For example, the Meteorological Office site was used to find out about weather patterns, and also to introduce pupils to the power of satellite imagery.

130. The quality of the teaching is good. A particular strength is the planning and

preparation of lessons. This is thorough, and supported by a well thought out scheme of work applied by both teachers. The pace and challenge in lessons is good. Particularly good question and answer techniques could be observed in both lessons. For example, in one lesson, pupils were encouraged to explain their answers orally and summarise them on the white board for others to note. Good use of praise was a particular characteristic of lessons, and it was used well to manage pupils' behaviour. Chastisement is rare instead pupils are invited to reflect that poor behaviour will not enable them to demonstrate their best work.

131. In some areas, for example the early Year 7 work, there is scope for more individualised work. For example, an obvious extension of the department's ICT work would be for pupils to do a self-assessment exercise on map reading which could be entered at different levels, rather than the current practice of using the same test material for all pupils. The department is already achieving high standards in many aspects of its work. The leadership of the department is good. The geography teachers work as a team, sharing ideas and approaches. The curriculum is well planned. Further development could include an audit of the different styles of learning provided for pupils over their five years in the school, and more explicit planning for the gifted and talented.

HISTORY

132. In history the quality of provision is good.

Strengths include:

- Monitoring and supporting academic performance (Care for pupils);
- The quality of teaching;
- Leadership and management;
- Contribution to literacy.

Areas for improvement:

- Broaden the curriculum for years 7 to 9 by reducing the concentration on British elements;
- Make effective use of assessment data to monitor overall gender attainment.

133. The attainment of pupils in the GCSE examinations in 2000 was well above the national average; three-quarters of candidates obtained grades A*-C; one quarter of girls and over one fifth of boys obtained the highest grade, compared to the one-twentieth of pupils who do so nationally. In 2001 the A*-C pass rate fell back to just over two-thirds, but as overall figures have yet to be published, no national comparisons are possible. Last year's teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 indicated that almost three-quarters of pupils reached the expected level. In 2001, as in the GCSE examination, the proportion of pupils reaching this level fell back to just over two-thirds. A probable explanation for the reduction in these figures might be the departure of the well-established head of department who was seconded to the service of the local authority in January and his replacement by an not specialist teacher.

134. It is early in the school year to make judgements about the likely attainment at the end of Year 9, but overall current standards in lessons and work seen are above expectations. Most pupils complete a good quantity of written work, much of it accurately spelled, and most of it well presented. There are particular strengths in source handling skills; pupils select, interpret and evaluate sources on topics such as the slave trade and trench warfare well, and offer perceptive comment, using terms such as accuracy,

reliability and hypothesis. Average and higher attaining pupils have advanced language skills and express themselves clearly orally and in writing; an example of the latter is the very high quality letters written to persuade a royalist to change sides in the civil war. Lower attaining pupils often contribute willingly in class as a result of the stimulating nature of lessons, but there are weaknesses in the amount and technical accuracy of their written work.

135. The popularity of history as an option at GCSE has increased over recent years, although in both Year 10 sets there is a marked preponderance of boys, who nationally achieve much less well than girls at this level. Pupils have a good knowledge of the topics studied, although they occasionally make errors in deploying it to answer questions, as for example in references to 'Spartacists and Communists', or the Kapp putsch in 1924. In a lesson on the origins of the First World War, pupils were able to distinguish between underlying causes, and events such as the Bosnian crisis and the launching of the Dreadnought, in lively group discussions on the extent to which the Kaiser was responsible for starting the war. The most able students have copious, well-organised notes, can reconcile conflicting sources on purposes of Marshall plan, and offer perceptive responses to questions such as why America found it so hard to come to terms with defeat in Vietnam.

136. A major factor in explaining the good progress made by pupils of all ability levels is the quality of teaching; there were no unsatisfactory lessons and of the three-quarters of lessons seen which were good or better, one quarter were very good. Close and regular liaison with the special educational needs department has had many benefits. These include resources accessible to, and tasks appropriate for, a wide range of abilities, individual feedback on pupil performance in exams and tests, and extra support sessions at lunchtimes and after school. All of these have contributed to the good progress made by lower attaining pupils in general, and those with special educational needs in particular.

