

INSPECTION REPORT

RIDGEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL

Stourbridge

LEA area: Dudley

Unique reference number: 103866

Headteacher: Mrs S M Bates

Reporting inspector: Mr Chris Warn
4293

Dates of inspection: 18 - 22 February 2002

Inspection number: 192844

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Secondary
School category:	Comprehensive
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Park Road West Wollaston Stourbridge Dudley
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr K Moreton
Date of previous inspection:	18 – 22 November 1996

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18648	John Rowley	Team inspector		How well are pupils taught? How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This is an 11-16 mixed comprehensive school. Currently 986 pupils attend, which means that the school is of average size for a secondary school. Of these, 504 are boys and 482 are girls. A relatively low proportion of pupils (2.6 per cent) is of ethnic minority origin. Three pupils come from homes where English is not the first language. Just over 17 per cent of pupils have identified special educational needs and 1.3 per cent have a statement of special educational need (both of which are below the national average). 11.5 per cent of pupils are currently entitled to free school meals which is broadly average for secondary comprehensive schools. Last year two pupils were permanently excluded (which is a lower figure than in comparable schools). The attendance figure for 2000 to 2001 (92.8 per cent) was better than in most secondary schools.

The school is situated on the edge of the densely populated urban area of Stourbridge and draws its pupils from an area that is neither strongly advantaged nor disadvantaged. There are some pockets of considerable social and economic disadvantage and approximately 100 pupils live in a Social Priority Area. More pupils wish to attend the school than there are places for. Currently the overall level of attainment of pupils on entry into Year 7 is above the national average, although until recently it was in line with the national average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good and improving school that provides its pupils with a high quality of education. Standards of attainment for pupils aged both 14 and 16 are above the national average. These standards have been maintained since the time of the last inspection in 1996. The overall quality of teaching is good, with much that is very good and some that is excellent. The quality of leadership and management is very good. Good value for money is provided.

What the school does well

- Pupils aged 14 reach above average levels in mathematics and science.
- Relatively high standards of attainment at GCSE have been maintained since the time of the last inspection, with particular strengths in music, German, religious education and media studies.
- Provision in music is very good and this subject plays an important part in the life of the school.
- The quality of teaching is good and is continually improving.
- The curriculum is greatly enriched by many out-of-hours learning opportunities.
- Pupils have a very positive attitude to their learning, attend well and behave very well.
- The school is very well led and there is a strong desire to continue to improve.

What could be improved

- There are gaps in the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) and the ways in which it is assessed and reported upon.
- In several subjects, more able pupils are not given enough scope to reach the highest levels by age 14 or the higher grades at GCSE.
- In several subjects, middle ability boys do not make sufficient progress, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 provides insufficient opportunities for vocational learning.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

There has been good improvement since 1996. The quality of teaching has greatly improved to make this now a very significant strength. Taking all test and examination results into consideration, standards have improved since the last inspection, but at a slightly lower rate than improvements nationally. More work still needs to be done to meet the specific learning needs of some able pupils and middle ability boys. The school now trains student teachers, who, in turn, contribute new ideas and energy. Very big improvements have occurred in the quality of development planning, monitoring and evaluation. Some progress has been made in improving the effectiveness of homework. There have been considerable improvements in the learning resources available, particularly in new technology.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			Similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	B	C	C	C

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

Pupils make relatively good progress from Years 7 to 9, especially in mathematics and science and achieve overall standards by age 14 that are above the national average. Pupils make satisfactory progress in English, but the proportion of pupils reaching Levels 6 and 7 is lower than it should be in this subject. Pupils make satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11. Overall attainment at age 16 is above average. Results at GCSE and GNVQ are above the national average in terms of the proportions of pupils achieving five or more passes at grades A* to C. The results are in line with average figures for the average point scores obtained by pupils mainly because most take only eight subjects compared to nine or ten in many other schools. A lower than expected proportion of pupils achieve GCSE grades in the range A* to B in design and technology and French than in comparable schools. The proportion of pupils

gaining grade B in mathematics is below the national average. In some subjects, middle ability boys gain lower grades than those predicted for them. Almost every pupil leaves with a GCSE qualification and eight out of ten pupils continue into full-time education beyond the age of 16.

Results from 1996 to 2001 have risen at a slightly lower rate to those nationally for pupils aged both 14 and 16. Significant measures have been taken to increase results in the future and ambitious targets have been set for attainment in 2002 and 2003, which are well on the way to being met based on inspection evidence. Generally, girls achieve more highly than boys, though not in all subjects.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are courteous, considerate, keen to learn and are very respectful of others.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Behaviour seen in lessons was generally very good. Behaviour outside lessons and in the grounds was generally good. The relatively few cases of unacceptable behaviour that occur are effectively dealt with by teachers.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils' relationships within the whole school community are exceptionally good. Many pupils are willing to accept responsibility and to participate in activities outside lessons.
Attendance	Good. Attendance rates are above the national average.

The arrangements for pupils' personal development are good. Many pupils are very keen to become involved in activities outside the classroom and some undertake tasks that require considerable personal responsibility. The school has worked exceptionally hard to raise the levels of attendance to nearly 93 per cent. Very few pupils are permanently excluded. Pupils are well prepared for the next stages in their education.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

From a sample of 160 lessons seen, the quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in almost all cases. In three-quarters of lessons, it was good or better and in some cases excellent. One per cent of teaching seen was unsatisfactory, compared with 16 per cent in the last inspection. These figures represent a very big improvement since 1996. This is a reflection of innovative approaches to staff development and training. The overall quality of teaching in English, mathematics and science is good, with particular strengths in science.

In many cases lessons are carefully planned and proceed at a brisk pace using a variety of techniques. Pupil-teacher relationships and classroom control are very good and any instances of challenging behaviour are managed well. The quality of support given to pupils with special educational needs is good, enabling them to make good progress. In a minority of lessons, higher ability pupils, particularly boys, could be expected to achieve more demanding targets. Marking is often thorough but sometimes lacks enough guidance about how work could be further improved. Teachers are prepared to support out-of-hours learning activities that are highly beneficial to pupils.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. The curriculum meets all of the requirements of the National Curriculum except for elements of ICT in all years and religious education for those not taking GCSE in Years 10 and 11. There are many valuable opportunities for learning outside lesson times particularly in music and sport. The school has Sportsmark and Artsmark awards which are reflected in the work seen. There is a need for more vocational courses in Years 10 and 11.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils with special educational needs are given helpful and well-focused support in all years and make good progress as a consequence.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. There are only a few pupils with English as an additional language, but they are given appropriate support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. There is an effective personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme in all years. Pupils' moral and social development is very well supported. There is good support for pupils' cultural development and satisfactory support for their spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Pupils are given high quality advice and guidance about personal matters and career intentions. However, the information they receive about how well they are doing in each subject, and what more they need to do to reach their learning targets is relatively imprecise.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Satisfactory. Parents are kept well informed about school events and their children's progress. Some parents wished to be more involved in the life and work of the school.

The quality of the care, support and guidance given to pupils is a major strength. It is a matter of urgency to meet all of the statutory requirements for ICT.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher provides exceptionally dynamic and well focused leadership linked to a clear vision of how the school could be better still. She is very well supported by an experienced and capable team of senior and middle managers. The school is very well administered.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well. Governors have a very clear vision of how good the school is, and how it can continue to improve. They bring a great deal of valuable expertise to the school and are active in planning, monitoring and reviewing activities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The success of plans, policies and teaching strategies is methodically and accurately evaluated. There is scope for teachers to make fuller use of test and examination data to improve schemes of work and lesson plans.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Financial resources are used very effectively to support school improvement. The principles of best value are consistently and rigorously applied.

This is an effective and improving school with the capacity and desire to continue to improve still further. Very strong leadership is playing a critical part in this process. The current buildings limit learning opportunities in music, physical education, drama, religious education, art and design, science and design and technology.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best. The good progress that most children make. The good quality of teaching. The help children receive to become mature and responsible young people. Staff are approachable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school working more closely with parents. Fuller information about their child's progress. Better timing and organisation of the consultation with parents on pupils' progress. A more balanced amount of homework.

Inspection evidence supports parents' positive views. Some concerns about homework were not substantiated from inspection evidence, as homework is generally set in a systematic way. However, some homework tasks do not receive constructive comments from teachers. The school is making vigorous efforts to improve ways of working with parents. The revised arrangements for consultation about progress brought about a very substantial increase in the percentage of parents attending. Inspectors judged that the interim progress reports gave parents limited information on what pupils had actually achieved. However, parents do receive comprehensive reports at the end of each school year.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

Overview

1. The overall standard achieved by pupils aged 14 in National Curriculum tests and teachers' assessments is above the national average. Similarly, the overall standard reached by pupils in GCSE examinations at the age of 16 is above the national average in all indicators except one. This is the figure for the average total point score, which is in line with the national average figure. This indicator is depressed mainly because pupils at Ridgewood High School have been entered for eight subjects at GCSE, which is a lower figure than in many other secondary schools. The school achieved its targets at GCSE in 2001 and is on track to reach higher targets in 2002. These targets are challenging and ambitious.

Standards attained by pupils aged 14 (at the end of Year 9)

2. Until 2000, pupils have entered Year 7 of the school with National Curriculum test scores that indicated that they were achieving at a standard that was in line with the national average. In 2001, the standard of attainment of Year 7 pupils rose to be above the national average in mathematics and science, although remaining in line with the national average in English. Given that the pupils who were tested at the end of Year 9 in 2001 entered Year 7 in 1998 with broadly average levels of attainment, the test results show that pupils made satisfactory progress in English, good progress in mathematics and very good progress in science.
3. In 2001, the overall performance of pupils in English at the age of 14 (Year 9) was in line with the national average, with 68 per cent reaching or exceeding Level 5. Lower ability pupils achieved results that were above expectation and middle ability pupils did as well as expected from their test scores at the age of 11. The pupils who were at the top of the ability range achieved slightly below expectation, as did those just above the bottom of the ability range. The proportion of pupils gaining Level 6 and Level 7 was below average. Boys performed less well than girls, but the gap was no greater than the national one. The average point scores for both girls and boys have fallen since the time of the last inspection, although this decline has now been arrested.
4. In 2001, the overall performance of pupils in mathematics at the age of 14 was above the national average, with 76 per cent reaching or exceeding Level 5. The proportion of pupils reaching Level 6 was above and the proportion reaching Level 7 was close to the national average. There was no significant gender difference. This is a very strong set of results. Since the last inspection, boys' performance has remained steady whilst girls' performance has risen to be equal to it.
5. In 2001, the overall performance of pupils in science at the age of 14 was well above the national average, with 78 per cent reaching or exceeding Level 5. The proportion

reaching Level 6 or above (45 per cent) was very high compared to the national average. These are impressive results and are considerably higher than might be expected given the known levels of ability of these pupils when they were aged 11. There has been no significant gender difference in any year since the last inspection, although the average point scores of boys have sunk a little and those of girls have risen a little. As in English and mathematics, the test results in science have been close to the results assessed by teachers. This indicates that pupils perform to similar standards in test and coursework assignments and that the teachers' results are accurately moderated.

