

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **STEWARDS SCHOOL**

Harlow

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115220

Headteacher: Ms Rhonda Murthar

Reporting inspector: Dr Kate Seager  
1995

Dates of inspection: 3 - 6 December 2001

Inspection number: 190026

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

© Crown copyright 2002

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Parnall Road Harlow Essex
Postcode:	CM18 7NQ
Telephone number:	01279 421951
Fax number:	01279 435307
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Gordon Hewlett
Date of previous inspection:	23 October 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1995	Dr Kate Seager	Registered inspector	Special educational needs	What sort of school is it? The school's results and achievements How well are pupils taught? Pupils' personal development How well the school is led and managed
9472	Mr John Edmond	Lay inspector	Personal, social and health education Careers	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? Finance and administration
3958	Mrs Maureen Cawdron	Team inspector	English English as an additional language	Assessment
13734	Mr Harold Davies	Team inspector	Geography Religious Education	
30695	Mrs Geraldine Dinan	Team inspector	Art & design Support design & technology	
15075	Mr Bryan Goodman-Stephens	Team inspector	French German	Resources for learning
30699	Mr Arthur Kemp	Team inspector	Mathematics	How good are the curricular and other opportunities?
31821	Mr Brian McCann	Team inspector	Physical education Citizenship	
18846	Mr Philip Priest	Team inspector	Music	
31159	Mr Clive Simmonds	Team inspector	Science Equal opportunities	Health and safety
2183	Dr Peter Thompson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Design & technology	
15372	Mrs Patricia Walker	Team inspector	History	Staffing and accommodation

The inspection contractor was:

Open Book Inspections  
6 East Point  
High Street  
Seal  
Sevenoaks  
Kent TN15 0EG

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager  
Inspection Quality Division  
The Office for Standards in Education  
Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>7 - 11</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?</b>	<b>12 - 15</b>
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
<b>HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?</b>	<b>15 - 16</b>
<b>HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?</b>	<b>16 - 21</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?</b>	<b>21 - 23</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?</b>	<b>23 - 24</b>
<b>HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?</b>	<b>24 - 27</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>29 - 33</b>
<b>PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>34 - 62</b>

## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Stewards School in Harlow, Essex, is a small comprehensive school of about 700 pupils aged 11-16. A steady fall in pupil numbers was reversed in the current year; there are strong indicators that the upturn will continue. There are more girls than boys, but the pattern is not consistent. Pupil mobility rate (nearly 13 per cent) is high. Pupils come from a full range of socio-economic backgrounds, but many are from less advantaged homes. Nearly a quarter (above average) are eligible for free school meals. About seven per cent, 46 pupils, are from minority ethnic groups, mostly Chinese, black African or Caribbean, or from the Indian sub-continent. Very small numbers of refugee and of traveller pupils are on roll. The percentage of pupils speaking English as an additional language is a bit higher than in most schools, but only two are at an early stage of speaking English.

Pupils of the full ability range enter Stewards, but significant proportions are well below the national average, and significantly fewer than average enter at a higher level. More than a quarter of pupils (above average) are on the register of pupils with special educational needs. About two per cent of pupils (below average) have a statement of special educational need.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Across the school teaching is good but standards are below the national average. Progress is satisfactory overall, but hindered by the poor literacy skills of many pupils. Leadership is strong. The school is highly effective at keeping pupils in education and developing their personal skills. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Standards are high in art and in information and communication technology (ICT) by Year 11.
- Teaching is good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed and nearly three quarters was good or very good.
- Pupils' very good attitudes, behaviour and relationships promote good quality learning.
- The headteacher, governors and senior team lead the school well.
- The wide range of extra-curricular activities and opportunities and very good links with the community enrich learning.
- All pupils are valued, well known and very well cared for.
- Very good target setting and reviews help pupils to know how they can improve.
- The school provides excellent opportunities for social development and promotes pupils' self-esteem. Of the many opportunities to take responsibility, the school council is exceptional in developing confidence and good citizenship.

#### **What could be improved**

- Low standards of literacy hinder the learning and progress of many pupils.
- The standards of numeracy of many pupils are too low.
- The poor attendance of several pupils, especially in Years 10 and 11, slows their learning.
- Standards and the quality of learning in design and technology are unsatisfactory.

*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 its last inspection in 1996, but standards in Years 10 and 11 have not improved enough. Standards have improved in art, ICT and physical education, and there has been a marked improvement in science in Years 7 to 9. The quality of teaching has improved considerably, as a result of the school's monitoring and training.

Senior and middle managers work together with a clear aim to improve standards. The school has brought in the national framework for teaching English in Years 7 to 9, a reading recovery programme, improved individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs and has introduced considerable study and learning support. Assessment procedures and practice are now good. The good programme for gifted and talented pupils has been enhanced.

The school has worked hard and imaginatively to improve attendance through rapid contact with parents, linking its rewards system to good attendance and offering alternative vocational courses in conjunction with Harlow College. It makes first day calls and uses pagers to contact parents. The success of these measures is masked by the school regularly accepting pupils with a history of poor attendance.

There is still insufficient time for religious education in Years 10 and 11 to cover the Essex Agreed Syllabus. The school has not fulfilled its requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.

## 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			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	E	E	E	D

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Good teaching is helping to raise standards, especially in Years 7 to 9, but the poor literacy, numeracy and retention skills of quite large numbers of lower-attaining pupils hinder their learning. Poor attendance brings down the standards of several pupils, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

Although attainment overall in the 2001 Year 9 national tests remains significantly below the national average, more pupils reached the expected Level 5 in mathematics and in science, and the school exceeded its targets. Its performance is now in line with that of schools where similar proportions of pupils receive free school meals. In science, standards are now better and in mathematics they are broadly in line with those in similar schools. Stewards' English standards continue to compare unfavourably, although it met its target of 42 per cent of pupils to reach Level 5+. The school has appealed against the marking of the English tests.



By Year 11, the proportions of girls and boys gaining five GCSE examinations graded A\*-C, five examinations graded A\*-G, and at least one graded A\*-G are lower than in 2000 and all are well below the national average. The trend over the last five years in point scores at GCSE is now above the national trend, however. The school met its 2000 target of 30 per cent grades A\*-C, but just missed its target in 2001. It did not meet its target of 95 per cent gaining one grade A\*-G in either year. One pupil attained 9 GCSEs graded A\*/A or B, however. The school's results are inevitably affected by its acceptance of several pupils who face difficult personal circumstances and/or a history of poor attendance. Of the seven pupils who left with no GCSEs, three were helped to remain in education by following a college course.

In work seen, by Year 11 standards are high and pupils achieve well in art and design and ICT. Standards are broadly in line with national expectations in science, business education, drama, physical education and history in Years 7 to 9. Low levels of literacy slow progress, and standards in other subjects are below average in Year 11. Additionally, many pupils forget what they learn from one lesson to the next. Taking into account their starting point, pupils' achievement is satisfactory in English across the school and in mathematics in Years 10 and 11. Their achievement is good in science across the school and in mathematics in Years 7 to 9. In all other subjects except design and technology, they achieve either satisfactorily or well. Standards are low in design and technology and pupils do not achieve well enough. The school is adding value to the pupils' learning other than in design and technology.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Attitudes to work and to the school are very positive and most pupils are prepared to work hard.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in lessons and around the school is predominantly good. Pupils are courteous and they respect the school buildings.
Personal development and relationships	The school gives pupils a wide range of opportunities for personal development, which they take up enthusiastically. Relationships at all levels are mostly very good. Pupils trust their teachers.
Attendance	Despite all the school's efforts, attendance is not yet satisfactory. Most pupils arrive punctually to lessons.

Stewards is a happy school because of the high quality of relationships, the excellent integration of all pupils, good behaviour and attitudes.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is good overall. It was good or very good in nearly three-quarters of lessons. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Teaching is good across the school in English,

mathematics and science. All teaching in physical education and ICT was at least good. The major strengths are good planning and class control, the teachers' good knowledge of the needs of individual pupils and carefully matching tasks and pace to meet those needs. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory overall, but needs more reinforcing in all subjects. The quality of learning was satisfactory in almost all lessons and good or very good in two thirds. Pupils listen carefully and try hard most of the time, but many have difficulty in remembering what they learned in previous lessons.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is good overall. Extra-curricular activities and the involvement with the community are strengths. The school makes good arrangements to retain pupils in education.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Overall, the school makes good provision for pupils with special educational needs, but several of the learning targets of individual education plans are not sufficiently precise.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. Most speak English fluently and many succeed well in lessons.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. The school makes excellent provision for pupils' social development, particularly through the school council. It makes very good provision for their moral and good provision for their cultural development. Overall, spiritual development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes immense trouble to ensure that pupils are well looked after. Attention to health and safety is excellent.

The school has a good home school agreement, works well with its parents, and gives them very good information, especially through the school reports. Too little time for religious education in Years 10 and 11 prevents coverage of the Agreed Syllabus in sufficient depth.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and the senior team provide good leadership. They effectively promote good teaching and learning and develop pupils' sense of responsibility and pride. Financial management is very good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors serve the school very well. They have good expertise and are well informed of the school's strengths and how it needs to improve.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Senior staff constantly monitor performance and strive especially to improve standards.
The strategic use of resources	All specific grants are used appropriately; money is well targeted at raising attainment. Administration is efficient.

The school has sufficient teachers, but a few are on temporary contracts. Until recently it has experienced staffing difficulties in English and mathematics. It has problems with recruiting suitably qualified teachers for design and technology. Accommodation and learning resources are good overall. School spending is closely guided by the priorities of the development plan. The school seeks good value and spends its money carefully.

## **PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The very good relationships between pupils and teachers.</li> <li>• Good teaching in art, drama, history and physical education.</li> <li>• The good care taken of each child.</li> <li>• The school helps all pupils to develop in many ways, especially in self-confidence.</li> <li>• The school's encouragement and praise of all achievements.</li> <li>• The excellent range of extra-curricular activities and visits.</li> </ul>	<p>Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire were highly positive about the school. There were never more than two negative responses to any point on the questionnaire.</p>

Inspectors endorse the parents' positive views.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and pupils' achievements**

1. Since the last inspection, pupils are reaching higher standards in the Year 9 national tests in mathematics and especially in science, but not in English. The school has appealed against the marking of the English tests. Despite a rise in the proportion gaining Level 5 (the expected level) in mathematics and science in 2001, attainment overall remains significantly below the nationally expected levels, especially in English. Standards are better in science than those in schools with similar proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals and similar to standards in such schools in mathematics, but compare unfavourably in English. The school met its target of 42 per cent of pupils reaching Level 5+ in English, and exceeded its targets of 42 per cent in mathematics, 45 per cent in science.
2. Since the last inspection, there has not been enough improvement by Year 11, where the proportions of pupils gaining five GCSE examinations graded A\*-C, five examinations graded A\*-G and at least one graded A\*-G are all well below the national average. Both boys' and girls' results are well below the national average, although the trend over the last five years in point scores at GCSE is now above the national trend. The school met its 2000 target of 30 per cent grades A\*-C, but did not meet its target of 95 per cent gaining one grade A\*-G. In 2001 it fell just below its target of 30 per cent gaining five grades A\*-C and below its target of 95 per cent gaining one grade A\*-G. One pupil attained 9 GCSEs graded A\*/A or B, however. The school's results are inevitably affected by its acceptance of several pupils facing difficult circumstances.
3. The proportions of pupils achieving five or more GCSE examinations, graded A\* to C or General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ), five or more GCSEs graded A\* to G and one GCSE examination graded A\* to G were close to the average of those in schools where similar proportions of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Pupils' progress, based on the average total point score per pupil, was below the average of that of similar schools, however.
4. To date, there have been too few pupils from any one minority ethnic group to make a statistically valid statement on their attainment. Individual pupils from most minority ethnic groups attain at least in line with others in the year group and some do very well. Girls attain better than boys in English, mathematics and design and technology. Boys out perform girls in business studies. In other subjects the performance of girls and boys is similar.
5. In work seen, standards are high by Year 11 and pupils achieve well in art and design and ICT. By Year 11 standards are broadly in line with national expectations in physical education, business education and drama. Knowledge and skills in science are broadly average but poor literacy skills, especially poor writing, often prevent pupils from showing what they know. Standards in other subjects are below average in Year 11. Taking into account their starting point, pupils achieve satisfactory standards in English across the school and in mathematics in Years 10 and 11. They achieve well in science across the school and in mathematics in Years 7 to 9. In all other subjects they achieve either satisfactorily or well with the exception of design and technology, where standards are too low and pupils do not achieve well enough.

6. Poor recall and retention skills and below average standards of literacy slow the long-term progress of many pupils, especially those with special educational needs. About a third of these pupils start at Stewards with a reading age of seven or below, which presents the school with a considerable task to enable them to follow a full curriculum. Equally, despite the school's efforts, a few pupils' learning is held back by a poor level of attendance. In design and technology, progress is slow in some lessons because the schemes of work lack challenge and some non-specialist teaching is insufficiently demanding.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

7. The last inspection report was very positive about pupils' attitudes. The position is similar today. Most pupils enjoy coming to school. Attitudes to learning are mostly good, especially when the teacher has high expectations, though they were unsatisfactory in a handful of lessons.
8. Pupils show a great interest in school life and they appreciate the very good provision of extra-curricular activities, for which the take-up is high, particularly in sports. Most pupils concentrate appropriately in lessons and apply themselves to their work; negative attitudes are evident in only a very few, usually older, alienated pupils.
9. Behaviour in the school is of very high quality overall. It is at least satisfactory in almost all lessons observed, and good or better in four fifths. In two fifths behaviour is very good or excellent. High standards of behaviour make a major contribution to learning. Unsatisfactory behaviour was noted in a tiny minority of all lessons, mostly in design and technology, where pupils were not stimulated by the programme of study and where staff continuity has been a problem. Behaviour during assemblies and registration periods is also very good. Pupils work sensibly and co-operate very well and ethnic minority pupils are integrated well in classes. Where the teaching is inspirational as in a Year 10, lower set science lesson, pupils show a high level of interest and involvement. High expectations of good behaviour, as seen for example in a Year 8 English lesson, produce the desired outcome. Pupils want to improve their work and take a pride in the finished product.
10. Pupils are courteous and helpful around the school. They behave sensibly when arriving at and leaving school and when they move between lessons on the rather narrow staircases in some blocks, and when queuing for lunch. Pupils respect property, and have a clear understanding of the impact of their actions on others. No graffiti were seen.
11. The level of fixed term exclusions at the time of the last inspection was high at 55, but there were no permanent exclusions. Fixed term exclusions rose in 2000/2001 to 70, but again the school managed to avoid any permanent exclusions. Those excluded are re-integrated unobtrusively after a very short period. Nearly half the exclusions relate to only nine pupils; otherwise there are few repeat offenders. The school maintains proper records of exclusions. Few pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds are excluded, and numbers are too small to make reliable comparisons.
12. Relationships among pupils and between pupils and staff at the time of the last inspection were reported to be exemplary. The school has managed to maintain this high standard, with no evidence of racial disharmony. Pupils work well in groups and pairs, with good integration of pupils from other countries and cultures.

