

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **THE PARK COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

Barnstaple, North Devon

LEA area: Devon

Unique reference number: 113514

Headteacher: Mr David Atton

Reporting inspector: Mr D P Cosway  
OIN: 2734

Dates of inspection: 28 January – 1 February 2002

Inspection number: 190416

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 16 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Park Lane  
Barnstaple  
North Devon  
Postcode: EX32 9AX

Telephone number: 01271 373131

Fax number: 01271 373167

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Jerry Kent

Date of previous inspection: November 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2734	Paul Cosway	Registered inspector	English as an additional language	What sort of school is it? How high are standards? a) The school's results and achievements How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9334	Jenny Mynett	Lay inspector		How high are standards? b) Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
19135	Derek Ebbage	Team inspector	Mathematics	Resources
31779	Vivian Harrison	Team inspector	Design and technology	Staffing
8501	Paul Hartwright	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
27585	Ken Hounslow	Team inspector	Science	
8185	Peter Kendall	Team inspector	Art	Accommodation
12179	Laurence Moscrop	Team inspector	Religious education	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
12276	Terence Payne	Team inspector	Music	
27983	Mary Sewell	Team inspector	English	
15372	Patricia Walker	Team inspector	History Equal opportunities	
18755	Roger Whittaker	Team inspector	Physical education	
20497	Vernon Williams	Team inspector	Geography	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
11720	Philip Winch	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Special educational needs	



The inspection contractor was:

Cambridge Education Associates Ltd

Demeter House  
Station Road  
Cambridge  
CB1 2RS

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33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

The school is bigger than average for a comprehensive school, having 1214 pupils, almost equal numbers of girls and boys, aged between 11 and 16. It is designated as a Beacon School and serves part of Barnstaple and outlying areas. The social and economic circumstances of this part of North Devon are mixed. Overall, the socio-economic circumstances are close to the average for the country as a whole. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average. The school is in an area where it can be difficult to recruit new staff. An important post, that of assistant headteacher, has remained vacant for the last two years.

Relatively high numbers of pupils move into or out of the catchment area. Almost a third of the 15 year-olds currently in the school began their secondary education elsewhere. Almost all the pupils are white, with around one per cent from families of African, Chinese or Asian origin. There is a smaller proportion than nationally of pupils for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of pupils with Statements or on the register of special educational needs is above the national average. Of the pupils with statements, most have emotional and behavioural difficulties, moderate learning difficulties or dyslexia. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is close to, but slightly below, the national average.

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

This is a very good school. Pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. In GCSE examinations in 2001, attainment was above the national average in the majority of subjects. This is partly the result of good teaching - very good or excellent in a quarter of lessons - and the very positive attitudes to work that the school generates in almost all its pupils. They recognise the importance of study and work hard, wanting to succeed. Behaviour is generally very good. There are excellent links with the community. It is an improving school. It went through a period of thorough self-review upon the appointment of the present headteacher and recognised where its weaknesses were. Effective action has been taken, resulting in improved examination results, better teaching and the raising of its reputation in the local community. Pupil numbers were falling. The school is now oversubscribed. Leadership and management are very good, providing clear direction and monitoring the work of the school effectively. The school gives good value for money.

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

- Attainment in GCSE examinations is well above that in similar schools. It is highest in art, combined science, French, some design and technology subjects and statistics.
- Teaching is good, overall. Teachers have the skills and knowledge to ensure that pupils learn well.
- Very good provision for social and moral education and excellent procedures for promoting good behaviour lead to almost all pupils behaving very well and having very positive, responsible attitudes to school.
- The careers education and vocational educational provision are excellent and the provision for personal, social and health education (PHSE) is very good.
- Links with the community are excellent and provide very good learning opportunities for pupils.
- The curriculum is extended by a very good range of clubs, activities and visits, which contribute to the rich cultural experience that pupils enjoy.
- The school is monitoring teaching and learning well and using what it learns from this to improve its work.
- The leadership and management of the school are very good.

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

- Some subject areas are not as effective as others in getting the best out of pupils.
- The progress that pupils make from entry to the age of 14 is not as rapid as it is on their GCSE and vocational education courses.

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



## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1996. Well-planned staff development and effective monitoring has succeeded in improving the quality of teaching. In the previous report, teaching was judged unsatisfactory in one GCSE lesson in every seven. It is now good across the school. There has been a considerable improvement since 1996 in the results that pupils achieve in the national tests at the age of 14 and in the GCSE examinations, an improvement greater than that nationally. The work of the school is being monitored with increasing effectiveness. During the inspection, building work was beginning on major improvements to the fabric of the school.

Progress has been made on all the key issues from the last report. The standards of writing and presentation of work have improved. The school development planning process has improved and is now good. The provision for information and communication technology has improved in all subjects, although there is a need for further expansion of facilities and coverage, as is planned. Overall, there has been good improvement since the last inspection and the school is very well placed to continue to improve in future.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the age of 16 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	D	C	C	A

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

At the end of Year 9, attainment in the national tests has been, overall, below the national average for the last four years. However, it improved in 2001 and was in line with both the national average and the average for similar schools. Results in English, mathematics and science were all in line with the national average in 2001. English and science results were in line with those in similar schools. Mathematics results were above those in similar schools. Pupils achieve satisfactorily, from close to average levels of attainment on entry to the school.

In 2001, the school performed very well in GCSE examinations compared with similar schools across the country. At the end of Year 11, the proportion of pupils who attained five or more passes at the higher grades, grades A\* to C, was above the national average and well above that in similar schools. Overall performance at GCSE was in line with the national average and well above that in similar schools. Almost every pupil aged 16 in 2001 gained at least one GCSE pass. This is well above the average nationally and reflects the efforts the school makes to ensure that every pupil is included and encouraged to succeed. Pupils attained particularly well in some subjects. In statistics, French and art, around a quarter of the substantial numbers of pupils who entered gained the very highest grades, A\* or A. In many other subjects - geography, English, design and technology, combined science, German, GNVQ (vocational education) and drama - overall attainment was better than the average nationally. In some subjects, however, such as some design and technology subjects and religious education, overall attainment was below the national average. The school exceeded its target for attainment in GCSE examinations in 2001 by a considerable margin and the indications are that it will do so again in 2002. In view of the progress it has made, it may be appropriate to review and raise its targets.

- The finding of the inspection is that, overall, boys and girls and pupils of all abilities are achieving well, especially in Years 10 and 11. Attainment is above the national average by the age of 16.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good: almost all pupils have positive attitudes to the school and work hard, valuing the learning opportunities that the school offers.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good in class and around the school. This helps to ensure that there is a positive ethos for learning in almost all classes. There are very small numbers whose behaviour, on occasions, disrupts the learning of others.
Personal development and relationships	Very good: pupils relate very well to teachers and to one another. They grow into responsible young people. The established and effective house system and very good personal and social education (PHSE) course contribute well to this.
Attendance	Broadly average. Most pupils are punctual and attend regularly.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Across the lessons seen, teaching was satisfactory or better in almost all. Eight unsatisfactory lessons were observed out of a total of 192. A quarter of the teaching observed in the school was very good or excellent; well over a third was good.

The teaching of English, mathematics and science is good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. In most lessons in all subjects, teachers' good planning, knowledge of their subject and class control are key strengths. They care for their pupils, relate to them well and give them good advice and support. The better lessons are purposeful, characterised by high expectations. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory across the school. Teaching is satisfactory to pupils with special educational needs and to the gifted and talented. In the very few lessons where teaching is not satisfactory, the work set for pupils is insufficiently challenging and class control is insecure.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good: the curriculum is broad and generally well balanced, with a good range of choices in Years 10 and 11, including work-related courses. The range of clubs, visits and activities is very good. Careers and vocational education are excellent. Links with the community make an excellent contribution.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory: the school offers an inclusive education that meets the needs of most pupils well. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is improving under new leadership. There is excellent support for reluctant learners in the 'Mulberry Centre'.

Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very few pupils for whom English is an additional language are supported appropriately and make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good: the provision for moral, social and cultural education is very good and is an important factor in the school's success. The provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. There is not an act of collective worship every day for all pupils but some subjects, especially PHSE, contribute well to pupils' spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well: the educational and personal support and guidance for pupils are very good; some aspects are excellent.

There are some aspects of information and communication technology that are not yet fully in place in Years 10 and 11. The school works well with parents to help them to support their children's learning.

### HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good leadership from the headteacher, supported very well by his senior managers, ensures that the school has a clear direction for future development. There is a strong commitment to raising standards further. There is much very good leadership of houses and subject departments
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fulfil their role well. They are involved in the work of the school and have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good: a range of data and good review procedures ensure that the school is evaluating its own performance.
The strategic use of resources	Good: the teachers are deployed well. They make effective use of the accommodation and resources. The school is being extended to improve its accommodation.

The school finds the best value for money in its use of funds and resources. There are some significant weaknesses in the quality of accommodation, however, as was the case in the last report. The areas with most problems are music, science, art, mathematics food technology and the canteen. The new building programme is addressing most of these very effectively. However, there are no plans at present to improve the music rooms, where the standards are affected adversely by the poor acoustics.

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

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>Most parents who responded are pleased with the school. More than 90 per cent of them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• agree that expectations are high;</li> <li>• believe that teaching is good and children make good progress;</li> <li>• would feel comfortable approaching the school with any problems;</li> <li>• think that the school helps their children to become mature and responsible;</li> <li>• almost 90 per cent believe that their children like coming to the school.</li> </ul>	<p>Of the parents who responded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a quarter are not satisfied with the work that their children are set to do at home;</li> <li>• a fifth would like more information about their child's progress;</li> <li>• just under a fifth would like the school to work more closely with them.</li> </ul>

The school works closely with parents but some are concerned about homework provision. The inspection team was satisfied with the quality and quantity of homework being set. The information the school provides to parents is satisfactory but the annual written reports on their children's progress are not always sufficiently detailed. The inspectors agree with the favourable comments made by parents. Their children develop responsible attitudes and make good progress.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is below average, as measured by standardised tests. A particular weakness is English. Pupils' verbal reasoning scores are significantly below average overall. However, analysis of the results of the end of Year 6 national test results for primary school pupils who have entered the school in recent years shows that their attainment in these tests is almost in line with the national average. Overall, the attainment of pupils on entry to the school is close to average overall, but slightly below average in literacy. They achieve satisfactorily during Years 7, 8 and 9, attaining results in the national tests for 14-year-olds that are in line with the national average and in line with results from pupils in similar schools. They achieve very well in their GCSE years, achieving GCSE examination results last year above the national average in many subjects. Their 2001 results show considerable improvement on their national test scores at the age of 14. This was true in 2001. Over recent years, GCSE performance has improved steadily, but there was a significant improvement in 2001. The work that the senior management team has done on monitoring and improving teaching, target setting and raising expectations is having a very positive effect on pupils' achievement.

#### **Performance in the national tests at the end of Year 9**

2. At the end of Year 9, at the age of 14, attainment in the national tests has ranged from below the national average to in line over the last four years. Results in English and science were below those nationally in 1998 and 2000, and in line with the national average in 1999 and 2001. Results in mathematics have been slightly more consistent: below the national average in 2000, but in line in the other three years. The English results for 2000 are still the subject of a dispute between the school and the testing authority. Compared with similar schools, the results in English and science were average in 2001. Performance in mathematics was above that in similar schools. Taking the three core subjects together, the overall performance in 2001 was in line with that in similar schools. Pupils achieve well, considering that their attainment on entry was slightly below average. The trend in national test scores at this school over the last five years has been an upward one, with attainment rising more quickly here than it has nationally.
3. Although girls have attained, overall, more highly than boys in English over the last five years, boys have outperformed girls in mathematics and science. When the performance of girls is compared with that of girls across the country as a whole and boys' results are compared with those of boys nationally, both have been slightly below average. There is very little difference in attainment between boys and girls in this school.

#### **Current levels of attainment for pupils in Year 9**

4. The finding of the inspection is that pupils achieve satisfactorily during Years 7, 8 and 9. The attainment of pupils currently in Year 9 is in line with the national average overall. Attainment is average in English, mathematics and science. Almost all pupils have achieved satisfactory standards of literacy and numeracy for their age. Low levels of literacy were a problem before the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy, but there has been some improvement. There are problems in external tests and examinations when the level of language required to understand the questions or respond to them is higher than the literacy levels of the candidates. This tends to further depress the scores of lower attainers, who might have known the answers if they had had a secure understanding of what was being asked of them. Departments are increasingly aware of this and they are beginning to address the problem. In science, levels of numeracy and literacy are satisfactory. The pupils can plot graphs accurately and write accounts of their practical work, using specialist vocabulary well. In history, they can produce charts using numeracy skills competently and write reasonably accurately, although spelling is a weakness,

especially in the work of some boys. Speaking and listening skills are satisfactory and are developed well in drama.

5. Attainment is average in physical education, history, religious education, design and technology and information and communication technology. Pupils use computers competently. They incorporate information and communication technology skills into their work in many subjects. They have good opportunities to word-process their written work, although they do not always make good use of the spell-checkers. They use information and communication technology for control and measurement in science, for data-logging and for information retrieval, using the Internet and CD-ROMs across the curriculum.
6. Attainment in geography and music is below average. In art and modern foreign languages, very good teaching and good provision are helping pupils to achieve very well and their attainment in these subjects is above average. A detailed description of their competencies and skills in these subjects is to be found in the subject section of this report.

### **Attainment in GCSE examinations**

7. Attainment in GCSE examinations has risen since the last inspection and there has been good improvement. However, over the last five years the rise in attainment in GCSE examinations has been below that nationally. This is because the school had a very successful year in 1997, when just over 50 per cent of pupils gained five or more passes at grades A\* to C. This was followed by a dip in 1999, when the proportion dropped to 41.3 per cent. Since then, the school's strategies to address underperformance have proved to be increasingly effective. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE examination passes at A\* to C grades has risen steeply, to 44 per cent in 2000 and 56 per cent – the best results in the history of the school – in 2001. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more passes at any grade was 94 per cent in 2001, which was above the national average. Almost every pupil gained at least one GCSE examination pass in 2001, which is well above the average for the country as a whole. Although both boys and girls have performed at a similar level over the last three years, in 2001 boys' attainment in GCSE examinations was above the national average, whilst that of girls was broadly in line. Taking the results overall in 2001, the school's performance in GCSE examinations was close to the average nationally, but it was better than that in similar schools. When their performance in the national tests that they took at the age of 14 is taken into account, they achieved very well in their GCSE examinations. They made very good progress from the levels they attained in 1999, well above the average for pupils in the country as a whole. The school exceeded its target for attainment in GCSE examinations in 2001 by a considerable margin and the indications are that it will do so again in 2002. In view of the progress it has made, it is appropriate to review and raise its targets.

### **Current levels of attainment at the age of 16**

8. The finding of the inspection is that attainment is close to the levels indicated by the GCSE results in 2001. Attainment in the core subjects of English and mathematics is close to average overall. In science, attainment is above the national average. These pupils are achieving very well. At the age of 14, they were below average in the national tests and so they have made very good progress in just over four terms since then. The rate of progress that pupils make is generally more rapid in Years 10 and 11 at this school than in Years 7 to 9. Analysis of past results shows that this was also true in 2000 and 2001. Attainment is highest in art, science and modern foreign languages. Pupils achieve well in these subjects, as a result of good, often very good, teaching and their positive attitudes.
9. Attainment in physical education is above average for some pupils, who have good physical skills and attain highly, but is average overall. Attainment is close to average in design and technology and pupils make good progress in geography, raising their attainment from below average at the age of 14 to average at 16. It is also average in history, religious education and music but pupils achieve well in these subjects through Years 10 and 11. An exception is information and communication technology (ICT), where attainment is below average. This is because not all the required aspects have been covered: a result, largely, of the shortage of facilities. With new

accommodation and new resources, provision is improving in this subject. ICT is used well in some subjects to help pupils to attain highly but could be used more. In science, for example, limited amounts of equipment exist for control and measurement and some use is made of them, but not yet enough. Pupils make good use of computers in the library to find out information to help them in many subject areas but access to these machines is limited by the relatively small numbers available at lunchtime and after school.

10. By the age of 16, all pupils have at least satisfactory levels of literacy and numeracy. In history, the department changed examination courses in order to reduce the literacy demands that the examination imposed on pupils and this has helped to raise attainment. In geography there was a similar problem. The department identified it and provides useful additional help to pupils, helping to develop the writing skills and vocabulary that they need to succeed. Key vocabulary is taught well in a number of departments – design and technology teachers do this well, for example - and this is raising pupils' skills in these areas. There are no subjects in which problems with basic numeracy are causing pupils to underachieve. In science they can handle data satisfactorily. In geography and history they can present information in charts and graphs and read the data from graphs with understanding when they are required to do so. As in Years 7 to 9, spelling is still a weakness, especially in the work of some boys. Speaking and listening skills are satisfactory and are developed well in drama, but literacy difficulties prevent some pupils from achieving well in the written coursework elements of the examination.
11. The GNVQ business (foundation and intermediate level) course work analysed was of very high standard. The quality of presentation and the standards evident were very high on both courses, with most pupils on course for a merit or distinction grade. The course is excellently organised and managed and most pupils on both courses are making very good progress. Independent learning skills are unusually secure for pupils at this stage in their course. The pupils who study these subjects, business foundation and business intermediate, achieve well. An exception is those pupils whose attendance is poor. By the nature of the entry, the subjects cater for some pupils who are not as enthusiastic about schooling and not as academic as the majority in the school. A fifth of the pupils do not complete the course because poor attendance affects their ability to complete the course work elements. In 2001, almost 80 per cent saw the course through to examination entry, and of these, in the foundation tier, there were seven distinctions and two merits out of 13 entries. In the intermediate tier, there were nine distinctions and six merits out of 24 entries.
12. The attainment of pupils with special educational needs is, as would be expected, below, often well below, average. In the current Year 7, 18 per cent of pupils entered the school with reading ages two or more years below their real ages. A few had reading ages five years below. Over time, achievement is satisfactory at the end of Year 9 and Year 11, at the ages of 14 and 16. Pupils who are supported in class often make good progress, as do pupils with statements. However, because of a lack of different materials for pupils with learning difficulties in many lessons, progress is only satisfactory overall. At GCSE level, many pupils with learning difficulties do well in relation to their abilities. The proportions achieving at least 1 A\* to G or 5 or more A\* to G passes in GCSE examinations is well above the average of similar schools. The few pupils with English as an additional language achieve well.