6. The overall standard of attainment in information and communication technology (ICT) in 2001, as assessed by teachers, is well above average. However, these assessments did not include all of the prescribed elements of the National Curriculum, so the results are higher than the work justified. Even so, in many elements of ICT, pupils exhibit considerable capability. There are gaps in pupils' capabilities in using databases and modelling using spreadsheets.
7. The standards attained by pupils aged 14 in 2001 in music and religious education were high. Standards in geography, history and physical education were above the average for pupils of this age. Standards in design and technology, art and design, French and German were in line with those expected for 14 year olds. Within the design and technology curriculum area, pupils attain highly in food technology and textiles. There were no subject areas where attainment at this age was lower than the average national standard.
8. The evidence gained from observing lessons and examining pupils' work indicated that the standards being reached in each subject by pupils in the current Year 9 were at least as high as last year. In some cases (such as in resistant materials and graphics within design and technology) work seen in lessons was of a better standard than was produced last year. In all subjects, pupils are being helped to set personal learning targets related to National Curriculum levels. In many instances these targets are ambitious and reflect high expectations. Sometimes, as in history and design and technology, the targets are directly tied to specific outcomes defined in schemes of work. In other instances, targets are more generalised and relate more to personal attitudes and effort.
9. There are many highlights to report. Personal and creative writing in English is done particularly well. There are impressive examples of extended writing in many subjects. In mathematics there is a notably good development of problem-solving skills. Especially good use is made of technical vocabulary and terminology in science and design and technology. In French and German lessons pupils use spelling and grammar accurately. In geography, pupils are able to weigh up carefully the advantages and disadvantages of economic developments on the environment. In history, many pupils are able to explain why particular events occurred and what the consequences of different peoples' actions were. Many pupils quickly acquire good performance skills in physical education and good practical skills in design and technology. In art and design, pupils build up their skill and confidence in handling clay particularly well. In religious education they are frequently thoughtful and

reflective, whilst in music they listen carefully and perform well together. Across all subjects pupils progressively build upon some of their ICT skills. In many subjects pupils exhibit high standards in practical work.

10. In all subjects pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Their specific learning needs are well documented in individual education plans. Subject teachers are fully aware of these plans and often provide additional help as specified. Pupils are given valuable support from classroom assistants and from the special educational needs co-ordinator. There are only a small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups and an even smaller number of pupils for whom English is an additional language. These pupils are also well supported and so make good progress.
11. The strengths in the work seen far outweighed any weaknesses. However, there were some aspects of attainment where there was scope for further improvement. Some pupils had insufficient analytical and critical skills in English, whilst in mathematics they needed more opportunities to work independently on practical activities. In science, a considerable number of pupils experienced difficulty with drawing graphs. Pupils' skills in control technology and data handling were weak because of insufficient opportunity to develop them within the existing curriculum. In several subjects the most able pupils were restricted in the application and extension of high level thinking skills. This was evident, for example, in English, mathematics, geography and ICT. Pupils often found it hard to give extended, reasoned, spoken answers or to justify a point of view systematically. In art and design, pupils' creative skills were sometimes constrained by too much teacher direction. In religious education, thoughtful ideas spoken in lessons were not always matched in the quality of written responses.

Standards attained by pupils aged 16 (at the end of Year 11)

12. In 2001, the proportion of pupils (57 per cent) gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to C was above the national average. This figure is significantly better than the 2000 one of 48 per cent and is comparable to the standard being attained at the time of the last inspection. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A* to G and one or more grades A* to G is well above the national average. However, the average total point score (39.2) was in line with the national average. This was mostly due to pupils being entered for fewer subjects than in many schools. This indicator has risen slightly since the time of the last inspection, but not as fast as nationally. Pupils performed particularly well in German and music.
13. In general, the pupils who sat their GCSE examinations in 2001 made good progress from Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11. Overall, girls performed at a higher standard than boys although the gender difference is no greater than is found nationally. However, the gender difference varied considerably between subjects. It was relatively small in English and science, but was significant in French, German and design and technology. The proportion of pupils gaining GCSE grades in the range A* to B was lower than average.

14. In the work seen in lessons, strengths in attainment considerably outweighed weaknesses. In English, many pupils were able to write convincing and persuasive arguments and have good discussion skills. These skills were applied well in PSHE lessons, including formal debates in Year 11. In mathematics, many pupils were capable of solving problems using methodical thought processes. Pupils' conceptual development was seen to be good in science. Those pupils who are studying ICT within the newly introduced General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) course have quickly acquired an impressive range of practical skills.
15. Pupils also exhibited high level practical skills in art and design, design and technology and child development. Many pupils were good at the interpretation of evidence in history. In music, they evolved strong individual composition styles. In physical education, pupils collaborated with each other well and showed strong tactical awareness. In religious education, pupils continued to refine their skills of reflection and empathy. In business studies, many pupils had acquired a secure understanding of how market forces operate. In several subjects, such as child development, pupils were able to evaluate their own progress methodically using well defined criteria.
16. Some of the areas of weakness in attainment seen in Years 7 to 9 were also seen in Years 10 and 11. These included limited graph skills in science, practical skills in mathematics and control technology skills in ICT. In some subjects, such as French, German, geography and science, there was considerable reliance on information provided by the teacher or by text books, which sometimes limited pupils' skills of enquiry and independent learning. In art and design, attainment was, to some degree, restricted by the limited range of contextual references used. In several subjects the heavy emphasis placed on notemaking meant that pupils did not develop their ability to write or speak at length sufficiently.
17. As in Years 7 to 9, pupils with special educational needs make good progress in Years 10 and 11 for similar reasons. Boys and girls make comparable progress in English, science and music but in several other subjects this is not the case. In general, higher ability boys attain as well as higher attaining girls. This is also the case for lower attainers. Middle ability boys tend to perform notably less well than middle ability girls.
18. Pupils' standard of attainment in literacy skills has risen rapidly for pupils entering Year 7 at the age of 11 from 1999 to 2001. Teachers have capitalised on this improvement, and the overall standard of attainment for pupils aged 14 is beginning to rise accordingly. Pupils' literacy skills are developed satisfactorily in most subjects of the curriculum, especially in Years 7 to 9. The standard of attainment in numeracy at age 11 is also rising. Numeracy skills are developed well within the mathematics department, but there is no systematic programme in place for their development across all subjects. The overall standard of attainment in numeracy skills is just above the national average, and has risen at a similar rate to the national trend since 1999.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

19. Almost all pupils have a very good attitude to learning and behave very well in lessons. This has a very beneficial effect on their progress and achievement. Almost all pupils have a positive attitude towards school. They are appreciative of the activities and courses offered to them as well as of the support they receive from teachers. Many are particularly appreciative of the wide range of extracurricular activities provided by staff, which offer them valuable opportunities to develop their sporting, musical and other skills. Throughout the school, most pupils habitually show very high levels of interest in their work. Almost all work hard in lessons to complete the tasks they are given, especially when these are challenging and stimulate their interest. This makes a very positive contribution to their learning and achievement in lessons in all subjects. Pupils with special educational needs have equally positive attitudes to their work, and make good progress as a consequence. It is rare for inappropriate behaviour to disrupt lessons. The school has been successful in maintaining the very positive attitudes to learning reported at the time of the previous inspection.
20. The 160 lessons observed during the inspection provided an outstandingly strong picture of how well pupils behave in lessons. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour were judged to be excellent in a quarter of these lessons and very good in a further third of them. In many of the remaining lessons these aspects were judged to be good, with only three cases of unsatisfactory behaviour being seen. The quality of behaviour was especially strong in Years 10 and 11. This represents an exceptionally high proportion of lessons with exemplary and very good behaviour. In almost all of these lessons the majority of pupils were enjoying their work, especially when it involved practical activities and original thinking.
21. In those lessons where behaviour was very good or exemplary, pupils were very well motivated to succeed, listened attentively to the teacher and to other pupils and worked at a brisk pace. They settled quickly to work and concentrated well, rising to the high expectations of the teacher. In one Year 8 religious education lesson, for example, pupils were determined to live up to the very high expectations of the teacher. They concentrated very carefully and asked questions confidently, responding well to the advice given by the teacher to improve the standard of their work. In a Year 10 design and technology lesson, the atmosphere was calm and purposeful, with all pupils working hard and with real interest and engagement in the task. In a Year 11 PSHE lesson, pupils were enthusiastic, willing to contribute ideas and challenge assumptions made by the teacher. They engaged in thoughtful discussion about job applications and listened respectfully to the views of others. In the very few lessons where behaviour was unsatisfactory, the task set by the teacher failed to stimulate pupils' interest sufficiently to hold their full attention throughout the lesson.
22. Pupils with special educational needs respond very well to the arrangements that are made to meet their needs. They show very positive attitudes and have respect for each other. They form constructive relationships with their teachers and support assistants. They are able to work collaboratively and are appreciative of the wide range of provision which is used to support their learning.