13. Inspectors were made aware of a few examples of bullying, including one reported incident during the inspection. The school dealt with it and other reported incidents quickly. The school impresses on new pupils the need to consider others, and pupils react positively, with some really sensitive and supportive attitudes noted. Respect for others' feelings, values and beliefs is high. This came across particularly clearly in several religious education lessons, which also had a high spiritual content. Pupils relate very positively to each other and work very well together in lessons. They react politely when addressed, and are friendly and helpful to visitors, opening doors for others at all times. All this makes for a very tolerant, happy and supportive society.
14. The school council and its year committees continue to give pupils a voice in school affairs. Both staff and pupils take the council's activities very seriously. Pupil representatives make significant gains in confidence and ability to take responsibility. Some even interview potential staff. The 40-pupil council with representatives from all year groups enjoys such a high status that the applications for election exceed the number of places available. This is a healthy sign of the close identity pupils' share with the school. Pupils have a large number of opportunities to take on other responsibilities round the school, for example by becoming a prefect, form or sports captain, or giving peer support. They carry out their duties very responsibly. The school also makes plenty of provision for pupils to give of themselves – for example in working for the local hospice and contributing to charity.

### **Attendance**

15. At the time of the last inspection attendance was a key issue, especially that of pupils in Years 10 and 11, although attendance figures nearly met the national average. The rate of unauthorised absence was low, but authorised absence was above that of mixed comprehensive schools nationally particularly in the older year groups. This had a negative impact on the education of those who were absent and disrupted their learning. Pupils were punctual at lessons.
16. Pupils' attendance is still below the national average, though unauthorised absence is broadly in line with the national average. Despite the school's efforts, the level of attendance has hardly changed since the last report. In the last three years it has hovered around the 90 per cent level, though it rose gradually from 88.9 per cent in 1997/1998 to 90.3 per cent in 1999/2000, the last year for which national comparisons are available. In 2000/2001, attendance fell to 89.7 per cent, well below the school's own target of 92 per cent, with unauthorised absence rising a little. Most of the time Years 7, 8 and 9 exceeded the 90 per cent level, but Years 10 and 11 fell below. During the first half of this term Years 7, 8 and 9 all attained over 91 per cent attendance (with Year 7 reaching 94 per cent); however, Year 10 only achieved 86 per cent and Year 11 88.5 per cent. In two specific lessons for lower ability pupils, English and mathematics, the turnout was minimal. Most of the absence in Years 10 and 11 can be attributed to only 13 pupils. Unsatisfactory attendance still has a negative effect on the attainment and progress of a group of pupils. Truancy from lessons is negligible, as pupils know that staff take a register each lesson. The legal requirements for recording and reporting attendance are met.
17. Most pupils are on time at the start of the day, and the majority display a reasonably responsible attitude to punctuality to lessons, though still too many arrive late to school in the morning.

### **HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?**

18. Overall teaching is good. It is very good in Years 10 to 11. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Teaching was good or very good in nearly two thirds of the 156 observed lessons, (very good in nearly a third), with a higher proportion of good and very good lessons in Years 10 and 11.
19. Teaching was always at least good in ICT, drama and physical education. It was good in at least three quarters of lessons seen in art, history, German, mathematics, religious education, business studies and personal and social education, and very good in at least half of French, German, physical education and personal and social education lessons observed. Correspondingly, the quality of learning was satisfactory in almost all lessons and good or very good in two thirds.
20. Despite operating with a number of temporary teachers, the considerable commitment to monitoring teaching by senior staff and local authority advisers, and providing training is paying dividends. The quality of teaching has improved considerably since the last inspection, when the teaching in only three-quarters of lessons was judged at least satisfactory.
21. Planning is good. Care is taken to vary activities to maintain pupils' interest and attention. Most teachers begin with clear learning objectives, which in the best lessons are shared with pupils. Equally in the best lessons time is left to go over and consolidate what has been learnt. Not all teachers leave time to do this plenary session.
22. A major strength is the teachers' good knowledge of the individual needs of pupils in the class. The school's planning for relatively small lower sets is helpful, as are the teachers' notes of the subject needs on individual education plans of pupils with special educational needs. The great majority of teachers cater well for each pupil, carefully selecting questions and tasks and providing individual support. They use the experienced and trained teaching assistants well, so that when these assistants are present, the very few pupils whose English is not fluent and the many with learning needs are well supported. One teaching assistant has been trained to work with small groups of pupils on a reading recovery scheme. A specialist teacher plans very carefully and gives very good attention to overcoming reading difficulties in individual support lessons. Pupils' significant learning needs are slowly being overcome.
23. Classroom and behaviour management is another major strength and is greatly helped by the general expectation in the school that pupils will behave well. Good class control results in pupils listening carefully to the teacher and each other in a large majority of lessons. On the few occasions where this was not the case, the pupils were not sufficiently interested in what they were doing, and the teaching, whilst satisfactory, was unexciting.
24. On-going assessment is good. Marking is careful, regular and often gives clear indication of how pupils can improve. Most teachers correct errors heard or seen in class. There is less evidence that teachers stop what they are doing to cover again points which are not understood, or change lesson plans in the light of their marking, but pupils reported that this happens and is highly appreciated in some English classes. Pupils in these classes are aware of making progress because the teacher checks carefully that they understand.
25. Generally teachers encourage pupils to believe that they can succeed. In consequence many teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do, and sometimes pupils are surprised at the amount of progress made in the course of a lesson. Teachers use

praise effectively, so that pupils are willing to try. Expectations are not high enough in several design and technology lessons, however. Occasionally, for example in some English lessons, the teachers' high expectations result in moving on to new work too quickly before pupils are sufficiently clear or confident about the previous task. In a few instances, the planning is too ambitious for the low literacy and understanding of the pupils and too little progress is made in long-term gains. Not all teachers have sufficiently high expectations about the presentation of pupils' work; untidy notes of several pupils make poor revision tools for design and technology and mathematics.

26. The teaching of basic skills is satisfactory, but needs further reinforcement across all subjects, especially since both standards of literacy and numeracy are below average overall, and well below average in many classes. Subject departments do well in teaching the specific technical words of their subject, but could do more to expand general vocabulary and writing skills. For example in science many tasks allow pupils to show understanding with minimal writing, to prevent it being a barrier to learning about science. Pupils were rarely asked to find a range of adjectives to describe their reaction to what they were discussing. For example in a personal and social education lesson pupils were not asked to describe what they felt after reading an article on bullying. Very few subjects support the confident use of mathematics by estimating and checking calculations or distances.
27. The quality of learning was at least satisfactory in most lessons, and good in more than three-quarters. In well over a third of all lessons (more in Years 10 and 11) the quality of learning was very good. It was at least good in all ICT, drama and physical education lessons and in almost all lessons in art, history and religious education. The pupils' good attitudes and good relationships are a major factor in promoting this good quality of learning. Many examples of very good or excellent application, with pupils working very hard and concentrating very well were seen, in particular in a Year 9 mathematics lesson. Many teachers generate a sense of urgency and pace in lessons, to which pupils react positively. Several pupils in most classes have the capacity to work independently and to persevere, though in one or two lessons they are spoon-fed, which inhibits initiative, for example the teacher pre-weighed the ingredients in a food technology lesson.

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

28. The curriculum is generally broad and balanced overall, with all National Curriculum subjects and religious education being in place in all years. Statutory requirements are met, apart from religious education in Years 10 and 11, where insufficient time prevents coverage in adequate depth of all aspects of the Essex Agreed Syllabus. The total teaching time of 25 hours is in line with national guidelines. The school is quite well advanced in its preparation to introduce citizenship.
29. In Years 7 to 9 the curriculum is broad and balanced and meets current requirements. Pupils study either French or German. No pupil in the school studies two foreign languages. Curriculum time for music in Years 7, 8 and 9 is below the national average, which restricts standards. The arrangement for design and technology where pupils rotate and do modules in food, graphics, textiles and resistant materials gives the pupils experience of many skills but the time for each restricts the expertise gained. The setting of pupils by ability for subjects such as mathematics, as from part way through Year 7, and science and modern languages as from Year 8, helps teachers to meet the needs of pupils in the class. Careful planning enables ICT to be taught across the curriculum within subject areas throughout Years 7, 8 and 9. Certain departments are



designated to provide specific aspects of ICT training and allocated blocks of time in the computer suite to do so. This arrangement is generally successful. Literacy has enjoyed a whole school approach since 1997, but the classroom strategies have not yet made an appreciable difference; they are just beginning to make a difference in Years 7 to 9. The overall measures for this crucial element of the curriculum need to be further monitored and evaluated for effectiveness; improving literacy remains pivotal to the raising of standards. The development of numeracy is unsatisfactory; teachers need to take more opportunities to help pupils use number across all subjects.

30. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow a common core curriculum of English, mathematics, science, physical and religious education, ICT leading to a General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) intermediate level, and a programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) together with three optional choices. Pupils and parents appreciate that all have the opportunity to work with the school's good ICT equipment and to gain an ICT qualification. The current free option system enables pupils to have a curriculum which lacks balance, for example it is possible to study no aesthetic subject. The curriculum time for English is just within the national recommendations, and barely enough for pupils with low literacy skills. No support option is offered; consideration should be given to providing additional time for English or a support option, given that there are so many pupils with poor basic skills. In subjects such as languages and music there are only sufficient pupils for one mixed ability group; teachers have to cope with preparing pupils of a very wide ability range for examinations.
31. In Years 10 and 11 the level of disapplication from the National Curriculum is high, 187 disapplications altogether<sup>1</sup>. Currently only 40 per cent of pupils opt for GCSE French or German, and only about 25 per cent do design and technology. Several pupils do neither. The current low standards in languages in Years 10 to 11 make it quite sensible to disapply a modern language. Disapplication from design and technology is largely driven by the school's difficulty in recruiting teachers; it is less desirable to remove the possibility of following a practical subject. Inspectors could find no written document informing parents that pupils do not follow the full National Curriculum if they are disappplied, but this point is explained to those who attend the option meeting.
32. Over a quarter of pupils, 195 pupils, are on the register of those identified as having special educational needs. Provision for these pupils is good. The 15 with a statement of special needs all receive their entitlement. Pupils with special needs are fully integrated in their classes. Individual education plans are in place, a significant task with so many pupils on the register. Overall the individual education plans are satisfactory. Some are quite good and provide teachers with clear guidance on the help they need to provide for pupils. Some group education plans are too general; they do not identify sufficiently sharp targets to help teachers' awareness of the pupils' needs, and in several the base from which the pupil starts is not obvious. Several pupils have only behavioural targets, but it is obvious that they have quite major learning needs as well, which need identifying and tackling. It is a strength, however, that teachers use these plans as working documents and add subject targets and note subject needs.
33. The school has set up a number of measures to help pupils with special educational needs. These include summer schools, individual tuition with a specialist teacher, and a reading recovery programme to all Year 7 pupils, and additional sessions to groups of pupils with greater needs. All of these measures have had a degree of success.

---

<sup>1</sup> Disapplication is the official measures the school needs to take if pupils do not follow all the national curriculum subjects currently required.

Records of reading recovery sessions show that, although a few pupils make no progress, most make at least satisfactory progress and several make good progress, for example 12, 16, 18 months progress over eight sessions in a six week period. Pupils make good progress in individual lessons with basic phonic work, but poor retention means that long-term progress is slow and few reach the stage of reading for pleasure. Eight trained learning assistants support pupils well in class. They know the individual needs of the pupils they support and make a significant contribution to their learning.

34. The school has recently set up an attractive learning support unit for pupils with behavioural and attitude problems. The newly appointed teacher commands great respect. His efforts, and very good support from a teacher of a local pupil referral unit, result in considerable success in improving behaviour and attitudes through 'circle time' discussions. Most of the pupils who attend also have considerable learning problems and poor basic skills which contribute significantly to their poor behaviour and attitudes. The current time allocation of a double period is long, and the time spent improving basic skills is not yet sufficient or used effectively, especially if the teacher needs to spend some of that time dealing with problems of individual pupils. The school intends to review the success of the unit and needs to consider the time allocation or providing some learning support for part of the double period.
35. The school works very hard to keep all pupils in education, going to some length to find the best opportunity for each pupil. Links with the Harlow tertiary college provide an alternative vocational curriculum for a very small number of pupils selected because of very poor attendance and at risk of becoming non-attenders. Currently two are offered work experience, coupled with tuition in basic skills and others follow hairdressing or vehicle maintenance courses, and prepare for the first rung of qualifications. This good provision is successful in keeping some, but not all pupils, in regular education. The successful cases raise pupils' self esteem and confidence and prepare them well for finding a job or continuing in education.
36. The school makes good provision for its gifted pupils. Pupils are identified by results in National Curriculum tests and scores from cognitive ability tests and the current register includes 84 pupils, with the highest number in Year 7. The school participates in a Harlow scheme where pupils from various secondary schools work together on themes for a day, or for Summer School weekly projects, for example noise pollution, Surrealism, drama (for example, *Richard III*), mathematics or courses on how you learn. As from Year 9 potentially gifted pupils are offered classes in Latin and dance at Harlow College. Pupils thoroughly appreciate both the opportunity to visit and learn in different venues and to extend their learning.
37. The high quality personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is broad and balanced, and has been very carefully planned. It includes health, social, drugs, sex and careers education and, for pupils in Year 10, two weeks work experience. This programme was also judged good by the previous inspection team. The programme includes provision for specific pupils to attend courses run by Harlow College. Environmental education is well covered in the science and geography curriculum in Years 7 to 9. A learning mentor scheme for about 80 volunteers in Years 9 and 10 helps develop their self-assertiveness. The school is imaginative in its wide use of outside expertise in many areas, including drugs, policing and career development. The PSHE and careers lessons seen during the inspection were at least satisfactory and most were good or very good.

38. Careers education is sound. The school has developed a close and effective relationship with the local careers service, which provides both advice to pupils and parents, and career interviews for most Year 11 pupils. Other specific provisions to increase pupils' understanding of the world of work include well-attended careers evenings, an industry day in Year 9 and a careers fair for Year 11. Pupils are prepared well for a working environment through following a GNVQ course in ICT.
39. A very good range of extra-curricular provision and very good links with the business, cultural and educational community within the town, enhance learning opportunities. These are significant strengths.
40. Parents spoke highly of the school council in the pre-inspection meeting; it supports pupils' personal development very well. Over 30 clubs run on a regular basis before and after school as well as at lunchtimes. The establishment of a free breakfast club each morning has proved to be popular with the pupils; it provides a good start to the day with opportunities to study, read newspapers or listen to the news. After school, study and homework clubs give further opportunity for curriculum support together with full access to ICT facilities. The links the school has with sporting clubs include nine different sports including dance, karate and tennis. Good use is made of Harlow Leisure Centre particularly for Year 11 pupils.
41. The school's very good involvement with the community enriches the pupils' education. Its close association with West Essex Business Partnership provides lunchtime mentoring for pupils in Years 9 and 10 to help them gain confidence. Middlesex University's and Anglia Polytechnic University's 'widening participation scheme' is designed for able pupils whose families have no prior involvement in university education. The school's artist in residence, its hosting an evening of poetry with a visit by the Poet Laureate, and later hosting a poet-in-residence as a part of Essex Arts week, all widen pupils' education. The school has completed a bid for Performing Arts status alongside another school in the town. Various local industrial companies enrich pupils' experience. They offer work experience, fund equipment and awards, provide sponsorship and visits to promote interest in science and a science lecture at Harlow theatre designed for the gifted and talented programme. The school is well supported by the Harlow Playhouse. The school has close and long standing links with a local hospice. Representatives spoke very warmly of the pupils and school. The parent teacher association has contacts with many local bodies and firms.
42. Primary liaison is effective and in recent years curricular links have been made in ICT, physical education and music. Literacy and numeracy Summer Schools have now been running for several years and are regarded as being very successful. The school offers pupils in Year 4, 5 and 6 'Taster Days' to experience secondary school. Various departments offer 'master classes' for able pupils. Local children benefit from access to the weekly 'music school'.

