

INSPECTION REPORT

ST. HELENA SCHOOL

Colchester, Essex

LEA area: 881 Essex

Unique reference number: 115364

Headteacher: Mr. Clive Waddington

Reporting inspector: Brian Oppenheim
2686

Dates of inspection: 30 April – 3 May 2001

Inspection number: 191726

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:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Sheepen Road Colchester Essex
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. Brian Watling
Date of previous inspection:	27 January 1997

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9977	Fran Luke	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school working partnership with parents?
12003	Andrew Marfleet	Team inspector	English	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social; and cultural development
23289	Carol Singh	Team inspector	Mathematics	
10153	Graham Soar	Team inspector	Science	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
31685	Val Girling	Team inspector	Art	
2731	Penny Holden	Team inspector	Equal opportunities Special educational needs English as an additional language	How well are pupils taught?
27238	Alan Lazell	Team inspector	Design and technology	
31328	Liz Webber	Team inspector	Geography	
7728	Bernardette Holmes	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
15926	Janet Dyson	Team inspector	Music	
22601	Loo Devine	Team inspector	Physical education	
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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?	14
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	16
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	18
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	20
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	20
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	23
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	24
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	29

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Helena School is a mixed 11-16 comprehensive school and pupils represent the full range of ability. Pupils' educational standards are just below average when they join the school particularly in their language skills. The school has increased in size and now has 927 pupils, most of whom live close to the school. Pupils come mainly from white UK backgrounds and about 39 represent a wide range of other ethnic backgrounds. The school does not receive extra money to support ethnic minority pupils but has nine who speak English as an additional language. About 14.5 per cent of pupils are entitled to school meals free of charge which is similar to the national rate. The proportion of pupils with learning needs and the number who have specially identified needs are broadly average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Most pupils do well at St Helena School. Standards are high by the time they leave and they achieve very well in comparison with pupils in similar schools. Good teaching in Years 10 and 11 helps most pupils to make good progress in the last two years of school. A few pupils do not gain as much from school as they should: inconsistencies in handling behaviour, the mainly academic curriculum and the higher than average absence all mean that a small number of pupils slip through the net. The school is run effectively from day to day but there are weaknesses in the way it checks what it does well and what needs improving. Value for money is satisfactory.

What the school does well

- Standards at GCSE are high and pupils achieve very well compared to other similar schools.
- Standards are especially high in art, drama food technology, physical education and English and pupils achieve well in mathematics.
- Teaching is good in Years 10 and 11 where about six in 10 lessons are good, very good or excellent.
- The support given to pupils with special needs is very good and they make good progress.
- Many pupils take part in a wide range of after school activities.

What could be improved

- Achievements in Years 7, 8 and 9 are not good enough: progress is limited because teaching is not consistently good.
- Behaviour is not dealt with consistently and this has a negative effect on school-wide discipline.
- Attendance is still not high enough and this affects some pupils' progress.
- The way the school checks how well it is doing is not sharp enough and does not have a strong enough impact on school-wide improvements.
- A few pupils are not gaining as much benefit from school as they should because teaching and the mainly academic curriculum do not meet their needs fully.
- Standards in modern foreign languages are still not high enough.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the school was last inspected in January 1997 it has made improvements in some important areas. Standards by the end of Year 11 have improved at a faster rate than other schools. Teaching has also improved, particularly in Years 10 and 11 where much more is good or very good and much less is unsatisfactory. Standards in mathematics, science and geography have improved and the range of books in the library is much better but improvements in modern foreign languages have been slow and attendance is stubbornly stuck below average. The school has

developed new ways of checking its performance but these are still not as sharp as they need to be and action to improve things is not consistent. The quality of computers for information technology courses has improved but they are not always used to support work in other subjects. Overall, the school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection and has, without doubt, the commitment to improve further.

STANDARDS

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

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

Standards are high by the time pupils leave St Helena School and are very high for similar schools¹. GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than in other schools and have been higher than average for the past four years. When pupils' GCSE results are compared with their achievements in the national tests at 14, standards are also very high.² This shows that between the ages of 14 and 16 pupils make good progress with their learning. The school has met most of its examination targets but fell short for those gaining at least one GCSE pass and is on track to achieve similar results this year. The best results were in English, drama, art, food technology and physical education and there were strengths in science, information technology and mathematics. Results were weakest in geography, history and German: religious education has not been a GCSE course. Girls' results are higher than those of boys' and the gap between them is greater than the national picture. The picture at the end of Year 9 is not as good but test results are close to the national average and pupils achieve as well as those in similar schools.

These standards achieved in examinations and tests are reflected in the work seen in lessons and by the quality of teaching. The great majority of pupils achieve well and make good progress with their learning in Years 10 and 11 and satisfactory progress in Years 7, 8 and 9. This pattern is mirrored by achievements in English and mathematics. Particular strengths in lessons are in art, drama, physical education and food technology but progress in religious education and modern languages is unsatisfactory. Achievements in information technology (IT) lessons are broadly satisfactory: although GCSE results are above average not all pupils follow this examination course. Girls do better than boys in lessons: boys do not make as much progress as they should because they are more likely to disrupt lessons. Those pupils who do not attend regularly make only satisfactory progress at best. The high achievements of the great majority of pupils at age 16 are mainly because of the way teaching is geared effectively to the GCSE courses.

¹ Similar schools means schools with a similar proportion of pupils who qualify for school meals free of charge which, for St Helena, is between 13 and 21 per cent of pupils.

² This means that pupils' GCSE results are compared with other schools that have similar National Curriculum test results (SATs).

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils have satisfactory attitudes to school but in classrooms attitudes are liable to change from one subject to another and from one teacher to another.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is satisfactory in most lessons but the behaviour of some pupils disrupts the progress of the majority. Behaviour in and around the school is sometimes unsatisfactory.
Personal development and relationships	Most pupils form constructive relationships with their teachers but some are discourteous and disrespectful. Most pupils relate well to each other but there are instances of boisterous play and bullying.
Attendance	Well below average.

Pupils in Years 10 and 11 appreciate being treated as adults. Many are prefects or school council officials and carry out their duties responsibly. A small number of pupils have unsatisfactory attitudes and do not behave well in lessons: this means that learning is slower than it should be. Behaviour around the school is sometimes unsatisfactory because pupils are not always supervised effectively.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The majority of teaching at St Helena's School is effective and helps pupils achieve well. Ninety per cent of teaching is satisfactory or better, 51 per cent good or better and 10 per cent less than satisfactory. Overall, teaching in Years 10 and 11 is better than that in Years 7, 8 and 9: this is because teachers' good understanding of the GCSE examination syllabuses helps them to plan successful lessons.

Teaching is satisfactory in Years 7, 8, and 9 but much of it lacks sparkle and does too little to inspire or motivate pupils. It is here that the unsatisfactory teaching is most noticeable. There are two important weaknesses: the purpose of the lesson is not made clear enough and pupils are not sure what they should be doing; pupils are not expected to work hard enough and thus make satisfactory progress at best. In Years 10 and 11 teaching is good because teachers set demanding tasks that challenge pupils: because more is expected of them in Years 10 and 11 they make good progress and achieve good examination results.

Teaching in English is satisfactory for 11 –14 year olds and good for those aged 14 - 16: in mathematics and in science it is satisfactory for all pupils. Teaching of literacy and numeracy throughout the school is at an early stage but is satisfactory where they are taught as part of English or mathematics lessons. Teaching meets the needs of most pupils but those who experience unsatisfactory lessons gain too little benefit from what the school has to offer.

Teaching in art, drama and physical education, and for pupils who get support for their learning, is, however, frequently good in both key stages. In personal, social and health education, design and technology and geography teaching is satisfactory or better and in just over half of lessons it is good. In a few subjects staffing shortages or illness means that pupils are not being taught as well as they should. In modern foreign languages, for example, too many lessons are unsatisfactory. Where pupils are taught well they are enthusiastic about learning and make good progress but where teaching is less than satisfactory their behaviour quickly deteriorates. In some lessons the poor behaviour of a few pupils is not tackled well: here, pupils are disrespectful of less effective teachers and disrupt the learning of others.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory: the curriculum is generally broad and balanced but does not meet the needs of a few pupils who find academic courses difficult. All pupils take an IT course but computers are not used enough to support work in other subjects.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good: as a result pupils with special educational needs make good progress with their learning.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good: the small number of pupils involved get well organised individual support which is very well matched to their particular needs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Pupils' social, moral and cultural development is satisfactory. Their spiritual development is unsatisfactory: apart from religious education, opportunities to go beyond the material aspects of life are missed.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Support and guidance for pupils is satisfactory and the school provides a safe and caring environment: but the way good behaviour and attendance are promoted is weak.

The school's partnership with parents is satisfactory. The opportunities the school gives pupils to take part in productions, attend clubs and visit places of interest are very good and appreciated by pupils and parents. The implications of long-term staff absences in science, music and religious education are having a negative impact on curriculum provision and standards. Assessment is not always used to help pupils improve their work. The school does not meet the statutory requirement for a collective act of worship.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	St Helena School is managed effectively from day to day and senior managers share a strong commitment to the school. Most subject and year heads lead their particular area reasonably well but do not contribute enough to school-wide improvements.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body has a good grasp of the school's strengths but it does not have enough information to make a sharp analysis of areas for improvement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school's systems for monitoring and evaluating its work, analysing its strengths and weaknesses, and taking action to improve, are not methodical enough.
The strategic use of resources	Financial management is systematic and regular information about spending is available to the school and the governing body. Money is targeted appropriately to improve pupils' achievements.

The qualifications and experience of most teachers is matched well to the subjects they teach. Some temporary teachers do not meet these needs and, not surprisingly, this depresses standards in a few subjects. The accommodation provided by the school allows for the curriculum to be taught effectively. Standards of cleaning are high and cost-effective, and are managed effectively by the school. Learning resources such as books and materials are mainly sufficient for pupils' needs but there are not enough computers to allow all subjects to use information and communications technology. The principles of best value are beginning to be used by the school but it does not always have enough information about how well it is doing.

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 do well. • The progress their child is making. • They feel comfortable approaching the school with queries. • The improvement in the school over recent years. • The range of clubs and trips outside school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They would like to know more about how their child is doing. • Some parents would like more homework and others less. • Inconsistent teaching which means that some pupils get a different experience. • The behaviour of some pupils.

Seventeen parents attended the meeting for parents before the inspection and 10 per cent responded to a questionnaire about their views of the school. Most have positive views of the school but a significant minority do have some concerns about behaviour; homework, information about their child's progress and the way the school works with parents. The inspection supports parents' views about the poor behaviour of a small, but significant, minority of pupils and the effect this has on learning. However, written reports for parents are good and overall the school works satisfactorily with parents. The quality of homework is mostly of good and regularly set and marked. The inspection also agrees with parents' positive views. Most pupils make good progress and work hard especially in Years 10 and 11. Standards have improved and many pupils take part in the good range of out of school activities.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Standards are high by the time pupils leave St Helena School and are very high for similar schools³. When their GCSE results are compared with their achievements in the national tests at 14, standards are also very high.⁴ This shows that between the ages of 14 and 16 pupils make good progress with their learning.

2. Since the last inspection GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than in other schools in England and are now above the national average. The percentage of pupils who gained five or more A* - C grades was above the national figure by about six percentage points but the proportion who achieved five or more A*-G grades, was just below it. About eight pupils failed to gain at least one GCSE grade and this is also a slightly lower proportion than the national picture. In other words the school was successful in helping most pupils achieve the highest grades but for a small minority of pupils it was not as effective. A more detailed analysis of the GCSE results shows that the school's overall performance just falls into the above average range: the school's success at the highest grades means that the overall picture is positive but is affected by the small minority of pupils who do not achieve so well.