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

13. Pupils' attitudes to school are very good. Parents are pleased by the way the school helps their children to become confident and responsible and by the good attitudes and values it promotes. Almost all pupils have very positive attitudes to school and work hard to improve their performance. Most pupils enjoy school. They talk about the 'nice atmosphere, helpful teachers and friendly pupils'. They feel that teachers are approachable and 'try to sort things out'. However, there are small numbers of pupils who do not take their work sufficiently seriously. They do not attend school regularly or work hard enough in lessons. The majority of lessons are interesting and involving, with tasks well matched to the abilities and needs of pupils. The result is that pupils are enthusiastic, well motivated and eager to contribute. Many participate in the

extra-curricular activities or study support groups. Pupils report 'sports are a strength of the school...' and 'you can represent your house if you are not good enough for the school team'. They talk enthusiastically about the many clubs and activities that are open to them.

14. The standards of behaviour in and around the school are very good. Parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting for parents were generally pleased by the way the school promotes good standards of behaviour. However, about 15 per cent of parents responding to the questionnaire expressed some concerns about behaviour in school. This was not borne out during the inspection week. In the vast majority of lessons seen, the pupils' attitudes and behaviour were judged to be satisfactory or better. In a significant number of lessons they were judged to be very good or excellent. The inspection team were very impressed by the standards of behaviour around the school, particularly during the wet lunch and break times when the pupils had to remain inside. Whilst most pupils are well behaved and form supportive relationships with each other and their teachers, small numbers of pupils exhibit very challenging behaviour and can be a disruptive influence in class. Where lessons are well managed, with effective implementation of the school's behaviour strategy, these incidents of poor behaviour can be contained. The use of the 'time out' room and behavioural contracts helps to control these disruptive pupils.
15. Pupils feel that the school provides a safe and happy environment. They report occasional incidents of bullying. They feel the school is 'strong on bullying – and won't have it'. If there are problems they know who to go to, and feel that the school takes any incidents seriously and deals with them promptly and effectively. The number of pupils excluded has risen slightly since the last inspection. However, the school has been very effective in retaining pupils who have been excluded from other schools. The development of the Mulberry Centre as a behavioural support unit helps to retain pupils in school and is one of the success stories of the school.
16. Relationships in the school are very good, both between staff and pupils, and amongst the pupils themselves. Pupils feel teachers are approachable and helpful. The house system provides many activities where pupils interact across the age ranges, and there are many occasions where pupils can work together in lessons. For instance, small drama groups were collaborating well in improvisations. Pupils were supporting and helping each other during physical education lessons. This friendly and supportive atmosphere promotes a good working environment and makes a positive impact on learning.
17. Pupils' personal development is very good and this area is a particular strength of the school. It is very well promoted through initiatives such as the Personal Effectiveness Programme Initiative (PEPI) and the well-established house system. Pupils listen to each other's views in the personal, social and health education programme and are happy to talk about their opinions and feelings, with pupils respecting others' opinions, values and beliefs. Pupils willingly take advantage of the many roles of responsibility offered to them both in class and around the school. Pupils perform their 'Park Assist' duties conscientiously, running errands or showing visitors around the school. Others act as librarians, run the school shop, or have responsibilities through the house system, such as 'merit collectors', 'charity reps' and house or sports captains. The house and school councils provide a voice for pupils to express their opinions and take an active role in the decision processes of the school. Pupils reported that 'the councils get lots of feedback about what is happening, and 99 per cent of the time things get changed for the better'. The prefects are well respected and have many duties, including assisting staff on lunchtime/break duties, monitoring behaviour or showing visitors around the school. A successful peer-mentoring scheme is run in the houses to deal with pupils who have concerns about bullying or other issues, and do not wish to talk to staff.
18. The levels of attendance in the school are generally satisfactory and broadly in line with national averages, which was similar to the situation at the time of the last inspection. However, during the inspection week there were a large number of pupils away with viral infections. The school is closely monitoring attendance patterns. Close contact with the educational welfare officer is enabling her to follow up cases of poor attendance and, if necessary, take parents to court. Despite the school's continued efforts to improve the attendance levels in the school, with a very



small minority of pupils, this is having a limited effect. The irregular attendance of these pupils is having a negative impact upon their education and standards of attainment.

19. Punctuality to school in the morning is often a cause for concern, with a significant number of pupils arriving late on a regular basis. This is generally a result of the late arrival of the buses. On the Friday of the inspection week nearly forty Year 11 pupils were late for assembly because of the late running of buses. The school has had frequent contact with the bus companies to improve the situation but to little long-term effect. During the course of the day, pupils are generally prompt into lessons. Registers are taken at the start of the morning and afternoon sessions and by class teachers in each lesson to monitor any potential truancy. Form tutors use morning registration time effectively to build good relationships with their class by sharing the thought for the day, passing on contact messages and reviewing pupils' contact books.

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

20. Teaching is good overall. This leads to many pupils achieving well, because they make good progress and are interested in their studies. Across the school, teaching was satisfactory or better in almost all lessons observed. Eight unsatisfactory lessons were observed out of a total of 192. More than a quarter of the teaching observed in the school was very good or excellent, with good teaching in two in every five lessons. This is an improvement on the situation at the time of the last report, when teaching was unsatisfactory in one lesson in seven for GCSE classes. In this inclusive school, the teaching meets the needs of most pupils well. Teaching, in the lessons observed, was equally good for all year groups. In Years 7 to 9, only six of the 120 observed were unsatisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, there were two in which the teaching was unsatisfactory out of 72 observed.
21. The school has done considerable work since the last report on the development of good teaching and learning strategies. Outside consultants have been brought in to give guidance. Effective teaching styles have been the focus of much 'in-house' training. The results are very positive. In the many good lessons observed, it was apparent that teachers are using the techniques that have been discussed in order to motivate pupils and ensure that they get the maximum possible benefit from the lesson. In these lessons, for example, the objectives are explained to pupils at the beginning, so that they know what they are expected to achieve. There is a good variety and balance of activities so that pupils are interested and supported from one learning activity to the next. Teachers are aware of the concentration spans of their pupils and so plan a series of activities within each lesson to provide variety and maintain concentration. They pitch the work at the correct level for each pupil, so that everyone is challenged by the work that is set. Sequences of lessons are planned to ensure that work is revisited, so that the learning is consolidated through the repetition over time of key facts or concepts. For example, in a very good German lesson with Year 9 pupils, the teacher began with a brisk revision of the skills they had covered in their previous lesson. The teacher made good use of a wide range of strategies and resources to keep the lesson interesting and hold the pupils' attention. The work set by the teacher was challenging, extending the pupils' skills and competence so that they made very good progress in the lesson. The pupils learned very well. They increased their vocabulary, consolidated their understanding of word order and improved their research skills. The brisk pace that was sustained helped the pupils to learn quickly and their excellent responses to the challenging and well-directed questioning ensured that all were alert and involved.
22. In a very good Year 10 art lesson, the pupils were seen working on complex, large-scale designs based on symbolism. The teacher had prepared them well, building on their previous study of a number of great artists, including Modigliani and Moore. Their studies in their sketchbooks bore testament to their enthusiasm and interest, stimulated by their teacher's excellent use of resources. There was abundant evidence of exploration, research and experimentation as they had, over time, developed their ideas and accepted or rejected a wide range of possibilities, always under the secure guidance of their teacher. Her specialist knowledge was very evident. She had used her own expertise very well to open their minds to the possibilities in their work,

firmly based on their own needs and ideas. This was education of a high order, as the teacher guided the pupils to high levels of attainment, never allowing them to lose ownership of their work. The teacher had a very good rapport with the class and relationships were very good between the teacher and the pupils and the pupils themselves. They were co-operative and helped each other to learn. They made very good progress and achieved well. Homework had been used very well to extend the work done in class.

23. In the few lessons in which teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory, teachers failed to engage the interest of their pupils. They had planned thoroughly in most cases, but the activities they had planned were neither interesting nor challenging enough to motivate the pupils. They did not always make the learning objectives clear and failed to break the lesson into a series of interesting steps. The pupils lost interest and failed to concentrate. They were noisy and ignored much that the teacher told them. There was no sense of urgency in their work and they achieved relatively little in the lesson. Most of these lessons were taught by teachers new to the school who have not had the benefit of the school's training in teaching technique, nor yet established good relationships with their pupils. Poor class control was a significant area of weakness. In a history lesson, for example, the teacher spent too long talking to the class at the start of the lesson and lost their interest. The activity she had planned was the same for all the class. The higher attainers found it too easy and said so. They were bored and achieved little. The lower attainers were discouraged by the language of the questions, which was too difficult for them. The class became noisy and did little work. The teacher's class control was not strong enough to bring them back to order.
24. The teaching of English, mathematics and science is good, overall, in Years 7 to 11. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory across the school, although there are still some pupils whose progress is restricted by literacy and numeracy problems.
25. There is some particularly gifted teaching in art and modern foreign languages. In these subjects, teaching is very good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and the skill to enthuse their pupils. Examples were seen of excellent teaching in physical education, information and communication technology and personal and social education. Instances of very good teaching were observed in almost all subjects. The teaching of religious education and history is satisfactory overall, with some examples of good teaching but also some instances of unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching is satisfactory overall in information and communication technology for Years 10 and 11, but is weakened by some of the non-specialist teaching.
26. Teaching is good in design and technology: teachers have good expertise in the aspects of the subject that they teach, such as textiles and graphics. It is also good in physical education and music. In physical education, teachers are adept at developing pupils' skills. In music and drama, teaching is good despite difficulties with the accommodation, which sometimes mean that they are working over noise from adjoining areas. There is satisfactory teaching in religious education and history, although there are instances of unsatisfactory teaching when class control is a problem.
27. The teaching of special educational needs is good when learning support assistants are on hand to give individual help or teachers have planned appropriate work, especially for the lower attainers, that is challenging yet achievable. In a minority of lessons, teachers are not planning work to take account of the needs of pupils with special educational needs, making teaching satisfactory overall.

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

28. The curriculum is very well managed by the deputy headteacher who has this responsibility. It is regularly reviewed through the curriculum council and working parties. The curriculum is good overall.

29. Statutory requirements are met in Years 7 to 9 in all subjects. The curriculum has good breadth and has improved since the last inspection. There are now opportunities for pupils to study two modern foreign languages from Year 7. Information and communication technology is taught as a discrete subject in Years 7 and 8 and geography, history and religious education are taught separately in Years 8 and 9. A revised timetable structure has also allowed subjects such as science, design and technology and physical education to make provision for more able pupils and double periods have been introduced to provide longer sessions in subjects that will benefit from this, such as drama, art, design and technology and physical education. Drama is taught to all pupils in Years 7-9. Dance is taught to girls, but only in the extra-curricular programme for boys. Religious education and personal, social and health education (PSHE) are taught each week. The National Literacy Strategy has been successfully introduced, but the National Numeracy Strategy is still in its infancy.
30. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is good, although not all statutory requirements are met in information and communication technology, as was the case at the time of the last inspection. The school has a major building programme in progress that, when completed, will provide the necessary resources to ensure that pupils have adequate access to all aspects of the subject. A wide range of GCSE subjects is offered within a broad and balanced core and option provision that includes a technology, humanities, modern foreign languages and an expressive arts subject. Non-national curriculum subjects, such as child development, keyboard skills and sociology, are also offered, as are courses in physical education, religious education and ICT. The curriculum provides flexible, varied and relevant Programmes of Study for pupils across the ability range, particularly low attainers, through the ASDAN Youth Awards Scheme. This includes a significant and extremely valuable work experience programme in Year 11. The GNVQ business Part 1 course is taken at foundation or intermediate level by some pupils in place of design and technology and provides an important vocational dimension.
31. The PSHE provision is very good and gives appropriate coverage of sex and drugs education. The PSHE course is taught to all pupils by the form tutor, with specialist teachers also involved in Years 9 to 11. A particular strength of the course is the way that the year co-ordinator, a head or deputy head of house, organises and monitors the quality of teaching. INSET is provided for all staff throughout the year to prepare for and review the teaching programme. The overall programme is very well planned, with the health education and careers education programmes of especially high quality. The work experience arrangements are well organised and operate effectively, with most tutors participating in supporting pupils in their work placements. The school PSHE course has been used as a model of good practice for Devon schools. There is a need, however, for the school to ensure that the citizenship course element, covered through subjects such as geography and history, is separately available to pupils who have not opted for these courses in Years 10 and 11.
32. There is very good extra-curricular provision. It is particularly good in sport, drama and art. A wide range of sporting activities is offered and the take-up rate is high. There is an extensive enrichment programme available through school productions and community art projects, involving large numbers of pupils. Facilities are made available for homework, 'catch-up' and revision classes after school. The school's strong commitment to this aspect is such that it provides transport for pupils staying on after school to attend extra-curricular activities. There are also many enrichment opportunities, including visits to theatres, museums, visits to Germany and France in modern foreign languages and fieldwork trips in geography.
33. The school has very good links with partner institutions. Links with feeder primary schools are well developed in many subjects. The school works very effectively to ensure a smooth transition for pupils from primary to secondary education. There are some productive links with local special schools. Links with North Devon College are well established and there are generally good opportunities for pupils to continue and progress their studies. Links with initial teacher training institutions, particularly the University of Exeter School of Education, are very good indeed and a professional partnership exists that noticeably benefits the school and the student teachers.

34. The provision for careers education and vocational education is excellent. A very well considered and comprehensive programme exists in Years 9 to 11 provided as part of the PSHE course. The careers co-ordinator provides excellent leadership and ensures, through careful monitoring, that all pupils have knowledge and understanding of relevant careers opportunities and are fully prepared for entering the world of work. The careers co-ordinator works very closely in partnership with the local careers advisor, who provides very valuable professional guidance and advice on careers through individual or group interviews. The open access to the careers library within the learning resource centre is useful and effective. The GNVQ business (foundation and intermediate level) course is a valuable addition to the curriculum and the links made with local business and industry are significant.
35. Overall, the contribution of the community to pupils' learning is outstanding. The school has an extremely effective partnership with the community and local industry, which is well exemplified in the Personal Effectiveness Pupil Initiative programme in Years 7 and 8. It is also evident in the programme of problem solving with industry in mathematics in Year 9, work experience in Year 10 and support for career interviews in Year 11. The very high quality of the provision has been recognized by the recent successful renewal of the Investors in Business Links Diploma. The school has been designated a community school. The sports facilities are very well used and are a significant community asset. The school has developed excellent links with the local council and is heavily involved in the art and other festivals. It has pupil representation on the town's Youth Council. There are also impressive and developing links with a range of other community projects (including the Health Authority, The North Devon Theatre Trust and the Magistrates' Court), which contribute positively to pupils' learning experiences.
36. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory overall. Teaching assistants give good support in class and at lunchtimes. They have clear records of pupils' needs and achievements, which enable them to know pupils well and provide appropriate support. Liaison between assistants and subject teachers is inconsistent. Support is more effective where the subject teacher has talked in advance of the lesson to the assistant, giving her the opportunity to prepare materials to promote learning. Where the liaison is lacking, the assistant's role is less clear and the support less focused. The school's plan of attaching assistants to departments generally works well. Teaching assistants become accustomed to how departments work and are increasingly familiar with lesson content. Provision is very good in art and good in modern languages, design and technology, physical education, English and drama. Teachers use assistants effectively in class and often suit questions and work to pupils' needs. The use of different materials is a strong feature of work in English. Provision is satisfactory in geography, mathematics, science and history, but unsatisfactory in religious education and information and communication technology. In these subjects, there is no separate provision for pupils with learning difficulties. There is little or no use of different materials and so these pupils struggle to learn. This is unsatisfactory because they make less progress than other pupils in the class. Where there is a teacher assistant supporting, progress is at least satisfactory for these pupils.
37. The special educational needs base offers good provision for pupils. There are arrangements for pupils with literacy difficulties in Years 7, 8 and 9 to do corrective reading, rather than a second modern language, during lesson times and at lunchtime. A Year 7 lesson observed was well taught and pupils made good progress. The teacher managed the programme of work efficiently and fully involved pupils in their own learning. At lunchtime, groups of pupils work hard with teaching assistants to improve their reading. Information and communication technology is underused but the base has just received some computers and this should enhance learning opportunities.
38. Provision in the Mulberry Unit for pupils with behavioural difficulties is very good. The teacher in charge and the three teaching assistants monitor behaviour very well. Pupils enjoy visiting the centre and feel well supported. Records show that pupils' behaviour improves and this enables them to be included in lessons. In a lesson on self-esteem for a group of Year 8 pupils, the teacher's sympathetic but firm approach evoked a good response from pupils, who grew in confidence, related well to one another and behaved sensibly. Pupils benefit from having very

clear guidelines about what is acceptable or unacceptable behaviour, and this is a major factor in the good, sometimes very good, progress they make in 'anger control' and in their learning.