137. A notable feature of lessons is the variety of teaching methods employed, which stems from the work done on, and the good understanding of children's different learning styles. Another significant factor in explaining the good progress and achievement in history is the practice of sharing mark schemes and National Curriculum levels with pupils, in order to identify areas where there is scope for improvement. Teachers mark work closely, and although errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar occasionally pass uncorrected, targets for improvement are set and helpful guidance on achieving them is offered. Literacy is well supported by the practice of reading aloud, displays of keywords and specialist terminology, and the use of frameworks to develop extended writing. Opportunities in lessons to extend pupils' knowledge by using terms such as autocracy, or challenging them to speculate on the consequences for naval supremacy of the launching of the Dreadnought, are occasionally missed. Information and communications technology skills are well integrated into the curriculum; for example in a Year 9 lesson on population change, pupils investigated a spreadsheet containing local census data, to draw conclusions about local and national trends.

138. The subject is well managed and led; the monitoring and development of teaching is effective because the two staff involved work closely together in the planning and evaluation of lessons. Although the head of department has only been in post since January, he has a clear understanding of the department's strengths and weaknesses and has already made significant progress in addressing the latter. There has been good improvement since the last inspection and the department is committed to continuing this trend.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

139. Provision for information and communications technology (ICT) has improved significantly, the statutory curriculum is in place and pupils are now making good progress in their use of ICT to enhance work in a number of subjects across the curriculum.

Strengths in relation to ICT in the school include:

- teaching on the GNVQ ICT course and in discrete ICT lessons at Key Stage 3;
- development planning for ICT and,
- the management and maintenance of ICT resources.

To improve ICT provision further the school should:

- continue to extend the cross curricular use and monitoring of ICT in all years, particularly in art and music;
- encourage pupils to be more systematic and rigorous in organising their files on the computer network.

140. Standards in GCSE ICT examinations have fluctuated in recent years. The proportion of A*-C grades improved to be in line with the national average in 2000, although the percentage of higher grades was lower in 2001.

141. In ICT lessons in years 7-9, and lessons in other subjects where ICT was used, attainment overall was satisfactory. A significant proportion of pupils are now making good progress in a wide range of ICT applications and are working towards higher National Curriculum Levels than have been achieved in the past. A Year 8 class was using the Internet to good effect to explore and report upon weather patterns. They swiftly moved from finding the weather in Manchester, to observing the cloud patterns at the Equator, using satellite photography. Their skills in searching for information were enhanced, as was their knowledge of the methods and techniques of meteorology. Most pupils have appropriate word processing skills, which enable them to produce accurate, well illustrated work. Word processing and presentation software is also used extensively in English lessons. Work on handling information using spreadsheets and databases is covered in the ICT course, but should be exploited further in other subjects.

142. In years 10 and 11, the new GNVQ ICT course is already beginning to have a very positive impact upon standards. Pupils are beginning to be more independent learners, using their skills to exploit a wide range of resources available via the Internet. In several lessons their oral skills were also being used well in presentations to the whole class, which were critically evaluated in a mature manner by other pupils. Most students demonstrated a good knowledge of a range of technical terms. Attainment in year 10 is usually good or very good. Attainment in year 11, where pupils are still following a GCSE course in ICT, is in line with expectations.

143. Across all years, pupils with special needs are receiving good support and making good progress. They are encouraged to contribute to class discussions. There was no discernible difference between the performance of girls and boys in lessons or in work samples.

144. In lessons where ICT is used, pupils work with interest, diligence and enthusiasm. They are very co-operative and keen to learn. Pupils on the GNVQ course were very willing to discuss their tasks and were clearly enjoying the course. In all lessons observed,

pupils were polite, and had respect for teachers, learning support staff and each other, all of which had a beneficial effect upon learning. ICT and in particular the Internet, is used effectively by some subjects, particularly English, RE, history and geography, to enhance the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of their work.