23. Pupils co-operate and work together very well in small groups when they are given the opportunity to do so. They enjoy being able to discuss their ideas in pairs or groups and work very effectively without direct supervision from the teacher. However, in some lessons, some pupils remain too dependent on the teacher and are uneasy about taking responsibility for their own learning. Instead they are happy to let the teachers tell them about the topic without contributing directly themselves. When using equipment, for example, in science and design and technology, pupils co-operate sensibly and pay good attention to safety. Often pupils support one another well, helping by lending equipment and at times with the work. For example, in some lessons more able pupils were paired with the less able and helped their partners to understand and achieve the task. Almost without exception, pupils listen well to the teacher and to one another. Pupils usually enjoy taking responsibility for their own learning and many are adept at working independently. They demonstrate high levels of self-discipline. Pupils reflect thoughtfully on their work in many lessons and undertake self-evaluation of it.
24. The overall standard of behaviour outside lessons is good. The school functions as a very orderly community despite the constraints of narrow staircases and corridors. In some areas of the school, large numbers of pupils have to change classrooms using very small, congested landings. There is inevitably some pushing and jostling caused by the weight of numbers, but it is almost always good-humoured. The level of staff supervision around the building is sufficient to ensure that any inappropriate behaviour is dealt with. Prefects play an important role in this process. Behaviour in the dining hall is very good. Pupils queue quietly for their food and chat with their friends over lunch in a polite and pleasant way. At breaks and lunchtime, behaviour is usually very good, although a small number of pupils use these opportunities to smoke in toilets or remote parts of the school grounds. Teachers are aware of the potential trouble spots and patrol accordingly. Almost all pupils are consistently polite and courteous. They are very willing to offer help to their teachers, peers and visitors to the school.
25. There is a high level of respect between pupils, their peers and staff. They usually treat their own, other pupils' and the school's property with respect. There is very little graffiti. Staff and pupils regularly pick up litter, but the windy site means that even litter deposited in bins is often blown out again. The quality of relationships throughout the school is very good and represents a major strength of its work. Pupils enjoy very good relationships with one another, teachers and other adults. Pupils respond very well to the positive role models provided by teachers and other staff both in lessons and around the school. Pupils value highly the support that teachers give to them and respond enthusiastically to it. They appreciate the time teachers give to them outside the taught day by providing a wide range of interesting activities and helping them with any problems. Pupils almost always treat others with courtesy and consideration and show a high level of respect for the feelings and values of others, for example, when discussing controversial issues in lessons. The very good relationships between teachers and pupils promote a good working atmosphere in most lessons. Pupils report that incidents of bullying and other forms of oppressive behaviour are infrequent and that the school responds firmly when it does occur, ensuring that incidents are dealt with both quickly and effectively. Pupils generally

feel safe in school, although some pupils in Year 7 feel uneasy in crowded corridors and stairways, and occasionally in the toilets.

26. The outstandingly comprehensive range of extracurricular activities has a significant impact on the personal development of the large numbers of pupils who choose to take part. Pupils and parents appreciate the time that teachers devote to running clubs and activities. Most pupils acknowledge the relevance of the programme of PSHE to their lives. Pupils from each year group participate in the recently re-established school council. The council enables senior staff to gain pupils' views about aspects of the school and pupils to put forward their own concerns and ideas for improvement. The council is expected to raise its own budget through sponsored events and other activities. Pupils are offered a good range of responsibilities and respond very positively to them. In particular, they are involved in organising some of the extracurricular programme and take considerable responsibility for staging school concerts and productions. A hundred pupils in Year 11 are prefects and they take their responsibilities seriously, discharging them well.
27. The school's expectations of behaviour are clear and well publicised. All pupils are aware of them and understand why the rules are in place. Pupils also understand the system of rewards and sanctions. Most pupils value the rewards that they receive for good work, effort, behaviour and attendance. However, in Years 10 and 11 some pupils are not well motivated by the system. Pupils know what to expect if they misbehave and most state that the sanctions are both fair and fairly applied. The code of conduct puts the onus on pupils to choose to behave well and this develops their social responsibility and self-reliance well. Last year there were two permanent exclusions. This is comparable to the average figure for schools of this size and type. The rate of fixed term exclusions is broadly in line with the national average. Parents state that the school achieves high standards of good behaviour.
28. Attendance at the school was good at the time of the previous inspection and remains above the national average. The rate of unauthorised absence is below the national average. Analysis of absence is very thorough. The school strongly promotes the importance of regular attendance and routinely makes a telephone call home on the first day of any unexplained absence. The strong emphasis placed on raising attendance levels has had a beneficial impact on pupils' standards of attainment and progress. Attendance in the first half of the autumn term was 92.6 per cent. Attendance so far this term is lower, affected by an epidemic of a stomach virus. Punctuality is generally good, although a small number of pupils arrive late in the morning. Despite the distance pupils sometimes have to travel between lessons, it is unusual for a lesson to start late.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

29. Pupils are taught in a mixture of sets, banded groups and mixed ability classes across the school. This largely reflects the preferences of different subject areas, but sometimes results from timetabling practicalities. In the great majority of lessons, teachers are using either their first or second subject specialism. Where this is not the case, non-specialist teachers have been given effective training to ensure that their

subject knowledge and understanding match the needs of the curriculum. Student teachers often bring refreshing and dynamic new approaches to subject teaching.

30. The overall quality of teaching is good in all years and is an important strength of the school. This is a big improvement since the time of the last inspection in 1996 when nearly one lesson in six was judged to be unsatisfactory. As a result of the good teaching and the very good attitudes, behaviour and relationships within the school, the quality of learning is also good.
31. The good quality of teaching reflects a wide-ranging programme of professional development for teachers, particularly in the last year. The development of teaching has been central to the school improvement plan. New approaches to performance management, including lesson observations, self-review and the extensive use of data on attainment, have led to explicit consideration by teachers in all subjects of the links between teaching and achievement. At all levels, staff have been given responsibility for improving the quality of teaching across the school which they have responded to very well. Teachers have been encouraged to carry out research into ways of tackling different aspects of underachievement. Their work has been effectively disseminated on professional development days and through department meetings and working groups. In-service training, both within the school and from outside providers has been very effective.
32. One of the key strands of the school's professional development programme has been the involvement of staff in initial teacher training. This has benefited the large number of student teachers, but has also led to more than a third of staff training as professional mentors. The need to train others has encouraged teachers to reflect on their practice and see themselves as role models. A climate of open classrooms and shared teaching in which all are learners has, in their own words, rejuvenated many experienced staff.
33. During the week of the inspection, 160 lessons were observed. The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in all but two of them. In three-quarters of lessons, the quality of teaching was good or better. In one quarter of lessons seen it was very good and in a small number of lessons it was excellent. The proportion of teaching that was good or better is greater than that found in most schools. There was a wider range of teaching quality in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11.
34. The quality of teaching in English is good. Most lessons are well planned and use a constructive range of teaching styles that engage all pupils. As a consequence, pupils find much of their English work interesting and rewarding and most gain confidence in using language fluently. In the best lessons, teachers make very effective use of pupils' own knowledge and ideas and encourage pupils to use high level questioning and reasoning skills. Where teaching is less effective, teachers tend to reveal the answers to questions too readily or limit tasks to those set out on a worksheet. Such actions tend to restrict the responses of the more able pupils in these instances.
35. The quality of teaching in mathematics is good. Lessons have clear learning objectives, which are systematically shared with pupils. They are well structured and offer plenty of support for those pupils who experience difficulties in understanding

what to do. Concepts are clearly explained and exemplified. Most pupils learn well as a consequence. However, in some cases all pupils in the class are required to undertake the same activity at the same pace. Whilst middle and lower ability pupils benefit greatly from this approach, some more able pupils require additional intellectual stimulus. This helps to explain why almost all pupils achieve a pass grade at GCSE, but the proportion of pupils who gain results in the A*, A to B range is lower than expected.

36. The quality of teaching in science is good. Pupils are encouraged to learn at a brisk pace and are presented with interesting tasks that can be tackled in a variety of ways. Teachers give a great deal of individualised support for pupils of all abilities. Questioning techniques involve opportunities for explanation and justification. Practical work is carried out safely and accurately. As a consequence, both boys and girls achieve equally well, pupils with special educational needs attain well, and more able pupils gain above average results at the higher grades at GCSE.
37. The quality of teaching of literacy across the curriculum is satisfactory. Increasingly, pupils in all subjects are being given additional, valuable help with the development of spelling and vocabulary. More opportunities are now being provided for discussions to strengthen speaking and listening skills. Further work is needed to encourage pupils to give extended, reasoned answers to oral questions and to write at greater length in a more structured and analytical way. The overall quality of the teaching of numeracy across the curriculum is satisfactory. In mathematics, good progress has been made in adopting the teaching and learning approaches linked to the Key Stage 3 National Strategy for numeracy. In other subjects the emphasis placed on numeracy teaching varies from good to barely satisfactory. There are plans for immediate action to be taken during the summer term of 2002 to shape and implement a whole-school approach to teaching numeracy.
38. Overall, teaching in ICT examination classes in Years 10 and 11 is good and frequently very good. Within other subjects, the teaching of ICT is satisfactory overall with examples of very good practice in geography, science and French where the learning objectives of both subjects are often integrated to maximise pupil learning. In some cases, teachers' limited expertise restricts pupils' attainment at the higher levels.
39. The overall quality of teaching is very good in design and technology, music and religious education. In design and technology the greater proportion of very high quality teaching occurs in food technology, textiles and child development lessons. The quality of teaching is good in art and design, history, modern foreign languages, physical education, business education and PSHE. The overall quality of teaching in geography is satisfactory. There are examples of very effective approaches to teaching and learning in all subjects. These examples of good practice are yet to be shared between subject teams in a systematic way.
40. Particularly successful aspects of good practice relate to the setting of targets and objectives for pupils to achieve, classroom management and the work of support assistants. Many teachers make good use of their knowledge of pupils' strengths and weaknesses when planning lesson activities. The intended outcomes of lessons are

often shared with pupils so that they know what they have to do to succeed. Increasingly, as in history, well defined steps towards success at different levels or grades are being provided. Examples of very good work are used to set a standard for others to aim for. Knowledgeable explanations are pitched at the right level and good use is made of stories, everyday examples and humour to capture and maintain interest. Good planning leads to a mix of activities during the lesson which keep up pace and match the different needs of the learner. Classroom management and interpersonal relationships are both very good. Consequently, learning takes place in an atmosphere in which experimentation is possible and pupils feel confident about expressing their ideas without fear of ridicule. Pupils are praised and their work is celebrated and valued in many ways encouraging further effort.