3. The success of the school in meeting its targets also shows a similar pattern. The school exceeded its 2000 target for the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A* - C grades at GCSE but fell short for those gaining at least one GCSE grade and for the average point score⁵. Evidence from the inspection indicates that the school is on track to achieve similar results this year. Nevertheless it has set quite challenging targets for improvement: for 2001 it predicts 55 per cent of pupils will achieve five or more A* - C grades and 99 per cent will gain at least one GCSE pass.

4. In most subjects the 2000 GCSE results were above average. They were best in English, drama, art, food technology and physical education where results were at least above average: in drama results were particularly high with nearly 95 per cent of pupils entered for the examination gaining a grade A* - C compared with a little over 68 per cent nationally. There were also strengths in science, information technology and mathematics which were all a little above the average. Only in geography, history and German were results below average for the top A* - C grades: however, standards in history and geography are starting to improve. Religious education has not been a GCSE course for the past ten years and thus there are no results to compare. Both girls and boys do better than average but the gap between them is greater than the national picture: girls' results are higher than those of boys' and by a greater margin than they are nationally.

5. Standards at the end of Year 9 are not as good as those at the end of Year 11 but are close to the national average. Compared with all schools in England pupils' results in the 2000 National Curriculum tests were average. Results in mathematics and science have fallen a little since the last inspection: however, in both subjects standards are beginning to rise again. The English results have remained fairly stable but are a little higher now than at the last inspection. Compared with similar schools a similar pattern emerges: pupils achieve as well overall as pupils in similar schools and in English they do better. The reason for the stronger results in English is that more pupils gained the higher marks than in other schools.

³ Similar schools means schools with a similar proportion of pupils who qualify for school meals free of charge which, for St Helena, is between 13 and 21 per cent of pupils.

⁴ This means that pupils' GCSE results are compared with other schools that have similar National Curriculum test results (SATs); for St Helena this is a point score of between 30 and 33.

⁵ Average total GCSE point score per pupil is the most comprehensive measure of pupils' GCSE attainment. Point scores are calculated in the following way: A*=8; A=7; B=6; C=5; D=4; E=3; F=2; G=1.

6. The work seen in lessons confirms the picture painted by the test and examination results. The great majority of pupils achieve well and make good progress with their learning in Years 10 and 11 reflecting the good teaching. In Years 7, 8 and 9 achievement is satisfactory in most subjects: again, this reflects the satisfactory teaching in these years. In religious education progress in lessons is satisfactory but over time unsatisfactory: this is because the difficulty in recruiting permanent religious education teachers has affected the quality of teaching in the past. In modern languages achievements are not high enough in either language: this is largely due to weaknesses in teaching. As with the GCSE results, girls do better than boys in lessons. This is largely because boys are more likely to disrupt lessons although a few girls are also difficult to manage. Coupled with weaknesses in managing behaviour effectively, this means that some boys do not make as much progress as they should.

7. Not surprisingly, those pupils who have poor attendance achieve less well and make only satisfactory progress at best. It is some of these pupils who make up the group of pupils who do not gain any GCSE passes or who gain fewer than five. Most higher attaining pupils do well but, again, it tends to be girls who do best. This is illustrated by the fact that the proportion of boys who achieve the top GCSE grades is lower than girls in nearly every subject except science and physical education. The high achievements of the great majority of pupils at age 16 are mainly because of the way teaching is geared effectively to the GCSE examinations. Teachers' good understanding of the GCSE syllabuses means that they prepare pupils well for examinations and help them make good progress with their learning between the ages of 14 and 16.

8. Although standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are broadly in line with expectations for pupils aged 16, across the school there is not enough use of ICT. This means that pupils are not consistently good at using what they have learnt about ICT in their specific information technology (IT) courses to help with their work in other subjects. In design and technology, for example, there are no opportunities for computer-aided designing and making (CAD/CAM).

9. The development of a literacy strategy in the school is at a very early stage. The programme of lessons for reading in Year 7 contributes well to pupils' positive attitudes to reading. Speaking and listening skills are at least satisfactory: they are well provided for in drama lessons where standards are high. Writing skills, however, are the least well provided for and are just satisfactory. Spelling, as at the time of the last inspection, is a weakness for many pupils. Written work is also broadly satisfactory although sometimes it is limited to short pieces of work. By the age of 16 pupils' number skills are generally sound. They have a satisfactory knowledge of number facts and most know when it is appropriate to use a calculator, and are generally able to use one efficiently when required.

10. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in their work. This is partly because the targets set in these pupils' individual educational plans are well written and very specific about what they should learn. It is also because the learning support assistants give high quality support to pupils both in lessons and in separate groups: these contribute effectively to pupils' progress.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

11. Most pupils have satisfactory attitudes to school. This is reflected both in their enthusiasm to participate in extra-curricular activities, school productions and the extensive range of sports teams and clubs and in their willingness to take on roles of responsibility. There is a very active school council, prefect system and Buddy system, which involve many young people in playing a full part in the school community. The pupils who take a lead in these groups show great maturity of judgement and sensitivity to others. They are a credit to their families and to the school and present very positive role models to other pupils.

12. Within the classroom, pupils' attitudes are more variable and in a significant minority of lessons, attitudes are unsatisfactory. Although the majority of pupils are keen to cooperate,

attitudes are liable to change from one subject to another and from one teacher to another. This change in attitude is not confined to any particular year, social or ability group, but comes as a direct reaction to the quality of teaching. Pupils respond positively to well-structured lessons, which offer them opportunities to work collaboratively. Pupils work particularly effectively in drama, art and PE, where teachers set clear goals and have established routines for classroom behaviour and group work. Attitudes to learning are generally better in Key Stage 4 where teachers focus on specific objectives provided by the requirements of the GCSE courses. In such lessons, pupils show the ability to work independently and to sustain concentration. This was the case, for example, in GCSE music, where pupils were motivated to improve their performance and worked very well in pairs unsupervised.

13. Most pupils form constructive relationships with their teachers and many pupils in Key Stage 4 appreciate being treated as young adults. Pupils receiving learning support enjoy trusting and positive relationships with their teachers. However, there are instances where pupils can be unforgiving towards less confident teachers, supply teachers, new members of staff and visitors to the school. Even in Year 7, there can be discourtesy and disrespect to adults within lessons despite the clear expectations laid down by the teachers. This was seen in Key Stage 3, in music, modern foreign languages and science. In such lessons, pupils are unwilling to listen to one another or to their teacher and persist in off-task chatter.

14. Overall, behaviour in lessons is satisfactory most of the time. However, there are still a significant number of lessons where the unsatisfactory behaviour of some pupils disrupts the progress of the majority. The same pupils who work effectively in one lesson can be uncooperative in the next. Teachers are not always successful in taking corrective action. Some are overly lenient or are too slow to intervene, while others adopt an abrasive tone, which is not conducive to creating a positive environment for learning. There is a lack of consistency in the approaches taken to the management of behaviour across the school. Teachers do not all follow set procedures and there is great variation in expectations of behaviour within lessons.

15. Behaviour in and around the school is not always satisfactory. Pupils jostle one another in the corridors and do not always show respect for each other in the canteen. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 complain of frequent name-calling. Most pupils relate well to each other but there are instances of boisterous play and bullying. When these are reported, they are dealt with immediately. However, pupils are not always willing to come forward. The school is aware of this issue and has set up the Buddy system to confront such attitudes and support pupils in need. This is very effective in Year 7 but is less well used in older year groups.

16. The school takes a hard line on reported incidents of poor behaviour and does not hesitate to use the sanction of fixed term exclusion. This is intended to give a strong message that poor behaviour will not be tolerated. However, levels of fixed term exclusion remain consistently high.

17. Improving levels of attendance remains a priority for the school. The school is aware that attendance levels fall significantly below the national average in most year groups. Although levels of unauthorised absence are lower than average, levels of condoned absence authorised by notes from parents are high. In some classes during the inspection, one third of pupils were absent. This can have a negative effect on the pace of progress for the individuals concerned and for the group as a whole.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

18. The majority of teaching at St Helena's School is effective and helps pupils achieve well. Overall, teaching in Years 10 and 11 is better than that in Years 7, 8 and 9. Teaching is often better for the oldest pupils because the clear expectations of examination syllabuses help teachers plan successful lessons. The effect of this good teaching is the high standard achieved in GCSE results in most subjects. Teaching has improved since the last inspection, particularly in mathematics and geography. The very good teaching in art, English, food technology and learning support has been

maintained. Nine out of 10 lessons are now satisfactory, when only eight out of 10 were in the last inspection.

19. There are, however, because of staffing shortages or illness, subjects where teaching is less effective and pupils are not being taught as well as they should. In modern foreign languages, for example, too many lessons are unsatisfactory. Whilst teaching in the majority of lessons in science and music is satisfactory, where temporary teachers or non-specialists cover long-term absence then the quality of teaching is too often unsatisfactory. Overall, the majority of the unsatisfactory teaching occurs with Year 7, 8, and 9 classes. In these year groups much of the teaching is satisfactory but lacks sparkle and does too little to inspire or motivate pupils. The main weakness here is that the purpose of the lesson is not made clear enough for pupils: sometimes pupils are not expected to work hard enough. In both cases this means that pupils make only just satisfactory progress with their learning.

20. Teaching in many subjects, however, is frequently good. In art, drama, physical education and learning support, in both key stages, teaching in the majority of lessons is good. In mathematics, design and technology and geography teaching is satisfactory or better and in just over half of lessons it is good. Personal, social and health education are also taught well because the course is well organised and planned. The teaching of literacy and numeracy throughout the school is at an early stage but is satisfactory where they are taught as part of English or mathematics lessons. Some subjects such as areas of design and technology have developed work to help pupils' literacy improve but this has yet to have an impact.

21. The few pupils who arrive at the school from another country not yet speaking English are given some special support to help them understand their work. This support varies according to individual pupil's need. For example, special arrangements were made to recruit an adult speaking a pupil's own language so that he could begin to understand the routine of school and the community outside. Other beginner speakers of English have individual help which ensures they understand the more abstract aspects of their work and complex vocabulary. The school receives no special funding for this and therefore is limited in the amount of support it can offer, however, the quality of support pupils receive is good.

22. A characteristic of the good and very good teaching at St Helena's is teachers' secure knowledge of their subject. This helps them set demanding tasks and give interesting examples so that pupils are challenged by their work: because more is expected of them in Years 10 and 11 they make good progress and achieve good examination results. Often these effective teachers are really enthusiastic about their subject and this enthusiasm rubs off on the pupils who are motivated and eager to learn more. The effective teachers are also good at asking pupils questions to make them use what they have learnt in more taxing situations. They use questions well to check what pupils understand and then give extra information and guidance if they find out a pupil is unsure of something. In a Year 8 drama lesson the teacher used questioning extremely effectively to get pupils not only to evaluate their own work but also to give them clues to how they might improve. After sharing their group interpretations of poems they had read, the teacher asked varied and interesting questions about the performances of each group which developed their understanding. For example, "How did they make the beginning so realistic?" to which the insightful answers included "the urgency in their voices".

23. Good subject knowledge and the ability to present it clearly to pupils is also evident where teachers structure lessons so that pupils' understanding is built on throughout the lesson in a planned and sequential way. In a Year 10 English lesson, looking at James Thurber's writing style in the 'Secret Life of Walter Mitty', the teacher's good planning and knowledge of the text combined to produce a very good lesson where information was shared, analysis was supported and a variety of tasks introduced at pertinent times. The standard of work the pupils produced in this lesson was very good and gave evidence of the effectiveness of the teaching.

24. In the best teaching a variety of strategies are used to involve pupils so that they have to think. On the final session of the GCSE physical education course Year 11 pupils looked at a past

paper and were totally engaged by the teacher's excellent feedback session. The teacher kept a lively pace, using interaction with pupils to get them thinking. The teacher demonstrated and involved pupils to give them clear visual examples. Humour was used well whilst misconceptions were challenged and this combined to ensure pupils readily volunteered good answers, which confirmed clear thinking.

