

INSPECTION REPORT

COPLEY HIGH SCHOOL

Stalybridge

LEA area: Tameside

Unique reference number: 106259

Headteacher: Mr J Joyce

Reporting inspector: Dr A R Beaver
20224

Dates of inspection: 15th – 18th April 2002

Inspection number: 191415

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:	Huddersfield Road Stalybridge Tameside
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Appropriate authority:	Tameside
Name of chair of governors:	Mr R Jeary
Date of previous inspection:	20 th – 24 th January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
20224	Dr A R Beaver	Registered inspector	Equal opportunities	<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>How high are standards?</p> <p>The school's results and pupils' achievements.</p> <p>How well are pupils taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
9188	Mrs J McHugh	Lay inspector		<p>How high are standards?</p> <p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development.</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
20729	Mr J F Berry	Team inspector	Science	
8216	Mr G Binks	Team inspector	English English as an additional language	
7926	Mr J E Bowden	Team inspector	Physical education	
22695	Mr R A Cardinal	Team inspector	Religious education Special educational needs	
11838	Mr D J Cronin	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	

4773	Mr E P Gilliat	Team inspector	History	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
10209	Mr V Gormally	Team inspector	Art	
10385	Mr K Hopkins	Team inspector	Design and technology	
12276	Mr T I Payne	Team inspector	Music	
11300	Mr B R Smith	Team inspector	Geography	
	Mr M Shaw	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
8341	Mr W Wimshurst	Team inspector	Mathematics	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Copley High School's pupils live in Stalybridge, Tameside. Most pupils come from the area near to the school and more come from this neighbourhood than did so five years ago. The school is comprehensive and provides for 871 girls and boys aged 11 to 16. It is of average size, for a secondary school. Sixty-one per cent of the pupils are girls and there are more girls than boys in all years. The school is popular with parents and more pupils attend it than at the time of the last inspection in 1997. The proportion of pupils who either joined or left the school other than at the usual ages of 11 and 16, is average. A small proportion of the pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds, mainly the Indian sub-continent. Some use English as an additional language, but very few are at an early stage in acquiring the language. The percentage of pupils who are known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. An average percentage of pupils is identified by the school to have special educational needs. An above average percentage has statements of special need. These pupils have a wide range of learning, emotional, behavioural and physical difficulties. The school works closely with an adjoining recreation centre. Pupils' attainment when they enter the school at age 11 spans the full range, but is below average overall. On average, boys attain much lower standards on entry than girls. The school has encountered considerable difficulties in finding suitably qualified temporary teachers to replace regular teachers who are ill.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Copley is a good school. Pupils achieve well at all ages. They attain standards above those of similar schools and in line with the average in all schools nationally. The teaching is good. The school is well led and managed and gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils achieve well, attaining standards that are above average compared with those of similar schools.
- The school is very well led by the headteacher.
- The teaching is good and enables pupils to make good progress.
- Pupils' attitudes to work are good and they behave well because relationships with teachers are positive.
- Provision for the moral and social development of pupils is very good.
- Extra-curricular opportunities are very good.

What could be improved

- Provision of more time and continuity of lessons in information and communication technology to improve pupils' standards in the subject.
- Adequate ventilation and natural light in some classrooms to improve the quality of teaching, learning and behaviour in those rooms.
- Better methods for the school to evaluate the priorities it sets in planning for improvement.
- The quality of some marking of pupils' work and informing them of their standard against national expectations.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the last inspection in January 1997, the school has improved considerably. Pupils' standards in Year 9 National Curriculum tests have improved more rapidly than nationally. Good progress from entry to the school has enabled them to attain standards above the average of similar schools in both National Curriculum tests and at GCSE. The teaching continues to be good overall, despite considerable difficulties arising from the absence of some teachers. Many lessons are now very well taught and fewer lessons are unsatisfactory. Most of the key issues of the last inspection have been resolved. There is now much more use of information and communication technology and pupils are far more skilled in using computers. However, continuity in learning the subject is restricted by the experience of fortnightly or fewer lessons and pupils do not yet use computers enough in all subjects. Standards in modern foreign languages are much improved. Individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs are better drafted and used more effectively by teachers. Additional support staff are effective in supporting pupils, managing the learning resource centre and providing valuable clerical help to teachers. Curricular time for religious education in Years 10 and 11 has been increased and teaching and learning have greatly improved. Time allocated for physical education in Years 10 and 11 is now adequate to teach the National Curriculum.

STANDARDS

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

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

+The average point score at GCSE is calculated on a scale of 1 point for each grade G attained, rising by one point per grade, up to 8 points for each grade A*. The average point score is considered the best measure of the school's overall performance.

++Reference to similar schools is to those schools that contain a similar proportion of students who claim entitlement to free school meals. This is considered to be a valid indicator by which to compare schools with students of similar backgrounds. Reference to all schools indicates all secondary schools across the country.

Overall, pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9. In the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science in 2001, 2000 and 1999, pupils from all ethnic backgrounds attained standards that were above those in similar schools and in line with the average of all schools. Girls enter the school attaining higher standards than boys and continue to do so in the Year 9 national tests.

In GCSE examinations in 2001, pupils from all ethnic backgrounds attained above the average of pupils in similar schools and average standards compared with those of all schools nationally. In 2000, results were higher because the year group had more potential than those of other recent years. From 1999 to 2001, the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C has been average. Attainment of five or more A* to G grades

compared very well with that of all schools, and highly compared with similar schools in 2001, when the school was among the top five per cent of similar schools in the country. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well and make good progress. Girls attain standards well ahead of those of boys in GCSE examinations, more so than in most schools. In 2001 and recent years, pupils attained particularly well in GCSE design and technology and religious studies. Pupils did comparatively less well in physical education, art and double science.

In work seen during the inspection in English, pupils' reading and response to poems, plays and stories were good. They were less practised in extended writing, especially in Years 7 to 9, because they had few opportunities to write at length. In mathematics, they used number and handled data well, but many pupils' skills in algebra were weak. In science, pupils increased their scientific knowledge and managed practical work satisfactorily, but many had difficulty in understanding the purpose of some experiments.

The trend in results in Year 9 National Curriculum tests has risen above the national rate of improvement for the last five years. In GCSE examinations, the trend in performance, shown by the average point score attained, has risen in line with improving national results. The school sets itself very challenging targets and has high expectations of what pupils should achieve at all ages.

Overall, pupils of all levels of competence and ethnic background make good progress and achieve well throughout the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils have positive attitudes to school and most work hard.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Pupils behave well in most, but not all, lessons and they act sensibly and responsibly around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Good relationships among pupils and with teachers help pupils to learn successfully and to behave well.
Attendance	Attendance is above average. Unauthorised absence is average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 to 9	Years 10 and 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.

The school meets the needs well of pupils from all ethnic backgrounds and of pupils of varying competence, including those with special educational needs. The quality of teaching is good overall. It is effective in that it enables pupils to learn successfully and to make at least a good rate of progress throughout the school. Teachers expect pupils to work hard, and usually they do so. Pupils concentrate on their work in most lessons and good relationships with teachers encourage them to learn. English is well taught throughout the

school. Mathematics is taught well in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11. The teaching of science is satisfactory in all years. Literacy is taught well throughout the school. The few pupils at an early stage of learning English are taught well. Numeracy is taught well in mathematics and satisfactorily in other subjects. Teachers have good knowledge of their subjects and plan their lessons well, using a good range of methods to enable pupils to learn. Some teachers have difficulty in managing some pupils and ensuring that they behave well enough and as a result a few lessons were not satisfactory in enabling all pupils to make the progress that they should have done. The marking of pupils' work is satisfactory overall, but some does not provide sufficient advice to pupils on how they can improve. Food technology and drama are very well taught. In no subject is the teaching less than satisfactory overall.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. Life studies (personal and social education) extend pupils' experience very well. Extra-curricular provision is very good, and is much appreciated by pupils and parents. Lesson time for information and communication technology is inadequate and pupils' skills in this subject are not practised enough in many other subjects.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils with special educational needs progress well and all gain qualifications from GCSE examinations.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. The very few pupils at an early stage of learning English receive good support to make progress with the language.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good, and their cultural development is well provided for. Provision for their spiritual development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The quality of care is good. Pupils are effectively supported so that they achieve well.

The school works well with parents and rightly has their confidence that it is helping their children to do well. Links with other schools and colleges are underdeveloped. Not all pupils have the opportunity of an act of collective worship daily.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher's contribution is very good. He has overcome difficulties confronting the school and has enabled significant improvements to take place since the last inspection.
How well the governors	Governors are strongly supportive of the school and of the

fulfil their responsibilities	headteacher. They use their expertise and fulfil their responsibilities well on the school's behalf.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good in most respects. Pupils' standards and the quality of teaching are evaluated well. The means for the school to evaluate its success in achieving the objectives it sets itself in school improvement planning are not always clear enough for it to judge how successful it has been.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school has used resources very well to improve accommodation and equipment substantially to benefit pupils.

Staffing is sufficient to meet pupils' needs, although the school has, occasionally, been unable to find temporary replacements in some subjects when regular teachers have been ill. Accommodation and learning resources have improved considerably and are now good. However, some classrooms are not ventilated well enough, a situation unhelpful to the teaching and learning that takes place in them. The school provides a good quality of education for the income that it receives and applies the principles of best value well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school expects their children to work hard, achieve highly and become mature and responsible. • They are confident to approach the school with problems. • The range of extra-curricular activities. • Their children make good progress because teaching is good. • The school is well led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour. • Homework. • Information on pupils' progress.

The inspection team agrees with the positive views of parents. Some parents have concerns about behaviour; inspectors found this to be good, overall, but unsatisfactory in some lessons, mainly in mathematics, science and music. Although an appropriate amount of homework was set, staff sometimes did not follow the homework timetable and this made pupils' organisation of their work unnecessarily difficult. School information is of good quality and includes useful information on courses, regular opportunities to discuss progress and informative newsletters. However, although reports on pupils' progress are satisfactory, some subject reports do not tell parents precisely enough what their children should concentrate their efforts on so as to improve.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

The average point score at GCSE is calculated on a scale of 1 point for each grade G attained, rising by one point per grade, up to 8 points for each grade A. The average point score is considered the best measure of the school's overall performance. The same indication of attainment applies to pupils' average point score in the National Curriculum tests in Year 9.*

Reference to similar schools is to those schools that contain a similar proportion of students who claim entitlement to free school meals. This is considered to be a valid indicator by which to compare schools with students of similar backgrounds. Reference to all schools indicates all secondary schools across the country.

1. Pupils entering the school at the age of 11 have a wide range of attainment. However, fewer are of above average than below average attainment, as shown in National Curriculum tests in primary schools and in the school's testing of pupils when they enter Year 7. There are relatively fewer higher attainers among the boys than among the girls. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is average. An above average number have statements describing their needs. Some pupils have considerable learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties when they join the school.
2. During Years 7 to 9, girls and boys from all ethnic backgrounds achieve well and make good progress. By the end of Year 9, they attain average standards in the National Curriculum tests for English, mathematics and science, showing substantial improvement from their attainment on entry to Year 7. Their performance in these tests is above the average attained in similar schools. These standards have been maintained for the last three years. The trend in results in Year 9 National Curriculum tests, shown by pupils' average point score, has risen above the national rate of improvement for the last five years. On average, girls continue to attain higher standards than boys by the end of Year 9, as they did on entry to the school in Year 7. However, both sexes achieve equally well to progress at a similar rate during Years 7 to 9.
3. In Years 10 and 11, pupils make good progress and achieve well. In the 2001 and 1999 GCSE examinations, pupils from all ethnic backgrounds attained above average standards compared with those of similar schools and average standards compared with those of all schools nationally. In 2000, a more competent year group attained standards above the national average. During the last three years, the percentage of pupils attaining five or more GCSE A* to C grades was in line with both the national average for all schools and that of similar schools. In 2001, the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE A* to G grades was well above that of all schools, and very high compared with similar schools. The latter impressive comparison positioned the school among the top five per cent of similar schools in the country. In GCSE examinations, the trend in performance, shown by the average point score attained, has risen in line with the improving national results. During the last three years, pupils attained very well in design and technology and religious studies but less well in art, physical education and double science.
4. The school sets itself very challenging targets, and has high expectations of what pupils should achieve at all ages. Girls regularly attain standards well ahead of those of

boys in GCSE examinations in most, but not all subjects, as they do in the National Curriculum tests, to a greater extent than in most schools. However, boys achieve well, making equally good progress with that of girls in Years 10 and 11.

5. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. They make good progress overall and their rate of progress is often more rapid than that of other pupils because of the good support they receive from teachers and support assistants. The great majority of pupils on the special needs register exceed predicted results in GCSE examinations, confirming the good progress that they make throughout the school. Many individuals achieve very well in view of the impressive progress that they make. The very few pupils with English as an additional language achieve in line with others.
6. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, pupils' standards of literacy are good. They read competently and compile notes and written records in different subjects well. Most are confident when speaking and express themselves clearly. The effective emphasis given across all subjects to the development of literacy is supporting learning well. The pupils with below average standards of literacy who receive special help through 'catch-up' units of work make very good progress from the support they get. Currently, pupils' standards of numeracy are average across the school. Good practice in using number in science and design and technology is helping to raise pupils' standards further. The National Numeracy Strategy is in place in mathematics lessons and, overall, pupils' standards of numeracy are rising.
7. In English, pupils make good progress and achieve well in Years 7 to 9. Pupils, particularly those of higher competence, write informative and imaginative pieces, although their spelling and expression are not always accurate enough. In general, pupils lack sufficient opportunity to write and redraft extended pieces of work. In Years 10 and 11, pupils achieve well in English literature, attaining good standards in GCSE examinations in this subject. They achieve a greater depth of understanding by an effective response to the literature that they study. However, they attain lower standards in English than in English literature in GCSE examinations.
8. In mathematics, pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and achieve well. Their data-handling skills are good and their capacity to do mental calculations improves greatly by the end of Year 9. They can solve mathematical problems satisfactorily. However, only higher attainers manage algebra well. In Years 10 and 11, pupils achieve satisfactory standards. Algebraic skills remain a weakness for all but the most competent. All pupils' skills with number and in handling data are at least satisfactory and often good.
9. In science, pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9. They gain subject knowledge and maintain a good record of this in written work. They tackle simple practical work with increasing skill and confidence, but some have difficulty understanding the purpose and findings resulting from practical work. In Years 10 and 11, their achievement is satisfactory, overall, but more competent pupils do well and achieve more highly than might reasonably be expected from their earlier standards. The absence of two regular teachers because of illness during the week of the inspection hindered pupils' progress in some of the lessons seen.
10. In most other subjects, pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and at least satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11. However, in information and communication technology, although pupils achieve satisfactory work and progress and there has been good progress in the subject since the last inspection, their standards are below average. Progress is restricted in all years by the lack of continuity of lessons timetabled for the subject. The

situation is made worse by insufficient use of computers and other information and communication technology equipment by other subjects to extend pupils' skills well enough. As a result, pupils' standards in information and communication technology are below average.