### **Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

43. The school provides pupils with satisfactory opportunities for spiritual development. Assemblies are largely secular. A significant proportion of the Essex religious education syllabus focuses on spiritual experience and pupils learn about and reflect on some of the different major world faiths. Pupils are comfortable talking about spiritual issues. In a few other subjects, for example in history, personal, social and health education, and in the learning support unit pupils speak of their feelings or react to a poem with profound reflection, and a few tutorials have a spiritual dimension. Empathy, compassion and sensitivity to others, are promoted by the school and the prevailing

ethos is one which values and respects the beliefs of all. Until very recently a youth leader of a local Christian church organised regular lunchtime clubs where pupils could reflect upon their Christian beliefs and their faith. Several pupils help the local hospice, and the choir which sings there had moments of deep reflection as pupils took part in lighting an eternal flame.

44. The school provides pupils with clear moral guidelines and a very good moral education through expectations about behaviour and attitudes, its non-acceptance of racist behaviour or attitudes, its valuing of each pupil and by providing good staff role models. The personal, social and health education programme helps them to consider responsibility in sexual conduct, to fight bullying and avoid drug misuse. Pupils raise money and give generously to charities; such opportunities raise awareness of others' needs. Parents approve of the school's atmosphere and the values it promotes.
45. The school provides excellent opportunities for pupils' social development. Pupil librarians, running the school bank and Year 8 pupils on duty as 'student of the day' to greet visitors and help at reception are but a few ways in which they can develop courtesy and confidence. Year committees, form and sport captains and participating in assemblies enable pupils to take initiative, gain confidence and develop leadership skills.
46. The school council, in particular, is a model of excellent practice. It allows pupils to assume responsibility and to affect the running of the school and the decisions made. Senior staff delegate many roles to those on the council, provide appropriate training, and trust them to fulfil the roles well. Council representatives are invited to present the pupils' views at senior management, governors' and parents' meetings, and are praised for their presentations. They meet important visitors. They are involved in the interview process for new staff when they prepare and put questions to prospective teachers. They take these responsibilities seriously, aware that theirs is not the final decision, but were proud that recently their choice was endorsed by senior staff and governors. Giving pupils such responsibility to represent others and to develop consideration and confidence is an effective and practical way of promoting good citizenship, which parents, governors and the pupils themselves recognise.
47. The school offers a good cultural education. Pupils are helped to value their own and other cultures in religious education. They make good use of other cultures in art, for example by using illustrations of Japanese woodcuts as a starting point for their work. Art, music, drama, English and foreign languages broaden their cultural horizons, as do the opportunities to take part in school productions and concerts, visits to the theatre and day and residential visits within Britain and abroad. In religious education and music, more could be done to inform pupils about our multicultural society. The religious education programme has a strong Christian content and there are few visits to places of worship of other faiths, because there are few in the vicinity. Music provides fewer opportunities to experience contributions and links with other cultures than is often found. The school could make more of its ready access to multiple artefacts, instruments and books from many cultures housed in the school in the Ethnic Minority Achievement Service. Pupils are given opportunities to live harmoniously with pupils from other cultures, and the school annually welcomes two Japanese pupils.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

48. At the time of the last inspection it was reported that the school's detailed attention to the welfare, health and safety of its pupils was an important strength. The level of training in child protection and first-aid were very good, with close and effective

relationships with all local agencies. Staff invested much time in working with children and families experiencing difficulties. These same high standards prevail today.

49. Pastoral care is delivered through a form tutor and head of year, overseen by two assistant head teachers. An assistant head teacher, the head of Year 7 and the special educational needs co-ordinator maintain long-term contacts with the primary schools. Staff take immense trouble to provide effective support and guidance to pupils and to promote their welfare. This care makes a very positive contribution to educational standards and helps pupils to feel happy and secure. The school has a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. Pastoral staff know their pupils very well and pupils confidently turn to them or other members of staff for help. The high quality of co-operation and liaison between all staff on pastoral matters is an important feature of the school. Pupils and parents appreciate greatly the personal support given and the comprehensive arrangements for introducing new pupils in Year 7.
50. The school complies fully with child protection guidelines and ensures that not only staff but pupils also have training in this area; liaison arrangements with social services and other external agencies are very good. The school has introduced a range of measures to support pupils, such as the breakfast club and the exclusion room, which allows pupils to calm down after a disagreement. The school effectively supports pupils with special educational needs to meet the targets set in individual education plans and statements.
51. The school's arrangements for health and safety are excellent. All aspects are thoroughly checked and covered. Spot checks by the site manager and the business manager and regular monitoring by the governing body supplement formal termly internal inspections. Three first-aiders have up-to-date certificates and all physical education staff are lifesavers.
52. The school has introduced a range of imaginative measures to monitor and improve attendance, in particular the Stewards Challenge and, for those with serious attendance problems, pagers for parents and vocational courses off-site. The school works with the local authority and other institutions directly to defeat the problem of low attendance, though it still has a way to go. Procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour work very well and pupils consider them fair. Staff promote an orderly and cheerful atmosphere throughout the school and have very high expectations of good behaviour. These expectations are fully realised by the standards of behaviour observed round the school. The Stewards Challenge, which pupils have taken to with enthusiasm, makes a major contribution here. The school does not tolerate bullying and the procedures for dealing with bullying, racism and other oppressive behaviour are comprehensive and effective. Representatives of Year 11 pupils, which included pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, put on record that they had never encountered racism.
53. Assessment is now used well. It was a key issue for improvement in the previous inspection report: since then, there has been significant improvement both in procedures and the way in which it is used to monitor individual progress.
54. Assessment procedures at entry are thorough. Pupils are assessed both to determine a general cognitive ability score, as well as reading and spelling scores. These data are used, along with information from primary schools, to compile the register of those with special educational needs and to draw up individual education plans, a substantial task with so many on the register. The register and plans are reviewed twice yearly.

55. Assessment within subjects has improved since the last inspection, and the large discrepancy between teacher assessments in Year 9 and results in national tests has decreased significantly in mathematics, though there is still too wide a margin between teachers' assessment and test results in science and English. The previous report commented on a blurring of the distinction between effort and attainment. Whilst this aspect has been improved with National Curriculum levels being used in all subjects to give a clear indication of attainment, the difference between teachers' assessments in Year 9 and standards observed in several subjects in Year 10, for example modern languages, suggests that pupils attain a level in a test, but do not sustain that level over time. The assessment arrangements in physical education are now fully in place and meet statutory requirements. Many departments involve pupils in assessment by providing them with a simplified version of the National Curriculum criteria so that pupils too are much more aware of their levels of attainment than they were previously. In the English department, for example, the process starts with pupils being asked to estimate their own levels using these criteria: pupils are thus able to see what they need to do to improve. A real strength in history is the degree to which pupils are aware of their own levels of attainment. It is important that pupils are aware that they need to retain knowledge and skills and that teachers provide regular opportunities to consolidate learning to sustain the level reached. Most departments have compiled portfolios of assessed work to help with the standardisation of teachers' judgements, particularly at the end of Year 9. This good practice could usefully be extended to all subjects.
56. There is now good use of assessment to plan the curriculum. Information of pupils' results from National Curriculum tests in core subjects and other tests held in Year 7 and Year 9 is given to all staff to help plan teaching. Assessment results are used to set pupils' individual targets, which are sent to parents termly on pupils' individual progress reports. The school's practice of giving pupils both achievable and challenging targets motivates many to try harder. Staff have received training on target setting and the practice is now more consistently applied by all teachers, and is beginning to have a beneficial effect on standards, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
57. Whilst thorough reviews of subject performance take place, the school's database still needs refining at the whole school level. Results are analysed by gender, but there is little readily available whole school information on the progress of those pupils who have been identified as gifted and talented, for example. Information of progress of pupils from different ethnic groups and pupils with special educational needs is held only at subject level. In consequence the data base is not yet able to provide readily details of overall progress, for example of how many pupils are moving nearer towards reaching a reading age in line with their chronological age, or the overall performance of pupils with special educational needs in GCSE examinations. The central computerised system needs more work to make the tracking of various categories of pupils easier.
58. There is only limited assessment of pupils whose first language is not English. Pupils are assessed on entry against the criteria defining the four early stages of learning English, but very few pupils fall into this category. Those who do so are mostly provided with appropriate individual support, but in science, for example, a Japanese pupil could usefully be given more support. Most of the pupils have progressed beyond the early stages, several are identified as gifted and talented, and there is no further tracking of their development as learners of English.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

59. The comments below on parents' attitudes to the school must be treated with a little caution, as the proportions of parents who replied to the questionnaire or attended the

parents' meeting are rather too small to be representative. Nevertheless, parents have an exceptionally positive view of the school. They confirm that their children enjoy coming to school and consider that they make good progress. Respondents to the questionnaire feel that behaviour in the school is good, and those at the parents' meeting broadly confirmed this view. Parents see the teaching as good, with high standards in art, drama, history and physical education, though staffing in English and mathematics has been a problem and this is perhaps reflected in the present unsatisfactory standards of literacy and numeracy. They consider that pupils get the right amount of homework. They feel comfortable about approaching the school, which works closely with them, and are kept well informed about progress. Staff are very approachable and are good role models. Parents see the school as being well led. They recognise that the school both expects their children to achieve their best and effectively helps them to mature and make progress. It promotes a caring attitude and high values, and one ethnic minority parent confirmed the general view at the meeting that all pupils are well integrated. Parents are very pleased with the interesting range of extra-curricular activities. The inspection findings confirm the parents' very positive views about the school.

60. The school frequently consults parents on its performance and on their views and takes their comments into account, when making its plans. It expects them to be actively involved in agreeing their children's personal targets. It provides them with frequent information evenings on matters of educational interest, such as how parents can help pupils revise or how to cope with coursework. These evenings attract a reasonable response. The school holds well supported parents' consultation meetings on progress, and staff actively encourage informal contact by parents, particularly if their children are undergoing problems. Parents are invited to a wide range of musical and dramatic productions, sporting events and other activities, notably the annual open day, graduation evening and presentation evening.
61. The quality of information provided for parents is excellent. The tone of the school's documentation is businesslike and the contents are very informative. The prospectus and governors' report to parents are comprehensive and both meet statutory requirements. They are supplemented by an induction video, which captures the spirit of the school and gives pupils a reassuring idea of what school life is like; an Internet website is in preparation. The regular newsletter keeps parents informed on specific school events and requirements. Any parent can request copies of the school's detailed policies in key areas, such as homework, behaviour and special educational needs, and many do. The school has set up highly appropriate arrangements for ensuring that parents whose English is limited, or who have learning or physical disabilities, are kept in touch with school developments.
62. The main annual reports meet statutory requirements and the quality of their presentation and content is excellent. They evaluate pupils' performance clearly, and staff are consistent in setting out what pupils know, can do and understand. Reports incorporate targets agreed with pupils and make provision for parental comments, before they are discussed with parents. These reports are supplemented by individual progress reports in the other two terms. Parents of pupils with individual education plans or statements of special educational need are fully involved in the reviews of their children's progress.
63. The overall contribution of parents to children's learning at school and at home is satisfactory. Parents want their children to do well and most see that homework is done. Parents have the opportunity to keep themselves informed about their children's homework and to support day-to-day progress through the homework diaries. Tutors

are rigorous in checking that parents have signed diaries. One excellent example of how this document is used in practice was seen: a learning support teacher checks parental comments on how much the pupil has read at home and writes in a number of suggestions for the parent as to how best to help the pupil at home. No parents currently help in the school, though some support sports fixtures, outings and residential visits. The Parent Teacher Association holds social and fund-raising events that raise some money for the benefit of their children, but it sees its main role as supporting the school and its functions. In 1999 its good work was acknowledged in that it was runner-up in a European parents' association award for its work in bringing together parents, teachers and pupils.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

64. Overall, management has improved since the last inspection, especially monitoring and planning.
65. The school benefits from good leadership by the experienced headteacher and the very well informed governors. They have a clear idea of the school's strengths and where it needs to improve and direct their spending and resources well. Governors, parents and pupils respect the headteacher. She is well and loyally supported by members of the senior team and many staff spoken to.
66. Governors are very well informed and appropriately involved in the strategic planning for the school. They are financially astute and have influenced and improved the school's long- and medium-plan that they review regularly. It would be improved with fewer objectives, focused tightly on the main things that would make a difference to pupils' attainment and learning. A tighter focus would also make each review simpler. The governors use their wide business, artistic and educational knowledge and connections to help enrich the pupils' curriculum and personal development. They are proud of their connections with the school and of its improvements. They serve the school very well. The school does not, however, provide sufficient time to cover the Essex Agreed Syllabus in religious education or fulfil the statutory requirement for a daily collective act of worship.
67. The headteacher knows the school, staff and pupils well. Her consultative management style involves them effectively and there is a strong sense of communal purpose. For example, pupils speak proudly of improved attendance and behaviour as a result of the Stewards Challenge. Staff were consulted in drawing up a good School Plan and consulted at each review.
68. The senior team has been enlarged since the last inspection, when a main recommendation was to strengthen the accountability of senior managers. The team now consists of the deputy headteacher, four assistant headteachers, quite a big senior team for a school of this size. Each handles his or her responsibility well. The efficient support provided by the administrative team removes from academic staff many of the time-consuming tasks, such as organising the lesson cover for absent staff, thus enabling them to concentrate on educational issues. The school runs smoothly and important issues are dealt with quickly and well.
69. Monitoring and evaluation have improved significantly since the last inspection and are now thorough, involving heads of subject and heads of year. Classroom observations, work sampling, pupil interviews, parental surveys and departmental reviews, help senior staff and governors' awareness of strengths and areas for attention and provide evidence of progress in meeting the targets of the school plan. Monitoring of teaching,



with 87 lesson observations in 2000-2001 by local authority advisers, senior managers, heads of department and peers, alongside a programme of three or four departmental reviews a year, all followed by target setting or training, have been major influences on the greatly improved teaching since last report.

70. The business manager and her team are competent and effective. Financial management and administrative systems are highly efficient, with good use of administrative staff to relieve teachers of tasks which can be done by others, for example reprographic and recording tasks. They support the school unobtrusively and make a considerable contribution to its smooth running. Good use is made of information technology to provide data on pupils and to control and provide data on finance. Governors are provided with appropriate and very detailed information to guide their decisions. A full-time network manager helps both administrative and teaching staff in their use of computers. The retrieval of data could be further improved to provide an overview on attainment and progress.
71. The business manager and governors monitor expenditure carefully. All specific grants are used appropriately and the school adds to the sum allocated for special educational needs. The school is adept at finding additional sources of funding and targets them well in its aim to raise attainment, for example by funding smaller groups in Year 9 in order to raise literacy. (The current Year 9 has a high proportion of pupils who entered the school with low attainment). Administrative costs are very high compared with other schools, but the governors deliberately hired a business manager to free teachers to teach. It is an effective investment. Although the carry forward sum of the current budget appears high, almost all is earmarked for the planned refurbishment of the laboratories, and the actual surplus is below one per cent.
72. The cost per pupil is high and standards are well below average when pupils leave school. The school gives satisfactory value for money, however, when a below average socio- and economic background and well below average attainment on entry, are considered alongside the good quality of teaching and education.
73. There are sufficient teachers to cover the National Curriculum subjects and other courses offered by the school. At the time of the inspection eight were on temporary contracts, including one head of department; some of these teachers have had a fairly long commitment to the school, however. Two of the temporary teachers, whilst qualified abroad, are unqualified in Britain. The relatively high number of temporary teachers is the result of recruitment difficulties and the policy of the school to not make appointments of teachers unless they are totally suitable to fill the vacancy. Staff turnover is broadly average for Essex, and several staff elect to remain at Stewards despite offers of promotion elsewhere. Staff recruitment in some subjects is difficult, however. The standards reached by some pupils in mathematics and English and by most pupils in design and technology have been badly affected by staffing difficulties. Design and technology continues to be short of teachers with appropriate qualifications to develop pupils' technical skills.
74. While most teachers are well qualified for the posts they fill, there are a number of teachers who are not qualified in the subject they teach. Generally these teachers are very experienced and their lack of formal subject qualification has no adverse effect on the attainment and progress of their pupils, other than in design and technology.
75. The school's strategy for the performance management of teachers is very good and its introduction has been carried out efficiently. As the school enters its second cycle of this process, teachers' confidence in using it is increasing. A good allocation of time for

the key stages of this process means that they are carried out thoroughly. Staff training needs are matched to school priorities identified on the school and departmental development plans, and to the targets developed through the performance management of individual teachers. There is a planned programme of in-service training delivered through both dedicated in-service training days and through shorter after-school sessions. The threshold assessment was praised for its meticulous attention to detail.