25. Teaching for those pupils with special learning needs is generally very good when they are taught by special needs teachers and assistants. Special needs teachers and assistants are well trained and have a good understanding of how pupils with special educational needs can be best supported to improve their skills and understanding. They use the pupils' individual learning plans well to ensure teaching builds on what pupils know and helps them develop the skills they need to improve. This support is effective during subject lessons or in the special needs room.

26. Poor teaching very clearly affects behaviour and therefore pupils' learning. Some pupils have little tolerance and quickly behave rudely and disrespectfully towards less effective teachers. However, in some lessons teachers do not tackle the poor behaviour of some pupils; these pupils are allowed to talk, do not complete their work and wander about the class interrupting others. This means that some pupils do not learn as effectively as others. The school does have strategies to help teachers manage their classes effectively. There is, for example, a school agreement to use a seating plan in every lesson so that pupils always sit as prescribed by their teacher, but this policy is not being universally followed. Where it is always in use, as in art, it contributes towards the high standards of good behaviour.

27. An important weakness in teaching across the school happens out of lessons but affects lessons adversely. Too many teachers abdicate responsibility for setting standards of discipline and courtesy around corridors and stairs. Neither teachers nor pupils routinely hold doors open for each other or greet each other in passing. Teachers often push through groups of noisy pupils blocking corridors rather than asking them to move on or move to one side. Early indicators of bullying such as noisy, taunting behaviour by groups of pupils towards individuals are not always taken seriously. Pupils who have been behaving inappropriately outside lessons may also have had some unsatisfactory teaching already during the day and even the best teachers will need additional time to settle them. Boisterous behaviour outside lessons can often be frightening to more timid and hesitant pupils and may contribute to the poor attendance figures.

28. In the same vein the quality of teaching during tutorials is very variable; form tutors and year managers do not all contribute fully to helping the pupils develop positive attitudes to their work. Whilst some tutorial times are used very well to develop study skills, check homework, and reinforce school rules, other tutorials are just wasted opportunities where registers are taken and pupils chat together before lessons start.

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

29. Overall, curriculum provision is satisfactory. It is generally broad and balanced but is not always relevant to meet the needs of all pupils. Weaknesses are largely in the variability between subjects and how they promote learning. Opportunities to promote basic skills are clearly evident and extremely effective for those pupils with special educational needs where there is targeted support to help meet their agreed targets. However, the use of information and communication technology to support learning in other subjects is underdeveloped. The school is, nevertheless, very successful in preparing pupils for GCSE examinations as shown by the high attainments compared to national averages.

30. The quality of the personal and social education programme is good. The programme embraces a range of topics that systematically supports pupils' personal development including health, sex education and careers advice, preparing pupils effectively for the next stage of education and/or the world of work. In Key Stage 4 the programme encompasses religious and moral

education and there is sufficient time and opportunity to cover all aspects of the locally agreed syllabus. The school makes good use of the community, educational visits and outside speakers to support and promote learning and personal development. The range of extra-curricular activities and the large number of pupils involved are very good.

31. Although there are good links with local colleges of further education and good pastoral links with feeder primary schools, development of curriculum and assessment links between primary and secondary are underdeveloped. In those areas such as mathematics where staff plan the curriculum to take account of pupils' primary experiences and achievements, progress throughout Key Stage 3 is improved. In the case of science there is a great deal to do to overcome the weakness in curriculum transition and progression.

32. There have been some changes to the Key Stage 3 curriculum since the last inspection. Information and communication technology is now taught as a discrete subject. Whilst provision in this area has improved, the application of information technology across the curriculum remains weak and under developed. The low ratio of computers to pupils and the limited access to a wide range of applications and software does not help. Developments in literacy and numeracy across the curriculum, building on the national strategies from the primary school, are at an early stage of development. However, there is not a clear framework in all subject areas to currently support development of these key skills. One weakness is the development of higher order reading skills to help improve pupils' learning. There has been an increase in the time for modern foreign languages. However, this additional time is not being translated into improved examination results or an increase in numbers taking either French or German in Key Stage 4. In fact only 55 per cent of pupils follow a modern foreign language to GCSE level.

33. The school has used the flexibility of disapplication⁶ from the National Curriculum to enable a significant number of pupils in Year 10 to opt out of modern foreign languages. This enables them to have an increased focus in either the performing and creative arts, humanities, additional support for basic skills and/or a work related curriculum. The current curriculum for Years 10 and 11 focuses largely on GCSE examination courses. This arrangement does not meet the needs of those pupils who find academic courses difficult: this is reflected in the 10 per cent of pupils who do not achieve at least five GCSE passes. The school is currently reviewing the curriculum to extend the vocational curriculum from September 2001.

34. The two-weekly timetable is generally effective and an improvement on the previous inspection, with fewer classes being shared by more than one teacher. However, the shortage of specialist staff particularly in modern foreign languages and the implications of long-term staff absences in science, music and religious education are having a negative impact on curriculum provision and standards.

35. Curriculum planning is generally sound but there is not enough emphasis on specific learning outcomes or how work links to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. In some cases lesson objectives are about completing particular tasks rather than trying to identify what pupils are to learn. In those subjects that have a clear understanding of these learning outcomes, such as English, mathematics, drama and art, work is effectively matched to meet the wide range of differing pupil needs in the groups. In science, music, religious education and modern foreign languages, for example, the same activities are set for all pupils: as a result not all pupils' needs are met fully.

36. Overall, the provision for social, moral, spiritual and cultural education is satisfactory. Good provision for moral development is found in personal and social education lessons, and moral issues are dealt with in quite a sophisticated way in religious education, drama and English. Issues such as the Vietnam War are studied in history, and environmental issues feature in geography. There are detailed policies on behaviour, and the evidence is that pupils know the difference

⁶ Disapplication from the National Curriculum means that a school can ask the DfEE to waive the requirement to take modern languages for GCSE if it benefits pupils.

between right and wrong, but insufficient supervision outside lessons and inadequate discipline in a few lessons send contrary messages to pupils about what can be tolerated in terms of public behaviour.

37. The same messages contribute to anti-social attitudes amongst a minority of pupils, and some bullying occurs in spite of the clear policies to deal with it. This needs to be set against the good provision for positive community attitudes that is created by pupils being allowed to serve as prefects, buddies, and on the school council. In some subjects, notably English and drama, pupils are encouraged to work in pairs or groups, and learn to value the benefits of this. They also develop positive social attitudes through participation in school trips, productions and sporting events.

38. Some areas of the curriculum contribute effectively to cultural development. Visits to theatres, museums and art galleries occur. There are many opportunities for pupils to participate in musical and theatrical performances, both in school and at local venues outside school. The cultural heritage of this land is given fair coverage in work done in art, drama, music and English literature. There is less emphasis on non-British culture, although ethnic art is not ignored; African art as well as Australian aboriginal art is studied. Given the background of the school population, the cultural activities of the wider world are not given enough prominence here.

39. Provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory. The school does not comply with statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship; opportunities for reflection in assemblies are missed. Some subject areas provide good opportunities to reflect on the non-material aspects of life, particularly art, where the beliefs behind aboriginal art, such as dreamtime, are considered. Texts used in drama and English also allow for spiritual reflection, such as poems and plays that face up to tragedy and human mortality. Displays in mathematics hint at the wonder that can be aroused by numbers, but in too many subject areas, apart from religious education, opportunities to go beyond the material aspects of life are missed.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

40. The last inspection found that the school was mostly successful in its aim to produce an environment that was warm and welcoming, well ordered and disciplined. The inspection finds that this largely remains the case but that the school's good policies and procedures are not always implemented effectively.

41. The procedures for promoting discipline and good behaviour are good but they are not always used effectively. There is, for example, a detailed policy for behaviour with set rewards and sanctions and pupils are awarded certificates for good behaviour in assembly. Behaviour and discipline are monitored and recorded carefully but these are not always followed through. In the canteen, for example, too little is done to nip poor behaviour in the bud. When this happens in lessons it has a negative impact on pupils' learning.

42. Similarly, there are appropriate procedures for promoting and monitoring attendance but their impact on the level of absence is limited. Over the past two years, for example, attendance has dropped from 90.5 per cent to 88.7 per cent. Form tutors deal with any concerns about attendance in the first instance. Year managers discuss problems with the education welfare officer but, because they rely on them to follow up any concerns, they do not always have enough impact on promoting high attendance. The school receives good support from the education welfare officer who comes into school on a regular basis, and will visit parents if requested. The use of the computerised attendance system allows the school to monitor absence but this information is not used rigorously enough to identify patterns or follow up individual pupils. As a result a few slip through the net.

43. Support and guidance for pupils and the monitoring of their personal development is satisfactory. There are no formal procedures for the monitoring of personal development and the school relies on teachers' knowledge of the individuals in their care. There is a tutor team who work only in Year 7 in order to build strong relationships with the feeder primary schools. In Year 8 to 11

tutors stay with their groups moving up the school with them each year. This is effective in building relationships and enables them to know the pupils in their care well.

44. The school provides a safe and caring environment for most pupils. The school follows the local guidelines for the protection of children and procedures are satisfactory: the deputy headteacher is the nominated officer for child protection and year managers monitor concerns. Staff are trained in first aid and there is a medical room which is staffed at all times. All incidents are appropriately recorded and any concerns are passed on to teachers. A counsellor is also available at appointed times and offers pupils good support. The buddy system works well when used. Pupils acting as buddies indicated that the system is most used when Year 7 pupils join the school, but is not used as much by older pupils.

45. Appropriate health and safety procedures are in place. The bursar has overall responsibility for health and safety matters, and she ensures that all necessary checks are made to grounds, buildings and equipment. The school identifies and deals with any hazards effectively, and health and safety checks and inspections are regularly undertaken.

46. The policy and rationale for assessment is very good but because it is not always consistently applied it has limited impact on helping to raise standards and aid planning. There are clearly a number of exceptions to this where departments have good procedures for monitoring and assessing pupils' attainment and progress: most notably in English, mathematics, drama and art. Weaknesses are clearly evident in science, music and modern foreign languages with some variability in the quality of assessments in humanities.

47. The freedom offered by the school's assessment framework has both strengths and weaknesses. Where departments clearly understand National Curriculum levels and provide effective feedback to pupils to help them improve, assessment is effective. In many cases emphasis is placed on assessing pupils' achievements at the end of a unit of work or course of study by testing. However, the information obtained from these tests is not always used to help improve either the teaching or to address pupils' weaknesses shown up by the tests. Another difficulty is that assessment procedures across the school are not effectively monitored. This means that there is not enough evaluative data and this makes it difficult for senior managers to identify which assessment procedures are working well and which are not.

48. The quality of marking overall is unsatisfactory. In a number of subjects, pupils' work is clearly not marked regularly or effectively. The school's marking system unfortunately confounds attainment, effort and completion of work. Marked work, other than in those departments that have good procedures, is rarely accompanied by informative comments to support pupils' understanding of the marking. Many pupils do not know the standards to which they are working or what they need to do in order to improve. This is more evident in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. Teachers' comments such as "excellent work" are not always informative because there is often no link between the statement and National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades.

49. There have clearly been some improvements since the last inspection but some subjects have not kept up with developments in assessment, particularly in the use of information from feeder primary schools to help pupils move smoothly into secondary school. However, for pupils with special educational needs, the identification and monitoring of their progress towards agreed targets is very good. Pupils themselves are clearly involved in the process and have taken ownership of their own targets and progress.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

50. The last inspection found that parents were generally supportive of the school, expressed satisfaction with the way they were kept informed and involved in their children's education. Evidence from the inspection shows that this is still the case.

51. Parents continue to generally have positive views of the school. The parent questionnaire responses and comments made at the pre-inspection parents meeting show that parents are generally supportive of the school, however, a small but significant minority do have some concerns. In particular they have concerns over poor behaviour; they do not feel that pupils always receive the right amount of homework, and they also expressed concerns over how well they were kept informed about children's progress, and the way in which the school works with parents. The inspection supports parents' views about the behaviour of a small, but significant minority of pupils and the effect on learning. However, the written annual reports for parents are good, and overall the school works satisfactorily with parents.

