

INSPECTION REPORT

THE BYRCHALL HIGH SCHOOL

ASHTON-IN-MAKERFIELD, WIGAN

LEA area: WIGAN

Unique reference number: 106533

Headteacher: Mr S. J. Wall

Reporting inspector: Mrs J. Tracey
20270

Dates of inspection: 18th - 22nd March 2002

Inspection number: 189740

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 controlled
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Warrington Road Ashton-in-Makerfield Wigan Lancashire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs M. Dyson
Date of previous inspection:	October, 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
20270	June Tracey	Registered inspector		<p>The school's results and pupils' achievements</p> <p>How well are pupils taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
13762	Norman Shelley	Lay inspector		<p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
11508	Christopher Griffin	Team inspector	English	
10308	John Paddick	Team inspector	Mathematics	
21866	David Tracey	Team inspector	Science	
27803	Joseph Clark	Team inspector	<p>Information and communication technology</p> <p>Equal opportunities</p>	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
29849	Karen Cowley	Team inspector	Geography	
31779	Vivian Harrison	Team inspector	Design and technology	
11975	Thelma McIntosh-Clark	Team inspector	Music	
19452	Antony Pearson	Team inspector	Physical education	
3930	Roy Pitcher	Team inspector	Religious education	
23709	Ann Powell	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
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31680	Philip Redican	Team inspector	Art	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Byrchall High School is a mixed comprehensive school with 1128 pupils of ages 11 - 16 on roll. Numbers are rising because the admission number has increased. Currently, there are more pupils in Years 7 and 8 than in the other year groups. There are significantly more boys than girls in Years 8 and 10. The school has a long history of service to the community and the majority of pupils come from the local area. The proportion of pupils claiming eligibility for free school meals (8 per cent) is below average. Very few pupils come from ethnic minorities and there are no pupils for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average. The majority of these have moderate learning difficulties. The proportion with formal statements of need and more severe difficulties is average. Overall, pupils' attainment on entry is average. The school is designated as both a Beacon School and a Training School. It shares and promotes good practices in literacy, information and communication technology (ICT), the teaching of gifted and talented pupils and the training of student teachers, with other schools.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Byrchall High School is a very good school with some outstanding features. Standards of work are well above average in Years 9 and 11. Pupils of all abilities achieve very well because of their positive attitudes to learning and very good teaching. The school is very well led and managed and gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards are well above average in English, mathematics and science. They are above average in most other subjects.
- Pupils of all abilities achieve very well.
- Teaching is very good.
- The leadership and management are very strong. They promote a good ethos amongst pupils and staff.
- Pupils are very well cared for. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good. They underpin the school's work and contribute to its effectiveness.

What could be improved

- The satisfactory standards in art, music and ICT could be raised further.
- The use of assessment information could be further extended in Years 7 and 8 to inform pupils how well they are doing in relation to National Curriculum levels.
- The monitoring of pupils' work in personal, social and health education in Years 7 to 9.
- The amount of additional support in the classroom for pupils with special educational needs.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since the previous inspection in October 1996. Overall, standards and results have improved and the school has become a Beacon School and a Training School. A sophisticated system for measuring and monitoring pupils' progress enables the school to identify and act upon underachievement at an early stage. The quality of teaching has improved, there now being a higher proportion of very good teaching. Accommodation has been improved and extended, notably though the recent addition of a new building. However, maintenance work is still required on the older buildings, some of which are in poor condition. The school has successfully dealt with issues raised at the time of the previous inspection. The library has been refurbished and well equipped as a Learning Resource Centre. Most heads of subject departments are much more involved and effective as middle managers. Provision for ICT has improved. The school recognises the need for tighter management and administration of whole-school ICT facilities.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	All schools			Similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	B	C	B	C	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

Overall, pupils achieve very well in Years 7 to 9 in relation to their starting points in Year 7. In Year 9, standards of work are well above average in English, mathematics and science, above average in geography, history, modern foreign languages and religious education, and average in other subjects. In 2001, pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were well above average in English, mathematics and science when compared with all schools. Compared with similar schools, they were well above average in mathematics and above average in English and science. The proportions of pupils achieving higher levels than expected for their age (level 5) were well above average in each of the three subjects. Pupils' performance has improved year-on-year and the trend in the pupils' average point score is above that found nationally. Overall, pupils' reading, writing and numerical skills are well above average and contribute significantly to the good standards in other subjects.

Standards of work in Year 11 are also well above average. Overall, pupils of all abilities, including the gifted and talented and those with special educational needs, continue to achieve very well. Pupils achieve very well in English, mathematics and science; standards are well above average. Good achievement in design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages, music, religious education and physical education (GCSE) is reflected in above average standards. Achievement and standards are average in art and ICT. The school achieved its best ever GCSE results in 2001. The proportions of pupils gaining five or more A* - C and A* - G grades were well above average. The proportion gaining one or more A* - G grades was in the highest five per cent nationally, which is creditable considering that in almost every subject, including English, mathematics and science, higher proportions of the year group were entered than found nationally. The school sets itself very challenging targets that were almost achieved in 2001. The overall trend in results over the last five years is below average. This reflects variations in the ability range of pupils in the different year groups.

There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls or of different ability groups.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have very good attitudes to school. They respond well to the many opportunities offered to them and most are keen to live up to the standards expected of them.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The great majority of pupils behave well and respect the school's code of conduct. The behaviour of a small minority is sometimes challenging but it is well handled by the teachers through consistent application of the disciplinary procedures. The number of fixed-term exclusions is above average. Pupils move about the school in an orderly manner, even in heavily congested areas.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Relationships between members of the school community are very good and contribute to the good learning environment.
Attendance	Attendance is above average. Unauthorised absence is very low.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is very good throughout the school and results in a similar quality of learning for pupils of all abilities. The quality of teaching has continued to improve since the previous inspection. It is a significant factor in the well above average standards being achieved and indicative of the reason why the school is designated as a Training School for student teachers.

Teachers create a secure environment in which pupils are motivated to learn. They have high expectations, which are transmitted to pupils. The strengths of the teaching lie in the teachers' very good subject knowledge and meticulous planning. Good use is made of praise and encouragement to raise pupils' confidence. Written work is usually well marked with useful comments showing pupils how to improve and indicating to what extent they are meeting the targets set for them. Weaknesses are few but where they do exist are linked to lack of urgency in lessons and a poor balance of activities. In these situations pupils are not sufficiently challenged or motivated to strive for the highest standards. The teaching of English, science and history is very good throughout the school. It is good in mathematics, design and technology, geography, modern foreign languages, physical education and religious education. It is also good in music in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is satisfactory throughout the school in art and ICT, and in music in Years 7 to 9. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are taught very effectively and methodically within English and mathematics. They are reinforced and used well in other subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum provides good learning opportunities for all pupils. It is enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities that provide well for pupils' different interests. Provision for careers education is also good. Strategies for teaching literacy and numerical skills are very effective.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school makes good provision for pupils with special educational needs. They benefit from the teachers' acute awareness of their requirements and the manner in which they are directly involved in assessing their own learning. The amount of provision from learning support assistants is limited, but, where available, is very effective. The school provides very well for gifted and talented pupils through an interesting range of challenging activities and extension courses.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. The provision fosters sound values without suppressing pupils' individuality. Provision for social development is very good. It is good for moral and cultural development and satisfactory for spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils are valued as individuals and the school cares for them well. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and monitoring progress are very good and underpin the high standards and very good achievement. The use of assessment information could be further extended in Years 7 and 8.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. Leadership is purposeful and visionary. The headteacher is effectively supported by the senior management team and other key personnel. They are well supported by a committed team of teaching and non-teaching staff. Staff morale is high and underpins the caring ethos within the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are experienced and fully committed to the school. They disburse their responsibilities well and set targets based on high expectations. Governors have a sound understanding of the school's strengths, weaknesses and aspirations. Statutory requirements are met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school's analysis of its performance is thorough and self-evaluative. It focuses attention on areas for development and effectively contributes to formulation of priorities in the school development plan
The strategic use of resources	The school understands and satisfactorily applies the principles of best value. The management of resources and finances is good and reflects targets in the school development plan.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pupils' academic and personal progress.• The good standard of teaching.• The leadership and management of the school.• The school expects pupils to work hard and do their best.• The overall quality of support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The setting of homework.• The organisation of parents' consultation evenings.• Information about pupils' progress.• The school to work more closely with parents.

An independent survey of parents' views that was undertaken a year previously was wider in scope than the questionnaire. It generally confirmed the majority of parents' present views.

Inspectors agree with the positive views expressed by parents. In general, adequate and relevant homework is set. It usefully supplements work in class and contributes constructively to the development of pupils' independence in study. In a few instances, for example in middle and lower ability groups in Year 9, homework is not given regularly. In the course of a year, parents are well informed by several means and have satisfactory access to information about pupils' progress. The school sends letters to parents to notify them of their children's good performance or underachievement. However, in Years 7 to 9, annual written reports are not sufficiently clear and consistent across all subjects about pupils' attainment, strengths and weaknesses. Overall, it was felt that the school made considerable effort to work as closely as it could with parents. Inspectors are unable to comment on the organisation of parents' evenings and can only record that some parents say that there is insufficient privacy.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Overall, pupils' attainment on entry to the school is average. The proportion of pupils on the register of special educational need is below average; the number with formal statements of need is average.
2. In 2001, pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were well above average in English, mathematics and science. Compared with similar schools they were well above average in mathematics and above average in English and science. The proportions reaching higher levels than expected for their age were well above average in each of the three subjects. Pupils' performance has improved year-on-year and the trend in average points per pupil is above the national trend. Girls and boys achieve similarly.
3. Evidence from the inspection, including lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work, indicates that, overall, standards of work are well above average in Year 9. They are well above average in English, mathematics and science, above average in geography, history, modern foreign languages and religious education, and average in other subjects. Overall, pupils achieve very well in Years 7 to 9. In art, ICT and music, where achievement is satisfactory rather than good, pupils could be presented with greater challenge to stretch their potential to its limit.
4. The overall trend in GCSE results, taken over the last five years, is below the national average. This reflects the difference in the range of pupils' abilities within different year groups. The average point score per pupil was above average in 1999 and 2001, and average in 2000. The school achieved its best ever results in 2001. The proportions of pupils gaining five or more A* - C and A* - G grades were well above average. The proportion gaining one or more A* - G grades was very high. This is particularly creditable considering that in almost every subject, including English, mathematics and science, a higher proportion of pupils is entered for the examinations than found nationally. Compared with similar schools, results at five or more A* - C grades were above average. They were well above average at five or more A* - G grades, and in the highest five per cent nationally at one or more A* - G grades. All pupils take short GCSE courses in design and technology and ICT in Years 10 and 11. Results are commendable, for example, in 2001, almost three-quarters of all Year 11 pupils gained grades A* - C in ICT. The school sets itself very high targets, possibly a little more aspirational than realistic. The school did well to get close to achieving them, and did in the one or more A* - G range. Overall, boys and girls achieve similarly, as do pupils in each of the ability ranges. Gifted and talented pupils are identified within their working groups and they achieve at levels matching their ability.
5. Overall, standards of work in Year 11 are well above average and pupils achieve very well. There is some variation from subject to subject. Standards of work in English, mathematics and science are well above average. They are above average in design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages, music, physical education (GCSE) and religious education. In other subjects they are average. Achievement is very good in English, mathematics and science. It is good in all other subjects except for art and ICT where it is satisfactory. This is because some aspects of each course are not pursued in as much depth as is necessary.
6. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well in relation to their standards on entry. Lesson observations and scrutiny of work confirm that, overall, they make very good progress. They are entered for GCSE examinations and often obtain better grades than might initially have been expected. Year 7 pupils with the very weakest literacy and numeracy skills achieve satisfactorily, but not as well as they might, because not enough additional support is available for them when they work in some of the larger teaching groups. The school is aware that consideration needs to be given to this as otherwise these pupils will progressively fall behind in their learning.

7. Pupils' reading and writing skills are developing well and are well above average. Pupils are taught critical reading skills which they apply well in English and other lessons. Teachers help pupils to structure their writing for its specific purpose and the progression in continuous writing is clearly evident in all subjects. Teachers make effective use of literacy skills and this underpins the good standards achieved.

8. Overall, pupils' numerical skills and competence in their use are very good. The teaching in this area is very effective and a contributory factor to pupils' confidence in transferring these skills to cross-curricular work.

9. Teachers make good use of information technology skills to support learning in other subjects. Pupils use computers confidently to present and research information. They remember what they have learned and apply it satisfactorily as required. For example, word processing skills and spreadsheets are used to calculate profit and loss, produce graphs and charts and costings for food. Pupils understand what they are doing and know how to access the appropriate programs and files.

10. There are no pupils for whom English is an additional language.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

11. Pupils' attitudes are very good. Their values, behaviour, attendance and personal development are good. Standards have been maintained since the previous inspection. Parents are pleased with the standards of behaviour.

12. Pupils are right to be enthusiastic about their school. They recognise the very good results that are achieved and the support that they are offered. They say that they like almost all of their lessons and particularly enjoy the extra-curricular activities, in which many participate, and the opportunities for cultural exchanges. Pupils' attitudes towards their work are positive. Almost all pupils work hard and do their best. Many are keen to receive extra tuition in order to achieve higher grades in their examinations. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into the life of the school and respond accordingly. They are very highly focused, keen to learn and constantly on task in lessons, and when additional support is provided for them in withdrawal sessions and registration periods. Their behaviour, too, is of a very high standard with only rare instances of disruptive behaviour.