41. The quality of classroom support given to pupils with special educational needs by their teachers and by the support staff is very good. Generally, tasks are well pitched so that a challenge is presented, but the work is manageable and realistic. As a result of this support, pupils with special educational needs make good progress.
42. One reason for the very good relationships, and a particular strength of the staff at Ridgewood High School, is the amount of time given to learning activities beyond the classroom. Many staff contribute to extracurricular and enrichment activities. The quality of what they do can be seen in both the very high levels of pupils' involvement and the outcomes in, for example, physical education, music and the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.
43. Within the very positive picture of teaching across the school, there are some areas for further development. In some lessons, the planning of work to be done and the teaching strategies that result do not take enough notice of the different needs of individual pupils within the class. Consequently, not all pupils make as much progress as they could. In most of the lessons where this happens, it is the most able who are not being sufficiently challenged. In a minority of cases tasks are set that are technically or conceptually too complex for lower attainers to handle without intensive support. In a few cases planning does not take account of the school's recent move from 60-minute lessons to 50-minute lessons. As a consequence of this, important concluding activities are sometimes rushed so that the key points of the lesson are not sufficiently reinforced.
44. Marking is inconsistent across the school in terms of range and quality. At best, regular and informative marking gives pupils a clear idea of the standard that they have reached and what they need to do to improve. There are few instances of work not being marked at all, and many cases where work is acknowledged and useful comments on effort are provided. As yet, there are relatively few instances of comments being made by teachers that link directly to how well pupils are progressing towards their personal learning targets for the unit of work being studied. Some parents also noted that they were not satisfied with the depth of comments provided by teachers in response to homework activities.
45. The good teaching results in good learning. Good ongoing assessment means that much of the teaching builds on what pupils know, understand and can do. For example, an excellent child development lesson started with the teacher questioning

the pupils about their previous lessons and then sharing objectives and tasks based on their knowledge so that pupils felt confident about what they had to do and why. In most lessons, pupils work at a brisk pace because their lessons are well planned with appropriate levels of challenge. They show a good interest in their work and concentrate well.

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

Overview

46. The quality and range of the curriculum is satisfactory at both key stages. Within this overall picture, there are many substantial strengths but also a few important weaknesses, particularly with respect to ICT and the range of vocational courses available. This has already been recognised in the current school improvement plan. Some important curriculum changes were introduced in September 2001 that have had a beneficial effect and further changes are proposed for the next academic year.

The curricular provision

47. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is broad and generally well balanced. All National Curriculum subjects are taught and the curriculum is enriched by enabling all pupils to have the opportunity to study two modern foreign languages. Governors have taken the decision to give relatively generous allocations of time to modern foreign languages and the creative arts subjects as a reflection of the school's ethos and priorities. Adjustments have also been made in Year 7 to cater for the new National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. The school aims to meet the current requirements for ICT in Years 7 to 9 by teaching it within the context of other subjects. This approach is only partially successful and in this respect the curriculum does not meet statutory requirements, particularly with respect to modelling, data handling and the use of spreadsheets.
48. There are some weaknesses in the breadth, balance and appropriateness of the curriculum at Key Stage 4. All National Curriculum subjects are taught to GCSE level, but the amount of time allocated to English, mathematics and physical education is less than that found in most secondary schools. The numbers of pupils studying religious education as a GCSE subject are greater than in most schools. These pupils receive their full statutory entitlement to religious education. For other pupils, the quality of religious education provided within the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is very good, but the time allocation is insufficient to meet the requirements of the Dudley local education authority agreed syllabus. In addition to the National Curriculum subjects, pupils can study for a GCSE qualification in business studies, child development, drama and media studies plus a GNVQ course in ICT. The majority of pupils who do not follow the GNVQ course do not have a satisfactory provision for ICT in Years 10 and 11. The number of pupils disapplying from National Curriculum requirements in design and technology is greater than that found in most schools, but these pupils have been guided towards other choices that reflect their aptitudes, interests and career aspirations. The

accommodation is inadequate to enable all pupils to study a design and technology GCSE subject.

49. The quality of curriculum planning is uneven. It is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 with the exception of aspects of planning for ICT. In Years 10 and 11, some isolated improvements have been introduced to increase the number of subjects that students can take at GCSE or GNVQ level from September 2001. These have been necessary short term measures to enlarge the curriculum offered, but they have not completely met the need for an appropriate curriculum for all pupils. The present option system means that not all pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a curriculum that fully meets their learning needs and it also means that they are sometimes taught in inappropriate groups. This is largely because of a lack of vocational courses or because timetabling arrangements sometimes produce teaching sets that have a very broad range of ability within them. The school has recognised the need to reconsider the curriculum for Years 10 and 11 and to link it more closely to post-16 learning pathways. Revisions to time allocations, the range of subjects offered and functioning of the option system are proposed in the current school improvement plan.
50. At the time of the last inspection, the school was in the first year of implementing the new National Strategies for Literacy and Numeracy. Consequently, existing policies and approaches were under review. New schemes of work have since been introduced in both English and mathematics and across the school the impact of the literacy strategy is now readily apparent. For example, the use of key words and writing frames is a routine element of many lessons. There was less evidence of the impact of the National Numeracy Strategy across the curriculum at the time of the inspection.
51. The quality of curriculum enrichment and of extracurricular activities is very good and is an important strength of the school. The school's commitment to the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme is very impressive. A high quality programme starts in Year 8 and continues through to Year 11 with many former pupils returning to complete their programme up to the Gold Award. There is a tradition of school productions, which are spoken of very highly by all sections of the school community and involve large numbers of pupils. There is a very good range of out of school sporting activities, including football, netball and outdoor and adventurous activities. Enrichment and extracurricular activities in music are exceptionally good. Large numbers of pupils benefit from a wide variety of musical opportunities, including participation in regional, national and international events. Good use is made of the school's own residential centre.
52. Curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. A thoughtful balance is struck between support in the classroom and withdrawal for extra work in small groups. Careful planning ensures that pupils with special educational needs have an equal opportunity to study all aspects of the curriculum. Teaching support assistants are appropriately assigned to individual pupils with specific identified needs. These assistants keep a daily record of each pupil's progress. This information contributes to the ongoing assessment of individual pupils. This information is also used to confirm that the arrangements being made to meet their special educational needs are still appropriate and contributes to the review of individual educational plans and statements of special educational needs.

53. In most respects, all pupils have equal access to the curriculum that is offered. However, the good practice in meeting the needs of gifted and talented pupils in some subjects, such as music, science and physical education, is not replicated in every subject.
54. The curriculum is enhanced by a well-designed and effective programme of PSHE which has a strong profile in the school. It is very well co-ordinated and taught by a capable team of specialists supported by form tutors. Health education, sex education and attention to drug misuse are carefully and sensitively planned in close co-operation with a number of outside agencies. The school already has relatively good provision for citizenship and so is well placed for its compulsory introduction from September 2002.
55. The school has very good links with the community, which considerably enhance pupils' academic and social development. Visits and visitors make a valuable contribution to learning opportunities. An example is careers education, which is provided as an element within the PSHE programme. It is well planned, within the limitations of time and resources, and is very well taught. Good links have been established with local employers and the school participates in work-related learning activities such as '*Take your daughters to work day*'. An important element of careers education is the work experience programme which includes very nearly all pupils in a carefully planned and evaluated programme over two weeks at the start of Year 11.
56. There are very good links with partner institutions. Ridgewood staff visit potential pupils in their primary schools from Year 5 onwards. Primary pupils are involved in creative arts and sports events with Ridgewood staff taking an increasing part in mentoring gifted and talented primary pupils. Good systems have been developed to ensure that personal and academic information is used to ease transfer from Years 6 to 7. Ridgewood pupils have a wide range of choices for providers of post-16 education and training. The school has a good relationship with all of them and takes part in various taster and induction activities.

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

57. Overall, the school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This arises from a shared ethos across the school which can be summarised in the core rule of 'treat each other with courtesy, consideration and respect' which is applied to the whole school community. However, there is limited strategic planning or evaluation of this provision so that not all opportunities are taken and the best practice is not shared by all.
58. The provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. A strong religious education curriculum in Years 7 to 9 and for GCSE pupils gives opportunities to explore their feelings and emotional responses to issues such as how people of different faiths deal with moral issues and make their judgements. There is no overall policy or strategy for spiritual development, but during the inspection week sufficient examples were seen in practice to show that it was implicit within the curriculum. For example, in geography lessons on resources and sustainability, pupils were encouraged to consider ultimate questions about the purpose and meaning of life.

59. The school does not fully comply with the requirements for a daily act of collective worship. Available accommodation means that each year group has only one full assembly a week. On other days, collective worship is provided through ‘thoughts for the day’ in tutor groups. During the inspection week, the assemblies were very well led. There was an appropriate atmosphere, stimulating presentation, strong moral messages and opportunities for reflection. Whilst there was some evidence of the ‘thought for the day’ being used within tutor time, this was inconsistent and was often little more than a token gesture.
60. Very good provision is made for pupils’ moral development. Within the PSHE programme, pupils consider moral issues such as bullying and children’s rights. Moral issues form a central part of the religious education programme and are taught sensitively in many areas of the curriculum. Other subjects often consider ethical issues, such as the opportunities and threats related to economic development projects in geography or marketing ethics in business studies. In all aspects of its work, the school provides a strong lead in showing pupils what is right and wrong.
61. Very good provision is made for pupils’ social development. Both teaching and non-teaching staff provide very good role models in the way in which they treat pupils. For example, the very good atmosphere in the dining room at lunchtime results from courtesy, respect and humour. In lessons where pupils have opportunities to work together and within groups there is a culture of sensitivity and consideration. The school has its own residential centre, which is used by all pupils in Year 7 and by large numbers of pupils in subsequent years. This has a very positive impact on the induction of pupils into the school and contributes to the high quality of relationships and personal development described elsewhere in this report. The school has invested considerable energy in developing a sense of school identity and belonging through, for example, the new school badge, the school council and the prefect system. There is a strong tradition within the school of charitable and community work. For example, at the time of the inspection, pupils had initiated activities to sponsor a child from a developing country.
62. Provision for cultural development is good overall. The school’s strengths in the creative and performing arts, the programme of visits and the strong links with the community all contribute to very good development of the cultural traditions of the majority of pupils. Minority ethnic cultures are reflected in some subject areas. Some examples are: music from different traditions, Black and Asian dance performances in art and design, discussing practices from different faith communities in religious education and storytelling from a range of cultural backgrounds in English. In spite of some very good inter-cultural work in some subjects which includes a recent trip by a group of pupils to Kenya to support a school there, there is a general lack of awareness of other cultures. The display in corridors and classrooms, for example, does not reflect the rich diversity of cultures present in our British society. More work needs to be done to enhance the input of different cultures into the school curriculum, and so to prepare pupils more readily for life in a multicultural society.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

63. The quality of pastoral care throughout the school is consistently high and is a major

strength. This success is based on the high quality of the individual care and support provided for all pupils. The high standards reported in the previous inspection have been improved upon still further. Arrangements to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety, including child protection and first aid, are very good. Procedures for child protection are clear and comply fully with requirements. Staff are regularly reminded of them. The high quality of relationships helps to ensure that pupils trust teachers to deal sensitively with any personal concerns they choose to share. Procedures for first aid are very good and appropriate care is exercised when medication is brought into school. Pupils benefit from the services of a school nurse and a visiting counsellor. Accidents and injuries are accurately recorded and parents are informed promptly.