11. Since the last inspection, pupils' standards in Year 9 National Curriculum tests have improved at a more rapid rate than those that have been attained nationally since 1997. Their impressive rate of progress from entry to the school has enabled them to attain standards above the average of similar schools in both National Curriculum tests and at GCSE. Although major improvements have been achieved in information and communication technology, further development is needed to enable pupils to extend their skills well enough.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

12. Pupils have good attitudes towards the school and towards learning. All groups, including girls and boys from minority ethnic backgrounds and pupils with special educational needs, have positive attitudes. In lessons, pupils usually show obvious interest in the work that is set and are keen to learn. Relationships are good and have a positive impact on the standards achieved. For example, in physical education, pupils work well together in small groups. They support each other's efforts and this promotes positive attitudes to learning. The school is a harmonious community in which adults and pupils usually respond to each other with respect, concern and humour. Pupils and parents speak highly of the supportive attitudes in the school.
13. Behaviour in school and in lessons is good. An average number of pupils were excluded for a short period of time last year and no one was permanently excluded. Consistent attention is paid to achieving high standards of appropriate behaviour. Litter is minimal. Pupils are polite and friendly to visitors and to one another. They behave well when they are not directly supervised on corridors and at lunchtimes. However, the attitudes and behaviour of a significant minority of girls and boys were unsatisfactory and, occasionally, poor in some lessons, mainly in mathematics, science and music. For example, during a Year 11 science revision lesson on energy, pupils were restless, chatted among themselves and showed a general lack of interest. In a Year 8 music lesson involving the performance of a piece of music, lack of self control, constant interruption and immature response towards the opportunity to practise their skills, resulted in insufficient progress being made by all pupils within the class. Pupils say that they appreciate the firm stance taken by some staff but are critical of those that they see as unable to manage disruptive pupils, as is occasionally the situation with classes taught by temporary teachers substituting for teachers who are ill. Most lessons where behaviour was unsatisfactory were conducted in rooms that lack adequate ventilation. Pupils and parents are convinced that any bullying is rapidly dealt with by the school.
14. Pupils' personal development is good. Many opportunities are given for pupils to organise and make decisions about their own learning and other aspects of school life, and they take good advantage of these. Pupils value form councils and the school council as means to express their views on aspects of the school. Their suggestion of dividers for queues in the dining hall has made an effective contribution to the orderly behaviour seen during lunchtimes. Pupils are currently applying for grants to stage a community event. The Eco Club regularly recycles waste paper and is currently designing improvements for the garden area. Pupils frequently respond well to the trust placed in them by the school. They value highly the opportunity to use the school facilities throughout the extended school day. For example, pupils using the music

department at lunchtime and other areas of the site do so responsibly and behave well with a minimum of supervision. Older pupils welcome the option of supported personal study aimed at developing research skills, completing homework and improving coursework. Pupils actively take up the opportunities provided, which contribute to their good development as mature and responsible citizens.

15. Since the last inspection, attendance immediately improved and has remained broadly at that level. The school successfully maintains the same overall level of positive attitudes and behaviour evident at that time. However, as at the last inspection, the behaviour of some pupils is unhelpful to learning in some lessons. Attendance is regularly above average. Unauthorised absence is average.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

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.

16. The teaching is good overall. It was satisfactory or better in the vast majority of lessons seen in all years. Over half of the 146 lessons seen were of good or better quality and almost one sixth were of very good or excellent quality. Teaching was unsatisfactory in seven lessons seen and poor in one. All but one of these lessons were in Years 7 to 9. In most of these, teachers had difficulty in managing pupils' behaviour well enough to enable them to learn as well as they should have done. A temporary teacher substituting for a regular teacher who was ill taught one unsatisfactory lesson. The teaching of food technology and drama was consistently very good. In English, art, design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages and religious education, the teaching was good to all age groups. Life studies (personal and social education) were also taught well overall. In mathematics, the teaching was good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In science, music and physical education, the teaching was satisfactory to all age groups.
17. Literacy is taught well throughout the school. Much attention is given to key words in every subject and all teachers are active as teachers of literacy. Teachers use support staff very effectively to work with small groups of pupils to help them to improve their standards of literacy. Support staff contribute fully in planning, in developing resources and in leading pupils through the 'catch-up' units for literacy. The few pupils at an early stage of learning English as an additional language are well taught. Numeracy is taught well in mathematics and satisfactorily in other subjects. The teaching of information and communication technology is satisfactory in lessons especially timetabled for this subject across all age groups. However, in general, teachers do not use computers and other equipment for information and communication technology sufficiently in subject work as much as they should.
18. Teachers enable girls and boys to learn successfully and individuals of both sexes and of all ethnic backgrounds receive equal attention in lessons. The impact of good teaching enables the school to meet the needs of pupils of varying competence, including those with special educational needs, well. Teachers expect pupils to work hard and pupils usually respond well to the good teaching that they receive, extending their subject knowledge and understanding well. Most pupils concentrate on their work in lessons – which are of a full hour's length – and work hard. Good relationships with teachers encourage pupils to want to learn. As a result, pupils make good progress throughout the school to achieve well in GCSE examinations. Although both girls and boys make good progress from the teaching that they receive, most girls attain higher standards than most boys from entry to the school at age 11.

19. Teachers expect their classes to work hard. They are very committed to enabling them to succeed with learning and to achieve well. A very good Year 8 life studies lesson on how smoking can affect health used drama very well to challenge pupils' thinking about the topic and successfully conveyed stark messages about the implications for health. The teacher of a Year 11 physical education lesson, in which work on circulation and respiration was being revised for the coming GCSE examination, enabled pupils at all levels of attainment to plan their revision of the topic well through the use of diagrams. Their knowledge was properly tested, and they were helped to extend their understanding of the subject. Similarly, a Year 8 geography lesson on Brazil challenged pupils of wide-ranging competence in the subject, including those identified as gifted and talented, to deepen their understanding of the topic. All were expected to research for themselves, with suitable help and support from the teacher, and made very good progress. However, in a few lessons seen, teachers did not adapt work fully for the wide range of pupils' levels of subject competence.
20. The planning of lessons is good. Teachers make clear to pupils from the start what they are to learn in that lesson, so that teacher and pupils share a common purpose. It is regular practice across the school for objectives for lessons to be displayed on flipcharts or the board and pupils' attention is drawn to these at the start; they are reminded of these as the lesson proceeds and, again, at the end. Teachers' effective planning of lessons enables them to maintain a good pace of work. For example, a very good Year 8 design and technology lesson, in which pupils were designing a carton for a soft drink, ran at a good pace because the teacher made very clear to pupils what they were aiming to do, and involved all individuals and groups very well in the work, helping them to draw their ideas together from a sequence of tasks.
21. Teachers have good subject knowledge and, in the best lessons, enthuse pupils with interest in the subject. English teachers have great interest in the literature that they introduce to their classes. For example, the teacher of a good Year 7 lesson enthused the class with work comparing three poems about dogs, making pupils interested and enthusiastic about the subject. The teacher of a Year 11 art lesson gave pupils the support they needed in preparing for the GCSE examination. Pupils benefited from teachers' good subject expertise and skilful techniques well adapted to their individual needs.
22. The range of methods that teachers use is extensive and effective in helping pupils to learn. Teachers explain clearly to assist pupils' understanding. Their demonstrations are effective in helping pupils to perform activities for themselves, particularly in science and physical education. Teachers' questions sometimes encourage pupils to reflect on their learning and often test what they know. They regularly give pupils the opportunity to exchange ideas in discussion in small groups, so that they share ideas and extend their understanding for themselves. A particularly strong feature is teachers' regular use of the very good practice of summarising what has been learned, at a point near to the end of the lesson, so that pupils leave the classroom able to remember the knowledge that they have gained. Teachers also use homework to good effect, so that pupils extend their learning beyond the classroom.
23. Resources are used well to help pupils to learn. For example, the teacher of a very good Year 7 history lesson helped pupils of wide-ranging attainment to understand the horrors of the slave trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, by using well-chosen evidence of life and death on the 'middle passage' – that taken by sailing ships conveying slaves from west Africa to America. Display of pupils' work in most classrooms is very good and helps to stimulate ideas and to extend learning. Staff

supporting pupils with special educational needs are used well and are effective in mainstream classrooms. In a Year 7 geography lesson, for example, a support assistant questioned individual pupils well about performances in the Olympic Games, using statistics, and also helped them to locate where the events were held, improving their skills in using maps. Individual education plans are helpful in guiding teachers and support staff when they are assisting individuals with special educational needs.

24. In the vast majority of lessons seen, teachers managed their classes well and ensured that pupils' behaviour was good. However, some teachers, including some temporary teachers substituting for regular teachers who are ill, have difficulty in managing pupils well enough and lack control and good discipline in a few lessons. Six of the eight unsatisfactory or poorly taught lessons seen involved inadequate management of pupils' behaviour. As a result, some lessons are not satisfactory in enabling pupils to make the progress that they should. However, in no subject is the teaching less than satisfactory overall. The marking of pupils' written work varies too much in quality. Some is very good; it provides good advice to pupils on how to improve and often recognises and praises their efforts and achievements. However, even within the same subject, the quality of marking varies too much. In some cases, pupils do not act on the advice given, and teachers do not follow this up. Opportunities for pupils to evaluate the quality of their own performance are not provided enough in physical education. However, pupils' self-evaluation of their performance is a good feature of drama lessons.
25. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs when they are withdrawn from mainstream classes for special help is generally good and, occasionally, very good. Pupils learn successfully and make good progress as a result. Pupils with very low levels of literacy are encouraged to develop their reading and spelling skills through a variety of methods. For example, a pupil was encouraged to speculate on how a story might develop, with the help of visual prompts on cards that traced the events in order. Well-chosen methods give pupils confidence in reading and help to develop their understanding. Practice in spelling is well supported with the use of a whiteboard and a computer. Selected pupils participate in 'anger management' sessions that enable them to reflect fully on their own behaviour and on the means that they can use to help them to manage their behaviour better. In teaching of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream classes, teachers usually show good awareness of their individual needs and involve them fully in activities. In a Year 10 English lesson, for example, pupils were included in the allocation of parts for the reading of a play and this encouraged them very well to participate in the lesson. In many lessons, teachers frequently work with individuals and use praise very effectively to encourage and enthuse them.
26. Since the last inspection, teaching continues to be good overall. More lessons are very good or excellent and fewer are unsatisfactory than in 1997, although the school has encountered difficulties in finding temporary teachers with the specialist qualifications needed in some cases when regular teachers are ill. The teaching of modern foreign languages, a concern of the last inspection, has improved considerably, despite absences of staff. The key issue requiring improvement of individual education plans to guide the work of teachers and support staff to help pupils with special educational needs has been resolved well. Plans are now of good quality and are valuable in enabling teachers and support assistants to help pupils to learn.

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

27. Overall, the curriculum provides pupils with a good range of learning opportunities to which they have equal access. The curriculum provided for pupils in Years 7 to 9 is good. It meets the statutory requirements for teaching all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. Pupils are also given enhanced opportunities through the provision of personal and social education, drama and a second modern foreign language. The continuity of pupils' learning of information and communication technology is restricted because the subject is only taught once a fortnight in Years 7 and 9, and there is no timetabled provision of a specific lesson for the subject in Year 8.
28. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is also good. All pupils continue to follow a broad and balanced curriculum so that the widest range of possible options remains open at the age of 16. They have a good choice of options of National Curriculum subjects, but the school does not provide any vocational courses, other than the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in information and communication technology. The option to undertake supported learning instead of one GCSE subject reduces the examination load for some pupils and gives them a good opportunity to organise and improve their work. Insufficient time is given to mathematics and extra lessons have to be arranged outside the school timetable so that the syllabus is fully covered. Also not enough time is allocated to information and communication technology to cover the requirements of the recently introduced GNVQ course.
29. Curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. Support is appropriately targeted at Year 7 where needs are identified. Withdrawal of pupils from mainstream classes is carefully managed to ensure that pupils' curricular entitlement to the National Curriculum is maintained. Pupils are withdrawn to support their wide range of needs, including literacy, improvement of their behaviour and specific learning difficulties. Pupils identified with the greatest need have individual learning plans. In Years 10 and 11, some pupils discontinue one subject and are given extra support and guidance in their remaining subjects. Support staff are deployed well and provide effective in-class support. The level of support has improved from the last inspection.
30. Opportunities for pupils to extend their learning and widen their experience through extra-curricular activities are very good. These are very well managed and publicised under the banner of the Copley Club. Extensive use is made of facilities in the school and adjacent recreation centre to provide a very good programme of sport, music and other activities at lunchtimes and at the end of the school day. In preparation for GCSE examinations, pupils are given good opportunities for revision classes after school and in the Easter holidays.
31. Very good provision for personal and social education is made through the life studies course, which is taught to pupils in all years. The programme includes education in sex and relationships, issues of drugs misuse, aspects of citizenship and careers education. The course is planned very thoroughly. It is supported by good resources and makes extensive use of outside agencies.
32. The school makes good provision for work-related education. The careers education element of the life studies course is carefully planned and ensures that pupils are well prepared for the decisions they need to make at the end of Years 9 and 11. They have good access to careers guidance and to the careers area within the school's learning resource centre, which provides useful material to help pupils to research and plan

their career interests. All pupils take part in work experience at the beginning of Year 11 and local employers provide helpful support in preparing pupils for job interviews.