76. A good programme of induction for newly qualified teachers includes appropriate time out of the classroom, sometimes observing the work of more experienced colleagues and sometimes 'shadowing' pupils. Teachers who are recently qualified speak highly of the quality of support they have received. A similar programme of induction for teachers new to the school is planned to meet the needs of individual teachers at different stages of their careers.
77. Learning support assistants have a good programme of induction and on-going training, some of which is shared with the teaching staff, and some of which is specific to their particular needs. As a result of receiving specific training some learning support assistants have taken on additional roles. For example, a learning support assistant teaches the reading recovery programme to some groups of pupils who have particular difficulty with their reading. This represents effective use of support staff. Technicians are equally effective in supporting learning and helping staff to concentrate on teaching.
78. The good quality of the accommodation commented on in the previous inspection report has been maintained. Current accommodation is good overall and provides a stimulating environment for the delivery of the national curriculum. All subjects benefit from suites of rooms with a department office and good storage space. Classrooms are light and spacious. There are some unusual and distinctive features of the accommodation, for example the all-weather pitch, the meadowland area and the greenhouse, which offer particularly good opportunities to widen and add interest to the curriculum. Pupils benefit from having a swimming pool on site. The reduction in the size of the school has created a number of classrooms which are surplus to the needs of the school and are considerably under-used. Several have been used to provide specialist rooms to enhance facilities, such as the conference room and reading support room. Poor accommodation for drama restricts the subject's development.
79. Governors have a clear set of plans for the continuing development and up-grading of the accommodation. There are, for example, plans at an advanced stage of development for the complete refurbishment of the science laboratories. The opinions of pupils are taken into account when planning the development of the accommodation; one result has been the refurbishment of one set of boys' toilets, and further refurbishment of all toilet facilities is planned over time.
80. A strength of the school is the high quality of display both in classrooms and all corridors. This not only provides a stimulating learning environment but also offers good examples of a wide range of pupils' achievements.
81. Resources are good overall and most are used well. They are very good in history, information communication technology, special educational needs and religious education. Information communication technology has a new network and two new computer suites have been provided over the last 12 months. The special educational needs department has a very good selection of readers appropriate for specific age groups. Religious education has a very good range of artefacts, videos and resources developed within the department. Resources in mathematics are satisfactory and are currently being targeted for development. Resources in design and technology are

satisfactory for developing the existing curriculum, but are not appropriate for more high technology developments. Drama lacks specialist equipment. The library is a good resource, and is used well by pupils in all year groups. Some modern computers, with Internet access are available in the library. There is a satisfactory stock of books. The school has free access to the Ethnic Minority Achievement Services suite of rooms which is based in the school. This centre contains a wealth of resources including musical instruments from a wide range of cultures.

82. Teachers and the school are very well served by the staff in the resources centre. The network manager helps staff if computers break down and gives advice on using ICT. The technician records material, enables best use to be made of video cameras, as she processes film to make it a classroom resource and fulfils the many reprographic needs of teaching and tests.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

83. To improve standards the school needs to:

(1) Improve literacy by:

- providing more frequent and varied opportunities for reading and writing in all subjects;
- promoting the use of correct English in all subjects;
- alongside developing subject-specific vocabulary, subject teachers should strive to increase pupils' general vocabulary, for example the adjectives they use to describe historical events, geographical features, features they encounter in science or design and technology, the adverbs and verbs they use to describe what happens in experiments or after exercise;
- teachers providing regular revision and consolidation of what pupils have learnt to try to improve retention of learning;
- considering provision of additional time for English or a support option in Years 10 and 11 to enable low-attaining pupils to improve basic literacy;
- helping pupils to develop learning strategies to help long term gains of knowledge;
- ensuring that individual education plans include clear and precise literacy targets;
- ensuring that if double lessons are spent in the learning support unit some of the time is given to improving basic skills.

(Paragraphs 5, 6, 25-26, 32-34, 55, 88, 92-93, 111-115, 128, 138, 142, 143, 147, 148, 153, 190)

(2) Improve pupils' use of number by:

- identifying opportunities to use number, measurement, graphs, dimensions in all subjects and giving practice in these activities;
- regular revision and consolidation of previous learning.

(Paragraphs 100-104, 108, 129, 153)

(3) Continue with all the strategies currently used to improve attendance.

(Paragraphs 6, 15-16, 32)

(4) Improve learning in design and technology by:

- giving more emphasis to presentation, accuracy and precision in all design and make tasks;
- recruiting specialist staff.

(Paragraphs 5, 127-132)

Whilst not a key issue in raising standards, the school should also provide sufficient time for religious education.

(Paragraph 28, 191-192)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	156
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	68

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	3	45	60	45	0	0	0
Percentage	2	29	39	29			

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Please note that the teaching of one physical education lesson observed was not graded, as pupils opted for activities of their choice in the leisure centre. Teaching was not graded on two vocational courses observed at Harlow College.

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	693
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	156

Special educational needs	Y 7 – Y 11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	15
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	195

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	23

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	40
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	47

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	per cent
School data	9.5

#### Unauthorised absence

	per cent
School data	0.8 (0.5)

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. Figures in brackets are for 2000*

### ***Attainment at the end of Key Stage3 (Year 9)***

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	69	60	129

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	24 (25)	40 (28)	42 (22)
	Girls	32 (42)	34 (33)	31 (31)
	Total	56 (67)	74 (61)	73 (53)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	43 (49)	57 (45)	57 (39)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	10 (15)	26 (19)	24 (13)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	35 (36)	44 (36)	50 (31)
	Girls	39 (50)	32 (43)	34 (35)
	Total	74 (86)	76 (79)	84 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	57 (63)	59 (58)	65 (49)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	24 (31)	24 (33)	27 (23)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

*Percentages in brackets refer to the year 2000.*

### 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	60	53	113

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	14	44	55
	Girls	14	46	50
	Total	28	90	105
Percentage of pupils achieving The standard specified	School	25 (30)	80 (83)	93 (91)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year 2000.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	26.5 (29)
	National	39 (38)

Figures in brackets refer to the year 2000.

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	18	61
	National		n/a

NB: 83% of pupils successfully achieved Unit 1 and 61% achieved Units 2 and 3. National figures are not yet available.



### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	4
Black – other	4
Indian	2
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	10
White	635
Any other minority ethnic group	36

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage	2	
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	62	
Other minority ethnic groups	6	

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

### ***Teachers and classes***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	38.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.9

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	398

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72%
-----------------------------------------------------------	-----

#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	24

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	2000-01
----------------	---------

	£
Total income	2168542
Total expenditure	2041401
Expenditure per pupil	3190
Balance brought forward from previous year	119391
Balance carried forward to next year	246532

### ***Recruitment of teachers***

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	17
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	17
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	4.9

Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## **Results of the survey of parents and carers**

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	693
Number of questionnaires returned	30

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	57	40	0	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	65	32	0	3	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	39	55	0	3	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	42	55	0	3	0
The teaching is good.	48	52	0	0	0
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	52	35	3	0	10
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	61	35	0	0	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	81	19	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	55	42	3	0	0
The school is well led and managed.	48	45	6	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	52	39	3	3	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	74	23	3	0	0

### **Other issues raised by parents**

Only one issue was raised in writing and this was investigated. The parents' meeting was attended by 19 satisfied parents. One was concerned that her Year 7 child had not used a computer by the November meeting. Several parents stated that their children were using computers. Investigation showed that all Year 7 pupils are introduced to computers on induction day. Perhaps this pupil had missed that day.

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

### ENGLISH

84. Overall, the quality of provision in English is **satisfactory**.

#### Strengths

- Good teaching overall ensures that pupils make at least sound progress over time.
- Good relationships between teachers and pupils, pupils' positive attitudes and good behaviour create a favourable climate for learning.

#### Areas for improvement

- Standards of English across the school are too low.
- Low standards of literacy across the school are impeding progress in many subjects.

85. Standards in English are below average overall. The standards reached, however, represent good achievement at the end of Year 9 and satisfactory achievement at the end of Year 11, because the level of pupils' attainment on entry to the school is well below average.

86. Results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were well below the national average in 2001 and lower than those in other core subjects. The proportion meeting Level 5 and above met the school's target, however. Results have fluctuated between below and well below average since the last inspection; they have declined overall. In line with national trends, girls have consistently shown higher attainment than boys. GCSE English results in 2001 were well below average and slightly lower than those in the previous year. The GCSE English literature results rose slightly from well below average in 2000 to below average in 2001. Since 1997, the results have been consistently below or well below average. Girls again do better than boys, although boys' performance in GCSE English in 2000 was better than that in their other subjects. Other than the very few pupils whose English is not yet fluent, pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve in line with their peers with similar prior attainment.

87. Standards in the work seen and in the lessons observed during the inspection are better than these results suggest, especially in Years 7 to 9. They are below average, rather than well below, other than in the lowest sets. By the age of 14, pupils are attentive listeners and many speak with confidence, although not always grammatically and not always using Standard English. Some read aloud fluently, many show satisfactory comprehension, but too often this is restricted by pupils' narrow grasp of vocabulary. Higher-attaining pupils in particular produce some imaginative writing, showing sensitivity in creating character and understanding of the feelings of others. They are starting to make deductions from the texts they read and are able to use quotations as evidence. The writing of many pupils, however, is less accurate than it should be, and there is little evidence of much extended writing. This could partly be the result of teachers conscientiously trying to follow the Literacy Hour model in their lesson planning and not allowing enough time for sustained writing in lessons. Many pupils need to write with a greater awareness of their audience, using a more appropriate formal style if required.

88. By the age of 16, many pupils' speaking and listening skills show greater confidence than in Year 9, although some of all levels of ability are more reticent, and few speak at length. It is rare to find pupils taking the initiative and asking their own questions during oral work. Pupils' reading improves in fluency, but even many high-attaining pupils read aloud with little expression and do not always pay enough attention to meaning. Relatively small numbers of pupils have serious difficulties with reading that persist until Year 11. Many pupils become familiar with literary vocabulary, but lack of wide general knowledge and a wide reading experience means that pupils still have a restricted vocabulary range, despite the efforts of many teachers. High-attaining pupils mostly write fluently and accurately, but there remains an unacceptable level of inaccuracy in much written work. Some good analytical writing is seen, and many pupils write interesting personal responses to literature. Many are able to use ICT, and some use desktop publishing programs, to improve the presentation of their writing.
89. Achievement throughout the school is at least satisfactory, helped by well-planned and carefully structured teaching. Pupils who have had consistent teaching often make good progress, but achievement generally has been adversely affected by recent turbulence in staffing. In several instances, pupils make good progress during the course of a lesson but recall of previous learning is weak. Some, but not all, pupils with special educational needs make good progress as a result of good support from assistant staff and much individual help from class teachers. Teachers have a very good awareness of their pupils' individual learning needs. The very few early stage learners of English as an additional language make good progress, helped by a 'buddy' system and by carefully targeted individual support. Other learners, at more advanced levels of competence, are well integrated and their achievement is at least in line with that of other pupils. The better motivated often make very rapid progress in the acquisition of English.
90. The quality of teaching is good overall: some is very good and occasionally it is excellent. There is a wide variety of teaching styles in the department, but a common feature is the firm, friendly classroom management which helps to create a favourable environment for learning. Pupils are helped to learn by the very good relationships which have been built up between teachers and their pupils: there is mutual respect. Pupils respond with good behaviour and positive attitudes. Most take their work seriously and most work productively in class: classrooms are generally busy places, the pupils expect to learn and little time is wasted. In the most successful lessons, teachers have a very lively approach and humour is used effectively to make learning fun and to keep pupils interested and alert. Teachers ensure that the pace of learning is brisk and that lessons include a variety of activities, although very occasionally pupils are confused by being given too many activities to complete in too short a time. Very good learning was seen in a Year 10 lesson where the pupils in a top set were planning a coursework essay on *'Romeo and Juliet'*, using a helpful framework devised by the teacher. A cooking timer was set to remind the class to keep on task, pupils read out draft paragraphs at intervals, and both the class and the teacher provided helpful feedback. Teachers use a variety of other techniques to help pupils learn. Lessons usually begin with clear statements of objectives, and end with effective plenary sessions in which pupils are encouraged to reflect and consolidate their learning. Some teachers use visual stimuli to help with pupils' understanding: in one classroom a visual timeline stretched across the room enables pupils to understand the links between literary, political, social and intellectual developments of the distant and the more recent past. Much marking is helpfully diagnostic: pupils are given appropriate targets and know what to do to improve. Some marking develops into a dialogue between teacher and pupil; in some cases, the teacher's exacting comments produce a positive

response and clear improvement. Occasionally, marking is overgenerous. In these cases, a more rigorous approach is needed so that pupils' spoken and written English becomes more accurate.

91. The department is very well led and efficiently managed. The ethos is in line with the school's: staff work collaboratively, they are committed to the improvement of pupils' learning. Good systems for monitoring the work of the department include the observation of lessons. This monitoring, together with the high quality training given both by the head of department and visiting experts, has undoubtedly contributed towards the improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection. The quality of assessment has also improved: teachers now distinguish more clearly between effort and attainment, and better use is made of national curriculum levels to monitor progress and in target setting. A great deal has been achieved despite staffing difficulties in the last few years, but some important developments such as the compilation of a departmental portfolio for standardisation purposes have been delayed. It is hoped that the relatively more stable staffing situation will allow such developments to proceed. There should now be a focus on improving literacy and standards. In this respect, the school should review the curriculum time given to English. Although just within the national recommended limits, it is barely sufficient to move on pupils with very low prior attainment and to provide enough teaching time for two GCSE examination subjects. Further measures to improve literacy should include developing pupils' skills in reading aloud with meaning and expression, devising formal and informal strategies to extend pupils' vocabulary and providing more opportunities for extended writing.

### **Literacy across the curriculum**

92. Low standards of literacy are impeding pupils' progress in many subjects. Standards of literacy are well below average when pupils enter the school; about a third of pupils on the special educational needs register enter with a reading age of seven or under. This low start leaves Stewards with a large task to tackle. The introduction of the national literacy strategy and a reading recovery programme are not yet showing enough benefit across the curriculum.

### **Drama**

93. Overall, the quality of provision in drama is **satisfactory**.

#### **Strengths**

- Good and sometimes very good teaching enables most pupils to make satisfactory progress over time.
- Pupils are enthusiastic and drama is a popular choice at GCSE.
- Pupils develop skills of collaborative working and self-evaluation.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Pupils need to make more use of a wider range of drama skills in their improvisations.
- Poor accommodation and equipment restrict the development of the subject.