64. The local education authority's policy for health and safety has been adopted. Regular checks are carried out, but at present these are not fully documented, which is a weakness. In lessons such as science, design and technology, art and design and physical education teachers pay close attention to health and safety considerations. Pupils also show high levels of awareness of their own safety in lessons. Pupils are well supervised outside lessons, although the nature of the extensive, wooded site means that those determined to evade supervision may do so. Prefects successfully help staff to patrol the corridors and supervise pupils, for example, during lunchtime clubs and activities.
65. The systems in place for monitoring pupils' personal development are very good. Pupils are very well known to their form tutors and year co-ordinators. Teachers care deeply about pupils' well-being and success. Form tutors have daily contact with their form at morning and afternoon registration sessions. They are responsible for introducing a 'thought for the day'. However, this is not consistently done on a daily basis, so that opportunities for appropriate reflection are lost. All pupils participate in a well-designed PSHE programme. In Year 11, pupils follow an accredited foundation stage GNVQ course. However, as this course takes the equivalent of a GCSE course in teaching time but does not yield any point scores, it has been decided to discontinue it in the current Year 10. The quality of teaching overall in the lessons observed was good. Pupils generally value their PSHE lessons as they realise the value of the course to their everyday lives. Pupils also benefit from a well-designed programme of careers education and guidance that helps them prepare for life beyond school. All pupils have the opportunity to undertake work experience. The quality of teaching throughout the school helps to ensure that pupils are well motivated to learn and sensitive to the needs of others. They are consistently encouraged to listen carefully to others and to value their opinions.
66. The caring ethos makes a significant contribution to the integration of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds into the mainstream life of the school. The supportive environment in the school provides good learning opportunities for most pupils, irrespective of their heritage or ability level. There is no evidence of overt racism impacting on the achievement and self-esteem of minority ethnic pupils. The school has set up a good system for recording racist incidents. The priority to record all racial harassment incidents and take appropriate follow-up action has been communicated to parents, pupils and staff. Pupils know what to do if they witness or if they are victims of racial harassment. The numbers of minority ethnic pupils are low in the school but the school is sensitive to their individual needs. The

relationships with their parents are positive although their input into the curriculum is minimal.

67. The school has effective measures in place to promote the importance of regular attendance. As a consequence, attendance figures are consistently above the national average. Clear systems are in place to promote good attendance. These systems include the use of a merit system and following up any unexplained absences on the day in question. Parents support the school well by reporting authorised absences on a routine basis. The education welfare service is involved appropriately in those cases where absence becomes a cause for concern. Lateness is monitored and repeated instances lead to a detention.
68. The school has a policy on equality of opportunity but it is not specific enough and lacks a defined strategy to implement it. The school acknowledges the need to revise it in the near future. The school also recognises the need to take appropriate action in order to meet the requirements under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. This includes the requirement to identify a senior member of staff to lead on race equality and to consult all stakeholders on a Race Equality Scheme. There is also an urgent need to ensure that all test and examination results are analysed by ethnicity in order to have an accurate overview of the achievement levels of minority ethnic pupils.
69. All pupils with special educational needs receive positive support and encouragement from their teachers and support assistants. Pupils are able to come to the learning resource base during lunchtime breaks to meet staff, to practise their computer skills as well as receive support for their homework. Pupils highly value this and are very grateful to staff for giving up their own time.
70. The school has very effective measures in place to promote good behaviour and to address bullying and other forms of harassment. The behaviour policies, including procedures to counteract bullying and for rewards and sanctions, provide a strong framework for promoting and monitoring behaviour. Pupils understand the very high expectations placed on them and almost always rise to them. Pupils are given recognition for achievement and are very well motivated by the merit system, wearing their badges with pride especially in Years 7 to 9. The system of sanctions is clear and implemented with good levels of consistency by staff. The school does not exclude pupils lightly but appropriate procedures are in place and followed when necessary. The work to counter bullying done in assembly and PSHE lessons is very effective in ensuring that bullying is reported to staff. Pupils are confident that reported incidents are dealt with firmly and quickly. They feel safe in school, aware that there is always an adult to turn to in time of need. The very good relationships and high levels of mutual respect between staff and pupils make a significant contribution to the promotion of good behaviour.
71. There are appropriate measures in place to assess pupils' work. Well-designed criteria have been devised to award grades for work on an objective basis in many subjects. Marking is, however, inconsistent both between teachers and in different subjects. The best marking provides pupils with comments that help them to improve their work and learn from their mistakes. In some subjects, for example, in religious

education, assessment is good and pupils are given thorough advice on strategies for improvement. In music, assessment practices are well used in lessons. The good liaison between the special educational needs co-ordinator and heads of department helps to ensure that all teachers are well informed about the specific needs of pupils. In art and design, ongoing assessment leads to the setting of clear, achievable targets. Where marking is less rigorous, pupils are characteristically given an acknowledgement that their work has been completed plus a comment on presentation and attitude, but no clear indication about how to improve further. Marking and other forms of written advice do not always pick up signs of underachievement, as in the case of some middle ability boys.

72. Examination results are analysed by gender but not by ethnic origin. Individual pupils who are under achieving receive mentoring from senior staff to ensure that they achieve their best. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported by the special educational needs co-ordinator and by special educational needs teachers and support assistants. In mathematics, the monitoring of attainment allows for pupils to be moved between sets as appropriate.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

73. The parents and carers who made their views known by completing the inspectors' questionnaire or attending the parents' meeting were generally very supportive of the school. One parent in six completed the questionnaire and only one in 28 attended the parents' meeting. From this relatively small sample, parents state that the school expected their child to work hard to achieve his or her best. They were pleased by the good progress that most children made and by the good quality of teaching. Parents believed that the school was helping its pupils to become mature and responsible citizens. Staff were considered to be approachable. However, a significant number of these parents were concerned that the school did not work closely enough with them. They would like more information about their child's progress and did not feel that their child always got the right amount of homework. Recent changes in the timing and organisation of parents' opportunities to consult with teachers have proved unpopular with some parents, but have assisted others. Some parents were concerned about the cleanliness of pupils' toilets.
74. Inspection evidence fully supports the parents' positive views of the school. Many of the concerns about homework were not substantiated by inspection evidence, as homework is generally set in a systematic way. However, teachers do not consistently mark homework tasks in sufficient detail so that pupils sometimes do not understand what more they must do to improve. The school is making vigorous efforts to improve and expand ways of working with parents. The revised arrangements for interim consultation about progress brought about a very substantial increase in the number of parents attending. However, inspectors judged that the summary reports gave parents too little information on what their child had actually achieved.
75. The school provides a wide variety of useful information for parents. The prospectus is attractively presented and contains the full range of information required, including a brief overview of the curriculum. The annual report of governors provides a good level of detail, especially about the progress of pupils with special educational needs.

Weekly newsletters give advance notice of events and developments as well as celebrating pupils' achievements. All pupils have a homework planner. This provides a range of detailed information, including the homework policy, and can be used as a means of communication between parents and the form tutor. Effective systems are in place to ensure that parents are kept informed by telephone or letter of any concerns about attendance, attitude or behaviour. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are very well informed and involved at all stages. The school is committed to working closely with parents and keeps them well informed of developments.

76. A review day for parents was held just before the inspection, at which the summary reports were provided. Parents had the opportunity to attend with their child and to discuss the report with the form tutor. The change from previous arrangements was driven partly by the poor attendance at conventional parents' evenings, which had dropped to around 40 per cent. The review day attracted over 80 per cent, including some parents who had not attended any previous meetings. Those who attended were asked to complete a questionnaire as they left. The overwhelming majority were supportive of the changes. They welcomed the opportunity to attend during the day, so that they did not need to organise childcare. They also appreciated a longer appointment with one teacher who knew their child well. However, a number of parents were unable to attend during the day due to work commitments. A significant number also expressed the desire to see subject teachers, as the form tutor was not always sufficiently well informed to deal with deeper questions. These arrangements are currently being evaluated in the light of feedback from parents. As a result of the questionnaire, the school has gained the support of over 130 parents in a new initiative to reflect the views of parents.
77. The interim report aims to give parents an insight into the level their child is working at and what he or she has to do in order to improve. However, in the majority of cases the targets provided are insufficiently precise to guide progress effectively, for example, "Continue enthusiastic approach" or "Work harder". They are not sufficiently focused on gaining improvements in the skills, knowledge and understanding of each subject. Some are repeated across several subjects. The interim reports give parents too little information on what their child has actually achieved. However, one full progress report is provided each year. These full reports generally provide a clear picture of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in each subject although there is considerable variation in the quality of subject comments. Most provide a clear indication of attainment, often including the National Curriculum level the pupil is working at, or towards. However, the reporting of progress is inconsistent. Comments are not always sufficiently related to specific progress made in skills, knowledge and understanding for each subject. Too often comments relate to attitude and effort without focusing sufficiently on specific ways pupils can improve their learning. In order to gain a complete picture, parents have to refer to the previous report. However, there are examples of good practice. For example, reports in history in Years 10 and 11 are both detailed and helpful. The report format does not provide space for comments to be made about achievement and progress in ICT or PSHE. This is a significant weakness that needs to be addressed.

