

INSPECTION REPORT

RIDGEWAY HIGH SCHOOL

Birkenhead

LEA area: Wirral

Unique reference number: 105097

Headteacher: Ms A. Walsh

Reporting inspector: W. K. Baxendale
2928

Dates of inspection: 19th – 23rd March 2001

Inspection number: 191590

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

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Noctorum Avenue
Prenton
Wirral

Postcode: CH43 9EB

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: L. Stewart

Date of previous inspection: 13th – 17th January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2928	W. K. Baxendale	Registered inspector	Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Information about the school The school's results and achievements How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
12775	J. Goodchild	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
8503	A. Allfree	Team inspector	Art and design Design and technology	
27050	V. C. Blackburn	Team inspector	Science	
3534	A. Braithwaite	Team inspector	Physical education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
21971	J. Glennon	Team inspector	English	
23480	M. J. Harding	Team inspector	Religious education	
2024	R. Hart	Team inspector	Provision for pupils with special educational needs	
30110	M. Hillson	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
19915	P. Hooton	Team inspector	History	
3827	J. G. Knight	Team inspector	Geography	
13619	B. R. Meech	Team inspector	Ma Information and communication technology	

30128	S. Stanley	Team inspector	Music Equality of opportunity	
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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	12
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	16
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	19
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	21
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	23
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	24
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	27
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	28
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	32

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Ridgeway High School is a smaller than average all-attainment school educating 756 boys and girls in the 11-6 age ranges. Each year about 25 per cent of the 11 year-olds in the area (mainly higher-attainers) go to an alternative local private, grammar, single sex or denominational school. The school is gaining rapidly in popularity and is substantially over-subscribed. Whilst very many pupils come from highly deprived suburban housing estates, increasing numbers come from other areas. Very nearly 50 per cent of the pupils is entitled to a free school meal, an increase since the previous inspection, and well above the national average. An above-average proportion, 25.5 per cent, of the pupils are on the register of special educational needs and an above-average, 4.1 per cent has a statement of special educational needs, for learning, behavioural or hearing difficulties (there is a small unit for the hearing impaired). A low proportion, less than 1 per cent, comes from a home where English is not the first language spoken. Very few pupils enter the school after the start of Year 7 and very few leave before the end of Year 11. Standards are rising rapidly. The attainment of pupils in Year 7 and of those who took national tests for 14 year-olds in 2000 was below average when they entered the school. When they entered the school in Year 7, the attainment of those who took GCSE examinations in 2000 was well below average. The school sets itself and meets very demanding targets for improvement.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good and rapidly improving school that is heavily over-subscribed. Through excellent leadership and shared commitment to improvement the school provides a good quality of teaching and learning. Its key personnel manage it very well. The school knows its strengths and builds well on them; it knows its weaknesses and takes effective action to eradicate them. The very good ethos shows in the pupils' very good behaviour and attitudes to learning that have contributed to substantial improvements in examination results, which have improved year-on-year and are now much closer to average than at the time of the previous inspection. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The pupils achieve standards that are well above those of pupils in similar schools.
- Pupils rightly claim it a privilege to be part of a school where they feel secure and do their best.
- Very good attitudes and behaviour allow the pupils to work in what is nearly always a quiet atmosphere of hard work and enthusiasm.
- Leadership is excellent and the contributions of comparatively-newly-appointed heads of faculty and year are very good.
- Very good practices in self-evaluation lead to continuing improvements in teaching and learning, so raising standards.

What could be improved

- Standards and the quality of much teaching in modern foreign languages are not good enough.
- Geography, science, physical education and religious education could do more to improve pupils' writing.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the previous inspection in January 1997 is very good. The pupils now leave with far better qualifications. Average GCSE point scores have risen year-on-year from 26.7 to 36.1; they are well above the average for similar schools and in line with the national average. Attendance rates have also improved substantially, exclusion rates have dropped

and the school is now oversubscribed. The quality of teaching and of learning is much improved. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is now very good. Information and communication technology (ICT) and other curriculum provision have improved. Non-compliance with provision for religious education and a daily act of collective worship persist. The school's capacity for further improvements is very good.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	E	D	C	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

The school sets itself demanding targets for improvement and has a very good capacity to meet them. Standards are well up to what could reasonably be expected in most subjects. Rapid rises in standards are because of the very good focus on achievement: the pupils make good progress. They leave school with better qualifications than their attainment as 11 year-olds suggested they would and have a good foundation for continuing in education or training. Although results in national tests for 14 year-olds are below national averages in English, mathematics and science, they are well above average compared with similar schools. The GCSE results have improved year-on-year since the previous inspection and the pupils' average point scores are now in line with the national average: no mean feat for pupils who started the school with well below average attainment. The improving trend in the school's results is faster than the national rate of improvement and the pupils' attainment in both Year 9 and Year 11 suggests that standards will shortly be above national averages. In national tests and at GCSE, the pupils do well in each of English, mathematics and science. Attainment in history and music is rising rapidly and it is well above average in ICT, drama and art and design at GCSE. GCSE results are better in textiles and graphics than in the other aspects of design and technology. There are weaknesses in geography, where GCSE results are too low, in physical education where the pupils do not make as much progress as in other subjects and in modern foreign languages, as too much of the teaching is not good enough so standards are too low. Boys' attainment is not as good as that of the girls, as they achieve less well over their time in the school. The school is taking some enterprising steps to combat this discrepancy. Standards of literacy improve satisfactorily, but more should be done in geography, science, physical education and religious education to help raise attainment in reading and writing.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. The pupils feel privileged to be part of the school. They are proud of their own and others' achievements.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Behaviour overall is very good and helps the pupils to make the good progress they do. There are clear expectations of good behaviour and the introduction of learning mentors is helping some pupils to overcome barriers to learning. There is a sharp fall in exclusions, with no permanent ones in the last two years. There is some misbehaviour in a few Year 8 lessons.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Tolerance and mutual respect are paramount. The pupils have a genuine say in the way the school is run. They are keen to monitor how well they are doing and appreciate their targets for improvement.
Attendance	Satisfactory. There are significant improvements: attendance rates are 7 per cent higher than at the previous inspection and are now about average. Some pupils attend infrequently, so their standards suffer.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years
Lessons seen overall	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.

There are significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection. Particular increases in the amounts of good and very good teaching are the result of effective training, some very good appointments and very hard work on the part of the staff. Good teaching both promotes and benefits from the very good atmosphere for learning and is at the centre of the school's continuing improvements. In the 135 lessons inspected, teaching was satisfactory or better in 95 per cent; it was good or better in 74 per cent and very good or better in 33 per cent. Teaching was very good in history, science, music and ICT and good in all other subjects except modern foreign languages where it was unsatisfactory overall, although much of the teaching was very good. The weaknesses in this subject were because of an unsatisfactory command of the language, too great a readiness to blame the pupils for not enjoying the work and hesitancy and poor pace in lessons. Along with the very good teaching in science, that in English and mathematics is also good throughout, but in common with other subjects, teaching is slightly better amongst 14-16 year-olds than with younger pupils. The school is placing due emphasis on improving the teaching of literacy and numeracy. Although these are well taught to those with special educational needs, not all subjects play a full part in raising the standards of all pupils. Work that is graded according to the pupils' attainment is well developed, so the pupils' learning is good. They concentrate well and most are well aware of what they need to do to improve. The use of homework to help learning has improved, but there is still scope for further refinements.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The school provides a rich and varied curriculum in lessons and house and year activities. Provision for personal and social development and for careers is very good and the school works hard to extend the pupils' education through very good relations with the community and partner institutions. A comparative weakness is the inadequate time allocated to religious education for 14-16 year-olds, although this and provision for collective worship have improved since the previous inspection.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. This is a socially inclusive school that provides very well for pupils with learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties and for some with hearing impairment. They are able to follow the full curriculum or have suitable alternatives that allow them to make good, often very good progress, because of the effective extra help they receive.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Spiritual development is good, excellent moral development reflects the philosophy of the school. Social development is very good and cultural development good. Pupils gain an awareness of the nature of society and learn the value of tolerance and restraint.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. Arrangements for child protection and pupils' welfare are very good. Good assessment procedures are a springboard for raising standards.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	The very good collaboration with parents is also a springboard for raising standards.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good: Excellent leadership by the headteacher and some very good management of faculties and years lie behind the rapid improvements in standards and the school's rising popularity.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. The governors are proud of the school's achievements and know its strengths and weaknesses very well. They support the headteacher wholeheartedly in her unflinching pursuit of excellence.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Teaching and learning are evaluated regularly and there is very detailed analysis of test and examination results. Very good school improvement planning is based upon identified areas needing attention: the school knows its strengths and its weaknesses, including those in modern foreign languages, and does something about each.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Pupils benefit greatly from efficient and prudent financial planning. The school provides a good quality of education, although staffing is only just adequate, the accommodation tight and resources adequate. The principles of best value are rigorously applied and extra grants for specific purposes are put to very good use.

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 child to work hard and achieve his or her best• The school is well led and managed.• Parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or problems.• They find the teaching is good.• They find their child likes school, is making good progress and becoming a mature and responsible young person.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The amount and quality of work to be done at home.

Inspectors agree wholeheartedly with the parents' views. The school clearly has a good relationship with the pupils' parents. It is a school with many strengths. The very good partnership with the parents only serves to reinforce standards. The school has done a lot of work on improving homework, but inspectors agree that more needs to be done.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The very good, consistent focus on achievement is the reason why standards are rising at a considerably faster rate than the national trend of improvement. Excellent leadership that gives real purpose and commitment to improvement, which had just started at the time of the previous inspection, has turned the school around. The pupils' achievement is good and is much better than at the time of the previous inspection. They leave with more qualifications than their attainment on starting the school, as 11 year-olds, suggested they would. Leavers have a strong basis for going on to their next steps of education or training. Successes have been recognised by a national school achievement award.

2. When the pupils whose GCSE results are evaluated in this report started as 11 year-olds, their attainment, measured by national tests, was well below average. Since then, the standards of pupils starting the school have been rising, but they are still below average. The attainment on entry, for example, of the pupils who took the National Curriculum tests for 14 year-olds in 2000 was below average, as was that of pupils in the current Year 7 when they started.

3. In 2000, the Year 9 pupils' national test average point scores in English, mathematics and science were below the national averages. The average point scores of 16 year-olds who took GCSE in the same year, were in line with the national average, though the percentages who obtained 5 or more higher grades, A*-C, were below the national average. This is because the school loses many who would be expected to reach these standards to local grammar schools. Comparisons with similar schools put the pupils' good achievement into clear perspective: they are well above average by any measurement means. Considering their starting points on entry to the school, these results are no mean feat and are well up to what might reasonably have been expected. The school's demanding targets for improvement appear to be well founded: the capacity for further improvements is very good.

4. GCSE results have risen year-on-year since 1997 and inspection evidence suggests they will continue to do so. The trend of results for 14 year-olds is also upwards, well in line with the national trend.

5. On starting the school, the boys' attainment is slightly in front of that of the girls. At the end of Year 9, the boys and the girls do equally well: their just-below average point scores in English, mathematics and science were, taken together, just about the same in relation to boys and girls nationally. There is, however, a substantial difference in the results of 16 year-olds in GCSEs: the girls maintain their upward progress far better than do the boys. Overall, girls make better progress and achieve better than do the boys. The school is well aware of this and has taken enterprising remedial steps, for example organising successful single sex English classes and providing the head of science, where the boys do better than the girls, with the job of improving the general situation. Raising the boys' achievement is a main concern of school improvement. There are too few pupils with English as an additional language to make any relevant comparisons.

6. Overall, the learning support base provides a very good, flexible response to the above-average number of pupils with special educational needs. It is inappropriate to judge these pupils' attainment against national averages. However, their achievement is also good. Progress in raising reading standards is very good. Most pupils who entered the school in Year 7 with limited skills in literacy have by Year 11 made very good progress. The individual education plans (IEPs) are very good with clear, concise, measurable targets. Reviews of IEPs show that most pupils are making progress towards the targets set. Individuals in the inclusion area, set up to help the pupils who have occasional difficulties with their learning, benefit from the close attention and are able to complete subject assignments satisfactorily. Pupils with hearing impairment achieve well within the school, some remarkably so. The specialist teaching within the area and the support in class is the key to this good progress.

7. The principal reason for under-attainment amongst 11 year-olds is their weakness in literacy on arrival. The effects of the primary school literacy work are starting to show and standards are rising, but many pupils still have some difficulty in coping with the reading and writing demands normally expected. The school's support measures are effective and with work well tailored to pupils' different levels of attainment, progress is sustained. By the time they start their GCSE courses, very few pupils are insufficiently equipped to manage the work. Standards of literacy are, therefore, satisfactory. Speaking and listening develop well. Literacy concerns are, however, real and some subjects do not play their full part in raising reading and writing standards in particular. Some pupils do not have enough opportunities to write at length in geography, science, physical education and religious education, whilst history and English provide role models for this. The system for getting all subjects to learn from the best practice is weak. Reading from source materials in history is very effective, but the way reading materials are matched to the attainment of all pupils, not just those with special educational needs, is unsatisfactory in some other subjects. Writing is generally satisfactory, but some pupils' punctuation is weak although most do not make too many mistakes.

8. The application of mathematical skills is also satisfactory in several subjects, but there are weaknesses, although the school is aware of this and is concentrating on improving provision in its improvement planning. There is some good practice in science when, for example, finding lines of best fit and in design and technology when weighing and measuring accurately. However, the interpretation of graphs in geography and the use of measurement and monitoring of physical fitness are examples of areas where practice is weaker.