### **The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

39. Overall, the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good, though some aspects of it are stronger than others. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. Assemblies throughout the week enable the pupils to have some opportunity for quiet reflection, though there is not an act of collective worship every day for all. These opportunities focus the pupils' minds on events and situations, both inside and outside the school, that have had and continue to have far-reaching consequences in the lives of individuals and communities. These include the Holocaust, Remembrance Day and broader topics, such as children who suffer as a result of poverty. Many of the activities that the pupils engage in also have a spiritual dimension to them, particularly the many charitable events in the school. Some individual departments encourage the pupils to reflect. These include art, where the pupils explore the spirituality of other cultures. Religious education has an element of spirituality in some of its lessons, particularly in its study of the meaning and purpose of life and its analysis of 'unanswerable questions'. However, there is still room for further development in this aspect of the provision. Provision could be planned more thoroughly and be more consistent across the curriculum.
40. Provision for moral development is very good. The pupils are expected to behave well and have a clear sense of right and wrong. All members of staff work hard at this, both by giving guidance and by setting good personal examples. The school's code of conduct and behaviour policies reinforce this provision. The code of conduct, for example, clearly indicates what the expectations are: good behaviour, respect, consideration and co-operation. The personal and social education programme includes many topics of a moral nature. These include sex education, discussion of drugs and smoking, work on bullying and many aspects of citizenship. Some assembly themes, as well as Thought for the Week, are of a moral character. Outside speakers and visitors to the school also raise the pupils' awareness of this aspect. In addition, the Home School Agreement clearly indicates what the expected standards are. Individual departments in the school also contribute to this provision. History, for example, includes many moral issues in its scheme of work, such as war and divorce. The design and technology department places a clear emphasis on individual rights and responsibilities. Other general provision includes work on issues such as anger management, self-esteem, behaviour contracts and behaviour targets.
41. Provision for social development is very good. Positive relationships are encouraged and developed through the many activities and extra-curricular events that take place in the school. These include residential trips that have an emphasis on team work. Many of the after school clubs involve working together, such as the many sporting activities and musical events. The pupils can participate in the community in many and far reaching ways. Examples include the Young Carers Project and work with the elderly, as well as involvement with the many business links. The pupils have many opportunities to take responsibility through the prefect system, working as library monitors and on the various school councils as well as helping at parents' evenings. The personal, social and health education programme has significant units of work on this aspect. These include topics on decision-making, assertiveness, personal skills and responsibility. The personal effectiveness programme initiative also includes units of work aimed at social awareness, such as work on communication and teamwork. A significant number of individual subject departments in the school also encourage the pupils to work collaboratively in pairs and in larger groups.
42. Provision for cultural development is very good. The pupils have opportunities to appreciate their own cultural traditions through the many visits and activities that the school offers. These include visits to galleries and theatres in London as well as to more local theatres and museums. Many clubs in the school also have a cultural aspect to them. These include clubs for dance, drama and music. There are also art day trips. Pupils have the opportunity to be involved in cultural activities in a broader sense, such as in the Park Environmental Support Team. There are foreign language trips to France and Germany and there is an active language club in the school. An acknowledgement and a celebration of the multicultural aspect of Great Britain itself are less

noticeable and so there is still scope for further development in this area. Nonetheless, there has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. For example, the library includes many books about other cultures and traditions and has an effective display about religious traditions in other cultures. Some departments, such as art, include multicultural studies, such as study of African and Aboriginal artistic traditions. In music, pupils study African and Japanese music and in design and technology some work is centred on fabrics from around the world, as well as multicultural masks. Religious education includes the study of many world religions in its scheme of work.

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

43. The school provides a very caring and supportive environment. Parents speak highly of the care and commitment of staff. They feel it is a 'listening, caring and responsible school', and that the support offered to their children helps to develop their confidence and self-esteem. The provision for pupils' health, welfare and guidance makes a very effective contribution to their personal and academic development. There is a very effective pastoral system in place. Class tutors, subject specialists and the heads of house know their pupils well and act quickly when they see a need. The school seeks to ensure that pupils have equal opportunities, including those with special educational needs and English as an additional language.
44. Procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour are excellent. The comprehensive behaviour policy offers very clear guidelines and procedures for promoting good behaviour and dealing with any unsatisfactory or disruptive behaviour. Daily report sheets, 'isolation', the 'time out' room and Mulberry Centre and the pastoral support programme have been very successful in helping to manage behaviour in the school. The system of internal and external exclusions is very effective. There is also a comprehensive system of merit and credit rewards, certificates and 'colours', highly valued by pupils. They feel it motivates them to work hard and behave well. The school recognises and celebrates pupils' successes and they feel proud to bring their parents to tea with the governors when they have achieved the appropriate number of credits.
45. Procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour are excellent. The school takes the issue of bullying seriously and addresses it through the personal, social and health education lessons and during assemblies and tutor times. Houses have also set up peer-mentoring schemes: CATS (Calm After The Storm) groups to support pupils who have problems and do not wish to speak to their form tutors or heads of house. Parents report that the systems work well and that any incidents of bullying that occur are handled sensitively and effectively. Pupils feel there are lots of people to whom they can turn.
46. Procedures for monitoring and encouraging good attendance are very thorough. Parents are kept well informed regarding their responsibilities for ensuring that their children attend school regularly and arrive promptly. They are very aware of the need to inform the school if their child is unwell and unable to attend. Form tutors and heads of house liaise regularly to monitor attendance and punctuality and keep in close contact with the deputy headteacher with responsibility for this area. Very good links have been established with the education welfare officer. Occasional truancy sweeps have been effectively co-ordinated by all schools in the local area.
47. The monitoring of pupils' academic and personal development is very good. This is one of the many strengths of the school and an improvement on the positive comments in the previous report. The arrangements for supporting pupils within tutor groups are very effective. Form tutors and heads of house get to know the pupils very well. The very good tracking and targeting arrangements help to identify and record good effort and achievement or the development of personal skills, as well as picking up any incidents of unsatisfactory behaviour. Pupils are able to share achievements with their parents and the information is included in pupils' Records of Achievement. By sharing information with pupils and their parents, teachers reinforce the parents' partnership with the school and pupils' progress is recognised and praised.

48. The school's procedures for child protection are good. The school follows the local authority's policy and guidelines for child protection, with the deputy headteacher as the designated contact point. Regular updating of training keeps staff well informed of any changes. Systems for ensuring pupils' health and welfare are good. Well-established systems are in place to take care of pupils who may fall ill during the day and good records are maintained. Three members of staff have received first aid training and there are effective procedures to meet the medical needs of pupils. There are good links with the relevant outside agencies, whose representatives attend regularly, including the school nurse, who visits twice a week and offers a counselling role alongside her regular health reviews.
49. There is an appropriate health and safety policy and procedures in place to address the issues of safety and security of pupils in the school and when out on visits. Departments carry out health and safety checks and risk assessments. However, there is no consistency to these checks or effective cross-referencing to ensure that issues raised have been attended to. Health and safety procedures relating to the new building projects are satisfactory and the school takes its responsibility seriously for the safety of pupils and staff.

### **Assessment**

50. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good but the use of the data is not consistently good. The school identified assessment as a key development priority and is working hard to establish the effective use of assessment information to raise standards. The school has developed and introduced a system for predicting each pupil's attainment at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. This information is used to predict National Curriculum levels of attainment at the end of Year 9 and to monitor each pupil's progress towards her or his targets. This allows senior and middle managers and subject teachers to identify and intervene at a very early stage if any pupil is identified as underachieving. The same method is applied to Years 10 and 11, with Year 9 National Curriculum test information used to predict GCSE grades. While many teachers are increasingly making good use of this information to plan lessons and help pupils, there is still some inconsistency across departments. If achievement is to be increased, especially through Years 7 to 9, all departments need to use pupils' Year 6 test scores from primary school to set demanding targets for teachers and pupils. They also need to closely monitor the pupils' progress towards meeting them.
51. The assessment co-ordinator, with the help of the head of science, provides a considerable amount of information for staff, which is accessible and retrievable. They give very good support to departments in their developing understanding of how assessment information can be used to raise standards. Additional support for this process is provided through meetings between senior staff and heads of department to review progress in the use of assessment information. The school has made good progress since the last inspection, when the inconsistent use of assessment information was identified as a weakness.
52. The use of assessment information to support pupils with special educational needs is currently good. The co-ordinator for special educational needs assesses pupils on entry and provides the staff with very helpful information to assist planning. The Individual Education Plans she has rewritten since her arrival, seven months ago, are good, with specific targets and clear success criteria. The older plans are too imprecise to enable teachers to monitor progress. Annual reviews are conducted well and informative notes made to inform future planning.
53. The special educational needs base and the Mulberry Centre offer valued support before school and at lunchtimes. Pupils know teachers and assistants will listen to them and deal swiftly with problems. During the inspection, the special educational needs co-ordinator was seen to deal sympathetically with a pupil in distress: she listened patiently and went to considerable trouble to allay his worries. Her links with primary schools and outside agencies are good.

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

54. The partnership with parents is very good and one of the strengths of the school. The school has worked hard to foster strong links with parents and to establish effective liaison between home and school. Parents are very supportive of the school and think that teaching is good and that the pupils make good progress. However, whilst most parents who responded to the questionnaire felt the school was very approachable, nearly a fifth felt that they were not kept sufficiently informed about the progress of their children, or did not think that the school works closely with parents. A quarter of parents expressed concerns about the amount of work their children are set to do at home.
55. The range and quality of information provided for parents are good. The attractive school prospectus and governors' annual report to parents provides comprehensive information about the school and its activities. Some information about the curriculum is circulated at the start of the year. The regular newsletter celebrates pupils' achievements and successes. The school operates an open door policy and encourages parents to contact the school if they have any questions or concerns. Partnerships with parents are well promoted through the Home-School Agreement, consultative questionnaires, and individual interviews during the induction process. Heads of house and form tutors contact parents if there are problems or to share successes. Open meetings, consultations about the national tests, option choices, careers evenings and occasional workshops, such as the Year 8 adolescent evening, are held to keep parents updated and suitably informed about new initiatives. Formal consultation evenings are well attended and provide good opportunities to review pupils' progress and achievements. Parents generally feel happy about the annual student reports and monitoring sheets and find them very informative. The reports provide information regarding progress and attainment, plus targets for improvement. However, there are too few details provided of what pupils have covered within each subject area and too little specific information about what they need to do in order to improve.
56. The school offers frequent and appropriate opportunities for parents to become involved in their child's learning. Pupils have a regular homework timetable. Parents are encouraged to support the homework schedule. The pupils' contact books become a regular day-to-day link with the school, with parents required to sign them each week. Parents are very supportive of activities in the school and attend concerts, plays and special events. They are invited to have tea with the governors once their child has achieved sufficient merits. The Parents' and Friends' Association is very active, helping out at open evenings and running a number of social evenings and fund-raising events each year. These events help provide valuable additional funds for the school. Parents recently helped to raise money to support the school's bid for Technology College status and are now helping to raise funds to replace the school's minibus.
57. Links with parents of pupils with learning difficulties are improving. The co-ordinator values the support of parents and keeps in regular contact. Parents are welcomed when they visit the school. The Mulberry Unit has good links with parents. The teacher in charge works very hard each weekend to write detailed reports on the progress of each pupil, which are then posted to parents. This link has a positive impact on pupils' behaviour.

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

58. The leadership and management of the school by the headteacher, ably supported by the deputy headteachers and the senior and middle managers, are very good. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. The senior team and heads of subject monitor the school's performance well and, as a result of this analysis, effective action is taken to improve the work of the school. This has led to good progress since the time of the last report and the school is very well placed to improve in future. Resources are deployed well to improve the quality of education for the benefit of pupils and the school succeeds very well in getting the best value from its use of its funds and resources. Levels of staffing are good. The teaching staff are well qualified and, for the most part, members of staff teach their specialist subjects. The learning support assistants are deployed well, sufficient in number to meet the needs of pupils, and are supporting pupils' learning effectively. The administrative and clerical assistants and caretaking and cleaning staff all work very effectively to ensure that the school runs smoothly.



59. The headteacher, along with the other senior managers, provides very clear direction for the work of the school. Upon appointment he reviewed the strengths and weaknesses of the school and recognised that it was no longer attracting sufficient numbers of pupils. He shared with the senior managers, middle managers and governors the areas of concern that he had identified. These included a recognition that the school was very successful in promoting the personal development of pupils and supporting them in a social sense, but it was not challenging or extending them academically. With the full support of the senior management team, he undertook a rigorous review of the quality of teaching. The procedures for professional development, now part of the national initiative for performance management, were in place here before they became a requirement for all schools. Together, they led the school to become one of the first schools in the country to be awarded Beacon School status, in recognition of the work that had been done on assessment, PSHE, initial teacher training and home/school links. Most recently, the success of developments within the school has led to the award of Technology College status, made during the week of the inspection. The leadership team has a complementary range of strengths and works very well together.
60. The headteacher and the senior managers are ambitious for their school, wanting it to be an institution that serves its pupils and the community as well as possible, attaining high standards. This has led to a culture of critical questioning of provision, always looking for ways in which the work of the school can be improved. The proof of the success of their approaches is not only in the recognition that the school has gained nationally. Examination performance has improved significantly as target setting and higher expectations have taken effect. The school intake has increased. The school was hit by falling rolls as parents looked elsewhere for a school for their children and this was causing serious budget problems. The school is now popular and over-subscribed. The extensive work on developing effective, common teaching strategies across the school has raised the quality of teaching since the last report and led to a doubling of the percentage of lessons judged to be excellent or very good. The effectiveness of the collaborative approach to leadership is apparent in the way that the Curriculum Council of middle managers shares and discusses good practice, looking for successful approaches that will improve the quality of teaching in the school. Work was underway during the inspection week on extensive additions and improvements to the school buildings.
61. The school is giving increased autonomy to middle managers, who are, in general, responding by steering their own areas of responsibility with commitment and growing skill. There are some who are newly in post who are growing into the role, but overall the leadership and management that the heads of department and the heads of house are providing are good.
62. Both literacy and numeracy are well managed within the school and their introduction has been prepared for well. All departments are aware of the literacy and numeracy demands that their work places on pupils. They are also aware of their responsibility for ensuring that pupils are taught the basic skills they need to succeed in their subjects. Some subjects, such as science, respond very well and give good support, teaching pupils key words and numerical skills. Some other heads of department are not yet monitoring the work that is set by teachers to ensure that it is always written in a way that pupils can understand.
63. The co-ordinator for special educational needs gives good leadership. Teaching assistants are all committed to helping pupils achieve as well as they can. They are effectively deployed and keep good records of progress in lessons. The co-ordinator has worked very hard to update Individual Education Plans but realises there is still some way to go. The co-ordinator is aware of the lack of suitable materials in some areas and has already done some team teaching in science and visited the religious education department to assist with pupils' progress. She has very good knowledge of the New Code of Practice and is incorporating its recommendations into her systems, with the help of a teaching assistant. Since the last inspection, there had been a slight deterioration in the quality of provision, because of difficulties in recruiting a replacement for the former co-ordinator, but the situation has improved considerably over the past few months and the capacity for further improvement is good.

64. The school's development plan is well structured and addresses the issues facing the school in its efforts to become more effective. There are increasingly high expectations of both teachers and pupils. There is a clear focus on the need to improve examination results, while not losing sight of the importance of other aspects of school life, such as pupils' personal development. The governors are closely involved in the work of the school. They monitor the work of the school effectively, with the help of the senior managers, and provide specialist expertise in a number of fields, such as finance, business and architect services, to the great benefit of the school. They help to produce the school improvement plan and have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

### **Staffing**

65. Staffing levels have improved since the last inspection and are adequate to cover the demands of the current curriculum. The situation in the humanities subjects has improved since the last inspection: there is some non-specialist teaching, but only in Year 7. All departments have well qualified members of staff with, at the time of the inspection, two departments using supply cover for long-term illness. This does not have an adverse affect on standards. An assistant headteacher position is still to be filled.
66. Arrangements for induction are generally good and teachers feel well supported by departments and the senior staff. Members of the non-teaching staff give very effective support to the curriculum and to the general administration of the school. Technician support is just adequate overall. There is a good performance management system in operation, based on a line management structure. This includes academic and professional targets. There is also a quality assurance programme run by departmental teams. A training budget is supplemented by the school, which supports ongoing training for all staff.

### **Accommodation**

67. The current overall provision of accommodation is unsatisfactory. The 1996 Ofsted inspection reported a number of shortcomings of accommodation. For example, rooms for mathematics were too small and science technicians had to move equipment "far and often". Most of the problems of accommodation raised in the 1996 inspection report remain.
68. In addition to mathematics and science, rooms for food technology and textiles, history, ceramics and music are too small. Music has insufficient practice rooms and the very poor acoustics in music rooms make music teaching very difficult. Science laboratories are outdated and insufficient in number, so that some science has to be taught out of laboratories. Physical education classes sometimes lose their limited access to halls because these spaces have to be used for examinations.
69. In all other subject areas, accommodation is satisfactory. The learning resources centre provides the school with a pleasant and stimulating learning environment. The concern about the safety of the access to the school has been resolved well by the separation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic.
70. The big difference between the state of the accommodation at the time of the 1996 inspection and now is the ambitious building plan, about to become a reality. Staff and governors have worked effectively over a long period to study accommodation needs now and in the future, and to develop solutions. The new buildings, whose groundworks had just been started during the week of the inspection, will address almost all of the school's current and foreseeable future accommodation needs. The new building, on three storeys, will link several of the existing separate teaching blocks into a coherent whole, with a further plan to completely replace the outdated dining hall facilities and to provide a new, multipurpose hall and new toilets. Altogether, some four million pounds of investment in new buildings has begun.

71. New accommodation will come into commission for September 2002, with further releases through to 2004. As new rooms are taken over, re-allocation and refurbishment of rooms in the existing buildings will eventually overcome the school's accommodation problems. The only unresolved accommodation issue will be for music. A solution to this serious shortcoming has yet to be found.

### **Resources**

72. The quality and quantity of the school's resources are satisfactory, although there are some areas of weakness. Resourcing is good in geography. Here, resources are well chosen and adequate in all areas except for insufficient access to information and communication technology (ICT) rooms. The resourcing of modern foreign languages is also good and teachers have good access to books and equipment, except for information and communication technology resources. The levels of resourcing in physical education are very good: resources are well maintained and of good quality. The library is very good. It is maintained very well by the library staff and provides an attractive and stimulating environment for learning. There are good book stocks for every subject area and a good range of information and communication technology equipment for individual research.
73. Every other subject has a satisfactory level of resourcing, except for information and communication technology, science and religious education. In science, the problem is that equipment and chemicals, sometimes hazardous, have to be moved from laboratory to laboratory. This is being resolved in the new build. In religious education, there is a shortage of textbooks. In information and communication technology, the quality of the new computers is very high but the total number of computers in the school for use by pupils is below the average nationally and this makes access to information and communication technology equipment difficult for some subject areas. The school is aware of this and more computers are planned.