13. The quality of learning and pupils' achievement are directly and very positively affected by the good standard of pupils' behaviour and their attitudes. A calm atmosphere prevails in the very large majority of lessons and pupils conduct themselves in a sensible and responsible manner. When moving about the school and at break times pupils are orderly, including in areas that are heavily congested. A few pupils fail to exercise appropriate self-discipline and this is usually in the few lessons that are not sufficiently challenging or where there is a temporary teacher. Since the previous inspection, more instances of challenging behaviour have led to the need to exclude a greater number of pupils. Although the number of exclusions last year was above the average for secondary schools, approximately half of them were caused by just nine pupils. Almost all of the remainder were excluded once and did not re-offend. Bullying is not an issue in the school. The very few instances that occur are dealt with immediately and effectively. Relationships between staff and pupils are very good. They get on well with each other, are tolerant and mutually supportive in the course of their work and socially.

14. Pupils' personal development is good overall. Some pupils rise to a very high level of personal maturity and this is often recognised by appointment to positions of responsibility, such as Head Boy or Girl. All pupils who are offered responsibility respond well and carry out tasks, such as form captain, prefect or buddy, in a conscientious manner. Pupils learn to have a regard for others and this is demonstrated by their efforts to support charities and their hosting of an annual party for considerable numbers of senior citizens. Their experiences in competitive sport, public performances on stage, community service, cultural exchanges abroad and work experience add further dimensions to their growing maturity. Most pupils develop appropriate attitudes towards the social and moral issues of society

and develop respect for the values and beliefs of others. However, lapses do occur such as disrespectful attitudes at times by a few pupils and, for example, smoking in school without regard for the rules and the possible effects on others. Those pupils who drop chewing gum, for example on the carpeted floor of the new Learning Resource Centre, have too little regard for property and hygiene.

15. Attendance is good. It is above the average for secondary schools. Unauthorised absence is very low. Pupils arrive punctually for the start of school and their lessons.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

16. Overall, teaching is very good. It is equally good in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 - 11. A total of 161 lessons was observed during the inspection. Three per cent were outstanding, 39 per cent very good, 38 per cent good and three per cent unsatisfactory. The remainder was satisfactory. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection, especially with respect to the amount of very good teaching which, based on the lessons seen, has trebled. The quality of teaching is a significant factor in the consistently good standards achieved throughout the school. It is also indicative of the reason why the school is designated as a Training School for student teachers. It receives funding for this work from the national training agency and through its work as a Beacon School.

17. The high standards of teaching result in very good learning and achievement for pupils of all ages. Learning is productive, as is evident from the extent to which pupils remember what they have learned in previous lessons and apply it in new work. From average standards on entry, pupils achieve very well from their starting points and, overall, attainment is well above average by the time pupils are aged 14 and 16.

18. The major strengths in the teaching are the teachers' very good subject knowledge, high expectations and meticulous planning. Teachers plan lessons carefully, taking into account how individual pupils learn. Activities are devised to capture pupils' interest and motivate them to want to learn more. For example, in a very good history lesson in Year 10, lower ability pupils gained great satisfaction from working through the complex background leading to the Treaty of Versailles. The teacher's skill in structuring the work, incorporating use of a video and overhead projector, made the lesson fascinating. It caused pupils to interject with comments which showed they remembered earlier work and had sounded out members of their own families. Good use is made of praise and encouragement to raise pupils' confidence. Where marking of written work is good, pupils receive helpful advice which informs them how to improve further. In Years 9 and above this is often linked to target grades which are known to pupils and matched to those in national tests and GCSE examination. In Years 7 and 8, this practice is less consistent and is an area targeted for further development.

19. Four outstanding lessons were seen during the inspection, in English, history, religious education and physical education. Common features of these were the stimulating, highly dramatic teaching which made serious demands on pupils, bringing great satisfaction when success was achieved. The teachers were not afraid to aim high and to leave pupils with open-ended challenges at the end of the lesson. The Year 7 dance lesson, for boys, was exceptional. The teacher built up the introduction to the practical activity so skilfully, getting boys to follow his cues, that they began to 'dance' without realising it. The learning was so good that the pupils were left looking forward with anticipation to the next lesson. The few unsatisfactory lessons were due to poor planning, a slow pace to learning, and unchallenging work for the majority of pupils in the group. Weaknesses in teaching, albeit in otherwise satisfactory lessons, were lack of urgency and poor balance of time for the various activities. In these lessons pupils sometimes 'switched off' before the end because interest was not sustained. The large numbers in some classes sometime restrict opportunities for work in small groups because some classrooms are small. Teachers usually manage these situations well and try to compensate by finding other means of involving pupils in independent work.

20. The quality of teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good. This is because teachers in the department are specialists, plan their work very well and liaise very closely with subject teachers and with learning support assistants. They consistently employ strategies geared to meet pupils' needs. The learning support assistants are particularly effective because they share the planning with the teachers. However, the amount of additional support available is insufficient to fully meet the needs of pupils. For example, in one of the lessons observed, a dyspraxic pupil received help in only one period of a three period session of resistant materials, and another no support in physical education. Progress in one English class, in which nine of the pupils had statements, was diminished because of lack of support.

21. Integral to its work as a Beacon School there is a good focus on the teaching of gifted and talented pupils. Characteristic of the approaches being used is the design of unusual activities that stimulate pupils to explore on their own and have confidence to take risks in their thinking. All the work is underpinned by the teachers' enthusiasm for their subject that is noticeably transferred to the pupils.

22. Strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy skills are very effective. Within English and mathematics lessons pupils are given good grounding in basic skills that they transfer well to other subjects. Although there are no formal whole-school policies for literacy and numeracy there is clear evidence that teachers reinforce knowledge, understanding and use of these skills in both oral work and the follow-up to written work. Computing skills are taught satisfactorily. Most pupils are confident and competent in transferring these to other subjects. For instance, in a Year 7 science lesson, the pupils worked individually on an excellent, previously prepared program which enables them to delve into classification of plants and insects. Pupils gained much new knowledge and were able to integrate it with what they already knew to produce answers to searching questions which challenged their understanding to its limit. Information technology is not used as consistently in some subjects, for example art, geography and modern foreign languages, partly because of problems with access to sufficient numbers of computers. The school is aware of this and is aiming to improve the situation.

23. Throughout the school, teaching is very good in English, science and history. It is good in mathematics, design and technology, geography, modern foreign languages, physical education and religious education. It is also good in music in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is satisfactory throughout the school in art and ICT, and in music in Years 7 to 9. The teaching of social and vocational subjects is good.

24. The high quality of the teaching reflects the commitment of staff and the constant re-evaluation of practices. In sharing these with others through the Beacon School activities, teachers have to think objectively about the contributory elements and their effect on pupils' learning. The school believes that this has lifted its own teaching, which is confirmed by the improvement noted since the previous inspection.

25. Response to the parents' questionnaire indicated that parents were pleased with the quality of teaching. Inspectors endorse this view. Concern was expressed about homework. Here inspectors found that there were some instances of homework not being set regularly, for example, in middle and lower ability groups in Year 9.

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

26. The quality and range of learning opportunities offered to pupils are good. In Years 7 to 9, as well as National Curriculum subjects and religious education, pupils follow a course in personal, social and health education (PSHE). In Year 7, pupils are taught drama as a separate subject. There are opportunities for Year 8 and 9 pupils who show an aptitude for languages to take German as well as French. In Year 9, pupils who do not take German follow an economic awareness course. No pupil is disapplied from the National Curriculum. A substantial range of accredited courses is offered in Years 10 and 11. As well as full and short GCSE courses in a wide range of subjects, including two modern foreign languages,

drama and child-care, pupils can study for the Youth Challenge Award and a small number of vocational qualifications. The range of these could usefully be extended to cater for pupils who would like their studies to include more practical applications. Pupils follow a well-structured social education course that includes elements of religious education, citizenship and careers. The school is developing good links with industry and pupils are involved in work placements through the Rathbone and Metro Training schemes. In some subjects, such as English, mathematics and science, the grouping of pupils by prior attainment enables teaching to be highly focused on the specific needs of the group. This has contributed to pupils' above average attainment.

27. The school offers a suitable and varied curriculum that meets the needs of its pupils and provides equally for girls and boys and pupils of different abilities. Unlike at the time of the previous inspection all statutory requirements are now fully met. Since then, the time given to the taught curriculum has increased. However, timetabling arrangements for pupils in some subjects has a detrimental effect on pupils' learning. In ICT and design and technology pupils are taught for three consecutive periods with the inevitable loss of concentration in the last part of the session. The school has recognised this and changes are already planned for next year. In mathematics, double lessons in Year 10 adversely affect pupils' attentiveness. Large class sizes in some subjects, particularly when taught in small rooms in cramped conditions, restrict the range of teaching styles and opportunities for group work.

28. The school makes effective provision for the development of literacy and numerical skills. These are well promoted through other subjects.

29. Good provision is made for pupils with special educational needs to follow the full National Curriculum. In Years 10 and 11 they have the option to follow National Vocational Qualification courses and the Youth Award Programme of the Awards Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). Pupils are afforded every opportunity to make progress and be successful. In Year 11 they are entered for a full range of GCSEs.

30. The school has made a particular focus of provision for gifted and talented pupils in its Beacon School initiatives. Bridging courses have been established in biology, chemistry, physics and modern foreign languages to provide links between GCSE and Advanced Level studies. These are open to pupils from Byrchall and other local schools. A considerable number of pupils take up the courses and the feedback clearly demonstrates how much they are valued. Parents drew attention to this at the Parents' meeting, reinforcing the fact that the 'taster courses' helped pupils to make the correct decisions about post-16 options. Similarly, there are extension classes in science in Years 7 to 9 to enable pupils to work towards and achieve National Curriculum levels 7+. These are well in excess of the nationally expected level (5) for fourteen-year-olds. Pupils' results (some from those attending from other schools) verify the success of these classes. Teachers also undertake work with Year 6 pupils from contributory primary schools in a food partnership pilot project and in French. The courses are popular and successful.

31. Within the school's own curricular arrangements, extra classes, setting challenging assignments, are provided for high achievers in English and mathematics in order to enable pupils to achieve higher grades in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE at the end of Year 11. In French, too, a sharp focus on high attainment results in many pupils gaining A* grades in GCSE.

32. A very good range of extra-curricular activities enables pupils to enhance their learning in music, sport, drama, visits out of school and through a wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs. Musical activities could be extended to include more instrumental work. An annual school production involves staff and pupils in music, drama and dance. There are annual trips abroad of both an educational and recreational nature. The Learning Resource Centre is open before and after school and at lunchtimes for pupils to use computers. However, only a restricted number of computers is available to pupils which is insufficient to satisfy demand, so pupils without a computer can be limited in opportunity to do research or complete homework.

Careers education

33. Provision for careers education is good and there are some very good features. The scheme of work, particularly for Year 11, is very carefully planned and lesson activities are relevant and challenging. Resources are identified and used well. Input by agencies and a careers advisory service contribute well to the quality of learning. A work-shadowing day and careers conventions enhance awareness of the world of work. Accommodation for the careers department is adequate but does not reflect the importance of careers education and does not provide specialist facilities. Computers are available, but with limited access, so that pupils can use relevant careers related information and guidance. There is a good careers section on the school's internet web site. The school provides good information about subject options and consultation opportunities for pupils and parents. The department is well managed. Staff development takes place and is relevant. As yet, it does not include placements in commercial organisations to keep careers staff up-to-date with current best practices, particularly regarding recruitment processes.

Personal, social and health education

34. The school's provision for PSHE is satisfactory. All relevant elements, including sex education and drugs awareness, are included in the well-developed programmes of study. There is regular reinforcement of the essential message about drugs. External agencies and organisations make a good contribution to the overall programme. During Years 7 to 9, PSHE is taught within the various subjects of the curriculum. Subject and form teachers satisfactorily integrate the work into their other teaching but there is no check on the consistency of the provision across different classes within each year group. In Years 10 and 11, social education and citizenship take place for one lesson per week on a rota basis with other subjects. The teaching by specialist staff and visiting speakers is good. Pupils are encouraged to give reasoned thought to their personal views on moral and social issues. For example, in Year 10, pupils discussed law and order with a police liaison officer and were very forthright in expressing their opinions about punishment and justice.

Community links

35. The contribution of the community to pupils' learning is good. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are given the opportunity of undertaking community service as part of the school's award scheme and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Pupils host an annual party for senior citizens and they also support many charities. The nearer and wider community is used for a wide range of experiences such as fieldwork to enhance class work, competitive sport and cultural exchanges. Employers support the school, for example, by offering work experience placements. An annual carol service is held at a local church and representatives of the British Legion attend an annual school service.

36. Links with primary schools and colleges of further education are very good. Year heads are attached to each of the main contributory primary schools and liaison arrangements are very good. A joint summer school is held and Year 6 pupils attend the high school for clubs and activities, for example, the Harry Potter club for Year 6 and Year 7 pupils. Teachers of French have spent time in the primary schools giving pupils a taste of the language. Staff from local colleges attend Year 10 and 11 parents' evenings and visit the school to talk to pupils about transition from high school to further education. Links with local colleges have been developed in food technology, science and mathematics. As a result of its Beacon status, the school is developing valuable links with other primary and secondary schools both locally and as far afield as Kent.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

37. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, underpinned by the aims and code of conduct declared in the prospectus, is good.

38. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. Since the previous inspection the school has maintained its values of tolerance and open-minded attitudes within a broadly Christian approach.

Each year group benefits from assembly held twice weekly in which there is time for prayer and an opportunity to reflect on the theme for the week. During tutorial time on other days pupils are able to discuss with their form tutor different aspects of the current theme. Spiritual values are explored in a number of subject areas, although the practice is not consistent. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on the spiritual values of the medieval church in history, and in design and technology they appreciate the exhilaration of solving problems. In English, pupils become aware of the spiritual effects of poetry. Particularly good examples were found in drama, where pupils in Year 11 were deeply moved by the exploration of themes of betrayal, cruelty and reconciliation within the family. Good spiritual awareness is found, too, in all year groups in religious education lessons.

39. Provision for pupils' moral education is good. Expectations of pupils are high, and pupils are clearly taught the difference between right and wrong. In this respect older pupils provide good role models for those younger than themselves. The ethos of the school places great emphasis on tolerance of differences of cultures, traditions, beliefs and feelings. The school recently played host to a student teacher of the Muslim faith who was warmly welcomed into the community. In most areas of the curriculum pupils have a wealth of opportunities to discuss moral issues. In history, pupils reflect on the consequences of war and the effects of famine, and become aware of the moral aspects associated with slavery, the holocaust and the use of nuclear weapons. Display by the department includes pupils' sensitive reactions to these issues. In ICT they discuss the need for data protection and the right of the individual to privacy. In English, teachers take advantage of opportunities to promote discussion through the texts being studied. For example, pupils reading novels such as 'To Kill A Mocking Bird', thoughtfully considered the effects of racial and social prejudice. In art, pupils explore ways of illustrating their reactions to various moral issues including racist attitudes in sport, protecting endangered species, and the horrors of war. In physical education, pupils satisfactorily learn the importance of teamwork and personal commitment. Through its social education programme, the school aims to raise pupils' awareness of community responsibilities. The community liaison officer is a frequent visitor, and as a result of talks given by volunteers and representatives of local and national charities pupils become aware of the plight of people in disadvantaged circumstances. They raise substantial funds for a number of charities, such as Mencap.

40. Provision for pupils' social education is very good. In most subjects pupils have regular opportunities to work collaboratively in pairs and in groups. Large numbers of pupils take up opportunities to play sport, or participate in dramatic and choral activities. Many take part in various other clubs such as chess, computers or 'The Harry Potter Club' at lunchtime or after school. In the interests of broadening pupils' horizons there is an extensive programme of visits and trips. Each year, pupils from Year 7 spend a week in London, and the modern foreign languages department organises visits to France and Germany. The Trekkers club involves around thirty pupils on countryside walks and in residential visits to the Lake District. As a result of good links with the local rugby league club, pupils are able to visit and use the facilities available there.

41. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. By studying the works of eminent authors, painters and musicians from different historical periods pupils develop a good understanding of the cultures both of this country and of other western European countries. By contact with native speakers in modern foreign languages pupils become aware of the values and attitudes of neighbouring but different traditions. Pupils' understanding of non-western cultures is developed in music, where they learn to compose in the idioms of Indian and Balinese music, in art, where they create African masks, and in food technology, by creating dishes from different traditions. The school is currently creating internet links with Muslim and Jewish schools and is considering various other initiatives in order to prepare its pupils for living in a multi-ethnic, multi-faith society. The school has very few pupils from ethnic minorities. It is proactive in ensuring that pupils have opportunities to respond to situations that promote understanding of the importance of racial harmony within society.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

42. The school's arrangements for the care and welfare of its pupils are very good. Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' attendance, behaviour and personal development are good. The very good standards described by the previous inspection have been maintained. Parents are pleased with the standard of care provided.

43. Child protection procedures are in place and are well managed. The arrangements for health and safety and first aid are very good and risk assessments are carried out in all relevant areas of the school and its activities. The school recognises that lockers would be a helpful facility for pupils but is unable to provide them owing to insufficient available space. Specialist agencies, relating to health, special education needs, behavioural difficulties, attendance and social concerns, provide good quality service to the school. Relationships between adults in the school and pupils are mutually respectful and constructive and form the basis of an environment that is conducive to learning and in which pupils feel valued, safe, encouraged and supported.

44. Attendance is closely monitored. The school continues to recognise and encourage even better attendance despite the fact that it is already above the average for secondary schools.

45. All teachers have very high expectations of the pupils' behaviour. Good multi-staged strategies are in place to help pupils who misbehave to consider their actions and to improve. A social inclusion teacher counsels pupils very effectively. This service could usefully be extended in order to provide for the increasing numbers of pupils who present challenging behaviour. Personal support plans and targets for improvement are used to help pupils and the support of parents is engaged in the process. The school's approach is almost entirely positive but the severity of some offences leaves no option but to exercise the right of fixed-term exclusion in the best interests of all pupils. In many instances exclusion has had the desired effect of deterring repetition.

46. The school employs the very best methods of achieving good attendance and behaviour. That is, by providing good teaching, relevant and stimulating learning activities and an enjoyable, supportive and motivational environment. Consequently, pupils want to come to school and are able to enjoy all of their academic and social experiences.

47. The school makes good provision for pupils' personal development. Form tutors maintain records of pupils' self-completed profiles that are later used to prepare their records of achievement. Numerous opportunities are offered to pupils for responsibility and involvement in the community. Out of school experiences, such as work placements, fieldwork to support studies, competitive sport, exchange visits abroad and public performances contribute considerably to pupils' personal development. The programme for personal and social education, assemblies and registration periods help pupils to develop responsible attitudes towards moral and social issues. Pupils are taught, and have the opportunity to practise, team working, problem solving, decision-making and self-evaluation skills. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to use their initiative, for example in research relating to studies and by involvement in managing their own community through the school and pupil consultation process.

48. The greatest care is taken to identify pupils with special educational needs and provide for their needs. The school maintains excellent records to track progress from the time pupils start at the school. A particularly good feature is the focus on the needs and difficulties of the incoming Year 7 in the end-of-year in-service training for staff, led by the special educational needs co-ordinator. Individual education plans are of a high quality and are reviewed very thoroughly once a year, with appropriate adjustment at other times. Teachers and learning support assistants, who work very closely together to identify the best ways to meet their pupils' needs, display very great care and concern for them.

49. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment are very good. The school collects and records a substantial amount of data on its pupils when they enter the school. This is put to very good use by both the school and subject departments in their planning and organisation. Initial assessment information, plus the results of the school's own testing, is given to teachers to help them set targets for pupils and to place pupils into groups by ability. From this early stage, assessment results are used effectively to identify

pupils who are underachieving and who require extra monitoring, or who are doing especially well and deserve commendation. Throughout Years 7 to 11 pupils have a mid-term review to check how well they are doing against the targets set for them at the beginning of the year. In Years 7 to 9, targets relate to end of Year 9 tests in English, mathematics and science. In Years 10 and 11, they are matched to predictions for GCSE.

50. The support that pupils receive to ensure that they make progress in their work is very good. At the heart of the system are year heads and form tutors. Twice a year they carry out a review of each pupil's performance, interviewing them on an individual basis. Parents of those pupils who are under-performing are contacted and staff arrange to keep a watchful eye on progress. Subject departments make good use of assessment data in setting their own targets for Year 9 and Year 11 pupils. Pupils in Years 9 to 11 are fully aware of the national test levels and GCSE grades they are working towards but in Years 7 and 8 subject departments do not consistently use National Curriculum levels to inform pupils how well they are doing in relation to national standards. This is an area for improvement.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

51. Parents hold the school in high regard. The partnership between school and parents is good and is stronger than at the time of the previous inspection. Parents are right to be pleased with the quality of education and support that are provided. They recognise the improvements in academic standards and the learning facilities. A small proportion of the responses to the questionnaire indicated that some parents thought the school did not work closely enough with them or keep them informed about their children's progress.

52. Newsletters, reports and opportunities for consultation satisfactorily inform parents about school activities and pupils' progress. However, in annual school reports, attainment is not reported in a consistent manner by all subject departments for pupils in Years 7 and 8. Consequently, parents are not always clear about how their children are performing with regard to expectations for their age. In Years 7 to 9, some departments describe pupils' strengths and weaknesses better than others. The information that is provided following the annual review of pupils' progress is helpful. Pupils' work and most of their planners are good sources of further information, as are the contacts by school staff about exceptional performance or underachievement. Pupils' planners are checked meticulously by many form tutors, but infrequently by others.

53. Parents' support for the various meetings and activities is good. The number of parents involved brings its own problems. For example, parents do not feel there is sufficient privacy in discussions at consultation evenings. They respond positively and co-operate well with the school regarding strategies to support their own children. Most parents encourage and support pupils with their work at home. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are kept fully informed of their children's progress through reports and meetings. They are involved in annual reviews of pupils' statements of need, for which they provide their own written comments.

54. The Parents' and Teachers' Association supports the school well. The school conducts surveys of parents' views from time to time and makes satisfactory use of the information to inform planning. Parents are not involved to a great extent in the curriculum or daily life of the school, but they contribute well as governors. The school is pleased by the positive way in which parents respond to specific requests for support.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

55. The quality of leadership and management is very good. It constantly drives the school forward, seeking new ways to match provision to local and national initiatives. The headteacher and senior management team have a clear vision of the school's educational direction. Ideas are effectively put into

practice because teachers and non-teaching staff are fully involved in consultations about the school's development prior to decision-making. The school development plan accurately reflects the school's immediate priorities but it is not sharp enough in its costings and identification of success criteria for its targeted aims. Departmental development plans tend to have similar deficiencies. The staff is hard working and dedicated to providing the best for individual pupils. All these factors combine to create a very good learning environment in which pupils thrive and reach well above average standards. The school's status as a Beacon School recognises that it has good practices that can profitably be shared with others. They are, to the mutual benefit of Byrchall and the other schools involved.

56. The staff work closely together as a team to maintain an atmosphere of calm and orderly conduct. Teachers give generously of their time to support pupils' interests, for example in extra-curricular activities. The site managers, administrative and other staff make an equally valuable contribution to the smooth running of the school. The pastoral system is a strength of the school. It is well managed by senior personnel and heads of year. They set the tone for the school's caring environment and place paramount importance on knowing each pupil well. This is not without difficulty because limitations of space restrict opportunities for private and personal interviews. The headteacher and senior staff have high profiles about the school and this enables them to keep fully informed about pupils' views and behaviour. Pupils are made to feel secure. The staff provide good role models because they earn, rather than demand, pupils' respect.

57. Everything the school undertakes focuses on attention to detail. Systems are rigorous, for example, the procedures for monitoring teaching, learning and pupils' progress. They make a significant contribution to the very good achievement throughout the school. In addition, the school has instituted the practice of 'pupil shadowing'. This enables teachers to follow specific pupils' activities throughout the course of a day. The information gained is used to analyse the effect of teaching on the learners' experience. Teaching techniques are then modified if necessary to make learning more interesting and varied. The process is repeated, with the same pupils, at intervals, to detect changes in pupils' attitudes or achievement. This method of monitoring, from a different starting point, is proving effective in encouraging teachers to make the learners' experience a priority in planning. The passing on of good practices from senior management to subject departments is also effective and results in all staff appreciating where their efforts fit into the wider scenario of the school's work. Very good procedures exist for analysing GCSE outcomes. The information is used well to set targets for groups of pupils, boys and girls, and whole subject departments. Provision is very good in English, mathematics, science and history. It is good in all other subjects except art, music and ICT where it is satisfactory. In these subjects more urgency needs to be directed to increasing the pace and content of the teaching to match that of the best. In addition, there needs to be tighter monitoring and management of facilities for the use of ICT across the curriculum, and of the implementation of the PSHE curriculum in Years 7 to 9.

58. The special educational needs department is very well organised. Management ensures that all staff are kept fully informed of the nature of difficulties experienced by each pupil, together with information on how to tackle them. Planning, too, is very good, focusing on the identified needs and taking full account of the progress of individual pupils, which is recorded and analysed through formal tracking procedures and through regular assessment of, for example, reading and spelling. The deployment of learning support assistants is very well organised, within the limits of staff available. Similarly, the arrangements for withdrawal of pupils from lessons and for help in registration periods are very successful in raising standards in reading, spelling, comprehension and number work.

59. The governing body is active and effective in carrying out its responsibilities and ensuring that statutory requirements are met. It is well balanced in terms of expertise and experience in educational matters. The governing body operates well through a committee structure and is fully conversant with the school's strengths and areas for development. It effectively holds the school responsible for the implementation of its decisions without being intrusive on its daily management.

60. The financial planning, control and day-to-day management of accounts are good. The school operates within a surplus budget which is well managed to provide for ongoing initiatives, for instance, in

the current year, extension of facilities for design and technology. The school is fully committed to the principles of best value and constantly seeks to ensure that it obtains good value through tendering and contract procedures, and by carefully comparing costs. This is of vital importance considering that the school is disbursing monies granted to it to assist other schools through its Beacon status.