33. The school's links with the community and its partner institutions are satisfactory. Visiting speakers and outside agencies, such as the police, health professionals and a local theatre group, make an important contribution to pupils' learning in the life studies course. Although the school has links with the business community and other groups in the locality, these are not extensive and the school recognises that they need to be developed. Relationships with partner primary schools and with the two local colleges providing for education after age 16 are good, but links to ensure subject continuity are underdeveloped. Good links are in place for the training of new teachers who are following courses in higher education.
34. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good. In Years 10 and 11 curricular time for religious education has been increased and the time allocated to physical education is now adequate to teach the National Curriculum. Provision for information and communication technology has improved considerably, but the time allotted to discrete lessons for this subject is inadequate for pupils to make the progress that they should. Provision for personal and social education has also improved so that the programme now takes better account of pupils' existing knowledge, understanding and skills.
35. Overall, the school makes very good provision for pupils' moral and social development. Provision for their cultural development is good and that provided for their spiritual development is satisfactory.
36. Although the school makes satisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual development, it does not meet the statutory requirement for an act of collective worship for every pupil each day. Pupils have two assemblies each week and the 'thought for the week' is the topic considered in these. Some assemblies are inspiring and make an effective contribution to spiritual development. There is also a strong moral content in assemblies and good time for reflection on the messages given. Assemblies often involve pupils in the presentation of the topic and this was seen in a Year 8 assembly in which one class had prepared well in order to convey to the rest of the year group the importance of honesty. 'Thoughts for the Day' in tutor groups give opportunities for reflection on a wide range of ideas in a programme run by the head of religious studies and life studies. However, registrations do not generally offer opportunities for acts of collective worship and, sometimes, make no reference to the 'Thought for the Day'. There is little evidence of planning for pupils' spiritual development in subject departments, but some lessons encourage pupils to think about and reflect deeply on the subject. In history, for example, pupils are encouraged to develop sympathy for people from the past, such as soldiers in World War I. In music, religious links are made through world music and pupils are given time to reflect on their work. The whole school participates in collective moments of reflection as in the two minutes silence observed for Remembrance Day.
37. Provision for pupils' moral development is very good. The school's statement of beliefs and aims emphasises the importance of moral considerations to the life of the school. Moral priorities are reflected in the attitudes of pupils and staff. Respect for others is a priority and is lived out in the school. Pupils have a good regard for the rules of the school and are able to take responsibility in many areas of its work. A strong framework of values regulates behaviour. Ideas of right and wrong, truth and honesty are strongly presented by teachers and well supported in lessons in life studies. Pupils' awareness of moral considerations is raised through discussion of equal opportunities,

discrimination, prejudice and human rights. Pupils enjoy equal access to the school curriculum and to extra-curricular activities and play a full part in the numerous activities available. In physical education, fair play and safe practice among competitors are priorities. In lessons in modern foreign languages, reference is made to the code of conduct and healthy living. In a geography lesson, the Exxon Valdez disaster led to evaluation of the merits of conservation and exploitation. Initiatives to further pupils' moral development include the activities of the school Eco Group that helps, through its interest in conservation, in the grounds of the local hospice. There is a strong anti-bullying policy that is well advertised around the school and is effective in opposing oppressive behaviour. Staff provide good role models in the respect they show and in the calm, non-threatening way that they teach.

38. Pupils' social development is very well provided for. Pupils have many opportunities to take responsibility and to develop social awareness. Relationships in lessons are good and are apparent when pupils work well together in pairs or small groups, as they do regularly. In a geography lesson, pupils were prompted to respond compassionately when shown a well-chosen video presentation of victims of a flood. In design and technology, pupils regularly celebrate and share in the success of others from the high quality of workmanship that all achieve. Pupils make a social contribution in physical education, by writing reports of matches on behalf of their class. Year 11 pupils develop social understanding through the prefect system. Others represent others through form and school councils. The school council considers the quality of life in school and has had a positive impact, for example on deterring pupils from smoking. Active citizenship is encouraged through the comprehensive arrangements for elections to the school council and extends the emphasis given to the processes of democracy provided in life studies. Pupils were encouraged to exercise social responsibility by a recent application for funds to the regeneration forum. Fund raising for charity is a feature of the school's activities, as seen in a recent sponsored silence.
39. The many extra-curricular opportunities available, including residential trips, provide very good opportunities for pupils' social development. For example, the Copley Club, geography fieldwork, trips to Paris, the Rhineland and Italy for skiing, and extra-curricular sport provide very good opportunities for social development. There are very strong community links that lead to regular instructive visits from organisations such as the police, MORI and the Royal Bank of Scotland. At Christmas local senior citizens are entertained at a Christmas Party. However, the school is not complacent about the strength of its very good social provision and there are plans to create a Theatre in Residence, in partnership with other schools. The aim is to present work reflecting social problems that occur locally, such as drug taking and some implications of transferring between schools.
40. The provision made for students' cultural development is good, overall, but not all subjects make an equally good contribution. Aspects of cultural diversity are well represented in the provision made, but are not yet provided in all subjects. In Year 8, a cultural festival celebrates black culture and features steel bands. Anti-racism is a part of lessons in life studies. Visits by the police have given pupils insight into the background of recent racial troubles in Oldham. Provision is strong in music, where there are studies of the music of China, Jamaica and India. Good display of the cultural origins of the subject is in place in mathematics. Science celebrates the work of scientists from around the world. An appreciation of black culture is part of history courses. Art plays an important part in developing understanding of British and other cultures in a wide range of studies. These include Aboriginal art, the changing community of Stalybridge and the cultural contribution of artists' work from around the world. Many extra-curricular opportunities enable students to be involved in cultural

activities. There are regular visits to museums, galleries, the theatre and concerts to enable pupils to appreciate their own cultural background and the values and beliefs of other cultures.

41. Since the last inspection, provision for pupils' moral and social development has continued to improve and is now very good. Provision for spiritual development has not improved to the same extent and not all subject departments contribute enough. Provision for cultural development is improving, and a wider range of cultures is now being studied through different subjects. Anti-racism is made part of all pupils' experience.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

42. The school cares well for its pupils and encourages them to do well. This shows in the supportive, encouraging relationships between staff and pupils and displays in classrooms such as the simple poster that says, "Can't is spelt T.R.Y". Child Protection procedures are good. A dedicated medical room and several qualified staff contribute to the very good first aid provision.
43. The health and safety of pupils and staff are high priorities and are well provided for. Risk assessments are being updated. Issues identified during the inspection and in a recent audit were systematically dealt with. Governors and staff carry out safety checks. Regular meetings of the health and safety committee monitor the management of matters of concern, such as ventilation in parts of the building. These matters are fully followed up. In some parts of the school, for example the science laboratories and music rooms, the inspection team considers that the lack of ventilation and natural light contribute to unsatisfactory behaviour in some lessons. Most of the lessons seen during the inspection where pupils' behaviour was less than satisfactory were in rooms that lacked adequate ventilation, especially in science and music areas. In some lessons in these areas, inattentive or disruptive and unacceptable behaviour was seen. As a result, teaching and learning were adversely affected and pupils did not make the progress that they should.
44. As pupils move through the school, their personal development is monitored well. Membership of the Copley Club is encouraged and allows access to the adjoining recreation centre. Senior staff mentor pupils identified as at risk of underachieving. Potential problems are identified and support is given to ensure that they do not fall behind in their studies.
45. Procedures to ensure good behaviour are currently under review. As at the time of the last inspection, credits are much appreciated by younger pupils but senior pupils remain unaware of any reward system for them. Following consultation with the school council, a system of rewards appropriate to the age groups concerned is being developed. Pupils and parents give strong endorsement of the success of the school's anti-bullying policy, reporting that any incidents of bullying are dealt with well.
46. Good attendance at school is expected and achieved. Registration procedures are understood and adhered to by staff. An attendance panel, consisting of senior staff, governors and local authority officers, supports year groups or pupils who give cause for concern. There is a system of 'first day calling' in operation for these pupils when they are absent and the school has not been notified of a reason in advance, ensuring that absences are very quickly followed up. The system is effective for the targeted group of pupils at risk within each year group, but has yet to be extended to include all pupils within the school.

47. Since the last inspection, satisfactory progress in the care of pupils has been made overall. Good standards are maintained in many areas. Attendance has improved and litter much reduced. However, inadequate ventilation in some classrooms, highlighted as an area of concern in 1997, remains unchanged. This is unsatisfactory, although it is acknowledged by the inspection team that circumstances are not within the direct control of the school.
48. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and monitoring their progress as they move through the school are good. The school collects information about pupils' prior attainment both from primary schools and from tests to measure initial attainment when they join the school. This information is made available to all teachers and added to on a regular basis. The data is used very well to predict pupils' grades in GCSE examinations and, through regular meetings with pupils, teachers keep a close check on how pupils are progressing towards the targets set for them. This supports their achievement well. The school's assessment policy provides clear guidelines for teachers. Test and examination results are well analysed and discussed with subject departments so that they are aware of how they are performing in relation to other subjects and national standards.
49. The use of assessment information to guide curricular planning and teaching is satisfactory. In some subjects, for example design and technology, assessment is used very well to plan for individual needs and work is very well reviewed and monitored. In modern foreign languages and science, the information is used well to set targets. In some subjects, however, assessment procedures are not providing an accurate picture of the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 9. For example, in mathematics, teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 did not match pupils' results in the 2001 National Curriculum tests well enough. Teacher assessments in information and communication technology were also too high. Although all subjects have implemented the school's assessment policy, reference to National Curriculum levels is not common practice across the curriculum. As a result, pupils and their parents do not know how pupils are performing in different subjects, in relation to what is expected for their age.
50. Assessment of pupils' special educational needs is effective in enabling the school to respond well to these, so that pupils make the progress that they should. The school makes full use of information from primary schools about pupils' special educational needs. The special needs co-ordinator maintains good links with primary schools and attends Year 6 reviews there to ensure that the school is fully informed of individual pupils' needs before they transfer into Year 7. Testing is used well on pupils' entry to the school at age 11 to assist in further identifying needs. Special testing is used to decide what action to take to support pupils as well as possible. There are regular reviews of pupils' progress, in which they are fully involved. Individual education plans have a clear format that enables them to be used well in lesson planning. Targets in these plans are relevant to all curricular areas, although numeracy targets are not yet well developed. Whole-school assessment procedures are used well to give class teachers comprehensive profiles of their teaching groups. Individual pupils' records are of very variable quality and many are not up to date. Statutory reviews meet requirements.
51. Since the last inspection, overall, improvement in using assessment data has been satisfactory.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

52. Parents' response to the questionnaire used before the inspection and the comments of the small number at the pre-inspection meeting express strong support for the school. Parents recognise that the school expects their children to work hard and helps them to become mature and responsible. They are confident to approach it with problems. They think that the range of extra-curricular opportunities provided for their children is very good. They also consider that teaching is good and that the school is well led and managed. However, a minority have concerns about behaviour, homework and the information that they receive on their children's progress.
53. The inspection team agrees that parents are right to hold their positive views of the school. Of the concerns of a minority of parents, inspectors find pupils' behaviour to be good, overall, but unsatisfactory in some lessons, mainly in some mathematics, science and music lessons. Homework was set regularly during the inspection and provided a good basis on which to extend learning. However, although an appropriate amount of homework is set, teachers are not always consistent in following the homework timetable provided and this results in difficulties for pupils in managing their work.
54. Information provided by the school for parents about their children's progress is generally good, but there are differences in the quality of subject departmental practice in reporting. Not all subject reports inform parents enough about their children's strengths and the areas in which they should improve. It is not always clear whether progress is sufficient and targets are sometimes too general for parents to be sure how they can best support their child. Regular newsletters are of good quality. Both the prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents are about to be reviewed to ensure that they include the most recent requirements and the information to which all parents are entitled. An informative and helpful school website is provided for pupils in Year 6 in neighbouring primary schools to enable them to find information about the school. An e-mail system provides a way for them to ask questions and to get answers about the school.
55. Parents' involvement in their children's learning is satisfactory. A high percentage of parents attend consultative evenings to discuss their children's progress with teachers. There is good support for trips, sporting fixtures and musical productions. A group of parents were involved in developing the school anti-bullying policy and the home – school agreement. However, pupils' planners, which provide a useful means of communication to enable parents to support their children's work in school, are not always used well enough. Currently, there is no active parents' association in the school.
56. There are good links with parents of pupils with special educational needs. Parents receive copies of individual education plans and are well aware of the targets that are set to help their children to improve. They are invited to complete questionnaires to comment on progress and are regularly invited to visit the school to review progress.
57. Since the last inspection, the school has retained the support of parents, who express confidence in what it is achieving for their children. Good progress has been made to involve the parents of pupils with special educational needs in the review of targets set in individual education plans.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

58. The leadership of the headteacher is very good because it gives clear direction to determining the purposes and work of the school. The aims of the school, to maintain a community based on clear moral principles and where all should have the right to happiness and success in learning, are lived out day to day by staff and pupils, and provision for moral development is very good. The newly created leadership group of senior staff works very well together with the headteacher, giving direction and support to all staff and pupils. The headteacher has the confidence and support of staff, governors and parents, because he has led the school to overcome considerable difficulties in recent years to improve on the situation at the time of the last inspection. The rate of improvement has been good. Headteacher, staff and governors have the capacity to improve even further on the good standards now achieved. Currently, pupils are achieving good standards of work compared with those of similar schools, the teaching is good, despite the staffing difficulties arising mainly from teachers' illnesses, and the key issues raised at the last inspection have largely been resolved successfully. Funding for major improvements to accommodation and learning resources has been won by the efforts of headteacher and governors, who have gained the confidence and support of the local authority towards raising the substantial sums that were required. The active, energetic leadership of the headteacher and his senior colleagues throughout the school during the school day is apparent to all and sets high expectations of responsible behaviour and standards of work. The leadership of subject departments is generally good. A shared sense of purpose applies within and across departments, all of which are strongly committed to enabling pupils to achieve well. The headteacher recognises that not all pupils behave well enough in lessons. He personally provides training in the school to help teachers to develop their skills in managing pupils' behaviour effectively, because some pupils, including a significant minority joining the school at age 11, do not behave well enough in some lessons. An 'on-call' system, by which the headteacher and senior staff support teachers encountering difficulties in lessons, is operative and was observed to be effective during the inspection.
59. Governors make a good contribution to the leadership of the school. They work closely with the headteacher and give him the essential support he needs to take the school forward. He has their confidence and they recognise the unstinting commitment and effort he gives to the school. The governors are equally committed to making the school successful and are very knowledgeable about it. They participate actively in setting priorities in planning for change, and they actively challenge and question plans and developments, making the school answerable to their leadership. Their committees enable them to develop expertise in aspects of the school and they use their good range of professional skills generously in its interest. The involvement of governors is good with the department for special educational needs, where two designated governors have regular contact with the special needs co-ordinator. Governors meet their statutory obligations well. However, although the school provides assemblies of good quality, governors do not provide for an act of collective worship every day for all pupils.
60. The school's leadership at all levels applies the principles of fairness and equal opportunity well. A commitment to equal opportunity for all enables pupils' needs to be met. Individual pupils at all levels of competence in learning and from different ethnic backgrounds achieve, at least, the standards that they should and often achieve more highly than might reasonably be expected. Good leadership of the department for special educational needs enables pupils identified with special educational needs to

achieve well, making very good progress and attaining impressive results in GCSE examinations.