145. Teaching in the ICT lessons observed was good or very good. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives, which are shared with pupils. Further reference to the objectives was usually made as lessons progressed. Classroom management was usually very effective and very good use was made of the 'interactive whiteboard' in one of the computer rooms, although it was not easy to see the whole image from all parts of the room. All teachers are currently involved in, or have just completed, their 'New Opportunities Fund' ICT training. This is beginning to have a positive impact upon confidence and skills. There is a greater willingness to use computers for teaching.

146. An effective development plan is in place for ICT, and more clusters of machines are being installed in subject departments as the school moves closer to the national average number of pupils per computer. If both pupils and staff are to make the best use of the growing quantity and range of ICT equipment available, more rigour is needed in monitoring ICT use in some subjects. The learning resource area has recently been equipped with new machines and there is access to the Internet from most areas within the school.

147. Since the last inspection there has been a good improvement in ICT resources, in cross-curricular use, and in staff training, although there is still scope for greater use of computers in some subjects.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

148. The quality of provision in modern foreign languages is good.

Key strengths are:

- The standard of teaching;
- The progress made by higher attaining pupils;
- The attitude of pupils towards the subject;
- The improvements in pupil attainments at Key Stage 3 and GCSE;

Key areas for improvement are:

- Information and communication technology to be more systematically integrated into the curriculum;
- Greater consistency in the grading of work, especially in Year 10;
- Pupils to have the opportunity to take more responsibility for their own learning and be more aware of their progress;
- Monitoring and evaluation of teaching to be more regularly and systematically undertaken.

149. At GCSE pupils' level of attainment in 2000 at grades A*-C was above the national average in French, but below in German. Girls' performance consistently outstripped that of boys. Although boys achieved well above average in grades A and B in French, girls made similar achievements at grades A* and A. Results of the 2001 examinations show increased standards in both languages at grades A* - C, bringing German close to the national average of the previous year. This has been achieved by a significant decrease in the number of grade E passes, and an increase in grade C passes, in both languages.

Against the usual trend boys have performed slightly better than girls in French.

150. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is at a high level. In 2000 teachers' assessments showed seventy per cent of pupils attaining in line or better than national expectations, with thirty-nine per cent attaining at higher levels. The 2001 assessments show an increase to seventy-eight and forty-four per cent respectively.

151. In the work seen in the school, the present Year 7 is showing fluency in speaking and accuracy in pronunciation. Higher attaining pupils especially are communicating confidently in complete sentences. Pupils with special educational needs are making good progress in the mixed-ability groups. During Key Stage 3 higher-attaining pupils achieve well above expectations, helped by challenging work and extended tasks. Middle- and lower-attaining pupils improve in accuracy both in speaking and writing, especially spelling, but are limited in their skills in dealing with more complex language. By the end of year 9 the divide between the levels of attainment has widened, but is less marked in listening. By the time pupils are submitting coursework for GCSE, the limitations in the writing skills of some middle and lower attainers become more marked. Despite improvements in accuracy, the restricted content, as well as range and variety of language, depresses the overall achievement. Those same improvements in accuracy, however, enhance attainment in listening and reading tests. Higher-attaining pupils manage a wide range of styles and manipulate complex grammar and syntax with increasing confidence.

152. Pupils' attitudes to French and German are very positive. They enjoy good relationships with their teachers, are eager to participate in lessons and listen attentively to each other's contributions. They collaborate well, especially in pairs, using the target language effectively in games and role-play. They take the work seriously, are rarely distracted, and standards of presentation are good.