52. The general information provided for parents by the school is satisfactory. There are planned formal opportunities for parents to meet with staff to discuss their children's progress, in addition parents receive good information regarding children's attainment and progress through the written end of year reports which let them know what their children can do and where they are in relation to national expectations. There is some variation between subjects: in most subjects there is a focus on how the pupils can improve but in a few, such as science, this is limited. Tutors are available to discuss any concerns and the student planners are used as a means of communication between school and home. Parents' responses to the inspectors' questionnaire indicate that parents do not feel the school works well with parents: however, parents spoken to during the inspection felt the school was supportive and that if they had any concerns they were able to come and discuss them with staff who would sort out problems quickly and effectively.

53. Regular letters are sent out to parents on specific matters, but at present there is no whole-school newsletter. The school prospectus and governors' annual reports to parents do not meet statutory requirements as there is some statutory information missing from each document.

54. The impact of parental involvement on the life of the school is satisfactory. The majority of those parents who do want to support the school give good support; in mathematics parents attend GCSE revision courses and the parent-teacher association works hard to raise funds for the school. Parental support for learning at home is also satisfactory. A number support their children by helping them with their homework. Some parents use the planners well as a means of communication with school staff.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

55. St Helena School is managed effectively from day to day but there are weaknesses in leadership. There is little doubt that the headteacher, deputy heads and senior managers share a strong commitment to the school: the recently enlarged senior management team has been effective in tapping this commitment and works hard to raise standards and improve the quality of what the school has to offer its pupils. This commitment to improvement is reflected in the school development plan which provides a succinct and well thought out programme for improvement. In the same vein, the improvement in teaching and standards since the last inspection are examples of how the hard work has paid off. There is little doubt, too, that the school's reputation locally has improved: the school has grown in size over the past few years and is well on its way to meeting the target of 1000 pupils.

56. The governing body supports the school well. It has a strong commitment to working in partnership with the school and governors hold the headteacher and teachers in high regard. As a result they share the headteacher's vision for the school and, for example, are working closely with staff to become an Arts College. The governing body receives helpful information from the school about, for example, examination results and budget details. Governors also find out about the school by making personal visits: all governors are linked to a subject or area and some give

practical help and support. As a result they keep a close eye on examination performance and spending patterns, and through their visits, have a pretty good idea about staff morale. However, in its desire to work in partnership with the school, the governing body is not always as rigorous about holding the headteacher and staff to account. An example is the school development plan. Governors play an important role in endorsing the plan presented by the school and regularly monitor progress towards the priorities. However, they do not always have enough information to help with this monitoring or about areas where the school is not doing well. As a result, the governing body has a good grasp of the school's strengths but it does not have enough information to make a sharp analysis of areas for improvement.

57. One of the reasons for this is that the school's systems for monitoring and evaluating its work, analysing its strengths and weaknesses, and taking action to improve, are not systematic enough. This weakness is one of the reasons why improvements since the last inspection have, in some areas, been slower than might be expected. Advances in modern languages, for example, have been patchy and have not resulted in better teaching and learning or improvements in standards. There are still inconsistencies in managing behaviour identified in the last inspection report and too much variation across the school.

58. One of the key issues in the last inspection report was for middle managers to monitor more rigorously and senior managers to use this to take effective action. The school has developed some systems for monitoring its performance: for example, the quality control week seeks to monitor teaching and learning across the school. This has given the headteacher and deputy head useful information about strengths and weaknesses in different subjects and has resulted in small, but important, improvements. Mathematics, for example, identified as an area for improvement in the last inspection, has made good progress. Overall, however, the school's understanding of the process of self-evaluation is limited. Middle managers are not fully involved in monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching and learning in their areas and the purpose of monitoring, and of the criteria for judging quality, are not clearly spelt out and agreed. This means that there are inconsistencies in the way monitoring is carried out and that the impact on school-wide improvements is limited.

59. Most subject and year heads lead their particular area reasonably well, but they do so in isolation: they work hard for their subject but this does not always contribute effectively to the development of the school as a whole. The result of this is a degree of inconsistency across the school, unclear messages to pupils and a reluctance to take corporate responsibility for raising the quality of what the school has to offer. The most effective subject departments have clear strategies for managing pupils and achieving or maintaining high standards. In art, for example, teachers are consistent in their expectations of pupils and in the way they manage behaviour and discipline. Another example is drama where consistent expectations ensure that pupils are always challenged by their work. However, other subjects do not necessarily use similar strategies or follow these well-tried and successful methods. As a result a few pupils slip through the net and do not get all the benefit from school that they should.

60. The school's spending plans are clear and linked broadly to its plans for development and improvement. The school development plan, for example, shows the cost of each objective; financial management is systematic and regular information about spending is available to the school and the governing body. In recent years the school has had a fairly large financial deficit but has successfully reduced this by careful planning. Evidence from lessons and the budget indicates that money is targeted appropriately to improve pupils' achievements. For example, additional money is being used to improve the quality of computers and money has been used well to buy textbooks in science. As yet, however, the school is making only limited use of information and communication technology in subjects. The money available to support pupils with special learning needs is very well used: this has a strong impact on these pupils' achievements and they make good progress with their learning.

61. The principles of best value are beginning to be used by the school. The school is careful to ensure that it gets competitive prices and, for example, employs its own cleaning and catering

staff rather than use a contractor. There is little doubt that this is one of the main reasons why the school is clean and well cared for. The school compares some aspects of its performance, such as examination results, social and economic data and attendance, with those of other schools but could use a wider range of information to help identify areas for improvement. Because self-evaluation is not strong it is difficult for the school to challenge the way it does things.

62. The qualifications and experience of most teachers is matched well to the subjects they teach. In some subjects, such as science, English, religious education, music and physical education, temporary teachers are filling in for teachers who are on long-term absence. Their experience does not always match the needs of the curriculum and, not surprisingly, this depresses standards and progress in these subjects.

63. The support given by science and design and technology technicians is very good and ensures the smooth running of practical sessions. This enhances the quality of education in these subjects.

64. Staff working with pupils who have special educational needs and pupils for whom English is an additional language are very effective. Learning support staff meet regularly, work effectively as a team and are well qualified: as a result they are deployed more effectively.

65. Arrangements for supporting newly qualified teachers and unqualified teachers are not as effective as they should be. Part of the reason for this is that the co-ordinator is one of the teachers who is on long term absence and arrangements have had to be changed. However, the induction programme for teachers new to the school is not well thought out and planned opportunities to observe experienced colleagues are limited.

66. The accommodation provided by the school allows for the curriculum to be taught effectively. In some GCSE subjects where there are large numbers of students to be taught in specialist areas, such as drama or food technology, or as a result of setting arrangements, there are pressures made upon the available teaching spaces.

67. The school has many good specialist areas and rooms, and in particular for design & technology, art, drama, music and sports. High quality display materials enhance teaching rooms and corridors throughout the school: these stimulate learning and have a positive impact on standards. Resources in the library, identified in the last report as weaknesses, are good but the accommodation restricts its potential as a learning resources area. In particular, the size of the room means that it cannot be used by a whole class for reading or for learning about the library. The lack of carpets in rooms used for the teaching of modern foreign languages sometimes has an adverse effect on aural practice because the acoustics make it difficult for pupils to hear clearly. There is good wheelchair access to most parts of the site.

68. Standards of cleaning are high and cost-effective, and are managed by the school through sub-contracting arrangements. Minor building repairs are dealt with quickly. Toilets for boys and girls meet health and hygiene requirements. These small but important strengths add to the overall quality of the environment.

69. Learning resources such as books and materials are mainly sufficient for pupils' needs. Areas which have some inadequacies are physical education, where there is no dance equipment or resources and gym equipment is old and in the modern foreign languages department where resources are generally inadequate to support new courses. The number of computers is less than in other schools and this means that information and communication technology is not used sufficiently to support learning in science, religious education, geography, history and design and technology. In design and technology, for example, there is no opportunity for pupils to learn about computer aided design or manufacturing. On the other hand, the information and communication technology department has been particularly effective in using resources by building and servicing its own computers.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

70. The school should now:

(1) Improve achievement, progress and teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9 by:

- i. ensuring that there is greater consistency in teaching;
- ii. improving procedures for assessing pupils' progress and marking their work;
- iii. using the good teaching as models of best practice;
- iv. providing strong support to new and temporary teachers;
(*paragraphs 7; 8; 13; 18; 19; 22 - 24; 34; 46 - 49; 65*)

(2) Improve the behaviour of a minority of pupils by:

- i. ensuring that all teachers follow the school's policy for discipline by careful monitoring;
- ii. use the results of monitoring to highlight successful and less successful strategies for managing behaviour;
- iii. continue to provide professional development opportunities to improve teachers' skills in managing behaviour well;
(*paragraphs 13 - 16; 26; 27; 36; 37; 40; 41; 43; 44*)

(3) Maintain efforts to improve pupils' attendance by:

- i. applying the systems that are in place more rigorously;
- ii. making parents aware of the link between good attendance and high standards.
(*paragraphs 7; 17; 42;*)

(4) Develop further the systems for self-evaluation by:

- i. establishing a common understanding of the criteria for judging teaching and its impact on learning and the skills needed to make such judgements;
- ii. ensuring that evaluation makes a clear link between leadership and management, and the quality of teaching;
- iii. analysing and evaluating the outcomes of monitoring carefully to establish strengths and weaknesses;
- iv. using this analysis to identify clear strategies for improvement;
- v. monitoring the implementation of school policies to ensure greater consistency;
(*paragraphs 40 - 42; 46; 55 - 61*)

(5) Review the curriculum at Key Stage 4 to ensure that all pupils gain as much benefit from school as they should;
(*paragraphs 7; 17; 33*)

(6) Improve standards in modern foreign languages by improving teaching and learning in the subject.
(*paragraphs 46; 134 - 139*)

OTHER ISSUES WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BY THE SCHOOL

(7) Develop the use of ICT in subjects.
(*paragraphs 29; 129 - 133*)

(8) Ensure that the legal requirements for a daily act of collective worship and are met fully.
(*paragraph 39*)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	178
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	28

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	12	34	39	10	1	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	927
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	135

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	20
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	206

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	9

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	70
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	57

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	10.9
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2000	85	85	170

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	45	57	52
	Girls	53	50	43
	Total	98	107	95
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	58 (63)	63 (59)	56 (41)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	27 (21)	35 (35)	20 (14)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	52	67	58
	Girls	58	63	50
	Total	110	130	108
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (60)	80 (68)	67 (54)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	31 (21)	48 (42)	29 (19)
	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	95	95	190

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	40	84	92
	Girls	61	86	90
	Total	101	170	182
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	53 (56)	89 (94)	96 (96)
	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 per pupil	School	40.1
	National	38.4

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	40
	National	n/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	6
Black – other	3
Indian	2
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	4
Chinese	6
White	888
Any other minority ethnic group	14

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	3	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	120	4
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	52.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	454

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 2	
Key Stage 3	24.4
Key Stage 4	20.7

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	2,574,351
Total expenditure	2,578,673
Expenditure per pupil	2,869
Balance brought forward from previous year	11,024
Balance carried forward to next year	6,702

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	927
Number of questionnaires returned	104

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	54	11	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	43	47	7	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	16	55	15	5	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	55	14	8	2
The teaching is good.	25	62	7	2	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	33	41	19	6	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	64	26	5	2	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	63	33	3	2	0
The school works closely with parents.	36	33	21	7	4
The school is well led and managed.	41	38	7	1	13
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	39	40	15	2	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	36	43	11	2	9

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

ENGLISH

71. Standards in English are satisfactory overall, but by the time pupils leave the school at 16, they are good. Results at age 14 compare quite well with those at similar schools, although they were marginally below the national figures for percentages reaching National Curriculum Levels 5 and 6 in the tests in 2000. GCSE results for 2000, however, show pupils up to 10 per cent ahead of their counterparts nationally in achieving the higher grades, A* - C. Girls, both in English and English literature, were further ahead of their national average than were boys, but all pupils continue a trend that, with minor variations, has been a feature of English results at St Helena for several years. What was seen during the inspection confirmed this pattern, whether in lessons or in the written work that was seen. Attainment in Years 7 to 9 tends to be below average, although in the higher sets pupils work at a level comparable with national standards. Many pupils are already able to write quite creatively. This includes poetry work, for instance Year 8 pupils have written sonnets in the style of Shakespeare, demonstrating technical skill, knowledge of the form and considerable imagination. In Years 10 and 11, standards are usually in line with national norms, and are often higher. The work of many pupils is very good; they produce extended pieces of writing, often word-processed, of a high quality. They are good at redrafting work in the light of targets set for them, and show imagination in creative work and sound knowledge and understanding of texts. Notable work produced by pupils includes 'newspaper' reports of the events in *Henry IV Part One* and their background, which gives scope to demonstrate knowledge of media forms and desktop publishing skills as well as knowledge of the play.