94. Drama was lightly sampled. It is taught as a separate subject within the performing arts department. Standards seen during the inspection are broadly average, both by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11. Achievement is satisfactory. GCSE results have fluctuated, reaching a peak in 1999 when they were above the national average. Since then there has been a pronounced decline, to the extent that some results for 2001 are currently under appeal.

95. Pupils gain a satisfactory range of basic drama skills by the end of Year 9. They make good use of facial expression and gesture. Most are able to create and sustain convincing characters, using humour to do so when appropriate. In GCSE classes, pupils create dramatic tension and have good skills of evaluation, although not all pupils are able to keep in role successfully, and many performances lack sophisticated presentation techniques. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in this subject.
96. The teaching is good overall, sometimes very good. Very good classroom management ensures a serious working atmosphere, even in the difficult conditions in the drama room. Discussions are handled skilfully: the teacher's good questioning skills help to develop pupils' perceptions about their own performance as well as that of others. Pupils are enthusiastic about drama and usually behave well. They form an attentive audience, offering thoughtful supportive comments on each other's work. They recognise that they learn a great deal about how to work collaboratively. Many gain in confidence.
97. The running of the department is shared between the only specialist drama teacher, who has other senior responsibilities, and the head of music, who is in overall charge. Extra-curricular activities such as a drama club are consequently restricted. Accommodation and equipment are unsatisfactory. The school hall is spacious, but is not always available. The one specialist room is too small for most classes, apart from GCSE groups. Its low ceiling makes all activity very noisy, and it lacks specialist equipment such as lighting to enhance pupils' performances. Drama has the potential to make a strong contribution to pupils' personal development and to the cultural life of the school, but this contribution is limited by the current staffing, management and accommodation arrangements.

## MATHEMATICS

98. Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good.
- Departmental schemes of work are thorough and informative.
- Pupils develop skills of collaborative working and self-evaluation.

### Areas for improvement

- Attainment needs to improve.
- Numeracy is poor. It needs to be supported in subjects across the curriculum.
- Teachers need to provide more opportunities for investigative mathematics.
- The department needs to use a wider variety of ICT software to support learning.

99. The attainment of pupils in mathematics on entry to the school is well below national standards. The overall results of National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds in 2001 were below the national average but close to the average of those of schools with similar proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals. The results pupils gained in Year 6 in the primary schools in 1998 at level 4 and above compared with their results gained in Year 9 at level 5 and above in 2001 show good progress, however. Attainment in 2001 has considerably improved at Levels 5 and 6 since 2000. The proportions gaining Levels 5 and 6 are similar to those in science and are better than English.

100. GCSE results in 2001 at grade A\* to C were well below the national average and below average for similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining A\* to C grades was just above half of that seen nationally. The proportion of achieving within the A\* to G grade range was extremely low, with a quarter failing to obtain any grade at all. Girls performed better than boys, the difference being in excess of national averages, this difference has widened since 2000 and is an issue which needs tackling. Pupils have performed less well in mathematics than other subjects taken at GCSE.
101. In recent years there have been critical staffing issues, which have seriously affected standards and the development of the department. During 2001 staffing shortages have eased, these changes have not been in place long enough to improve overall attainment appreciably across all age ranges. The improvement seen in the National Curriculum test results for 14-year-olds suggests that attainment is improving in Years 7 to 9. Nevertheless observations of lessons and pupils' work continue to reflect the low level of pupils' attainment on entry to the school. The standard of work in lessons ranges from weak to, in some instances, above national average but is still, overall, well below national average and therefore attainment remains an issue for further improvement.
102. Many pupils, including those of higher ability, lack the confidence to succeed when faced with applying previously taught skills. Whilst the work pupils are asked to do covers a relevant range of mathematical skills, it is sometimes completed without fully grasping mathematical connections and understanding. For example, in a Year 8 class of average ability, the pupils were dealing with addition of fractions. Pupils had previously been taught preliminary techniques but when asked to apply these skills in a more difficult situation many lacked confidence, and could not remember or apply previously taught methods. Even those who applied the correct techniques struggled to explain the underlying concept. Another example was where pupils were being taught percentages. They were reasonably confident when calculating 10 per cent of £5, or 20 per cent of £20, mentally recognising that 10 per cent is equivalent of one tenth and using this fact to solve the problem. When this was extended to calculating an increase to £35000 of 8 per cent and then finding an overall answer, however, a significant minority did not know what to do. This was despite good teaching methods. Issues similar to this were reflected throughout the inspection.
103. The quality of teaching was good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. In the most effective lessons teaching was well planned, and the objectives were clearly explained at the beginning of the session. Good use was made of question and answer techniques; explanations in many lessons were not unduly tied to textbook or worksheet references. In such lessons pupils enjoyed themselves, good progress was made and pupils were able to explain both the technique and its mathematical context. In one particular low-ability Year 9 class, the lesson began with an arithmetical game of multiples, which was enjoyed by the pupils and created a level of interest, which was sustained throughout the lesson. The main lesson developed whereby pupils were taught the correct use of a protractor. All the familiar mistakes in this technique were addressed. Volunteers were confident in describing their understanding by demonstrating at the front of the class using the whiteboard. This activity fostered mutual learning. The pupils' grasp of the skill enabled them to measure angles accurately; plans for the next lesson included using this skill to confirm the angle sum of any polygon. The lesson was very much a shared experience which reflected the effective pupil teacher rapport. A high proportion of lesson time was engaged in demonstration, instruction and in particular, collective and individual dialogue with pupils. Overall the general level of progress in mathematics does not always equally reflect the high level of good teaching; for example previous inadequate learning experiences have lead to low self-esteem which weakens progress.

Learning by pupils with special education needs is good overall. In the two lessons observed where a teaching assistant was present, their work was effective in promoting learning, they displayed an intimate knowledge of the pupils together with detailed individual education plans. There is however a need for increased use of differentiated work, in particular in Year 7, where pupils during the initial term are taught in mixed ability groups.

104. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is always very good; it fosters a pleasant learning environment. In many exercise books, including those of higher-attaining pupils, there is an amount of poorly presented and incomplete work. Learning is impeded by untidy written work and, because it lacks structure, it does not encourage understanding and retention. In addition the lack of systematic note taking together with accurate exemplars hinders provision for revision and weakens long-term progress.
105. The recently appointed head of department provides enthusiastic leadership; she is open to fresh ideas and is determined to secure higher standards. A more stable staffing situation, together with the improved 2001 National Curriculum tests for fourteen year olds, have provided a more secure foundation to build upon. New schemes of work comprehensively link teaching and learning objectives with appropriate resources. Springboard 7, which is designed as a mathematics catch-up programme is available for use with pupils who have not achieved level 4 on entry to the school. Assessment and monitoring follow the school plan, but a detailed and commonly shared department data record is yet to be put into place. ICT is a good feature of the school in well-equipped rooms. The mathematics department supports its use across the curriculum with the use of spreadsheets and LOGO. The use of further forms of software should be considered.

### **Numeracy across the curriculum**

106. Standards of numeracy are well below average. Many pupils lack confidence in applying mathematical concepts to new situations. The lack of a co-ordinated approach is resulting in considerable variation across subjects and indeed evidence of numerical work is limited. Science provided the best examples of numeracy with two Year 7 pupils capably dealing with mental calculations, for example  $76 \times 2.5$ . The pupils converted metres to centimetres, accurately measured arm span and height and tabulated the results. In physical education, pupils are involved in measuring distances, scoring in games and timing events. The GCSE folders displayed evidence of the use of graphs and the changing rooms notice board raises pupils' awareness to aspects of numeracy using conversion tables. Ways of using numeracy are included within the schemes of work of most subjects, including calculating the percentage of marks gained, but Year 8 pupils were not able to do the calculations. Teachers need to help pupils see mathematical links. In art pupils were studying Art Deco and Art Nouveau. Whilst pupils were familiar with rotational and reflective symmetry, they did not make the link between what they had learned in mathematics and what they were studying until the teacher pointed out how the patterns drew on symmetry. Teachers of all subjects need to look for ways to help pupils apply mathematics to what they are doing.

## **SCIENCE**

107. Overall, the quality of provision in science is **satisfactory**.

### **Strengths**

- Results at the end of Year 9 have improved.
- Pupils are fully involved in lessons.



- Well-qualified staff communicate and share good practice.
- The good accommodation and resources, particularly the increase in texts since the previous inspection, support learning well.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- To raise the attainment in GCSE pupils need to be given more opportunities to write and explain what they are doing.
- The department needs to develop the schemes of work for the newly established separate sciences in Year 10.

108. On entry to the school in 2001 the attainment of a significant majority of pupils was well below average, with very few showing average or above average attainment, although the numbers of pupils achieving a Level 4 on entry into Year 7 has increased since the previous inspection. The 2001 results in the National Curriculum assessment tests taken at the end of Year 9 were below the national average, but above those of similar schools. The boys' attainment was higher than the girls' with 61 per cent achieving a Level 5 or above compared with 52 per cent of the girls. The figure for all pupils in school achieving Level 5 or above was 57 per cent, an increase of 18 per cent since 2000. The results have improved significantly since the previous inspection with the teachers' assessments now showing much more accuracy. The department achieved its first Level 8 result since the start of the National Curriculum tests.
109. GCSE examination results in 2000 were well below the national average with 31 per cent of pupils achieving an A\* - C grade compared with 49 per cent nationally. They were well below those of similar schools. The percentage of pupils achieving higher grades is well below the national average. Since the previous inspection the proportions of boys and girls achieving A\* - C grades has been broadly similar. The results have fluctuated since the previous inspection, peaking in 1999. The 2001 results show a drop from 2000. The school has appealed against some of the 2001 results.
110. In work seen during the inspection, standards are in line with national expectations by the end of Year 9. Pupils can retain more prior information, but their poor writing skills cause difficulty for them in producing extended writing. Their poor literacy skills make them more able to cope with short questions. Pupils in Year 7 show enthusiasm when classifying animals into vertebrates and invertebrates. A Year 8 class of mainly below-average pupils and pupils with special educational needs, can key in their own data on a computer in an experiment to find out the effect of acids and alkalis on seed germination. The same pupils rapidly develop their skills in the use of Excel to produce spreadsheets. A Year 9 class with pupils of mainly average prior attainment can carry out an experiment to produce a soluble coloured salt by the action of an acid on a metallic oxide. Pupils with average and below average attainment in a Year 9 class write simple word equations and understand that although carbon is a non-metal, it can conduct electricity.
111. Understanding of science by the end of Year 11 is broadly in line with national expectations in individual lessons, but their attainment is below expectations as many pupils are handicapped in writing explanations by their poor literacy skills and have difficulty remembering what they have learned in previous lessons. As their knowledge increases, pupils in Year 11 can deal confidently with a range of activities. Pupils with special educational needs know that green plants make starch in their leaves using light energy from the sun, but are unsure of the function of flowers as organs of reproduction. Higher-attaining pupils understand that zinc and magnesium produce hydrogen gas when reacting with sulphuric acid, but cannot relate the inactivity of copper to its position in the reactivity series. All the pupils in a Year 10 class of average and above average-

attainers know that the radioactive gas radon is released from rocks, particularly granite, and that if inhaled over a period of time can cause cancer.

112. During the inspection, pupils in Years 10 and 11 were revising for a modular science test. Consequently there were very few opportunities to observe practical work. Scrutiny of their GCSE coursework and their exercise books shows that planning and observation in experiments are good, but analysis of results and their evaluation are less so. Strategies are being developed to improve these weaker areas. Pupils have to work independently for their coursework and more opportunities are provided for independent learning with assessment of practical work being a part of everyday lessons. Pupils do less well in the GCSE examinations than in the work seen in the classroom; their relatively poor literacy skills prevent them from expressing themselves fully in their written work. Their inadequate reading prevents best use of texts in lessons, although some high-attainers use them frequently. Poor use of texts reduces revision possibilities. Many below average-attainers have difficulty in retaining scientific facts over a period of time. Improved retention is fundamental to raising their attainment in GCSE.
113. Pupils of all prior attainment make good progress from Year 7 to Year 11. In a Year 7 mixed ability class, pupils of below average attainment make good progress by sorting out pictures of animals into those which had a backbone and those which did not, because of the good planning and clear explanations from the teacher. In Year 9, average and below average-attainers make good progress because the teacher keeps up the pace of the lesson and has high expectations of them to complete their experiment on metals reacting with acids and collecting and testing the gas given off.
114. Higher-attainers in Year 10 consolidate their earlier knowledge of physics because of the perceptive questioning of the teacher who carefully probed possible areas of weakness in their revision about waves, atoms and space. A Year 11 class of below average-attainers grew in confidence because the teacher encouraged them by varying his methods of questioning to a level they understand without losing the original purpose of the questions. Almost all pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve in line with those of similar prior attainment.
115. Enthusiasm, collaboration and perseverance are strong features in the best learning. Pupils work well together, but are less confident in working on their own. Increased attention to literacy is slowly improving the pupils' approach to revision and pupils in Years 7 and 8, but more particularly in Year 9, use their textbooks with confidence. Most pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds read texts with obvious confidence and enjoyment, but there are rare occasions when a few with weak English need more English language support.
116. Teaching is good throughout the school and is a major strength of the department. The good accommodation and resources support the teachers' organisation and management. There are good displays of pupils' work in all laboratories. The teachers are well supported by two full time technicians. Learning is best when objectives are shared with the pupils and the planning is structured with clear aims. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils and manage them well. They verbally reward good behaviour and response. They are good role models for the pupils and encourage pupils to think and reason, rather than simply remember facts, but try to develop this area as well by regular testing. They have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject and use a range of methods to help the pupils learn more effectively, and are prepared to try experimental strategies to improve learning. The success or failure of these innovative methods is always evaluated. They actively encourage pupils to read.

117. A learning support assistant, who is attached to the department, enhances the learning in lessons. The assistant is involved in the planning of lessons, and where children have special educational needs subject specific targets are drawn up and implemented. These targets are used to modify the teaching methods to meet the specific learning needs of these pupils. Homework is given throughout the school and, while marked regularly, the comments do not always show the pupils how to improve. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment are good, but they are not used enough to inform planning. New schemes of work are being used in Year 10 where two groups of average and above-average prior attainers are studying the three separate sciences. In the existing schemes of work opportunities to discuss social, moral and cultural and spiritual issues are well mapped, but there are only few references to these in the lessons observed. Pupils are growing up in a multicultural society, but there is little celebration of this in the science curriculum.
118. Given the short time the head of department has been in post the quality of leadership and management is satisfactory. The major strength is the good teamwork and sharing of good practice. As a result, teaching has improved across the department, a key development. ICT across the curriculum has improved considerably. Year 10 and 11 pupils use it to word process their GCSE coursework. In the ICT suite pupils are introduced to Excel. The monitoring of teaching has been effective in raising teaching standards. The department must strive to meet its challenging targets set for 2002 and 2003 to improve GCSE results.

## **ART AND DESIGN**

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

### **Strengths**

- Standards are high, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- The quality of teaching is good.

### **Areas for improvement**

- The lack of ICT facilities within the department constrains learning.
- There is inadequate storage for three-dimensional work.