153. Teaching is good overall, a third being very good. Teachers conduct most of the lessons in the foreign language, but maintain a sensible balance, using English according to the needs and level of understanding of the group. All the teachers have a profound knowledge of their subject, and a high standard of intonation and fluency. Teaching is at its strongest when teachers know the needs of their pupils well and have high expectations of their performance. In a Year 10 French lesson, a group of middle attaining pupils applied themselves with determination to the increasingly challenging task of producing complex sentences to a model, in order to describe activities available in a town. The teacher had explained that this was designed to enhance the range, variety and style of their language for speaking and writing tests at GCSE. By the end of the lesson, with mutual help, all had succeeded in presenting a wide variety of items, based on a text and on prior knowledge. The lessons are very well planned, paced and timed, and include a variety of activities, covering different skills and using different media effectively. Teachers make effective use of games and 'fun' activities to ensure that as many pupils as possible are involved directly in classroom exchanges, and to increase pupil motivation. Homework is appropriate and designed to extend and consolidate work done in class. Marking is frequent and fairly consistent in Key Stage 3, but much less so in the grading of Year 10 work.

154. Pupils enhance their learning by recalling prior knowledge at a simple level, which they then extend and consolidate through varied and increasingly challenging activities. A lower-attaining Year 9 German set, half of whom had special educational needs, showed good retention and recall skills when being 'tested', by a game, on previously-learned phrases expressing injury or illness. All pupils participated eagerly, and were able, accurately and without confusion, to reproduce items which involved different constructions. Most pupils successfully completed a more challenging task involving

listening to a song based on the same topic, seeing the text on the second listening, then completing a gap-filling exercise on the same text.

155. The curriculum meets the statutory requirements, and has been enhanced from September 2001 by the opportunity for around sixty mainly higher-attaining Year 8 pupils to study a second foreign language. Setting from Year 8 onwards aids differentiation in favour of pupils with special educational needs, but necessitates large groups in sets 1. So far no evidence of difficulties in accommodation or motivation and progress of pupils has surfaced. There is a strong, long-established pen friend and exchange link with a German school, and a pen-friend scheme has just been set up with a Catholic school in France. The department shares the use of French and German language assistants with a nearby school. Pupils have access to information and communications technology software for French and German on the school network, but not on a regular and systematic basis. The department needs to integrate ICT more fully into the delivery of the curriculum, especially with the imminent arrival of new hardware.

156. The department has accurate records of pupil progress and attainment targets, but does not yet fully exploit them. In assessing pupils, teachers provide effective feedback where necessary, and the school's new marking policy should remove inconsistencies in grading. However, pupils are not at present sufficiently aware of how much and how well they are progressing. They could assume more responsibility for their own learning by charting their progress and levels achieved, and contribute more to setting their targets.

157. The department is well managed and developing clear educational direction, tackling major issues such as monitoring pupil progress, and assessment. The latter has already aided curriculum planning in the adoption of new courses, which are more appropriate for the needs of all pupils. There is careful provision of differentiated materials for the highest- and lowest-attaining pupils, and a very detailed scheme of work, linking course materials to National Curriculum targets and levels. Although some monitoring and evaluation of teaching has taken place under the school's performance management scheme, there is a need for a system of more regular, mutual monitoring to be established.

158. Since the last inspection the provision of textbooks has improved, and they are available for pupils to borrow for completion of tasks. Although the number of rooms for specialist language teaching are insufficient, the available facilities are generally spacious and well equipped, apart from large stretches of bare wall which could be adapted to enhance the already effective displays of pupils' work and basic vocabulary and constructions.

- Other improvements since the last inspection are:
 - * Provision and support for special educational needs is more extensive.
 - * Higher-attaining pupils are actively encouraged to extend personal reading and are challenged by more complex work.

MUSIC

159. Provision for music is unsatisfactory.

Key strengths:

- enthusiasm and musical ability of the head of department.

Areas for improvement:

- departmental management;
- curriculum revision;
- resources with particular emphasis on ICT;
- strategies for using assessment to monitor pupils' performance and influence curriculum planning; position of the music room in the light of difficulties experienced during the examinations and similar activities.