9. The use of ICT across the curriculum is patchy and is a comparative weakness. There is much good practice, for instance in science where data logging is a strength and in history, but surprisingly little use is made of ICT in resistant materials in design and technology and computer provision is unsatisfactory in music.

10. Standards are well in line with expectations and achievement is generally good in English, mathematics and science amongst 14 year-olds. Such achievement leads to standards that, at this age, are higher in English than recent national test results show. Pupils are good speakers and listeners; they make good progress in reading from when they start the school. They read quite fluently and also write fairly accurately. In mathematics, pupils have satisfactory skills in mental arithmetic by this age, and they handle decimals and fractions confidently. All pupils achieve well in science. The progress of higher attainers has improved since the previous inspection, but they are not always made to think hard enough;

pupils with special educational needs make very good progress by small, graded steps in the subject.

11. Similar good progress is maintained amongst 14-16 year-olds in these subjects. It is better in English than recent GCSE results show and suggests further rises in results. 16 year-olds interpret ideas in poetry well and express themselves clearly and precisely. Their writing is expressive and reading is good enough to let them gauge the writer's feelings well. Achievement in mathematics is good; pupils handle fractions well, they write well at length about their investigations and bring system to problem solving. In science, the higher attainers are able to delve into the moral issues surrounding their work and nearly all make good progress, but just occasionally, work does not make enough demands upon them and their achievement is slowed as a result. Other pupils make good progress at this stage.

12. Achievement from 11-14 years of age is good in most other subjects and is a main reason for these pupils' above average performance compared with those in similar schools. Often, in such schools, pupils do well only in subjects that make fewer demands on reading and writing skills. Here, achievement is more uniform. Because they make good progress, attainment by the age of 14 is above national expectation in ICT; the pupils design web sites, for example, and conduct enquiries into the quality and effectiveness of their work. Attainment is about that expected in art and design, where the pupils make good progress in creating textures, but there is too much copying. Similar levels of attainment, at about expected levels, are found in religious education, where the pupils gain an insight into the world's main faiths, and in geography, where they begin, for example, to appreciate conflict of interest in naturally delicate surroundings. Attainment is also about that expected in physical education, but the pupils' achievement is less than it should be, as they do not have enough opportunity to evaluate what they do; they make less progress from 11-14 years of age in this subject than all others.

13. Attainment is below that expected in design and technology, as designing is weaker than making. It is also below expectation in history, but good and very good teaching is producing rapid improvements; pupils understand through source materials how economic and social freedoms have been won and they have a good idea of chronology. The pupils are able to understand the gist of a modern foreign language spoken at normal speed, when taught well: achievement in these lessons is satisfactory, but there is too much unsatisfactory and poor teaching that leads to unsatisfactory achievement overall. The attainment of 14 year-olds is below that expected in this subject and does not form a sound enough platform for pupils to do well in GCSE. From very low starts, the pupils achieve well in music. They gain a range of composing and playing skills and some reach above expected standards, though overall attainment is below expectation.

14. By the end of Year 11, even better overall achievement means that attainment levels continue to rise and the year-on-year improvement in GCSE is a direct result. There are exceptions. GCSE results in English and in English literature were below average in 2000 and lower than at the time of the previous inspection. A new head of faculty is redressing this situation very rapidly and achievement is very good. The attainment of 16 year-olds is in line with national expectations and better than previous GCSE results. GCSE results in mathematics and in science show a continuous rise since the previous inspection and though still below national averages are well above those of similar schools. All pupils make good progress in both these subjects, and lower attainers make particularly good progress. The attainment of 16 year-olds is now in line with national expectations, promising further improvements in GCSE results.

15. GCSE results in 2000 were well above the national averages in art and design; 16 year-olds now work freely with different art forms. Results in drama show good achievement

and were above national averages; current 16 year-olds develop a character satisfactorily and have similar performance skills. The GCSE results of Year 11 pupils were above national averages in ICT. The many pupils entered in Year 10 did very well considering the preparation time, but results were just below average. These results showed very good achievement, sustained amongst current pupils, in a full range of ICT-related skills, which are not, however, capitalised fully upon in the work they do in other subjects. Average GCSE results were obtained in the textiles and graphics courses in design and technology, but the results in other aspects, food and resistant materials, of the subject were well below average. Achievement is slowed because the pupils are often too eager to get on with making things rather than planning carefully what they are going to do.

16. In history, the 2000 GCSE results were below national averages, but above those of similar schools. Achievement is now good and improving; pupils' improving powers of criticism give them clear insights into reasons for conflict and political crisis. Achievement in modern foreign languages is haphazard. It depends on the quality of teaching and this is too volatile; some is very good, but too much is poor. As a result, well below average attainment was seen in low GCSE results. Lower attainers do achieve well, for example in closely rehearsed conversations. Achievement in physical education remains less than in other subjects and GCSE results were below the national average, but with a slight improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils do not do as well in this subject as they do in most of the others they sit: their ability to evaluate performance remains a weakness. GCSE results in geography were the weakest in the school and well below average. Attainment in Year 11 is, however, in line with that expected and suggests that results will improve. No GCSE course took place in religious education and music. Achievement in religious education is below expectation, also there is no examination course and the time allocated inhibits progress. Achievement in music is good, although the absence of computers leads to weaknesses in composing.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

17. Pupils' attitudes towards school are very good. The school's practice of celebrating success is a great motivator. Pupils respond with enthusiasm to the often lively and creative teaching in lessons that sometimes sparkle with excitement that stimulates pupils to learn. Most pupils display a keenness and eagerness to work and are able to sustain good concentration levels. Pupils are co-operative and generally make good use of their learning. Relationships between pupils and with staff are very good. A significant strength of the school is the respect that staff accord to each pupil. This forms the basis for the sensitive support that helps pupils achieve and their confidence and motivation to learn develop. Pupils work well together in pairs and small groups where they encourage and support each other. Pupils are confident in talking about their work; they readily answer questions and participate fully in discussions. They are proud of their achievements and produce work that gives them personal satisfaction for their efforts. Pupils with special educational needs are interested in their work and fully integrated into the school community.

18. The standard of behaviour both in lessons and within the school is very good. This has a positive effect on pupils' overall attainment and learning. The school has clear expectations of good behaviour and nearly all pupils conform to this, although a few pupils present challenging behaviour that make it impossible for teachers to ensure that a lesson's purposes are met and this affects the learning of the rest of the class. The teacher's poor class management skills were at the root of unsatisfactory behaviour in the very few lessons where this arose. Learning mentors have recently been introduced to work with pupils who find learning presents them with barriers that are hard to overcome. This initiative is proving successful. Incidents of oppressive behaviour that occur, when brought to the attention of staff, are taken seriously and effectively dealt with. Since the previous inspection there has

been a significant reduction in the number of pupils excluded. Exclusion is only used when all other strategies have failed. Procedures follow the local education authority guidelines and appropriately involve the governing body at all stages.

19. The personal development of pupils is good. The school council gives pupils the opportunity to present their views to the headteacher and their suggestions are taken seriously. The toilets are being refurbished in line with their suggestions and pupils have been consulted on their design and colour scheme. Currently pupils are canvassing the views of their peers on the colour and style of trousers for girls. The house committees organise a range of inter-house competitions and fund raising events for charities. Pupils' experience of the wider community is developed through a range of visits both in this country and abroad. Pupils are encouraged to monitor their own academic progress and set targets for improvement so they can begin to start to take responsibility for their own learning. However, in some lessons opportunities to develop the pupils' independent learning skills are too few.

20. There has been a significant increase in the level of attendance since the previous inspection. Attendance was judged to be well below the national average at the previous inspection. In the last academic year overall attendance was just below 90 per cent and unauthorised absence was broadly in line with the national average. Current attendance is in line with the national average and is satisfactory. The attainment and progress of those pupils whose attendance is unsatisfactory is adversely affected. A few pupils in Year 11 consistently arrive late in the mornings and frequently miss tutor time. The school has placed a high priority on improving attendance levels and some of its strategies have clearly been successful. The school is using social inclusion funding to increase the time allocated to year co-ordinators to improve the monitoring of attendance. Parents are encouraged to work in partnership with the school to ensure their child attends regularly. The learning mentor attached to Year 11-target group has been successful in raising the attendance amongst this group. Despite this, there are factors outside of the school's control that affect levels of attendance such as the attitude of some parents who do not value education and condone the absence of their child from school.

21. The attitude to learning of pupils with special educational needs is good. Within the hearing support base they work hard and welcome the positive relationship they have with the staff. The opportunity to visit the inclusion area for either mentoring or subject support is valued by many and assists some potentially disaffected pupils to value what school can offer. For some pupils the good in-class support helps to ensure they understand what is required of them and they are consequently keen to attempt the work.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

22. The quality of teaching is good. In the 135 lessons evaluated, teaching was excellent in 8 per cent; it was very good in a further 25 per cent; good in a further 41 per cent and satisfactory in 21 per cent of the rest. Teaching was unsatisfactory in 2 per cent and poor in 3 per cent of the lessons. The proportions of good or better teaching are very substantially higher than at the previous inspection and are one of the main reasons for the rise in standards since then. Much of the very good and excellent teaching was by newer teachers, appointed in the last three years. Strongly influencing the good quality of teaching and learning are the teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach, their very high expectations of the pupils and very good class management skills.

23. The school's very good learning atmosphere complements teaching that produces both the pupils' good learning and achievement and genuinely celebrates the pupils' many successes. Teaching and learning are slightly better in Years 10 and 11 than in the first three years. This is partly because more non-specialists teach younger pupils and there is also

some poorer behaviour amongst pupils in Year 8, the control of which undermines some teaching quality. As a result, there is less good or better teaching in Year 8 than in any other. However, overall improvements in the pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding of most of their subjects are good. They learn at a good pace and put real effort into their work. The pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of how they are doing. Target setting helps them to become aware, though sometimes there is not enough reference, for example in modern foreign languages to what they need to do to improve further.

24. Teaching and learning are very good in science, history, ICT and music; they are good in all other subjects, except modern foreign languages where they are unsatisfactory. No unsatisfactory teaching took place in any subject except modern foreign languages, geography and design and technology. In ICT and history teaching was never less than good: reasons why standards in the one are above average and are rising rapidly in the other. The weakest link was modern foreign languages where the biggest contrast in teaching quality occurred. Over 40 per cent of the teaching was very good or excellent, but a very high 30 per cent was unsatisfactory and mainly poor in this subject. Most of the unsatisfactory or poor teaching in the school was because the teacher was unable to accommodate the school's positive philosophy on learning and tended to blame the pupils for not liking to learn. Weaknesses in subject expertise and in assurance of presentation also undermined that teaching.

25. The quality of teaching for children with special educational needs is good. Lessons are well planned and have clear targets that are used to assess learning. The pace of lessons is good and is maintained by introducing a variety of activities. This variety keeps pupils' interest and motivation to achieve. The work is well graduated so it matches the pupils' present level of attainment. There is a high expectation that pupils with special educational needs will succeed and literacy skills are consistently improved.

26. Basic skills are also carefully taught in lessons within the learning support base. Detailed record keeping ensures that the teaching is matched to the pupils' level of attainment. Suitable resources ensure that materials are available to help the teacher. For example, a group of pupils practised their knowledge of grouped letters within words by playing a game in which they had to identify the missing letters to win.

27. Very good support for pupils with special educational needs helps them make progress in lessons. With skilled support, a pupil with a profound hearing loss was making sound progress in relation to the rest of the group in a design and technology lesson. With support and access to a lap top computer, a pupil with dyspraxia was able to take part in an English lesson. Work to extend pupils who have particular gifts and talents is developing well and most lessons are geared to extend those who cope more easily with the work.

28. The sharing of the lesson's purposes with the pupils is commonplace in nearly all lessons in all subjects. Where teaching was best, in history, for example, skilfully designed activities led pupils, one step at a time, to scan and refer back to relevant resources to let them come to decisions, for example on whether propaganda was reliably accurate. The teacher's effective planning made use of documentary extracts, songs, contemporary videos and films to excite and challenge the pupils who learned very well as a result. The use of ICT is good in mathematics, business studies, history and science: effectively used, the Internet promotes learning and computers are used well to, for example, take time-lapse photos and to log data. In both subjects, literacy skills are taught very effectively and discussion and argument are frequent features of good learning. In ICT, teachers remain flexible, responding to altering circumstances as the lesson goes along. Work is graded so as to stretch, but not over-stretch, the pupils and this helps them to make good progress. The use of ICT to help learning in music suffers from inadequate provision of computers and in some other

subjects, including design and technology, the pupils are unable to give full rein to their very good skills, although many word process and use computers for private research.

29. The teaching of basic skills is good overall, but there are some gaps in the way that work teachers devise supports literacy and numeracy improvement. The library is under-used and opportunities to engage the pupils in extended writing are missed in subjects such as geography, science, physical education and religious education. Teachers do get the pupils to talk about their work and the pupils' very good listening skills help them to learn. Most subjects use key word lists that relate to the specific vocabulary needed to make progress, but they are not always used enough in lessons to help convey a point.

30. Teachers plan well and in the best English lessons this showed in their acceptance of nothing but the best. Fun characterised healthy learning in the best-taught English, science, history and French and German lessons. The best classes were conducted at a rattling pace and, in music, the emphasis upon practical work enthused the pupils to learn well. Time, resources and the effective learning support staff are used well in all subjects; lessons normally have a sequence of inter-related activities that help learning and work is graded to let all pupils follow: this is good practice and is an improvement since the previous inspection. Most lessons culminate with a review of what has been learned and this informs the teacher of the success or otherwise of the planning. Feedback through sharp questioning during the lesson also provides clear information on how well the pupils are learning.