120. Standards have improved since the last inspection. The examination results at GCSE level are very good when compared with other subjects in the school and with similar schools. School records show that, since the previous inspection, there have been no failed grades, a significant achievement considering that during this period, a total of 183 pupils have been entered by the school, a high percentage of whom, had special educational needs. This success is attributable to the dedication and expertise of the teachers, and the trust, respect and self-confidence, which they promote in the pupils. The high grades peaked in 2000, when 83 per cent of pupils entered, gained the higher A\*-C grades, well above the average for all schools. In 2001, 61 per cent gained the higher grades, broadly average for all schools.
121. By the end of Year 9, pupils achieve the nationally expected levels for their age and this demonstrates good progress, given that many pupils enter the school with low capability in art. Teachers introduce pupils to a wide variety of dry drawing media and teach drawing techniques on a carefully structured, step-by-step basis, to build confidence whilst promoting competence. Pupils make preliminary, annotated drawings, which they analyse and amend in the light of evaluative discussion with peers and teachers,

before using them as a basis for finished pieces such as paintings and collage work. Pupils use effective tonal contrasts, sensitive linear depictions and a variety of textures, as well as skilful colour mixing techniques to express their ideas. Teachers encourage pupils to make regular comparisons between their own work and that of recognised artists from a variety of cultures, European and worldwide. Pupils as young as eleven, are taught to incorporate issues of global importance into their work. In response to a Christian Aid poster about homelessness and to photographs showing the plight of people living in shanty-towns in a disadvantaged area of Africa, pupils express their concerns in visual form. They imaginatively develop their own personal responses to the moral issues encountered, by making collage pictures, using similar materials to those used in the construction of shelters, such as plastic sheeting, corrugated card and string. By incorporating dried foodstuffs, they represent hunger. Pupils mix a wide range of earth colours, to represent the ever-present muddy conditions. In contrast, pupils in Year 9, study closely the architecture and artefacts designed in the Art Deco style. They are encouraged to emulate the flamboyant and extravagant features of this optimistic and opulent period in time. Pupils analyse and reproduce the characteristic geometric patterns in their own work. This helps to enhance their understanding of mathematics but some pupils are unable to make useful connections between art and mathematics, and some teachers miss valuable opportunities to help pupils to recognise the different kinds of symmetry, for example. Pupils confidently refer to other artists' work to inform their own, for example, they paint well-observed portraits in the style of Modigliani, using similar techniques in composition, expression and colour. There is no evidence of computer-generated imagery. This was mentioned in the last report and remains a constraint to pupils' learning. The majority of pupils are keen and enthusiastic. They complete homework tasks well. Some bring in extra information from home to augment the basic requirements.

122. By the end of Year 11 standards exceed national expectations, which is good improvement since the last inspection. Pupils in Year 11 demonstrate a wide repertoire of painting, drawing, collage and printmaking skills. They are proficient in low relief modelling and produce good examples of three-dimensional sculptural forms, in many units of work. Most use papier-mâché to good effect and commercial modelling materials with increasing skill. Pupils are encouraged to develop a recognisable personal style and successfully pursue individual topics and issues in their work. This insistence on the part of teachers, for pupils to work individually, encourages personal viewpoints and perceptions. Pupils take a real pride in their work and this results in the work being spontaneous and lively, attractively presented and well executed. Individual pupils currently working on coursework units are incorporating the study of Japanese woodcuts, aspects of ancient Chinese and Indian culture and recent developments in African politics concerning human rights issues in their work. This work, not only reflects the rich cultural heritage, which many pupils bring to the school, but also helps to inform other pupils through class discussions and displays of finished work.
123. The quality of teaching is consistently good and at times it is very good. Teachers share high expectations for their pupils. The teachers' personal enthusiasm and good levels of specialist subject knowledge commands respect from pupils and their high levels of practical expertise, enables teachers to demonstrate practical techniques, both in class demonstrations and when giving individual feedback to pupils. Teachers introduce key words in every lesson to help pupils to gain a good working vocabulary of visual and tactile terms. Pupils use this newly acquired language to talk knowledgeably about their own work and use good levels of expressive and technical vocabulary when describing the work of peers and other artists. Teachers manage pupils and lessons very well; often whole classes work safely with tools for shaping and cutting. Firm guidelines for acceptable behaviour are laid down and implemented, consistently and

fairly. In consequence, all pupils feel secure and supported in lessons. Teachers identify pupils who are particularly talented as well as those who have special needs. Good quality forward planning ensures all pupils are appropriately catered for and all make good progress through the different levels of work offered to them in the subject.

124. Leadership and management of the subject have recently changed and much of the good work on display is due to the very good management of the previous head of department. The newly appointed head of department is well qualified and experienced, has brought a new vision to the subject and shows a good understanding of what needs to be done to build upon the previous success. Procedures for assessment are of good quality, regularly updated and used to inform pupils of their individual targets. Teachers use assessment information to guide developments in pupils' work by incorporating it into future planning. Displays are a major feature of the success of the subject in the school. Work is well labelled to ensure it is interpreted for a wide audience. Some examples of work are clearly identified with National Curriculum marking levels, this helps pupils to recognise their own achievements and know what they need to do in order to gain the higher grades. A good indication of the popularity of the subject is the high attendance by pupils at the daily art club sessions after school.
125. There is no dedicated area for ceramics work, the storage of 3 dimensional work, finished or in progress, or facilities for information and communication technology within the department. These shortcomings constrain pupils' learning. Practical tools and materials are sufficient in quantity, well maintained and of good quality. Reference books are of good quality but do not celebrate the work of women artists sufficiently well to provide good role models for girls.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- Teachers plan lessons well.
- The assessment and monitoring pupils' progress is effective.

### Areas for improvement

- Pupils' attainment in all years is unsatisfactory.
- Progress of pupils with special educational needs is held back by poor literacy and numeracy. They need more support to improve both these skills in design and technology.
- Teachers have too low expectations with regard to the presentation, accuracy and demand of pupils' work, especially in Years 7 to 9.
- There is too little teaching of literacy, use of number, control and ICT within the subject.

127. Standards at the age of 14 are well below the national average with just over half the pupils reaching the expected national attainment level. Overall, pupils' attainment is about two years behind the national average at the age of 14. Achievement in relation to the standards pupils had reached on entry to the school is satisfactory, however. In keeping with the national trend, girls' attainment is higher than that of boys. Pupils with special educational needs are integrated well in lessons and perform satisfactorily in relation to their prior attainment. The difficulties these pupils have with literacy and the use of numbers inhibit progress, and these difficulties are not sufficiently addressed or provided for in lessons. Standards at the age of 16 are well below the national average, with less than a quarter of pupils obtaining the higher A\*-C grades in the GCSE examinations in 2001. The attainment of pupils in food technology is consistently better than that in electronic and graphic products. The gap between the performance of girls and boys is wider at the age of 16 than at the age of 14. The achievement of the girls is generally satisfactory, but that of the boys is poor.

128. Overall, the quality of learning is unsatisfactory between the ages of eleven and fourteen. Pupils undertake projects using an adequate range of wood, metal, plastic, food and textile materials, but in too many lessons pupils are given work which is well within their capability and not sufficiently challenging. Too much time is spent on freehand drawing and colouring and not enough on developing skills to improve presentation, accuracy and finish. Scrutiny of pupils' work showed that too many of the projects are designed to be attractive to girls rather than boys - copper jewellery, sand-filled toys, fabric book, fabric logo, children's pop-up book. The standard of presentation of the work is generally poor with many examples of untidy notes, freehand sketches without dimensions and poorly finished products. Teachers have developed many project guides and notebooks, but these only require pupils to tick boxes, enter short phrases and make freehand sketches to complete them. There is little opportunity for pupils to write at length about their work or use information and communication technology or to learn about control. In one generally satisfactory Year 7 lesson pupils were making scones, but there was a missed opportunity in not requiring pupils to weigh or measure the ingredients. In a satisfactory Year 8 lesson pupils were designing a pop-up book which incorporated card levers and springs; there was a missed opportunity in this lesson not to relate what pupils had learnt about mechanisms to other areas of technology. Some good projects have recently been introduced in the resistant

materials area, but overall the work undertaken between the ages of 11 and 14 does not develop pupils' basic skills sufficiently.

129. The quality of learning between the ages of 14 and 16 during the inspection was satisfactory, but the work scrutiny showed that the quality of both teaching and learning had been unsatisfactory until very recently. The quality of presentation and accuracy and finish of products were generally poor; reflecting the inadequate basic skills pupils had developed in the earlier years.
130. Only one in four pupils opts to take design and technology, other pupils are disapplied to enable them to take subjects in which they are stronger. Pupils follow a course based on their chosen material or product and in the current year are taking GCSE courses in either resistant materials, graphic products, textiles or food technology. They learn satisfactorily to work from a design brief, research a topic, develop a range of designs, choose a final design, make drawings, produce a product and evaluate their work. In a Year 10 lesson pupils were evaluating shortcrust pastry products satisfactorily; they analysed various features of the products, recorded their views on a numerical scale and displayed the results on a spider diagram. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils were satisfactorily learning about the properties of different woods and manufactured boards and revising for a mock examination.
131. The standard of teaching observed during the inspection varied but was satisfactory overall. During the inspection, all teachers planned lessons well, fully explained the work and engaged pupils by asking them many questions in lessons. Most teachers are qualified but those with an art background do not do enough to develop pupils' making skills. In less successful lessons teachers adopt a slow pace, do not use time efficiently, accept work of a low standard and do not challenge pupils sufficiently. Teachers do not routinely require pupils to provide well-presented work, draw designs to scale, work from drawings with dimensions and make accurate products. When the pace of lessons is slow and the work is uninteresting pupils' attitudes and behaviour become unsatisfactory.
132. The department has had great difficulty in recruiting and retaining teachers; suitably qualified teachers are not available for appointment. During the inspection the acting head of department and two other teachers were on temporary contracts and two teachers were specialists in other subjects. One specialist was sick. The lack of suitably qualified full-time teachers has greatly inhibited the development of the subject since the last inspection. The acting head of department has done well in addressing some of the problems in the department since his appointment a few months ago. During the inspection he was ably supported by his new colleagues. Since the last inspection the department has introduced effective and improved assessment and recording procedures. Accommodation is good. Learning resources are generally adequate for the present level of work, but equipment to enable control to be taught is needed. The low attainment of pupils, lack of challenge in the work, slow pace of some lessons and poor expectations of teachers observed during the last inspection remain. Overall, progress since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory.

## GEOGRAPHY

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

### Strengths

- The management and leadership of the subject are good.
- The quality of teaching is good.
- The subject helps effective development of thinking skills.
- Assessment procedures and the use of data to plan lessons and advise pupils are effective.
- There is good monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.

### Areas for improvement

- Teachers need to use strategies to improve literacy and long-term retention and recall.
- There is room for improvement of some pupils' understanding of how they can improve their national curriculum levels.

134. Standards overall are below the national average. This represents good achievement by pupils in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory progress by the GCSE groups in relation to their attainment on entry to the school.

135. In the GCSE examinations in 2001, results for the higher A\*- C grades were well below the national average but close for the overall A\*- G grades. There has been a very slight upward trend over the last three years. This still, however, represents satisfactory achievement in learning, as the standard of attainment of pupils on entry in Year 7 was very low.

136. From evidence gathered during the inspection, the slow upward trend in standards continues. Lessons observed in Years 10 and 11, analysis of books and files and of teachers' assessment records shows pupils' level of attainment to be below, but not well below, national performance. Pupils are making satisfactory progress in relation to their standards on entry to the school. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. Higher-attaining pupils display good field study skills. Others find the analytical and evaluative tasks difficult. Despite good teaching and positive attitudes from pupils, progress is limited by weak literacy skills and in many cases by difficulty in retaining and recalling information. Most pupils are able to carry out effectively individual and paired research tasks and their ability to think about geographical issues and use subject specific language is improving. Satisfactory examples were observed in lessons on tourism and industrial location in South Wales.

137. In Year 9, attainment is below the national average. As the standard of attainment on entry was very low, this shows that pupils are achieving well and making good progress, particularly in the short term. As in the GCSE classes, progress is hampered by weaknesses in literacy and weak retention and recall of learning over time. By the end of Year 9, pupils appreciate the important relationships between physical and human dimensions of the subject. This is particularly true in the case study of Brazil. They are able to carry out enquiry tasks. Some satisfactory enquiry work, using computers to gather and present information, was observed in Year 7 when pupils were preparing word-processed pieces of work on volcanoes. In all years pupils with special educational needs and English as an additional language make equal progress to others in relation to their individual needs.



138. Teaching and learning are good. All teaching observed was at least satisfactory, with a high proportion of good lessons, as well as some very good practice. Lessons are well planned and contain a range of appropriate strategies to assist pupils to learn. Expectations are high and teachers have good subject knowledge, which encourages pupils' interest and understanding in the subject. Pupils are encouraged to think about the issues they are studying. This was seen in Year 7 where pupils were exploring the causes, processes and consequences of volcanic action. There is very appropriate emphasis in planning on the growth of enquiry techniques. Good examples were observed in work on changing patterns in the tourist industry over time and in the impact of Stansted Airport on the local environment. Computers are being used increasingly and effectively to enable pupils to gather, analyse and present information. Field study is well integrated into the curriculum and is effective in developing practical skills. Good use is made of the school grounds and the locality to examine the environment, local shopping facilities and influences of the school site on microclimate. Marking is regular and thorough, providing pupils with helpful comments to assist their learning. Learning is also greatly assisted by pupils' positive attitudes and very good behaviour. The department is addressing the needs of pupils well. Pupils with special needs and English as second language pupils are well supported by teachers and learning support assistants. More specifically focused tasks for higher ability pupils are limited and would help to raise the rate of progress.
139. The subject is well led and managed. Assessment procedures are thorough and data are used effectively to set targets and help teachers plan their lessons. National Curriculum levels are used well to enable pupils to assess their progress. Most pupils are aware of their levels but some need further guidance to ensure that they appreciate what they need to do to improve the standard of their work. Teachers work well as a team and there is a commitment and capacity to raise standards further. There is good input into raising pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Progress of pupils on the GCSE course has improved, as have their attitudes. Teachers now have high expectations of the quality of work and response required. The department is initiating revision sessions for GCSE candidates to develop their study and examination skills and techniques. This is needed and is an example of good practice.

## HISTORY

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

### Strengths

- Consistently good and very good teaching promotes good quality learning.
- Good use is made of a wide range of resources to stimulate pupils' interest.
- Pupils have a clear understanding of their own progress and what they need to do to improve.
- Pupils practise examination techniques from an early age so that they understand what they need to do.

### Areas for improvement

- Teachers need to raise attainment by Year 11.
- Teachers need to monitor and promote consistently pupils' all round literacy skills.

141. In 2001 attainment at the end of Year 9, measured by assessments carried out by teachers, was a little above the national average for the percentage of pupils attaining the expected level. This represents a considerable improvement over the previous year

when attainment was considerably below what is seen nationally. There was no difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Based on a full range of evidence seen during the inspection, the attainment of pupils who are some months away from the end of Year 9 is close to the national average, although poor literacy skills mean that they cannot always express themselves well in writing. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection.