### **Finance**

74. The school's educational priorities are very well supported through careful financial management and planning. The renewal of Beacon School status has continued to bring additional funds into the school. All such additional funding is used appropriately. The current focus on Technology College status ensures that the integration of information and communication technology across the school is a high priority area. The excellent link-up with a software firm represents best value principles in action, by providing 'state of the art' computer facilities for pupils in the school at a nominal cost, with the agreement that other schools can come and see the equipment in use.
75. The sports facilities provide a valuable asset for both the school and the local community. Grant money is spent appropriately, such as the money allocated to support those pupils with special educational needs. The Home Office grant for improved security cameras has helped reduce the bill for dealing with vandalism. The local authority's 'Park and Ride' facility, built on the school grounds, has improved the site access and security around the school. The bursar and finance officer work very closely with the governors and senior management team to ensure that good financial records are kept and that appropriate value for money criteria and principles of best value are applied to all spending decisions. Recommendations in recent financial audits have been acted upon, and the very good support offered from the finance department ensures that all departments are kept adequately informed and suitably updated about the school budget.

### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

76. This is a school that is providing a good standard of education but it recognises, nevertheless, that there are still areas for further development. In order to improve and to raise levels of attainment, the governors, headteacher and teaching staff should:
- seek ways to raise attainment in subjects that, in GCSE examinations, are relatively less successful than others in motivating pupils to make the best possible progress in their

learning. The monitoring of teaching and learning needs to continue to focus on the recognition and sharing of the most successful practice (see paragraphs 8, 9, 11, 13, 21, 23, 156, 167, 183, 196.);

- increase the rate of progress made by pupils from entry to the school to the taking of the national tests at the age of 14 by using their Year 6 test scores from primary school to set demanding targets for teachers and pupils and by closely monitoring the pupils' progress towards meeting them (see paragraphs 23, 27, 50, 90, 123, 143, 151, 161, 168, 178, 195.).

### **Minor Issues**

The following issues were not regarded by the inspection team as significant enough to be Key Issues, but nevertheless the governing body should consider including them in their action plan.

- The accommodation is unsatisfactory in a number of subject areas. The new building programme that had commenced just before the week of the inspection, costing four million pounds, will solve almost all the problems that currently exist and provide accommodation of high quality. The governors need to be aware, however, that the accommodation for music, not included in the current rebuilding plans, is unsatisfactory and in urgent need of refurbishment (see paragraphs 26, 67, 68, 185.).
- The school is not meeting the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all (see paragraph 39.).
- The provision for information and communication technology is not fully meeting statutory requirements (see paragraphs 30, 126, 143, 152, 168, 179, 192.).

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	192
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	41

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	9	42	76	57	8	0	0
Percentage	5	21	40	30	4	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1214
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	180

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	51
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	307

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	60
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	48

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.5
National comparative data	8.1

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.7
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2001	103	106

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	54	57	62
	Girls	79	71	64
	Total	133	128	126
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	64 (53)	61 (64)	60 (53)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	22 (17)	42 (30)	31 (26)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	57	65	62
	Girls	88	82	69
	Total	145	147	131
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	70 (60)	71 (53)	64 (56)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	32 (29)	33 (29)	33 (30)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2001	90	117

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	45	86	90
	Girls	70	109	116
	Total	115	195	206
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	56 (44)	94 (96)	100 (99)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score	School	40.6

per pupil	National	39.0
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### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	2
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	3
Chinese	2
White	1091
Any other minority ethnic group	5

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

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	78	4
Other minority ethnic groups	5	0

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

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

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	66.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.3

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

Total number of education support staff	27
Total aggregate hours worked per week	704.54

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

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	70
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	27.8
Key Stage 4	26.4

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	2799656
Total expenditure	2758010
Expenditure per pupil	2421
Balance brought forward from previous year	93465
Balance carried forward to next year	135110

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

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	11.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	21.7

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1214
Number of questionnaires returned	376

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	53	9	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	40	54	4	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	21	57	11	3	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	54	19	6	2
The teaching is good.	29	60	5	1	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	51	15	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	45	3	3	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	54	41	4	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	27	53	13	4	3
The school is well led and managed.	36	52	4	2	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	35	57	4	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	32	51	7	2	8

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

### ENGLISH

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

#### Strengths

- Very good leadership provides clear direction for development.
- Pupils achieve very well in GCSE examinations.
- Reading is taught well.
- There are good methods for raising standards of literacy.

#### Areas for improvement

- Assessment, including day-to-day marking and the use of assessment information to plan appropriate work for pupils.

77. Standards of attainment in English on entry are below national expectations. Standards in English at the age of 14 in the 2001 national tests were average when compared to schools nationally, and average when compared to similar schools. There was a difference in performance between girls and boys, with a greater proportion of girls achieving the higher levels than the boys. However, this reflects the national picture. In general, the overall trend between 1996 and 2001 has been upward. Inspection evidence confirms that standards in English are broadly in line with national expectations at the age of 14. Achievement at the age of 14 is satisfactory.
78. Standards in English language at the age of 16 in 2001 were average compared with results nationally in GCSE examinations, but well above average when compared to results in similar schools. Girls significantly outperformed boys. The trend in recent years has been steadily upwards.
79. Standards in English literature in the GCSE examination in 2001 were average when compared to schools nationally. Again, girls significantly outperformed boys. Achievement at the age of 16 in both English and English literature is very high. Pupils achieve much better than would normally be expected from their levels of attainment at the age of 14.
80. At the ages of 14 and 16, pupils with special educational needs are attaining well and reach standards that are good in relation to their prior attainment. The pupil who has English as an additional language is attaining well, reaching standards in line with expectations.
81. During the inspection, attainment in **speaking and listening** at the age of 14 was above average, at least consistent with national expectations and frequently better. A good example was in a Year 9 lesson in which pupils confidently discussed the significance of the dark imagery used to highlight evil in 'Macbeth'. High-attaining pupils demonstrated clear insight into the ways in which these images had been used as theatrical devices in a film version.
82. Attainment in speaking and listening at the age of 16 is above average. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils demonstrated a high level of critical appreciation and understanding of language as they discussed and analysed Neil Kinnock's election speech. A pupil with learning difficulties made a clear and lucid presentation by incorporating the essential features of good oratory she had learned in this lesson.
83. Inspection evidence indicates that attainment in **reading** is average at the age of 14. The range of texts used by the pupils is impressive. This is due entirely to a rigorous programme of reading, which involves all pupils in personal reading for one lesson each week. This strategy is raising standards in literacy, and is reflected in high achievement by the age of 16. Pupils read with clear expression and obvious pleasure, as in a Year 9 lesson in which the conflict of conscience in

- 'Macbeth' was first discussed from the script and then developed into a debate. In this lesson, pupils were able to select appropriate pieces of text to support their arguments.
84. At the age of 16, attainment in reading is above average. Pupils read with sensitivity and understanding. In a lively Year 10 lesson on 'An Inspector Calls', they read analytically and sensitively, which enabled the pupils to establish the various levels of meaning in the script. The structured support given by the teacher in this lesson helped them to identify the major theme - 'social class'. Higher attaining pupils extended their reading and understanding by closely analysing the language and the finer nuances of dramatic tension in J. B. Priestley's play.
85. The standard of **writing** seen during the inspection indicated that attainment at the age of 14 was average for girls but below average for boys. Boys are still writing short pieces, frequently marred by grammatical and spelling errors. The department has employed various strategies to raise standards for boys but these are not used consistently across teaching groups. The use of a wide range of writing methods helps pupils improve, as in a Year 8 lesson where pupils became poets and used a variety of similes and metaphors to parody Ted Hughes' poem 'A View of the Pig'. 'Poets' of all abilities in this class produced work of a very high standard. This was because the lesson was well planned and the teacher demonstrated exactly what was needed at the outset of the lesson.
86. At the age of 16, pupils' attainment in writing is close to, and frequently slightly above, average. Presentation is often excellent and shows a high level of commitment to the subject. There is evidence of pupils of all abilities drafting and redrafting their work and using information and communication technology as a tool for improving presentation. Higher-attaining pupils are producing creative pieces of work of exceptionally high quality and are achieving the highest grades in GCSE examinations. A good example of this was from a Year 10 pupil writing about a field of thorns:
- A field of emptiness, a large, vast space;  
She looks on, quietly,  
Imagining the strong steady thorns,  
Not standing tall, proud, sharp and stern.  
Everything she knows is gone;  
Is still; silent, deadly.  
No wind whistling through the sharp, rough edges.  
Is this the change?*
87. However, some lower-attaining pupils at both 14 and 16 are still experiencing difficulty with accuracy in spelling and grammar, which frequently affects the clarity of their writing and hinders understanding. This is worse for pupils in some teaching groups than others. Where marking is less effective, improvement is slow.
88. Despite these technical weaknesses, pupils produce imaginative pieces that clearly demonstrate an awareness of the reader and purposeful writing. In a Year 11 lesson, on Simon Armitage's poem 'About His Person', their understanding was considerably extended as they became literary 'detectives' and recorded their evidence on a carefully constructed writing guide. This enabled them to make a full written response, which reflected both their thorough group discussions and their personal views.
89. All pupils behave well in lessons. In lessons that were stimulating and well planned, the pupils responded in a very mature manner and concentrated well. Pupils with special educational needs were well supported in lessons by learning assistants and this significantly reduced the amount of attention they would otherwise have needed from their teacher. Warm, businesslike relationships were a feature of most lessons and are a strength of the department.
90. In lessons observed, the teaching was good overall, with nearly one-third of lessons graded as very good or excellent. Most teachers display good subject knowledge but their expectations of their pupils are varied. Where expectations are high and pupils are challenged by stimulating materials, the relationships are business-like and well focused. A good example of this was a

Year 7 lesson in which pupils were asked to explore marketing devices, using some current advertising campaigns. In this lesson, pupils learned about bias in media language. Where teachers' expectations were lower, progress was often less than satisfactory, as in a Year 7 poetry lesson where pupils were all given the same task to complete. This left the higher attainers bored and restless.

91. Departmental planning is a strength. Already, the National Literacy Strategy has been incorporated into the teaching. These plans are detailed enough to support new, temporary and part-time teachers and provide a cohesive and comprehensive framework. In the most successful lessons, teachers explain what they expect pupils to learn at the beginning of the lesson and return at the end of the lesson to check that learning has taken place. In such lessons pupils are drawn into taking an active part because tasks are well structured, as in a Year 7 lesson, where pupils worked on a poem enlarged on the whiteboard. By actually being involved, lower-attaining pupils were able, with some support from friends, to identify imagery in the piece.
92. Good questioning technique and oral feedback allowed pupils to make very good gains in understanding. An excellent example was a Year 9 lesson on 'Twelfth Night', where the roles were reversed and pupils asked skilful questions of their teacher, who pretended to be a character from the play, to extend their understanding.
93. Good pace, high expectations of pupils, stimulating and well-planned lessons and extended plenary sessions to consolidate learning were all features of lessons where achievement was good. Good use was also made of peer group support. Lower-achieving pupils developed confidence in all aspects of their work and higher-achieving pupils were provided with opportunities to extend their learning further. The whole philosophy of the department, to move towards independent learning, was observed frequently during the inspection. All contributions from pupils are valued and a real ethos of shared learning is developing. This could be further improved if teachers used assessment information more consistently to help them to set appropriate work for all pupils. The department has some excellent assessment strategies in place. Assessment criteria are shared with pupils and they are encouraged to assess their own progress. Teachers set individual targets for pupils, who refer to these in order to improve. However, there are some inconsistencies across the department. Some pupils' work is thoroughly marked, yet other work is not marked as rigorously. The department has a clear marking policy, but not all members of the team are interpreting it in the same way. Although the department has an abundance of performance data available, there is a lack of interpretation and analysis. There needs to be further development in the interpretation of data in order to identify areas of weakness in pupils' work. Homework, which is of a high quality, is set and marked regularly.
94. Procedures are in place for the early identification of pupils who have English as an additional language. The school's newly appointed Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator receives advice and information from the local education authority, the advisory support teacher for English as an additional language and from the relevant feeder primary schools. Such pupils make good progress.
95. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good. Speaking and listening have improved and there are many opportunities for pupils to share ideas orally. During the period of inspection, many pupils took part in 'Youth Speaks', competing with local schools. Good, neat presentation of written work is now a strength, with many pieces of work word-processed. The increased use of information and communication technology, both as a resource and as a tool for improving presentation, is widespread. This high standard of presentation enhances wall displays and gives classrooms a purposeful atmosphere.
96. This is an enthusiastic and energetic department, very well led and managed. The department is now adequately staffed and is well resourced, but needs a more cohesive approach to the monitoring of pupils' progress. However, the team's commitment to mixed-ability teaching in order to raise standards and ensure inclusive education is working well.

### **Literacy Strategy**

97. The school had strategies in place for the raising of standards in literacy before the launch of the National Literacy Strategy. This was as a result of staff recognising that low levels of achievement were affecting progress in their subject areas. One of the deputy headteachers is Key Stage 3 strategy manager. She oversees both literacy and numeracy and will extend her brief to include ICT and science next year. There was no provision for a summer school last year.
98. The school developed an action plan in which specific departments are committed to various areas of the strategy. Departments are monitored by the senior management team to ensure continuity. In addition, all teachers of pupils aged up to 14 display, teach and test the spellings and understanding of key words and specialist vocabulary in their subject areas. The best examples are seen in design and technology, history, drama, geography and science. By the age of 16, pupils are confidently using writing guides to support a range of writing activities. In drama, science and design and technology these have helped pupils produce better organised, more extended and detailed pieces of writing.
99. Departments have not used the National Literacy Strategy Audit as a focus for the identification of literacy needs because a similar Quality Assurance system was already in place and working effectively. Core departments have responded particularly well and there is strong evidence of raised standards already. In other departments, which have other priorities to address, progress has not been so rapid. However, literacy is identified as an issue for further development in all department improvement plans. Many subject areas display learning objectives and review these during the plenary sessions. Pupils are encouraged to identify what they have learned and many are able to express an understanding of their own learning.
100. Standards in literacy on entry are below national standards. Various strategies are in place to raise achievement. Pupils working at a level below national expectations at the age of 11 are targeted for extra support using the National literacy Strategy progress units. These pupils are currently removed from some of their lessons in humanities, science and English. This has a disruptive effect on the teaching of these courses. Older pupils, up to the age of 14, are disapplied from a second foreign language and are given intensive support in small groups. In addition, the English department has a vigorous reading programme and pupils are encouraged to develop independent reading. This strategy is further enhanced by the good use of the learning resource area (library). The high rates of book borrowing in all year groups indicate that regular reading is becoming a feature of the work in the school. Homework clubs, which are run three times per week, are well attended.
101. Inspection evidence suggests that standards in speaking and listening are generally satisfactory. Pupils communicate effectively in groups and with their teachers. The best examples of high standards of oral work are in English and geography.
102. Standards in writing are satisfactory. However, there were many good examples, which include a range of writing for a variety of purposes in English. In history, pupils' knowledge and understanding is recorded using a range of techniques: note-taking, newspaper reports, etc.. However, there is a weakness in spelling across the curriculum. It is weakest in ICT, English and history. There are too few opportunities for extended pieces of writing beyond English. Presentation is still weak in some subject areas.
103. Across the school, standards in reading are satisfactory and improving. Pupils are able to read a range of literary and non-literary texts and are able to select and retrieve information. Pupils are also confidently interrogating Internet websites.
104. The introduction of the strategy has been helped by very good management, good primary liaison, extra resourcing and by support by the local education authority literacy consultant and team. The school is identified for early intervention because of the relatively low levels of literacy shown by its pupils on entry.

## **MATHEMATICS**

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

#### Strengths

- Steadily improving attainment.
- The quality of teaching, which is now good overall – an improvement since the last inspection.
- The management of pupils is good and sometimes very good.
- Good relationships between teachers and pupils lead to very good attitudes to mathematics and very good behaviour.
- Pupils' interest in mathematics and concentration in lessons.
- The percentage of pupils entered for the GCSE examination is significantly above the national average.
- The use of information and communication technology is improving.
- Good team effort is being developed.

#### Areas for improvement

- Numeracy teaching across the school.
- The quality of marking by teachers requires standardisation.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teachers' work and taking effective action based on the results.
- In some classes, pupils should show more working in their written work.
- The need to plan more opportunities for using information and communication technology as part of mathematics teaching and learning, when facilities become available.
- The need to improve the information given in reports to parents so that it is more detailed about mathematics.

105. Standards in mathematics at the age of 14 are in line with national averages. In national tests in 2001, the percentage of pupils reaching Level 5 or above was in line with the national average, and the percentage of pupils reaching Level 6 or above was very close to the national average. The percentage results showed an improvement on 2000, with the percentage at Level 6 or above increasing by 12 per cent. When judged on average point scores, pupils performed very slightly below the national average. Results are above average when compared with similar schools. Attainment has increased above the rate of the national average over the last three years. Pupils achieved results in line with expectations, because they entered the school with average attainment.
106. Results in GCSE examinations are average when compared to national figures. The percentages reaching grades A\* to C are in line with the national figures. In 2001, girls performed slightly below the national average, with boys performing at the national average. This is not the normal pattern and no reasons have been identified by the department. Results at grades A\*-G are in line with national figures. The department entered very nearly all the pupils in last year's Year 11: this was above the national average and is very commendable practice. When results in mathematics are compared to other subjects in the school, pupils performed significantly below other subjects. There is not a significant difference between boys' and girls' results overall. Pupils achieved well, above expectations, in 2001, when results are compared to their results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 1999.
107. When pupils join the school in Year 7, they have average mathematical skills. The courses in Year 7 have been carefully structured to build on the pupils' skills, and good planning has taken place to introduce new ideas and new methods of teaching as recommended in the National Numeracy Strategy. Pupils' appreciation of mathematical processes is good. Pupils in Year 7 deal well with probability. They demonstrate good skills in converting between fractions, decimals and percentages, which allows them to describe probabilities in different ways. In a practical task, in which groups of pupils were given only one suit of cards, pupils very enthusiastically considered favourable outcomes and adjusted their thinking when various cards were revealed. A very good summary of the lesson confirmed the pupils' learning of theoretical and experimental probabilities. Pupils in Year 8 also practise mental arithmetic at the beginning of lessons. Pupils of average ability understand why probabilities should total one. Key words associated with mathematics are well stressed in lessons; pupils write down these words so that they can learn them for homework. Higher-attaining pupils are working at levels appropriate to their

mathematical ability; their exercise books show accurate use of standard form and some high level work on transformations. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 understand how to construct scatter graphs; they use scales well and interpret graphs, drawing sensible conclusions. Pupils convert easily between fractions, decimals and percentages, showing good numeracy skills. They show a good appreciation of the principles involved. Lower-attaining pupils collect like terms in their algebra work; they describe what they are doing and concentrate very well on their learning. Levels of achievement for all pupils are being enhanced by the introduction of quick 'starter' sessions at the beginning of lessons, which help pupils to develop mental arithmetic skills.