72. Good teaching contributes to the high standards. Teaching was at least satisfactory in almost every lesson, indeed it was usually good or very good. This was particularly the case in Years 10 and 11. Where teaching is good, teachers structure and pace their lessons well. Their knowledge and understanding of the subject is very secure and they employ a variety of methods: in the week of the inspection, lessons were seen involving poetry writing, role play, analysis of media forms, revision by means of a video presentation, analysis of the text of a Shakespeare play and paired work to discuss preliminary drafts of writing in the style of James Thurber. There is a very experienced core team of English teachers, who demand and get a high standard of behaviour in their lessons.

73. Pupils respond well to this work ethos. Positive attitudes also contribute to the learning that takes place; good behaviour is a feature of about half the lessons in Years 7 to 9, and in half the lessons in Years 10 and 11 it is very good. Although some silliness was seen in a few lessons in the lower part of the school, it is understood, particularly in GCSE classes, that this is not the way to behave. Most pupils therefore co-operate well with their teachers and with each other. They work well in pairs and small groups, and show considerable enthusiasm for many of the texts studied. They are ready to discuss and write sensitively about the texts. The fact that they take responsibility for their own learning is a factor that leads to the level of success in GCSE examinations.

74. Most pupils are entered for both English and English literature GCSE. Teaching staff are very alert to the strengths and weaknesses of their pupils; they assess them accurately, especially in Years 10 and 11, and set appropriate targets. Self-evaluation is encouraged, and pupils know what they must do to improve their work, particularly between initial and final drafts. The department has changed examination boards more than once in the past few years; the choice of curriculum is clearly based on the knowledge of what their pupils can do.

75. The head of department has only been in post for a few months, but already has the respect of colleagues. New appointments in the autumn can only strengthen the experienced team she has inherited. There is much that should be maintained – such as the use of visiting writers to aid creative work, or the special emphasis on reading in Year 7 – as well as new opportunities that

can be explored, particularly in the area of language work. The progress that was noted in the last inspection report has been maintained; there is the potential for further improvement. The raising of standards in Years 7 to 9 would contribute to even higher standards eventually by the end of Year 11. This represents the most fruitful area for development.

76. The development of a literacy strategy in the school is at a very early stage. Key words are displayed on classroom walls in various departments, but no overall strategy has been worked through. The features of the National Literacy Strategy that have already been adopted in many secondary schools, such as literacy hours, summer schools and paired reading schemes, have not yet been adopted here.

77. There is a rolling lesson for reading in Year 7 at a different hour each week that replaces the timetabled lesson. This certainly contributes to a positive attitude to reading in the school; pupils, including many boys, borrow from the library regularly and appreciate the book boxes introduced by the English department. The enhancement of speaking and listening skills is well provided for in drama lessons throughout the school; the fact that so many choose drama as a GCSE option means that this contribution benefits a high proportion of the pupils. Writing skills, however, are the least well-provided for. Spelling, as at the time of the last inspection, is a weakness for many pupils. Written work, in many subject areas, would benefit from the greater use of writing frames. This would enable more pupils to produce better pieces of extended writing.

78. It is to be hoped that the group formed to develop a literacy strategy will address these issues, and spread good practice across departments. More professional development time needs to be set aside for this. The effect of a good strategy would be to raise standards in all subject areas, particularly in the lower part of the school.

Drama

79. Standards are very high in drama. It is taught in mixed ability groups to all pupils up to the end of Year 9, and then becomes an optional course for GCSE. About 100 pupils a year choose it as an option, which is an indication of the success it has had in recent years. In 2000, almost 95 per cent of the candidates for GCSE drama achieved grades A* - C, which is much higher than the national average. Some pupils have gone on to gain wider recognition of their skills at a national level.

80. The standards seen during the inspection underline this. In no lessons throughout the school did the standard drop below average, and the quality of work done by pupils in their lessons was at times quite high. Pupils in Year 11 in particular were able to produce very sophisticated work based on a script that demanded acting in cross-gender roles; they prepared and presented their work with much skill and enthusiasm. Pupils from Year 7 onwards show a sense of commitment to the work they are doing: they co-operate well with their teachers and each other, and make good progress because they are focused on their tasks.

81. Drama teaching is always good; it is sometimes very good, whether taught by part-time staff or by the two full-time teachers. The teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject, and considerable skills in managing the pupils in their lessons, often in quite large groups. As a department, they have devised a way of ensuring that all key drama skills are taught in a progressive way, by means of a grid showing all the features that are to be covered. This is translated into a range of challenging lessons, using a variety of approaches, all contributing to the success of the department.

82. The department has the use of a well-equipped studio, with storage areas and an adjacent classroom, although the number of classes needed to meet demand necessitates the use of the school halls for lessons as well. A case could be made for enhanced accommodation for drama, particularly as the performing arts contribute so much to the extra-curricular programme of the school, with several large productions each year, and work done in conjunction with companies and theatres locally and further afield.

MATHEMATICS

83. In the GCSE examinations in 2000 the proportion of pupils at age 16 gaining grades A* - C was just above the national average, and above the average for comprehensive schools. The school enters almost all of its pupils for the GCSE examination and the proportion gaining a pass at GCSE (grades A* – G) last year was close to 100 per cent, compared with a national figure of 96.7 per cent. Pupils' performance in mathematics at GCSE compared with other subjects is broadly in line with the national picture. Standards achieved by girls are higher than those reached by boys but the difference is not significant.

84. At age 14 the proportion of pupils gaining the national expectation is in line with the results achieved in all schools nationally and in line with results in similar schools. Attainment in mathematics is similar to that achieved in English and science within the school. Girls do less well than boys in the tests but the difference is not significant. Teacher assessment of pupils' national curriculum levels at age 14 was substantially above the results the pupils gained in the tests. However, teachers do monitor their pupils' progress effectively and have a good grasp of what they know, understand and can do. This needs to be related more closely to national curriculum levels.

85. Evidence from the inspection supports the picture outlined above. The curriculum is well planned and appropriately challenging for pupils at all levels and the majority of pupils in the middle and higher sets often cope well with the demands made by the work set. There is less consistency in the standards achieved by pupils in the lower sets, but most pupils make satisfactory and often good progress. In Year 11 about half of the pupils are on course to achieve at least a grade C at GCSE, with a number working well above this level. For example, higher attainers are able to solve quadratic equations using a range of methods including completing the square. They understand rational and irrational numbers and simplify algebraic fractions including those involving quadratic terms. Lower set pupils solve simple equations at the required level. Average pupils have a good knowledge of bearings and understand the basic rules of algebra well. In applying their mathematical knowledge and skills to solving problems and investigations, pupils set out their work clearly and communicate well using tables, graphs, diagrams and text as appropriate.

86. Across the school most pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of number facts and a sound understanding of the number system and place value. This is good in Years 7 to 9 among average and higher pupils, and means that they can tackle work such as evaluating algebraic expressions and calculating probabilities using fractions with relative ease. Most pupils are given sufficient opportunities to practise their number facts and mental calculating skills but lower attainers in particular need more opportunities to learn and develop strategies for working things out in their heads. Most pupils know when it is appropriate to use a calculator and are generally able to use one efficiently when required.

87. Work done in shape, space and measures is often of a good standard. Most pupils have a good understanding of reflections, rotations and translations of shapes at the appropriate level. They use units appropriately and work on area involving a range of shapes is well understood.

88. Throughout the school pupils' understanding of their work in mathematics is supported and enhanced by the emphasis teachers place on their knowledge of mathematical language and vocabulary.

89. Pupils in the lower sets often demonstrate a good understanding of the mathematical ideas they are working with, and this is an improvement since the last inspection. For example, pupils in Year 8 working on probability apply their knowledge of the concept effectively to help them work out the likelihood of independent and combined events. Understanding of place value is still an area of weakness for some pupils in the lower sets. The teaching of mental calculating skills with a focus on partitioning numbers and other similar strategies will help to address this issue.

90. The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in the great majority of lessons observed and in all lessons seen in Key Stage 4. In nearly half the lessons seen the teaching was good or very good. The teaching has a number of strengths which were seen in many lessons across both key stages. Teachers have good expectations of the standards pupils should achieve. They use classwork and homework well to monitor and assess pupils' progress, and have a good awareness of pupils' levels of knowledge and understanding. Homework is used effectively to reinforce or extend what is learned in school. Teachers give good, clear explanations, often using a step-by-step approach to developing new concepts. They check regularly for understanding and this helps build pupils' confidence. Most teachers focus well on pupils knowing and using appropriate mathematical language, having clear expectations to which pupils respond positively. In most lessons objectives were clear and often teachers were able to involve pupils in making decisions about how much practice they need to do and when to move on. Pupils responded well to taking responsibility for their own learning and were motivated to concentrate well and achieve. In the best lessons teachers used a range of methods which focused on the key learning points but involved pupils in different ways, keeping them interested and working hard all through. In nearly all lessons teachers used overhead projectors well to support their teaching.

91. In a small number of lessons teachers were not sufficiently clear or demanding in their expectations of the way pupils should behave. This led to some poor behaviour and affected the progress made by all pupils in the class. There were not enough examples in lessons of teachers asking pupils to say how they worked out answers, to give reasons or to explain their thinking. Where this did happen it gave pupils opportunities to develop their use of language and their mathematical reasoning and communication skills, as well as helping to develop the understanding of others in the class. It also provided some opportunities to clarify misconceptions. This approach needs to be developed much more widely as part of the department's professional development programme. Similarly, there was little evidence of the teaching of mental calculating skills and strategies, and this needs to be developed particularly for pupils in the lower sets, many of whom have not developed these skills for themselves.

92. The planned curriculum is good. It ensures that all pupils are given opportunities to achieve and supports teachers in effectively assessing and monitoring pupils' progress on a day-to-day basis. Comprehensive pupil performance data is available in the department and the use of this can be further developed to help raise standards especially for the lowest and highest achieving pupils. The department has already begun this development and put in place procedures which will support this.

93. Leadership and management of the department are strong. Responsibilities are clear and shared across the department which works well as a team. Resources are well organised and the learning environment is stimulating and welcoming. Good progress has been made since the last inspection and standards are improving.

SCIENCE

94. Standards by the end of Key Stage 3 are generally in line with expectations and the progress pupils make is sound overall. In the 2000 end of Key Stage 3 tests, pupils at the school performed in line with both the national average and the average of similar schools. However, pupils do not achieve as highly in science as they do in mathematics. This is largely because there is limited use made of pupils' previous experiences or achievements in science in primary schools: much of the work, according to pupils, is repetition of Year 6. There is a large amount of assessment information available on each pupil based largely on test scores or performances in end of unit tests. Pupils' attainment in these tests is not yet matched to National Curriculum levels and regular checks on their progress is at an early stage of development. These factors, coupled with the limited range of marking and information for pupils about how to improve their work, means that few pupils actually know the level to which they are working or what they need to do in order to improve.