31. Teaching in design and technology is satisfactory, but too variable. In the best lessons in ICT, textiles and graphics, the pupils are self-motivated to learn and to monitor the quality of what they have produced. Similarly in art and design, where teaching gets the pupils to observe closely and to think for themselves, good learning takes place. Teaching in physical education is good overall, but a recurrent weakness is in the failure to get the pupils to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of performance to help them to improve. Sometimes questioning is too peremptory, not giving the pupils time to explain themselves clearly or fully enough. Teaching is better amongst older pupils in geography, as from Year 9 they only have specialists working with them. Their work is more expansive and stimulating; much of the work in Years 7 and 8 sticks too closely to texts. Teaching in religious education is good, considering the number of non-specialists who contribute. Although non-specialists are unable to delve into the finer points of issues, they are well supported by teaching aids and have very good teaching skills in their own right. Teaching in music is very good; following the school pattern, it is slightly better amongst the older pupils, where they are, for example, encouraged successfully to identify the characteristics of given types of music. Improvements in the teaching of mathematics are the result of successful training on classroom practice. Teaching in drama and sociology is satisfactory.

32. Areas in need of improvement are in the quality of homework, particularly in science and art and design. The parents found this to be an aspect that pleased them least and there is scope for further refinement in the work undertaken to make homework more purposeful. The marking of pupils' written work also lacks uniformity in design and technology, science and geography.

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

33. The curriculum fully supports the aims and values of the school. The opportunities the school offers to its pupils through the curriculum and extra curricular activities are very good. Throughout the school many activities and opportunities both planned and informal encourage pupils' personal development and a wider knowledge and understanding of the world of work. Equality of opportunity is good and all pupils have access to the full range of learning opportunities. Appropriate provision is being made for all pupils', those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented, different needs.

34. The school provides all the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education for 11-14 year-olds. The time allocations for subjects are satisfactory in most subjects. However, as at the previous inspection, history and geography receive less time than is common in similar schools. On some occasions this is combined with non-specialist teaching and takes place in a number of different classrooms. As a result it is difficult for teachers to cover the required work in the time available and to the required depth. The school works hard to overcome these difficulties with well planned schemes of work and resources to support non-specialist teachers.

35. The curriculum for 14-16 year-olds is unsatisfactory because the religious education programme only operates in Year 10 and has insufficient time to cover the required scheme of work. A full range of National Curriculum subjects is offered together with a satisfactory range of subjects from which pupils can make further choices: business studies, media studies, child development and sociology. In response to the wishes of parents, the school has chosen to concentrate on the GCSE examination for nearly all pupils. Both double award science and the three separate sciences are offered to all. Great care is taken to ensure pupils select a balance of subjects. Rapidly improving provision for ICT is now through a faculty that also includes design and technology. Music is allied to physical education, art and design, drama and dance. The amalgamations and rearrangements are beginning to work very effectively; National Curriculum requirements are met and rising standards are direct outcomes. For the very few pupils for whom GCSE is not appropriate the certificate of achievement is offered. A small number of pupils have a modified curriculum to give them greater experience of the world of work outside school. Time allocation for subjects is satisfactory with the exception of religious education.

36. Very good provision is made for pupils' personal, social and health education and the lesson planning is very good. The elements of health, sex education and drugs awareness are covered as required. The school also covers work on citizenship in these lessons. Good schemes of work and resources are provided to support the form tutors responsible for teaching these lessons. The programme is reviewed each year after consultation with them. Parents and pupils value these lessons.

37. Overall the provision for out-of-school time activities is very good. Substantial numbers of pupils also take part in the many house and year activities as well as the out-of-school time music activities, clubs and competitive games. There are excellent opportunities through science clubs for pupils to extend their knowledge and follow their particular interests.

38. A very good programme of careers education and guidance begins in Year 9 to help all pupils, including those with special educational needs, develop an awareness of the world of work. Pupils have good support and guidance when making choices of subjects at the end of Year 9. In Year 10 a well-planned project week develops pupils' understanding of the world of work using local businesses. The work experience week in Year 11 completes the programme before pupils make their plans for further education and work. The school takes great care to ensure pupils have good information on which to base their decisions about education opportunities post-16. Staff from local colleges visits the school and talk with pupils at key points in this decision-making process.

39. The contribution of the wider community to pupils' learning is very good. The school house system is linked to and sponsored by four major local employers. Many visitors from these and other firms enrich the pupils' experiences. There is a community library on site and plans are completed for extensive new buildings to be shared with the community. There are good links with partner primary schools that ensure a smooth change to secondary school. In the summer holiday around 60 pupils attend the summer school for Year 6 pupils.

40. This is a socially inclusive school, which provides very good access for pupils with special educational needs to the National Curriculum. The school makes effective specialist provision for pupils with different learning needs. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are very well supported through the inclusion area. For pupils with hearing impairment, the well-established hearing support base provides an opportunity for them to receive direct teaching from a teacher who has specialist qualification in teaching hearing-impaired pupils or support in the ordinary classes.

41. The specialist support available on an individual or small group basis assists pupils with reading difficulties to overcome their difficulties. In addition to specialist teaching the school has a range of activities to raise literacy standards. There is paired teaching, with Year 9 pupils helping Year 7 pupils. There are specific lessons focused on literacy, and the school runs a two-week literacy summer school.

42. The quality of pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is now very good overall. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection.

43. Provision for the pupils' spiritual development is good, although the school fails to comply with the requirements for a daily act of collective worship. The school has made efforts to resolve the issues brought to its attention through the previous report concerning the lack of an act of collective worship and the need to develop a more consistent approach to spiritual matters. There is now a more consistent approach to assemblies, with weekly themes, and time is provided in some of these for pupils to reflect on spiritual and moral dilemmas. Across the curriculum, there are good opportunities for spiritual development in physical education through movement studies; religious education in most lessons; music, and geography. There are missed opportunities in art and design, mathematics and parts of design and technology. In form tutor time attention is given to the thought for the week.

However, pupils are not always given the opportunity to reflect; yet there are good examples, for instance in a Year 7 registration.

44. The school makes excellent provision for the pupils' moral development: a strong emphasis on the way one's actions affect others runs through all aspects of school life. The concept of a moral community is stressed both in documentation and in practice, and there are firm but fair disciplinary procedures that help pupils to distinguish right from wrong. Issues of bullying are dealt with effectively and teachers provide very good role models throughout the school. There are also numerous initiatives to sustain the moral development of pupils, such as the school house system, which raises money for chosen charities each year. Moral development is also promoted in science, with debates on the moral and ethical argument for cloning in various contexts, and in religious education, where pupils have ample chance to learn and consider commandments and rules and why belief affects our living.

45. The provision for social development is very good. The school council system encourages pupils to take responsibility and is a useful channel of communication between staff and pupils. The 'buddy' system by Year 10 contributes towards Year 7 pupils making the transition from primary to senior school. There is a wide range of lunchtime and after school activities to enhance the social development of pupils. The school provides a safe harmonious atmosphere for all its pupils and there are positive relationships both in the classrooms and throughout the school buildings. Opportunities for social growth are provided in most subjects through group and pair work in lessons. The integration of pupils with disabilities such as hearing impairment is complete.

46. Provision for the cultural development of pupils is good. There are activities and exchanges to enrich pupils' awareness and knowledge of the wider world. There are exchanges in modern foreign languages. Cultural growth is also fostered through various clubs and activities, especially in science and music. The previous inspection report noted that the multicultural development of pupils was underdeveloped. There are now many opportunities to celebrate the cultural diversity in Britain and thinking about the wider issues of life, as the curriculum uses a wide range of multicultural themes in, for example, English, history, religious education and in music, which has a world-wide cultural approach to the subject.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

47. Procedures for child protection and pupils' welfare are very good. A strong pastoral system provides effective support for pupils helping them to make good progress with their studies. Pupils feel secure and many feel privileged to be a member of the school community. An effective induction programme prepares pupils well for the move into the secondary school. Form tutors stay with their tutor group throughout the school and know their pupils well. Year co-ordinators effectively oversee their work. They are able to effectively monitor their academic progress and personal development because the school has used additional funding to allocate extra time for them to carry out their duties. The educational and personal support and guidance for pupils is very good. Learning mentors, funded through the EIC initiative, are allocated to pupils to support their learning and preparation for GCSE examinations. Pupils in Year 11 have study sessions after school to enable them to catch up on coursework and help their revision. The school provides a tea for them and transport home. Pupils are prepared for post-16 choices through a very good careers programme supported by the careers service. Positive links have been made with further education colleges who give advice to pupils to help them make appropriate post-16 choices. The well-organised personal, social and health education programme ensures that sex and drug education is carried out effectively and helps prepare pupils for life beyond school.

48. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good. Attendance is monitored daily and there is immediate contact with home if pupils identified as having attendance problems fail to arrive at school. All staff have a high commitment to ensuring the regular attendance of all pupils. The school has developed a work based alternative curriculum for a few disaffected pupils in Years 10 and 11 whose attendance has been a cause for concern. The education welfare service works in partnership and extra time has been given to the school. This year a focus has been placed on ensuring the regular attendance of pupils in Year 11 to ensure they achieve their potential GCSE grades. The inclusion area within the school has been effective in reintegrating pupils.

49. The school's procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are very good. There are clear expectations of good behaviour based on self-discipline and respect for others that are clearly understood even by the youngest pupils. Staff are expected to provide good role models for pupils in their dealings with them. Pupils are encouraged to look at their actions, particularly the effect they have on others, and this is reinforced through lessons and assemblies. An innovative approach to training staff in behaviour management has been developed by the school. A visiting theatre group helps teachers develop strategies to manage and diffuse conflict situations that might occur. The systems for managing incidents of poor behaviour within lessons are clearly documented in the behaviour management plan. There are appropriate sanctions for pupils who display inappropriate behaviour that focus on recognising improvement in attitude and behaviour and encouraging pupils to take responsibility for monitoring their own progress. What constitutes oppressive behaviour is discussed effectively in personal, social and health education lessons where the effect of pupils' actions on each other is taught. Appropriate procedures for the exclusion of pupils are in place and follow local education authority guidelines.

50. Child Protection procedures are very good and the nominated person regularly attends courses to ensure she is fully aware of recent changes to the system. Good relationships have been established with the relevant support agencies. Clear guidelines in the staff handbook ensure that staff understand what action to take if incidents occur.

51. The procedures for ensuring the health, safety and welfare of pupils are very good. The local education authority carries out safety audits on behalf of the school and risk assessments are all in place. A few minor points were brought to the attention of the school. Arrangements for first aid and the welfare needs of pupils meet requirements.

52. Arrangements for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good. The school has an assessment policy, which encourages teachers to indicate the way forward clearly to pupils. School examinations are held annually for all year groups and mock SATs and GCSE examinations are taken in Years 9 and 11 in preparation for external public assessment.

53. Some faculties and departments assess achievement well, but others do not. A more consistent approach across all subject areas, supported by computer-generated records and statistics is being developed. Science provides a very good example of how consistent assessment of pupils' work raises attainment. Pupils are keen to learn from the marking:

they establish where and how well they have succeeded and exactly how better progress can be made in future.

54. In Years 7 to 9, in some subjects, pupils are not aware of the National Curriculum levels at which they are working. In design and technology resistant materials, for example, there is no coherent system of marking and few comments are made to indicate how work may be improved. In history the levels are used in the marking of specified pieces of work. Procedures for assessment in English are very good. National Curriculum levels are used consistently. In classrooms, the best practice sees teachers refer regularly to these as they teach. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a more detailed grasp of their anticipated and target grades for the GCSE examinations.

55. The school has collected a considerable amount of data, which ranges from pupils' results as they leave primary schools at age 11 through the diagnostic testing carried out in Year 7 and sometimes in later years too and from very regular testing of reading ages. Teachers use this information very well in their planning of the curriculum so that appropriately challenging tasks and targets are set. Procedures are in place for setting targets across all year groups, based on the highest probability from all the testing carried out. Target setting is now well embedded in Years 10 and 11 and is monitored through the mentoring scheme.

56. Parents are well informed about their child's progress through parents' meetings, records of achievement and progress reports. Continuity of information is effectively arranged through a system that ensures parents benefit from one in each term.

57. Self-assessment by pupils is encouraged through the personal log book system which gives an outline of the work to be completed during the school year. Each pupil then comments on the actual work done. This helps to raise standards, as the pupils know very clearly what to do to improve and how they have done.

58. The school's assessment and monitoring of the progress of pupils with special educational needs is very good. Pupils, on entering, are assessed for attainment in reading and their progress in literacy skills is frequently monitored. Those pupils with major difficulties in reading, for example, have their small steps in progress recorded. Reviews of pupils' IEPs every half term ensure careful monitoring of progress towards objectives. In addition to IEP targets, pupils have individual subject-specific targets against which their progress can be measured.

59. When required, special educational needs pupils benefit from extra support and advice from external agencies, such as the school psychological service or the speech and language service. The inclusion base and mentoring provide good support to potentially disaffected pupils.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

60. The parents' views of the quality and effectiveness of what the school provides and achieves are very good. About 33 per cent of parents responded to the inspection questionnaire circulated prior to the inspection: their comments were very positive. However, only 18 parents attended the meeting with the registered inspector. Parents felt that the school was well led and managed and their child was making good progress. They thought that pupils were expected to work hard and to do their best. Parents found teaching to be

good and they felt the standing of the school within the community was rising. The only concern expressed was about the amount of homework pupils received.