108. Pupils with special educational needs learn well when supported by both their teacher and a learning support assistant. The allocation of a learning support assistant to the mathematics department allows for better continuity of support than is normal in schools. The learning support assistant works well with classes that include special educational needs pupils; she has a delicate and caring approach to pupils, which encourages them to develop confidence.
109. Following national tests at the end of Year 9, pupils are placed in groups based upon their mathematical ability for Years 10 and 11. Teachers present work that is well matched to pupils' abilities and good learning opportunities take place. Attainment is average, overall, at the age of 16. Pupils in the top set of Year 11 recognise inequalities and illustrate inclusion and exclusion of the end points when representing inequalities graphically. Some lower-attaining pupils know their tables well because of the regular practice that the teacher gives them at the start of lessons. They are working on an individual basis to complete the Foundation level course. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 10 take pride in their exercise books, which show examples of high quality work on reflection in straight lines and standard deviation. Number skills are good. Pupils aiming towards the lower grades at GCSE follow the techniques of calculating angles to draw pie charts, but only a few can explain why they divide the total into three hundred and sixty degrees.
110. The quality of teaching in mathematics is good. All the lessons observed, with one exception, were satisfactory or better. Seven-tenths of lessons are good or better, and a quarter of lessons are very good. This is a significant improvement from the last inspection, when one in five of the lessons were unsatisfactory. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are very good. This is shown in many lessons by the way that teachers explain the principles of mathematics and the sure confidence with which they handle pupils' questions. The teaching of the basic skill of numeracy is good, and much thought and planning has been given to introducing new methods to stimulate pupils' learning. For example, teachers introduce target number grids and pupils show good interest in using numbers to make specified totals. Lesson plans have a standard format, with the best plans showing time constraints. Good detail is seen and teachers note any pupils who have special educational needs or who require special help. Teachers set high standards, which pupils are expected to reach. In a good lesson in Year 9, the teacher ensured that all pupils worked very quietly when interpreting graphs. Pupils learned in a very mature manner, without any undue pressure from the teacher, showing that this is the normal way of working in lessons.
111. There is a good drive in most lessons to push forward pupils' learning; interventions by teachers are appropriate and add to the pace of learning. This is especially the case when written tasks for pupils are kept short and time constraints are given in which to finish the set work. When pupils in Year 7 were learning about probabilities, the teacher set written work that had to be completed in five minutes. He gave a further deadline when 30 seconds remained. Teachers control pupils very well, which leads to lessons in which pupils concentrate well and are very keen to learn mathematics. Pupils are eager to demonstrate their mathematical knowledge by working at the front of classes on the board. In interviews with Year 7 pupils, they all enjoy the experience of demonstrating their skills in front of their peer group. They show confidence but could be further encouraged to explain exactly how they approach problems. Year 9 pupils interpret scatter graphs showing good understanding. They discuss and explain well the important facts about scale and accuracy.



112. Teachers make good use of classroom aids to enhance pupils' learning. Practical tasks, such as using home made cards for collecting like terms and performing operations in a Year 9 lesson, enhance pupils' learning. The use of new technologies is developing but the department needs to plan more opportunities for pupils to use information and communication technology in mathematics. Following a starter, which uses a variation of Countdown, pupils in Year 8 studied rotational symmetry. One third of the group used computers to work on transformations, under the careful supervision of the learning support assistant. Key words are used in lessons and displayed in classrooms; on occasions, these could be more strongly stressed.
113. Teachers use time well, with most lessons starting promptly. Pupils' exercise books show average standards of presentation. Often, more stress could be given to setting out all the working in a problem. Marking is variable and not enough helpful comments are made. Homework is set at the end of most lessons but the evidence recorded in pupils' planners is spasmodic. In a few classes, there is very little evidence of homework being completed. The quality of reports to parents should be improved by including comments on what pupils understand and what they must do to improve further in mathematics. Teachers can improve pupils' learning even more by giving summaries of what has been learnt at the end of each lesson. This was well done in only a few lessons - in particular, one teacher asked pupils to write down what they thought their friends had learned in the lesson, and this then led to a good summary. Teachers know pupils very well and show great care and patience in their classroom practice.
114. Pupils' attitudes to their learning are very good. They are keen to learn mathematics and concentrate very well in lessons. When teachers are talking, pupils listen very carefully and always follow instructions. They settle quickly in classes and show good enthusiasm for their mathematics. Pupils remain interested in their mathematics throughout lessons. Behaviour is very good. Pupils know the expectations of teachers and show very good respect in the lessons. They are committed to learning mathematics and show good levels of self-discipline. Generally, pupils work very well in pairs. In a Year 8 lesson, good collaborative working was seen when pupils used counters for a competitive game identifying percentages. The classroom was a hive of activity, and pupils' concentration was very high. Pupils checked each other's work and shared knowledge usefully. The positive response in classes is due to the care shown by teachers, who build very good relationships with pupils.
115. The head of department of mathematics has good management skills and is a good teacher. He gives good leadership in the philosophy and practical aspects of running the department. He keeps up to date with developments in the teaching of mathematics but does not yet ensure that the team of teachers share good practice in the new ideas being introduced. The staffing of the department is very good, and the teachers are keen to adopt new strategies to help pupils' learning. Improvement since the last inspection has been good in many areas, especially the quality of teaching. There is, however, a lack of standardisation of approaches and procedures, for example on marking and the setting of homework. With a strong team of teachers, the department serves pupils well and has a high capacity to improve further.

### **Numeracy**

116. A numeracy policy for the whole school is in place and many initiatives have been taken within the mathematics department. These are proving to be successful. The curriculum in Year 7 has already been significantly revised in line with the National Numeracy Strategy. Additionally, the three-part lesson is used in other parts of the school. Short 'starter' sessions are seen often; sometimes these are aligned to the main topic for the lesson and sometimes they cover different, discrete topics. Year 7 pupils describe their lessons in mathematics using the term 'starter' and appreciate the new ways of working. In a Year 7 lesson, the teacher introduced a selection of kites and trapezia; this led onto discussion of the probabilities of selecting certain shapes. Other lessons start with straightforward practice on number bonds. Pupils' numeracy skills seen in mathematics lessons are average and are improving because of the teachers' awareness and changes in teaching techniques.

117. The school was designated a local education authority pilot school for the National Numeracy Strategy in September 2001. Good training has been provided to teachers. The mathematics department is planning to give in-service training to all members of staff at the school in the summer term. Cross-curricular discussion has taken place and this is still an area of development for the school. In particular, the science department has produced a comprehensive booklet detailing how numeracy is to be used in science.
118. In English, there are good uses of numeracy when pupils count beats and rhythms in learning about poetic form. In Year 9 lessons on media studies in English, aspects of money and marketing involve calculations. In science, the pupils' numeracy skills allow them to access the highest levels in their coursework. Impressive line graphs are seen in Year 7 work showing temperature and time measurements. In design and technology, weighing and measuring of ingredients are completed well during practical work in food technology. Numeracy skills are satisfactory in ICT where pupils complete spreadsheets; there is no obvious attempt to teach numeracy, although many of the teachers of ICT are mathematics teachers. In history, bar charts are used satisfactorily to show changes in population. The use of number in the graphical presentation of statistics in geography is good. A range of line, bar and pie charts are used together with compound climate graphs and population pyramids. Coordinate work involves the use of six-figure grid references. In Years 10 and 11, pupils' application of number is competent in both fieldwork and course assignments.
119. In lessons in modern foreign languages, pupils write multiplication sums to practise spelling and numeracy. In music, pupils count beats effectively. There is little evidence of statistics or graph work in physical education and no planning to ensure that it takes place. Good numeracy teaching is undertaken in business studies when profit and loss spreadsheets are used that include formulae and calculations.

## SCIENCE

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

### Strengths

- Very good leadership and management.
- Good teaching.
- Very good assessment procedures.
- Improvement since the last inspection.

### Areas for improvement

- Monitoring to eliminate inconsistencies.
- The format of lesson plans.
- Written risk assessments and electrical testing.

120. When pupils enter the school they come with standards around the national average for all schools. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is at the national average when compared with all schools and similar schools. In 2000, results were below the national average so there was an improvement in results for 2001. Results in 2001 for science were similar to those in mathematics and English. Pupils achieve satisfactorily, attaining the results in science that might be expected based on their attainment at age 11. Over time there is no significant difference in the performance of girls and boys.
121. Standards in GCSE examinations are above the national average and well above the national average when compared with similar schools. The school offers three GCSE science courses – triple, double and single awards. Results from the double award course, which most pupils follow, have remained fairly constant over the last three years: above the national average. Pupils' achievement is very good. GCSE results in 2001 were well above what might be expected for those pupils based on their attainment at the age of 14. Attainment in science for pupils at the

end of Year 11 is similar to that in English and slightly above that in mathematics. Results vary from year to year, but there is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. One group of the highest-attaining pupils in Year 11 is taking the triple science course. No external examination results are available yet, because this is the first cohort to take this course. Some of the lowest-attaining pupils take the single award science course and obtain results well below the national average, although this represents good achievement for pupils of their abilities.

122. Inspection evidence indicates that attainment currently is average at the age of 14 and above average at the age of 16. Most pupils have sound literacy and numeracy skills, which enable them to gain benefit from all parts of the science curriculum. Pupils cope satisfactorily with the calculations that are required for both their terminal examination and their coursework. Pupils have the expected levels of recall and understanding of previous work. Year 7 pupils can satisfactorily identify various human organs as either from female, male, or either. Pupils in Year 8 know well how to test for starch and sugar. By Year 9, at the age of 14, pupils' practical skills are well developed. They can explain how timing errors, which occur when starting and stopping a stopwatch, give rise to inaccurate results when measuring the speed of sound. Most able pupils in Year 10 are able to name simple organic compounds and understand well the link between molecule size and physical properties. Not surprisingly, levels of recall and understanding of previous work are not high with the lower attaining pupils. For example, Year 10 pupils from one of the lower sets had great difficulty in recalling the test for carbon dioxide using lime -water. The most able pupils in Year 11 were able to name the factors that alter the rate of a chemical reaction. Less well understood were the scientific explanations of why increasing the temperature will increase the rate of reaction. Teachers make good provision for gifted and talented pupils through the accelerated groups in Years 8 and 9 and offering the most able pupils the opportunity to follow the triple award course. The first module test results for Year 10 pupils taking this course are very encouraging. Providing pupils maintain these standards then results at the end of the course should be well above the national average for triple award. Pupils' standards in ICT are satisfactory, but they are not given enough chances to carry out experiments using data-logging equipment.
123. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. However, there is variation in the quality of teaching in the department, as might be expected with a large group of teachers. Nevertheless, in over half the lessons observed the teaching was good or better and in the rest of the lessons teaching was mostly satisfactory. These teachers can be proud of the work they do to improve pupils' learning. There is no significant difference in the quality of teaching for pupils of different ages. All teachers have very good subject knowledge and understanding. Teachers give pupils many opportunities to improve their literacy skills by the use of key words, good use of the technical language and role-playing exercises. They are confident to use video, demonstrations, and experiments, all of which enable pupils to learn well. They generally manage the pupils well in the classroom so that most have every opportunity to learn. When teaching is unsatisfactory it is because the teacher fails to control pupils' chatter, so that insufficient work is covered. Clear objectives are set for every lesson. Teachers use a wide range of methods and resources to achieve these objectives. The teaching groups are accurately arranged in terms of pupils' attainment. Teachers match the work to the needs of the group as a whole, but do not provide sufficiently for the needs of different pupils in the same group. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, but the quality of marking is variable, particularly in respect of the use of scientifically supportive comments. When pupils have been absent they often fail to catch up work missed, so they have an incomplete set of notes from which to revise. Not all teachers ensure that pupils complete any work missed. Sometimes teachers, when marking pupils' work, indicate how improvements can be made. Not all teachers insist that pupils respond to their marking comments. The reports to parents are unsatisfactory because they do not identify sufficiently what pupils can and cannot do in science. Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to improve standards by giving pupils more precise targets about what they need to do to improve.
124. Overall, pupils learn well. Year 7 pupils made satisfactory progress learning about sexual reproduction in humans. A key feature of this lesson was the way the teacher broke the lesson up into small achievable tasks, which helped to motivate the pupils and to avoid potential embarrassment on this sensitive subject. When investigating the conditions for enzymes to work

best in the digestive system, Year 8 pupils learnt well. The clear explanations and organization of the practical work by the teacher led to all pupils understanding well that above certain temperatures enzymes will not work. The most able Year 9 pupils learnt very well about the principle of moments through practical investigation. The teacher's high expectations for this very able group were well justified. By asking pupils challenging questions the teacher enabled pupils to use their experimental results to prove that for balance clockwise moments must equal anti-clockwise moments. Another teacher used a very good range of resources including demonstration and interactive software in a far from ideal converted teaching room. The Year 10 pupils in this lesson learnt very well how fractional distillation is used on a large scale. Importantly, the teacher took the opportunity to highlight the supply and demand for products from crude oil. Pupils were therefore well prepared to study the scientific aspects of cracking of large molecules in their next lesson. Year 11 pupils learnt well when considering the issues surrounding biological pest control against pesticides to help plant growth. During this lesson the teacher gave the pupils the opportunity to improve their communication skills through a carefully organized role-playing exercise. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. A key factor is the way that the teacher and support assistant work well together. A key factor in the good learning is the way that teachers use a wide range of methods and resources to capture the pupils' interest.

125. The quality of pupils' written work indicates that their attitudes to high academic achievement are good. However, some pupils must make more efforts to complete or make up for missed work. Pupils work well together carrying out experiments and move responsibly around the laboratory to collect materials and equipment. They mostly follow their teachers' instructions to wear safety glasses and consequently work safely. Behaviour is mostly good. Pupils generally have respect for others, which they demonstrate by putting up their hands to answer questions. Sometimes pupils spoil otherwise worthwhile answers by calling out. They have good relationships with their teachers and each other. When talking to each other and their teacher they are courteous and polite.
126. The department has very good assessment procedures. Teachers use these procedures very well to keep pupils informed about their level or grade. Module test marks are displayed publicly, which helps to keep pupils motivated and is an effective way of giving them targets to aim for. The head of department provides very good leadership but there is insufficient monitoring to eliminate some of the inconsistencies in marking and teaching. The technician team is efficient and supportive, and makes an important contribution to the work of the department. The department will be in a better position to deliver the ICT requirements of the science curriculum when additional computers are purchased. Presently there are more sensors and interfaces than computers. The accommodation is unsatisfactory because laboratories are out of date and too many science lessons take place in non-specialist rooms. The problems associated with accommodation and resources will be resolved when the new, purpose-built science block is completed. The department gives due attention to health and safety. Some written risk assessments for experiments exist but require more development.
127. Overall, the department has made good improvement since the last inspection. There are two main areas still to be improved. Teachers need to follow up corrections and missed work more carefully. More pupils should be provided with textbooks to take home so that they can develop their independent learning skills.

## ART AND DESIGN

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

### Strengths

- Excellent and very good art teaching informed by expert subject knowledge and leadership.
- Excellent provision of extra-curricular activities making a major contribution to pupils' development and to the artistic life of the local community.

- Individually expressive and creative work of high quality, brought about by teachers providing a great deal of individual attention during art lessons.
- Wide experience of art provided by the excellent scheme of work. Many projects deal with significant issues in pupils' lives, leading to powerful contributions to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment objectives are sometimes too broad.

128. In the 2001 GCSE art examination, 75 per cent of pupils gained A\* to C grades. This is well above the national level of 63.9 per cent and well above that for similar schools. In 2000 the school's GCSE art results closely matched national levels, but the 2001 results continue a trend of better than national levels of success established over all years since 1996. Pupils of all abilities, both boys and girls, gained art grades that were generally high in relation to their grades in other subjects, indicating that pupils of all levels of ability achieve well in art. Art is a popular option choice in Years 10 and 11, with a much larger than average percentage of pupils choosing it.
129. From work observed in the inspection during lessons and in portfolios, sketchbooks and other records, overall attainment in art is above expectations for pupils at the age of 14, and above expectations for the GCSE course by the age of 16. This overall judgement takes account of a fairly wide range of attainment, including a number of pupils, across all years, whose work in art reaches exceptionally high standards.
130. A strength, which develops across all years, is the individually expressive quality of pupils' work. This grows to become a major feature of GCSE examination coursework, but is also seen in work produced by pupils in Year 7. For example, in Year 7, pupils respond creatively and expressively to basic colour theory exercises linked to ideas about portraiture and Picasso, with many individual interpretations explored in their sketchbooks. By Years 10 and 11, pupils are able to develop their own creative and expressive responses over extended stages of research and experimentation. This results in many examples of complex, powerfully expressive imagery based on pupils' own ideas and feelings, triggered by the themes and topics set.
131. Pupils' practical skills and their abilities to manipulate visual aspects, like colour, tone, pattern, texture and form, develop well to enable them to achieve their expressive intentions. The range of skills, materials and processes is wide, including both two and three-dimensional work, with some excellent examples seen in all areas. One of the exceptional pieces of artwork seen was imagery and text manipulated by a Year 8 pupil, using computer software to make a powerful piece about the role of Nelson Mandela in the struggle for equal rights in South Africa. This particular example illustrates the high level and expressive power of work that gifted and talented pupils can achieve. It is also an example of how the work set involves all pupils in significant themes and encourages a world view of moral, social and cultural issues.
132. Knowledge and understanding about artists and the history of art and design, in European and other cultures, are good. For example, pupils in Year 7 can clearly explain the characteristics of surrealism, in Year 9 they can investigate Islamic architecture to inspire their own ceramic work, and pupils working on the GCSE course can choose their own critical and historical art and design topic to inform and inspire their work. This work is often seen in well written and presented form.
133. There are no specifically weak areas of attainment in art, although now that there are computers in the studios there are better opportunities to develop the use of information and communication technology in both the visual and the critical and historical research areas of art.
134. The vast majority of pupils in all year groups value and enjoy art lessons. They come to art expecting worthwhile lessons where they will be able to tackle interesting tasks and acquire new skills and understandings. They work enthusiastically and behave well. The enthusiasm for art shown by both pupils and teachers extends from lessons into excellent extra-curricular opportunities. Pupils' achievements in art are celebrated around the school in stimulating

displays. They have also featured regularly over many years in displays, processions and events such as the North Devon Arts Festival, along with other community projects. The school's work in art has become an important feature of the local art scene, contributing strongly to the development of pupils' self-confidence and bringing great credit to the school.