61. Staffing is adequate. There is a good match of qualifications and experience to the taught curriculum. However, there are not enough learning support assistants to fully support pupils with special educational needs, especially in Year 7.

62. The provision of initial teacher training in the school is excellent. The school is involved at a national level in developing materials and approaches to teacher training, including a range of mentoring training videos. It is a designated Training School, with a particular focus on developing flexible routes into the teaching profession. There are strong links with the Teacher Training Agency, other schools within the cluster group, and with a range of training institutions, including six universities. There is a strong commitment from the senior management team to developing and spreading good practice as part of Beacon School status. The school organises and hosts important conferences and meetings, which raise the profile of teacher training both locally and nationally. Initiatives are being developed in a number of areas, for example, in the use of ICT to improve communication between institutions and individuals. The school is making a very significant contribution to local and national work in this important area. There are also benefits for the school itself. The focus on training is maintained at a high level, and staff are aware of the importance of continuing professional development. Trainees also bring new ideas from which established teachers can learn. This promotes a culture which values striving for improvements in teaching and learning, and staff are encouraged to be reflective about their own practice. This benefits the pupils in the classroom, as teaching and learning approaches are continually being refined and improved.

63. Induction for newly qualified teachers is excellent; the programme is very well planned and extremely thorough. In addition to subject and professional mentors, newly qualified teachers are assigned a 'buddy' in another subject area. As a result, they feel very well supported, and there are frequent structured opportunities for professional dialogue. In addition, a new computer package is being piloted with Nottingham University to enable professional development systems to be even more effective. The mentoring system is well established, objectives are regularly set, and progress towards them is assiduously monitored and supported. Induction for staff new to the school is also of a very high standard, and this helps maintain staff retention rates at a good level.

64. The accommodation has improved considerably since the previous inspection. A new building provides accommodation of a very high standard, including four new laboratories, two music rooms, and three extra classrooms. Throughout the school, displays, for example in art and design, history, and geography, make a significant contribution to improving the quality of the learning environment. A lively and colourful display in geography, based on the tropical rainforest, is particularly stimulating and imaginative. The accommodation is good in mathematics, science, geography, history and special educational needs, and it is satisfactory in most other subjects. Provision in physical education, however, is unsatisfactory, because of the poor condition of the flooring in the gymnasium, and the cramped changing rooms for the girls. Lack of space overall in the school causes problems in a number of areas. Some of the teaching rooms are rather cramped for the larger groups in a number of subjects, including art and design and music. There is a lack of office space for subject managers, and for administration staff. In addition, there is no base for the social inclusion officer, or for the education welfare officer. This makes it difficult for pupils who are experiencing problems to talk freely to the relevant staff who are responsible for supporting them.

65. The provision of learning resources is satisfactory; spending in this area has increased year-on-year since the previous inspection. Many of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have been tackled, including the provision of textbooks and the library facilities. The newly established Learning Resource Centre is well appointed and welcoming. It is well used by pupils, both before and after school,

and during breaks and lunchtimes. This makes a significant contribution to developing their independent learning and ICT skills, and promotes greater interest in reading and literacy. However, the quantity of books provided in the Learning Resource Centre is too small for the number of pupils in the school. In addition, the good number of computers cannot always be fully used, for example at lunchtimes, because it is difficult to supervise pupils adequately in all areas of the Learning Resource Centre under the current arrangements.

66. The management of the school is very successful because of its focus both on the consolidation of existing standards and its aspirations for further improvement. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

67. Taking into account the good improvement, the well above average standards from pupils' average attainment on entry, and the very good quality of provision, especially teaching, the school gives very good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

68. In order to consolidate and sustain its present standards, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) raise the satisfactory standards in art, music and ICT to match those in other subjects by;
- increasing the pace of lessons in art and broadening the approaches to painting and drawing in Years 7 to 9,
 - providing a better balance between written and practical activities in music in Years 7 to 9,
 - encouraging more pupils to learn to play musical instruments,
 - sharing and implementing the best practices in ICT across the whole department.

(Paragraphs 5, 106, 107, 110, 136, 138, 155, 158, 159)

- (2) extend the use of the assessment system so that subject departments make full use of the information to inform pupils in Years 7 and 8 how well they are doing in relation to National Curriculum levels.

(Paragraphs 50, 79, 101, 138, 159, 168)

- (3) monitor pupils' work in PSHE in Years 7 to 9 to ensure that their experiences are consistent and cover all aspects of the curriculum in sufficient depth.

(Paragraph 34)

- (4) provide more additional support in lessons for the pupils with special educational needs, particularly those with the weakest literacy and numerical skills in Year 7.

(Paragraphs 6, 20, 58, 77, 90, 99, 123, 166)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	161
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	55

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	4	62	61	30	4	0	0
Percentage	2.5	38.5	37.9	18.6	2.5	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1128
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	91

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	33
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	180

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	12
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	16

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	7.9	School data	0.1
National comparative data	8.1	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)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	125	89	214

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	84	101	93
	Girls	79	73	71
	Total	163	174	164
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	76(83)	81(83)	77(83)
	National	64(63)	66(65)	66(59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	44(44)	57(56)	51(52)
	National	31(28)	43(42)	34(30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	88	103	93
	Girls	80	76	70
	Total	168	179	163
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	79(76)	84(84)	76(78)
	National	65(64)	68(66)	64(62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	48(52)	58(65)	46(42)
	National	31(31)	42(39)	33(29)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	121	94	215

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	65	115	119
	Girls	66	93	96
	Total	131	208	215
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	61(52)	97(93)	100(98)
	National	48(47)	91(91)	96(96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	42.4
	National	39.0

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	N/a
	National	N/A	N/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	1
White	1127
Any other minority ethnic group	

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	105	1
Other minority ethnic groups	1	

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y 7– Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	66.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	272

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

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

Key Stage 3	25.9
Key Stage 4	20

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	200/2001
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	£
Total income	2732590
Total expenditure	2678752
Expenditure per pupil	2423
Balance brought forward from previous year	52694
Balance carried forward to next year	106532

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	9.4
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	15.6

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3

Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1120

Number of questionnaires returned

290

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	26.3	56.7	12.8	3.1	1.1
My child is making good progress in school.	39.8	54.8	3.9	0.4	1.1
Behaviour in the school is good.	30.7	56.2	7.9	0.4	4.8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23.1	55.9	15.2	3.1	2.7
The teaching is good.	30.0	61.3	2.4	0.4	5.9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	29.0	50.3	15.2	4.8	0.7
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48.4	40.7	4.8	2.7	3.4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	62.4	35.2	1.0	0.4	1.0
The school works closely with parents.	25.9	51.4	12.4	4.8	5.5
The school is well led and managed.	39.0	49.0	4.8	1.0	6.2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	35.5	52.4	5.9	1.4	4.8
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	26.2	48.3	9.7	3.4	12.4

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Standards of work are well above average and pupils achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to their work.
- The department is well led and has high professional standards.
- Curriculum coverage of GCSE courses is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Some aspects of assessment and monitoring procedures in Years 7 to 9.
- The curriculum for some below average pupils in Years 7 and 8.

70. Pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well above the national average, matching the standards of the previous three years. There was no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. Results were above average compared with those of schools of similar background. The proportion of pupils exceeding the level expected for their age was well above average.

71. In the 2001 GCSE English language examination, the proportion at A*-C grades was well above the national average and above average compared with similar schools. Although the figure was slightly lower than in the previous three years it maintained the consistently well above average performance. More pupils attained grade C or better than would have been anticipated from the pupils' earlier results at the end of Year 9. These results represent very good achievement given that the school successfully enters a higher proportion of pupils from the year group than most schools. However, the proportion of girls gaining grade C or better was significantly greater than the proportion of boys.

72. Pupils' results in the GCSE English literature examination in 2001 were well above average at grades A*-C, as was the overall standard represented by the average grade. This is again very good achievement since, as with English language, the school's entry rate is much higher than most schools. The 2001 A*-C figure was slightly higher than the previous three years. More girls than boys achieved grade C or better: nevertheless, the boys' results were still half a grade above the average grade for boys nationally. A notable strength was the proportion of grades A*/A. It was more than twice the national average and also much higher than the same pupils achieved in their English language examination.

73. Standards of work are well above average in Years 9 and 11. This represents very good achievement since the pupils' standards are broadly average when they enter the school. The significant improvement over time is the result of very good teaching and pupils' very positive attitudes.

74. Evidence from the inspection shows that overall standards of speaking and listening are well above average in both Years 9 and 11. Responses and engagement in group and pair work are sustained and purposeful. However, some pupils in lower and middle groups tend to give very short answers. Some of the questions put by teachers are not sufficiently open-ended to draw out a fuller response.

75. Standards of reading and writing in the current Year 9 are well above average, and closely match those achieved in the national tests by the previous Year 9. Higher-attaining pupils showed perceptive insight and a sophisticated ability to identify and demonstrate an author's implied meaning when

answering a comprehension passage about an explorer's adventures. Their learning was greatly enhanced by the teacher's excellent demonstration of how to read critically and annotate implied meanings. Pupils' writing was highly accurate and they used persuasive language effectively. Middle-attaining pupils have a secure understanding of the themes in 'Macbeth' and point out clearly cause and effect within the text. They effectively identify the techniques used by a range of writers to enhance descriptive writing and use these techniques well in their own writing. Most of these pupils write with a reliable accuracy. They lack the range of vocabulary of the more able pupils. Those pupils whose standards are below average make too many punctuation and spelling errors in their writing. They understand the main events of 'Macbeth' but find it hard to make detailed references to the text to support their judgements.

76. Standards of reading and writing in the current Year 11 are well above average, matching those of the previous Year 11. More able pupils make astute comments on the impact on meaning of the author's use of language. One pupil used vocabulary to great effect to establish mood, mystery and setting in her story: 'The Migration'. Another displayed excellent use of analytical language in her assignment: 'Guide to acting the role of Abigail Williams'. Pupils clearly enjoyed the challenge of these demanding pieces. Middle-attaining pupils have a firm grasp of the themes in the texts they study. Some do not always use their knowledge and understanding effectively enough to answer an essay title directly. Most of them write clear, coherent and accurate English but a few make errors in punctuation, spelling and in their use of appropriate standard English. Some have still not grasped basic rules such as changing the 'y' to 'ie' when changing 'cry' to 'cried' for example. A few pupils are consistently below, and occasionally well below, average. Their understanding of texts tends to be superficial and literal. Their writing contains a number of basic errors, although they make good progress in their use of paragraphing.

77. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress as confirmed by the high entry rate and success in national tests and GCSE examinations. They benefit from highly skilled teaching in which methods and resources match their needs. They also benefit when additional support is available. Support is not available in all lessons: in Year 7; this hinders the progress of some pupils whose standards are low.

78. The overall standard of teaching and learning is very good. The quality of the teachers' lesson planning is a major strength. It focuses sharply on how the pupils will learn and improve their skills. Consequently, teaching methods are varied, lessons are busy and the pupils want to do well and work hard. In an outstanding Year 7 lesson, pupils helped each other understand the features of news reporting that they were to emulate. The task of transforming a well-known fairy tale of their choice enthused them. Several took the opportunity to 'twist' the narrative to give an individual angle to their writing. The task challenged the pupils' intellect and creativity. The effective use of exemplar material in this lesson (an influence of the National Literacy Strategy) was a strong feature, as in many lessons, and led to confident and sustained writing. Expectations are high as confirmed by the quantity and quality of course work in Year 11. There is a strong focus on improving standards. In a Year 9 lesson, higher-attaining pupils analysed examples of answers at different levels through a mix of pair and whole class discussion. They used their increased understanding to improve their written expression on a recent task. The teaching of lower-attaining pupils is skilled. Clear demonstration and good pace helped a Year 8 group to make very good progress in the correct use of a range of connective phrases. Some of these qualities are still to be established on a fully consistent basis. The clarity of aims and tasks, which provide a strong sense of purpose to many lessons, is not always apparent. Much of the marking is very precise with respect to strengths and weaknesses, but not always so. The management of the behaviour of some lower and middle-attaining pupils is not assured enough.

79. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection. It is well led and managed, backed up by a committed and professional team. The coverage of the GCSE course is a real strength. The department is developing an equally extensive coverage of the core curriculum in Years 7 to 9 but this needs completion. The use of assessment in these year groups lacks the explicit rigour of the system in Years 10 and 11. The monitoring of progress against National Curriculum targets is not precise enough and pupils do not consistently know their standards. The school has not yet made effective arrangements

to ensure teaching of the Literacy Progress Units assists some below average pupils to make the progress they could in Years 7 and 8.

Drama

80. The proportion achieving grades A*-C in the 2001 GCSE drama examination was significantly above the national average. Results tend to be above average, but in 2000 were below average. The pattern of results needs to be taken with some caution because numbers of entries fluctuate and groups are relatively small. This is partly a consequence of drama not being on the timetable in Years 8 and 9. The school has rightly identified this impact and it is planned to teach drama separately in Year 8 from September, 2002. In the current Year 11, standards are broadly average. A devised piece presented by three students displayed well above average standards. The quality of teaching is good. Year 11 students are comfortable with performing and evaluating. Their work showed a good independent attitude. A lower-attaining group in Year 7 was also taught well and the pupils achieved well in the lesson. Their learning benefited from a carefully stepped approach, each task providing a platform for further achievement. Drama makes a very good contribution to the pupils' extra-curricular activities. There is a strong tradition of annual production. ('Seven Brides for Seven Brothers' was in rehearsal during the inspection.)