61. The effectiveness of the school's links with parents is very good. Parents are alerted quickly if any concerns arise. They are invited to work in partnership with the school to resolve them. Parents receive very good information, particularly about pupils' progress. Both interim and annual reports contain sufficient, clear information for parents to be able to assess what their child can do, how well they are doing it, whether they are working at the appropriate level and what they need to do raise their level of attainment. Annual consultation evenings after the publication of the annual report are also held where parents are able to meet subject staff to discuss their child's progress. Other information evenings are held for parents such as a 'settling in' evening for parents of Year 7 pupils in the autumn term. Advice and guidance are sent home at the beginning of each academic year on completing homework and coursework. As part of the school's well-focused concern to celebrate pupils' successes, letters of congratulation are regularly sent to parents. The pupils' planners are an effective means of daily communication between home and school.

62. The impact of parents' involvement on the work of the school is very good. Many support the school by accompanying school visits and helping with transport to events outside of school. The parent teacher association raises funds for the school by running a range of events. They also run the weekly tuck shop. Parents' opinions are sought on issues such as bus routes and the drugs policy. The contribution of parents to children's learning at school and at home is good. Parents are encouraged to get their child to use the community library's facilities for out of school study. However, a significant minority of parents still fails to ensure that they send their child regularly to school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

63. Leadership and management are very good; they are the main reasons why this very good school is improving rapidly. The school evaluates its performance rigorously, it knows and builds on its strengths and takes effective steps to deal with its weaknesses. Excellent leadership comes from an enterprising, dynamic headteacher who, since her appointment just before the previous inspection, has turned the school fully around. The quality of management of the key personnel is very good. The school has a very clear sense of purpose and direction and its overall commitment to improvement is remarkably successful. Outcomes of these factors are, since 1997, a rapid rise in standards at above national rates of improvement and a similar rise in the school's popularity with parents and the community. With very good behaviour amongst nearly all pupils who feel it a privilege to attend, there are substantial improvements in rates of attendance and a large fall in exclusions, with no permanent exclusions in the last two years. Much-improved self-criticism and evaluation of performance are leading to better quality teaching and learning and effective target setting for improvements for school and pupils alike.

64. Well supported by the one very effective deputy headteacher and a strong central management team, the headteacher and governors have set up clear lines of delegation with thorough follow up to ensure the common interpretation of agreed improvement planning and school policy. The school operates very effectively through teams that are set consistent challenges for improvement, are fully accountable and have the pupils and their achievements as their sole purpose.

65. The quality of middle management is very good overall, although along with some real excellence there are weaknesses. The numerous, relatively newly appointed heads of faculty and of year accept with infectious enthusiasm responsibility for the interpretation of the school's excellent plan for improvement, adapting it as necessary to their particular areas of accountability. A leadership vacancy in mathematics is being well substituted and there is great strength in the other core subjects, English and science. Standards in these subjects are improving as a direct result. Leadership and management in modern foreign languages are unsatisfactory: staff absence is a problem, standards are too low and the quality of teaching has not been improved in spite of careful monitoring. Although well supported by the head of expressive arts, there is inertia in the direct management of physical education that contrasts with the general pattern of subject management. Standards in both these subjects have not improved as rapidly as in the rest.

66. The management of special educational needs provision is very good. The special educational needs co-ordinator gives a clear direction to the work of the department and, with the support of a committed staff, makes very good provision for pupils with special needs. The senior management perceives the provision for pupils with special educational needs as an important part of the work of the school and consequently the meeting of these needs has a high profile on department and senior management teams' agendas. As a result, the pupils with special educational needs make good progress.

67. The school's aims permeate its everyday life. The headteacher's unflinching, simple philosophy on quality and standards is the best example of this. Hard decisions are taken to make sure that the resources available are used for the single benefit of pupils' education. The school's current and projected use of special grants, including EIC, reflect the school's aims and the decision to site a City Learning Centre in it is well founded.

68. The school's commitment to good relationships is successful. Mainly, pupils leave domestic and other problems at the school gate. Pupils behave very well and the 'feel' of the school is one of purposeful resolve to do well; shouting by anyone is frowned upon as a sign of failure. As a result, the school has the very strong support of the parents, the local and ever wider communities. Its successes are recognised, for example by a very recent DfEE school achievement award, Investors in People status and the participation of the headteacher on national working groups to help other schools deal with challenging circumstances. Excellent examples of non-retaliation to provocation are good indicators of how far it has come. Leadership and management have gone a long way to generating real harmony. The curriculum and the way most teaching is devised to cater for individuals' needs epitomise equality of opportunity for all.

69. The school's very thorough procedures for evaluating its own performance, its use of outside agents such as the local education authority advisory services and its succinct plans for improvement are clear indicators of a shared commitment to do better. Because strengths and weaknesses are clearly recognised, its capacity to succeed is very high. Priorities for further improvement; boys' standards; numeracy; ICT; raising standards and refining self-evaluation practice are fully explored and are results of evaluation or logical extensions of recent initiatives. Weaknesses in especially modern foreign languages and to an extent physical education are not, however, included directly in planning.

70. The governors fulfil their statutory duties except in the provision of suitable study time for religious education for 14-16 year-olds and a daily act of collective worship, though there are improvements since the previous inspection. The governors know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and take great pride in contributing to its successes. The contributions of the chairman and vice-chairman are disproportionately high: delegation in the governing body does not reflect that in the rest of the school. The governors hold the school

thoroughly to account and their stewardship of special educational needs is very good. The governors have responded very well to the previous inspection report and the substantial improvements, reported annually to parents, are the outcome.

71. Rigorous, effective monitoring of teaching includes mini-inspections of subjects, annual critical observations of teaching and performance management. Improvements in the quality of teaching are a direct outcome, although there is still room for further evaluation of some teaching in modern foreign languages, especially.

72. The number, qualifications and experience of teachers, support assistants and technicians are generally adequate for the curriculum taught. However, non-specialists teach a few lessons in geography, and religious education. The school works hard to eliminate any adverse effect of this on standards and these teachers are helped with extensive schemes of work and detailed lesson plans. However, non-specialist teaching restricts the range and depth of topics covered, especially in religious education in Years 7 to 9. The staffing of special educational needs is good, with teaching and support staff who have experience and qualification in teaching these pupils. Temporary teachers who cover staff absence are given good information about the school and their classes. Senior management makes sure no group of pupils is adversely affected. Arrangements for the induction of newly qualified teachers are very good. Newly appointed heads of faculty are well supported by other senior staff. The continuous development of staff is suitably focused on priorities identified in the school improvement plan. The school has carefully planned and implemented performance management into its professional development programme.

73. Accommodation is unsatisfactory overall. There is not enough of it and too many areas are poor. Current provision for drama is unsatisfactory. There is no specialist base for religious education so classes are spread around the school with no clear focus for the subject. Sound proofing of music rooms is poor and detracts from the teaching of languages in adjacent rooms. The outside of the building is drab and the condition of the netball courts poor. Accommodation is, however, very good and has a positive influence on pupils' learning in special educational needs and ICT. The learning support base has been further developed and now provides a very good working environment for pupils with a wide range of learning and behavioural problems. Internally the school has done a good deal to improve classrooms and corridors with a programme of refurbishment and lively displays. Classrooms and corridors are clean and well maintained. The school has a planned programme for improvement and currently the local education authority is reviewing accommodation.

74. Resources are much improved since the previous inspection and now play a good part in most areas of the curriculum. There is a weakness in the part which the library, a shared facility with the community, plays in broadening the learning possibilities available to pupils. It plays an unsatisfactory part in improving pupils' standards of literacy because there is a lack of readily available books and in particular a poor quality of non-fiction. The school has continued to build on and improve the quality of resources for pupils with special educational needs identified in the previous inspection; they are now good.

75. The school has set up efficient systems to manage its finances. Best value principles are applied in all processes. Close links combine strategic improvement planning and the resources available. The school improvement plan identifies the cost implications of its intended activities. There is effective financial control through the bursar, the headteacher and the governors. Prudent use is made of extra funding available to the school. The social inclusion grant is used effectively to provide support and administrative systems that are raising attendance rates. Heads of year are able to get information rapidly through their own computers and useful clerical assistance checks absentees and informs parents immediately if pupils are not in school. This grant and others have been widely used to make

very good environmental improvements to the interior of the school buildings.

76. Excellence in Cities funding has been put to good use in the mentoring systems for pupils in Years 10 and 11: this is raising standards. Extra funding has improved the learning support area and provided more resources for each faculty. This funding also supports after-school provision for pupils to do homework and coursework.

77. Considering the relatively low basic cost of educating each pupil and the good quality of education provided, the rapidly rising standards pupils achieve and the very good potential for further improvement, the school gives very good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

78. The governors and senior management should address the following weakness in their post-inspection action plan for further improvements:

(1) Raise standards and improve the quality of teaching and of learning in modern foreign languages by:

- Sharing more effectively the very good practice that already exists in the subject so that all teach to the standards of the best;
- Evaluating rigorously and regularly teaching and learning in the subject in order to eliminate the current weaknesses.

See paragraphs 13, 16, 23, 24, 65, 69, 71, 144-151.

(2) Governors should also address the following important areas in their action planning:

- Continuing refinement of the way pupils' literacy standards are improved in geography, science, physical education and religious education, by increasing the opportunities in these subjects for pupils to write at some length and for them to be able to explain their ideas and feelings by this means.

See paragraphs 7, 16, 29, 90, 120.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	135
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	65

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
8	25	42	21	2	3	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	756
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	357

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	31
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	234

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	7

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	7
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	16

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	9.5
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.5
National comparative data	0.4

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	76	67	143

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	35	43	42
	Girls	49	40	32
	Total	84	83	74
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	55 (56)	58 (48)	52 (40)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	10 (15)	25 (18)	19 (11)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	21	36	42
	Girls	26	37	37
	Total	47	73	79
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	32 (54)	49 (39)	53 (41)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	5 (15)	20 (21)	12 (14)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	49	64	113

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	13	41	44
	Girls	25	59	60
	Total	38	100	104
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	34 (32)	88 (86)	92 (92)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score	School	36.1 (31.2)

per pupil	National	38.4 (37.8)
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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	0
Black – other	5
Indian	0
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	6
White	744
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	1	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	1	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	86	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)	46.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	281

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.3
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	21.9
Key Stage 4	19.0

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	1 791 872
Total expenditure	1 798 521
Expenditure per pupil	2 379
Balance brought forward from previous year	40 527
Balance carried forward to next year	33 878

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	756
Number of questionnaires returned	223

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	52	42	4	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	51	45	3	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	51	37	6	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	40	44	10	3	3
The teaching is good.	52	43	3	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	48	39	8	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	61	36	1	1	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	72	25	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	45	42	6	2	4
The school is well led and managed.	65	30	1	1	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	46	3	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	42	42	6	0	9

Other issues raised by parents

Extended replies wished to emphasise the school's very caring attitudes to pupils' illnesses, welfare and standards. Individual concerns were raised over lack of progress.

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

ENGLISH

79. In the national tests for 14 year-olds the percentage of pupils reaching the expected Level 5 or above was close to the national average in 2000. Largely explained by the fact that most of the highest attaining pupils go to local selective schools, the percentage reaching the higher levels of 6 and above was well below the national average. When compared with similar schools, attainment was well above average. Girls performed better than boys by a larger margin than in most schools, although in some recent years the gender gap has been smaller than the national average. Results in 2000 were similar to those in mathematics and science. Results began to rise again in 2000, having declined in the previous two years, and are now not far from those noted in the previous inspection.

80. The percentage of pupils gaining GCSE higher grades, A*-C, in English in 2000 was below the national average. All pupils who were entered gained grades A*-G. Girls performed better than boys by a margin slightly larger than in most schools nationally. Pupils' results in English were better than their results in mathematics and similar to those in science. Owing to prolonged staff absences over the last three years, GCSE results in English have not altered much and are significantly worse than at the previous inspection. The percentage of pupils gaining higher grades, A*-C, in English literature in 2000 was well below the national average. All those pupils who were entered gained grades A* to G. Again, girls performed better than boys by a greater margin than in schools nationally. Overall performance was worse than in most other subjects and for boys it was the subject in which they fared worst of all. Results have dropped rapidly over the last three years and are well below those at the previous inspection.

81. Work seen from 14-year-old pupils is of a higher standard than indicated by the results of the national tests and is consistently in line with national expectations. This represents good progress by the pupils as the data available shows that their attainment on entry was below the national average. By the age of 14 pupils speak confidently and have reasonably wide vocabularies. They can explain quite complex ideas. For example, they can explain in simple terms why people like to read their horoscopes. Reading test results show that pupils make good progress from Year 7 to Year 9. Most pupils read without much hesitation and with understanding, although many cannot be heard clearly when reading aloud. By Year 9 the higher attainers have good understanding of *Macbeth*. One pupil cleverly paraphrased Lady Macbeth's words, *Consider it not too deeply* as *Don't dwell on it*. All pupils understand at least the main outline of the plot while the highest attainers understand the changing emotions of the characters from what they say. They realise, for example, that Macbeth becomes scared after he has murdered the king. In their written work most pupils write simple sentences accurately and do not make many mistakes. The lowest attainers have difficulty in forming clear sentences and mis-spell simple words. For example, *little* was seen written as *littal*. On the other hand, the most accomplished pupils write in an excellent style as in this example: *A dark alleyway severed the right side of the street and led to nothingness.*

82. Work seen from 16-year-old pupils is in line with national expectations. It is better than the standard suggested by last year's GCSE results. As these pupils entered the school with attainment well below the national average this shows very good achievement on their part. When speaking to each other or to adults most pupils express their ideas clearly. In a lesson on the poetry of Carol Ann Duffy they offered sensible suggestions about how the poet achieved her effects and used appropriate technical language. In another lesson pupils spoke with precision, using words like *labelled*, *victimised*, and *rejected*. Most pupils read with

sound understanding both of poetry and prose passages. They are able to deduce the feelings of a poet from what they read. One class showed sound understanding of a fairly complex newspaper article about fear although the lowest attainers did not grasp the more subtle points. Most pupils write with clear expression. Their spelling is generally sound with mistakes limited to less usual words such as *hurridly*. The main weakness is the inability to recognise where a sentence ends. The highest attainers produce work of very good standard and their work is very largely free of error.

83. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. This is largely because in most lessons they are given work that is designed at the right level for them. Teachers are aware of the targets on their IEPs and plan accordingly. In addition, some pupils benefit from being withdrawn for specific teaching in small groups or by going to the paired reading sessions at lunch time.

84. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It is good in Years 7, 8 and 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject. This is especially apparent on the GCSE courses where their understanding of literature and language helps pupils to make good progress. Pupils made good progress in improving their writing skills by being shown how to apply some of the techniques of poetry to their own style. The basic skills are well taught, specifically in the literacy lessons allocated in Years 7 and 8. One of the strengths of the faculty is the detailed planning of lessons. The purposes of the lessons are explained to pupils at the beginning in order to focus their attention and are usually reviewed at the end. The planning includes making provision for pupils of different abilities. Sometimes this is by arranging for high and low attainers to work together and, at other times, by giving work designed specially for the low attainers or the gifted.

85. In the very best lessons it is apparent that the teacher expects nothing but the best work from pupils and challenges them accordingly. This was seen in a Year 11 lesson on the poem *Valentine* in which the pupils were expected to analyse the language in detail and use higher skills to explore the theme and structure. Similarly in a Year 10 lesson the teacher expected the pupils to extend their learning about stereotyping to its effects and how it leads to prejudice. Learning is encouraged by teachers using a variety of stimulating methods to make their lessons more interesting. For example, Year 7 pupils were taught to summarise a story by producing their own strip cartoon. Above all, in a number of lessons, the interest and enthusiasm of the teachers made learning enjoyable.

86. Teachers' class management skills are very good and are based on very good relationships with the pupils. The result is orderly lessons in which pupils behave well. They concentrate well in response to the good pace of lessons. Very often their interest is maintained as they are expected to move on to a number of different tasks in the same lesson. Teachers, however, do not expect pupils to make sufficiently wide use of computers; at present computer work is limited to word-processing. Not enough use is made of the library although plans have already been developed to remedy this. All work is regularly marked and written comments are helpful to pupils. Homework is given regularly, the best practice being when it extends learning as when a Year 11 had to answer questions on a poem which were graded in difficulty. The first questions were based on what had been learned during the lesson while at the end pupils had to think more for themselves.

87. The leadership and management of the English faculty are excellent. The head of department has been in post only two terms but in that time has introduced new schemes of work of excellent quality. In addition, appropriate resources have been produced to use with each unit of work. There is a highly relevant improvement plan that is focused firmly on raising standards. Very good assessment procedures linked to National Curriculum criteria have been introduced. All the English classrooms now present an excellent environment for learning. The underachievement of boys has been identified as the main area for concern and strategies are already in place. For example, the setting up of single sex classes in Year 9 is showing every sign of success. Above all faculty members play an active part in decision making and are as committed to improvement and high standards as is the head of faculty. The fall in standards since the previous inspection has now been arrested and the attainment of pupils is returning to previous levels and above.

88. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C in drama in 2000 was above the national average, as it has been for a number of years. It is not taught as a separate subject in Years 7 and 8, but is part of the English curriculum. The only lesson seen in Year 9 was satisfactory. The standard of pupils' performance was below what is expected of 14-year-olds. In lessons with Years 10 and 11 teaching is good. Pupils have reached an average standard by the age of 16. They can base a scene around a theme and most can develop a character satisfactorily. Most show satisfactory performance skills. Accommodation for drama is poor but the school is aware of this and plans for improvement are in hand.

89. A GCSE course in media studies is now in its second year and as yet no pupils have sat for the examination. The subject is enthusiastically and satisfactorily taught. However, not as many pupils are working at the standard required to obtain the highest grades as would be expected nationally.

Literacy across all subjects

90. Standards of literacy across the curriculum are satisfactory. Speaking skills are developed in a number of subjects. In mathematics and music teachers insist on pupils using the correct technical language. In history pupils are not allowed to use single word answers but have to explain reasons for their conclusions. The most concentrated effort on raising speaking skills, other than in English, is in science. A Year 11 debate was seen in which pupils argued for and against cloning. A Year 7 class was seen orally presenting ideas on sex education. Good practice, however, does not run through all subjects. Pupils listen well in all subjects to teachers and to each other. Although reading standards improve as pupils go through the school, this is not the result of a concerted approach. Pupils are not often required to read, although they are generally quite competent. History is an exception, where it is standard practice for pupils to read source materials. In some subjects, not enough attention is paid to matching the difficulty of reading materials to the attainment of pupils. For example, some of the worksheets in physical education are too difficult for low attaining pupils. In addition, not enough use is made of the library. The picture is also mixed with regard to practice over writing. In history there is a good system where pupils are taught conventional phrases to use, such as *Another point to be considered is...* In other subjects such as geography, science, physical education and religious education opportunities are missed for pupils to practise extended writing to enable them to structure their thoughts. The school has a literacy policy but it is not sufficiently stressed in the written policies or the teaching practice of all subjects. For example, although most subjects display lists of key words, they are not always referred to enough. The system for ensuring that all subjects learn from the best practice is at present inadequate.

MATHEMATICS

91. Since the previous inspection, results have been below the average for all schools but

with a consistent improving trend. In this time girls have performed better than boys, although below average compared with girls nationally. Owing to the influence of local selection procedures for 11 year-olds, the proportion of pupils reaching the highest grades A* and A has also remained below the national average for both boys and girls. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 were well below average compared with all schools in 2000 but well above average compared with similar schools. Results have been similar in each of the past three years. The percentage of pupils attaining the higher levels of 6 or above has improved significantly in 2000 although remaining well below the national average. In GCSE examinations in mathematics the overall pass rate of grades A*-G has been consistently above average for the past three years. The proportion of pupils achieving higher, A*-C, grades in the GCSE examinations in 2000 was below average compared with all schools but was above average in comparison with similar schools. The higher, A*-C, grade achievement in 1999 was similar to 2000 and was a considerable improvement from that for 1998.

92. Standards of work seen amongst 11-14 year-olds are in line with national expectations. In general, the work seen was better than national test data suggest and all pupils, especially lower attainers, make good progress through this stage. Standards in mathematics on entry to Year 7 are well below average. The pupils achieve well, for example, developing their skills in investigative work, although there is not enough writing to explain patterns or hypotheses. By Year 9 most pupils display satisfactory skills in mental arithmetic and handle fractions, decimal numbers and percentages with confidence. There is good work in statistics across the attainment range and higher attainers have a good understanding of scatter graphs and correlation. Work with algebraic expressions and equations is also good although lower attainers are less confident in solving equations.

93. Standards of work amongst 14-16 year-olds are also in line with national expectations. The standards of work seen reflect good progress by the time they are 16 for all pupils, but with lower attainers and those with special educational needs making particularly good progress. There is a good development of investigative work and all pupils develop a systematic approach to problem solving. Higher attainers now write at greater length to describe their work and all make good use of appropriate ICT. There is good investigative course work from all pupils in both content and presentation. The emphasis on promoting numeracy is continued with some higher attainers handling arithmetic with fractions with considerable confidence. By Year 11 pupils understand the idea of a function and can construct the graph of a quadratic function, with most pupils producing work of good quality. In general, pupils are less confident in work involving the solutions of equations and particularly in work with simultaneous equations. All pupils can work with angles of all magnitudes and construct various types of triangle. There is a good emphasis on pupils acquiring an appropriate mathematical vocabulary to describe their work.

94. The quality of teaching is good. There has been a good emphasis on teaching and its quality has improved since the previous inspection. This improvement has contributed to the rising levels of achievement in mathematics seen in the inspection. Teachers have a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their pupils, including those with special educational needs, and lessons are well planned to match pupils' needs. Relationships are good and in most classes pupils are keen to participate in answering questions or explaining their ideas. In the best lessons the purposes of the lesson are shared with pupils at the beginning and their enthusiasm is well used to ensure that effective learning takes place. In a lowest attainment Year 9 class, practical work in reflection and symmetry involved pupils drawing and tracing with considerable care. The sustained involvement of the teacher and co-operation of the class in the work resulted in good independent learning throughout the lesson. In a Year 11 class of average attainers, working on the solution of simultaneous equations, the teacher used continual questioning to monitor pupils' understanding and

adapted the lesson to take account of their difficulties. As a result, there was a growing level of confidence in the practical work as the lesson progressed. Teachers have good data relating to previous and current attainment of individual pupils and this is well used to set targets against which progress is measured. Good classroom management ensures that satisfactory learning takes place even when a few pupils' attitudes are not of the highest standard. In some classes, even though pupils are grouped by attainment, there are wide variations in standards. In these circumstances teachers are unable to provide the support and reinforcement to build confidence for some, whilst promoting independent learning and providing challenge for the higher attainers.

95. The leadership and management of the present acting head of faculty are good and the small group of teachers work well as a team. The schemes of work have been completely revised to take account of new textbooks and teaching in classes based on attainment from Year 8 instead of Year 9. Pupils make appropriate use of computers for work with spreadsheets, databases and LOGO in their mathematics and the recent provision of a mathematics computer room will enhance this work considerably.

Numeracy across all subjects

96. Standards of numeracy and mental arithmetic are satisfactory and good in Year 7 where pupils have benefited from the national numeracy project in primary school. The mathematics faculty has reviewed the scheme of work for Years 7 and 8 in line with the national numeracy strategy and there is a good emphasis on promoting number skills whenever possible in mathematics lessons. Lessons are often planned to begin or end with a short number puzzle, or number game and these are popular with pupils. Pupils are frequently required to make calculations and many can work without a calculator to a considerable extent with both integers and fractions. The school is developing a whole school policy for numeracy but at the moment the evidence of pupils applying their mathematical skills in other subjects is unsatisfactory because opportunities to reinforce work with mathematics are sometimes missed in, for example, science, geography, history and physical education.

97. In science with 11-14 year-olds, weighing and measuring accurately and expressing relationships through simple formulae for variables such as distance, speed and time develop mathematical skills, but there are too few opportunities to practise these. Older pupils' abilities to represent data graphically, find lines of best fit and work with formulae and equations are well developed. There is good promotion of mathematical skills in design and technology where pupils are required to weigh and measure with accuracy. In Year 7 pupils analyse data from a pizza survey and continue in subsequent years to develop skills in processing consumer surveys using charts and graphs to interpret the data. A range of graphical representation is used to look at problems such as population changes in geography and concepts of direction, scale and grid reference underpin map work. There is, however, less evidence than usual of older pupils' interpretation of scatter graphs and correlation work in geography. In sociology, there is also work interpreting and displaying information from questionnaires and surveys and pupils look at different types of sampling and longitudinal studies for acquiring information. Opportunities for analysing numerical sources are missed in history. Work with dates, times and travel timetables are features of modern foreign languages and in a Year 8 art and design class pupils demonstrated good mathematical skills in calculating the repeat for a pattern they were constructing based on Islamic art. In physical education, pupils time activities and present results in tables and graphs, but there too little exploitation of pupils' mathematical skills in other areas of work such as measuring or checking playing areas or monitoring fitness levels.

SCIENCE

98. Attainment in science is rising throughout the school and has improved significantly since the previous inspection. The results in national tests at the end of Year 9 have improved each year for the last three years. In 2000, the proportion of pupils attaining both Level 5 and Level 6 was just below that attained nationally in all schools, boys getting better results than girls. When compared with similar schools, the results for Level 5 were in the top five per cent in 2000 and those for level 6 well above average.

99. GCSE results in science have also improved since the previous inspection, but are still below those obtained nationally. Taking all results together there has been a steady increase in the proportion of pupils attaining higher, A*-C, grades, but this disguises differences in the attainment of pupils following different courses. Most pupils take double award science; results for this course improved considerably between 1998 and 1999, with a slight drop in 2000: results were below the national average. Girls have performed better than boys until 2000 when the trend was reversed. Overall, both boys and girls performed significantly better in science than in other subjects in the school. A small group of pupils chose to take three separate science subjects and over the last three years their results at GCSE have been significantly below those for all schools nationally with a drop in 2000, when boys attained more of the higher grades than girls. The below average performance is because of the absence of higher attainers, lost to selective schools.

100. The faculty's close analysis of the results has pinpointed areas for improvement: strategies such as reducing rotation of groups, making staff accountable for a particular group and matching the strengths of individual teachers to specific groups are positive outcomes.