142. Pupils enter Year 7 with standards of literacy, which are used extensively in history, that are well below the national average and with very varied experience of the study of history. They make very good progress in Years 7 to 9, developing an appropriate range of key historical skills and a specialised vocabulary, which supports them in speaking and writing about the subject. Most use and spell specialised subject vocabulary correctly, helped by the lists of historical words prominently displayed in classrooms. In many cases their historical vocabulary is more extensive and precise than their general vocabulary, although lower-attaining pupils find the specialised vocabulary difficult. Many pupils have a very limited basic vocabulary, however, which restricts their ability to write and talk precisely about their knowledge and understanding. The overall spelling of many pupils is inaccurate and little use of dictionaries is evident.
143. Pupils have basic knowledge and understanding of an appropriate range of historical facts, situations and personalities and use this knowledge in lessons to draw conclusions, for example they make decisions about whether the Romans were civilised. Pupils understand the importance of historical sources in informing their knowledge and opinions, know that there are different types of source material and all pupils make conclusions about its reliability. Higher-attaining pupils use quotations by or about well-known historical figures. Pupils understand that several key historical skills are employed when studying the past and most, for example, understand that situations have both causes and effects. Pupils in Year 9 studying World War 1 know that it had a range of complex long and short-term causes.
144. Independent research skills are undeveloped; although pupils are able to locate and identify sources of information, many copy indiscriminately from these, rather than use them to inform their understanding.
145. Attainment of pupils in GCSEs in 2001 was well below the national average for the percentage of pupils attaining grades A\*-C. These results represent a decline in attainment since the previous year, although they are currently the subject of an appeal to the examination board. All pupils entered for the examination attained a grade A\*-G which is better than the national average. There was little difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Results in history are subject to fluctuations from year to year, although they have been below average for the two most recent years. Based on a full range of evidence seen during the course of the inspection, the attainment of pupils who are some months away from their GCSEs is below the national average. There has been little change in the standard of attainment reported in the previous inspection.
146. All pupils develop the use of a range of facts in their written and oral answers and understand their importance in justifying their opinions and conclusions. Many pupils use historical vocabulary confidently and usually correctly. A strength of the subject is that pupils across the attainment range compile well-organised notes, using a variety of methods of recording their knowledge and understanding, and these provide an effective revision aid. Higher-attaining pupils have a clear understanding of key historical skills and use sources competently, identifying bias or lack of reliability. The written style of many pupils is very simple and fails to do justice to their generally satisfactory historical understanding. Many pupils are hampered by weak literacy skills such as inaccurate

spelling, a very limited vocabulary and poor retention and recall of previous work. Lower-attaining pupils rely heavily in their written work on description rather than analysis of events and average and higher-attaining pupils find the drawing of inferences difficult. A minority of pupils has a tendency to use sources of information uncritically, accepting them at face value. All pupils understand clearly the requirements of the examination syllabus and what work it is necessary for them to complete in order to meet these.

147. Although attainment by Year 11 is below the national average, pupils make overall satisfactory progress in meeting the considerable demands of the GCSE syllabus. In lessons, pupils make good progress in response to teaching which offers high quality support to meet the identified needs of all pupils. To make a long-term difference, poor literacy skills and recall of facts need to be tackled.
148. In all years pupils with special educational needs, who receive good support from teachers and learning assistants, and those for whom English is an additional language, make progress which is very similar to that made by all pupils.
149. All teaching seen was at least satisfactory and virtually all was good, and some very good. Teachers plan their lessons in considerable detail and share their objectives with pupils, enabling them to know what to expect and what is expected of them. Teachers use a good range of activities and resources to stimulate and maintain concentration and pupils show great interest and enthusiasm for their tasks, making good progress in lessons. Because of detailed planning for a wide range of activities, there is a great deal to fit into each lesson and the pace is very brisk, with a clear requirement that pupils will work hard to keep up. Pupils are frequently surprised by the amount of progress they have made during the course of a lesson. Teachers' explanations are clear, show good awareness of the difficulty which many pupils experience with the understanding and retention of facts and situations. Teachers give pupils extensive opportunities for discussion and they respond well to these by listening carefully to the ideas of others and learning from them. Teachers' good use of questioning makes pupils think hard and refine their ideas, taking care to target their support on pupils who are clearly experiencing difficulty. On these occasions pupils make good progress by thinking carefully about their answers and make considerable effort to respond thoughtfully. Most are enthusiastic about participating. A considerable strength of the teaching is the strong, long-term and extensive support which is given to enable pupils to understand and put into practice revision and examination techniques. Marking is regular, supportive and gives pupils clear guidance on what they need to do to improve. Spelling errors and careless mistakes in punctuation and grammar are not always marked, in line with the school policy, however, and pupils' tendency to copy directly from research materials is not consistently picked up in the marking. The previous inspection judged that there was 'much good practice in the teaching' and this situation has been maintained, with improvement in the pace of lessons, which was previously judged to be too slow.
150. The management of the department is good, with a clear commitment to the raising of attainment. The detailed scheme of work and lesson plans are supported by an extensive bank of resources. The head of department has written and independently resourced a local history unit for the GCSE syllabus which has been given a very favourable evaluation by the examination board. Documentary and audio-visual resources are made easily accessible to older pupils. A clear structure for the regular assessment of attainment is used to familiarise all pupils with examination style tasks from an early stage. The results of these assessments are made very clear to pupils, who have good understanding of their own attainment and what they need to do to

improve. The information from assessments is used in tailoring the curriculum to meet the needs of all pupils. As at the time of the previous inspection, very good use of carefully organised display acts as an interesting and informative source of reference. Management retains the strength reported in the previous inspection report.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

151. Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

### **Strengths**

- Leadership and co-ordination of the subject across the school.
- Teaching, particularly in Years 10 and 11, especially teachers' knowledge, methods and management of pupils
- Pupils' good attitudes and behaviour.
- Assessment and recording.
- Accommodation and the computer network.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Attainment of pupils aged 14 is below average.
- The progress of pupils with special educational needs in Years 7 to 9 is held back by poor literacy.

152. Standards at the age of 14 are below the national average with just under half the pupils reaching the expected national level of attainment at the end of the last academic year. The current achievement between the ages of 11 and 14 is satisfactory in relation to the attainment of pupils when they entered the school. Girls perform a little better than boys. Pupils with special educational needs are integrated well in lessons and generally achieve satisfactorily in relation to their prior attainment. The problems these pupils have with literacy and their use of numbers makes progress difficult, and, although a small number are helped by learning assistants in lessons, more needs to be done to help them make better progress. A small number of pupils from overseas with English as their second language find lessons difficult to follow unaided.

153. Standards at the age of 16 are good overall. In 2001, well over half the pupils took GCSE in information studies and nearly two-thirds of them obtained the higher A\*-C grades. All pupils who took the examination passed and obtained at least a G grade, a result which is well above the national average. This was a very good achievement for this group of pupils. Another one in six pupils took three units from the GNVQ in information and communication technology at intermediate level, a forerunner of the course which is now compulsory in Years 10 and 11 at the school, and over eight out of ten passed these units. This was a satisfactory achievement for this group of pupils. The remainder of pupils learnt information and communication technology in other subjects. Their attainment in computing was assessed separately and a majority achieved the expected national attainment level in 2001. Overall, this represents a good achievement for all pupils aged 16. In the current year, all pupils continue their study in a successful and recently launched GNVQ course in information and communication technology at intermediate level. The course has not yet been finally assessed but the school has set a target that two-thirds of pupils will gain the full award, an ambitious target in relation to the attainment of pupils when they entered the school. At the age of 16 the majority of pupils become independent users of information and communication technology and are able to produce work of a high standard.

154. The quality of learning between the ages of 11 and 14 is good. There are no discrete lessons in Years 7 to 9 but the subject is satisfactorily taught as a part of other subjects. The school has devised a very good series of fifteen units, based on different applications of computing, which are collectively taught through English, geography, history, mathematics, modern languages and science. The units cover word processing, desktop publishing, use of databases, Internet, CD Rom and spreadsheets. It is planned that design and technology teach control but this has not been possible in the current year mainly because of staffing difficulties. In a very good science lesson pupils in Year 8 used spreadsheets in a lesson on ecology. Pupils' attainment is separately assessed, successfully related to National Curriculum levels and reported to parents at the end of Year 9.
155. The quality of learning at the ages of 15 and 16 is very good. In the GNVQ in information and communication technology pupils learn to present information, handle information, hardware and software, information resources together with optional units which have yet to be decided. In two good Year 10 lessons pupils prepared a business card and studied invoices. In a good lesson on invoices pupils considered the main features of three invoices and later successfully developed an invoice for their fictitious company. In the lesson on business cards pupils developed a business card using publisher and annotating it for examination purposes. In a very good Year 11 lesson pupils studied information sources and made travel arrangements for wedding guests and a honeymoon. Scrutiny of the portfolios from the successfully completed unit, presenting information, showed that pupils have done good work on an agenda and minutes of a meeting related to the school's play 'Fame', an advertisement for a job vacancy, a letter applying for a job, a flyer for the school play etc. The overall standard was good but the range and complexity of work varied from one pupil to another.
156. The quality of teaching is always good and very good in Years 10 and 11. All teachers have a sound knowledge of the subject, plan lessons very well and share enthusiasm for the subject. In the best lessons teachers introduce the work well, involve pupils by asking many questions and, when appropriate, use brainstorming sessions to develop ideas. Teachers are good at providing individual help to pupils during the practical sessions, particularly help to those with special educational needs. They all have high expectations and require pupils' work to be of the highest quality. As a result pupils are eager to learn and make good progress. Attitudes to the subject are good and sometimes excellent. Behaviour is generally good and there is normally a good working atmosphere in most lessons.
157. The subject has been led for many years by an experienced teacher who is well regarded by both colleagues, and pupils alike. She is ably supported by three other well-qualified teachers, one on a temporary contract. The department has a good network manager. The computer network is excellent and has recently been upgraded; the ratio of pupils to computer terminals is better than the national average. The accommodation is also good.
158. Much has been improved since the last inspection. The subject is now compulsory in all years and all pupils take the GNVQ course. Assessment, recording and reporting arrangements have been improved and the co-ordination and leadership of the subject clarified. The progress since the last inspection is very good.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

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

**Strengths**

- The monitoring and recording of pupils' achievements and progress is good.
- Teaching is good.
- The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- Modern languages make a strong contribution to raising the standard of pupils' general literacy.

**Areas for improvement**

- The attainment in GCSE French and German is well below average.
- There is a need to develop effective learning strategies to ensure long term gains in pupils' skills and knowledge.
- Very occasionally some pupils' attitudes and behaviour are unsatisfactory.

160. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are below the national average. Achievement in relation to general standards of literacy is satisfactory. The results in teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well above average for all schools with about two thirds of pupils achieving Level 4 or higher. These teacher assessments were higher than in the previous year when attainment was about average. Girls and boys achieved similar standards. In some of the higher sets in French and German lessons during the inspection pupils demonstrated average standards. From a scrutiny of pupils' written and recorded oral work it was evident that the standards of work of higher and average-attainers in both French and German are broadly in line with national expectations, but the overall standards across the year group are below average.

161. The achievement in both French and German of many pupils in Years 7 to 9 in relation to their ability is good. Many pupils make good progress in the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening skills are satisfactory. In a Year 7 class pupils understood a lesson conducted entirely in carefully selected French when supported by clear mime and gesture. In a Year 9 top set pupils could understand the main points and some important details from a video in French. In a Year 9 class, containing several pupils with special educational needs, pupils could understand a grammar rule carefully explained in German, when supported by good mime and visual clues. Many pupils repeat words and phrases, chorally and individually, with good pronunciation and intonation and a few pupils read out loud fluently and accurately. The pronunciation of many pupils when recording their oral performance in both French and German is hesitant and influenced by the way the word is written.

162. Pupils need more practice speaking freely or with the help of bullet points rather than with the support of full written texts. Higher-attainers reply confidently with good accents to questions in French and German and practise short dialogues in pairs. Occasionally pupils used the language spontaneously to make simple requests in the foreign languages. They asked for paper, for permission to take off their jackets and to go to the toilet. Such spontaneous use of French and German and the use of the foreign language amongst pupils needs further development, however. The reading skills of high-attainers are satisfactory, but many pupils have great difficulty skimming and scanning a text. Some pupils successfully used dictionaries or glossaries to look up the meaning of unknown words. Many high-attainers make satisfactory progress in their writing skills. By Year 9, higher-attainers write with the aid of models or writing frames, short texts containing present, future and past tenses. They can express simple opinions and give reasons and are beginning to have a awareness of very basic grammatical patterns, for example gender, adjective agreement, prepositions and the conjugation of some common verbs. Many average-attainers can copy sentences and short dialogues fairly accurately and write short paragraphs and dialogues when fully

supported. Lower-attainers often experience difficulty with even basic copying of words and phrases accurately.

163. Standards by Year 11 are below average. The take up of languages in these years is very low. Only about 40 per cent of the year group opt for GCSE. Results in French and German GCSE in 2001 were below national expectations, and well below in the higher grades. In 2001 21 per cent of pupils attained A\*-C in French which is well below the average of 46 per cent. In the same year 24 per cent of pupils attained A\*-C in German which is well below the average of 52 per cent. In 2000 the attainment was higher with 28 per cent A\*-C in French and 29 per cent A\*-C in German.
164. The attainment of many pupils in the Year 10 GCSE French class during the inspection was broadly in line with national expectations in listening and speaking, but there were gaps in pupils' knowledge of basic grammar and vocabulary. In the Year 11 French class many pupils had below average reading and listening skills and poor grammatical awareness. Writing skills were very low. The evidence from a scrutiny of pupils' written work confirmed that the attainment in writing of some higher-attainers in French is now average, but the standard of written work of many pupils is below national expectations. The attainment of many pupils in GCSE German lessons was below national expectations although some pupils in the Year 11 German class displayed good ability to understand key information from an extended listening text, had good pronunciation and intonation and were able to answer questions on prepared topics using fairly complex structures. The scrutiny of work in GCSE German also confirmed that only a few pupils are working at average levels of attainment.
165. In Years 10 and 11 pupils generally have satisfactory achievement in relationship to their ability in French and German over the short term, but many do not make sufficient long-term gains required to ensure success in obtaining higher grades at GCSE. There is a need to develop effective learning strategies to improve pupils' retention and recall to ensure long-term gains in skills and knowledge.
166. The teaching of both French and German was sound or better in all years. It was good or better in over two thirds of all lessons. In over half the lessons it was very good. In some French and German lessons with pupils with special educational needs teaching was very good. Teachers used the foreign language extensively to the great benefit of pupils' listening skills. All lessons were very well prepared and nearly always delivered enthusiastically and at a brisk pace, with very good use of home-produced resources, which motivated pupils to achieve of their best in all four skills. Effective use was made of deadlines to motivate pupils and keep them on target. The content of most lessons was carefully graded and matched to the needs and interests of pupils, with frequent change of task and good coverage of the four skills. This ensured that all pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, made appropriate progress. There was generally a productive atmosphere in lessons, and effective teaching combined with good motivation, enabled most pupils to progress well. The very best lessons were delivered with skill, enthusiasm and use of humour and consisted of a wide variety of linked activities. Effective use was made of the overhead projector, cassette recorder, video recorder, computer and resource sheets.
167. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally very good in both languages. Most pupils are very enthusiastic language learners, especially about playing noughts and crosses and bingo in French and German. Very occasionally, pupils were not paying attention and their attitudes and behaviour were unsatisfactory.

168. The trips to France and Germany and the exchange link with a French school ensure that the department makes a good contribution to the cultural development of some pupils. The language teachers work very well together; the sharing of ideas has helped to raise standards of teaching. Assessment policies and procedures are good and ensure that pupils' progress is well monitored. Most pupils are clear about National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades, which helps them to make progress. The department runs a lunchtime club to offer support to pupils with specific language problems or needs. The department has recently experienced some difficulty in recruiting specialist staff. Resources and accommodation are good.
169. There has been improvement since the last inspection in some areas. The teacher assessments in Year 9 have improved and are now above the national average, but standards seen indicate that they may be too generous. The use of assessment data to track pupil progress is more sophisticated and effective. Attainment in GCSE in both French and German has not improved, however.

## MUSIC

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

### Strengths

- Good aspects of teaching include skilful questioning and good use of time.
- The self-assurance of many pupils in performance.

### Areas for improvement

- The amount of lesson time is short
- There is insufficient use of computers for composition.