61. The school is managed well. In many respects, the processes to ensure the continued success and improvement of the school are effective. The monitoring of provision and standards achieved is thorough. Where weaknesses are identified, action is taken to deal with these, as has happened in the modern foreign languages and science departments in recent years. Where weaknesses have persisted, they have often resulted from difficulties beyond the school's control – usually the absence of teachers because of illness.
62. The headteacher and the school's senior managers swiftly implemented the process of performance management of staff. This process is now well into its second successful year of operation and is contributing well to ensuring that morale among teachers is high, for example through residential conferences that all attend and which enable all to reflect on their achievements and needs for further professional development. The system of performance management of staff links teachers' individual professional needs well to school priorities.
63. Priorities for the school's further development are arrived at through a process of consultation that actively engages governors and all staff. The resulting 'operational aims' (the school improvement plan) give very good direction to the school's development, defining the right priorities that are shared by all across the school. Appointments to the leadership group have been made which reflect these priorities for improving teaching and learning further. However, the means for the school to evaluate its success in achieving the objectives it sets itself in school improvement planning are not always clear enough for it to judge how successful it has been. Indicators to measure performance are not yet clearly enough defined for the school to be sure of the extent to which it has successfully achieved its stated objectives as part of its own process of self-evaluation. In all other respects, school planning is very effective and helps to unite school and staff in the pursuit of important common goals.
64. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's progress in achieving the targets that it sets itself to be achieved in GCSE examinations are well managed. The school collects, analyses and uses performance data well to determine how successful it has been in achieving set targets.
65. Funds are used and managed very well. In recent years, the headteacher and governors have worked tirelessly to secure additional funding and very good use has been made of it. Accommodation and equipment have been substantially improved to benefit pupils' opportunities for learning. Overall, the school achieves good value for the income it receives. It achieves good standards compared with similar schools. It gives its pupils a good range of learning opportunities and makes very good provision for extra-curricular activities to extend their learning and achievement. Regular consultation with pupils, parents and staff takes place. Parents and staff express confidence in the good management and leadership of the school, and very strongly endorse the headteacher's contribution to the school's continuing success. The school achieves good value for the services it purchases.
66. Staffing is good. The school has an adequate number of staff to teach the National Curriculum and religious education and there is a good match of staff experience and qualifications to timetabled requirements. There is a suitable balance of men and women teachers and of staff with more experience and those newer to teaching. Overall, staff are well qualified; there is only a small amount of non-specialist teaching.

The school does not find it any more difficult to recruit and retain staff than most schools. However, staff illness and long-term absences have resulted in the use of temporary teachers in some subjects, for example in science and modern foreign languages, where learning has been adversely affected by the lack of continuity caused by substantial use of supply teachers. These difficulties have been beyond the school's control and the use of supply staff has proved expensive. Unfortunately, some pupils have been timetabled for more than one teacher who has had extended absence, and this has affected their quality of learning. In modern foreign languages, teachers have attempted to switch classes to overcome the difficulties, but this has caused additional pressures on teachers and standards have been affected.

67. The strong team of special needs support staff provide a wide range of support and are very well led by the co-ordinator. They give a good quality of support – as far as time allows. The number of non-teaching staff giving good support to learning includes technicians who work in science, design and technology and information and communication technology. There is no technical support in art or music and this imposes additional pressures on teachers in these subjects. There are foreign language assistants for both French and German and they provide valuable support to pupils learning these languages. The librarian and assistant in the learning resource centre manage pupils and resources there well. A sufficient number of administrative, caretaking and catering staff contribute well to the good management of the school.
68. There is a rigorous induction system for newly qualified teachers and staff new to the school. The professional development of staff is well organised and in-service training is suitably linked to the needs of the school and individual teachers. Teachers regularly observe one another teach and this helps to identify their professional training needs. There is an annual residential staff conference, which addresses issues identified collectively by school and staff, such as the strategies for literacy and numeracy. The conference provides an intensive social as well as professional occasion and is highly valued by staff. The school enjoys good relationships with teacher training institutions, and school and students benefit from this. Adequate funds are set aside for this and clear records kept.
69. The quality and range of accommodation are good overall for the numbers of pupils on roll and the curriculum on offer. There have been considerable improvements since the last inspection. There is now a learning resource centre of excellent quality, a newly opened learning support unit (for pupils with special educational needs), refurbished design and technology rooms and continuing development to provide better outdoor accommodation for sport. The whole school site is now fenced. This has improved security arrangements and overcome the problem of vandalism and intruders on site reported at the time of the last inspection and subsequently. Most subjects have specialist rooms grouped conveniently together to assist departmental management and co-ordination. Classrooms contain good displays of pupils' work and subject information, providing a stimulating environment in which to learn. Display in the mathematics department is of excellent quality. Although there are sufficient classrooms for music, provision of spaces for instrumental practice are inadequate; there is also a lack of storage space for musical instruments.
70. Lack of ventilation and natural light in the older parts of the building are considerable weaknesses. These difficulties mainly affect the science and music departments but one classroom in the English department and another in modern foreign languages also suffer these difficulties. Lack of ventilation and natural light have a negative impact on standards of teaching and learning. The warm, airless atmosphere leads to restiveness in some pupils and it is not helpful to teachers or pupils to have to work all

day in these conditions. In a German lesson, for example, the atmosphere induced sleepiness in some pupils. Most of the lessons seen during the inspection in which pupils' attitudes or behaviour were unsatisfactory were conducted in inadequately ventilated classrooms. The school is concerned to overcome the heating and ventilation problem. A professional survey of the complex system that operates throughout the school is planned and is due to be undertaken before the end of the current term. However, the school is likely to require substantial additional funding, beyond its own resources, to remedy the difficulties.

71. The quality of learning resources is good overall. There have been substantial improvements since the last inspection. Particularly noteworthy is the development of the now well-stocked learning resource centre, with its good range of books and periodicals, together with good computer facilities. Two well-equipped computer suites and access to the adjacent indoor sports facilities of the recreation centre provide resources of good quality. Although there are some shortages of sheet-music for singing, for example, all departments have at least satisfactory resources to ensure that good teaching and learning of the curriculum can take place.
72. Since the last inspection, leadership at all levels has enabled the school to achieve good standards and has greatly improved the provision of accommodation and learning resources. There has been very good improvement in levels of support staffing, as required by a key issue of the last inspection. The amount of support made available to pupils with special educational needs and the numbers of technicians, administrative and library staff have improved considerably, and provision is now equivalent to that of all schools.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

73. In order for the school to improve its standards and provision further, the headteacher, staff and governors should:

- (1) Further improve pupils' learning in information and communication technology, by timetabling lessons to give pupils more time and continuity in learning the subject; and continue to extend its use across all subjects. *(See paragraphs 10, 27, 34, 79, 128, 132)*
- (2) Improve ventilation (and also provide natural light if possible) in those parts of the building where it is inadequate, especially classrooms currently used for science and music, by completing the planned survey of the building and using all appropriate means to obtain additional funding to complete these essential improvements. *(See paragraphs 13, 70, 98, 147)*
- (3) Ensure priorities identified in improvement planning are achieved, by stating the means by which progress towards objectives will be determined and using these to assist evaluation of the school improvement plan. *(See paragraph 63)*
- (4) Provide pupils with a clearer indication of how to improve their work and of the standards that they are achieving, by ensuring that the marking of their written work is of a consistently high standard and that they are informed of their levels of attainment against national standards. *(See paragraphs 24, 79, 97, 130, 154, 159)*

In addition to the key issues listed above, the school should consider including in its action plan the following issue relating to another weakness:

Extend links with the community, by further developing curricular links with primary schools and institutions providing education at age 16. *(See paragraph 33)*

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	147
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	40

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 7 – 11

Number	1	25	56	57	7	1	0
Percentage	1	17	38	39	5	1	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Percentage figures do not total 100 because of rounding.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	871
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	147
Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	26
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	205
English as an additional language	
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	10
Pupil mobility in the last school year	
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	23
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	24

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.9
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	70	110	180

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	33	43	48
	Girls	83	78	74
	Total	116	121	122
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	64 (62)	67 (62)	68 (58)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33 (23)	39 (35)	32 (23)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	32	49	48
	Girls	84	95	78
	Total	116	144	126
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	65 (62)	80 (77)	70 (66)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	27 (27)	60 (34)	32 (23)
	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 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	66	110	176

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	23	63	65
	Girls	51	109	110
	Total	74	172	175
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	42 (46)	98 (94)	99 (95)
	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	39.1 (41)

Per pupil	National	39 (38.4)
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Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	4
Black – other	0
Indian	11
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	2
White	851
Any other minority ethnic group	1

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	33	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	52.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	369

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.7
Key Stage 4	22.3

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
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	£
Total income	2353268
Total expenditure	2333510
Expenditure per pupil	2711
Balance brought forward from previous year	40233
Balance carried forward to next year	59991

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

871

Number of questionnaires returned

350

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	55	9	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	43	49	6	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	25	54	13	3	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	51	14	3	3
The teaching is good.	34	58	4	1	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	47	10	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	56	38	3	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	72	26	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	42	45	9	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	48	44	3	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	41	50	5	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	56	38	2	0	4

Figures that do not total 100 have been rounded.

Other issues raised by parents

Parents attending the meeting for parents before the inspection expressed confidence in the headteacher and the school. Some concerns were expressed about the absence of regular teachers because of illness and the effect of this on pupils' progress.

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

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well.
- All pupils gain results in GCSE English literature examinations in line with the national average.
- The teaching is effective so that pupils learn well in most lessons.
- Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and complete examination courses in English and in English literature.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils' performance, particularly that of boys, in the GCSE English (language) examination.
- More consistent approaches to the marking of pupils' written work.

74. Pupils achieve well in English by the end of Year 9. From below average starting points on entry to the school, they reach standards in English that are in line with the national average. Attainment in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2001 was close to the average for all schools and above the average attained in similar schools. Performance in English at 14 is very similar to what is achieved in mathematics and science. Girls' attainment is higher than that of boys, as it has been in the previous three years and is from entry to the school onwards. In the 2001 National Curriculum tests, girls' average point score was slightly above the national average. On the evidence of work seen during the inspection, pupils write competently, but with varying degrees of accuracy. Higher attaining pupils write particularly well in imaginative work and in response to poems, plays and novels. All pupils, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds and the very few for whom English is an additional language, showed skill at reading and interpreting shades of meaning and bias from newspaper extracts in media studies. Teachers provide a wide range of activities in lessons in both language and literature in Year 9, but give relatively few opportunities to pupils to write at length. Most pupils would benefit from having more opportunities to practise writing and redrafting longer stories, reports and reviews. On the evidence of work seen during the inspection, pupils with special educational needs made good progress. Many pupils arriving with standards of reading and writing well below the national average improve their skills by the age of 14.
75. Achievement is good by the end of Year 11. Pupils entering the school at age 11 with relatively low levels of speaking, reading and writing make good progress and complete double GCSE examination courses in English and English literature. All pupils attained a graded A* to G result in English and almost all gained the same in English literature in 2001. Girls are more successful than boys overall at all levels in the examinations. Nevertheless, the percentage of boys who attained GCSE grades A* to C in English literature in 2000 and 2001 was in line with the national average for boys. All pupils were particularly successful in English literature in 2001, when almost six out of ten gained a GCSE A* to C grade, a result close to the national average and one which compared well with the pupils' performance in their other subjects. In English in 2001, however, the attainment of GCSE grades A* to C by only four out of every ten pupils was

significantly below the national average and below the standards attained by these pupils in most of their other subjects. This is a similar pattern to that of the previous two years. It shows that pupils are more successful in examinations which test the areas which they have studied than they are in tackling new and unseen material. The department is now giving pupils more practice to remedy this.

76. Pupils' work seen during the inspection reflects their relative strengths in examinations. They are competent in recognising poetic and literary devices in writing because these are regularly practised. Towards the end of Year 11 pupils of all levels of attainment show perception in examining new poems and interpreting their meaning. For example, a group studying a Carol Ann Duffy poem, 'Stealing,' made perceptive comments on the use of slang, imagery and the possible motives of the thief. One pupil led the group towards a deeper understanding by noting the thief's loneliness as a reason for his unlikely theft of the snowman. Pupils with special educational needs receive good teaching and guidance that lead to good progress. Teachers are very adept at providing frameworks to guide the structure of their writing.
77. Satisfactory progress has been made in English since the last inspection. In particular, pupils' attainment in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests has improved steadily until it is now in line with the national average. Pupils' performance in GCSE English literature is in line with the national average but in GCSE English (language) it has been below this in the last two years. This is lower than was reported in 1997. Teaching is better overall, in that no examples of unsatisfactory teaching were seen during this inspection. Similarly, pupils with special educational needs are achieving better standards than they were at the time of the last inspection.
78. Teaching is mainly good in English. A few lessons seen were of a very high standard; none were less than satisfactory. Particularly good teaching in Year 7 allows pupils of all levels of competence to develop their skills well in the use of language and in spelling. They are helped to practise writing in different poetic styles and to read and interpret the meanings of poems. In a successful lesson on haiku (a Japanese form of verse), pupils practised using dictionaries to help to define new vocabulary and revise parts of speech. They rehearsed the linguistic requirements for writing haiku poems, before writing and illustrating their own poems and adding them to their personal anthologies. The lesson was stimulating for pupils of all levels of attainment and valuable for pupils with special educational needs, who received regular individual help from the class teacher. Time was used very productively. Another characteristic of many lessons is the good rapport enjoyed between teachers and pupils. It encourages older pupils, some of whom might otherwise be discouraged by lack of success in English, to persevere and complete the GCSE courses successfully.
79. Some aspects of teaching could be improved. In some lessons better use could be made of the 60 minutes to introduce a greater variety of linguistic activities. Some teachers make effective use of starter exercises in language, in line with the National Literacy Strategy, but others, as yet, do not use them regularly. More regular marking of their written work that provided immediate advice on how to improve it, rather than waiting for the assessment and grading of finished assignments, would help some pupils' progress. Teachers make little reference to National Curriculum levels in marking pupils' work in Years 7, 8 and 9, except in formal assessment exercises. In contrast, good use is made of GCSE grade criteria in teaching the examination groups in Years 10 and 11. Teachers generally do not use information and communication technology enough as a means of composing, drafting and editing their work.

80. The management of the department is effective in enabling all pupils to achieve well in all age groups. The department makes good use of school data on pupils' levels of attainment to set challenging targets for pupils and teachers to aim for. Monitoring of teaching and learning now takes place – another improvement since the last inspection. Important improvements still to be completed by the head of department and his team are the updating of schemes of work, and the revision and implementation of a departmental marking policy.