Key skills across the curriculum - Literacy

81. Literacy features as an identified strand in the school's work as a Beacon School. In this capacity, under the direction of well-informed co-ordinators, it has supported other schools in the development of their own literacy practices. Initiatives are wide-ranging. They include a summer school for gifted and talented pupils from Years 6 and 7; the development of materials for the teaching of spelling and grammar in Wigan schools; lectures to trainee teachers; and conferences on literacy for high schools in the authority. Involvement in the Beacon initiative has also raised the awareness of literacy issues within the school itself. In all, both the school and others are mutually benefiting from the activities emanating from this work.

82. The school has made good progress in supporting the pupils' accurate use of subject specific words and phrases, although in music there are no displays of terms to support pupils. Most subjects adopt the good practice observed in history where key words are emphasised and the use of exact terms stressed. Other good examples were observed in mathematics and ICT. These good practices underpin pupils' literacy skills and foster understanding of concepts in other subjects. Teachers successfully promote the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills across the whole curriculum.

83. There is similarly good support for writing. In geography there is an effective emphasis this year on supporting the pupils' use of linking terms to add clarity to their explanations. Pupils analyse the effectiveness of each other's paragraphs. Writing frameworks are used in most subjects to support the development of continuous writing. Writing is developed well in mathematics because pupils are strongly encouraged to produce properly argued mathematical processes. This prepares them well for their course work at GCSE. In religious education there is a considerable amount of high quality writing.

84. Reading is developed very well in history. Teachers ensure the pupils know how to analyse documents and research skills are developed well from an early stage. In science, there are good opportunities to read aloud. In art, there are opportunities for note-taking in the Learning Resource Centre. Pupils have many opportunities to use the Learning Resource Centre which is an asset to the school.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- GCSE results are well above average.
- Pupils make very good progress throughout the school.

- Teaching is good with very good features.
- Management and organisation are very good.
- Pupils' attitudes to mathematics are good.

Areas for improvement

- Raising the standard of the small amount of satisfactory teaching to that of the best.
- Extra support for the Year 7 pupils who are not yet numerate.

86. The school's results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well above average, and considerably better than at the time of the previous inspection. They were also well above average for schools taking their pupils from similar backgrounds. The 2001 results were similar to those of 1999 and 2000, which were also well above average, and represent very good progress for pupils in Years 7 to 9. There has been no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys over the last three years.

87. GCSE results have also improved since the previous inspection, and represent very good progress in Years 10 and 11. Results in 2001 were well above average in terms of the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C and A*-G, as they were in 1999 and 2000. They were also well above average for schools taking their pupils from similar backgrounds. Boys did better than girls as they have for several years. Over the last three years, pupils have done better in mathematics than in their other subjects.

88. Current standards are well above average in Year 9, and reflect the national test results. Pupils' very good achievement is a direct consequence of the quality of teaching that they receive. Their standards in written and mental arithmetic are particularly strong and support their work in problem solving, algebra, geometry and statistics well. Higher-attaining pupils have successfully begun their study of trigonometry, and can relate linear algebraic equations and gradients to lines drawn into the four quadrants bounded by co-ordinate axes. Average pupils are competent with addition, subtraction and multiplication of fractions. Their algebraic skills have developed well to enable them to handle equations and expressions involving brackets. The lowest-attaining pupils handle questions involving addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of whole numbers with reasonable competence.

89. Standards are also well above average in Year 11, and reflect the previous GCSE results. Achievement is very good. This is because teaching is particularly effective in enabling pupils to fully master the GCSE topics that they study. Very good standards of arithmetic and algebra support the pupils' work and learning in geometry, trigonometry, statistics, investigation and problem solving. The highest attaining pupils understand the addition of vector quantities, and are moving confidently towards GCSE grades A* and A. Average pupils use trigonometry competently to find unknown sides and angles in right-angled triangles. Their work and practice questions are consistent with GCSE grades B and C. The lowest-attaining pupils are also GCSE candidates. They have developed reasonable numerical skills and most of their work is consistent with grades F and G.

90. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress as they move through the school. Many begin their studies of mathematics in Year 7 with a very feeble grasp of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of whole numbers yet by Year 11 they are able to access GCSE at the lowest grades with success. However, in the current Year 7, the lowest-attaining pupils have very poor numerical skills and require constant extra support in the classroom.

91. Pupils' attitudes to their work in mathematics are good overall throughout the school and have a positive effect on their learning. Consequently, the learning atmosphere in most classrooms is good or very good. Pupils usually listen well, concentrate, try hard and ask for help in a mature manner. Their work is usually neat, logical and extensive. They only become restless in the small proportion of lessons where the teaching does not fully engage them. A minority of pupils' attitudes towards homework could be better.

92. Teaching and learning are good with very good features throughout the school. They have improved since the previous inspection. Teaching is normally good or very good. It is never less than satisfactory.

The long-term absence of a teacher through illness is being managed well but the employment of temporary teachers inevitably causes some discontinuity in pupils' learning. The strong overall quality of teaching enables pupils of all levels of attainment to make very good progress. Teachers constantly work at improving pupils' numerical skills particularly through teaching the processes of mental arithmetic; this enables pupils to work through examples quickly without having to waste time pressing buttons on a calculator. They also enable pupils to fully master the topics they study as they revisit and extend them as the pupils move through the school. The insistence on good standards of logical presentation ensures that pupils' work is properly sequenced and easy to follow. Teachers usually make their lessons interesting and cover a lot of ground in 50 minutes. They manage pupils very well and relationships are very good. Occasionally, the choice of examples to explain on the board or the explanations themselves could be more compelling.

93. The management and organisation of mathematics is very good. Standards have risen quickly since the previous inspection and other improvements have been made. Teaching has improved and it now incorporates much more use of ICT than previously. The national strategy for Key Stage 3 in numeracy is almost fully in place. Staff morale is very good and teachers have made great efforts to provide extra lessons and activities for the pupils. They educate them in classrooms where excellent displays help to create an atmosphere of interest and fascination with the subject. Many children enjoy mathematics here. In order to improve provision further, the satisfactory teaching should be improved to the standard evident elsewhere in the department. The lowest-attaining pupils in Year 7 should be provided with extra assistance in the classroom.

Key skills across the curriculum - Numeracy

94. Pupils' numerical skills and competence in other areas of mathematics are developed so strongly between Years 7 and 11 that they encounter very few problems in using and applying their knowledge and understanding across the curriculum. Graphs, numerical work, and the use of algebraic formulae in science pose no real difficulties for most pupils. The same applies to measurement, units and the use of scale in design and technology. Equally, few difficulties are encountered in geography and history with the interpretation of graphs, charts and data.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- High standards in national tests and examinations.
- Pupils achieve very well.
- Very good teaching by well-qualified and committed staff.
- Very good learning environment and an effective and interesting curriculum.

Areas for improvement

- Provision of more opportunities for science investigations in Years 7 and 8.
- Greater use of National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9 to provide pupils with a better knowledge of their own learning.
- Extension of the use of ICT to include data-logging experiments.

96. Pupils' results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well above average. They were above average compared with similar schools. Over the past four years results have been consistently well above average and have improved faster than the national trend. Boys and girls perform similarly. Pupils' performance is similar to that in English and mathematics. All pupils are entered for GCSE double

award science. In 2001, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*- C was well above the national average. All pupils gained at least a grade G and most did much better. Significantly, the proportion of pupils gaining the higher A*/A grades was well above the national average. Although results in 2000 dipped compared with previous years, the trend over the past four years has been steadily upwards. Girls do better in GCSE examinations than boys, in line with the national picture.

97. Evidence from the inspection shows that standards of work are well above average in Years 9 and 11. The high quality of the work is due to consistently good teaching combined with pupils' very positive attitudes. Overall, pupils achieve very well throughout the school taking into account the average attainment on entry. In Years 7 to 9, pupils' knowledge and understanding of biology, chemistry and physics is well above average. For example, lower-attaining pupils have a good understanding of forces and how they affect objects. They can extend this understanding to explain, for example, why wood floats in water but iron sinks. Middle-attaining pupils have a secure knowledge and understanding of biological processes such as digestion. They can name the organs of the digestive system and explain their function. Higher-attaining pupils have a very good knowledge and understanding of electromagnetism. They successfully explain how devices such as doorbells and magnetic relays work because of their very good understanding of this scientific concept. Investigative and practical skills, although well above average, are somewhat weaker compared with other aspects of the subject. This is because teachers focus more on the separate sciences in Years 7 and 8 rather than on broader scientific investigations.

98. Experimental skills improve considerably in Years 10 and 11 due to the increased importance teachers place on these from Year 9 upwards. Teachers' very good subject expertise, combined with pupils' very good and sometimes excellent attitudes, underpin the high standards achieved. For example, middle and lower-attaining pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of biological functions and chemistry. They are able to give the products formed when saltwater is electrolysed and explain what they are used for. Higher-attaining pupils delve deeper. They write word and molecular equations to describe the reduction reactions involved in the extraction of metals. Investigative skills improve rapidly in this age range, as the result of teaching that carefully explores the criteria needed for success in this aspect. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, pupils considered the variables that affect the decomposition of hydrogen peroxide. Very good planning of the learning situation enabled pupils to progress very well in their understanding of how to control the variables.

99. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress towards the targets set for them as a result of teaching that very effectively supports their learning. Where support assistants are available, they work well with the class teacher to ensure pupils make progress. Gifted and talented pupils also make very good progress. In addition to their normal science lessons, teaching of extension work is provided outside the school day and results in a deeper and wider understanding of scientific concepts and theories.

100. Pupils of all ages display very positive attitudes to science. They are very well behaved in class. They carry out practical work in a sensible manner so that their fellow pupils can work in safety. Pupils enjoy their work, for example, when older ones copper-plated objects at the end of a lesson on electrolysis. As a result, their motivation was better and progress improved.

101. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Of the 16 lessons observed, all were satisfactory and 14 were good or better. The majority was very good. There is a very good focus on the sharing of good practice to improve standards. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subject specialisms, and in particular of GCSE examination criteria. As a result, lessons are very well planned with clear objectives that enable pupils to make very good progress in their learning. Concepts such as selective breeding are very well explained so that pupils understand better. In such a lesson, pupils were encouraged to discuss the arguments for and against the breeding of aggressive dogs, so improving their literacy as well as their biology. Management of practical activities is very good with a suitable emphasis on safety. Pupils learn very well in their science lessons. Their interest, concentration and independence are very good. However, younger pupils are somewhat lacking in knowledge of their

own learning because National Curriculum levels are not used in day-to-day assessment. Homework is set regularly and consolidates pupils' knowledge and understanding of science.

102. The department makes a good contribution to the teaching of numeracy, literacy and ICT. Literacy skills are well taught through the use of key words and structures to support writing. Pupils are encouraged to read aloud from texts to improve their fluency and comprehension. Numeracy is good. Pupils can draw graphs, handle data and manipulate formula and this contributes well to their high standards in science. The provision of ICT has improved but there is too little use of data-loggers in science lessons.

103. Management of the department is very good. Assessment of pupils' work through end of topic tests is very good. Assessment data is very well used to set appropriate targets and provide pupils with a suitable science education. The science curriculum is effective in the promotion of high standards throughout the school. The department has made very good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards are very high and improving. Teaching has improved considerably. Very good relationships between pupils and teachers help promote learning and create a very good atmosphere in the department.

ART AND DESIGN

104. Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Lessons are well prepared.
- Work in colour is thorough.
- The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' moral development.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of work in all years.
- Lack of urgency in some lessons, and slow pace.
- Lack of broader approaches to painting and drawing in Years 7 to 9.
- Not enough use made of ICT.

105. Pupils' results in the GCSE examinations in 2001 at grades A*-C were below average. This represents a fall in results, which in the previous three years were average. The difference in results was due to problems in interpreting assessment criteria in 2001. All pupils gained grades A*-G. The number of girls taking the examination was too small to compare results reliably with those of the boys.

106. Standards of work are average in Year 9. In Years 7 to 9, pupils learn to use a good range of materials and processes, which includes work in printing, ceramics, textiles and card constructions. They show a sound knowledge of colour, and can choose and mix a wide range of tints and shades in their paintings. Their construction skills are sound, and some bright pieces based on the study of art deco are well made and attractive. In addition, they use oil pastels to produce vigorous portrait studies, which are informed by the work of Picasso. However, too much of the work is on too small a scale, and pupils' approach to drawing and painting is not broad enough. In addition, there is not enough use of ICT to support and extend their work. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. All pupils make steady gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding of art.

107. Pupils continue to achieve satisfactorily in subsequent year groups and standards of work are average in Year 11. Pupils learn to use a variety of methods to decorate their work in textiles, which is richly textured. Work in this area also shows pupils' increasing ability to use colour in sensitive and harmonious ways. Work in composition is good. Above average pupils use paper and sacking to manipulate shapes, colours and textures to produce high quality work in low relief. Pupils' research skills develop at a sound rate, and they produce small experimental pieces using cork and string, which help

further develop their skills of composition. Work in ceramics, however, is rather crudely made and heavily modelled, though surface decoration shows good skills. In addition, some developmental drawing in pencil, in graphics and in three-dimensional studies, is laboured and lacks sensitivity.

108. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily. This is because teachers are very encouraging, and build up good relationships. Consequently, pupils apply themselves sensibly in lessons.

109. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. Pupils enjoy the good range of activities on offer, and make sound gains in learning in their lessons.

110. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in all years. A strength of the teaching is the good lesson preparation, which enables a good range of processes to be tackled successfully in the same lesson. In the best lessons, materials are varied, and the approach is active. For example, in one lesson on textiles, pupils could print, use dyes, or use appliqué techniques to decorate their work. The atmosphere in the room was lively and pupils showed good levels of interest and engagement with the materials. Because of this, they made good gains in media handling skills, resulting in good learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge, and give good advice and demonstrations during lessons. In some lessons, however, there is a lack of urgency, and the atmosphere is too comfortable and relaxed. As a result, pupils do not focus sharply enough on their work, and the pace is slow. In addition, lesson introductions sometimes aim to cover too much ground, and go on for too long. This means that pupils' attention begins to wander, and interest levels fall. These factors restrict learning to a satisfactory rather than a higher level.

111. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored, and assessment procedures are good. The accommodation is satisfactory overall, but one of the teaching rooms is rather cramped for the larger groups of pupils, and this makes it more difficult for them to spread their work out and keep it clean, especially when printing. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' moral development, and many projects encourage them to think about issues such as pollution, the horrors of war, or the plight of endangered species of animals. Since the previous inspection, there has been an increase in the work displayed around the school and the subject now makes a good contribution to developing literacy. Overall improvement is unsatisfactory however because the quality of teaching and learning is now satisfactory rather than good.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Standards of work are above average in Year 11.
- Pupils achieve well throughout the school.
- Teaching is good.
- Good planning for future developments.

Areas for improvement

- Include control and structures in the curriculum in Years 7 to 9.
- Greater consistency of practice in the marking of pupils' work.

113. Pupils' results in the GCSE short course in 2001 were above average at A*-C and A*-G grades in food technology and resistant materials. This follows the trend over recent years. In 2000 and 1999, results were well above average overall. The results compare well with other short courses taken at the school. Girls generally perform better than boys, particularly at the higher grades.

114. In the 2001 teacher assessments for pupils in Year 9, standards were in line with the national average. This was reflected in the work seen during the inspection. Good work was seen across all areas of the department, for example as in a project on 'Bread through the ages' where pupils made good use of technical language in describing existing products. Good work was also seen in dimensioned drawings in

a jewellery project and in a mechanisms project based on cartoon automation. Weaker work is mainly due to poorer presentation, ideas not being developed sufficiently or work being incomplete. Drawings are sometimes out of proportion and some work with colour is inappropriate. Achievement is good, especially in practical work, in all areas.

115. Standards of work in Year 11 are above the national average for both subject areas. Some very good work was evident in resistant materials where pupils used card modelling to investigate mechanical movement in a pull-along toy project, and where good research included the historic development and gender bias in a project on clocks. In food technology, ICT skills are well used for research, and there was good development of ideas in a project on pizzas through quality drawings and use of colour. Where the work is weaker, particularly in Year 10, it is mainly due to a limited range of ideas and over-reliance on commercial material in research. Handwriting and annotation of drawings are poorer and some work is not complete. Overall, achievement and progress are good and the majority of pupils respond well. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 10 produce a good standard of practical work in both material areas. Literacy and numeracy skills are good and ICT skills are used satisfactorily.

116. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. Pupils come to lessons prepared for work and settle to the tasks quickly. This enables the teacher to begin lessons in a constructive way and share lesson objectives with the pupils. Pupils work well and produce a good standard overall. Homework is usually completed on time. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, respond well when suitably challenged. This has a positive effect on learning and the good progress made.

117. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. All the lessons observed were satisfactory or better. Some were very good. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to advantage in developing or expanding ideas and planning. Time and resources are used effectively and pupils are managed very well. Good examples were the Year 8 lesson on mechanisms where pupils were developing modelling skills, and a lesson where pupils were using simple electronics in a timing device. Similarly, in a Year 11 lesson, where teaching concentrated on requirements for examinations through focused activities. In some lessons there is a tendency for independent learning to be rather limited and some pupils are over-reliant on the teacher for guidance. Expectations are usually implicit and could be more explicit at times. Some sessions extend over three consecutive lessons. Teachers cope with this satisfactorily but the task of keeping pupils purposefully engaged can be demanding. The arrangement is good for practical work but less well-motivated pupils sometimes lose concentration towards the end. Marking of pupils' work is regular but is not always as helpful as it could be because pupils are unsure of National Curriculum levels in Years 7 and 8. More attention could be given to this aspect.

118. The department is effectively led. Documentation is well prepared and thorough. There is good analysis of data and target setting for improving pupils' work. New ideas have been initiated, including the introduction of a NVQ course in hospitality and catering. Further GCSE and GNVQ courses are planned. Good links with local primary schools are being developed and good contacts with colleges and agencies, such as the environmental health department, have been established. These supplement and contribute to pupils' learning. Assessment procedures are good but a sharper focus on monitoring for consistency of practice in marking pupils' work is needed. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 does not include a control or structures module. There are no CAD/CAM facilities in the department at present, which restricts a valuable learning opportunity. Teachers insist on high standards and this is generally reflected in the work seen and pupils' response. The mixed gender pair and group work is also a contributory factor in supporting good learning in all areas of the department.

119. Satisfactory improvements have been made since the previous inspection. These include improved design skills, particularly in food technology, more open-ended tasks allowing for exploration, and good display of pupils' work in all rooms. Safety lines need renewing on floor areas around machinery in the resistant materials rooms.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average and pupils achieve well.
- Teaching is good.
- Pupils' progress is well monitored.
- Inspiring displays create a stimulating environment in which to learn geography.

Areas for improvement

- Lack of progression in the development of enquiry skills using first hand evidence in Years 7 to 10.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Insufficient use of ICT to support learning.

121. Pupils' results in GCSE examinations in 2001 were above the national average. The results at grades A* to C were the best ever achieved by the school. Since the previous inspection results have risen considerably. Overall there is very little difference between the performance of boys and girls except that a marginally smaller proportion of girls achieve the highest grades A* and A. Results are now broadly comparable with those in other subjects which is an improvement on previous years.

122. Standards of work are above average in Years 9 and 11. This is due to good teaching that motivates pupils well. Attainment in geographical skills on entry is average. By Year 9, pupils have attained above average results in teacher assessments, which represents good achievement. From the start of Year 7 pupils use atlas and large-scale maps to build a foundation of sound locational knowledge. By the end of Year 9 they can also use maps to describe geographical patterns, such as the population distribution of Italy, and to make reasoned connections between physical and human geography. Most pupils have developed the ability to explain geographical processes such as those relating to weather. They have started to develop enquiry skills and some groups have used ICT to support their learning in geography. However, such opportunities are too limited at present. The achievement of pupils studying for GCSE examinations is good. The higher-attaining pupils write detailed and accurate accounts of geographical processes and patterns, such as those relating to the understanding of flooding. They make good use of graphical skills. The lower-attaining pupils are less well organised and their conclusions are more limited and descriptive. Pupils understand and can use a wide range of subject specific vocabulary. They have all undertaken geographical fieldwork. Many of the individual field studies are of high quality. Pupils develop the skills of accurate data collection, recording and analysis but there is limited opportunity for pupils to frame enquiry questions for themselves. The majority of pupils in Years 7 to 11 have above average levels of literacy. Teachers expect pupils to be able to write their own notes, using the correct terminology, and make connections between description and explanation. Strategies are in constant use to develop this skill further and this is a key reason for the above average standards in geography.

123. Pupils of all abilities make good progress because teachers are responsive to individual needs. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress even though there is little in-class support. The attainment of girls in Year 9 is higher than that of boys because of the girls' greater facility in writing and presentation. Boys and lower-achieving pupils frequently achieve above average standards in oral work, which is not formally assessed at present.

124. Pupils' attitudes cause the quality of pupils' learning to be good in all year groups. In all lessons pupils are well behaved and responsive to learning. They frequently ask follow-up questions and their exercise books are well cared for, indicating a good attitude to the work.

125. Overall, teaching and learning are good throughout the school. The majority of lessons start with a clear outline of what pupils are expected to learn, are well structured and conclude with a thorough check on learning. This practice, though common, is not consistent across the department. Some lessons do not move quickly enough, make insufficient demands on pupils and fail to focus clearly on the lesson's learning objectives. The specialist geography teachers know their subject well and explain the concepts clearly. Classes are well managed and most teachers are very vigilant in providing for the needs of individual pupils. Only a limited range of teaching styles was observed. Most lessons were strongly teacher directed, which limits the opportunities for independent work. Marking is regular and uses the departmental grading scheme. End of unit assessments, focused on the knowledge and understanding of National Curriculum themes, are linked to level descriptions. The results of GCSE assignments are linked to pupils' individual target grades, therefore pupils in all year groups are aware of their own progress and how to improve further. This is an effective strategy for raising achievement.

126. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. It extends to better teaching of writing skills, the implementation of departmental monitoring and target setting, and improvement of the environment for teaching geography. All of these contribute to higher results at GCSE. These have been achieved through good leadership and management. An effective teaching team has been developed which is strongly focused on improving the quality of teaching and learning. Plans to extend the use of ICT to support learning and to provide opportunities for pupils to develop enquiry skills are still to be implemented in full. Opportunities for pupils to take more responsibility for their own learning are too limited.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average throughout the school and pupils achieve well.
- Teaching is very good.
- Pupils have very good attitudes and respect for teachers.
- The leadership and management of the subject are exemplary.

Areas for improvement

- The accommodation is cramped for the large classes.
- Easier access to computers.

128. Pupils' results in GCSE examinations in 2001 were above the national average. Boys performed significantly better than girls in 2001. Girls' results were average. Their results clustered around the middle grades but with fewer of the higher ones. However, the trend over the past five years has been for both boys and girls to achieve consistently above average grades, with no significant difference between their results.

129. By Year 9, pupils have acquired a good range of historical skills. Standards of work are above average. Overall, pupils achieve well. From the outset in Year 7, they are able to use documents and pictures as sources, and they can use the Internet to produce very good wall displays, such as their newspapers on Becket. They write extensively by Year 8 and use numerical skills very well in Year 9, in topics such as emigration from the UK, where they construct pie charts and graphs. More able pupils often write with great imagination and express ideas fluently, as in their work on trench warfare. Pupils continue to achieve well in later years. Standards are above average in Year 11. Pupils are able to use sources very critically and can make sound judgements from complex information. One GCSE class was able to distinguish between conflicting interpretations from video and documents, about the reasons for dropping the first atomic bombs. They were also able to reflect on the moral issues involved. They use ICT and the Internet very well in their coursework projects and have developed very good independent

learning skills. Achievement is good because pupils have access to very good resources, prepared by very knowledgeable and skilful teachers.

130. Pupils with special educational needs and those with lower abilities make good progress and achieve well. This is the result of careful diagnosis by teachers, who devise methods that meet both learning needs and literacy requirements. A further reason is that they are taught in small groups, according to ability, with some extra support in classes up to Year 9. In one such class, the teacher involved a very low ability group well through the use of role-play involving the learning support assistant.

131. Pupils' attitudes are very positive towards history and their teachers. They show respect and settle down to work, keen and interested, so that little time is wasted. In return, teachers use considerable initiative to make lessons interesting, to praise good work by the reward of certificates of achievement and to mark work promptly. In one class in Year 7, stimulated by excellent teaching, boys and girls worked in pairs and were confident enough to give responses to the causes of the Peasants' Revolt, receiving praise in return for their very intensive work.

132. Teaching and learning are very good. All the teachers are very well qualified and experienced and constantly update their knowledge of literacy, ICT and new historical sources. They work as a team in preparing very good materials. They make very good use of their equipment, all four rooms having video and overhead projectors, which are in constant use. They challenge pupils of all abilities and conduct lessons at a rapid pace. One Year 10 class was engaged as soon as they entered the room, with working out the motives of the great powers in the peace treaties after 1918, through the use of video, maps, the overhead projector, documents and constant questions. The pupils were fully involved and were helped to work issues out for themselves. Teachers reinforce pupils' learning by very clear marking, which is rapidly returned, to ensure that pupils know how well they are doing, and have clear targets to work to.

133. The department benefits from excellent leadership and management. The curriculum is very well organised and incorporates effective links to citizenship, social, moral and cultural development, literacy, numeracy and ICT so that the subject makes a valuable contribution to the broader aspects of pupils' development. Teaching and learning are monitored very well by observation of teaching, by the effective use of data and by the sampling of pupils' work. Improvement since the previous inspection is good, particularly in the use of ICT, promotion of literacy and numeracy skills, and in the acquisition of more resources. There remains a problem of space, where some large classes are too crowded, and there is a need for easier access to computers. The effects of the Beacon School and its standing as a Training School are evident in the high morale and pride of the staff, the high standards and constant renewal of initiatives.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

134. Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- GCSE results in the short course are good.
- Good use of ICT to support other subjects.
- The school's Beacon status and the Wired for Learning initiatives are helping to disseminate and extend good practice across other schools.

Areas for improvement

- Raise overall standards further.
- Find ways of sharing the very good practices of the best teachers with others in the department.
- Make provision for higher-attaining pupils to take the full GCSE course.