135. The quality of teaching in all year groups is very good, with some excellent teaching seen. Lessons are well organised, productive and purposeful. Teachers communicate their passion for the subject, but in ways that enable pupils to understand what is expected and how to accomplish it. For example, in a Year 9 lesson the teacher used a combination of well-produced illustrations and a video about an artist's ways of working to provide pupils with a powerful stimulus for a new project. In a Year 11 lesson, the teacher's subject expertise and detailed knowledge about each individual enabled every pupil to gain technical help as well as ideas about alternative ways to take their individual work and ideas forward. Detailed, individually adapted support is a strong feature of the best art teaching seen.
136. Homework is well planned into all projects in a scheme of work that provides an excellent sequence of projects and topics covering a very broad range of artistic and creative activity, enabling pupils to build up their skills and understandings from year to year. Progress and attainment are well assessed and recorded, but assessment could be even more useful if assessment objectives and criteria were more specific to each project, enabling all aspects of National Curriculum levels to be pinpointed over time. At the moment, the objectives for each unit of work are sometimes too general. There needs to be a narrower range of skills to concentrate on in each project, which over time will progressively cover the whole range of national curriculum levels, so that the aims are clear and achievable for every pupil.
137. Issues in the inspection report of 1996 about the need to improve critical knowledge and understanding have now been fully addressed and attainment has continued to rise. The need to develop the use of computers in art has now begun. However, studios and furniture are very worn. It is the high quality of teaching, the positive response of the pupils and the enthusiasm for art, extending beyond the curriculum into the community, which accounts for the success of the subject rather than the level of provision.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- Good teaching.
- Improving levels of attainment at examination level.
- Good assessment procedures and target setting.
- Effective leadership and shared vision for development.
- Good relationships.

### Areas for improvement

- Monitoring progress and standards.
- Use of the design process in all areas of the department.
- Presentational skills.
- The range of courses in Years 10 and 11.

138. Levels of attainment in Year 9, at the age of 14, are average, as reflected in recent Teacher Assessments. A minority of pupils achieve the higher levels. Pupils enter the school with a varied level of experience in design and technology and make good progress from Year 7 to Year 9. Pupils use a wide range of hand and machine tools safely and confidently. Good work is seen in all areas of the department, with design folders and notebooks showing good use of colour, use of card models, a good range of research ideas, good 'dimensioned' drawings and information and communication technology to improve presentation. This is seen in a Year 7 mechanisms

project, a Year 8 electronics module where good drawing skills helped to illustrate circuits and in a Year 9 textiles project where information and communication technology is used in logo designs. Where the work is weaker, it is due to poor skills of presentation, including graphical and written work. Research is also shallow in depth and evaluations often incomplete. Grammatical and spelling errors are also evident.

139. In the 2001 GCSE examinations, results were above the national average overall for A\*- C and A\*- G grades. Girls performed above the national average for both A\*- C and A\*- G grades, whilst boys were close to the national average for A\*- C and above for A\*- G grades. Individual specialist subjects had varied success, with textiles and graphics performing particularly well and resistant materials less so. Almost all pupils achieve well, making good progress when their attainment at the age of 14 is considered.
140. Attainment at the age of 16 is in line with the national average, overall, but varies across the specialisms. There is good and very good work in textiles and graphics and also in some design folders in food technology. In electronics the work is satisfactory, but some pupils find the technical detail difficult to understand. In resistant materials, the standard of practical work is often good but the design folders are generally weak. Examples of good work in design folders are seen in a shop front design for a wine bar project in graphics, where good research into colour schemes was carried out. There were also good evaluations of different forms of decoration and fabrics for a bag design in textiles and good research into proteins in food technology. There was also good investigation into a garage alarm system in electronics. Presentational skills are generally weak in design folders in resistant materials and also in other specialisms, when work is not completed, and there is a lack of depth in research and over-reliance on commercial material for ideas. There are also spelling errors in some of the work. In the child development lessons, pupils are working at a satisfactory level for this stage in the course. There is neat folder work and pupils respond well to questions asked.
141. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. In the better lessons, learning is increased and good progress made. For example, in a Year 7 lesson pupils were making a simple card model to illustrate movement and in a Year 9 lesson a wide range of practical skills and processes were being learned. Similarly, good progress was seen in a lesson where pupils were using information and communication technology confidently in designing a logo for a bag design and in a Year 11 lesson, where pupils were engaged in group work considering packaging criteria and customer needs. These lessons have good pace, use effective teaching strategies, use appropriate teacher intervention and have good management. Satisfactory lessons have many positive features but can be teacher dominated so that pupils take too little active part. Pupils' understanding of concepts is not checked, or a lack of pace from teacher and pupils means that insufficient progress is made in the time allocated. Time can also be wasted by pupils not paying attention.
142. Pupils' attitudes are usually good. They work well together and respond positively when suitably challenged. There are instances of distraction and inattention and of pupils wasting time. Pupils enjoy their practical work, which is generally of a good standard. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress with help from the class teacher and assistants, who also give good support to pupils with behavioural problems.
143. Departmental leadership is good. Documentation is thorough and well prepared. There is a good assessment policy including target setting. The staff work well as a team and share a vision for development. Monitoring of pupils' progress does take place but needs a sharper focus across all areas. There is good curricular provision in Years 7 to 9 and good subject choices offered in Years 10 and 11. Some pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 do not take a technology subject. The department could consider additional or alternative courses in Year 10 and Year 11. Resources are satisfactory overall but there is a need to upgrade some equipment for effective delivery of control, and CAM is in the process of development. Literacy and numeracy skills are satisfactory and pupils make good use of information and communication technology in their work.

144. Improvements since the last inspection are satisfactory and include assessment procedures, target setting and improved use of information and communication technology in lessons. Documentation is now well prepared. A departmental referral system has been introduced. Accommodation has improved little but there is a building programme now in place.

## GEOGRAPHY

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

### Strengths

- Standards of work have improved significantly, as seen in recent GCSE examination results.
- Achievement of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good and for many very good.
- Teaching is good and there are examples of very good teaching.
- Teachers are committed, supportive and caring of their pupils.
- Relationships are usually very good.

### Areas for improvement

- Year 7 teaching is inconsistent and curriculum organisation and management are unsatisfactory.
- Fieldwork in Years 8 and 9 and ICT programmes are not provided for all pupils.
- Materials and tasks provided for higher and lower attainers are not fully appropriate to their needs.

145. Standards of work are below the national average at the age of 14. Pupils' achievement, in relation to standards at entry in Year 7, is satisfactory. The main reasons for progress not being better is the inadequate time available to cover the syllabus in sufficient depth in Years 7 to 9 and some inconsistencies in the teaching in Year 7. By the age of 14, at the end of Year 9, pupils have a sound grounding in geographical skills. Map work is satisfactory but there is need of more consistent teaching of how to present accurate analyses of statistical data graphically in Year 7. Knowledge of location is good, except amongst low attainers. There are some pupils at all attainment levels who have an inadequate understanding of spatial patterns. Higher attainers do not have sufficient challenge overall, in particular in developing higher levels of skills in their work. Average attainers progress satisfactorily but the pace of their work in Year 7 is limited. Low attainers are deterred from making more progress by literacy problems. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well when supported by learning assistants.
146. Attainment at the age of 16 is broadly in line with the national average and for some pupils it is well above this. Achievement of most pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good and, for many, very good when related to standards of their work at the end of Year 9. This is due to the department's approach to teaching the subject through fieldwork and case studies, the greater emphasis on enquiry skills and the scope and challenge provided by more open-ended assignments. By the end of Year 11, higher attaining pupils produce very detailed, thorough work. They are able to describe and explain a range of physical and human processes very well and show good understanding of quite complex input, process and output linkages. Average-attaining pupils are able to describe the processes satisfactorily but do not always fully understand the linkages involved. Low attainers have a sound basic knowledge of some processes but understanding is often insecure. The best individual GCSE project work based on fieldwork is of very high quality and most pupils produce work appropriate to their attainment levels.
147. Recent GCSE A\*- C grade results have improved from being below to being in line with the national average, as in 2001. The trend of improvement is significantly greater than the national trend. The proportion of pupils attaining the highest grades has also improved to reach national levels. In most years, boys perform better than girls and far better than boys do nationally. This is partly due to the large amount of fieldwork and practical elements within the course. Recent GCSE A\*- G results have been above the national average.
148. Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive and many display a real interest in their work. Most pupils are attentive, work conscientiously and are keen to learn. However, in a few lessons, some



pupils, mainly girls, display negative attitudes and frequently interrupt teaching. This wastes class time, reduces the work rate and leads to underachievement. Pupils' behaviour is usually good, often very good, but on rare occasions is unsatisfactory. Some teachers are extremely competent in dealing with potentially difficult situations that without strong classroom management and control could be very challenging. Pupils generally form very good relationships with their teachers and trust them and a real rapport is evident in classes in Years 10 and 11. Pupils relate well to each other when working in groups. Pupils' individual responses to questions are often good but a greater class response needs nurturing. Pupils ask far more questions of their teachers than in most schools and this is significant in contributing to their learning.

149. Teaching overall is good and there was some very good teaching in the lessons observed. There was a small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. When non-specialists teach in Year 7, there is a wide variation in the quality of learning, with some of it unsatisfactory. Subject specialist teachers are committed, caring and supportive of pupils within their charge. Classroom management and control are usually very good and built on good relationships with pupils. This provides a good base for learning. In most lessons, expectations are high and the pace brisk, but in some lessons in Years 7 to 9 pupils are not stretched sufficiently and underachievement results. Lessons are well planned and built on a secure knowledge foundation. Some lessons, although of sound quality, are too dominated by the teacher, but in the majority of lessons there are good opportunities for pupils to investigate situations and raise issues for themselves. Best learning occurs in lessons that have a variety of practical activities. Similarly, when visual aids such as video extracts, maps, diagrams, and graphs are used, especially when projected on a master screen, learning is noticeably better. Where there is good dialogue between the teacher and pupils that extends the pupils' knowledge, there is a greater understanding of the topic taught. In many lessons there were very skilful and effective interventions by the teacher to reinforce learning. In the best lessons, the teacher's presentation was lively, enthusiastic and interesting.
150. Fieldwork is very impressive and greatly enriches the curriculum. It results in very effective learning in Years 10 and 11 and has a considerable impact on GCSE results. It is insufficient, however, in Years 8 and 9, both within and outside the local area. Very productive links are made with local business and industry that greatly enhance the curriculum. ICT has seen some development since the last inspection and a sound course of ICT applications linked to curriculum themes is planned, but access to facilities has been difficult. A coherent programme of ICT skills, progressively developed over Years 7 to 11, is now necessary for all pupils.
151. Learning would be further improved if lesson aims focused more consistently on what pupils will know, understand and will be able to do by the end of the lesson and if the objectives were shared with pupils at the beginning and tested for effectiveness at the end of each lesson. Tasks and materials used in lessons need to be matched more directly to the learning needs of high and low attainers in Years 7 to 9. Standards of literacy are satisfactory and standards of numeracy are good.
152. Leadership of the subject is very good. Day-to-day management is good and the head of department provides very good professional direction. The assessment policy is satisfactory overall, but marking in Year 7 is inconsistent. Non-specialist teachers are not always confident in identifying areas for further improvement. Pupils would benefit from being more involved in the evaluation of their own learning and in identifying agreed targets for improvement. The staff work very well as a team but all have major responsibilities outside the department that restrict the administrative support they can give to the head of subject. Learning resources are good overall. However, there are important shortfalls, such as the need for accommodation for computers in the humanities area to ensure that the ICT requirements for all students are fully met. This is planned.
153. There has been good progress since the last inspection in taking appropriate action on the previous report, with the improvement in standards of work in external examinations particularly significant. The points raised in the previous report have been appropriately addressed. The department has the capacity to improve standards of learning further.

## HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Clear schemes of work which offer good guidance to teachers.
- Clear structure for the regular assessment and recording of attainment.

### Areas for improvement

- Raise attainment across the age range, but especially for 16-year-olds.
- Plan work which meets the need of pupils across the attainment range.

154. The attainment of 14 year old pupils in 2001, based on assessments carried out by their teachers, was in line with the national average. This has remained fairly consistent over the past few years and there has been a rise in attainment over that period. The attainment of boys is consistently lower than that of girls. Attainment, based on the range of evidence seen during the course of the inspection, is close to that nationally.
155. Pupils enter Year 7 with attainment in English, which requires similar skills to those used in history, close to the national average and with mixed experiences of the study of history. By the end of Year 9, their attainment in history is close to the national average, which indicates that pupils' achievement over that time is satisfactory. During Year 7 pupils make satisfactory progress in acquiring, or in some cases consolidating, some of the basic historical skills (such as the ability to understand simple source material) on which future progress in history is based.
156. The attainment of pupils aged 16 in GCSE in 2001 was below the national average for the percentage attaining grades A\*- C. However, this percentage represents a substantial increase over the previous three years when it remained consistently well below the national average. In 2001 there was also an increase in the percentage of pupils attaining the two highest grades, A\* and A, whereas, during the previous three years, no pupil had attained either of these grades. Girls attain close to the national average for all girls attaining A\* to C, but the attainment of boys was both well below that of the girls and also well below the attainment of all boys nationally. Currently, the attainment of 16-year-olds, based on all evidence seen during the course of the inspection, is slightly below what is seen nationally.
157. The whole year group of pupils who took their GCSE in 2001 had their attainment at the age of 14 assessed by their teachers as being in line with the national average. The students who went on to take history at GCSE level made satisfactory progress. In the current Year 11, and particularly in Year 10, pupils are making overall satisfactory progress in lessons and in their course work. They are making good progress in their independent research and in the way in which they use a variety of methods of noting and recording their knowledge and understanding. This work will provide a good basis for examination revision, indicating that further improvements in GCSE performance are likely to be made.
158. Pupils who are 14 years old show satisfactory knowledge of an appropriate range of historical events, situations and personalities and develop an appropriate range of skills in order to interpret these on a simple level. For example, they use their knowledge of the sequence of events leading up to the First World War in order to analyse and understand its causes. Most pupils find it difficult to include sufficient detail in their written work to explain and justify their opinions. Higher-attaining pupils understand and evaluate the reliability of historical source material but most pupils are, so far, unable to identify which sources are more likely to be reliable. All pupils are able to locate relevant information when undertaking research. There is little evidence of pupils referring to a range of sources of information and many pupils take a very uncritical view of the information they discover, copying it directly into their books without any independent interpretation. Lower-attaining and average pupils experience considerable difficulty with literacy skills and their written work is inaccurate, especially their spelling. A few pupils in Years 7 to 9 experience difficulty with

reading some of the material with which they are presented and lack understanding of how sounds can be built into words in order to read unfamiliar vocabulary. All pupils enjoy the opportunity to learn through discussion but do not benefit from this fully because some lack the essential skill of being able to listen to the ideas of others without shouting out their own.