101. The work seen shows the standards to be in line with those attained nationally. Attainment in lessons is better than the national test results indicate and reflects the work to raise the attainment of all pupils. In Years 7 to 9 attainment was above that expected nationally in four out of the nine lessons seen. This above average attainment was seen particularly in the higher-attaining classes in each year such as Year 8 looking practically at the effects of sudden temperature changes on the weathering of rocks or Year 9 learning about selective breeding in dogs. In GCSE lessons, pupils in two-thirds of the lessons showed attainment as expected by the end of Year 11, but a group of Year 11 pupils debating the moral and ethical issues of cloning demonstrated above average attainment.

102. The pupils' achievement is good overall. All teachers encourage them to do well and this plays a large part in improving pupils' motivation to succeed. The progress of high attaining pupils, mentioned as a weakness in the previous inspection, has improved, particularly when they are given tasks designed to make them think for themselves. An example was a series of experiments demonstrating electrostatics in everyday situations that pupils had to explain to each other. However, when the tasks do not present sufficient intellectual challenge, then progress is only satisfactory. There is still work to be done to provide a range of activities for higher attainers with opportunities to develop them as independent learners.

103. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well, particularly when supported by learning support staff or when teachers match activities specifically to the needs of individuals. In one lesson a hearing-impaired boy made good progress because the teacher enunciated clearly, used a transmitter and supported her speaking with visual reinforcement of words and terms posted round the room. Pupils with learning difficulties progress well in small but attainable steps when helped by easily read sheets and tasks designed to interest them.

104. The quality of teaching is very good across the whole age range; in six out of ten

lessons teaching was very good or excellent. In Years 7 to 9, this is over half the lessons and at GCSE a third of lessons. Teaching is a significant strength of the faculty and has been a major influence in raising the attainment of pupils. All teachers have very good subject knowledge, which allows them to present information in a variety of ways including the use of the latest ICT as an aid to learning. The pupils learn very well from hands-on use of the Internet to research the important dates in the development of radioactivity, and take digital time-lapse photographs of the effects of freezing and thawing on a rock sample. Teachers make it very clear to pupils what the lesson will contain, how it relates to previous work and what they are expected to know by the end. In many instances pupils are given the opportunity to assess their own progress at the end of the lesson. Pupils clearly enjoy and are interested in science, and all, irrespective of their attainment or their needs, are encouraged to do their best. Learning is correspondingly good. Pupils' interest is fostered further by a range of weekly extra-curricular activities such as chemistry club, revision lessons and an inter-house science competition.

105. Teachers expect and receive a high standards of behaviour from pupils and this in turn leads to well ordered, purposeful lessons, particularly practical sessions. Good technical support both for science and ICT play important parts in the success of many lessons. The skills of literacy are well developed by a range of activities. Pupils are encouraged to present their findings and ideas to the rest of the class, giving them confidence to speak clearly and logically. Examples seen were Year 7 presenting their group ideas about parenting during a lesson on human reproduction and Year 11 debating arguments for and against cloning of humans. Writing skills are also developed when pupils analyse results and evaluate their investigations for GCSE or produce information pamphlets about a topic such as respiration. At the moment there are not enough opportunities to write creatively about aspects of science in the forms of poems, articles or diaries and opportunities to practise mathematical skills are also missed. These, plus tasks such as designing and carrying out surveys and researching a topic, could improve the range of homework tasks which at present is restricted to short written activities.

106. Taken as whole, the faculty has made very good progress since the previous inspection. Since his appointment three years ago, the head of faculty has had a major influence on the development and improvement of the subject. His excellent leadership and the commitment of the staff have removed several weaknesses identified at the previous inspection. The planning of the faculty's development now follows the school plan and links priorities and projected resources. The performance of the faculty is monitored and evaluated closely, particularly in relation to examination performance. Whilst the faculty now has a policy to standardise the marking of pupils' work and evaluate their performance, the detail of marking varies. As yet there is inconsistency in the ways teachers give pointers to help pupils improve in the short term and inform them of the levels they have reached.

ART AND DESIGN

107. In 2000, teachers assessed standards reached by 14 year olds to be well above average. The standards reached by pupils of similar age seen during the inspection were broadly average in most areas, but work in three dimensions and sketchbook work was below average because there was not enough of it.

108. All pupils in Years 7 to 9, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in the way they use and combine different art forms. Pupils develop, for example, their understanding of texture by mixing paint and combining it with different things to create textures. They apply this knowledge and understanding when making expressive paintings that result from their studies of the work of Van Gogh. Similarly older pupils show genuine excitement as they discover new ways of using different media. Pupils' confidence in the way they freely experiment with different combinations builds progressively as they get older, and a characteristic of the work of the oldest pupils is the diverse ways they use techniques in their work. The weakest aspect in the work of all pupils is that they do not work enough from direct observation of the world about them. In a Year 7 lesson for example there was a marked difference between the standard of work produced when copying a reproduction and the work done from direct observation of the human face - the latter having more vitality and spontaneity.

109. Older pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve well. The GCSE examination results in 2000 were well above the national average and have improved significantly since the previous inspection when they were below average. Girls' results have improved at a faster rate than those of boys, with boys' results being still below average. Girls do better in art and design than in most of their other GCSE subjects, and boys gain similar results in art and design as those in their other subjects.

110. Teaching and learning are good overall, but all lessons are not of a consistently good quality. All lessons are well planned with pupils being given clear guidance about how they should approach their work. Lessons begin with whole class instruction, and demonstrations of technique help pupils understand how they might approach their work. During lessons teaching effectively supports individual pupils as they grapple with particular problems with praise encouraging them to do better. The impact of this approach can be seen, for example, in the Year 10 crazy creatures project, where good planning is reflected in the preparatory work pupils have done, and in the way they have been encouraged to make an individual response in both two and three dimensions. Where teaching is weaker, basic classroom routines have not been well enough established with pupils not listening to teacher instruction and guidance, particularly those points that are designed to lift standards. The effect is that in such cases standards are lower than they should be. Art is a popular subject and is widely enjoyed by pupils of all ages but work done at home is of a much lower standard than it should be, and the rate of homework completion is often low.

111. The recent revision of the curriculum for younger pupils means that the National Curriculum is adequately covered. Too few opportunities still exist for younger pupils to work in three dimensions, for all pupils to learn about the art and design of other cultures and to use ICT to make and learn about art and design.

112. The management of the department is good and there is a good understanding of where future developments need to take place. Pupils' artwork is prominently displayed throughout the school reflecting the positive contribution made by the subject to the life of the school and the education of its pupils.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

113. Since the previous inspection changes in the organisation and the management of the faculty have taken place. A very new head of faculty is providing an emerging vision of how the faculty that includes ICT will operate. Review documents show that steps are being taken to identify and overcome weaknesses. At present, however, the different areas of food, textiles and resistant materials tend to work in isolation, and this means that the curriculum taught to younger pupils is not as coherent as it should be.

114. Teacher assessment of pupils reaching the end of Year 9 in 2000 show standards to be below average, with boys doing less well than girls. Pupils who are currently reaching the end of Year 9 show similar standards. All pupils are weaker at designing than they are at making, but standards vary between areas. For example, standards of designing in both food and textiles are better than in resistant materials. This is because pupils are required to think more about design problems in these two areas. For example in the Year 9 biscuit project in food technology, pupils experiment with a wide range of outcomes which are carefully evaluated and tested as part of the process of refining the final product. Similarly in the holiday promotions project in textiles there is an expectation that pupils will thoroughly investigate a wide range of possible solutions before a final design is developed. In resistant materials technology pupils are too eager to begin the task of making with the result that too frequently ideas are only partially resolved. Another significant reason why pupils are less confident in their design work is because the conventions of free hand drawing and graphical presentation are not taught to a consistent standard across all areas. All pupils, including those with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily overall.

115. GCSE results have improved since the previous inspection, but in 2000 were still below the national average. Overall, pupils did better in design and technology than in most of the other subjects they took and all pupils who took GCSE gained at least a G grade, which is above the national average. More girls than boys gain the higher, A*-C, grades. The strongest results were in graphics and textiles, which were much closer to the national average. Results in resistant materials and food were well below this.

116. Standards overall are below expectation amongst older pupils. These pupils show lots of enthusiasm for work in technology. This is particularly true in graphics where pupils' enthusiasm is reflected in good GCSE results. Similar attitudes are found in textiles where Year 11 pupils working on a child's toy project show a good understanding of the design process. They research and investigate extensively existing products, markets and consumer requirements, and complete products to a good standard. The few examples of resistant materials work were limited in scope, inaccurate in manufacture and below average in finish. The design work of Year 10 pupils in resistant materials is also below average, showing poor understanding of such things as orthographic projections and rendering techniques.

117. Overall teaching and learning are satisfactory, showing variation in quality between very good and unsatisfactory. All full time teachers were not seen because of absence. The quality of supply teaching used to cover absence was satisfactory. A good feature of all teaching is the planning of both single lessons, and whole projects. The effect of this is that pupils are clear about what they are expected to do. For example in a Year 7 food lesson, step-by-step planning ensures that pupils are clear about how they should construct a questionnaire about the flavours of pizza, and how they should present the information in bar charts and pictograms. Where teaching is very good, as in a Year 9 textiles lesson, there is a direct link between the expectations the teacher has of what pupils can do, and how pupils themselves monitor the quality of what they do. The effect of this is to raise standards. The most significant weakness in the teaching of younger pupils is the way work is assessed. In

textiles an attempt has been made to resolve this problem, but there is no coherent and systematic approach to assessment across all areas. In some cases routine marking is not done, and pupils are rarely given clear information about what they do less well and how they might improve. The effect of this is that pupils in Year 9, whose work is to be assessed according to National Curriculum levels, have no understanding of what level they are currently working at, and how they might aim at a higher level.

118. At the time of the previous inspection pupils were not being taught about control technology. Planning has taken place to ensure that this is done in the future but most pupils now reaching the end of Year 9 will have not covered this aspect of the National Curriculum. Steps are being taken to improve access to, and use of ICT, but there is not yet a planned approach to its use.

GEOGRAPHY

119. The proportion of Year 9 pupils assessed as being at Level 5 or better in the 2000 National Curriculum teacher assessments was just above the national average.

120. Inspection scrutiny shows that by the end of Year 9 overall attainment is in line with national expectations, with substantial minorities above and below. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection. Most pupils can extract relevant information from a range of sources to enable them to write short notes. About one quarter, who have weak literacy skills, find difficulty in writing at length. Higher-attaining pupils produce fluent passages of writing in their enquiry work, which is frequently given extra depth from research via the Internet. These higher attainers can, for example, recognise how conflicting demands on the environment may arise and make informed judgements on the effects of its exploitation, as observed in a lesson on the Amazon rain forest. Lower-attaining pupils can describe, but do not explain, the effects of human activity in delicate environments. All pupils can draw simple bar graphs from tabulated geographical data.

121. In 2000, geography was the weakest GCSE subject in the school. The proportion of pupils gaining higher grades, A* to C, declined significantly from 1999. In both years it was well below the national average. This proportion has fluctuated considerably in the years since the previous inspection, but has shown a marginal overall improvement in that period. There has been no consistent pattern of either boys' or girls' superiority.

122. Evidence from completed assignments and lesson observations shows that overall attainment at the end of Year 11 is below national expectations, though for many pupils it is in line with them. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils extract information from a range of sources to produce accurate notes. Most reach reasoned conclusions in decision-making exercises, as seen in a lesson on changes in farming in recent years. They produce good coursework, while that of the higher attainers is very good, employing hypothesis testing to good effect, and using computers to improve the appearance of text and graphs. However, they do not use appropriately sophisticated statistical techniques to test their hypotheses fully. As with younger pupils, weaknesses in literacy restrict the fluency of some pupils' writing. The proportion with these weaknesses is greater in the current Year 11 than in the current Year 9. Most pupils are better at providing short answers than at attempting longer passages of writing.

123. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, ranging from poor to very good. This range represents a wider variation than at the previous inspection, but the overall quality is slightly better. On average, teaching is better in Years 9 to 11, where it is taught entirely by specialists and where the overall quality is good. Non-specialists carry out most of the teaching in Years 7 and 8. In the best lessons, teachers' good subject knowledge is reinforced by brisk pace, challenge and sensible allocation of time to different activities. These qualities were obvious in a Year 10 lesson on urban decay, when pupils responded well to the challenge of a decision-making exercise on the reasons for the demolition of multi-storey flats, after examining a wide range of evidence. In most lessons teachers provide a good atmosphere for learning through good discipline. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are overwhelmingly positive in most lessons. They respond to good teaching by settling down quickly to work, concentrating and listening respectfully to each other's opinions. Most lessons start with a clear statement of their purposes, followed by a review of recent learning, during which pupils readily recall and consolidate what they have learned before. Rare instances of poor behaviour are dealt with without confrontation. Learning is assisted by opportunities for collaborative learning, but there should be more opportunities for independent learning and research; several lessons are too teacher-directed. In some lessons, tasks are not well matched to the needs of individual pupils; introductions are too long and teaching sticks too closely to textbooks and worksheets instead of using the available wide range of alternative learning resources. In the poorly taught lesson, insecure specialist knowledge and poor time management had a negative effect on learning. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. Teachers and support staff know them well and recognise their needs. The regularly set homework provides useful reinforcement to classroom learning. Work is marked regularly, but the marking is too rarely accompanied by comments pointing the way forward for pupils. An absence of fieldwork in the earlier years is a weakness.

124. Some of the points for improvements raised by the previous inspection have been answered, but there has been no significant improvement in examination results or in planned opportunities for pupils to develop their computer skills. The time allocation for the subject in Years 7 to 9 remains low. The application of number through the use of statistical analysis is underdeveloped. A newly appointed head of faculty is starting to tackle the management deficiencies mentioned in the previous report. There is for example, careful analysis of a wealth of data on pupils' performance, aimed at raising standards through a more precise targeting of individual needs. A well-considered system for the monitoring of work is hindered by the scattered distribution of geography teaching across the school site.