78. The school offers very good support to the parents of pupils with special educational needs. Parents are fully involved in review meetings and contribute to decisions which are taken to meet the needs of their child. Many parents play a supportive role assisting with the implementation of programmes of work at home. The special educational needs co-ordinator is responsive to concerns expressed by parents and deals with concerns effectively.
79. There is a comprehensive induction programme for new pupils that involves parents appropriately. Year 7 pupils enjoyed their induction and state that it helped them to settle into school quickly. They particularly appreciated the Year 11 minders who helped them find their way around school in the first two weeks. Parents of pupils in Year 9 have the opportunity to be involved in the option choice process both through attending a meeting about the various courses on offer and by discussing their child's aptitude at a consultation evening. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are involved in the review of individual education plans and most make a good contribution to determining how the needs of their child should be met. Many individual education plans detail ways that parents have agreed to help at home to support their child's learning.
80. Parents provide valuable support for the school association, which raises large amount of money to support the school's work, including the school's residential centre in Wales. The association contributes to the maintenance costs of the minibuses. School concerts and productions are very well attended. A significant number of parents support extracurricular activities. An appropriate home-school agreement is in place, emphasising the importance of school, parents and children working together. The school is beginning to involve parents in regular consultation. Parents are encouraged to contact the school whenever they have any concerns about their child's work, progress or behaviour. Staff aim to respond quickly to parental concerns. Form tutors and heads of year contact parents at an early stage when concerns arise.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

81. Both the leadership and management of this effective school are very good. This is a key factor in the continuing improvement of the school since the last inspection. The governing body performs its work extremely well. There is a good understanding amongst staff, governors and managers of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and what more needs to be done to make it even more effective. Human and financial resources are very well managed by intelligently using the principles of best value. As at the time of the last inspection, there are accommodation constraints that place restrictions on the range of learning opportunities available.
82. The headteacher provides very clear educational direction for the school. Since her appointment in 2000 she has built constructively on the good work of her predecessor. In particular, she has energised staff and governors to press for a very ambitious programme of renewal. This has involved redefining the aims and values of the school and agreeing high performance targets for the future. These aims and targets are thoroughly linked to a comprehensive set of priorities that have been generated within a development planning cycle. These priorities are far more focused on teaching, learning and attainment than was the case when the school was last

inspected. She has taken the lead in a systematic review of the quality of teaching, which has resulted in much additional staff training and development. The curriculum has begun to be transformed with the addition of a GNVQ course in ICT that provides a very detailed coverage of all ICT skills and competencies. Improved arrangements for setting and assessing progress towards learning targets for individual pupils have been established. Under her direct leadership areas of under-performance are being pinpointed, challenged and addressed. These areas include the lower than expected results gained by some gifted and talented pupils and some middle ability boys. The inspection was carried out during a period of very intensive improvement activity. It was very evident that whilst much had already been achieved, considerably more improvements were in the process of being realised.

83. The headteacher is well supported by two deputy headteachers and three assistant headteachers. Together, this senior management team contains an impressive range of expertise and experience. The individual responsibilities of team members have been redefined since the arrival of the current headteacher to have a reduced emphasis on administration and a greater involvement in promoting high quality learning opportunities that in turn lead to higher standards of attainment. Senior managers have been influential in energising subject and pastoral leaders. These middle managers have worked very hard to meet a very sizeable agenda for change. They have risen to the challenge well. As a consequence, improvements are visible in all subject areas and the quality of subject management is consistently good. Responsibility is therefore delegated well within the school.
84. The governors collectively have a very impressive range and depth of expertise. This includes experience in finance, further education, site management, personnel management and of using the principles of best value and social inclusion in organisations other than schools. They are very committed to continuing the school's improvement, and are fully involved in reviewing the performance of the school and setting targets and priorities for further improvement. They are extremely supportive of the work undertaken by staff and pupils, but are equally prepared to hold professional people accountable for their actions and the results that are achieved. Most governors are attached to subject departments and pay careful attention to how well teachers in 'their' department interpret policies and plans. They are pleased with the open style of management that is currently in place and are determined to see a good school get even better. The committee structures work very well and the business covered in meetings is very substantial. This work has a real influence on the future directions taken.
85. The school's current improvement plan contains four major priorities, each of which is supported by a detailed action plan. These priorities relate to becoming a specialist science college, improving teaching, sharpening the ways in which targets are set and developing the school's community and ethos. The priority for improving teaching involves a greater emphasis on promoting thinking skills, addressing the needs of gifted and talented pupils, sharing good practice and implementing new national strategies. This example shows how an intelligent evaluation of the needs of the school has resulted in a sequence of actions that is making a real difference to pupils' attainment and progress. The link between development planning, asset management planning and financial management is very exact. Each subject team has produced a

subject development plan that sets out suitably detailed agendas that connect with whole-school priorities. Arrangements for performance management for teachers have been set up correctly and generally are working well.

86. The arrangements for meeting special educational needs are managed very well and the school fully meets the statutory requirements of the code of practice for special educational needs. The special educational needs co-ordinator has a very clear understanding of his role and leads the support team of teachers and support assistants very effectively. Links have been established between the special educational needs staff and teachers in subject departments. However, monitoring of provision needs reinforcing to ensure that there is consistent quality in the provision that is being made across all staff and all subjects particularly in lessons where no additional special educational needs support is being provided.
87. The finances of the school are very efficiently managed and administered. Senior managers and governors correctly believe that an annual budget should, where possible, be spent on enhancing opportunities for those pupils currently in the school. Governors play a very important part in establishing the principles and values that guide expenditure and in monitoring the extent to which the spending patterns affect standards of attainment.
88. The principles of best value are imaginatively applied to ensure that time, money, buildings, learning resources and expertise are all focused on raising attainment. For example, the performance of the school is frequently compared with others. In doing this it became very clear that there was a need to increase the average GCSE and GNVQ total point scores of pupils aged 16. The curriculum has consequently been adjusted to enable all pupils to sit an extra subject. The challenge of increasing the attendance rate has been met by employing an administrative assistant to monitor absence patterns closely and to ring home as soon as an unexplained absence is identified.
89. The quality and expertise of the teaching and support staff that are in post are both good. There are effective arrangements for the induction of new members of staff and a very strong commitment to training new teachers. The impressive improvements in the quality of teaching since the last inspection are in part due to the rejuvenating effects on mature teachers of mentoring trainees. It is still proving possible to fill vacancies and to retain teachers, even in shortage areas.
90. Expenditure on learning resources is relatively high compared with many secondary schools. This has led to most subject areas having sufficient modern books and audio-visual resources. The ratio of computers to pupils is better than in the majority of secondary schools. Much of the new technology equipment and software used in the school are relatively modern. The library is small for a school of this size and although the stock is renewed regularly, the ratio of books to pupils is relatively low compared to most similar schools. The library is used well by pupils for reading and research, especially at lunchtimes.
91. The school is situated within spacious grounds and has a very attractive aspect. However, the main building was designed for a smaller school population. As a

consequence, the hall needs to be used for assemblies, dining, physical education and dramatic performances. There is a need for an extra science laboratory. Some of the demountable buildings are nearing the end of their useful lives. The music suite is too small, resulting in pupils sometimes spilling out into the corridor and stairwell to work practically in groups. The practice rooms lack soundproofing. The high quality of teaching and pupil achievement in music is a great tribute to the staff who work in these difficult circumstances. The design and technology block is well appointed and modern, but is not big enough to enable all pupils in Years 10 and 11 to study a subject in this curriculum area. At the time of the last inspection the efficiency of art and design, music, physical education and storage generally were adversely affected by accommodation constraints. The school has not been able to resolve these difficulties since then.

92. The school provides good value for money. This is because standards of attainment are above average. Pupils make good progress from Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11. The quality of teaching and learning is good and leadership and management are very effective. These positive features have been achieved with a budget that has an income per pupil that is in line with the average amount for an 11-16 comprehensive school.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

93. This is an effective school which is fully committed to continuous improvement. There are four main development points to deal with in order to enable the overall standards of attainment to rise in line with the governors' future targets.

- (1) To plug the gaps in the provision for ICT and the ways in which it is assessed and reported upon. (These gaps are largely in data handling and modelling with spreadsheets).

(see paragraphs 6, 47, 48, 172, 178 – 185)

- (2) To ensure that more able pupils are given enough scope to reach the highest levels by age 14 and the higher grades at GCSE, in all of the subjects that they study.

(see paragraph 3, 31, 43, 96, 122, 154, 159, 187)

- (3) To enable middle ability boys to make better progress and achieve higher grades in GCSE and GNVQ examinations.

(see paragraphs 17, 117, 145, 187)

- (4) To revise the curriculum for Years 10 and 11 to enable all pupils to follow courses that match their specific learning needs and which connect with post-16 learning pathways.

(see paragraphs 48, 49, 184, 220)

In addition to these four main areas for improvement, staff and governors should also work to:

- (1) seek ways of addressing the deficiencies in the accommodation as set out in the asset management plan;

(see paragraphs 91, 142, 153, 176, 204, 212, 221)

- (2) take steps to ensure that the requirements for a daily act of collective worship are met.

(see paragraph 59)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	160
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	75

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	8	46	66	38	2	0	0
Percentage	5	29	41	24	1	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	986
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	113

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	13
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	168

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	32
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	21

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.2
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	104	91	195

<i>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</i>		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	54	71	72
	Girls	69	63	68
	Total	123	134	140
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (71)	76 (71)	79 (70)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	32 (31)	49 (47)	49 (36)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	42	74	82
	Girls	64	66	74
	Total	106	140	156
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	55 (70)	72 (64)	80 (68)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	21 (25)	42 (43)	45 (36)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	100	103	203

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	48	98	101
	Girls	67	100	100
	Total	115	198	201
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	57 (48)	98 (96)	99 (99)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	39.2
	National	36.0

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

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	0	n/a
	National		n/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	9
Pakistani	12
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	960
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	1	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	2	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	33	2
Other minority ethnic groups	36	2

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)	53.0
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.9

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	379.5

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.1
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.3
Key Stage 4	21.0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
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	£
Total income	2,463,520
Total expenditure	2,435,800
Expenditure per pupil	2,581
Balance brought forward from previous year	66,939
Balance carried forward to next year	94,659

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	4
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2.0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	983
Number of questionnaires returned	163

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	33	55	10	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	32	62	4	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	25	63	6	0	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	63	17	2	1
The teaching is good.	19	74	2	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	19	59	19	2	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	42	6	2	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	48	50	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	19	53	20	2	6
The school is well led and managed.	21	64	6	0	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	31	59	5	0	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	36	42	10	1	11

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

94. The responses from parents are generally very positive, especially with regard to the progress that children make, their enjoyment of school, standards of behaviour, teaching, leadership and management and personal development. There was a significant minority of parents who had concerns over homework, information about progress, and the school working closely with parents. Inspectors endorsed the positive comments made by parents and also considered that arrangements for the setting and marking of homework had no significant weaknesses. Parental concerns

about reporting arrangements have been conveyed to governors. They are reviewing the interim reporting arrangements as a consequence.