95. Regular checks on pupils' progress is more secure in Years 10 and 11. Standards by the end of Year 11 in double science are in line with expectations and in general pupils achieve well. Pupils make very good progress between the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 and the school is in the top 25 per cent of the LEA secondary schools. The department prepares pupils for the GCSE well. Since the last inspection the change to a new modular course, and the alteration of grouping arrangements, with fewer staff teaching each class, have both had a positive impact on raising standards in science. In the 2000 GCSE, 55 per cent of pupils achieved grades A* - C, above the national average, but overall achievement, measured by the mean point score was in line with the national average. It is clear that pupils in both key stages do well in recalling scientific facts but many have difficulty applying their knowledge and understanding to solve problems in different or unusual situations, and evaluating the outcomes. Attainment in experimental and investigative science is not as well developed as in the knowledge-based aspects of the course. This is mainly because the department uses investigations mostly for assessment purposes with limited focus on teaching and developing the skills of scientific enquiry systematically throughout both key stages.

96. The development of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology through science lacks a clear structure. In some cases, worksheets and other texts have a high literacy demand and this is impeding the progress of lower ability pupils in science. For those pupils who require additional support either because they have English as an additional language or have special educational needs, when additional support is available, these pupils make good progress. This was clearly evident in a low ability Year 10 science group where pupils were looking at the chemical and physical properties of elements across the periodic table. In this lesson the good range of demonstrations and other activities, brisk pace, effective use of resources matched to pupils' needs and the good quality of questioning ensured these pupils made good progress and achieved well for their ability.

97. The quality of teaching is satisfactory in both key stages. However, in those lessons that were taken by temporary supply teachers or by non-specialists to cover the long-term absence of two members of the department, then the quality of teaching is mostly unsatisfactory. The nature of the work set and the inability of staff to follow the school's behaviour management strategies coupled with the lack of respect from some pupils does not ensure that all pupils progressed at an appropriate pace. This is clearly evident in the outcomes of end of unit tests where pupils have relied on previous experiences and have in general scored one grade lower than in other units taught by full time members of the science department.

98. Good teaching is seen in Year 7 and in Years 10 and 11: the key characteristics supporting good teaching are clearly linked to planning, where the objectives set are made clear to pupils so that they know what they are doing; why; and what is expected of them. In these lessons teachers provide a range of learning opportunities encouraging pupils to work at pace and to be suitably challenged. In good lessons the focus is clearly on pupils' learning and less on the teachers imparting scientific knowledge. Lesson preparation throughout the department is very good and the support teachers get from the technicians is excellent, ensuring the smooth running of practical sessions or demonstrations.

99. In the majority of lessons that are just sound there is too much emphasis on teaching and less on pupils' learning. Lesson objectives in many instances lack clarity and are rarely matched to meet specific levels of attainment. The lessons are often characterised by common activities with limited room for pupils of differing ability to show fully what they know or understand. This lack of focus on outcomes targeted to specific levels or grades is symptomatic of the lack of focus on assessment for learning. Pupils' attitudes to science are mostly sound with good attitudes clearly linked to good teaching, with appropriately challenging sets of activities and effective use of behaviour management strategies. In the minority of cases poor pupil behaviour adversely affects progress of the majority.

100. Strategic leadership of science within the school is unsatisfactory. Development priorities are clearly identified but are not monitored effectively to ensure work is progressing at the right pace to meet the needs of the both pupils and the school priorities. Apart from the improved

performance in GCSE many of the issues raised in the previous inspection report are still outstanding. Individuals work very hard to make improvements but do not always work productively as a team towards a common goal. Monitoring and evaluation of standards, the quality of teaching and curriculum provision are underdeveloped. This means the school does not have sufficient secure information that can be used to check how well the department is doing or evaluate the effectiveness of any developments.

ART AND DESIGN

101. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is above average for both boys and girls according to teacher assessments and is supported by work seen during the inspection. Attainment at the end of Year 11 is above average for boys and girls who both perform better in art than in almost any other subject on the curriculum. Standards have remained stable since the last inspection.

102. Achievement and progress are good at both key stages. Pupils aged 14 explore the work of artists such as Magritte, Dali and De Chirico and demonstrate their understanding of the principles of Surrealism by creating their own surreal pictures using cut-out images from magazines. Some high-attaining pupils can draw well, create witty surreal compositions and are able to carry out extensive research using a variety of methods including use of the Internet.

103. By the end of the two-year photography course high-attaining pupils produce very good quality work using dark room techniques and can create interesting effects on the computer using Photoshop. Pupils at the end of the textiles course show how they can produce repeat designs printed on fabric. Starting points such as a visit to Mersea inspire pupils to develop ideas into a variety of media with high-attaining pupils producing striking 4-colour reduction lino-prints on fabric. After two years following the general art course pupils demonstrate their ability to draw with pencil sensitively. They use a variety of media to develop their work and personal responses include masks; silk painting and three-dimensional models as final pieces.

104. Teaching and learning are good at both key stages. Strengths in teaching are:

- good short-term planning to ensure progress of all abilities and help pupils to be clear about objectives i.e. visual aids and information sheets;
- a variety of teaching methods are used to ensure progress of all abilities and are fine-tuned to group and individual needs for example, different approaches to introducing the topic on Aboriginal art;
- good class management with strategies consistently applied throughout the department such as: boy/girl seating, high expectations of behaviour; quiet working conditions; good clearing up and orderly start and finish to lessons;
- a variety of specialist staff enables the curriculum to be broad with photography, textiles, and ceramics in addition to the usual two dimensional work.

105. Where there are weaknesses in teaching the higher attaining pupils are not always challenged enough and need to be given further activities that demand more of them.

106. Attitudes and behaviour are very good in both key stages. Pupils always behave well and are courteous. They listen intently when the teacher speaks, answer questions, are enthusiastic and show respect when their classmates answer questions. Pupils in Key Stage 4 take care to present work attractively and show that they are capable of independent learning.

107. Leadership and management are good. The particular strength of the department is that the consistent approach and high expectations of all the members of the department give the area a special atmosphere conducive to learning. The mutual respect of staff and pupils creates a rapport making the art department a pleasant haven. There is a comprehensive handbook which is supportive to all staff: this is one of the main reasons for the consistent approaches and systems throughout the department. Good schemes of work include the work of female artists and the study

of non-European cultures. Technical staff are strategically deployed so as to maximise their effect within the department. Regular monitoring of teaching, with constructive feedback to teachers, short-term planning and marking all ensure that standards are maintained.

108. Improvement since the last inspection is good and standards of attainment have been maintained. The use of information and communication technology has improved but only one computer means this is limited to GCSE courses and the potential for the use of computers has not been fully explored.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

109. By the age of 14, pupils' achievements overall in design and technology are in line with national expectations, with boys and girls achieving broadly at the same levels. The previous inspection reported that pupils made good progress throughout Years 7, and 9. This is confirmed, again, by the lessons seen and in pupils' previous work. Pupils experience a broad and balanced introduction to design and technology through a programme of designing and making activities that for the most part reflects the national curriculum requirements for the subject. Pupils use a range of tools, materials and equipment and can cut, shape, join and combine a variety of materials safely, and with reasonable accuracy. The quality of the presentation of design ideas is satisfactory overall and frequently good in the area of food technology. Some pupils incorporate information and communication technology in their design work by using graphics, word processing, and spreadsheet programs but there are no opportunities for computer-aided designing and making (CAD /CAM). Access to these facilities is limited, and pupils often use computers in school at lunchtimes, or at home.

110. The attainment of pupils at GCSE in design and technology has improved since the last inspection, to a point that it is now slightly better than the national average. However, levels of achievement reached in the individual courses offered in Electronic Products, Resistant Materials, Food Technology, and Graphic Products continue to vary considerably. Attainment is particularly high in Food Technology, close to the national averages overall in Graphic Products and Resistant Materials, but remains relatively low in Electronic Products where pupils' attainment is constrained by weak product development skills, and an insecure grasp of theoretical principles.

111. At GCSE there is also a marked difference in the performance of girls compared to boys. In 2000, the numbers of girls gaining A* - C grades in the subject was 12 percentage points above the national average, but 6 percentage points below for the boys, although more boys achieved a pass overall (A* - G) than the national average. When a comparison is made of pupils' performance in the other GCSE subjects they studied at school, girls achieve a better grade in design and technology than in other areas, whilst boys' results are lower by an average of a half a grade.

112. By the end of their GCSE course, most pupils are able to use a wide range of strategies to help generate and develop ideas by conducting questionnaires and surveys, by researching appropriate materials and processes, and by undertaking investigations of existing products. For example, in one piece of coursework, a student made a particularly effective educational toy by undertaking detailed research into the specific needs of people with sight difficulties. In the Graphic Products courses, a series of well-planned and motivating activities ensures that pupils progressively acquire key subject knowledge and skills. Work undertaken in Food Technology courses in both key stages is characterised by high standards in the development of design proposals for food products, and in their subsequent manufacture. In the Resistant Materials areas however, specific attention should be given to the progressive acquisition of key constructional skills in Key Stage 3, and particularly during Year 9, as the basis of a secure foundation for the manufacture of high quality products within GCSE coursework.

113. Teachers and learning assistants work hard to provide sensitive and focused support and guidance for those pupils with particular learning needs, and good progress results for the majority of pupils. There is currently no provision for made for those pupils identified as gifted and talented.

114. Teaching is almost exclusively always satisfactory or better, in just over half of lessons it is good or better, and judged very good in one lesson in every five. A strength of the department is that teachers know their subject very well. This is in both in their theoretical knowledge, and in their practical capability where they explain and demonstrate basic skills and techniques effectively. They work hard at promoting effective interactions with pupils, and many lessons are punctuated with good humour. In general, classroom management practices are effective, with an expectation by teachers of high standards of behaviour. They are enthusiastic about their subject, and endeavour to convey this to pupils at every opportunity. In response, the majority of pupils are actively engaged in their work, behave well, make progress in line with national expectations, and enjoy the time they spend designing and making products. The department strives to promote maximum achievement for all pupils, and is largely successful in meeting this aim. It should accelerate the plans it has to develop GNVQ or prevocational GCSE courses, in order that the needs, abilities and interests of all learners in the subject area are met.

115. The level of lesson planning varies across the department, and particularly within the area of resistant materials. Whilst all teachers in the department acknowledge the need for differentiation in learning activities, a lack of clarity surrounds the differences between a statement of what pupils should learn in a lesson, and a description of the activities they will participate in. In the most effective lessons, teachers make the learning objectives clear at the start of the session, and conclude with a review to reinforce new concepts and skills. Lessons in food technology in particular are characterised by a brisk pace, a variety of learning contexts, high quality learning resources and high expectations – to which pupils for the most part readily respond. Informal arrangements that exist currently to monitor teaching and learning in classes should be formalised in order to allow for the effective dissemination of the considerable good practice that exists within the department.

116. Different policies for marking pupils' work are used in the department. In food technology pupils are provided with constructive comments about how they should improve their work: this is one of the reasons why pupils achieve high standards. In resistant materials, marking is less good at helping pupils improve their work. The link between assessment and planning of the next stages of learning needs to be developed. Systems for storing and filing pupils' work in Key Stage 3 in resistant materials need to be reviewed and improved as current arrangements are cluttered and give negative messages to pupils about the value of their work. Leadership is energetic and enthusiastic and teachers are supported well as valued members of a team. The head of department has been successful at raising the profile of the subject both within the school, and also with partner primary schools and the local community.