Literacy across the curriculum

81. Standards of literacy are good across the school. Although pupils' levels of attainment in verbal reasoning tests on entry are relatively low, their standards of reading and writing are close to the national average by the end of Year 9. Subject departments throughout the school are aware of the need to improve standards of literacy and to provide appropriate guidance to pupils, and they do so effectively. Good progress has been made in improving spelling and in encouraging the recognition and use of correct technical vocabulary within subjects. Teachers display relevant key words and the definitions of important terms in classrooms. Particularly good displays were seen in some English, design and technology, geography, mathematics and religious education rooms. A helpful recent initiative provides pupils in Year 7 with a personal 'word book'. This introduces new words from all subject areas, encourages pupils to seek definitions and provides guidance on how to improve spelling.
82. The school's awareness of literacy needs has been improved by the appointment of a literacy co-ordinator in 2000 and focus on a school training programme. The annual staff training conference in September 2001 provided an effective launch to the school's initiatives to introduce the National Literacy Strategy for Key Stage 3 (Years 7 to 9). The training of key members of staff and the involvement of consultants from the local authority have helped the school to move forward well. English schemes of work are being revised in line with the national guidance. All teachers have received a helpful introduction to ways of improving pupils' skills in speaking and literacy. Training sessions at the conference on language starter activities, use of connectives and the marking of written work have helped to improve teaching. Good language starter exercises were seen in lessons during the inspection. Particularly effective spoken and written language work was seen in some life skills lessons. The 'catch up' programme for 45 Year 7 pupils with below average skills in English at the age of 11 was introduced in January 2002. This is now working effectively. It is well organised and it is enjoyed by the pupils.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9.
- The teaching is good.
- The head of department gives clear direction to the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment procedures do not provide an accurate measure of pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9.
- Computers are not used well enough to support learning.

- Time allocated to the subject in Years 10 and 11 does not allow the syllabus to be covered well enough.

83. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 9, in relation to their standards on entry to the school at the start of Year 7, is good. They enter the school with standards that are below average, but by the end of Year 9 their standards are at the national average. In Year 7, pupils' skills in using number are not well developed but by the end of Year 9 most pupils' skills are satisfactory. For example, in Year 7 many pupils have difficulty in recalling multiplication tables mentally, but by the end of Year 9 most are confident in doing simple calculations in their heads. Data-handling skills are good. Pupils produce appropriate tables to record information and draw a range of graphs, including pie charts, accurately. Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of spatial concepts and the most competent use Pythagoras' Theorem confidently. Algebraic skills are weak for all except for higher attainers. Problem-solving skills are satisfactory. Pupils identify patterns and find rules in investigations well. In the 2001 Year 9 National Curriculum tests, attainment was average when compared with that of all schools nationally and above average when compared with that of similar schools. Boys' results are not as good as those of girls from entry to the school onwards. However, these results represent good achievement in relation to the standards attained by girls and boys when they joined the school. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve as well as others throughout the school. Results have improved faster than those nationally during the last two years. Results in mathematics were similar to those in English and science.
84. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 11, in relation to their standards at the end of Year 9, is satisfactory. Most pupils' skills in use of number are satisfactory. Competent pupils who learn quickly use numbers with confidence, but pupils who cannot learn as quickly are still able to understand how to estimate answers to calculations. Algebraic skills continue to be weak for all but higher attainers, but develop well in Years 10 and 11. Pupils' understanding of shape and space is satisfactory. Competent pupils use formulae for finding lengths of arcs and areas of sectors of circles confidently, although less competent pupils lack confidence in using protractors to measure and draw angles. Data-handling skills are good; all pupils in Year 11 use frequency tables to calculate a range of measures and draw graphs confidently. Most pupils' problem-solving skills are satisfactory. They identify patterns and rules and predict and test hypotheses. In the 2001 GCSE examinations, the percentage of pupils gaining grades A* to C was slightly below average. These results represent satisfactory achievement for boys and girls of all ethnic backgrounds, but boys continue to perform less well than girls, as they do from entry to the school onwards. The proportion gaining grades A* to G was average. Pupils performed as well in mathematics as they did in most of their other subjects. Results in 2001 were not as good as those in 2000, although a significant improvement was made from those of 1999, when they were below average.
85. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Pupils' investigative skills and their capacity to describe and explain their problem-solving activities have improved. Pupils now make good progress as a result of significant improvements in the quality of teaching. The provision of textbooks has improved, although computers are still not used well enough to support learning.
86. The overall quality of teaching is good. As a result of this good teaching, the quality of learning is good. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and the few for whom English is an additional language, achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11. Progress in Years 10 and 11 is hampered by insufficient timetabled time to consolidate new learning well enough, especially for quick learners of the

subject. All teachers have good subject knowledge that helps them to explain new ideas clearly and to develop pupils' skills and understanding. Lesson planning is good. Good links are made between lessons and tasks are well matched to pupils' needs. Starter activities are being used well in many lessons to develop pupils' mental skills. Teachers regularly share the learning objectives for lessons with pupils at the start, although time at the end of lessons is not always used well enough to make certain that pupils have learned what was intended. Good relationships between teachers and pupils ensure that teachers usually manage and organise their classes well. This usually results in pupils listening attentively during discussions, concentrating on the work set and working well together. Teaching is least effective where teachers do not manage pupils well enough. Questioning is generally good, although sometimes teachers do not explore well enough what pupils already know about the topics covered. Appropriate methods are used to help pupils learn, although computers are not readily available to be used to support learning in lessons. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is good as a result of good teaching. Work is well matched to their needs and effective support is provided in lessons in Years 7 to 9, although none is available in Years 10 and 11. Teachers set clear expectations for pupils, and they usually get the good behaviour that they expect. In some classes, however, a small minority of pupils, girls and boys, do not behave well enough. Good use is made of homework to build upon pupils' learning. Marking of pupils' work is good and it usually has comments about what pupils should do to improve. Good attention is given to pupils' literacy skills and key subject words are displayed in all classrooms.

87. Departmental leadership and management are good. Very good planning to implement the curriculum, including the National Numeracy Strategy in Year 7, ensures good progress as pupils move through the school. The head of department provides clear direction for the development of the subject. Teachers support each other well and there is a clear commitment to raising standards by all. A formal process for the monitoring of teaching is in place and is having a good impact on improving standards in the subject. Satisfactory assessment procedures are in place. However, they do not provide an accurate assessment of pupils' standards at the end of Year 9. The achievement of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is adversely affected by insufficient timetabled time.

Numeracy across the curriculum

88. The effectiveness of the teaching of the key skills of numeracy across the school is satisfactory. The teaching of numeracy in mathematics lessons is good. The National Numeracy Strategy for Years 7 to 9 has been well implemented in mathematics lessons. All lessons are well planned to incorporate the development of pupils' numerical skills. As a result, standards of numeracy improve well as pupils move through school.
89. Satisfactory attention is being given in most other subjects to the development of pupils' numeracy, although the development of a whole-school approach is at an early stage. A numeracy co-ordinator has been appointed and subject departments have been made aware of the objectives of the national strategy. Pupils' standards of numeracy are generally average across the school. These are reflected, for example, in science, where pupils use formulae confidently and manage a range of apparatus for taking accurate measurements correctly. Pupils draw graphs of experimental data well. In design and technology, pupils are taught basic numerical skills well. They are confident when measuring materials and analyse results of surveys well. In geography, there is good teaching of scale and measurement and pupils use a variety of graphs confidently and accurately.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- The good methods employed for the development of pupils' independent learning.
- The good use of literacy to promote pupils' learning.
- The willingness of staff to give their own time to out-of-school lessons to improve pupils' standards.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in GCSE examinations.
- Pupils' understanding of practical work – why they are doing what they are doing, what it means and how it is recorded.
- Access to natural light and ventilation for better control of temperature and humidity.

90. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. Pupils enter the school from a large number of primaries where their experience has varied widely in the depth and range of topics covered. Their attainment on entry is below average, especially that of most boys. By the end of Year 9, the proportion of both sexes reaching the national expectation of level 5 in the National Curriculum tests is in line with the national average. As the course progresses, girls and boys from all ethnic backgrounds produce greater volumes of written work. Topics are covered in more detail, and pupils' levels of skill and range of knowledge increase considerably. Year 7 pupils consolidate their previous learning and extend their knowledge of the origins of oil and its separation into useful products by fractional distillation. They perform simple practical experiments competently, such as testing foods for glucose and starch. By Year 9, pupils working on the topic of speed know how to calculate acceleration. They understand the effects of friction and streamlining and how light gates are used for timing.
91. Pupils' attainment in the 2001 Year 9 National Curriculum tests was at the national average for all schools. When compared with those of similar schools, standards were above average. Although boys and girls were at the national average in attaining level 5, girls outperformed boys at level 6, as anticipated from their standards on entry. Taken over the last three years, results show a rising trend. The school's performance in science is similar to that found in English and mathematics.
92. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall. Pupils obtain the results from GCSE examinations that might be expected from their Year 9 performance. The more competent pupils achieve well and exceed what might reasonably have been expected. During Years 10 and 11, written work shows a steady expansion of topic breadth, use of skills and a fuller understanding. Knowledge gained earlier is reinforced and extended. Work in Year 10 demonstrates that pupils can manage practical work on turning forces and levers. Year 11 pupils know about the advantages and disadvantages of pesticides and biological control. Their knowledge of acids has been extended to include titration and the recovery of salts from neutralised bases. However, although pupils manage practical work and extend their knowledge, their understanding of the implications and results of what they do is often insufficient for all but the most competent to make good progress.
93. In GCSE examination in 2001, the percentage of pupils attaining grades A* to C and A* to G were below average compared with results in all schools and average with those of similar schools. Girls outperform boys as they do from entry to the school onwards.

Observation of lessons and examination of the pupils' work show that the standards of the present pupils are similar to those of last year. There has been no clear trend in the results over the past three years. Performance in GCSE examinations is weaker than that seen in English and mathematics and should be higher.

94. In all years, pupils with special educational needs are well known to their teachers, who grade the work appropriately and sometimes produce work specially tailored to their needs. Although these pupils receive little support outside this, most make good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans and cope well with the work.
95. Pupils use mathematics reasonably competently. They are encouraged to draw accurate graphs, to measure precisely and to perform simple calculations. Good attention is paid to developing literacy skills. Pupils are presented with keywords for each lesson. They are encouraged to read aloud and to themselves. Spelling is emphasised as are written responses in complete sentences. Their independent learning results in much good and extensive written work, especially concerning the contributions of famous scientists. The Internet is used to collect information, as are the school's intranet and CD-ROMs. Pupils undertake data-logging experiments and use *Excel* to generate graphs competently. Their achievement in using information and communication technology for science is satisfactory, and this area of the curriculum is under further development.
96. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are much higher, although those at GCSE have declined. The new head of department has brought about many improvements and more are in train. New and more appropriate schemes of work are being developed, as are systems for the use of assessment and targets. Independent learning and literacy have been successfully promoted and the use of information and communication technology has been extended.
97. Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory, although it varies in quality from very good to poor. Lessons are carefully planned and organised with clear objectives, which are shared with pupils. Good use is frequently made of keywords to provide a framework for each lesson. Most lessons begin by checking and reinforcing what was learned last time to provide a suitable starting point, but time to consolidate new learning at the end is not always sufficient. Where classes comprise pupils of similar competence, work is suitably adapted, and higher attainers receive more demanding work. A strong feature is the development of independent learning, and often use is made of the learning resource centre. Lessons provide pupils with good factual information and their learning is checked at regular intervals by teachers' questions. In the best lessons, pupils' ideas are sought and they are then encouraged to develop them by means of skilfully posed questions. Where lessons are less successful, class management is often insecure so that pupils do not learn as they should. Practical work is usually carried out successfully, but pupils often have little idea of why they are doing what they are doing and what it means. These lessons have insufficient challenge and interest. Almost all written work is marked, much of it with useful comments and suggestions for improvement, although there is too much variation between the practice of different teachers. Homework is usually set and provides a useful extension to learning. The willingness of teachers to devote their own time to out-of-school lessons to improve pupils' learning has a positive effect on standards and relationships. Pupils generally respond well to science, especially practical work. They usually behave well so long as there is plenty for them to do. They work best when they are asked to have ideas and to develop them by teachers' questions, individual research or practical experiment.

98. The subject is well led and managed by a hardworking and thoughtful head of department. The curriculum is good and new schemes of work are nearing completion. It is taught to a standard that allows higher attainers to reach high standards in examinations. The subject is enhanced by a science club and visits to such places as the Science and Industry Museum in Manchester and universities. Assessment is done regularly and well by end-of-unit tests, which are graded and given the National Curriculum levels that pupils attain. GCSE examination results are carefully analysed and used to plan improvements. New systems of recording and use of information are under development to improve individual target setting and to identify individual problems. Although there are large well-kept laboratories, the accommodation is unsatisfactory because of poor ventilation and the complete absence of windows. This causes high temperatures and humidity, especially in hot weather, that impact unfavourably on teaching and learning and contribute to pupils' unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour in some lessons. The resources are currently being increased to a satisfactory level, with the help of a significant rise in funding. Two hardworking technicians efficiently deploy and maintain the resources, despite having limited time and storage space. The excellent resources in the learning resource centre, which include computers linked to the Internet, a wide selection of books, scientific periodicals, CD-ROMs and videos, support the work of the department very well. Recently there have been problems with the absence of some teachers caused by illness. The uncertainties and difficulties caused have affected the learning of some pupils unfavourably. At the time of the inspection one third of the specialist teachers were not present.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- The quality of expressive work in drawing and painting.
- The use of art history in the development of practical work.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment of attainment by Year 9.
- Under-achievement by some pupils in GCSE examinations.

99. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 9, from their level on entry to the school in Year 7, is good. They develop knowledge, skills and understanding in a range of creative activities. Studies of the local environment are strongly expressive. Pupils' work with pottery also reaches a good standard. The curriculum at this stage is broad and varied and fully meets National Curriculum requirements. Information and communication technology is being used increasingly and this represents an improvement since the last inspection. Pupils use word processing widely and are able to use scanning and printing equipment, together with digital cameras. Literacy is addressed by the analysis of subject terms as they arise in lessons and word lists are displayed in the studios. Pupils also experience measuring and scaling which reinforces numeracy.

100. Girls and boys from all ethnic backgrounds, including those with English as an additional language, achieve well in relation to their competence for the subject. Pupils with special educational needs particularly benefit from sensitive individual tuition in class and make very good progress. The individual attention given to pupils, together with the nature of projects, places no limits on progress and allows gifted and talented

pupils to reach their full potential. Attainment generally, by the end of Year 9, is at the average expected nationally.

101. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is satisfactory. Pupils develop their strengths in expressive and imaginative work in a continuous way from Year 9. They are able to use colour boldly and imaginatively in pictorial composition. Art history is incorporated effectively into pupils' creative work. They are able to work independently and show creative self-confidence. In some cases, however, ideas outstrip technique and knowledge of method. This has an adverse effect upon learning, particularly in the case of average attainers, and is reflected in GCSE performance, where results were below average in 2001 and have fluctuated considerably in recent years. Work seen was, in many cases, of an above average standard, but overall the level of attainment was consistent with examination standards and was below average. Literacy and numeracy continue to be developed in the same manner as in the earlier years, and information and communication technology is widely used, especially for research and for the recording of visual material with the digital camera. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good, aided again by individual encouragement and the nature of projects which allow for success at the widest range of levels. For the same reasons, gifted and talented pupils make satisfactory progress.
102. Since the last inspection, significant improvement has taken place in the provision for information and communication technology in the department and in the level of achievement from entry to Year 9. This improvement, however, is not sustained in Years 10 and 11, where attainment continues to fluctuate.
103. The quality of teaching is good for all age groups. Lessons are prepared carefully and objectives are made clear to pupils. A main strength is the high quality of one-to-one tuition during lessons. Relationships with pupils are very good and there is a very good working atmosphere in studios. A comparative weakness is the level of challenge provided to some pupils in Years 10 and 11. This allows too great a degree of self-determination in the framing and development of project ideas. The result is a degree of under-performance by pupils of average attainment in GCSE examinations. Assessment is thorough and detailed, but assessment of performance related to National Curriculum levels is not currently applied with full confidence. There is a need for development in this area of assessment to ensure overall accuracy in the evaluation of pupils' performance.
104. The management of the department is good. The head of department is active and highly committed. Relationships among staff are good and there is shared concern for the success of the subject. Documentation is informative, well written and clear. The quality of display is outstanding, operating as a learning resource for pupils and as a source of pleasure within the school. Resources for learning are adequate. The accommodation is of good quality with roomy studios and good storage facilities. Though the department lacks the services of a non-teaching technician, it is well staffed with appropriately qualified and experienced teachers.

DRAMA

105. Drama has been introduced into the school curriculum from September 2001 for pupils in Years 7 and 8. This provides opportunities to strengthen the speaking and listening components of the National Curriculum's requirements for English. In particular it allows pupils to practise the activities of improvisation and working in role, devising and performing plays and discussing and evaluating their own and other pupils' performances. In addition, the course is intended to develop pupils' self-confidence and their communication skills and to help them to behave in more co-operative and considerate ways. It is already proving to be successful in achieving these purposes.
106. Pupils achieve well on the course. Those seen in Year 8, who receive one lesson per fortnight, spoke clearly, confidently and fluently in presentations to the whole group. Year 7 pupils, who have one lesson each week, have developed good skills in miming and the technique of freeze-framing, enabling them to present short scenes to an audience. They are beginning to develop appropriate skills of reviewing and evaluating their performance. Both girls and boys from all ethnic backgrounds have made good progress in the limited time allowed. The attainment of the Year 8 pupils seen is average for their age, despite the restricted time for developing specialist knowledge. Year 7 pupils with more timetabled time are developing good skills of communication through mime. The skills in devising, rehearsing and then performing an improvisation to an audience are good for their age.
107. The teaching is very good. Lessons are well planned in detail to maximise the use of lesson time, to provide a good range of activities and to use the good drama facilities possessed by the school. The quality of the Year 7 lesson seen was improved by the teacher's appropriate use of mood music and stage lighting to enhance the theatrical impact of the pupils' performance. Pupils were helped to feel that their improvisation was valued. Teaching and learning can be held back in Year 8 whenever a lesson is missed for any reason. This leads to a gap of at least four weeks and a loss of impetus in the development of practical skills. The teacher has built very good working relationships with the classes in a short time.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Very good achievement by most pupils over time, reflected in good results in GCSE examinations.
- Good teaching and relationships lead to good learning in most lessons by all pupils.
- Very good leadership and management give all pupils their full entitlement to the National Curriculum in design and technology within the limits of resources.

Areas for improvement

- Lack of opportunity for pupils' to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in programming a machine to manufacture a simple product and make general use of computers to support their learning in Years 7 to 9.
- Closer links with partner primary schools so that pupils gain experience in sequence that effectively builds on their previous learning.
- More technical support in food technology, so that teachers' time is not taken up with tasks that are more appropriately handled by technical support staff.

108. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9. From below average standards on entry to the school, they reach the average standard expected nationally by the end of Year 9. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 also show that most pupils achieve the nationally expected average level. This judgement is fully supported by inspection evidence. From early in Year 7, pupils are given good opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding in a broad range of materials. They design and make a key tag in metal, or a fruit salad in food technology, for example. Their skills are further extended and developed in Year 8 by successfully designing and making pizzas, and toys constructed with riveting techniques, and a range of graphical activities. By Year 9, pupils show good levels of creativity and innovation in their development of designs in different materials. Most are able to understand a design brief, to carry out effective research and to produce items which they enjoy making. They prize their work and, in the process of making, show good solutions to the original design specification. Presentation and graphical communication skills are good in the work of the more competent pupils. Other pupils, including those with special educational needs, have satisfactory skills of presentation, make good progress and attain to their potential. Almost all pupils' making skills are good and most pupils are able to evaluate what they make effectively and identify how they can improve their work by setting targets for improvement for the next design task.
109. By Year 11 pupils' achievement is well above expectations in relation to their attainment on entry in Year 7. Most pupils produce design folios that show satisfactory research and development of their design ideas with good graphical communication skills. In graphics, a significant proportion of pupils, mostly girls, produce work of good quality with good use of a computer to present their ideas. In all material areas, the work of most girls and more capable boys is meticulously developed with a greater emphasis on research and a clearer development of their ideas than seen in some other pupils' files of work. Pupils' coursework folders in food technology show good skills of presentation and most pupils have a satisfactory understanding of the chemical and nutritional values of a broad range of food products. They also relate their work well to industrial practices. In graphics, a very small minority, mostly boys, produce disorganised folios of work and generally show much weaker graphical communication skills than the more competent pupils. Lower attainers' skills in presenting their work are weak. Pupils' spelling, apart from that of the most competent, is often inaccurate. Overall, practical skills are good. For example, in a Year 10 food technology lesson pupils showed good skills in shortening flour using a range of fats and oils to produce biscuits, prior to evaluating the various outcomes. In 2001 and over the past few years, the proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to C in GCSE examinations has been in line with the national average. There is relatively little difference in results across each material area. Girls attain better than boys in the subject, and achieve in line with girls nationally. Boys attain below boys nationally but still achieve well and make good progress. Pupils attain better results in GCSE examinations in the subject than they do in almost all of their other subjects.
110. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The department has been successful in resolving most of the issues raised, within the limits of the resources available. Overall, standards have been maintained and considerably improved in food technology. Accommodation has been greatly improved. Rooms are now well furnished and equipped. Wall displays and examples of work of good quality effectively support and stimulate pupils in their learning. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported on a one-to-one basis and are provided with teaching material that meets their individual needs well.

111. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed and the teaching in a significant proportion of lessons was very good and occasionally outstanding. In a very small minority of lessons, although the teaching is satisfactory, the methods used are not always sufficiently successful in challenging pupils' creative and intellectual effort. The marking of pupils' work is good and clearly informs them about what they need to do to improve. Teachers do not always rigorously follow up some critical but constructive comments about incomplete or untidy work. In the best lessons, teachers plan work well, have high expectations of their pupils and effectively challenge gifted and talented pupils with extended work. Pupils who learn slowly, including those with special educational needs, are well supported individually. The very small minority of pupils for whom English is an additional language are provided with good pictorial presentations that enable them to understand the work and to achieve successful outcomes. Lists of new technical words are provided in most areas and are particularly useful to pupils, who find them very helpful in their writing. This practice is having a positive effect on the development of pupils' literacy. In Years 7 to 9, pupils are occasionally encouraged to use a computer to research and present their work, but this is not yet common practice. Also, pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills in the use of computers to manufacture a product are underdeveloped because of a lack of equipment. In most lessons, teaching successfully generates a positive attitude to learning. Pupils are expected to work supportively and well with one another when sharing tools and equipment. Their behaviour is good, because the tasks set by teachers are mostly well matched to their interest and intellect and, as a result, pupils enjoy what they do.
112. The head of department provides very good leadership with very clear educational direction for the work involved. He manages all the different aspects of the subject very effectively. For example, the monitoring of teaching and learning is thorough and has led to improved teaching styles and techniques. Professional development in the subject is well catered for, resulting in teachers who are well informed and show a very high commitment towards ensuring that pupils achieve appropriate standards for their potential levels of competence in the subject. Pupils are also greatly assisted by the hard work and efforts of the technician. However, time allocated for technical support is very low in food technology, and teachers are expected to carry out work that detracts from their primary objectives of teaching and promoting pupils' learning.

GEOGRAPHY

The overall provision in geography is **good**.

Strengths

- Pupils' positive attitudes to the subject.
- The quality of teaching.
- Provision for higher and lower attainers.
- Leadership and commitment of the team of teachers.

Areas for improvement

- Provision for those for whom GCSE is not an appropriate course.
- Use of information and communication technology.
- Day-to-day assessment.
- Pupils' imaginative and investigative writing.

113. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9. When they enter Year 7, their overall attainment is below average, but, by the end of Year 9, it is at the average level expected nationally.

Girls attain considerably higher standards than boys on entry to the school and this difference remains through Years 7, 8 and 9. The great majority of pupils make good progress in the subject, including in numeracy and literacy. This good level of achievement has been maintained for the last three years and is confirmed by accurate teacher assessments of standards in Year 9 and by the standards of work observed during the inspection. Basic geographical and numerical skills are put in place in Year 7 and pupils can measure line and angle. They use co-ordinates and latitude and longitude in exercises to locate different places correctly. They use map symbols and techniques successfully in their work. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, pupils accurately identified the site for the Commonwealth Games in Manchester.

114. Pupils' written skills develop well from Year 7 to Year 9. Their exercise books contain a good volume of well-written notes and extended pieces, such as a Year 9 account of the Exxon Valdez environmental disaster. There are some pieces of investigative work and attempts at imaginative writing, as in Year 9 pupils' 'letters home' about life in Japan and Year 8 pupils' homework, involving research on flooding. This type of imaginative and investigative writing, however, is an area for development, to match pupils' improving use of vocabulary.
115. In Years 10 and 11, pupils maintain the levels of progress seen in Years 7 to 9 and achieve satisfactorily. In lessons and work seen, their attainment continues to be in line with the national average. By Year 11, pupils have gained a good knowledge of place through world studies and they gain an understanding of geographical processes and patterns through work on climate, population and tectonics. This was seen in a Year 11 lesson for lower attainers on features of coastlines and in a well-attended after-school lesson on volcanoes.
116. By the end of Year 11, pupils have developed their investigative writing, although a significant number do not write in linked sentences well enough. Many have difficulty in remembering and using technical words correctly. Coursework, consisting of urban studies of Ashton-under-Lyne, shows that pupils can create hypotheses, gather and interpret data and reach good conclusions. They also improve their use of graphs to present data graphically and use geographical models to explain local urban development.
117. In 2001, the high level of achievement, from entry to Year 11, resulted in the best GCSE examination results ever attained in the subject in the school at grades A* to C. Standards were below the national average, but followed a steady upward trend and were within reach of the average. Boys' standards have shown significant improvement over the last three years and their results were close to the national average in 2001. They did better in geography than in most of the other subjects in which they took GCSE examinations. In 2001 and recent years, girls' results were more erratic and further below the national average than those of the boys, although there was some improvement in 2001. Girls did not attain as well in geography as in many other subjects that they took. The department is taking action to tackle occasional instances of girls' absence from GCSE examinations. It is also considering the suitability of the GCSE course, particularly for students of lower competence, because a very large proportion of each year group chooses the subject at age 14.
118. Since the last inspection, the department has made satisfactory improvement. High standards have been maintained in those areas considered to be good at the last inspection, for example in pupils' progress, the provision for high and low attainers, pupils' concentration and enjoyment of the subject, the teaching and leadership. Standards in GCSE examinations have improved. Better longer-term assessment and

more use of the National Curriculum levels reached by pupils have been put in place. One area which was unsatisfactory at the previous inspection was that computers were not used enough. Despite a new programme to give pupils knowledge of databases, the use of computers in classrooms still requires development.

119. The teaching is good throughout the school. Good planning and preparation of materials challenge pupils of all levels of attainment to learn. Pupils are well aware of what is expected of them and are well motivated by enthusiastic, knowledgeable presentation. Teachers use a good range of activities and make effective use of visual aids to help pupils to concentrate on their work. Pupils respond with keen interest in the subject and many attend after-school activities run by the teachers. Lessons are presented in a non-threatening manner with plenty of humour. This gives all pupils the confidence to involve themselves in the work. Good questioning by teachers and regular revisiting of themes and topics help to reinforce pupils' knowledge. Day-to-day marking is very regular, but could be strengthened by more constructive comment on how pupils might improve some areas of their work. More opportunity to read aloud in class is needed to improve further pupils' skills in literacy. Lessons are generally full of interest and are helped by very good relationships among pupils and between pupils and teachers. Pupils' attitudes are very positive and, overall, behaviour is good.
120. Pupils from all ethnic backgrounds have equal access to the curriculum. In the case of pupils on the special educational needs register and those who are gifted or talented, this is greatly assisted by the very careful and wide-ranging preparation and provision of appropriate learning materials that they receive. Pupils with special educational needs and the few with English as an additional language also make especially good progress when they receive help from support assistants. These pupils make good progress in relation to their levels of attainment.
121. The department is ably led. The head of department is assisted by a committed and united team that is working hard to maintain high standards of achievement while introducing new and improved methods of teaching, monitoring and assessing results.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well because of good teaching and learning.
- Pupils usually respond well in lessons and enjoy the subject.
- The leadership and management of the department are good.

Areas for improvement

- Lessons in Years 7 to 9 do not always contain enough variety to sustain pupils' interest for a whole lesson.
- There is insufficient provision for local history and visits to nearby places of historical interest in Years 7 to 9.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunity to use information and communication technology to support their work.

122. In Years 7 to 9, pupils achieve well and make good progress. They enter the school with below average historical skills and knowledge. By the end of Year 9, pupils from all ethnic backgrounds attain average standards. Girls enter the school attaining higher standards than boys and continue to do so in Year 9. Most pupils gain a sound understanding of the major events and changes in the periods that they have been

studying. For example, a Year 9 class was able to analyse the attitudes and feelings of different countries at the end of World War I. Most pupils use historical sources of evidence satisfactorily to extract information about past events. Although lower attaining pupils often struggle to see more than obvious information in pieces of evidence, higher attaining pupils make valid deductions about what the information tells them. Pupils make good progress in their written work over the three years, especially in their selection and organisation of material in answer to historical questions.