159. All pupils at the age of 16 show basic understanding of the historical situations, themes and personalities that form their examination syllabus, although only a minority are able to draw independent conclusions from this. All are able to locate information in their textbooks in order to answer questions or make notes, but many take an uncritical view of the information they discover and use it without fully understanding it. Most pupils develop their notemaking and general writing skills in order to record their knowledge and understanding in a way that will be helpful for revision purposes. They use an appropriate range of methods of doing this, for example bullet points, diagrams and bar charts, although there is some evidence of the practice of copying notes directly from their source in an uncritical manner, which limits their usefulness as a revision aid. While most pupils can understand a range of historical sources, most pupils find it more difficult to interpret them. Cartoons present a particular problem for pupils who find it difficult to understand that they present an exaggerated or “tongue in cheek” view of events. Lower-attaining pupils find this key historical skill particularly difficult. The written work of a significant number of pupils is inaccurate, with errors in basic punctuation and spelling. Pupils in Year 10 generally produce thoughtful notes and written assignments; for example, those studying the history of medicine have recorded their knowledge and understanding of a complex topic clearly and generally independently and have made thorough preparations for written assignments. Unsatisfactory oral and listening skills prevent a few pupils from taking full advantage of opportunities to learn through discussion.
160. Throughout the age range, pupils respond with enthusiasm to teaching that stimulates their interest. They maintain satisfactory concentration levels and do their best to succeed. When pupils are interested they show their curiosity by asking sensible questions. All pupils, including those with limited oral skills, enjoy the opportunity to take part in discussions. On most occasions the inability of some pupils to listen carefully and their tendency to shout out their own responses is occasioned by eagerness to participate rather than through lack of respect for other pupils’ ideas. On such occasions, pupils respond positively to reminders from teachers about the normal conventions of civilised debate and do their best to control themselves. A group of pupils in Year 9, discussing family memories of World War 1, spontaneously supported and encouraged one pupil who was having difficulty describing the wartime experiences of his grandfather. When teaching does not provide a range of activities which appropriately engages the interest of all pupils, or when an activity is too prolonged, a significant minority of pupils in all age groups respond by losing interest very quickly and indulging in unsatisfactory, distracting behaviour. Some higher-attaining pupils in Year 11, who finished their task on the American West very quickly, saw this as an excuse to stop work, showing little initiative in finding or requesting additional work.
161. Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory throughout the age range. Virtually all teaching seen was satisfactory, with teaching in only one lesson unsatisfactory. No good or very good teaching was seen, although some lessons had strong features. Teachers plan their lessons clearly and frequently share these plans with pupils, who thus know what to expect and what is expected of them. There are clear links with previous lessons and with lessons planned for the future, enabling pupils to understand and trace their progression through a topic. In the more successful lessons, teachers plan for a range of short activities that maintain the interest and concentration levels of pupils. In one lesson, on the American West, a video was used effectively in short sequences to give pupils the opportunity to compare their understanding of it as it went along. Pupils responded eagerly, wanting to view the next section in order to understand how the situation developed. All teachers in Years 9 to 11 have good, confident subject knowledge and use this to add interesting background detail to their lessons. Teachers give clear explanations and respond helpfully and knowledgeably to questions. However, teachers do not plan tasks and activities to meet the needs of all pupils across the attainment range and no examples of this were seen, despite the fact that all classes contain a very wide attainment range. Frequently, work set is either too easy or too difficult for some of the class and pupils themselves recognise

this and comment on it. Tasks that are set, ostensibly to extend the knowledge and understanding of higher-attaining pupils, do not in practice serve this function and act merely as time fillers. When this happens, these pupils do not make the full progress of which they are capable. Lower-attaining pupils who experience difficulty with reading and writing are frequently set tasks that, although interesting in themselves, require higher level reading skills than they possess. These pupils find such tasks inaccessible without immediate and intensive support from a teacher or classroom assistant. Pupils respond to this by losing interest and commitment and they have limited opportunities to make progress through independent thought and effort. Work is marked regularly, although some marking takes the form of a tick with no written comment. Such comments, although frequently quite brief, are usually supportive, but give little advice on what the pupil needs to do to improve. Spelling or grammatical errors are rarely pointed out and so pupils fail to realise the full importance of this side of their written work.

162. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory overall, with some strong features. There is a clear curriculum overview and detailed schemes of work for all topics. These are set out on a lesson by lesson basis and give strong guidance to all teachers of history. There is little emphasis in these schemes on the planning of work to meet the needs of all pupils. The relative lack of emphasis on the detailed study of historical source material until Year 9 means that pupils have insufficient opportunity to develop this key historical skill. This situation is not helped by the fact that the time available for teaching history in Years 7 to 9 is considerably less than that seen nationally and there is reduced opportunity to cover topics in appropriate depth. Teachers of history in Years 7 and 8 are not all subject specialists. While they are well supported by department planning and documentation, non-specialists sometimes find themselves ill equipped to offer pupils appropriate support. There is a clear structure in place for the regular assessment and recording of pupils' attainment. This is carried out consistently and there is a good range of assessment information available. There are some missed opportunities for using this information in order to raise attainment. For example, the extent of the disparity between the attainment of boys and girls in their GCSEs has not been identified or analysed and there are therefore no strategies in place to rectify this.
163. Progress has been satisfactory overall. Good progress has been made in some areas of the department's work since the previous inspection report and where there has been less progress made, this has sometimes been outside the control of the department. There has been some improvement in attainment by end of Year 9, which was judged at the previous inspection to be "often satisfactory". There has been fluctuation in GCSE examination performance over the past few years but this has recently begun to rise. The resources for the teaching of history are now satisfactory, with all pupils taking GCSE having their own copies of the necessary books and younger pupils having an appropriate range of books at their disposal. Some improvement has been made in the use of subject specialists to teach history, although the use of non-specialists remains widespread in Year 7. The previous report commented on the inadequate time devoted to history and this situation remains unchanged.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- Management of timetabled ICT.
- Co-ordination of cross-curricular ICT.
- Good teaching.
- The behaviour and attitudes of most pupils.
- The provision of new technology.

### Areas for improvement

- The accommodation and resources.
- The provision of ICT.

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The provision for pupils with special needs.</li><li>• Knowledge and understanding at the end of Year 11.</li></ul> |
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164. The progress made by pupils in Years 7 and 8 suggests that the new equipment, management structure and training are raising standards and will ultimately provide improved examination results for information and communication technology. However, Teacher Assessment results for 2001 of pupils at the age of 14 showed that pupils were below average when compared with their peers nationally. GCSE examination results in ICT will not be available until the summer of 2002, because the pupils currently in Year 11 will be the first ones to sit the examination.
165. Current levels of attainment in Year 7 are in line with national expectations. This is broadly in line with the attainment reported at the time of the last inspection and represents good achievement, particularly as some pupils are below average on entry to the school. During Year 8, some very good teaching raises attainment above expectations, so that pupils are competent when using a word processor, a spreadsheet and the Internet. The work of Year 9 pupils shows that their progress has been less sure, although attainment is close to the national expectation. Observation of Year 10 and 11 lessons and inspection of pupils' work show that their attainment is generally below expectations. Knowledge and skills have not been gained consistently due to previous equipment and software limitations. For example, many pupils were not able to add a column of figures in a spreadsheet.
166. Cross-curricular ICT is satisfactory in many subject areas. It is good in design and technology, where computers are used for design purposes. The use of electronics provides systems and control experiences for those pupils whose courses include such work. Mathematics and science make significant contributions. ICT is underused, particularly in religious education, modern foreign languages, and music. Planned improvements to accommodation and resources will create easier access for all departments.
167. Although the teachers are not specifically qualified in ICT, they have adequate knowledge and understanding of the techniques and applications to be able to help all pupils. Hardware and software problems are reduced by the rapid availability of technician support. Most lessons have a clear beginning where appropriate instructions are given. They also have a well-timed period in the middle. The best lessons end with a quick assessment of learning that has taken place. Most of the planned tasks present an appropriate challenge in Years 7 and 8. Expectations are generally good but further emphasis on using the spell checker would improve literacy as pupils observe the correct structure of the many words they get wrong. Numeracy skills are assisted by the use of spreadsheets containing formulae, although the formatting for numbers needs further explanation. Planning is effective and teaching methods are appropriate. Most lessons provide a good working pace. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, there was a very busy and responsive atmosphere in the room whilst pupils were investigating the use of supermarket loyalty cards. The interactive white board is used very effectively by all teachers. Students in Years 10 and 11 work independently to produce coursework. They are able to use word processing, desk-top publishing and painting programmes, as required. The Internet is readily available to provide information and ideas and pupils use it well. Homework is set when appropriate. Teaching was always satisfactory or better and was very good or even excellent in half of the observed lessons in Years 7 and 8.
168. Year 7 and 8 pupils acquire skills, knowledge and understanding as they progress through the prepared modules. It is essential that all the modules are taught in order to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum for Years 7 to 9 – this is not always the case. The best lessons reach a specific target so that pupils know that they have made progress. The pupils are good listeners and have no difficulty in concentrating for the length of a lesson. Pupils are frequently made aware of their progress by the use of National Curriculum levels. The teachers sometimes overlook the needs of the lower-attaining pupils and they underachieve as a result. The more frequent presence of a learning support assistant would help pupils with special needs and others in the large classes. Able pupils are recognised but could be given more challenge. The quality of learning closely follows the quality of teaching and is therefore frequently good or very good for the younger pupils. Learning is sound during the Years 10 and 11.

169. Students have a good attitude to ICT and show respect for their teachers. They show interest in the work and are keen to learn. During the observed lessons, attitudes and behaviour varied from satisfactory to excellent during Years 7 and 8 and were good overall. Year 10 and 11 pupils generally behave well, although the attitudes of a lower ability Year 11 group deteriorated during a double period where they were doing coursework for too long.
170. Recent curriculum developments have included the modification of the QCA scheme to provide a basis for the delivery of ICT in Years 7 and 8. A more consistent integration of ICT into subjects' schemes of work for Year 9 would enable pupils to be prepared for the Year 9 attainment test and would ensure that pupils received a broad range of ICT experiences. Some Year 10 and Year 11 pupils study GCSE ICT within the option system, but others rely on cross-curricular input to provide the continuation of their ICT entitlement. This is an improvement on the situation existing at the time of the previous report. The business studies course contributes to pupils' ICT development and provides an additional examination option. Eight computers in the learning resource centre are available by booking at most times during the day. They are very well used. Students do not yet have e-mail facilities.
171. An effective assessment system has been implemented since the last inspection. National Curriculum levels are used and will provide evidence for achievement as the data accumulates. Year 7 and 8 work in ICT is assessed in line with QCA recommendations. Together with national curriculum levels, this forms the basis of the information recorded for each pupil and is used when reporting to parents. Year 9 national tests provide additional information. Year 11 results for the examination are predicted from earlier data and shared with the pupils, so that they are aware of their progress.
172. The department is very effectively co-ordinated by the head of science. This has the direct effect that the basic organisation of ICT follows the existing pattern for that of a core subject. It produces a clear direction for the development of ICT. Comprehensive development plans are in hand so that coverage of the National Curriculum will be assured and there will be new accommodation and additional resources and schemes of work. Modules of work have been prepared so that the teaching is consistent through Years 7 and 8. This ensures continuity and progression. A clear outline of the work to be covered in Years 10 and 11 has been prepared. ICT techniques and skills have been developed for all teachers involved through thorough, intensive training. In contrast to the previous report, the co-ordinator is particularly active in encouraging the use of ICT in all subjects.

173. Accommodation is not satisfactory because there is only one room sufficiently large for the size of classes. Other areas have computers but the rooms are too small for effective teaching of whole classes. Present resources in terms of the number of computers available to pupils are below the national average and produce learning constraints. Major improvements in accommodation are under way and finance has been allocated to extend the provision of the facilities where wall-mounted flat screens provide considerably increased working space.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

### Strengths

- Standards overall are well above the national average for modern foreign languages in GCSE examinations.
- Teaching and learning are consistently good or better: teachers' very good subject knowledge helps pupils to learn quickly.
- Homework is very well used: this extends work done in class.
- Leadership and management are very good: all teachers have a shared commitment to raising attainment.
- Resources are good and used well: this promotes good learning.

### Areas for improvement

- Information and communication technology is very rarely used: access to computers is difficult.
- There is some inconsistency across the department in assessing the work of pupils in Years 7 to 9.

174. For pupils at the age of 14, Teachers' Assessments show attainment to be above national expectations. This represents good achievement from entry in Year 7. Girls do better than boys, as is the case nationally. At the end of Year 11 in 2001, the proportion of 16-year-old pupils achieving the higher grades (A\* to C) in a modern language was well above local and national averages. Results in French were well above average, and in German close to the national average. These results are similar to those of recent years. Fewer high-attaining pupils opted for German. Pupils do better in French and German than in most of their other subjects; and girls do better than boys in French, as nationally. In German, however, the boys' average point score matches the national figure, while the girls' is a little below the average for girls. Results in 2001 represent good achievement from the beginning of Year 10.
175. In lessons and work seen, standards are above average by the age of 14. All pupils study French and the majority also learn German. Progress in lessons is good, often very good or excellent, for pupils of all abilities. Pupils listen and respond well in most lessons. They pay close attention to the teacher and to a partner in paired work and listen carefully to tapes of foreign language spoken at near normal speed. In oral work, pupils ask and answer questions clearly and willingly. While higher-attaining pupils pronounce words accurately in fluent speech, other pupils' expression is anglicised and more hesitant. In French, for example, they pronounce the silent final letter in words such as 'est' and 'as'. Many pupils use vocabulary well in asking and responding to class questions, though sometimes they have difficulty in recalling numbers. For example, in a Year 9 German lesson, pupils asked questions confidently in trying to guess a hidden object and made good progress in speaking and listening. Pupils understand much of what they read from the board and textbooks. For example, in a Year 9 French lesson, the class studied a short passage and, showing good research skills, were able to note where characters lived and what nationalities they were.
176. Pupils read aloud accurately, both individually and in unison. Although pronunciation varies, they communicate the meaning of an extract. Most pupils copy accurately and can compose short paragraphs and letters about their interests, usually in simple sentences. Many use past and future tenses appropriately. Average and lower-attaining pupils forget agreements and sometimes definite and indefinite articles, while the more able reach a high level of accuracy and command a

good range of vocabulary. All pupils are accustomed to referring to dictionaries or vocabulary booklets to assist with spelling and word choice and this helps to raise standards in written work. Although girls do better than boys in assessments, the difference in performance and participation in lessons is not significant.

177. By the age of 16, in Year 11, standards are above average overall and well above average in reading and listening. A significant minority of more able pupils reach standards that are high in all language skills. Most pupils study one modern language and a few study two. In lessons seen, progress was never less than good, and in half the lessons it was very good or excellent. Pupils usually give the teacher their full attention and listen carefully to instructions in French and German, or taped passages, showing by their responses that they have understood at least the gist of what has been said, and often more. Pupils speak at greater length in more complex sentences, though lower-attaining pupils give briefer answers. They join in choral repetition readily and this helps to improve pronunciation. Evidence from taped assessments indicates that pupils in line for higher grades (A\* to C) in GCSE examinations speak with assurance and at normal speed. While others sometimes show less fluency, they make themselves understood. Pupils in Year 11 read with more of an eye for detail than younger pupils. They distinguish different tenses and extract information from a passage to help with oral assessment, as in Year 11 German lessons on 'Healthy living and fitness'. Extended writing develops well. Pupils write about past experiences, such as a holiday in Spain or a visit to Melbourne, and about themselves and their views on a topic, such as smoking. They use different tenses to give variety to expression and add details to a simple sentence to add greater depth of meaning. Lower-attaining pupils find writing difficult and present ideas in a series of sentences rather than in a coherent paragraph. Many pupils achieve a good level of accuracy, though sometimes verb endings are incorrect and accents missed. Drafting is assisting in the eradication of some basic errors. In most lessons, both boys and girls achieve equally well.
178. Teaching and learning in modern languages are very good. In lessons observed, they were never less than satisfactory and nearly always good, or better. In half the lessons, they were at least very good and, in nearly a third, excellent. Because teaching and learning are strengths of the department, pupils' achievement is good. Pupils have good learning skills but middle and lower-attaining pupils do not retain what they have learnt as well as those who attain highly. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subject. This enables them to use the foreign language very effectively as a teaching medium and to ask questions to assess learning. Lessons are well planned with an excellent variety of activities covering all four language skills. For example, in a Year 11 French lesson on 'Health, fitness and sport', the teacher's brisk pace and constant involvement of pupils in their own learning led to excellent progress. Pupils responded very well to the teacher, worked successfully in pairs, listened carefully to a tape and, in a subsequent test, showed they had understood what was said. A good question and answer session to check on learning ended the lesson. In many lessons, activities are well linked, though in a few there is too long a gap between tasks, so pupils' concentration lapses and learning slows. Group work is effective because relationships are good and pupils respect what others say. Learning is well promoted by teachers' very clear instructions, as in a Year 11 lesson on how to convey the future in five different ways. As a result, pupils learnt very well and knew what they were expected to do. Teachers have high expectations of work rate and of behaviour. Pupils, therefore, have good attitudes to their work and behave well, sometimes impeccably. However, a minority of boys in Year 11 show a casual approach to studies. These boys do not do as well as they should, despite the teachers' best efforts. Teachers use an impressive range of resources, which becomes an integral part of a lesson. Overhead projector sheets, vocabulary booklets, text books and good quality worksheets provide a stimulus for written and oral work and give pupils the chance to practise research skills. About a quarter of lessons seen, however, petered out at the end; without a recognisable conclusion, these lessons lost some of their impact and learning was adversely affected. Homework is very well used to extend pupils' classwork and consolidate what they have learnt. Teachers mark work conscientiously, though not all give National Curriculum levels where appropriate, so not all pupils are clear about how they are getting on. There are plans to work towards greater consistency in this area. All teachers work very hard to deliver interesting lessons where activities sustain pupils' concentration and enable them to make rapid progress.



179. The curriculum is very good in that it makes rich provision for all four language skills and focuses clearly on GCSE requirements in Years 10 and 11. A weakness is that there is very little use of information and communication technology, which restricts teaching methods and the way pupils learn. However, access to computers is difficult. Assessment is regular and efficiently documented so that teachers can identify the strengths and weaknesses of their classes. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department promotes high standards and is very ably supported by a dedicated and well-qualified team of teachers. There is a common commitment to raising attainment in the GCSE examinations and increasing the number of pupils opting for two languages, which is very small at present. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good. The high standards have been maintained, and in Year 9 they are now higher. Teaching is stronger: the number of lessons that are good or better has increased by a fifth. The quality of higher-attaining pupils' extended writing has improved.

## MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision in music is **unsatisfactory** in classroom work, but **good** in instrumental tuition and extra-curricular work.

### Strengths

- Teaching and learning are mainly good, including all teaching in GCSE work.
- Pupils show positive attitudes towards their practical work and behaviour is mainly good.
- The range of opportunities, standards and numbers involved in instrumental and vocal tuition is good.
- The numbers involved and standards reached in extra-curricular work are above average.
- Music makes a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development.
- The leadership and management of music are good.

### Areas for improvement

- Music accommodation is poor.
- By Year 9, standards are below average; performing, composing and listening skills are underdeveloped.
- There is an insufficient range of instruments for classroom work and this lessens pupils' achievement.

180. Pupils enter the school with variable musical experience, related to the quality of their musical education in their previous schools, interests and level of home support. Some pupils enter with above average experience but most pupils enter with below average attainment in music and Teachers' Assessments confirm this. By the age of 14, standards are below average, but achievement is satisfactory. Most pupils are working at about levels 3, 4 or 5, but some talented pupils, often instrumentalists, attain higher levels. In recent years, GCSE examination results have been broadly average when compared with all schools. Since the last inspection, there has been unsatisfactory improvement, because the accommodation is still having an adverse effect on standards.