160. The 2000 teacher assessments show pupils' standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 to be above average. Inspection evidence shows, however, that the majority of present pupils are achieving below the national average. Pupils in Year 7 enter the school with a wide variety of musical experiences, and the lack of planned progression prevents the majority of pupils from reaching the required standard. Pupils in Year 8 are able to define and play a pentatonic scale and a mode. They also able to identify with reasonable accuracy the countries in which extracts of music were written and give sound reasons for their decision. Pupils in Year 9 are only able to recall the names of notes in the treble staff after much prompting by the teacher. They are also unable to describe what a 'chord' is or the effect of a sharp sign in front of a note.

161. The 2000 GCSE results were just below the school average for those pupils achieving A* - C but above for pupils achieving A* - G. Results for the summer of 2001 were better with all pupils achieving A* - C, although fewer pupils took the examination. No Year 10 lessons were observed as they did not take place during the inspection, and the Year 11 pupils were away from school on work experience.

162. Pupils make unsatisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9, notwithstanding some acceptable progress in three of the lessons observed. In one lesson, pupils in Year 7 are split into groups and told to produce a composition within five weeks, with little or no preparatory work. In another lesson they learn a new song 'Come on everybody let's sing praises to the Lord', and by discussing the chord structure improvise a simple accompaniment. This is played on pitched percussion or keyboards. They also add two other parts to one of the lines, and complete the lesson by singing the song whilst they play the accompaniment. Pupils in year 8 use the notes from the pentatonic scale to form the basis for an improvisatory session in which some question and answer work takes place. They also use the notes from the Dorian mode to compose a modal melody. Rhythms characteristic of the country of composition of the listening pieces are clapped. Pupils in Year 9 are given a folk song to play from staff notation. Extension exercises for the more able pupils include adding a second part in thirds and /or sixths and providing a chordal accompaniment using given chords.

163. No written work from Years 10 and 11 was made available for scrutiny, but compositions heard show good work, with attention to form and some interesting use of the different voice channels available on the computer. There were no commentaries available for these compositions and no evidence was seen of progressive listening work.

164. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. Each pupil has an individual education plan, but as the targets are not based on musical topics, the teacher sets them for each pupil, depending on his or her specialist need. Where pupils have visual difficulties, larger copies of any worksheets or teacher written melodies are provided. In the two Year 9 lessons observed, the teacher gave individual help to some of the less able pupils, assisting them to make better progress than many of the remainder of the class. Talented pupils are identified on the lesson plans, but no effort is made to celebrate or share with the class any of the extra progress these pupils might be capable of.

165. Pupils' response to music is good in Years 7 to 9. They listen attentively to the teacher, and are willing to answer questions when they are confident that they know the answers. With encouragement from the teacher, they are also prepared to make suggestions as to which notes should be added to a modal melody written on the whiteboard to complete the phrase. Relationships between the pupils are good, with the more able members in a group assisting those who are struggling. Behaviour in the classroom is good and when necessary the pupils assist the teacher to put the instruments away in a responsible manner.

166. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is unsatisfactory, although some improvement was observed during the inspection. Initial observations were of lessons in which pupils were given tasks for which they had not been thoroughly prepared by work covered in previous lessons. Later lessons comprised a series of related tasks, which were thoroughly prepared by the teacher. The progression from these tasks to those planned for the following week is logical and is discussed by the teacher at the end of the lessons, thus giving those interested, an opportunity to prepare in advance. The teacher is a practising musician who has a considerable knowledge of the subject. However too much time is spent in lessons imparting detailed knowledge which the pupils are unable to remember. It also wastes valuable practical time. The more successful lessons are those which are well planned to ensure that each section does not last too long helping the pupils to sustain concentration. During longer activities the use of short-term time goals to check on progress helps to keep pupils focused. The teacher manages the pupils satisfactorily except on occasions when disobedience causes him to lose his temper. During class activities the pupils are aware of their progress through the constructive comments made by the teacher, and when group activities are taking place the teacher circulates offering encouragement and advice. No homework was set during the inspection, thus reducing the pupils' opportunities to express themselves using musical vocabulary about music heard, or their experience of participating in a performance. Very little musical vocabulary is used in the classroom either by the teacher or the pupils, and opportunities for expressing opinions vocally are very limited.