123. Pupils taking the GCSE course in Years 10 and 11 build on the progress made in the first three years and their overall achievements by the end of Year 11 are good. They develop a generally sound knowledge and understanding of the topics in the course. They use historical sources of evidence well. Higher and middle attaining pupils, for example, successfully evaluated the reliability and usefulness of a wide range of evidence when studying the local area. Pupils work hard to improve their written work. The best work is well structured and persuasive, as in some essays on the impact of the 1989 protests on the Chinese government. However, lower attaining pupils have difficulty in providing sufficient detail to support their arguments and some of their written work lacks detailed interpretation of the evidence considered. In the work seen, pupils attain average standards overall. Attainment of A* to C grades in GCSE examinations in the last three years ranged from slightly above the national average for all schools to slightly below. Boys' results have improved and last year boys did better than girls.
124. Good improvement has taken place in history since the last inspection. In Years 7 to 9 pupils are achieving better and making faster progress. Standards of attainment have been maintained in Years 10 and 11. The provision of materials to support the learning of lower attaining pupils has improved.
125. The teaching is good overall throughout Years 7 to 11 and pupils learn well as a result. Teachers' enthusiasm and knowledge of the subject are used effectively to engage pupils' interests and extend their learning. In Years 10 and 11, teachers' close focus on GCSE examination requirements particularly helps boys achieve better standards in their written work. In the best lessons, a good variety of methods is used. In a Year 7 lesson on the slave trade, for example, a wide range of different activities and tasks enabled pupils to make very good progress. In the few lessons that are less successful, progress is slower because they do not contain sufficient variety to sustain pupils' interest for the whole period. The work for lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs is carefully matched to their levels of competence, so that they make good progress in lessons. Teachers usually manage pupils well, which ensures good behaviour and positive attitudes. Pupils enjoy their history lessons.
126. The leadership and management of the department are good. Two teachers new to the school, one a newly qualified teacher, have been given good support. A carefully planned curriculum and scheme of work ensure consistency across the department. However, there is insufficient provision for local history and visits to nearby places of historical interest in Years 7 to 9 to extend pupils' experience and interest in the subject. Insufficient access to computers means that pupils are not given enough opportunities to use information and communication technology to support their work in history.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teachers make good use of the timetabled time available.
- Pupils take pride in their work.
- Some subjects use computers well to help pupils to learn.

Areas for improvement

- The subject needs more time and use across the curriculum so that pupils make better progress.
- Pupils do not evaluate their work sufficiently.
- Teachers' comments on pupils' work do not give enough advice on how individuals can improve.

127. Pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory, given the time made available to them for lessons regularly timetabled for this subject. When they enter the school at age 11, their standards are below average. By the end of Year 9, overall, their standards remain below the average expected nationally. Girls attain higher standards than boys from entry to the school onwards. Pupils from all ethnic backgrounds, including those with English as an additional language and also those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress in the timetabled time available. However, spelling and grammatical errors are apparent in many pupils' work. By the end of Year 9, pupils can design a web page and produce a simple graph from a spreadsheet.
128. In Years 10 and 11, pupils achieve satisfactorily on the timetabled information and communication technology course in the restricted time available. However, standards attained at the end of Year 11 remain below the national average. By Year 11, pupils can design documents such as an advertising leaflet and a fax header. They are able to select the best piece of software for a given task. However, they cannot evaluate their work in sufficient depth to attain the higher grades of the current examination course that they are following. Pupils do not analyse their own work enough to increase their understanding of its qualities and shortcomings. They lack the skills to annotate it to help them recall knowledge gained in previous lessons. They often cannot explain why they have arrived at a particular outcome in work that they have completed. They have not developed the good practice of maintaining comprehensive records of the ways in which pieces of work have developed. Some pupils lack the necessary competence or opportunity to measure, record or control equipment by using a computer. Girls' standards continue to be higher than those of boys, but they progress at a similar rate, irrespective of ethnic background. No pupils were entered for a public examination in the subject in 2001.
129. Good improvement has taken place since the previous inspection. Lessons in computing skills are now taught in Years 7 and 9. This has led to an improvement in standards, although these are still below average. The introduction of an examination course to be taken, eventually, by all pupils in Years 10 and 11 is providing the opportunity to raise standards. All pupils now receive their essential statutory entitlement to the subject, unlike the situation at the last inspection. The introduction of the post of head of department has improved the quality of assessment. The head of department has helped teachers of other subjects to use computers more effectively. The school has greatly increased the number of computers available and the ratio of machines to pupils is now at the national average. Two newly equipped suites of

machines are in place, and another is planned. The learning resource centre also provides access to modern computers. The improvement in resources for the subject has been very good.

130. The teaching is satisfactory at all ages. Only one unsatisfactory lesson was seen during the inspection, when the teaching was not well enough adapted for the range of all pupils' knowledge and skills in the subject. In all lessons, pupils learned best when they were encouraged to find things out for themselves. Year 9 pupils enjoyed experimenting with photographs to discover what they could do when using a graphics package. In this lesson, pupils worked more independently as they became more confident in their own skills. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly, so that pupils know the standard that they have reached. However, many comments on marked work do not inform pupils enough of what they should do to improve further. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to consider moral issues; a good example was seen when a Year 7 class considered whether images from a website were subject to copyright.
131. Teachers make good use of time to develop pupils' practical skills. Pupils present their work well. The pride they show in it helps them to improve. Insufficient time is given to developing pupils' skills in analysing their work, however. This leads to standards not being high enough for the higher attaining pupils to gain higher grades for coursework. Work is usually modified suitably for pupils with special educational needs and they receive more instruction to help them to learn. A classroom assistant is used effectively to support these pupils in information and communication technology lessons. The school has identified three pupils in Year 7 as having special talents in computing and provides appropriate work for them.
132. The head of department manages the subject well. He knows how pupils can develop their computing skills in other subjects, and he helps teachers of these subjects to contribute accurately to assessing pupils' skills. He has planned a course for the timetabled lessons for the subject that makes good use of the time allocated. However, too little time is given to the subject for pupils to develop their skills and achieve higher standards. In Years 7 and 9, only one 60-minute lesson is provided each fortnight for pupils in these year groups. Pupils do not currently have a timetabled lesson in information and communication technology in Year 8, although one is planned from next September. There is a lack of continuity in learning because of the time gap between lessons, and this is made worse if either teacher or pupil is absent. The gaps in time between lessons in Years 7 and 9 result in teachers having to spend too long consolidating what was covered two weeks earlier, before new work can be undertaken. During the week of the inspection, the second week of the term, a Year 9 class had not had a lesson for six weeks because of the recent two-week holiday and the teacher's unavoidable absence for the lesson immediately before this holiday. In Year 10, pupils receive three hours of lessons each fortnight for the newly introduced GNVQ course in information and communication technology, equivalent to two GCSE subject qualifications. Lesson time is not enough for some capable pupils to achieve the higher grades of this course in their current coursework. Teachers and some pupils give their own time out of school hours to work on the necessary topics, but this is not an adequate substitute for sufficient lesson time to meet the requirements of the course. Pupils do not have enough time to evaluate their work to the required depth. This is an essential requirement of the examination.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

133. Although there has been substantial improvement since the last inspection in the use of information and communication technology, insufficient use is made of this subject across the curriculum. Not enough use is made of computers and other equipment, for example, in English, mathematics, design and technology, geography, history and music to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum for use in all subjects. However, some good work is taking place in some of these and other subjects. Where information and communication technology is used, it enhances pupils' learning well. For example, pupils use computers well to design the control of traffic lights in design and technology. They use sensors competently to measure and record rates of cooling in practical work in science. In Years 10 and 11, not all pupils are given the opportunity to use computers to control events. However, this is managed appropriately in some situations. Some pupils in Year 10 are recording local and personal history to publish on the Internet. Not only does this activity develop their historical and computing skills, but it also helps to develop pupils' understanding of social and cultural matters. A clearing bank supports this project. The use of computers to help to describe God in religious education increases the opportunities for pupils to reflect on spiritual things.
134. All teachers have been trained to use computers in their teaching. Some teachers make good use of their skills in assessing pupils' attainment in information and communication technology. A good example was seen in a German lesson in which the teacher informed the pupils of what features of the word-search that they were designing would meet each level to be attained in information and communication technology; one girl was delighted to realise that her work contained the features required for National Curriculum level 5. Moderation of assessment of what pupils are achieving in information and communication technology is being introduced and this is increasing the accuracy of this work.
135. The learning resource centre is well equipped with computers and two new suites of machines have been established. These are major improvements since the last inspection and benefit pupils' learning very well. Pupils use computers enthusiastically at lunchtimes to continue work from lessons. For example, Year 7 pupils were observed researching information from the Internet on Chinese music. The school has adopted a realistic policy for use of the Internet and parents must give written consent before their children can have access. However, timetabled lessons for information and communication technology in Years 7, 9 and 10 take up many timetabled periods, reducing the opportunity for other subject teachers to use the computer rooms.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision for modern foreign languages is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching matches work to individual needs so that pupils achieve well.
- All pupils study both French and German.
- Leadership and management of the subject are good.
- Issues from the previous inspection have been managed well.

Areas for improvement

- Expectations for pupils' routine use of the foreign language.
- Pupils' pronunciation, especially in French.
- The development of pupils' skills in writing in Years 7 to 9.

136. By the end of Year 9, pupils achieve well, relative to their levels of attainment on entry to the school. They reach the nationally expected average level of attainment in both French and German by the end of Year 9, and this represents good progress during their first three years in the school. Pupils acquire vocabulary and increase their knowledge of language structure systematically as they study prescribed topics. In German they begin to understand unusual rules about word order and the use of capital letters for nouns. Regular exposure to the foreign languages in lessons consolidates their knowledge, so that listening and reading comprehension skills develop satisfactorily. Pupils of all levels of subject competence speak in full sentences and exchange information in role-play. Higher attainers manage to ask as well as answer questions. All pupils' pronunciation is insecure, particularly in French, and especially when they read from written prompts. Pupils write short paragraphs on familiar topics from Year 7. Though the complexity of their language increases with new learning, there is little evidence of progression to more extended or creative writing. Most pupils rely on using a set model on which to base their own writing, rather than writing more freely and independently. Content is better than accuracy, which sometimes prevents better communication. Work is well matched to ability, so that pupils with special educational needs and a small number identified as gifted achieve well, as do pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. In several lessons, boys made more confident oral contributions than girls.
137. In Years 10 and 11, pupils achieve satisfactorily. Average standards established by the end of Year 9 are sustained to the end of Year 11, indicating satisfactory progress overall. Pupils achieve better in German, the more popular of the two languages, than in French. They make satisfactory progress in listening and reading, as they extend their knowledge of vocabulary and tenses. Higher attaining pupils, including some boys, read increasingly long and demanding extracts with understanding. Average and lower attainers understand most details in shorter printed extracts, signs and messages. In oral work, these pupils convey information at a basic level. They need much support to produce brief sentences. Higher attaining pupils have more skill in speaking in French or German, sometimes with the foreign language assistants. Pronunciation continues to be better in German than in French, but remains an obstacle to accurate communication for most pupils. There is better progress in writing than in earlier years. Written coursework for GCSE examinations provides a strong structure to guide pupils' work. The best writing is good in both languages, as pupils combine tenses, opinions and effective linking phrases to write about past holidays, healthy living, school and daily routine. Average and lower attaining pupils tackle the same topics and benefit from models to reach an acceptable standard. There is no trend in GCSE examination results in either language. Results tend to reflect the effects of long-term staff absences. In 2001, results in GCSE examinations at grades A* to C were at the national average in French, but well below in German. In both languages, girls did much better than boys, beyond the national difference in performance. However, both boys and girls exceeded expectations based on their earlier attainment, and achieved as well in French and German as they did in most of their other subjects. All pupils were entered for the GCSE examinations and all achieved a grade across the full range, A* to G. This shows that lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs did at least as well as could be expected.
138. Since the last inspection, there have been significant improvements in the quality of teaching, the provision of reading resources and foreign language assistants for both subjects, and in subject leadership. At the previous inspection, there were major concerns about unsatisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11, especially by boys in French, and about the narrow range of teaching techniques. Progress in Years 10 and

11 is now satisfactory and builds on pupils' good achievement in their earlier years in the school. In the 2001 GCSE examinations, boys did much better in French than in German at grades A* to C, and as well as in their other subjects. There is now a good range of teaching styles. There is less evidence of noisy or disruptive behaviour. Overall, results have improved, sometimes reaching the national average. This represents a good rate of improvement.

139. The quality of teaching and learning is good, overall. Teaching was good in over half of all the lessons seen, and very good in a quarter of these. There was no unsatisfactory teaching by regular teachers. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Their extensive use of the foreign language to conduct lessons helps to improve pupils' listening skills. Pupils also benefit from teachers' good knowledge of GCSE examination requirements. Teaching of basic skills is satisfactory. Teachers assist pupils to develop their literacy by using reading schemes, but little contribution is made to supporting their numerical skills. A programme of lessons using information and communication technology in Years 7 to 9 improves pupils' computer skills. A Year 8 German class, for example, used a good range of techniques to produce an illustrated menu for a restaurant.
140. Pupils learn the foreign languages well because teachers' planning of lessons is effective, and teachers are skilled at matching work well to pupils' standards in the subject. However, a weakness in the planning of lessons is that teachers do not ensure that pupils use the foreign language in routine situations in class, for example when asking for equipment. Therefore, opportunities are lost to improve pupils' skills in speaking in the foreign language. The foreign language assistants contribute well and are used well by teachers. Teachers direct questions well in class to ensure that all pupils are involved and make progress. The small number of boys in many groups, pupils with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic backgrounds are regularly well involved by teachers' skilful questioning. Teachers enable talented pupils to make good progress overall, especially in Year 9, and in German in Years 10 and 11, where they benefit from classes formed according to pupils' competence in the subjects. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is satisfactory. Their comments help pupils to learn from mistakes and give advice on how to improve. Teachers use homework well to consolidate work done in class. The range of homework is restricted because textbooks are not taken home. As a result of good teaching, the vast majority of pupils behave well, participate actively in lessons and often find the work enjoyable. On a few occasions, pupils' concentration wavered during the last quarter of the lesson, and irrelevant conversation reduced the impact of the reading and writing being attempted.
141. The subject is well led and managed. Improvements have been made despite numerous long-term absences of teachers, affecting pupils' continuity in learning. The effort needed to cope with staff absences erodes the time available for observing lessons, but the head of department maintains a good grasp of efficiency through observation, the sampling of pupils' work, departmental meetings and evaluation of results. Strong features include good assessment procedures and analysis of assessment data. Resources and accommodation for the subject are satisfactory, although in three classrooms lack of effective ventilation sometimes causes drowsiness and affects concentration and learning.

MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision in music is **satisfactory** in classroom work and **good** in instrumental tuition.

Strengths

- Well above average numbers choose to take music in Years 10 and 11.
- The range of opportunities and quality of instrumental tuition are good.
- Voice tuition is very good.
- The range of opportunities and standards in extra-curricular work are good.

Areas for improvement

- Standards are below average; performing, composing and listening skills are underdeveloped.
- Pupils do not sing enough or make sufficient use of their own instruments in classroom work in all years.
- Accommodation for the subject is unsatisfactory and adversely affects teaching and learning.