HISTORY

125. Perceptive, very good leadership and lively teaching are taking history in new directions, engaging pupils and making them think. The newly appointed head of faculty has wasted no time in taking action to raise standards. Monitoring the work of colleagues and pupils, revision of schemes of work and overhaul of resources, target setting for pupils, support for non-specialists, training for himself in management skills and ICT have all contributed to improving standards in history. These developments represent a good response to the previous inspection report and promise well for the future.

126. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 is well below national expectations, but well above that of pupils in similar schools. Attainment in lessons indicates rising standards: the pupils make good progress given their level of attainment on entry to the school. They have targets and refer to their teacher's marking comments to know how to improve.

127. By the end of Year 9 pupils confidently place events in time and accurately use historical terminology. They know how events and people have shaped life in Britain and

Europe from Roman times to the mid 20th century. By making judgements and comparisons using a range of sources they understand how political, religious, economic and social freedoms have been won through the courage and suffering of people from all social classes. They interpret and assess the value and reliability of different types of evidence. Higher attaining pupils do particularly well in these aspects. All pupils communicate what they know in a variety of ways including newspaper reports, eyewitness accounts, role-plays.

128. Low time allocation, at this stage, squeezes opportunities for decision-making and developing independence. Pupils are not involved in extended discussion-based activities to fully explore the deeper meanings of key questions, which are at the heart of the department's new work schemes. There is not enough time to build upon the vitality and skill of the new specialist teachers to raise standards further. As a result, the experience of those who do not continue to study history after the end of Year 9 is not broad enough.

129. Attainment of pupils at the end of Year 11 judged according to GCSE higher, A*-C results, is below the national average. In comparison with schools of similar type these results are above average. Standards of work seen during the inspection are satisfactory and pupils make good progress, an indication that the recent small downward trend in GCSE results will be reversed in 2001 and 2002. The analysis of results and the monitoring of the progress of current pupils have generated new ways for making sure that targets are met.

130. By the end of Year 11, pupils' history skills are well established and they use the historian's critical eye to cope with a challenging course. They achieve well in Years 10 and 11. Through studies of European states, America, Korea and Vietnam they know how economic crises, political tension and fear can lead to insecurity and war. They understand the suffering of soldiers and civilians in war or economic depression and how the after-effects can permanently change people's lives. For example, as part of coursework, a Year 11 pupil wrote about how songs and paintings after the Vietnam War reflected changes in attitudes and culture. Pupils extend their literacy skills to include a range of English styles, which help them to fuse together knowledge, understanding and analysis with appropriately interspersed judgements or conclusions. Their coursework writing is impressive both in quality and quantity. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve well because the teachers help them to organise information. The absence of fieldwork remains an issue from the previous inspection, but measures are afoot to redress it.

131. In tune with the aims of the school, the quality of teaching and learning is rising, building on that reported at the previous inspection. Teaching overall is good. It is often very good and at times excellent, particularly with older pupils. Teachers' high expectations, good questioning techniques, imaginative and stimulating resources, often from the Internet, underpinned by very strong subject knowledge, make pupils curious and keen to be partners in learning. Helpful marking and the good use of homework raise standards. Learning is good, and there were examples of excellent learning in Years 8 and 9 when skilfully designed tasks led pupils, step by step, to scan and refer back to a range of sources to help them make judgements about the reliability of evidence and the techniques of propaganda. The process accelerated their understanding of new knowledge at a brisk pace. Such intricate planning by teachers builds in challenges for higher attaining pupils and support for pupils with special educational needs who also grow in confidence when working in pairs.

132. Teachers take seriously their role of improving pupils' literacy skills. Almost every lesson sees pupils reading aloud, explaining, reasoning and scanning text. There are, however not enough opportunities for analysing numerical sources.

133. Strong specialist teaching maintains consistently high standards in Years 10 and 11. The teacher's personal interest and expertise with documentary extracts, songs, feature

films and opportunistic video recording of contemporary news items, engages emotions as well as minds and challenges pupils when they make judgements about the value of such types of evidence.

134. Attainment of pupils in GCSE sociology is below national averages but pupils do better than their previous attainment patterns suggest they will. By the end of Year 11 pupils have a broad understanding of the society they live in through studying the role and influence of education, racial background, work, family, gender and the media. They know how to decide on the most appropriate research methods when testing a hypothesis and can collate and report their findings in writing or graphical representations.

135. Teaching and resources are satisfactory although pupils have too few opportunities for discussion or working in groups. Numeracy skills are very well developed to meet the demands of investigative work although writing tasks need to be more varied and focused to the specific needs of pupils at each end of the ability range. Sharing good practice with colleagues in the humanities faculty is essential to avoid isolation and establish commitment to raising standards.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

136. Overall the standards of work are well above average and, with the well below average attainment on entry, this represents very good progress. Teacher assessments of 14 year-olds indicate standards above those expected nationally in 2000. There is no significant difference in the achievement of girls or boys. Since the previous inspection the standards in and the resources for ICT have improved greatly and there is a good development plan to maintain the quality of this provision.

137. Recently, at least one group of pupils has successfully taken the GCSE examination at the end of Year 10. The proportion of pupils achieving higher, A*-C, grades in 1999 in the GCSE examinations in Year 11, and by early entry in Year 10, was well above the national average with no significant difference in the performance of girls or boys. The year 2000 results for the early entry GCSE course with two groups of pupils show very good progress, but a fall in A*-C results to below the national average, but the results for the Year 11 cohort were similar to those in 1999. The overall pass rate of grades A*-G has been 100 per cent in all GCSE examinations for the past three years. Taken as a whole, standards of 16 year-olds are well above the national average and high in comparison with similar schools.

138. Pupils achieve very well. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are well above average. Attainment on entry to the school is well below average and has changed little over the past three years. Pupils gain confidence rapidly in Year 7 as they acquire good basic skills in word processing, spreadsheets and graphics packages. In Year 8 they begin to select software appropriate to the demands of their assignments and make use of the Internet for e-mail and to research assignments. By Year 9 all pupils have acquired substantial skills across the full range of applications of ICT. They incorporate with skill and confidence diagrams, tables and graphics in documents. The competence of the more able is well above average and this enables them to tackle GCSE course work a year early with confidence. In a Year 9 class working on web site design, pupils had created a home page for on line theatre booking and were devising a questionnaire to assess users' views of their design. Some of the highest attainers had also begun to develop links from the home page to other pages of theatre information, although this work had not yet been covered in class. The recently acquired extra equipment to design and download control programs to test on robotic and other machines allows the school to meet the syllabus requirements for controlling, measuring and modelling.

139. The standards of work are also well above average for 16 year-olds. All pupils follow

the GCSE syllabus and course work assignments are realistic and work related. Work builds rapidly and effectively on the work in Year 9 with pupils developing their skills in graphics, desktop publishing and other software. They can select appropriate software for different facets of their assignment and use a variety of sources of information. In a Year 11 class, pupils had a range of commercial packets of washing powder to analyse and used the Internet to access manufacturers' customer web sites to evaluate current promotional techniques. Their work in presenting packaging designs and advertising material reflected very high levels of skill in using the appropriate software. Notwithstanding the high level of attainment on entry to Year 10, the quality of work seen up to 16 years of age reflects very good progress for all pupils.

140. The quality of teaching is very good. It is never less than good. There is no difference in the quality of teaching across the age ranges. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject, teach with confidence and in practical classes provide very good individual support for pupils. Lessons are well planned with clear purposes shared with pupils at the beginning, but teachers are flexible in responding to changing demands as the lesson progresses. In both a Year 8 and a Year 9 lesson, work on the Internet proved much slower and less reliable than expected, but in both cases the teachers had extra materials and reorganised the work to meet the lesson's purposes. There is a wide range of attainment in many classes and good use is made of graded sets of work sheets and notes that are produced to meet the different needs. In a Year 9 class on constructing a database, three different, graded worksheets on records and fields were used for three different groups of pupils, allowing all to make good progress. Relationships between pupils and teachers are very good. Pupils are well behaved and responsible when working with ICT and are very supportive of each other in practical work. The use of homework to reinforce learning is good in this subject, and work is well and helpfully marked.

141. The faculty is very well led and managed. There is a clear focus on maintaining and expanding technical competence, ensuring confident teaching. General resources are good and there are good, well equipped rooms for computing, but no appropriate ICT for teaching in the computer rooms. Technician support has improved and satisfies current needs.

Information and communication technology across all subjects

142. The uneven use of ICT across all subjects is a comparative weakness. There is limited evidence of pupils' ICT skills in some aspects of design and technology. Progress in music is hindered by a lack of facilities. Much practice is, however, good. In course work for business studies, pupils show a good understanding of business information systems and use their ICT skills to present their work to a very high standard. ICT is also used well in science experimental work and on-line data logging from simple experiments that are analysed and displayed on the computer screen. Pupils use copies of these results for further analysis in their homework. This work complements the work in control and modelling, as does the work with Logo in mathematics. There is effective use of pupils' research skills in sociology and history where CD-ROM and Internet sites give information on topics as diverse as Roman Wirral to the Wall Street crash and the great depression. Some written work is word processed and redrafted and English and mathematics have recently acquired specialist computer resources. Better mapping of ICT usage across the curriculum would underpin a whole school strategy for its development.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French and German

143. Each pupil studies one language, either French or German.

144. Pupils have no knowledge of either language when they start the school as 11 year-olds. Lesson observations and a scrutiny of pupils' work show that at the end of Year 9 pupils' attainment is below national expectations. The first three years of language study do not provide an adequate basis for the demands of GCSE in Years 10 and 11. Because of weaknesses in the teaching, about half the pupils have not developed the requisite language skills adequately. However, when taught well, pupils have more confidence in speaking and there is some detailed descriptive writing.

145. Standards of attainment at age 16 are below national averages. The higher, A*-C, grades obtained in the 2000 GCSE examinations were well below national averages: they were better in German than in French. All pupils entered achieved at least a G grade in both languages. Since the previous inspection there has been an improvement. The choice of a syllabus, which includes a coursework element, now ensures a more realistic endorsement of progress. Where teaching is very good, lower attainers in Year 11 in both French and German demonstrated their ability to use the languages in well-rehearsed situations and to follow the gist of taped passages, delivered at normal conversational speed. The pleasant individual greetings between staff and pupils at the start of lessons included, for example, the use of phrases to indicate pains and discomfort in various parts of the body as well as general revision points. In a Year 11 French class, two pupils willingly demonstrated their skills and confidence by engaging in conversation both with the inspector and with one another, emulating the teacher in requiring requests for equipment to be made in French. Attainment in lessons is noticeably better where teachers use the language in a relaxed manner and have high expectations of what pupils can do.

146. Many pupils with special educational needs achieve well. The encouragement and support of teaching assistants in the classroom contribute to raising their achievement. The achievement of other pupils, affected by the too often unsatisfactory or poor quality of teaching they receive, is unsatisfactory overall.

147. The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. During Years 7 to 9 most teaching was satisfactory, with some that was very good or excellent. However, over a third of lessons were poorly taught. In Years 10 and 11, the quality of most teaching was satisfactory and some was very good or excellent. However, poor and unsatisfactory teaching was seen in a quarter of lessons at this stage. The use by teachers of the foreign language is unsatisfactory overall. The best teachers make excellent, relaxed use of French and German throughout their lessons. Others lapse frequently into English so the pupils do not benefit from hearing the language spoken in a relaxed manner to help them develop their own fluency and confidence in oral work. Some teachers provide written purposes for each lesson to make sure that pupils are challenged to meet them during it. A brief review of what has then been achieved from those purposes, at the end of each lesson, helps teachers to stress that the responsibility for their learning lies with the pupils themselves. The pupils demonstrate sufficient knowledge and understanding of French or German to be able to understand and work to those purposes where they are written on the board and discussed in French or German. Common features of good teaching are vibrant, well-prepared lessons, which include a variety of briskly conducted activities that motivate and encourage pupils. Less effective teaching provides insufficient opportunities for pupils to practise, learn and use the languages themselves and offers less challenging activities. Pupils lose interest in the lesson; they chatter and have a casual approach to their work that typifies their response. The department makes good use of available data on performance. Homework makes a good contribution to learning in the best-taught lessons. Targets are set for improvement and pupils are challenged to achieve grades higher than those expected. All teachers do not, however, link language activities to a National Curriculum level in Years 7 to 9 and to GCSE grades in Years 10 and 11.

148. Good use is made of language assistants. In French, the assistant provides stimulating and dramatic dialogue with the teacher and aids good pronunciation through repetition of words and phrases with groups. In German, the two assistants are put to excellent use, enabling groups to be sub-divided into three, thus providing each pupil with greater attention.

149. Pupils' attitudes to the subject vary, depending on the quality of teaching they receive. Most are pleasant, friendly and co-operative. In Years 10 and 11 most pupils adopt a positive attitude to their learning. They behave well and are orderly and attentive. Satisfactory attitudes to learning occur in Years 7 to 9, whenever teachers' expectations are high. However, where teaching lacks the pace and rigour to maintain interest (in over a third of lessons seen), attitudes and behaviour are often poor. In Years 7 to 9 learning is unsatisfactory. However, in those where a few pupils are allowed to disrupt lessons, little learning takes place and little is retained. Where they are presented with challenging activities the pupils do better. In Years 10 and 11 learning was unsatisfactory, although it was satisfactory or good in three-quarters of lessons seen. Pupils learned and practised increasing amounts of vocabulary and developed well their ability to use different tenses. Teachers actively develop pupils' listening skills throughout all years. Pupils all perform well when listening to taped material, carried out by native speakers at a normal pace and are able to extract the gist of conversations and thus produce correct and appropriate answers to questions. However, insufficient opportunities for reading limit pupils' progress in developing reading skills. The poor teaching found at this stage also leads to poor learning.