181. When pupils sing, standards are satisfactory and some robust singing was observed in Year 7. Pupils keep good time when playing instruments in rhythm work but have insufficient experience of instruments other than keyboards and insufficient opportunity to use their own instruments. The proportion of pupils receiving tuition in school or privately is high and these students achieve well but the performing skills of most pupils are underdeveloped and music-reading skills are poor. In composing, pupils have some imaginative ideas but only the most musically experienced know how to use devices and structures to develop pieces confidently. The department has acquired a computer only this year and information and communication technology skills are underdeveloped. Pupils listen respectfully to pieces played on audio and to each other when performing. The technical vocabulary they use in appraising is underdeveloped. Their general musical knowledge, for example of instruments, composers, forms, structure and well-known pieces of music, is below average. Overall, pupils make good progress in lessons but

achievement over time is only satisfactory, mainly because of the poor accommodation and resourcing.

182. In GCSE work, standards in Year 10 are below average but standards in Year 11, at the age of 16, are broadly average. There is a very wide range of attainment in the groups, with those pupils who receive instrumental tuition generally attaining the higher grades. A good range of extra-curricular opportunities is offered and benefits those who take part. The most musically experienced show good understanding of devices and structures in composing and create imaginative and original compositions, which they can notate accurately. Pupils who are not instrumentalists find the work more difficult because of their lack of basic skills. Pupils are disadvantaged by the lack of computers and other music technologies in the department. They listen well to recorded extracts and respectfully to each other; their vocabulary used in appraising and their general musical knowledge are satisfactory. The attitude of most pupils is good in lessons and overall achievement in GCSE work is good.
183. Almost all the teaching and learning observed were good, including all teaching of Years 10 and 11. There was very little unsatisfactory teaching seen. When teaching is good, teachers show secure subject knowledge so that they teach confidently and use their musical skills to engage the pupils, as when a teacher used trumpet and guitar to demonstrate musical ideas. Instructions are clear so that the pupils understand the objectives, which are often written on the board. Schemes and lesson content are thoughtfully put together but a weakness is the over reliance on keyboard work. In the best lessons, expectations are high, with lessons matched to the needs of different levels of pupils. Expectations are too low in the less successful lessons; the most musical pupils need to be stretched more. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated and make similar progress to the other pupils. They receive very good support from classroom assistants.
184. The better lessons have clear structures, are pitched at an appropriate level and are well organised. The management of pupils is good so that most lessons are orderly. As a result, relationships are good and pupils are usually good-humoured and work well. They enjoy practical work but dislike writing. Lessons usually start briskly and maintain a good pace, so that pupils work hard, but there is insufficient use of visual aids such as OHP, illustrations or classroom display. The assessment of pupils is supportive. It shows them how they can improve, as seen in a lesson where pupils learned to play the tune of *Wimoweh* and add chords. Homework extends pupils' learning, but does not sufficiently relate to the development of pupils' practical skills. Most pupils are attentive and work productively; they are supportive of each other. Most use equipment sensibly. Most girls work far more productively than boys and are able to organise themselves well in group work. The most enthusiastic involve themselves in opportunities offered by the department and musical opportunities outside school, such as the North Devon Music Centre activities.
185. The teachers work hard and are committed and enthusiastic. The leadership and management of music are good. There is appropriate monitoring and evaluation of the subject's performance. The department has a good assessment scheme and has plans to revise the schemes of work and make them more relevant to the needs of the pupils to develop their practical skills. The contribution of music to pupils' personal development is informal but good. Curricular links with other schools, including the primary schools, are underdeveloped but there are plans to rectify this. The poor music accommodation was cited in the last report and still remains a major weakness affecting all aspects of provision. One room is far too small and there is inadequate storage. There are insufficient practice cells, resulting in instrumental lessons being taught in a small, unventilated former store, now being used as a departmental base. The noise from the cells disturbs classes and vice-versa; the poor acoustics of the main room present a serious health and safety risk to staff. Desks in the rooms, which are tutor group bases, inhibit work and limit the opportunities to make music in the classroom. Keyboard resources are of good quality and support pupils' learning well but there is a need for additional instruments and ICT equipment.
186. Eighty-three boys and a hundred girls receive instrumental lessons from ten visiting teachers; this is about 13 per cent of the school's population and is well above average. Lessons are

subsidised by the school. Standards are broadly average and rising but above average in wind and brass. Teaching is good and some very good teaching was observed in wind and brass tuition. The progress and achievement of pupils is good in relation to their ages and the time they have received tuition; keener pupils make good use of their practice books. Monitoring of pupils' progress needs strengthening. Instrumental tuition has the potential to make a greater impact on the quality of pupils' musical experiences in the classroom. The range of extra-curricular activities in music includes choir, band and senior band. A steel band is planned. Standards (as seen live and on video) and the quality of teaching are good and sometimes very good, as for example in band. The school promotes regular concerts and musicals such as *Grease*, involving large numbers of pupils. Visits to musical events outside school are constrained by the pressures on staff but groups such as the Royal Marines Band, the Devon Youth Jazz Orchestra and Jeff Rich have visited the school in recent years. These performances and workshops broaden the experience of the pupils. Groups perform at festivals, local arts and charity events, at hospices, in local old folks' homes and supermarkets. These activities reflect the dedication of staff, support of parents and governors and the enthusiasm of the musicians, whose performances and successes bring credit to the school and this improving department.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Overall good teaching, with some very good and one excellent lesson seen.
- A strong commitment to the moral and social development of pupils.
- Extra-curricular provision.
- Leadership and management.
- Participation levels.

### Areas for improvement

- Pupils' achievement in the GCSE course.
- Teaching of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology.

187. Attainment is average at the ages of 14 and 16. This reflects good teaching, with good response from pupils. Pupils' achievement at the age of 14, by the end of Year 9, is satisfactory in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. In relation to standards of attainment at the end of Year 9, achievement at the age of 16, by the end of Year 11, is satisfactory. While higher-grade GCSE results are well below national averages, results over the past two years show improvement and predictions for 2002 show a continuation of this trend. Most pupils' attitudes contribute positively to standards. Teaching contributes effectively to learning.

188. Inspection evidence indicates that attainment in physical education by the end of Year 9 is consistent with national expectations. Boys attain slightly higher than girls; this is consistent with differences that might be expected nationally. In work seen in lessons, pupils can perform basic techniques in team games. Pupils in Year 8 show good understanding of body position and accuracy in passing and shooting in basketball, but lose consistency when working under pressure of space or opposition. The proportion of pupils gaining A\* to C grades is well below national averages. The percentage of pupils achieving A\* to C grades in 2000, while still well below national averages, showed some improvement. In 2001, only one pupil took GCSE because it was not offered as part of the options. Inspection evidence indicates that this improvement will continue so that the percentage of pupils gaining A\* to C grades by 2002 should be nearer to national averages. By the end of Year 11 pupils have developed an understanding of team strategies. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, pupils can understand systems of attack and defence in basketball and work cooperatively to transfer this understanding to the game situation. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of physical education vocabulary are weak and this restricts attainment in oral and written work. Higher-attaining pupils are sometimes set tasks that are not challenging enough and this restricts their progress.

189. Most pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Examples of pupils' attitude and behaviour being unsatisfactory do occur, mainly where there are inappropriate tasks and weak class management by the teacher. Most pupils enjoy physical education and have a responsible attitude and approach to their learning. Most pupils are able to work effectively as individuals, but also co-operate well when working in pairs and small groups. Pupils usually develop good relationships with other pupils and the teacher. Many are able to take responsibility within extra-curricular activities.
190. The overall quality of teaching observed was good. The strengths of teaching include good planning based on a secure knowledge of the subject, good organisational skills, positive interaction with pupils and a commitment to pupils' moral and social development. Although good procedures for monitoring pupils' progress are now in place, greater use needs to be made of assessment in order to ensure that teachers and pupils have a clear understanding of the progress being made. Teachers are clear about intended outcomes and share them with pupils at the beginning of lessons. Teachers need to use strategies consistently in order to ensure that non-participants are included in lesson activities. Greater attention needs to be paid to pupils' standards of literacy in planning lesson activities. In a Year 10 GCSE hockey lesson, for example, many pupils were unable to plan properly appropriate short corners because the level of the vocabulary was beyond their competence. Behaviour deteriorated as a result.
191. By the age of 14, pupils have made satisfactory progress. Pupils develop competence in basic gymnastics, basketball and soccer techniques. Their development of knowledge and understanding is enhanced by their ability to work co-operatively in pairs and small groups when developing basic techniques through Years 7 to 9. However, activities do not always allow pupils to develop their observation and assessment skills, so that they are clear about what they could do and are capable of. By the age of 16, pupils make satisfactory progress. Pupils' continued satisfactory progress in the development of basic techniques, as in Year 10 fitness training, for example, enables them to transfer various basic weight lifting techniques into a personal training programme. The progress of higher-achieving pupils is restricted by a lack of consistency in the setting of challenging tasks and insufficient attention to their observation and assessment skills.
192. Leadership and management in physical education are good. The head of department has a clear vision for the future development of the subject, with a sharp focus on raising standards. More planned opportunities for pupils to assess their own performance against success criteria, improved teaching of numeracy and literacy skills and the use of ICT, together with strategies to include non-participants in lesson activities, are needed to raise standards more quickly. The department has a strong philosophy of care for its students and a focus on the social and moral development of the students. The department is well organised and the department's handbook provides good guidance on schemes of work, lesson planning and safety matters. The department does not have risk assessment data for all physical education activities and facilities. Both indoor and outdoor facilities are good. There are good resources, with good systems for maintenance and storage. The physical education curriculum meets statutory requirements. The department recognises the importance of extra-curricular activities, which enhance learning. Some, non-specialist, teachers help effectively with clubs and teams. Take-up by pupils is good, with some progressing to local and area teams and competitions. The department has made good progress since the last inspection.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- The department has good leadership.
- There is a good range of GCSE examination courses in Years 10 and 11.
- The pupils have a positive attitude to the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Some aspects of the teaching.
- The provision for religious education in Year 7.
- The matching of work to the needs of the full range of pupils in the classes.

193. Overall, the standards of attainment by the age of 14 are largely in line with the standards indicated in the Locally Agreed Syllabus. The pupils have a good basic grasp of several world religions, including Christianity, Sikhism and Buddhism. The pupils can understand and use religious language in a meaningful way. They have a sound understanding of how the many religious traditions that they study manifest themselves in the community, such as in worship and religious buildings, as well as on a more personal level in private prayer and devotion. The pupils' attainment is stronger in knowing about religions than it is in understanding how the knowledge they have acquired might be relevant to their own lives and experiences. In other words the pupils need to have a clearer appreciation of how they might use the knowledge they have. The pupils are good at giving verbal responses and they can think through issues of a complex nature. Their skills in extended writing are below average. The achievement of the pupils is largely satisfactory, but some groups, particularly pupils with special educational needs and the gifted and talented pupils, would make better progress if the work were adapted to their own particular needs. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls.
194. By the age of 16, at the end of Year 11, the standards of attainment in the GCSE examination are just below national averages. Of the 25 pupils entered for the examination in 2001, about 48 per cent gained the higher grades of A\* to C. These results are better than previous years, when the percentage has been around 33 per cent. There is an upward trend in results. The achievement of pupils is broadly satisfactory.
195. The department is in a transitional stage and so new examination courses are being introduced and others phased out. At the age of 16, the standard of work seen during the inspection is broadly consistent with national averages. This includes work observed in the lessons, in their books and in discussions with pupils. The pupils have a sound knowledge and understanding of Christianity and they can relate some of its beliefs and values to issues of a moral and philosophical nature. These include topics on medical ethics, such as abortion, and topics about the nature and existence of God. The pupils are also familiar with other religious traditions, such as Islam and Hinduism. The pupils are particularly good at thinking through issues and giving intelligent responses. Their ability to relate their general responses to the belief systems and world-views of the religions they are studying, however, is not so strong. Their ability to discuss issues from more than one point of view could also be better. As in Years 7 to 9, some groups, such as those with special educational needs, the higher and lower attainers and the gifted and talented pupils, would make better progress if their needs were more carefully addressed and provided for. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls.
196. Overall, the attitudes and behaviour of the pupils are good, though at times some behaviour is less than satisfactory. In the main, the pupils are attentive to the lessons and they concentrate on the work presented to them. The pupils are keen to participate in the lessons, particularly in responding to the many questions and issues that the lessons present, though they could be encouraged more to give specifically personal responses to specifically religious issues. They show an interest in their work and they listen to and respect the viewpoints of others. Sometimes a small minority of pupils disrupt lessons and this often has a significant effect on the learning of others. This usually happens when control of the lessons is not as decisive as it could be or where the work does not sufficiently meet the needs of all the pupils, particularly the higher and lower attainers.
197. Overall, the teaching is satisfactory. There are many good aspects and some aspects that need attention. The lessons are well prepared and the lesson objectives are clear. At times, the objectives of the lessons could be clearer to the pupils themselves. This would give greater focus to their learning. Sometimes the expectations the teachers have of the pupils could be higher, both in terms of the amount of learning done in individual lessons and the amount of learning done

over time. There is insufficient extension work for the higher attainers and the gifted and talented pupils. Easier, more accessible work is needed by the lower-attaining pupils and those who have special educational needs. The good aspects of the teaching include encouraging the pupils to reflect on their learning. The good teaching also includes firm control of the lessons. Homework is regularly set and the books are marked and helpful comments are added. The teaching and learning make a good contribution to the pupils' literacy; a good number of reading exercises are included in many lessons. Greater emphasis on extended writing and writing in general would be of additional benefit to the pupils. Rigorous monitoring of the teaching and learning in all years would ensure that there is more consistency in the quality of the delivery of the subject and that good practice is shared.

198. The subject is well managed by a relatively new head of department. There is one other specialist teacher. Various other teachers in the humanities faculty also teach religious education. Currently, religious education in Year 7 is not the direct responsibility of the head of department. This results in some inconsistency in the pupils' learning. New schemes of work are being developed based on the Agreed Syllabus. These are being prepared to give more emphasis to attainment target 2 of the syllabus, that is, helping the pupils to more readily appreciate and to reflect on the relevance of what they are studying to their own lives and experiences. This development should continue as this is an aspect that needs to be stronger in the department as a whole. The accommodation is very good, but the department is in urgent need of more resources, particularly textbooks. There is very limited use of ICT in the department. The department makes a significant contribution to the school's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspect in its study of Christianity and other world religions.

199. Progress since the last inspection has been very positive. A significant number of lessons, however, are still taught by non-specialist teachers, especially in Year 7, and this is having an adverse effect on the quality of the pupils' learning. No other significant issues were raised at the last inspection. The department has an excellent capacity for further development and improvement, particularly through the rigorous monitoring procedure that is in place.

## DRAMA

Overall, the quality of provision in drama is **good**.

### Strengths

- Teaching is good.
- Extra-curricular activities offer a wealth of enhancement opportunities.

### Areas for improvement

- The written coursework component in the GCSE course.

200. Attainment in drama is satisfactory at the age of 14 and above average at the age 16, with 72 per cent of pupils achieving A\* to C grades in the GCSE examination. The trend since 1998 has been steadily upwards. Achievement is satisfactory at the age of 14 and good at the age of 16. Many pupils achieve higher levels in the GCSE examinations than their predicted grades. This demonstrates exceptional progress for some pupils, many of whom are designated as having learning difficulties. The written aspect of the GCSE course has proved very challenging for some pupils. As a result, the department has put into place strategies to support pupils through the written component of the coursework.

201. Pupils, by the age of 14, learn a variety of techniques to improve improvisation and presentation. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, pupils developed a sense of theatre and audience as they performed improvisations depicting 'The Black Death'. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils learned how theatre might be used to convey a 'political' message. Pupils engaged in this very challenging lesson using voice, body language and space very effectively to demonstrate 'the school gates' or

'the canteen'. These short presentations, which interpreted aspects of their school environment, encouraged debate on the significance of place in school life.

202. Pupils at the age of 16 produce sensitive and empathetic interpretations of scripts. One group of GCSE candidates used a variety of oral devices - choral speaking, monologue and narration - to portray a cameo of passengers on a train just before a fatal accident occurred. The dramatic tension produced was excellent as the irony was understood by the audience of the 'life after death' quality of a pre-recorded telephone message. Yet another group used Alan Ayckbourn's 'Mother Figure' as a stimulus. This presentation demonstrated the ability of pupils to move beyond the text and develop characters in more detail. Maternal paranoia was acted with sensitivity and empathy - another excellent piece, the result of consistently high quality teaching over the course.
203. Teaching overall is good. All teachers display sound subject knowledge enriched by a wealth of relevant experience beyond the classroom. The department's planning is very good and provides a coherent framework within which drama skills are developed. The use of drama notebooks is excellent. These booklets enable pupils to focus on the work they need to do and the skills they need in their presentations and, later, to evaluate their performances. Homework is set and appraised regularly. Marking is detailed and close attention is paid to grammatical and spelling errors. This has helped raise the standard of written examination responses. Relationships are excellent – very professional and businesslike. The pupils are responsible and are able to work without close supervision.
204. Accommodation for drama is satisfactory overall. Space is adequate, although acoustics are poor and staging limited. The work of the drama department enriches the work of the whole school by providing links with both primary and tertiary sectors and with other local authority initiatives. There has been good improvement since the previous report. Drama makes a significant contribution to the provision within the school for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. It does this through a very well planned and executed programme of work that takes the pupils beyond their own experiences in life to a higher plane, on which they can begin to come to terms with and understand the feelings, emotions and beliefs of people they could or would never meet in their normal lives. There are very good opportunities in drama for interaction, discussion and reflection. In addition, there is an outstanding programme of extra-curricular drama that extends and enhances the work done in school. This includes annual school productions and community projects. The inspectors were able to see evidence of these, on video and in photographs, which showed their quality.