GEOGRAPHY

117. Performance in GCSE geography has risen slightly since the last inspection but remains below the national average. The percentage of pupils gaining A* - C grades increased to 51 per cent in 1999 but dropped to 44.7 per cent in 2000. On average pupils do less well in geography than they do in most other subjects in the school but analysis of results shows that this varies across the classes. Overall performance is a little lower than other schools mainly because there are quite a high proportion of the lower grades. However, geography is a popular subject and more pupils take the GCSE course than in other schools: this shows that overall standards are, in fact, better and broadly in line with those expected for pupils by the age of 16.

118. Evidence from lessons confirms these standards and shows that the current Year 11 pupils are on target to achieve in line with national standards. Higher attainers can interpret 1:25,000 maps to describe a wide, flat valley and relate this to a cross section. Most pupils are confident in their application of skills such as four and six figure references. Lower attainers can

verbally explain key terms such as constructive and destructive waves. In coursework, highest attainers write fluently and accurately to explain how artificial defences can protect the coast; some use annotated photographs to very good effect.

119. On average, by the age of 14 pupils are achieving results in line with national expectations. Higher attainers can rapidly interpret issues facing development in Cairo and explain how they might be overcome. Lower attainers can describe the impacts of volcanic eruptions on communities and talk about how people can reduce these impacts. Most pupils can write neat and detailed explanations.

120. Teaching in geography is satisfactory or better in all lessons and good or better in just over half the lessons seen. The best teaching is enthusiastic using a variety of teaching and learning styles, very clear explanations of objectives, clear modelling of examples, good pace and high expectations for independent work. In a Year 8 lesson a well-structured sheet and plan of the school challenges pupils to think independently and to apply their understanding to a study of the school microclimates. Very good open-ended questions in some lessons challenge pupils to give extended verbal answers. Other pupils listen carefully and then expand the answers further when asked. In some lessons there is an over reliance on textbooks and worksheets so that pupils complete a series of short tasks which lack extended, independent answers. The focus in these lessons is on content rather than depth of understanding and pupils lack the opportunity to think issues through at length. At GCSE, only higher attainers have access to a stimulating fieldwork day; all pupils need access to this to encourage enthusiasm and higher attainment in coursework.

121. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection in some areas. Behaviour is now good or better in most lessons, progress in lessons is always satisfactory and is good when it is not constrained by short tasks. GCSE results, though, remain lower than the school average. However, staffing difficulties of previous years have now improved and pupils are on target to achieve higher results than previously.

122. To improve attainment across both Key Stages 3 and 4 teaching must be more consistently good across the department. Clear objectives for each lesson should target skills and understanding, so moving away from a reliance on short tasks towards a focus on extended independent work. Opportunities to observe lessons should be exploited to ensure the very good practice seen in some lessons is shared across the department.

HISTORY

123. At the age of 14, standards are below average. The teacher assessments suggest that results are in line with national averages but the evidence of pupils' work during the inspection confirms that pupils' attainment is, overall, still below national expectations. Pupils handle historical facts well but they do not always demonstrate their ability to analyse and evaluate key concepts of cause and effect. Year 9 pupils, for example, in their study of the measures taken by the government to increase civil defence during the Second World War, can categorise effectively such actions as the introduction of rationing, the distribution of gas masks and the building of air-raid shelters but the majority of pupils cannot link cause and effect. For example, they cannot successfully perceive that all these actions are part of the government's response to the threat of bombing.

124. At the age of 16, the results attained by pupils have steadily declined since the last inspection and are below national expectations. During the last three years, the proportion of pupils reaching grades A *- C has declined from 55 per cent in 1998 to 29 per cent in 2000. Boys' results were, on average, about 10 per cent lower than those achieved by girls. However, inspection evidence from lessons show that standards are improving although they are still below average. In these lessons, pupils are skilful at linking several facts together to make a comprehensive and cohesive historical picture. For example, Year 10 pupils, in their studies of the war in Vietnam, can link reasons for the failure of the American forces, despite their superior technological weaponry, to

defeat the Vietcong forces. However, pupils do not yet demonstrate the analytical ability which is important to acquire higher levels at GCSE. Similarly, pupils do not have appropriate revision and examination skills and thus the confidence to tackle all the questions in tests and examinations. This leads to attainment falling below national norms.

125. Pupils' learning in Years 7 to 11 is satisfactory overall although it is distinctly better for 14, 15 and 16 year olds. In the first three years of school, the rate of progress is not uniform and in the first two years, it is often sluggish. This has an impact on the learning. However, good learning takes place in Year 9 and by the end of the year pupils have a good knowledge of the periods they are studying. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

126. Teaching is satisfactory and occasionally good. In the best lessons, teachers have good knowledge of the subject. Lessons are well planned and well prepared and lead to pupils' learning. Teachers enthuse about the subject and this has a positive effect on pupils' learning. Teachers are particularly adept at drawing out significant points from material which is both challenging and exciting. In a Year 11 lesson concerning non-traditional medicines, for example, the teacher helped pupils analyse in depth what appeared, at first, to be simple statistics and pull out a host of important facts about the role of such medicines. The teacher also drew out significant aspects of reliability and validity when looking at statistics. The quality of teaching led to good learning because pupils were stimulated by the challenge and applied their best intellectual and creative efforts to fulfil the tasks he set. In the less effective lessons, pupils are, too often, passive recipients rather than willing, active participants in their own learning. Pupils' learning, attainment and progress is inexorably linked to the quality of the teaching.

127. The response of pupils is satisfactory overall. However, it is variable, depending on the quality of the teaching. Where there is good teaching, good class management and the creation of a working and stimulating atmosphere, pupils show application to their work. They respond diligently, settle to task and sustain concentration, although their good oral contribution is often better than their written work. Where teaching is less effective, a significant group of pupils exhibit unsatisfactory attitudes towards both work and behaviour. Pupils' positive behaviour and response, which is an important factor in their increased learning, is often a direct result of good teaching and good classroom management.

128. Since the last report, standards in the subject have declined markedly and history is now one of the relatively weaker subjects in the school. However, the newly appointed head of department has already accurately identified the strengths and weaknesses of the department and has made a good start in putting in a structure where he can use the strengths to combat the weaknesses. He is a good role model for a department team committed to raising standards and to the encouragement of pupils to high achievement. The school recognises that there is still much to do in order to complete the appropriate policies and procedures. For example, up-to-date schemes of work for the courses of study are in urgent need of completion and the assessment policy for the department is not sharp enough. Resources, particularly those of information and communications technology, are inadequate. There are no artefacts to stimulate learning and the lack of text books for GCSE has a negative impact on learning and attainment.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

129. Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are broadly in line with expectations by the time pupils are age 16. In the 2000 GCSE examinations in information studies the percentage of pupils who gained five or more passes at grades A* - C was slightly above the national average. A larger proportion of pupils sat the examination than in other schools suggesting that these pupils achieved well. On the other hand, about two thirds of pupils follow a non-GCSE course: this gives them a basic level of ICT skills but limits their achievements. Coupled with a lack of ICT in subjects, this means that overall standards by the time pupils leave the school are average.

130. Last year's teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 shows that attainment was below average. However, evidence from lessons suggests that standards are rising and that pupils achieve appropriately when compared with their starting point at 11. This is because teaching in Years 7 – 9 is effective in helping pupils gain the right ICT skills and use these to develop their understanding. In a Year 9 lesson, for example, pupils using the computer to create the front cover for a magazine made good progress and achieved appropriate results. They were enthusiastic, responded well to the work and learnt at a brisk pace: this was because the work was interesting and challenging and because the teacher's very good knowledge was used well to help and guide pupils. Similarly, in a very good Year 7 lesson, the well-planned activity, the teacher's good understanding of the software package and the very good relationships all helped pupils to make very swift progress with their leaflets. More importantly, though, pupils moved a long way in their understanding of the software package, helping them to develop their ICT skills and understanding very well. By the end of the lesson all had planned the layout of their leaflet and many had begun using the computer to make their leaflet.

131. Teaching is mostly effective in Years 10 and 11 too. This is why pupils achieve well in their GCSE examinations. Many of the strengths apparent in Years 7 – 9 are also evident in Years 10 and 11. In a Year 11 lesson, for example, the teacher's good grasp of the subject was used well to help pupils revise for their examination. The good relationships that pupils had with their teachers, and the well-organised lesson, meant that progress was good: pupils of all ability certainly consolidated their knowledge of important ideas such as the Data Protection Act and improved their understanding of the demands of the examination. In most lessons both boys and girls respond well and have positive attitudes but occasional a minority, usually boys, disrupts the learning of others. Where this happens, teachers do not always have effective measures to maintain discipline and, for example, allow pupils to talk whilst they are explaining the work to the rest of the class. This obviously has a negative effect on learning and pupils' achievement suffers.

132. There is some evidence of information and communication technology being used in other subjects. In mathematics, for example, pupils use computers to support their work on coordinates and in art they use them for graphics. Pupils with special educational needs use computers in a variety of ways: some use ICT to develop their spelling and literacy skills and others to help them with coursework and homework. Pupils in Year 7, for example, practise their spelling using a word game on the computer and the computers in the learning support room are used heavily at break and lunchtimes. Across the school, however, there is not enough use of ICT: this means that pupils are not consistently good at using what they have learnt about ICT to help with their work in other subjects. In design and technology, for example, there are no opportunities for computer-aided designing and making (CAD /CAM).

133. Leadership and management of the ICT department, which is responsible for teaching the programme of IT lessons and courses, is effective. This contributes well to the continuing improvement in standards in Years 7 – 9 and in examinations for 16 year olds. The department has been particularly effective in using its resources by building and servicing its own computers. Leadership of ICT across the curriculum is not as effective as it should be, however: as a result the use of ICT in subjects, other than specific information technology (IT) courses, is somewhat limited and the school has not made as much progress as it might in overcoming the issues raised in the last inspection report.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

134. In the most recent results at GCSE, the percentage of pupils achieving grades A* - C was above the national average for all maintained secondary schools in French and below in German. When comparing standards in German to the national results, it must be borne in mind that nationally figures for German include a large proportion of more able pupils for whom it is a second foreign language. Moreover, the school entered more pupils for the GCSE than in other schools nationally: these two factors indicate that attainment was better in German than suggested by the figures. There is, however, evidence of significant underachievement in both German and French.

Inspection evidence shows that pupils appear to do less well in French and German than in the other subjects they take. In comparison to national norms they obtain an average one-third of a grade lower in languages than in other subjects.

135. Standards achieved in lessons by current pupils at the age of 16 are not high enough in either language. Standards in speaking are significantly below national expectations. Although the very able can produce quite fluent presentations and narratives, using a range of tenses, the majority of pupils communicate in one-word utterances and are reluctant to extend beyond the minimal response. The more able can write extended passages accurately describing events and expressing opinions with a good range of expression, but many able to average pupils falter over basic structures and do not have a firm grasp of grammar. There are particular weaknesses in the use of verbs. Standards for some individual pupils are affected by spasmodic attendance to lessons.

136. Standards are below national expectations for pupils at the age of 14 and progress over time is insecure over the key stage. Pupils can produce items of vocabulary and make some substitutions to model texts by referring to the course book or to worksheets. However, there is very little sustained communication in pairs or groups. Pupils do not appear to have built up knowledge of vocabulary and structures from one lesson to another. They rarely use French and German independently for the purposes of routine classroom requests and find difficulty in communicating spontaneously from memory. This is because they are not accustomed to responding to the consistent use of the target language by all of their teachers. Standards in listening, reading and writing are relatively higher than those in speaking. Most pupils can pick out details from short passages on a tape and from short printed texts. The more able pupils are beginning to write more cohesive paragraphs and show that they can describe past events accurately. However, the majority of average to less able pupils are working at sentence level only and considering the generous allocation of time given to the study of a single foreign language, they have made very limited progress.