135. All pupils are entered for the GCSE short course. Results in 2001 were creditable. Almost three-quarters of all Year 11 pupils obtained grades A*- C. Results in the short course have been improving for the last three years. There are no national comparisons available for the GCSE short course in ICT.

136. By the end of Year 9 standards are average. Pupils enter the school with mixed experiences of ICT but standards overall are broadly in line with national expectations. Progress in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Higher-attaining pupils, whose standards are above average, can select which software package to use, taking into account the intended audience and the type of information they want to convey. They understand the structure of databases and can use formula in spreadsheets. Middle-attaining pupils have a sound knowledge of what databases and spreadsheets are used for but are less accurate and skilful in manipulating the data. Lower-attaining pupils, including pupils with special educational needs, can use word processing packages to make presentations that combine words and pictures. They can input data to construct databases and spreadsheets but struggle to produce meaningful graphs and charts. By the end of Year 11 standards are average. Given their attainment at the end of Year 9 this represents satisfactory achievement for all pupils, including those with special educational needs. More able pupils have above average design skills and can design computer systems for others to use taking into account ease of use and suitability of purpose. For example, one pupil had analysed the paper-based procedures of a video shop and drawn up a detailed plan for improving the running and efficiency of the business. Middle-attaining pupils can use PowerPoint to make well-constructed presentations, matching the type of information and the style of presentation to attract the attention and meet the needs of the intended audience. Lower-attaining pupils, including pupils with special educational needs, can present information in different styles for different audiences but their design skills are weak. Throughout all years pupils have a very limited understanding of the use of ICT to solve problems by building models, constructing procedures and then measuring or controlling the results.

137. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall. Unsatisfactory attitudes were only seen in one lesson when a small minority of pupils took advantage of a temporary supply teacher and avoided doing any real work. The timetabling of three consecutive lessons has a negative effect on pupils' concentration and application. Towards the end of the third lesson pupils are often weary and become inattentive and restless so that learning suffers. In Years 7 to 9 the scheme of work is uninspiring and does not motivate pupils well. Overall, pupils generally work well and are willing to help each other when sharing resources. Behaviour is never less than satisfactory and in at least half of lessons seen it was good.

138. The quality of teaching and the learning it promotes are satisfactory. In the lessons observed teaching ranged from very good to unsatisfactory. The proportion of the latter was small. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are sometimes too low. Where teaching is very good, teachers expect pupils to work to high standards and set work that is interesting, challenging and matches pupils' needs. As a result, pupils learn new skills and reach a greater depth of knowledge and understanding in the subject. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, planning is poor, expectations are low and the work set, for example, copying dictated notes, is undemanding. In these lessons pupils learn very little. Teachers manage pupils well and relationships are good so that pupils are not afraid to ask questions and risk making mistakes. Year 10 and 11 pupils know what their target GCSE grade is and what they have to do to improve. Assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 are inconsistently applied and pupils are not always informed of the National Curriculum levels they are working at.

139. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow a GCSE short course and the use of ICT to support learning in other subjects is now good. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' personal and social development. The scheme of work for Years 7 to 9 does not adequately cover all strands of the National Curriculum in equal measure and needs revising in line with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) guidelines. The timetabling weaknesses referred to earlier have already been tackled and will not feature in next year's timetable. Higher-attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 could be offered the choice of the full GCSE course for greater challenge. Beacon

status and the Wired for Learning initiatives are valuable tools in the development of teaching styles and the dissemination of good practice.

Key skills across the curriculum - ICT

140. The use of ICT to support learning in other subjects is good and has significantly improved since the previous inspection. Word processing is widely used to present information, for example in GCSE coursework. In history, the Internet is used to research the history of Skipton Castle, in religious education to find out about Buddhism and in French and German to improve vocabulary by searching foreign sites. In English, teachers use news simulation software to bring new insights into traditional texts. In food technology, pupils use computers for nutritional analysis. In religious education, pupils have developed e-mail links with faith groups in other schools as part of their study of world religions. Spreadsheets are used in business studies to calculate profit and loss, in mathematics to produce graphs and charts and in food technology to work out food costings. In science, PowerPoint has been used for presentations but through lack of resources there is no data logging. The school's Beacon status is pushing forward several new initiatives. For example, very good teaching resources have been developed in physical education and lesson notes are available on the school's Intranet for pupils to use for homework or to catch up after absence. An independent learning system has been purchased and is being used effectively to raise levels of numeracy and literacy. The school's website displays aspects of its Beacon work to a wider audience. The school has benefited from its involvement in the Wired for Learning initiative that has helped share good practice in teaching methods across the fifty English schools participating in the project.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- GCSE results and current standards are above average.
- Teaching is good.
- Pupils achieve well throughout the school.

Areas for improvement

- Speaking skills need to be improved in Years 10 and 11.
- Develop a more stimulating style of teaching in Years 10 and 11 through more rigorous monitoring and sharing of good practice.
- Increase and monitor the use of ICT.

French

142. In 2001, the school achieved its best GCSE results in French since the previous inspection. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*- C was above average. All pupils in Year 11 were entered for GCSE in French and the proportion achieving grades A*-G was very high. Boys performed significantly better than boys nationally, though girls outperformed boys in line with the trend nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving grade A* was the highest in the school.

143. Standards of work in Year 9 are above average and closely match teachers' assessments. Boys and girls achieve well because attitudes, teaching and attendance are good overall and pupils have opportunities to develop each skill. Progress over time is good as pupils build up their knowledge of grammar structures and vocabulary and they learn to speak and write in sentences. More able pupils can use different tenses appropriately, for example to talk about their current eating habits compared with the past, and can write a paragraph about their plans for next weekend. Pupils in the lower ability groups can refer to future time and, although answers are often shorter and less accurate, they generally get their message across. Pupils develop comprehension skills quite well, picking out details from tapes and printed texts in the course materials. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from being taught in smaller

sized classes and make good progress, especially when teaching methods and resources are well adapted to their needs and in-class support is provided.

144. Standards in Year 11 are above average and pupils continue to achieve well overall. Listening and reading comprehension skills continue to develop well. Pupils in the lower ability groups can identify some factual information from tapes and printed texts whereas higher-attaining pupils deal with much longer extracts and most show some ability to recognise different viewpoints and attitudes. Relatively good progress is also made in writing as pupils use more varied vocabulary and expressions and learn to use verbs more confidently. In their coursework, writing on topics such as work experience, more able pupils display a good command of different tenses; they express personal opinions and accuracy is generally good. Pupils in the middle ability groups can write a short factual account of a holiday, though tense formation is sometimes faulty, and pupils with special educational needs work from models to write simple sentences. However, speaking skills are less well developed. In general, pupils tend to rely on written support, which results in errors of pronunciation and intonation, and most pupils lack the confidence to engage in and sustain a meaningful conversation of any length. Pupils do not have enough opportunities in lessons for regular speaking practice.

145. Attitudes are good. Pupils generally come prepared to work hard and most persevere when faced with challenging tasks. They enjoy working in pairs and groups to solve problems and practise speaking and boys participate as keenly as girls. They learn their vocabulary and complete homework. Younger pupils sometimes use their ICT skills at home to present their homework. There is good support among higher-attaining pupils in Year 11 for the after-school A-level bridging course and a good number of these pupils firmly intends continuing the study of French post-16. Behaviour is good. There is good support for the annual visits to France, including the school's exchange to Angers each spring.

146. Teaching and learning are good overall. The most successful lessons actively engage the pupils in their learning. The level of work is well matched to their abilities and resources are well chosen to stimulate interest. This was clearly demonstrated in a Year 10 lesson on the future tense in which effective use was made of the overhead projector to introduce the new language, followed by thorough drilling for correct pronunciation. This ensured pupils quickly learnt how to use the new tense and were then able to discuss future plans with a partner quite confidently. In the follow-up listening exercise, which proved very challenging, pupils successfully identified and noted accurately most of the verbs in the taped extracts and their sense of achievement was real. Another good example was a lesson about healthy living in which Year 9 pupils learnt to use the present and imperfect tenses to construct sentences comparing their eating habits today and in the past. After brisk oral recall of vocabulary, the teacher used the overhead projector to introduce and explain the new language. The pupils worked in pairs to produce a dialogue, taking turns to ask and answer questions and to note down their partner's responses in French. In the final session that followed, pupils presented their dialogues to the class and showed a good grasp of the new work. The teacher then gave the class excellent feedback on what they had achieved so far and what they needed to do to improve their work further in relation to National Curriculum levels. In another lesson where teaching and learning were very effective, an imaginative and fast-moving game around the class, and set to music, helped low ability beginners to consolidate their learning of new phrases by matching sentences on flashcards to visual aids. However, such good practice is not yet the norm and some teaching is only satisfactory. Where this is the case, lessons tend to be too teacher directed, pupils do not hear and practise speaking French enough and methods and resources do not always catch the pupils' interest or let them work things out for themselves. Teachers share good practice but there is room for further improvement, particularly in relation to teaching styles in Years 10 and 11. Marking and assessment are good but the use of supportive written comments to help pupils improve could be increased. Some pupils have good opportunities to use and develop ICT skills in their lessons but others do not. This aspect of pupils' learning needs closer monitoring to ensure all pupils receive their entitlement

German

147. In 2001, GCSE results were well above average and the 15 pupils taking German as a second language achieved passes at grades A*-C. Results were higher than in 2000 when there were fewer entries.

148. Higher-attaining pupils begin German as a second language in Year 8 and develop all the skills well. Standards in Year 9 are well above average and pupils are achieving very well. They show good understanding of instructions and develop their comprehension skills well, picking out specific details and opinions from what they hear and read. Their pronunciation is good because new words are drilled routinely. They hear German spoken consistently in their lessons and they have good opportunities to practise speaking. They speak and write accurately in sentences of increasing length because they can apply grammar rules correctly and can, for example, use the past tense confidently to write about a past holiday.

149. Standards of work in Year 11 are well above average and closely match recent GCSE results. Pupils learn to use different tenses appropriately and they increase their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar structures, which enables them to write and speak at some length, for example about work experience or a holiday in Germany. They develop their comprehension skills well because they have good opportunities to read a variety of texts and to hear German spoken on tape and by the teacher. Pupils achieve very well because they work hard, they attend regularly and teaching is very good.

150. Attitudes in German are excellent. Pupils enjoy what they do and come ready to work, maintaining their high level of concentration and effort throughout the lessons. They are well motivated and are keen to do well. They learn their vocabulary and complete their homework. A group of Year 11 pupils regularly attends the after-school A-level bridging class, most of whom intend continuing German at Sixth Form College. Behaviour is excellent.

151. Teaching and learning in German are very good. Pupils are well managed and relationships are very good, which together with thorough lesson planning, ensure that they learn effectively and at a good pace. Activities are well sequenced and there is good interaction between pupils and teacher. However, large class sizes in Years 8 and 9 result in cramped accommodation, which restricts the range of activities such as the ability to move freely around the room for group work. Good use is made of resources such as flashcards as a stimulus for oral work and to introduce new language. New grammar points are clearly explained and practised so that pupils apply the new learning accurately and confidently in new situations. Marking is good overall but more use could be made of written comments in Years 10 and 11 to explain errors and inform pupils more clearly how to improve.

152. Leadership and management of modern languages are good overall, though monitoring of teaching and learning needs to be more rigorous to ensure greater consistency of practice across the department. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. In connection with the school's Beacon status, good links have been established with schools in the locality to provide enrichment language classes. French is being taught on a weekly basis in a feeder primary school and the A-level bridging courses in French and German are open to Year 11 pupils in four local secondary schools.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Results in GCSE examinations are above average
- Pupils of lower ability in Years 7 to 9 achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.

Areas for improvement

- The balance between practical and written activities for pupils between Years 7 and 9 is unsatisfactory

- Opportunities for pupils to develop creative freedom are too restricted
- Numbers of pupils learning to play instruments and taking part in extra-curricular activities are low.

154. In 2001, results in music in GCSE were above average in comparison with all schools. The trend has been constant over recent years. There is no significant difference between the attainment of girls and boys. Numbers entered are small in comparison with most other subjects.

155. Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 indicate that standards are close to the national average, and this was reflected in standards of work seen in Year 9 during the inspection. Overall, pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory, but could be better. Because of the low allocation of time for practical activities for larger classes the difference between the attainment of more able pupils and lower-attaining pupils is less than is found in most schools. Pupils are able to follow guidelines to compose simple pieces in different styles but are not given sufficient opportunities to work creatively and independently to develop or extend their ideas. Most pupils develop a secure sense of rhythm and play simple pieces fluently as a result of following a systematic course in keyboard playing devised by the department. They can read uncomplicated staff notation and know some technical language. However, they have limited opportunities to discuss the music they hear, and do not, therefore, make great use of this knowledge. Less able pupils achieve well in relation to their prior attainment in both composing and performing. Several boys in a lower ability class in Year 8 competently created short pieces in the style of Indian raga. At present pupils do not have access to ICT in music. Younger pupils sing enthusiastically but do not listen sufficiently carefully to the effect they produce. Standards of attainment of pupils in Year 11 are above average and the achievement of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good. Although few have a wide experience in music outside the classroom, pupils quickly and systematically develop confidence in composing using conventional diatonic form, melody and harmony. Higher-attaining pupils create attractive pieces, which have some imaginative features, but pupils of average attainment do not develop their pieces beyond the scope of the guidelines suggested. Pupils of all abilities follow the same brief, without sufficient opportunity to explore original ideas. More able pupils perform competently, but lower-attaining pupils do not communicate confidently with an audience. Their knowledge about different styles of music is satisfactory.

156. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is good. Pupils benefit from the closer attention they have in smaller classes and most are able to cope with the same standard of work as other pupils. Pupils who are gifted and talented make unsatisfactory progress because there are no strategies for identifying the potential and extending the challenge for these pupils.

157. At all stages, pupils' attitudes are good. They arrive prepared to settle to work, and are fully co-operative with one another and with their teachers. They handle equipment responsibly and control levels of noise in a considerate manner. When they are working independently, most pupils use the available time well.

158. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. It is good in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, although there are some weaknesses at this stage. Teachers are well qualified and experienced, and relationships with pupils are very good. When lessons provide a proper challenge and all pupils are actively involved, learning is good. For instance, pupils in Year 9 rapidly learned the chord sequence and bass riff for a simple twelve-bar blues. However, pupils in larger classes spend too much time on unchallenging written work which does not extend their learning and musical abilities. Because of the fortnightly rotation between written and practical work more able pupils in large classes do not have sufficient continuity of contact to be able to develop their skills beyond a basic level. In Years 10 and 11 pupils are not given enough opportunities to experiment with original ideas.

159. The management of the department is satisfactory although there are some unsatisfactory features. The quality of teaching and learning is monitored regularly. However, the scheme of work for pupils in Years 7 to 9 does not allow sufficient time for practical activities. The assessment system for

pupils on the GCSE course is well used to inform them of their attainment and progress. The system operating for younger pupils does not relate their attainment to National Curriculum levels and so they are not as well aware of their progress or targets. The accommodation for music has improved significantly since the previous inspection but still has some unsatisfactory features. There are too few practice rooms, and soundproofing is inadequate. This has a direct effect on standards of attainment in composing, in performing in ensembles and on listening skills. Resources have improved since the previous inspection and are now good. The shortfall in provision for ICT is about to be remedied. Time allocated to music in Years 7 to 9 has improved since the previous inspection but still falls short of that in which the National Curriculum can be taught in sufficient depth. The department's development plan needs expanding to take account of the full range of the department's operations. The school's choir rehearses regularly and contributes to various important events within the school. Along with the madrigal group and barbershop singers it plays an important part in the annual prize day and the Festival of Lessons and Carols at Christmas. Rehearsals for 'Seven Brides for Seven Brothers', currently under production, involve around forty pupils in the cast. A small number of pupils learn to play instruments but there are no instrumental ensembles.

160. Since the previous inspection, standards of attainment have been maintained for the small groups of pupils taking music at GCSE. Standards are now satisfactory rather than good in Year 9. Consequently, overall improvement is unsatisfactory. In order to redress the situation, the department should examine ways of improving the scheme of work for pupils between Years 7 and 9, and should explore means of increasing the number of pupils learning to play orchestral instruments.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- GCSE results are consistently above average.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Pupils achieve well throughout the school in relation to their starting points.
- Pupils work well together and have positive attitudes towards their learning.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 are not sufficiently well linked to levels in the National Curriculum.
- Timetabling arrangements contribute to an imbalance between the teaching of invasion games and other parts of the physical education curriculum.
- Girls' changing accommodation is cramped and this contributes to the late start of some lessons.

162. Overall, standards of work are average in Years 9 and 11. They are above average in Years 10 and 11 in the optional GCSE examination classes. These standards are achieved because the teaching is good and the vast majority of pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Pupils' achievements in relation to their starting points on entry to the school and at the beginning of the GCSE course in Year 10 are good. They make good progress as they move through the school.

163. GCSE results in 2001 were above average. Over 60 per cent of pupils obtained the higher A*-C grades and, commendably, all the pupils who were entered for the examination obtained a graded result. A greater proportion of pupils obtained the highest A* and A grades than in most other schools. However a small minority of boys did not do as well as they should, in relation their starting points at the beginning of the course. Fewer girls than boys opt for the course and they consistently outperform boys by a greater

margin than found nationally. Results in recent years have been consistently above average and they represent an overall improving trend.

164. In Year 9, the majority of pupils are reaching expected standards for their age. Boys reach above average standards in badminton. They know the rules of play and can score accurately. Higher-attaining pupils show good racquet control in playing disguised drop shots. Girls' standards in football are below average but they make good progress because they listen carefully to their teachers and try hard to improve passing and dribbling skills in their practices. Lower-attaining boys and girls attain below average standards in netball, but they achieve well because the pace of learning and the activities provided are very well matched to their capabilities. Boys' standards in basketball are below average. Shooting skills are average but team play is naïve and pupils do not have the opportunity to talk about their work and devise ways of outwitting their opponents. Girls in Year 7 make rapid progress in building up a vocabulary of gymnastic movements, which they are beginning to link together in short sequences. Boys make particularly good progress in dance and quickly reach standards that are above average for their age. They use their understanding of quality in gymnastic movement well to develop control and show good tension in movements, which are well matched to the theme and rhythm of the music. In Year 7 to 9, most pupils have a good understanding of the effects of exercise on the body. They know why it is important to prepare safely for physical activity but are not always given the opportunity to take responsibility for this part of the lessons themselves.

165. Boys and girls build on the solid foundation of their experiences in badminton in Year 9 to reach above average standards in Year 11. They are well aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses and use this understanding well in doubles play to outmanoeuvre their opponents and make winning shots. Standards in boys' table tennis are average overall though they range from the beginner stage to skilled performance. Girls' performance in team play in netball is sound and they are developing effective dodging and passing skills. For those taking the GCSE course, standards in practical performance are above average. Some girls benefit from their experience in school teams and local club hockey to reach high standards in this sport. Standards in theory work are average, with no significant differences between boys and girls. Throughout the school, a good range of extra-curricular activities is helping to raise overall standards and provides good opportunities for the pupils involved to reach high standards, both individually and in their teams.

166. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school. This includes those pupils with special educational needs. They are well known to their teachers. Lessons and learning resources are normally well adapted to provide suitable levels of challenge. Learning is not as good for some of these pupils, despite the best efforts of their teachers, because they lack the one-to-one support that their particular needs require. Pupils are co-operative and hard working in their lessons, which are often physically demanding, and these positive attitudes are, in addition to the quality of the teaching, the key factors in the good progress. Boys and girls in mixed classes work well with one another. In some of the lessons seen, the proportion of pupils unable to take a full part in the lesson was higher than normally found.

167. The quality of teaching and the learning that it promotes are good throughout the school. Major strengths of the teaching are the ways in which the teachers' good knowledge and understanding are used to explain and demonstrate skills, and to analyse pupils' performance in lessons and suggest improvements. This was evident in a GCSE practical lesson in Year 10 where pupils made very rapid progress in learning the effective use of a short serve to establish an attacking position in doubles play in badminton. In a fitness and netball lesson in Year 9, lower-attaining pupils were sensitively encouraged to talk about their team play, and tactics improved as a consequence. In an excellent Year 7 boys' dance lesson, these good features were enhanced by the teacher's ability to inspire the pupils to overcome their initial worries about their capacity to succeed in this, for them, novel learning experience. They made extremely rapid progress and thoroughly enjoyed their learning. Expectations of behaviour and response are consistently high although, in a minority of lessons, pupils could take more responsibility and have more direct involvement in their own learning. Nevertheless, the opportunities now provided for pupils to talk to each other in order to plan and evaluate their work are much greater than at the time of the

previous inspection. Most lessons last for an hour and forty minutes. This suits the teaching of games, to older pupils in particular, but contributes, in Years 7 to 9, to an imbalance between the time devoted to games and other activities. Lessons are too long for many younger pupils to sustain demanding physical activity, especially in gymnastics and dance. In the main, teachers handle this well, for example, in a Year 7 girls' gymnastics lesson, by adroitly balancing the time for activity, explanation and discussion. Sometimes lessons, particularly for girls, are slow to start and, consequently, the time available for learning activities is less than it could be. Girls' changing accommodation is limited, as was the case at the time of the previous inspection, and this also contributes to the late start of some lessons.

168. Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection. Examination results have improved. Most of the issues raised at that time have been successfully resolved, although the changing accommodation for girls remains cramped. Computers are now used well to support pupils' learning in GCSE theory lessons. Leadership and management are good. There is a good understanding of current strengths and weaknesses but development planning does not include sufficiently stringent means of measuring progress towards the targets set. The work of pupils following the GCSE course is thoroughly marked and assessed and their progress is well monitored. However, although assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 are under review, they are not yet sufficiently well linked to the newly introduced attainment level descriptions of the National Curriculum for physical education. The accommodation is currently unsatisfactory. The gymnasium is used for school assemblies and the condition of the floor makes it unsuitable for pupils to work in bare feet. Lack of storage space means that mats and other gymnastic equipment intrude into the teaching area, and create a potential hazard when playing games such as basketball.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The rapidly rising standards.
- Teaching is good.
- Pupils achieve well.
- Leadership is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Better access to ICT.
- The amount of time allocated to the subject in Years 10 and 11.

170. Very good leadership over the past two years has resulted in a rapid rise in standards. Pupils' achievement relative to their prior attainment is good in Years 7 to 9 because of the variety of teaching methods and the skilful use of pupils' literacy abilities. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good overall; that of pupils taking GCSE examinations is very good. This reflects some very high quality teaching that motivates pupils well and raises their expectations.

171. Pupils' results in the full GCSE religious education course in 2001 were well above the national average at grades A*- C. This represents a continuous rise since 1999. All other pupils have been studying the subject for a school accredited Social Education certificate. A short GCSE course has recently been introduced for most pupils and there is evidence that standards are above average. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls – the decisive factor, irrespective of gender, being the pupils' literacy skills. Pupils with special educational needs work well and have attained appropriate levels for their ability in the Social Education certificate.

172. In Year 9, standards are above those expected in the Wigan Agreed Syllabus. Pupils with special educational need make good progress because they are well motivated both by the variety in the teaching and the positive work ethos of the school. This is especially true when the lessons are not heavily reliant on written work. In Year 9, most pupils are able to both talk and write about a wide range of religious issues related to Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism. These involve the various festivals, core beliefs and patterns of living. Some of the pupils' projects about various forms of prejudice are impressive and illustrate a good range of understanding. In the groups of lower ability, pupils' poorer literacy skills limit their means of fully expressing their knowledge. Overall, those pupils who start from average and above levels of attainment on entry, surge forward. With good teaching, they grapple with complex ideas and make use of artefacts to understand the basic concepts of Jewish religious practices related to the Passover, weddings, the Torah and worship. During Years 8 and 9, this progress and involvement is maintained, particularly in the higher-attaining groups where intriguing work was seen involving the use of Hindu artefacts. Evidence of all of this is clearly seen in the pupils' workbooks, most of which are presented very well. Attainment during Years 7 to 9 is raised through use of a good assessment process that encourages pupils to set their own overall target. The process does not, however, give pupils any indication of precise targets for each part of the curriculum. Pupils with special educational need benefit from the smaller classes and a small amount of in-class support. They persist with the work and their oral answers indicate a satisfactory understanding of the content.

173. Standards of work in Year 11 range from excellent to satisfactory. Overall, they are above average. The full course GCSE group in particular worked with a verve and expressed considerable enjoyment in studying Judaism, Christianity and issues involving all types of contemporary social and religious problems. This enthusiasm was a pleasure to observe. To a lesser extent this also applied to pupils on the short GCSE/Social Certificate courses. Here, discussions about the meaning of life and death, life issues such as war and peace, and environmental topics evoked a good level of response. The most notable feature is pupils' willingness to discuss matters in a mature way. The major limiting factor is

the short amount of time allocated to the subject, which is likely to suppress the short course GCSE results.

174. The pupils have good attitudes to religious education whenever the teaching is of a good or better calibre. Very good, professional leadership has helped to generate good relationships across the year groups. A wide range of lesson aids promote interest and encourage pupils to pursue tasks together in a very healthy manner. It is not surprising that the subject is gaining in popularity and that the number opting to study the full GCSE course is rising rapidly. This could be developed further through independent learning and more activities based on small groups.

175. Overall, teaching and learning are good. All the lessons observed were satisfactory or better. Many were good and one was excellent. There is some unevenness in the quality of teaching that is to be expected as only one teacher is a specialist in the subject. Teachers plan diligently and follow the departmental schemes of work. Pupils are stimulated when they are exposed to detailed knowledge. Impromptu drama, ICT and the use of artefacts were all seen to raise the pupils' sense of involvement in the learning. Where there are short, clear, confident explanations and a variety of activities, the teaching and learning result in a high level of success. The department has no computer or departmental library. Also, one teacher works in a small classroom isolated from others in the department. This makes the sharing of resources and ideas less practicable.

176. Considerable effort has been made to take the subject forward from mediocrity to one that is now taken seriously by the pupils. The new Agreed Syllabus is being carefully introduced in Years 7 to 9 and the range of provision in Years 10 and 11 has been restructured. There is a coherent development plan for the future but it is unlikely that this can be fully implemented without additional specialist support. For example, there are plans to create independent learning programmes, extend the use of ICT, and to review the particular needs of the gifted and talented pupils and those with special educational needs. The minimal time allocated for the subject is a limiting factor. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good and, given the opportunities, there is the capacity for much more.