167. Management of the department is unsatisfactory. The head of music is a very enthusiastic teacher whose intention is to offer his pupils broad opportunities in both classroom and in extra curricular activities. Compact discs (CDs) have been produced, festivals attended, music evenings promoted for which he has composed some or all of the music, all of which have required organisation and energy. This has resulted in lack of time for the administrative areas of the department, curriculum evaluation and revision, assessment development, thorough target setting, structured professional development, and organisation of the instrumental teachers, who have still not started to teach their pupils. Many extra-curricular activities do not run on a regular basis, with the inevitable consequence on standards and loss of musical experience to the participants.

168. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. This comprises a main teaching room, recording room, and two practice rooms with use of the hall and corridors for group work. The main teaching room is dingy with the curtain always drawn over the sole window. The lack of storage space means that the room is always cluttered with stands and instruments. The close proximity to the hall means that during the examination period and SATS time, composition and learning activities cannot take place owing to noise disturbance. Consequently many lessons are restricted in activity.

169. Resources are also unsatisfactory. Both pitched and non-pitched percussion instruments require repairing/replacing, as do the majority of the keyboards. There is a desperate need for computers to enable the needs of curriculum 2000 to be met and all pupils given their full music entitlement.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

170. The provision for physical education is good.

Strengths:

- Teaching;
- The excellent teacher-pupil relationship that lead to good and very good attitudes and behaviour;
- Extra curricular activities and inter school matches;
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs, both in separate activities as appropriate and inclusion in activities where possible;
- High levels of attainment.

Areas for improvement

- Complete the development of assessment criteria for each activity to the standard of the badminton one already completed;
- Introduce routine monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning to assist the self-evaluation and progress of the department;
- Develop pupil independence in areas such as peer evaluation and organising their own warm up;
- Develop a GCSE course alongside the appropriate facilities for the course.

171. The standard attained by the pupils at the end of year 9, as measured by the teacher assessments, is above average. In 2000 eighty-two percent of pupils reached the expected level compared to a national average of seventy-six percent. In 2001 a new national assessment scheme was used and the percentage of girls and boys attaining the expected level is again similar and above average but the number of boys achieving the higher levels is significantly higher. The attainment of pupils at the end of year 11 is well above the national expectations with the percentage of girls and boys reaching the expected level similar although again a higher percentage of boys exceed the national expectations. There are no national comparisons for the attainment levels at the end of year 11 for pupils following the core physical education course. The school does not offer a GCSE course in physical education.

172. The work seen during the inspection supports the teacher assessments made. The pupils in year 7 show average standards with the boys being better than the girls; this was seen especially in ball handling skills. By the end of year 9 all pupils understand the reasons for the necessity of a warm up, are able to participate in a number of game

situations and a number showing the ability to transfer skills from one game situation to another as seen in the rapid progress made in a rugby lesson. In gymnastics pupils show their ability to work well in groups and have a good special awareness of different parts of their body. The spatial awareness is less obvious in dance.

173. By the end of year 11 the physiological understanding of the warm up is of a higher level, and the games are played with a higher level of tactical skill. Higher attaining pupils are expected to adapt practices to include a greater challenge and are given the opportunity to develop higher skills in extra-curricular activities as well as playing in competitive situations in most sporting areas. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good, where appropriate different activities, such as Boccia, are provided and at other times pupils are fully integrated into lessons. The school has achieved success locally with both girls and boys teams in badminton, basketball, Boccia, cross-country, swimming for the disabled and football. The progress shown by the pupils over the 5 years in school represents very good achievement.