150. French provides rich extra-curricular activities. French clubs are held at lunchtime and pupils display a keen willingness to learn. A residential visit to France enables younger pupils to experience the cultural background of the country and to use the language, whilst also enjoying other aspects of the visit.

151. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. The monitoring of teaching and learning occurs, but does not influence those members of the faculty who are currently not providing the level of challenge necessary to gain improvement nor using the target language to best effect. The departmental handbook is clear and user-friendly. It provides all the information teachers need to carry out their work. Up-to-date schemes of work shape the learning intentions. A marking policy is consistently applied and appropriate comments, telling each student how to improve, are included at the end of pieces of work. Pupil self-assessment is not yet incorporated into the system of linking students' work to National Curriculum and GCSE levels.

MUSIC

152. Since the previous inspection, and in particular since the appointment of the very good new head of faculty, the rate of improvement has been very good. The numerous improvements include: the quality of teaching, the increased provision for instrumental lessons from 13 to sixty-five players, the introduction of the GCSE full course on the timetable and the purchase of additional instruments, including a drum kit.

153. There are no teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment in Year 9 or GCSE results because the management of the department has been in a period of transition. A new head of department has recently been appointed. Since then the full GCSE music course has been offered to pupils and there are 13 takers. There is a balance of girls and boys.

154. Many pupils enter the school with very little knowledge of the elements of music or experience in playing tuned or percussion instruments. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Years 7 to 10 were broadly average with no significant difference between the

attainment of boys and girls. No Year 11 pupils study the subject. By the end of Year 9, pupils have gained a range of musical skills especially in playing and performing. Well supported in their learning by instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities, a few pupils reach above average standards. The recently revised schemes of work give pupils increased opportunities for composing and improvising. As a result, standards in these areas are improving, but are below average. Pupils have no opportunities for developing their experiences in music technology because there are no computers in the department and half of the keyboards are inadequate. Achievement is nonetheless, good. All pupils are working towards using the correct fingering on the keyboards and most are able to find the notes with the aid of a keyboard plan. Boys and girls in Years 7 to 9 gain confidence in singing and are effectively encouraged to sing out. All pupils have a good understanding of the qualities of ethnic music, and this is revealed, for example, in Year 8 through their performance of Indian music, using percussion instruments, keyboards and voices.

155. In the work seen during the inspection, pupils in Year 10 revealed themselves to have, by national standards, a satisfactory and improving range of music ability. The pupils use their developed aural skills and innate creativity to produce satisfactory and improving standards in practical work, so that even those with limited familiarity with musical literacy are meeting targets for GCSE grades at the end of the course. Pupils do not have the opportunity to acquire skills in new music technology, especially computers; this means composition work is weakened.

156. The pupils clearly enjoy lessons, which are focussed towards practical work, and they obtain great satisfaction from creating and performing music through the use of keyboards, percussion and voice. Through encouragement from staff, including visiting instrumental teachers, pupils' confidence in performance is increasing in lessons and in the good range and quality of extra-curricular activities.

157. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers are good practitioners and have a secure knowledge of music methodology. The emphasis within the curriculum is on practical work and lessons are planned and prepared in great detail, often with very informative worksheets. Expectations of what can be achieved are very often high. In one Year 10 lesson, pupils made good progress in identifying features of Gospel music. They showed a mature approach in discussion. Although these pupils have limited experience in producing written descriptions of music, they are enthusiastic and concentrate well in order to achieve standards that are expected of them. Very occasionally, teaching provides too few chances for pupils to be responsible for their own learning. In most lessons, however, effective provision is made through extension work for pupils of all levels of attainment. Teachers know the pupils well, including those with special educational needs. Their continued encouragement and positive dialogue with pupils leads to many individual successes. For example, in one keyboard lesson, a Year 8 pupil with special educational needs was able to play the major scales of C and G with the right hand and a contrary motion scale with both hands. The pupil then went on to play a melody in time with a backing and at the same time adding one-finger chords. The atmosphere created by the teacher was happy and the pupil made good progress in the lesson. Gifted and talented pupils are identified and given good support by the department. The pacing and variety within most lessons are good. The quality of on-going assessment is good. The department is aware of the need to work towards using the new levels of attainment in Years 7 to 9. In Year 10 assessment is dealt with through on-going, oral approach and also at strategic points in a written form. The combination of successful teaching and the pupils' good attitudes ensure good progress across all years.

158. Music has excellent leadership and management from a new head of faculty. An outstanding feature is the commitment and determination of staff and senior management to ensure success.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

159. In spite of some energetic support from the head of faculty, there is inertia in the subject leadership and direction for physical education. The department has stayed much the same when compared with the previous inspection. The opportunities for pupils to plan and evaluate for themselves have not improved since then. There has been some improvement in GCSE results but standards remain below most other subjects in the school. Planning for improvement is satisfactory and well supported by whole school planning and monitoring of teaching by senior staff. Insufficient attention has been given to the assessments required by recent curriculum changes. The subject does not have a high enough profile in the school. Pupils do not have enough information about the physical education curriculum and how their progress will be assessed.

160. During the week of the inspection no work in girls' games was observed because of staff absence. Classes of boys and girls were observed in dance lessons in Key Stage 3 and boys' work in games across the school.

161. Pupils' standards of attainment on entry to the school are average. By the end of Year 9 inspection evidence shows most pupils reach the national standard. Teacher assessments show standards to be above this but do not always take sufficient account of pupils' ability to plan and evaluate their work for themselves.

162. In 2000 GCSE results were below the national average for higher grade, A*-C, passes and just above the national average for A*-G passes. Not enough girls took the examination course to make comparisons between the boys' and girls' results valid. Pupils did not do as well in physical education as in most other subjects. There is no clear trend in results in recent years. They vary from well below to being broadly in line with national averages. The numbers taking examination courses have been small and analysis of results does not reveal any clear pattern to this variation. Overall results have improved slightly since the previous inspection.

163. Pupils, particularly the more able, attain good standards in competitive games of football and basketball.

164. By the end of Year 9 standards overall are average. Pupils have the skills and knowledge of the rules to play a number of games to a satisfactory standard. They know how to prepare safely for physical activity and do this conscientiously. When guided by the teacher they practise carefully and improve their skills. However they are too dependent on the teacher. They are given too few opportunities to talk about their work and to assess the strengths and weaknesses in their own performance. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily because teachers give them individual support and help. In dance, pupils attain higher standards and their achievement is good. In Year 7 they show good knowledge of how to create dances when they composed movement sequences of different step patterns. They can observe others in the class and on video and comment accurately on a performance. They then use these evaluations to improve their own work.

165. Standards seen in general physical education lessons in Years 10 and 11 are average. Pupils make satisfactory progress as they continue to develop their skills and understanding of the activities started in Years 7 to 9. 16 year-olds show a sound knowledge of the rules and tactics in a game and can act as coaches and officials. Pupils' ability to evaluate a performance remains a weakness because teachers do not consistently use methods that encourage this. Pupils with special education needs continue to make satisfactory progress. Pupils prepare carefully before activities but do not make sufficient links between their work in lessons, the effect of exercise on the body and a healthy life style. In examination groups pupils attain a good standard of practical performance in basketball and badminton. They are encouraged to plan tactics in a game, as in a Year 11 lesson on how to move an opponent about the badminton court in order to make a winning shot. Folders of written work are generally well organised but some work is rather brief and over dependent on worksheets. Opportunities are missed for pupils to apply their skills of ICT in physical education. Pupils' work is marked regularly but does not always have sufficient advice on how they can improve or set targets for improvement.

166. As a result of the school's effective emphasis upon improvements in teaching, its quality is good overall. It is better in Years 7 to 9, where there is some teaching in dance that is very good. Pupils gain skills, knowledge and understanding because teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan tasks that interest the pupils and improve their practical performance. Teachers are very clear when introducing a new skill what are the key points to know and understand. So pupils know what to do and how to do it. In the best lessons, pupils are encouraged to observe and evaluate a performance for themselves, as they did in a Year 8 dance lesson based on ideas developed from traditional Indian dances. They watched others in the class and a video performance, then talked about what they had seen and used their ideas to improve and extend their own work. Not all lessons show the same careful selection of methods to improve pupils' skills of observation and evaluation. Teachers have clear expectations for good behaviour and involvement in lessons. As a result there are few non-participants and behaviour is very good. Pupils enjoy physical education lessons and relationships in lessons are very good. Teachers encourage and support pupils as they work. Pupils work hard in lessons and want to improve. They work well together in small groups and teams and organise themselves quickly in response to instructions. Teachers manage groups of pupils and equipment efficiently so lessons run smoothly. The slower pace of some lessons does not build on these good attitudes and response of the pupils. Teachers use questions to check pupils' understanding but opportunities are missed for them to extend their skills of literacy through explaining their ideas in greater depth.

167. Organisation of the subject runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The extra curricular activities programme is extended through house and year events and competitions, which are run by other teachers in the school.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

168. In the face of significant difficulties, the subject is well led with hard work and commitment. Pupils enter the school with below average attainment and often little prior learning in this subject. From this low start pupils' learning develops well and they make good progress. By the age of 14 most pupils are close to, but just behind the expectations of the Wirral Agreed Syllabus for religious education. Pupils with special educational needs do well, as they are well supported. Pupils acquire a broad basic knowledge of Christianity and all the main world faiths. They learn the correct terminology well, and this is helpful to pupils' literacy skills. Orally they are very responsive and show good knowledge. Written work is not as good and there are insufficient examples of sustained writing in the pupils' folders. However, varied ways of responding and communicating learning in writing, such as writing letters and newspaper reports, are used well in lessons.

169. Because only one major theme of the local syllabus is followed in Year 10 and no religious education is taught in Year 11, the attainment of 16 year-olds is below expectations. Learning is, consequently, unsatisfactory. Only two per cent of curriculum time is given to religious education at this stage and the locally agreed syllabus expects around five per cent. Pupils do acquire some worthwhile learning relevant to their future lives, as the teachers make good use of the time they have and the theme of the different sorts of love, which includes the spiritual and moral dimensions of family, friendship, marriage and other relationships, is appropriate to their needs. Again their oral skills are good, and lessons include ample opportunity for discussion. Their work is not accredited so there is not a strong motivation for pupils to write extensively and the subject could do more to help pupils improve this skill. Nevertheless, they do record their learning in folders that are well kept, and marked by the teachers. Literacy is strengthened by the teachers' insistence on extending vocabulary.

170. The quality of teaching and of learning is good. Teaching was very good in forty per cent of the lessons seen and good in a further 50 per cent. This is remarkable, as non-specialists teach very many of the lessons. However, although the practical teaching skills of the non-specialist staff are mainly very good, their lack of expertise in this subject limits the learning experiences of the pupils. With the specialist teaching, the ability to turn the lessons to the pupils' own experiences, and to draw out the spiritual and moral implications of what is taught is very good, so that pupils get more help with regard to the ultimate questions of life. Similarly, where there is a specialist, the lesson gets to the heart of belief rather than the more peripheral facts about religious lifestyle. As a result, spiritual development is better where the pupils have specialist teaching.

171. There are many strong features to teaching in all lessons. In the best lessons, aims are made clear and returned to at the end of the lesson so that pupils evaluate what they have learnt. Relationships are good, teachers establish an atmosphere of trust in which pupils will speak openly and also listen to each other. Question and answer sessions are conducted well to consolidate learning and to help pupils to think. Teachers know their pupils well, and are very aware of all those with special needs, including the gifted and talented. They are making good efforts to meet all needs although this presents some difficulties in classes with a very wide range of attainment. In several lessons religious artefacts were used well to enliven the lesson. Suitable homework is set and marking is thorough and encouraging. In Year 10 effective group work encourages social skills, independence and confidence. The response, behaviour, and attitudes of the pupils are very good. Pupils are

mostly very well behaved, interested and well engaged. This is a reflection of skilled teaching, as the teachers work hard to gain the pupils' respect and co-operation, and their management skills are very good. The pupils' personal development is good. Opportunities for moral development are very good, as is their education about cultural diversity and the need for mutual respect for those different from themselves.

172. In some lessons in the first three years pupils are sometimes too passive, as there is not enough group or active work. In part the result of teachers and pupils knowing that there is no accreditation and that learning will end in Year 10, there is, across these years, insufficient intellectual challenge in some lessons. To make it easier to follow pupils' progress and to help to develop the esteem of the subject, levels of attainment are being introduced this year.

173. Well laid out and giving good guidance, the schemes of work are very good. There are occasional visits out and visitors, but not enough to broaden the pupils' experience. Assessment procedures are satisfactory and will become easier as a new assessment scheme is gradually introduced.

174. Overall improvement is unsatisfactory because a number of significant issues remain from the previous inspection. The faculty organisation has, for example, changed and there are good plans to support the subject within the humanities faculty, but these have yet to take effect. Despite a good improvement, resources are still inadequate. Beside the specialist teacher there are six other teachers from other departments, and usually a different team each year. As a result, it is hard to monitor teaching and learning to improve further the team's good quality of teaching. The funding position has improved and is now equitable with other departments.