142. Pupils enter the school with variable musical experience related to the quality of their musical education in their previous schools, their interest and levels of support at home. A small number of pupils enter with above average experience of the subject, but most pupils enter with below average attainment in music, and teachers' assessments confirm this. By the end of Year 9, standards are below average but, overall, achievement is satisfactory, given the below average standards in the subject with which pupils join the school. Most pupils are working at about National Curriculum level 4, but some talented pupils attain higher levels. In recent years, GCSE examination results have been below average when compared with those of all schools, but pupils have achieved satisfactorily during Years 10 and 11 in relation to their earlier levels of attainment.
143. Pupils sing irregularly and insufficiently after Year 7. They do not sing as a class in work for the GCSE examination. This is a major weakness because pupils do not experience or enjoy an appropriate range of repertoire or develop their skills in reading music. Their instrumental skills are underdeveloped. They find it difficult to play in time when using instruments and make insufficient use of their own instruments in class. In composing, some pupils have imaginative ideas, but only the most musically experienced know how to use devices and structures to develop pieces confidently. Skills in reading music are poor. Most pupils listen respectfully to examples played in recordings and to each other when performing, but the technical vocabulary they use in appraising is too small. Their general musical knowledge, for example of instruments, composers, forms, structures and well-known pieces of music, is poor. At all levels, the attainment and achievement of girls is higher than that of boys.
144. In GCSE work, good numbers opt for music and pupils' achievement is satisfactory over Years 10 and 11. However, standards in Year 11 are below average and well below in Year 10. There is a wide range of attainment in the larger groups. In Year 11, pupils' performing skills are average below grade 3; four pupils are working for grade 6 but others are still at the beginner stage. Almost all pupils take advantage of the instrumental and voice tuition available privately or offered free by the school, but most pupils disadvantage themselves by not taking part in extra-curricular work. The most musically experienced show good understanding of devices and structures in composing, but many find the work difficult because of their lack of basic musical skills. The computers and other musical technologies in the department benefit pupils and they have satisfactory skills to create music using this equipment. Pupils listen well to recorded extracts and to each other but their choice of words used to appraise their work is too limited, and their general musical knowledge is poor. Pupils' attitudes to the subject vary too much and this affects attainment in work for the GCSE examination.

145. The teaching is satisfactory. Teachers have secure knowledge of topics but make insufficient use of their own musical skills in their teaching. In the best lessons, instructions are clear and teaching is energetic. Teachers make sure that pupils understand the objectives of the lesson. Schemes and content of lessons are thoughtfully put together, but a major weakness in them is the lack of sufficient singing. The department supports the literacy and numeracy strategies of the school well. However, pupils are given so much written work that it restricts their opportunities to make music to develop their practical skills. Work is usually matched to pupils' different needs, but in some lessons higher attainers are not always stretched enough. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated and make similar progress to that of other pupils. Lessons are usually well planned and are suitably organised. The management of pupils is good in most lessons so that sessions are orderly. As a result, relationships are good and most pupils are good humoured and work well together. When work is less challenging and learning does not engage pupils in music making, a few pupils become bored, lose their concentration and misbehave. Pupils enjoy practical work but dislike the amount of writing that they do. Lessons start briskly and maintain a suitable pace. There is good use of an overhead projector, but illustrations and classroom display are not used enough to help to keep pupils focused on the work. Assessment of pupils is a strength and helps to show them how they can improve. Most pupils are attentive and work productively when they are interested. They support each other and answer questions keenly. The most enthusiastic involve themselves in opportunities offered by the department and in musical opportunities outside the school.
146. Since the last inspection, improvement has been unsatisfactory overall. Pupils' attainment in GCSE examinations is no longer in line with the national average and the volume of written work in lessons restricts their practical experience of the subject. The good range of extra-curricular activities and good organisation, provision and quality of instrumental tuition, have been well maintained.
147. Music staff are committed, enthusiastic and hardworking and the leadership of the subject is satisfactory. There is suitable monitoring and evaluation of subject performance. Documentation is appropriate. The department has a satisfactory assessment scheme and is learning to use the newly introduced levels of the National Curriculum effectively to assess work. There is no technical support for music, although this would be helpful to the department. Accommodation for music is unsatisfactory. The main classrooms are small and one room lacks ventilation, natural light or emergency lighting. There are insufficient areas for instrumental practice or for storage. Desks in the main classroom restrict practical work; chairs are too low for keyboard work. Keyboards are of good quality but there is a need for additional keyboards and tuned percussion instruments, such as xylophones and glockenspiels, to enhance creative work and music for singing and playing.
148. Twenty-two boys and 65 girls receive instrumental or voice lessons from six visiting teachers. Ten per cent of the school's population, an above average proportion, is involved. Pupils' standards of performance are broadly average. Teaching is satisfactory and some very good teaching was observed in voice tuition. The progress and achievement of pupils are good, especially in vocal work, in relation to their ages and the time that they have received tuition. The classroom curriculum gives little opportunity for pupils to use their instrumental skills. Instrumental tuition gives valuable support to the good range of extra-curricular activities in music, although pupils' attendance at the choirs is low. Activities include junior choir, senior choir, violin club, percussion ensemble, wind band, guitar ensemble, rock bands and a small orchestra. The school promotes concerts and musicals, such as 'Annie', that are of a good

standard and involve significant numbers of pupils. However, opportunities to play music regularly in assemblies are not taken. Visits to local concerts broaden the experience of pupils, supporting their social and cultural education well. The school's groups perform in festivals, supermarkets and at charity events. These activities reflect the dedication of staff, the support of parents and the enthusiasm of the musicians, whose performances and successes bring credit to the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The achievement of pupils by the end of Year 9 is good.
- Pupils' personal relationships and behaviour are good.
- Good provision for extra-curricular opportunities broadens pupils' learning experiences.
- The excellent quality and range of indoor accommodation for the subject enable a good range of activities to be taught throughout the year.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of attainment at the end of Year 11 in the course that all pupils follow.
- The percentage of pupils achieving grades A* to C in the GCSE examination.
- Meeting all requirements of the 2000 National Curriculum.
- Use of assessment to recognise fully the levels introduced in 2001 and to ensure pupils' understanding of these.
- Attitudes and participation rates of older girls in lessons.

149. By the end of Year 9, achievement is generally good for all pupils in relation to their attainment on entry and their physical capabilities. For example, in track work in athletics, the more physically capable pupils understand the principles required for effective sprinting and are developing their use of sprint start techniques. Not all yet use the 'set' element of the sprint start and are rising too early. In cricket, although the catching and bowling skills of the less physically capable are not strong, these pupils are improving the effectiveness of their bowling techniques. In rounders, the less capable do not throw with sufficient accuracy and their catching skills are not well developed. Their striking skills are developing well. By the end of Year 11, in the compulsory course, achievement is satisfactory. In football, boys continue to refine and develop their skills in small-sided games. The more capable, however, are not being challenged sufficiently well and they are not making the progress that they could. In rounders, both boys and girls catch and throw securely but the less capable are not always accurate. By the end of Year 9, pupils attain average standards equivalent to those expected nationally.

150. Across Years 7 to 11, pupils have a secure grasp of the principles and procedures of preparing for physical activity and by Year 9 they can name the muscle groups being stretched. However, pupils are rarely given responsibility for leading warm-up routines. Although no pupils with special educational needs were observed with additional help in lessons, they are well supported and integrated into activities and make progress in line with others. Physically talented pupils achieve satisfactorily in lessons and are provided with further opportunities through taking part in school teams. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds perform and achieve similarly to those of other pupils.

151. The proportion of pupils achieving A* to C grades in GCSE examinations has remained generally constant since the last inspection and, in 2001, was below the national

average. Pupils do not do as well in this subject as they do in their other subjects. Far fewer girls than boys take the course, and therefore no reliable comparisons can be drawn. An analysis of a sample of pupils' written work as well as observations of both their theory and practical lessons shows that Year 11 pupils are making satisfactory progress. In theoretical work, they are developing a secure knowledge and understanding of issues concerning commercial sponsorship in sport and consolidating their knowledge and understanding of respiratory and circulatory systems. They are extending their practical skills well.

152. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. In lessons, standards in Years 7 to 9 have been maintained and, in Years 10 and 11, are average in the compulsory course. The quality of outdoor accommodation remains in need of improvement, but work was well under way during the inspection on construction of a new synthetic outdoor facility.
153. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. The planning of lessons provides a suitable range of structured and progressive activities. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subject and usually maintain pupils' interest. Lessons are generally clearly introduced. Good reference is made to key words so that pupils know what is expected of them and their literacy skills are extended. Most lessons start promptly and efficiently and pupils are rapidly involved. They respond well, working in pairs and small groups and showing respect for each other's subject capabilities. In a Year 9 track athletics lesson, for example, pupils worked very well together in small groups when estimating distances to be covered in timed sprints. Pupils responded well to the high expectations of the teacher in a Year 11 GCSE revision lesson, resulting in successful learning and effective revision for the examination. In practical lessons, pupils are made aware of their capabilities because teachers circulate well and offer constructive praise and criticism.
154. Teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to be involved in evaluation of their own performance. Non-participants are not always as fully involved as they should be in introductions to lessons, demonstrations, coaching or evaluation of others' performances. In one Year 11 lesson, half the girls arrived without kit and gained very little from the lesson from the task they were given. Sometimes teachers give a short evaluation at the end of lessons rather than require pupils to evaluate what they think they have achieved, to extend their learning. More capable pupils are not always challenged enough. For example, in a Year 11 football lesson, the non-specialist teacher did not insist that pupils followed up use of the 'Cruyff turn' from the skills' drill well enough. The quality of marking of pupils' written work for the GCSE examination does not always inform them enough of what they need to do to improve. Comments about missing work are not always followed up.
155. The subject scheme of work does not fully reflect the requirements of the new National Curriculum and the course description on Year 9 reports to parents requires updating. The department successfully introduced the new assessment levels in 2001, but present assessment procedures do not yet fully match the new level requirements and pupils do not understand well enough the new assessment levels being used. A good range of extra-curricular provision extends pupils' opportunities. Matches take place against other schools as well as inter-form and recreational activities. As a result of the continuing enthusiasm of teachers, some from other departments, five pupils are individual champions at district level and 12 pupils have achieved representative honours at this level in a range of activities. Four pupils have achieved representative honours at Greater Manchester level and one girl has achieved national representative

honours at under-14 basketball. As a result of the school sharing facilities with the on-site recreation centre, the quality and range of indoor accommodation are excellent and allow for a good range of activities to be taught throughout the year. The head of department provides sound leadership and is taking action to raise standards in GCSE examinations. The composition of current classes has been changed and alternative examination courses are being considered. The need to improve the participation rates of older girls is well recognised within subject improvement planning. However, the requirements of the new National Curriculum are not yet fully reflected in the work of the department.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The teaching and the attitudes of pupils to the subject are consistently good.
- A detailed scheme of work helps the planning of lessons.
- Lessons involve a wide range of activities, supported by a good range of resources.

Areas for improvement

- Marking to provide guidance consistently on how pupils can improve.
- Providing good challenge for all, especially higher attainers, in all lessons.

156. Achievement by the end of Year 9 is good, given pupils' standards when they enter the school in Year 7. Girls and boys from all ethnic backgrounds achieve well. They gain a good understanding of subject words and ideas associated with different religions. Literacy skills are strong and pupils communicate their ideas and understanding well in a variety of ways. They classify different activities successfully as 'good' or 'bad', according to Buddhist belief. Extended writing is a feature of the work of pupils with special educational needs as well as higher attainers. Pupils with special educational needs write, for example, at length about the life of Buddha. Higher attainers write extensively about the Old Testament prophets. Pupils develop skills competently in using different methods to present their ideas. For example, these include a newspaper account of the wisdom of Solomon, a cartoon of the Biblical account of creation and an information leaflet on symbols in Sikhism. Pupils use information and communication technology increasingly well. Their skills in reflection, response and evaluation are less well developed and they do not always write in sufficient detail. Boys' presentation of written work is unsatisfactory in some cases, and far inferior to that of most girls. Their standards of attainment by the end of Year 9 are average in comparison with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus.
157. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is also good and pupils make good progress in Years 10 and 11. They continue to develop their skills of literacy well to express clearly the fundamentals of religious belief and apply religious perspectives well to moral issues. They express their personal opinions well, for example in writing about the Holocaust. Pupils with special educational needs give their own ideas about modern miracles well. Higher attainers have very good note-taking skills in presenting different views on evidence for God's existence. All pupils produce very detailed responses in interpreting Biblical references to the sanctity of life. Pupils' skills in applying their knowledge to examination questions show some weaknesses. In some cases they do not apply their knowledge well enough to meet the requirements of the question. In other cases, they over-simplify and do not answer in sufficient depth. Pupils continue to make good use of information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11. Standards in work seen are average. All pupils now follow the GCSE short examination

course. Results of the full GCSE examination course in 2001 were just below the national average and results in 2000 were similar. Pupils entered for the GCSE examination in 2001 performed better than they did in most of their other examination subjects. The small proportion of A grades gained in recent years has been achieved only by girls.

158. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Good achievement and good teaching were findings at the inspection in 1997 and these have been maintained well. The insufficient curricular time referred to has been remedied. Since 2000, however, there has been very good improvement, following a period of changes in staffing and the significant appointment of a new head of department.
159. The teaching is good. Pupils respond well to teachers, and their attitudes and behaviour are good. They respond well because lessons are well planned with a clear structure, and learning objectives are identified well. In the most effective teaching, learning is enhanced because a high level of challenge is sustained for all pupils. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, pupils quickly grasped the distinction between objects that are valuable and things which have value in other ways. Consequently, the teacher adapted the lesson plan to involve extended written responses about what was of value in one's own life. In a Year 9 lesson a high level of challenge was enhanced by the very good use of a wide range of resources. In addition to constructing their own 'game' to consolidate their learning of Buddhist belief, pupils received additional opportunities in the lesson to speculate about the symbolism of different artefacts and to develop note-taking skills through the use of information and communication technology. The wide range of resources used in lessons enables both pupils with special educational needs and higher attainers to make good progress. In a Year 11 lesson involving revision for the GCSE examination, the good pace at which work was conducted helped to sustain the high level of challenge. Pupils practised techniques for revision through a challenging question and answer session, and then applied their learning to timed examination questions. A helpful booklet provided them with a very clear framework for consolidating their learning. Teaching is less effective when too much time is spent on activities that lack sufficient challenge. In one Year 7 lesson, for example, pupils spent a large part of the lesson listing and illustrating examples of valuable items. In a few lessons, discussion and explanation lack clarity and clear objectives, and the pace of learning slows. The quality of marking is of inconsistent quality. Some lacks sufficient evaluation and analysis for pupils to know what to do to improve.
160. The leadership of the head of department is very good. Detailed schemes of work have been put in place in the last two years and a new GCSE short course has been established successfully. Very good planning has given lessons a clear structure and a good variety of activities and resources that enable pupils to consolidate their learning well.