Other issues raised by parents

95. Some parents at the meeting held with inspectors expressed concerns about the lack of lockers and the condition of some of the pupils' toilets. They also reinforced concerns identified in the written returns about the reporting arrangements. However, parents at the meeting were very complimentary about the standards reached by their children and the work of the teaching staff. They greatly valued the wide range of extracurricular activities offered.

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

ENGLISH

The quality of provision for English is **satisfactory**.

Strengths:

- Pupils, particularly boys, attain well in GCSE English literature and media studies.
- Pupils with special educational needs make good progress.
- Pupils have positive attitudes towards the subject.
- Teaching is good, which encourages pupils to be interested and confident learners.
- The National Literacy Strategy has been successfully implemented in all Year 7 lessons.
- Leadership provides clear educational direction and guidance.

Areas for improvement:

- Strategies to stretch the most able pupils intellectually.
- A catch-up programme to move those pupils working at Level 3 when they join the school up to Level 4.
- Monitoring of marking to ensure consistency across the department.
- Teachers' use of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum assessment information to show pupils what they must do to improve.

[Evidence for this report came from the observation of 19 lessons, plus the scrutiny of many samples of written work from pupils in all years. Discussions were held with the head of English, senior managers and the special educational needs co-ordinator. Documentation relating to English and literacy was examined.]

96. Standards on entry in 2001 were above national averages, but had been in line with them for the past three years. Since 1998, there has been a declining trend in the average point scores gained in the national tests by pupils aged 14. In 2001, overall results were slightly above the national average and above those achieved in schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds; but fewer pupils gain the higher levels of 6 and above, than predicted by their entry levels. Girls continue to perform better than boys and by a similar margin to the national difference: however, neither group does as well in English as they do in mathematics and science. Teacher assessments are similar to the test results.
97. In GCSE results at age 16, standards of both boys and girls are above the national average in English and English literature. In English in 2001, there was a good increase in the number of pupils achieving the higher GCSE grades, A* to B, over the previous two years. A higher proportion of pupils was entered for GCSE English than in most schools but, even so, all pupils gained a grade between A* to G. In English literature, results were well above the national average, and higher than in the previous year, but they were not as good as in 1999. Boys' results were higher than those achieved nationally by boys and girls' results were above those achieved by girls in this subject. In 2001 pupils' results at GCSE in both English language and literature were exactly in line with the average point scores for all subjects taken within the school. However, an established policy of only entering upper sets for literature meant that only three out of five pupils, and only half of the boys, took the

examination. The school is aware of this lack of opportunity for a significant number of pupils and has taken action to ensure that all are able to follow the literature course in future. Standards of work seen during the inspection in all years are in line with the pupils' national test results and the school's recent examination results; and represent satisfactory achievement given their attainment on entry.

98. Speaking and listening skills are above average in all years because teachers plan frequent opportunities for class and group discussions; and encourage pupils to use talk to negotiate, solve problems, make decisions and explore ideas. Oracy skills are also assisted by good pupil relationships: pupils usually listen carefully and support each other well. A very good role-play of a press conference, based on *The Gresford Colliery Disaster*, was seen in a Year 8 lesson. Pupils showed both a good understanding of the ballad and a mature knowledge of the social conventions of addressing and questioning victims and officials. Year 11 pupils rehearsing for the school's production displayed an impressive knowledge of American culture in the 1960s and 70s in their discussions of *Grease*. Pupils of all ages and abilities freely volunteer to read aloud in class.
99. Reading attainment at the end of Year 9 is average and not as high as that in speaking and listening. Many who enter the school with low levels of skills make good progress because of the department's emphasis on the development of their basic skills, but those who are above average do not make satisfactory progress because they are not always stretched sufficiently. Most can read to gain information and are encouraged to read for pleasure and to record their reading in newly-introduced reading diaries, though library statistics indicate a considerable reduction in book loans as pupils move up the school. The highest attaining pupils in all years can make some deductions, inferences and predictions based on their class reading of a good range of fiction, media and non-media texts, such as biography and travel writing. By Year 11, they know how to select appropriate information from a variety of sources and to justify their responses and interpretations with carefully chosen textual evidence. Lower attaining pupils have difficulty selecting appropriate evidence and tend to paraphrase quotations, rather than analyse them and comment upon their effect upon readers.
100. Standards of writing at the end of Year 9 are also at the national average and indicate satisfactory progress overall: though many who had low levels of attainment on entry make better progress relative to their ability than some high attaining pupils. Standards in Year 7 are higher than in previous years because these pupils benefit from the National Literacy Strategy in their primary schools and its further development at this school. Lower attaining pupils can write simple stories, letters, character studies and some interesting personal and descriptive accounts but these are often beset by poor presentation, limited vocabulary and inadequate punctuation and spelling, particularly in Year 8. Higher attaining pupils show a growing ability and confidence in the use of complex sentences and enliven their creative writing with figurative language and a maturing vocabulary. They also usually support their opinions with appropriate evidence, as in their writing about their favourite TV advertisements. However, there is sometimes a lack of challenge, and therefore the opportunity to show what they are really capable of achieving, when all pupils are set the same task, or it is not open-ended.

101. At the end of Year 11, the standards of pupils' writing seen are average. Highest attaining pupils produce lively, and sometimes original, creative writing. They respond particularly well to media and literature texts and use quotations effectively to illustrate their points. However, because in some lessons these pupils are not given opportunities to do independent research or to choose their methods of working and approach, they are not always able to show their full capabilities. Middle and lower ability pupils rarely select textual evidence and often write about plot and characters as if they are real events and people, such as Billy Casper in *A Kestrel for a Knave*, or *Romeo and Juliet*, rather than literary constructs. They can say what texts are about, the poems of Simon Armitage, for example, but not how language and imagery contribute to our interpretations because their analytical skills are not well developed.
102. Pupils' writing is often done in 'draft books', especially in Years 7 to 9, but an insufficient amount of it appears in a refined form in their 'best books'. Because the 'draft books' are not always marked with suggested corrections or improvements, some pupils of all abilities are placing insufficient value on this work: they are consequently developing undesirable habits of untidiness and are not always completing set tasks. This is particularly noticeable in boys' books.
103. Pupils with identified special educational needs are making good progress in all areas of the subject and generally achieve at least basic standards by the end of Year 9. This is because of good quality, close teamwork between class teachers and support assistants and their awareness of the individual needs of all of these pupils and the good relationships which they have with them.
104. There is a planned opportunity for all pupils to use ICT in English in each year. Lower attaining pupils make good use of the interactive *Success Maker* software to develop their reading skills, particularly in Year 7 but, generally, pupils' use is limited to word processing and some desktop publishing. Those who make most progress are the pupils who have computers at home and have the enthusiasm and independence to develop their keyboard skills, to experiment with software and to use the Internet for research and to support and supplement their learning in lessons.
105. The department has introduced the National Literacy Strategy, with its three-part lesson structure and its sharing of learning objectives with pupils, into Year 7. The implementation is good. Teachers have collaborated very well on the rewriting of planned activities for pupils, and new texts and resources are in place and regularly used. The success of the initiative has meant that teachers are now using the same lesson structure and teaching techniques in many lessons higher up the school. Most pupils enjoy the greater variety of activities and challenges offered but a few are unsettled by the number of changes which can occur in lessons and do not always have time to finish tasks before having to move to the next one. One of the reasons for this is that the length of a lesson is only 50 minutes, and much less if it follows physical education. As the National Literacy Strategy was only introduced in September 2001, when pupils entered the school at a higher level than in previous years, the school does not have sufficient information to show how effective the strategy is in raising standards. There is no test evidence yet, though teachers' records show that pupils' progress is good. The school has still to devise and introduce a

catch-up programme aimed to help pupils who enter at Level 3 in national tests to achieve the next level.

106. Most pupils are effective learners because they have positive attitudes to school and to each other and are co-operative in lessons. Their learning gains are well monitored by teachers who are now developing their experience in the use of national test and other diagnostic data to negotiate progress targets with each pupil and to predict pupils' grades. Marking is generally supportive and usually shows pupils what they need to do to improve. However, teachers in Years 7 to 9 make few references to National Curriculum level criteria, though they are displayed in classrooms, to help pupils to understand the difference between their present performance and exactly what they need to do to achieve a higher level. There is also a lack of consistency in the usefulness of teachers' written comments in marking work; pupils are usually given short improvement targets, but rarely with advice on how they might be achieved.
107. The English curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is considerably enriched by the addition of media studies and drama. The former is well established: it is very well taught by an experienced, knowledgeable and enthusiastic member of staff and it is regularly one of the highest performing subjects at GCSE. Standards are above average and pupils enjoy the subject very much: they have a good knowledge of the major concepts and theories and are acquiring a good range of critical and practical skills which are helping them considerably in their English as well. Drama was only introduced in 2000 and pupils have yet to be examined in it. Teaching is good and pupils are achieving above average standards. They work together very well, support each other and share and explore ideas effectively in response to an imaginative range of stimuli. However, the lack of proper facilities and resources, such as a studio with portable stage blocks and blackout capabilities, and timetabled access to the hall and its stage, is limiting their opportunities to experiment and develop their acting and creative experiences. An extensive programme of extracurricular activities, including a book club, Readathon, theatre trips, visiting theatre groups and catch-up lessons for those with coursework problems enhance the learning opportunities for all pupils in all years.
108. The overall quality of teaching is good. It was at least good in two out of every three lessons and very good in a quarter. The good lessons are well planned; teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and progress, and share learning objectives with their classes. In these lessons, teachers have good subject knowledge and choose a variety of teaching styles and activities which make it possible for pupils to become fully engaged in a purposeful, supportive and enjoyable work atmosphere in which learning is rewarding and enjoyable. They also make good use of praise to encourage and give confidence and use open questions to check pupils' understanding and to challenge their assumptions. In the very good lessons, teachers make very effective use of pupils' own knowledge, experiences and interests, of films and television, cars and music, for example, to help them engage closely with their own learning.
109. Shortcomings in some lessons include:
 - teachers telling classes answers and opinions, rather than drawing them from pupils;

- their not ensuring that pupils maintain a record of important learning, through making notes;
 - their use of prepared writing frames which restrict the responses of the most able pupils because they do not give choices or lead to individual investigations or approaches;
 - the unnecessary provision of class information sheets, again for the most able who are thereby denied opportunities for fuller and independent research, to examine these handouts critically or to share the knowledge which they may already have.
110. The leadership and management of English by the newly appointed head of department are good. A new vigour has been injected into the department and it is re-evaluating its role in the school and drawing up plans for further improvement. Responsibilities are appropriately delegated, communication and relationships are good and there is regular monitoring of teaching and the sharing of best practice. The hard-working and conscientious team of experienced and specialist teachers is fully aware of current educational initiatives and the department is providing good expertise, support and impetus for literacy across the curriculum.
111. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Overall, standards have not improved. There was an increase in the higher grades obtained in GCSE English and English literature last year, but there has been a gradual decline in Key Stage 3 average points score because fewer pupils are achieving the higher levels. The shortage of books, which was identified in the last inspection, has been addressed. Actions to improve pupils' extended writing and their reading, as well as to improve the performance of boys, by rewriting schemes of work planned for them and introducing more appropriate texts, are proving successful. The National Literacy Strategy has also been successfully implemented in Year 7 but inconsistencies in marking, particularly in Years 7 to 9, remain.