171. Standards are a little below those nationally at both key stages. The number of pupils choosing GCSE music usually reaches double figures with boys and girls represented. About half of each group has been awarded grades A\*-C in the last three years, with none below grade G. There is no significant difference between the attainment of girls and boys. Teacher assessment of pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2001 placed half at above the expected levels and a substantial minority below. No information about previous years was available in the school.
172. The 17 pupils in Year 10 currently show a greater potential for success than the eight in Year 11. Confidence for Year 11 pupils is better for improvisation, stimulated for example by chosen prose passages, than it is for discerning listening. Their memory for technical terms and recall of other previous learning is below average. Very little written work is done by Year 11 pupils, making revision and reflection on their learning more difficult. While there are some enthusiastic musicians in the group, periods without specialist staff in some previous years have slowed progress and sapped confidence. More pupils in Year 10 are supported by instrumental tuition. Many show themselves to be quick learners after a late start. Their use of stave notation is developing, from a low level, with some using it directly for composition exercises with melodies and chords. GCSE pupils have yet to use newly acquired computer programs for composition, though digital recording and a synthesiser have been introduced.
173. The majority of younger pupils show a much better memory for facts about music and for music heard. Most pupils in a Year 7 class successfully identify features such as similarity and difference in a complex extract of a Messiaen piece, heard twice. They use their imaginations to describe these features orally. Some in a Year 8 lesson use



keyboards to produce variations to a known tune, for example by adding parallel fifths or trying retrograde motion. For others the lesson time is too short for them to decide on something and learn to play it. Year 9 pupils, working alone or in groups, in small rooms, make slow progress in attempting a song-writing exercise, but some ask perceptive questions in whole class sessions. Many younger pupils use their facility for word-processing in researching and producing projects, for example on musical instruments of the world. While some explain their choices well, a few low attaining pupils rely on sources such as the Internet, giving no evidence of learning from the information found. In general, pupils of differing levels of attainment on entry achieve well, including those with special educational needs. For some of these music is the subject in which they do best and better than the average for all pupils. Several in each year are designated talented by the school. Many pupils show a remarkable self-assurance in performing, including to camera. In each class, volunteers show responsibility in checking equipment.

174. Teaching in music is satisfactory with many good features. Relationships with pupils in all years are good so that even mild reprimands are rarely necessary. Most pupils respond well to the teacher's high expectations in terms of concentration when listening, understanding of concepts and mature behaviour. Questions are posed and answered with skill, promoting thought and active learning across the curriculum. Time is used well and a variety of learning activities is included in most lessons. Teaching regularly invites pupils whose progress has been observed to demonstrate musically something useful for the learning of all. Praise is given, often through merit marks, to all pupils who make a useful and unexpected contribution to learning in lessons, which encourages effort from all. Teaching builds on a sound knowledge of individuals and their rates of progress through careful and continuous assessment. Targets act as an incentive to greater effort where it is needed. Results at GCSE are analysed closely to benefit the teaching and learning of future candidates and improve standards.
175. There are a number of areas for development in teaching. Lower-attaining pupils are not always prepared well enough for complex tasks. Different tasks and materials are too rarely prepared for pupils of different abilities. Teaching does not demand writing, even of brief notes as a record of learning, frequently enough. This could provide better support for pupils' long term learning in music and general literacy. The use of resources such as recorded music should be more refined by being better prepared and by the use of fading. Computer-aided facilities should be introduced to teaching and learning more urgently, to enable composition and to meet statutory requirements.
176. Since the previous inspection standards have slipped a little, caused by a period of staffing problems. Assessment remains a strength; it has been adapted well to new requirements. The school has put much effort into its bid for specialist status in performing arts, with the aim of improving provision. Management, which currently embraces drama, is satisfactory. The 'music school', hosted here for Essex music service is an asset. It provides instrumental tuition for an increasing number of pupils from this school, from other schools and for adults. Parents who cannot meet the cost are supported financially by the school. Extra-curricular work, mainly for voices, continues to have a significant impact on the community, in school and beyond. Staged performances and concerts are given. Learning is enhanced by occasional workshops, for example in jazz or Indonesian music, from outside agencies. Some aspects have not yet improved, however. Curriculum time remains low, restricting what can be achieved. There are deficiencies in resources. These include maintenance of pianos; the number, quality and range of classroom instruments, especially those of non-European origin; and the number and use of computers with music facilities for composition. The link with drama provides an opportunity, not currently being taken, for

joint curriculum planning so that understanding of common concepts, such as climax, contrast and pace are strengthened. Accommodation is good but its use could be developed, for example to make observation of pupils' progress when working alone or in small groups more efficient and effective for learning.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Teaching is very good.
- Standards are improving across all years.
- Increasing numbers choose physical education at GCSE.
- The department provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities.

### Areas for improvement

- Continue with efforts to raise standards, particularly among GCSE pupils.
- Implement existing plans to introduce Junior Sports Leaders Award into the Year 10 curriculum.
- Improve aspects of outdoor provision.

178. In the 2001 GCSE examination 43 per cent of pupils entered gained the higher A\* - C grades and all pupils achieved A\* - G grades. Although the percentage of pupils gaining the higher grades is below the national average, the results represent a very good improvement over the previous year. They were also the highest physical education results achieved by the school so far. All but one of the 14 candidates who sat the examination were boys.

179. Attainment at age 14 has improved since the last inspection and is now in line with standards expected nationally by pupils of this age. The majority of pupils are competent and confident in a number of different activities. During the inspection these included football, netball, rugby, swimming and dance. Some individuals attain above average standards in all these activities. Teachers' records show that some pupils also attain above average standards in cricket and athletics.

180. Attainment has also improved among pupils at age 16 where standards are in line with national expectations. Pupils are now offered a wider range of activities. As a result, the numbers taking part have increased and non-participation is no longer a cause for concern. Attainment has therefore improved. Most pupils who are studying physical education at GCSE level reach standards that are average for the course. Several pupils in Year 11 find aspects of the theory paper difficult. Pupils of all ages have gained district or county honours in a variety of activities; these include football, netball, cross-country, athletics and trampolining. There are no obvious differences in attainment between boys and girls.

181. In relation to their prior ability, most pupils make good progress. Among younger pupils, for example, learning was particularly good in a Year 7 swimming lesson and in a dance lesson in Year 8. In both of those lessons pupils were able to make sensible and helpful comments about the work of others in the class. Most pupils are very enthusiastic in their approach to physical education and they are interested in what they are doing. They also enjoy their lessons. Pupils with special educational needs and pupils with English as an additional language progress as well as others. Achievement is also good for the majority of non-examination pupils in Years 10 and 11. GCSE pupils,

including several pupils with special educational needs who are following the course, generally make good progress. This was the case, for example, in two Year 10 lessons involving basketball and badminton. Extra activities are planned in some lessons for gifted and talented pupils who have been identified by the department, for example the possibility of following a high level dance course at Harlow College. Through its very good links with various sports clubs including Harlow Rugby Club and Harlow Athletic Club, pupils are given additional opportunities for extra coaching. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 achieve well in cricket where they take part in the Short cricket league through links with Essex County Cricket Club.

182. The quality of teaching and learning is very good across the department. The positive relationships that exist in all lessons encourage maximum participation and this improves learning. Teachers have high expectations of work and behaviour. A key strength lies in the fact that pupils have been taught good learning habits through a very consistent and structured approach in all lessons. These are recognised, understood and appreciated by the pupils who respond accordingly. Pupils always wear correct kit. They behave extremely well in all lessons. They are very willing to help by carrying various items of equipment before and after lessons. They also look after the equipment and other resources very carefully.
183. The physical education teachers, supported by several other colleagues, provide a very good range of extra-curricular activities at lunchtime and after school. These clubs provide pupils with additional opportunities to take part in activities and to increase their level of skill. Football and dance are proving to be particularly popular. During the inspection activities involving netball, indoor football, basketball and dance were very well attended. Boys and girls represent the school in a number of different sports. The netball, basketball, football and athletics teams have enjoyed a number of recent successes. School teams also compete against other schools in badminton, tennis, cricket, swimming and most recently, rugby union. A large number of pupils take part in dance festivals. Each year pupils have an opportunity to experience a residential course in outdoor and adventurous activities in either Bude or the Ardeche.
184. The head of department has been in post for only two years. His two full-time colleagues are also relatively new to the school. All three have worked hard to bring about improvements and they are all committed to raising standards. Management of the department is very good. A number of important developments have already taken place. Results at GCSE level have improved considerably. The numbers following the examination course are increasing each year. In the present Year 11 twenty-five pupils are studying the subject at examination level and in Year 10 the number is forty-two. New schemes of work are in place. Assessment is thorough. The curriculum has been broadened to include cross-country and orienteering in Years 7 to 9. Pupils in Year 11 have the chance to make use of the excellent facilities at Harlow Leisure Centre where they benefit from specialist coaching in a range of activities that include squash. The experience of using the Centre also makes a very good contribution to the pupils' personal development. Aerobics and karate have been added to the extra-curricular programme. Pupils are also able to gain coaching awards in netball and basketball through 'Top Links'. Dance is now offered as a GCSE subject through links with Harlow College. Older pupils help to organise an annual football and netball competition for primary school children.
185. Accommodation is generally good and includes a gymnasium, a multi-gym, a swimming pool and an all-weather area. Space and height are limited in the hall where badminton is taught. There are extensive playing fields but drainage is a problem. During the

inspection the fields were too wet to be used. The netball and tennis courts are not completely fenced.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

186. Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **satisfactory** in Years 7 to 9 and **unsatisfactory** in Years 10 and 11, as, whilst teaching is good, the time allocation does not allow full coverage of the Agreed Syllabus.

### Strengths

- The quality of teaching and management in the department is good.
- Religious education contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Teachers use a wide range of artefacts, videos, texts and departmental written materials to support learning.

### Areas for improvement

- The time allocation in Years 10 and 11 is too short.
- There are not enough visits to, or contact with, non-Christian faiths.
- Teachers need to use strategies to improve literacy skills, particularly writing, and recall of information over time.

187. No examinations are taken in Years 10 and 11. Standards in current classes are below the expectations of the Essex Agreed Syllabus.

188. From evidence in lessons and from analysis of books, standards in Year 11 are below expectation but when attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is taken into account this represents satisfactory achievement. Pupils listen well to teachers and to their peers and many are prepared to offer perceptive comments and opinions on sensitive issues. Discussions in Year 10 lessons on a range of current issues associated with prejudice and stereotyping, the analysis of Christian and Jewish views on life and the concept of free will in a debate on evil and suffering are good examples. While oral work is satisfactory, and often good, the quantity of notes and extended pieces of writing is extremely limited. This is the direct result of the low timetable allocation of time in which teachers and pupils cannot cover the required topics of the syllabus.

189. By the end of Year 9, attainment is below the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. As in the upper school, however, the attainment on entry of these pupils in Year 7 was very low and they are achieving well and making good progress in relation to prior attainment. Learning is often good in lessons, but literacy skills and retention and recall of information are weak. These limitations adversely influence progress over time. Pupils are developing knowledge and understanding, not only of major religions, but also the ways in which religious faith influences peoples' lives. Very good examples were observed in Year 8 when pupils were exploring issues of life and death, in Year 7 on the significance of the Five Pillars of Islam to a Muslim and Christian festivals such as Advent and Christmas. Analysis of books shows that many pupils use computers competently to research topics and present work. Two good examples were seen in Year 8 on the life of Jesus and issues associated with marriage. Some lower-attaining pupils also produced some sensitive and perceptive pieces of writing on the September 11<sup>th</sup> atrocity on the World Trade Centre. Pupils with special needs and English as an additional language make equal progress to that of their peers. The department is effectively addressing the needs of all pupils.

190. Overall teaching is good with some very good practice. Teaching was good or very good in over three-quarters of lessons, of which a third were very good. Lessons are carefully planned with a range of appropriate strategies to assist pupils increase their knowledge and understanding. Lessons are interesting and engage pupils' attention. Teachers are skilled at developing relationships, creating an atmosphere of mutual trust, thereby giving pupils the confidence to discuss sensitive and emotional issues in lessons. Very good classroom management skills possessed by teachers, together with the extremely positive attitudes of most pupils, result in the creation of positive learning environments. The effectiveness of this good teaching is limited by the restricted amount of time available, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Video clips are used effectively to develop pupils' knowledge. A good example was observed in a Year 9 lesson on moral issues associated with conscientious objection in World War One. Teaching strategies and the content of lessons support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well indeed.
191. The curriculum up to the age of 14 just meets the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. Some topics have to be covered in a sketchy manner and there are limitations on the breadth of teaching and learning styles possible in one lesson a week. Time in Years 10 and 11 is not sufficient to meet the requirement of the Essex Agreed Syllabus. The school is not meeting statutory requirements in these two years.
192. This is a very well led and managed subject area. The very hard working and efficient head of department also has responsibility for history, citizenship and Year 11 personal and social education. Despite the pressure of work, good progress in the scheme of work has been achieved. The need for a full time specialist teacher with responsibility for the subject was raised in the last report. It still has to be tackled. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection particularly in the range of teaching and learning styles. There has also been an improvement in pupils' understanding of religious beliefs and practices. Links with Christian faith groups are good. Contacts with other faith groups and visits to places of worship of other religions are much more limited.

## VOCATIONAL COURSES

193. Overall, the quality of provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Leadership is strong.
- Teaching is good, especially subject knowledge, methods and management of pupils.
- Accommodation and learning resources enhance learning.

### Areas for improvement

- Attainment, particularly of the girls.
- Ability to attract girls to the subject.

194. Standards are well below the national average. Prior to 1998 pupils took a very successful combined GCSE course in information studies and business; this was changed after that date to a new GCSE course in business studies. Since the change the examination results have been much lower, but have steadily improved over the past three years. In 2001, nearly one in five pupils opted to take the GCSE course in business studies and of these one-quarter attained the higher A\*-C grades. All passed the examination with a minimum of a G grade. Attainment in relation to the standards pupils reached on entry to the school is satisfactory. Boys performed much better than

the girls. Pupils with special educational needs are integrated well in lessons and perform satisfactory in relation to their prior attainment. Their weakness in literacy and the use of numbers inhibit progress, however.

195. Achievement is satisfactory overall, and often good or better in lessons. Pupils satisfactorily learn about different types of business; industrial relations; business structures; sources, use and management of finance; types of production and marketing. In addition, pupils learn about information and communication technology and undertake an extensive case study based on their chosen sector of business and the launching a new product. One good case study was looked at which was based on the launch of a new shampoo spray, all the work was word-processed and included a study of marketing, pricing strategy, promotion, business letters, and press releases. In a good lesson in Year 10 pupils were using *powerpoint* to develop slides for a talk each was to give on the recruitment process; in another lesson in Year 11 pupils were developing slides for a talk on the functions of a finance department. Both these lessons provided a good combination of computing and business studies. In a very good Year 11 lesson pupils were revising marketing and sources of finance for a mock examination.
196. Overall, the quality of teaching is always satisfactory and often good or very good. All teachers are well qualified, plan lessons well and share much enthusiasm for the subject. Teachers' class materials are always well prepared and helpful to pupils. In the best lessons teachers gain the interest of pupils through lively introductions to the work and by involving pupils by asking many questions. In all the lessons seen the topics were interesting and challenging. As a result, pupils are well motivated and eager to make progress. Behaviour of pupils in lessons is always good.
197. The subject is very well led by the ICT co-ordinator. She is ably supported by three-teachers. The learning resources, particularly the computer network, and accommodation are very good. The subject has been more firmly established since the last inspection. The GCSE course now offered contains a more extended study of business than the one used before. The quality of teaching has been maintained. The achievement of the boys has improved but that of the girls has fallen significantly. Overall, progress since the last inspection is satisfactory.