137. When lessons are well structured and have clear goals, pupils display positive attitudes to their work. They form constructive relationships with one another and with their teachers. In the most effective lessons, pupils of all abilities show that they can work independently in a sensible manner and take responsibility for their learning. They are able to listen attentively and concentrate, if the level of challenge is sufficiently motivating. This was the case in German in Year 8, when pupils conducted a class survey on clothing and in a Year 9 French lesson, when the pupils showed great enthusiasm in correcting the teacher's deliberate mistakes as she described pictures on the overhead projector. Too often pupils are unclear about what they should be doing and take advantage of the situation to persist in off-task chatter. Relationships are not always based on mutual respect and this can lead to a strained atmosphere in lessons, which is not conducive to a subject which relies on social interaction. In Key Stage 4, attitudes are generally better because there are clear objectives related to the GCSE syllabus and teaching tends to be more focused towards examination criteria. Much of this teaching is through the medium of English, and while this may be superficially reassuring and instrumental to examination preparation it seriously hinders pupils' progress in speaking.

138. The quality of teaching varies from one teacher to another and from one lesson to another. In Years 7 - 9 teaching is unsatisfactory: in only one half of the lessons seen was it satisfactory. There are inconsistencies in teaching methods, classroom management strategies and in particular, policy in relation to the use of the target language in all years: although the quality of teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 there are still clear priorities for development. In the best lessons, the teachers use French and German naturally and fluently for all communication, but this is not the case in the majority of lessons observed. There are clear priorities for development. Lesson planning does not always relate the teaching activities to the learning objectives and there is not always a logical progression from word to sentence to text level work. Pupils are rarely challenged to go beyond the practice stage of a lesson. Often the teacher is working harder than the pupils and strategies for involving pupils in the active use of the target language far earlier in the lesson should be explored. Tasks not always adequately demonstrated and frequent confusion

over ambiguous visual cues impede progress and slow the pace of the learning. Expectations of what pupils should do by the end of a lesson or sequence of lessons are often too low. There needs to be a focus on reviewing the relevance and value of activities within lessons in order to match pupils' interests, maturity and learning styles.

139. The school has taken advantage of the flexibility offered by recent changes to the National Curriculum to modify the arrangements for modern foreign languages for pupils aged 14 to 16. As a result French and German are available as optional courses as it is no longer compulsory to study either one up to 16. These changes have resulted in a significant drop in the number of pupils now taking an examination at GCSE. Improvements in modern foreign languages have been slow and not enough progress has been made to raise the quality of teaching and learning.

MUSIC

140. At the time of the inspection the head of department was absent due to long-term illness. During the inspection music was taught by an unqualified music specialist instructor and a specialist supply teacher.

141. Standards achieved by pupils following the GCSE course have improved steadily since the last inspection with 70 per cent of pupils achieving A* - C grades in 2000, slightly above the national average. However, there were no A* or A grades and, in this respect, attainment was below the national average. Evidence from the inspection suggests that the majority of pupils achieve best in the practical aspects of the course, while their understanding of the theoretical aspects, and the links between the two, is weaker. The pupils in the Year 11 GCSE group have a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and how to improve. Attainment by the time pupils are 14 is broadly in line with national expectations. Year 9 pupils worked in groups to compose and perform a 'jingle' for an advertisement. Some used the lesson time well to rehearse and refine their performance and were able to perform their work in progress at the end of the lesson.

142. Teaching is satisfactory overall. It is satisfactory in the majority of lessons in Years 7 - 9. Lessons in Years 10 and 11 have good features. There is a positive, supportive ethos in the classroom. Good support was given to Year 11 pupils in the final stages of their GCSE course, including helpful strategies for the revision of key musical terms and rudiments. There was a good awareness of pupils' achievements, their strengths and weaknesses and what they needed to do to improve. Time was used well to enable pupils to rehearse and refine performances and to consolidate their learning, ensuring that they made good progress.

143. Teachers' subject knowledge is good. However, in Years 7 - 9 teachers often dominate lessons, leaving little time for pupils to engage in the activities of composing, performing, listening to and appraising music which are the basis of the National Curriculum. Questioning is under-developed. Clear expectations about behaviour and what pupils will achieve are not always established and this leads to loss of interest and motivation for some pupils. Singing is planned for but was not demonstrated significantly in the lessons seen during the inspection. A number of pupils have instrumental lessons both in and out of school but their skills are not drawn on in lessons. This was an issue in the previous inspection.

144. Pupils in the GCSE groups have positive attitudes to music. They work well together and Year 11 pupils in particular were very focused on their tasks. They show a good degree of independence, take initiative and work well when not directly supervised. In Years 7, 8 and 9 pupils' attitudes are often unsatisfactory, with a minority of pupils showing lack of respect for adults. Listening skills are often poor and pupils are often noisy and unfocused when they are working on a task.

145. Schemes of work for the revised National Curriculum are planned but are not yet complete and at present planning lacks a clear structure and an explicit link between teaching assessment.

The unqualified instructor has co-ordinated the work of the department very effectively during the absence of the head of department but lacks specialist training.

146. There are very good extra-curricular opportunities for pupils who are involved in choir and instrumental ensembles. Around 70 pupils sing in the choir which achieves a high standard of performance. Pupils give regular performances in the community and raise money for charities. There are educational visits abroad, to Paris, where, for example, pupils performed in Disneyland and Italy, and visits to local performances. Major performance projects, such as the recent production of 'Annie' involve many pupils.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

147. Pupils' achievements are in line with expectations in physical education (PE) and they make satisfactory progress as they move through the school. Those who follow the GCSE course achieve particularly well, results are well above national expectations, with nearly 80 per cent achieving grades A* - C and 100 per cent grades A* - G in 2000. Many of these pupils achieve a higher grade in physical education than in other subjects; this is consistent with the previous inspection.

148. By the age of 14, pupils' attainment is broadly in line with national standards. Pupils develop secure skills and are able to apply them with increasing accuracy, as in athletics, where pupils demonstrate their developing understanding of relay baton changeover, and are progressively able to plan their team organisation in order to achieve success. Boys in particular understand how to combine and sequence actions to good effect, as they practise to improve their bowling and fielding in cricket.

149. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve levels consistent with the national expectation, though within this, boys achieve higher standards than girls, with the exception of girls following GCSE PE. By the age of 16, pupils are able to work independently, developing advanced skills and techniques and applying them to gain a tactical advantage, for example in tennis games. When given opportunities to do so, pupils successfully adopt a variety of roles, for example as coach or umpire in games. In their GCSE studies, pupils make very good progress as they apply their learning in theory sessions to their practical work, using technical vocabulary accurately.

150. Progress is good and evident from lesson to lesson and from year to year. When pupils are given opportunities to learn independently, such as making decisions and devising strategies to score in games, they make good progress. In a few cases pupils make poor progress: this happens when they repeat previously learned skills, as in a Year 10 fitness lesson, or when they are not fully engaged in the learning. Pupils with special educational needs, including lower and higher achievers, are helped to progress when they are set suitably challenging work. A few pupils make limited progress because those who are non-participants take no part in the lesson, standing idle, often at a distance from the group.

151. Teaching is good: it is and satisfactory or better in almost all lessons and in the majority good or very good. Strengths of the teaching include clear objectives, which, when shared with pupils, increase their understanding, and a brisk pace which keeps all learners engaged. Teachers' high expectations are generally met. Good demonstration by their peers and modelling by teachers helps pupils understand what they need to do in order to improve. Where pupils are involved in planning and evaluating their work, as seen in a Year 7 games lesson, they are able to achieve more as a result, but this is an area for development. In both key stages, and in most lessons, pupils are taught how to warm up appropriately and how fitness affects performance in the activity they are learning. Excellent teaching is a feature of GCSE lessons, where team teaching maximises learning opportunities for pupils of all abilities and every minute is used to extend pupils' thinking and help them make gains in their understanding. Unsatisfactory teaching occurs in a small minority of lessons, when time is not used well and the behaviour of some pupils deteriorates as a result. This has a negative impact on learning.

152. Pupils respond positively when teachers are enthusiastic and lessons well paced. Their behaviour is good and they work sensibly, keen to be involved and take part. Most pupils concentrate well and persevere with tasks in order to improve, as in Year 8 cricket, where they sustain their involvement in a bowling activity over a long period of time.

153. The curriculum for Key Stage 3 meets requirements but is heavily weighted towards games and there is not enough time to teach gymnastics and dance to the required depth. Year 10 and 11 pupils have a broad range of games, athletics and fitness that meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. Extra-curricular provision is strong, offering a wide range of activities to extend learning opportunities. A full programme of competitive fixtures, in which many teams achieve success, is complemented by opportunities for pupils to develop skills, as in the excellent judo session, which promotes vigorous activity as well as immersing pupils in the conventions and language of the sport. Outside school, pupils represent local teams, some are county players and a few are national representatives in their chosen sport.

154. The department is capably led. Routines and procedures are well organised and the team of teachers is committed to improvement. Since the last inspection, the department has improved standards of written presentation by GCSE pupils and has increased the number and range of text books and other resources for examination work. Dance is now taught in lessons in Years 7 and 9, although teachers acknowledge this as an area for development. Access to the gymnastics store has been improved.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

155. Since the last report, and particularly in the current academic year, the religious education department has had a difficult time. At the time of the inspection, the department had been without a head of department for more than four months because of long-term illness and most of the teaching has been by a series of temporary teachers, often without a religious education qualification. The most recent temporary teacher, happily a subject specialist, began at the school on the first day of the inspection.

156. In Years 10 and 11, there has been no provision at GCSE for the last ten years and therefore comparisons with national statistics are not possible. Now, however, there is one Year 11 and one Year 10 GCSE group: here, standards of attainment in lessons are below national expectations. Year 11 pupils can discuss the reasons for most divorces, for example, but cannot apply ethical reasoning to answer a GCSE question about the morality of divorce as perceived by some religions.

157. There is no separate non-examined religious education course for Years 10 and 11. However, a comprehensive religious education programme, drawn up by the head of religious education, forms a significant portion of the school's personal social and moral education lessons, which is studied by all pupils. The time allocation is just sufficient to meet the requirements of the syllabus and the criteria of the local agreed syllabus but careful monitoring to secure full and deep coverage is not yet sufficiently in place.

158. In Years 7, 8 and 9 standards are below national expectations. By the end of the key stage pupils know some of the major beliefs of Christianity and other world religions. For example, Year 8 pupils can describe the five pillars of Islam and they can name them in Arabic and English. However, pupils cannot effectively explain the principles and beliefs incorporated in each of the pillars.

159. Although learning in individual lessons is satisfactory, progress over time at both key stages is unsatisfactory because the difficulty in recruiting permanent religious education teachers has affected the quality of teaching in the past. This is particularly true for lower attaining pupils.

160. The response of the vast majority of pupils is only satisfactory. Pupils' response reflects the quality of teaching over the last few months. They often lack motivation and are cynical about the subject. However, in those classes observed during the inspection, where teaching was clearly planned and well presented, pupils showed application to and enjoyment of the subject. They settled well and remained involved in their work. They responded to intellectual challenge and showed pride in their work, although some pupils' presentation could be improved.

161. Teaching is satisfactory overall. The recently appointed supply teacher quickly established a working atmosphere in which pupils generally respond well. In the best lessons, good subject knowledge and good planning lead to all pupils taking their individual learning to deeper levels. In some lessons, however, only the higher attaining pupils apply their intellect with rigour. Pupils are too often inclined to be passive recipients rather than active participants, and are not sufficiently encouraged to become independent learners.

162. The pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development is enhanced by the study and discussion of a range of ideas about their own and other people's values and beliefs and how religion helps to find answers to some of the complex and perplexing questions which confront them, for example, divorce and suffering.

163. Some of the issues of the last report remain unresolved. These include the marking of work, assessment and the preparation of differentiated material. However, there is now enough time for the study of religious education in Years 10 and 11. The continued absence of a head of department, however, and the lack of confidence in the prospect for the long-term continuity of specialist teaching remain major factors which affect standards. Senior staff are aware of the problem and are currently searching for additional staffing with suitable qualifications and experience to support the work of the department.