174. The teaching of physical education is good in years 7 to 9 and very good in years 10 and 11. Of the 11 lessons seen, all were satisfactory or better, with over a third very good, and almost 80% good or better. Strengths within teaching are the teacher pupil relationships that inspire pupils in the topic being studied with good expectations leading to very good challenges. In many cases, during the lessons, links are made to other activities such as a comparison of tactical skills in hockey and football and activities that may be carried on out of school. Good adaptations to the lessons are made as required, this was seen on a wet afternoon in poor weather conditions when good use was made of the natural breaks in the game for teaching points. Very good use of pupil questioning and the adaptation of the work to suit the needs of the pupils occurs in many lessons for example in rugby a small group were given additional ball handling skills, in football the higher attaining pupils were asked to concentrate on their weaker side and in all game situations higher attaining pupils were expected to increase the pace and thus the skill level needed in practices. Slightly weaker areas within teaching include times when the teacher tends to give explanations rather than drawing out ideas from the pupils, lessons that have a higher element of discussion rather than practical experimentation and a the lack of encouragement for peer evaluation.

175. The attitudes and behaviour of the pupils in years 7 to 9 is good with many lessons being very good, pupil's work well in groups. Two good examples of pupils responding well to each other were seen in a Year 9 basketball lesson where girls helped another group put a tactical skill into practice and a year 8 boys rugby lesson when spontaneous applause was given for a particularly good effort in enabling the ball to make good progress. Attitudes and behaviour were excellent in the year 10 lessons seen. Excellent relationships between the teacher and pupils lead to very enthusiastic, pleasant competitive situations and on one afternoon where the weather was particularly unpleasant no complaints or comments were made about being outside and the year 10 girls gave one hundred percent in effort.

176. The areas of physical education offered to pupils in years 7 to 11 have improved since the last inspection so that now the range studied by the boys complies with the National Curriculum requirements. There is also a greater range and variety for all years although during Year 9 there is still a heavy bias towards games. Pupils of a range of abilities have the opportunity to experience competitive situations in the inter-form matches; with pupils having the responsibility for selecting the teams and choosing their own captain. There are extra-curricular activities at lunchtimes and after school on most days.

177. The facilities for physical education are unsatisfactory as reported at the last inspection. The outdoor facilities have not been improved and in fact some of the grass area has been taken for new buildings. During the inspection rain on one afternoon showed the drainage problems of the field and all-weather pitch. The all-weather pitch rapidly showed areas of standing water and the surface became slippery causing difficulty for girls playing football. The uneven hard areas also quickly collected water and even on a dry day the uneven surface caused problems in teaching ball control skills in a hockey lesson. It is obvious that when tennis nets are fitted pupils are playing well below the net causing inaccurate game situations. The sports hall is a spacious area when used by one group but in the majority occasions when the area is curtained off into two areas noise from one group impedes the learning of the other group, in that hearing instructions of teachers and contributions by pupils is very difficult and without skillful teaching concentration can waver.

178. Leadership of the department is good with many very good aspects. The staff within the department share ideas and make the best use of the facilities available. The department is reviewing schemes of work in line with new National Curriculum requirements incorporating aspects of literacy and numeracy ICT and citizenship within those schemes of work although the opportunities for spiritual and cultural development are not yet identified in the schemes. The department has also moved over to using the National Curriculum levels within physical education and in some topics such as badminton they have developed very good criteria to enable pupils to know their current level attainment and what they need to do to improve; this detail needs to be extended to all other areas. Cross-moderation of standards is carried out by all staff for end of year 9 and Year 11 assessments so that comparisons can be made. The department is currently looking at reasons why boys attain better levels and ways of enhancing further the attainment of girls. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching within physical education is still at an early stage. The newly qualified teacher within the department was given very good support and monitoring development of her teaching was good, however this has not yet been extended, on a formal basis, to all other staff within the department.

179. The Improvement since the last inspection has been good the good aspects commended at the previous inspection have been maintained, the curriculum for years 7 to 11 has been improved, the standard of teaching has also improved with a higher proportion of lessons being very good and the lack of flexibility of learning styles is continuing to be addressed with the new schemes of work identifying the particular opportunities for the different teaching styles.