Literacy across the curriculum

112. The work done by primary schools in literacy has begun to have a positive impact at the secondary level. At present, only one-third of pupils entering the school have reading ages below their actual ages: this is an improvement over previous years.
113. The National Literacy Strategy was introduced in Year 7 in September 2001. All staff have had in-service training and, led by the English department, opportunities to share good practice with each other. Departments have also carried out audits of how they contribute to literacy and have agreed a policy which is now in place. Literacy objectives and key subject words are on display in all departments. Opportunities for literacy have been identified in teachers' schemes of work for Year 7 in all subjects. Efforts are afoot to modify the schemes formally and plan for pupils' literacy development in all years. The English department has purchased new resources for the teaching of literacy and is providing considerable impetus and support for the strategy. In August 2001, a summer school was organised for Year 6 pupils from local primary schools. The literacy co-ordinator from Ridgewood High School shared responsibility for teaching with two teachers from primary schools and an initial teacher training (ITT) student. Pupils at the summer school benefited from the programme: their reading and spelling ages improved on average by six months. The pupils gained self-confidence and also benefited socially.

114. The teaching of literacy is satisfactory. In most lessons in Year 7, and also some in other years, learning objectives are shared with pupils, key vocabulary is explained and support is given with writing tasks: for example, through structured and guided writing frames. Pupils are also assisted in improving spelling and punctuation, although dictionaries and thesauruses are not yet readily available in all rooms, and there are planned group and class discussions in many lessons. In geography, expressions such as 'finite' and 'infinite resources' are explained, with examples, and pupils write letters about environmental issues. Good support is given in science lessons in writing up the outcomes of experiments, with sentence starters helping pupils to link their actions and results: such as, 'I mixed.... consequently...'. In English, differences between formal and informal language are explored and the use and misuse of contractions, such as 'I'm,' 'can't' and 'won't', are explained to pupils. During oral work, key vocabulary, such as 'myth' and 'tradition' are discussed and illustrated by well-chosen examples. In modern foreign languages, sentences are matched with pictures and specific vocabulary and grammar identified and practised through speaking and writing. However, further support for pupils' extended writing is required in some subjects, for example, in history; and the school's marking policy is not consistently applied in all subjects.
115. The provision and management of literacy across the curriculum are satisfactory. The appointment of a senior teacher to the role of literacy co-ordinator shows that the school acknowledges the importance of literacy in raising standards in all subjects. At present, the whole-school impact of the National Literacy Strategy is limited, as the initiative is in its first year. The structure of the three-part lesson is not yet established in all subjects in Year 7; and the role of the library, ICT facilities and the incorporation of literacy into pupils' personal and social education have not been fully investigated. A management group is proposed to take the initiative forward. This could usefully include the librarian as well as a representative from most departments. If introduced, its purpose would be to devise and implement further action planning and training, as well as to monitor both teaching and marking.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths:

- The overall standard of attainment is above the national average for pupils aged 14 and in line with it at the age of 16.
- Many pupils are able to solve mathematical problems well.
- Pupils behave well and show interest in their work in mathematics.
- The overall quality of teaching mathematics is good.
- The subject is very well led and managed, resulting in a strong team ethos.

Areas for improvement:

- The development of the plenary work in lessons to enable pupils to reflect on their learning.
- Improvement of GCSE standards, particularly in the higher intermediate grades, and especially by boys.
- Activities that better match the individual needs of pupils of varying ability within a set, particularly the more able.

[Evidence for this report came from the observation of 20 lessons, the scrutiny of the work of representative pupils from each year group, detailed discussions with the head of mathematics and senior managers and the examination of documents on mathematics and cross-curricular numeracy.]

116. The standard of attainment in mathematics of pupils entering the school in Year 7 is now above the national average. Pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in all years. In 2001, 98.5 per cent of pupils achieved a GCSE pass in mathematics. The school's Integrated Learning System (ILS) programme is particularly effective in motivating less able pupils and developing their confidence in mathematics. They demonstrate proficient numeracy and problem solving skills and are competent in their use of ICT.
117. Pupils' performance in the 2001 national tests for 14 year olds was above the national average. Pupils' performance was well above that of similar schools. At GCSE the proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to G was slightly above the national average. However, the number of pupils achieving grades A* to C at GCSE was slightly below the national average. While the school's GCSE A* grades were above national averages, and the total of A* grades plus A grades were in line with the national averages the B grades were below national averages. Boys did not perform as well as girls in all the grade categories from A* to C. Boys have not kept up with girls' improvement in GCSE grades A* to C since 2000. The overall point scores achieved by pupils in GCSE mathematics in 2001 were slightly below the average for all subjects taken within the school.
118. In all years there is significant variation between the work of pupils in different sets within a year group, which, however, appropriately reflects pupils' prior attainment. Pupils make good progress from Year 7 to Year 9. Most pupils in Year 9 demonstrate an understanding of circle geometry and use it to solve problems. Pupils know, for example, the formulae for calculating area and volume and apply them to solve problems involving a range of shapes. They can collect and process data and then calculate the mean, mode and median. Most pupils understand the rules for the transformation of algebraic equations and solve simple equations. The higher attainers can factorise algebraic equations, draw and interpret cumulative frequency charts, and solve simultaneous equations and problems involving inequalities.
119. For pupils in Year 11, the overall standard of work observed during the inspection was in line with national averages. Most pupils can simplify algebraic expressions, solve both linear and simultaneous equations, and interpret data in graphs and charts and complete frequency tables. They are proficient in circle theorems and can use and

apply Pythagoras' theory to solve problems. The attainment of pupils in the top set is above the national average. Pupils are proficient in aspects of trigonometry, most solve quadratic equations graphically or by using the formula and can calculate the area of sectors and arcs. They can plot a straight-line graph given its equation and solve equations using graphs.

120. The overall quality of teaching in all years is good. Teaching is never less than satisfactory and in a third of lessons it is very good. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and understanding of how to teach mathematics effectively. They show this through their confident delivery, the selection of appropriate teaching methods and their accurate use of mathematical vocabulary. Learning objectives are systematically shared with the pupils, who are clear on what is expected of them in the lesson. Lessons proceed at a good pace and have a clear structure. They begin with a focused oral session that extends pupils' numeracy skills and end with a plenary session that summarises what has been learnt. Currently, plenary sessions are too rushed. The teacher frequently dominates them, with few opportunities for pupils to contribute their reflections on what has been learnt in the lesson.
121. Teachers provide pupils with clear methods and strategies to solve mathematical problems. They are able to explain concepts in different ways, using a range of examples of varying complexity in order for pupils to understand successfully. Within a lesson, mathematical concepts are broken down into manageable modules of learning, and teachers continually assess pupils' knowledge and understanding. Consequently, they can quickly challenge and support pupils, by careful questioning, to reflect on their learning and clarify their understanding. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils were not completely clear on the function used to calculate percentage increase and decrease. The teacher promptly replaced the example being worked on with one whereby the function used was in a different, but very simple context.
122. Often recorded lesson plans are very simple and they do not reflect the effort that teachers have put into determining the lesson. In most lessons, pupils are presented with the same activity. Teachers need to consider whether all the pupils are at the same starting point and whether differentiated activities would be more appropriate. In a number of lessons observed there were pupils, particularly the more able within a set, for whom a different starting point or greater acceleration through the topic would have been more appropriate. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported through an appropriate programme. Learning assistants are effectively deployed to support individuals or groups of pupils to enable them to tackle, with confidence, the activities set. Homework is routinely set and often is a consolidation of learning that took place in the lesson. Pupils' work is regularly marked and graded but is rarely accompanied by informative comments that explain to the pupils what they have learnt and the aspects that need further improvement. Teachers have clearly established routines, which, combined with good behaviour management, enable lessons to run smoothly.
123. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their work are very good. They are keen to do well, have a desire to learn and work conscientiously. Many pupils say that they enjoy mathematics and are gaining in confidence. They value the support and guidance from teachers. Pupils have limited opportunities to work collaboratively, or within

groups. When they undertake practical work they move quickly and quietly. They are courteous to each other and respect others' views in a discussion.

124. Since the last inspection, pupils' attainment in mathematics at the school has risen, both in national tests for 14 year olds and at GCSE. In 1996, the standards of attainment for pupils aged 14 was in line with the national average whilst in 2001, it was above the national average. In 1996 the proportion of pupils obtaining a GCSE grade between A* and C was below the national average, whilst in 2001 it had risen to be in line with the national average. Pupils in the top set, within a year group, are working at levels that are above the national averages. Pupils' numeracy skills have improved since the introduction of the numeracy session at the beginning of every mathematics lesson. The department now has an adequate range of suitable textbooks and resources to support the delivery of the schemes of work and syllabuses. There is an ICT suite that is used to deliver the ILS strategy and appropriate components within the schemes of work.
125. A competent head of department effectively leads the department. She has developed a strong team ethos where staff share a commitment to high achievement for all pupils. There is a strategic development plan, which clearly identifies priorities for the future. It is a working document and is routinely revised and updated. There are systems in place for assessing pupils' mathematical capabilities and recording pupils' attainment and progress. Pupils' attainment and progress are reviewed throughout the year against the targets. There is a commitment to reviewing and improving the quality of teaching and learning. The head of department has been monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and has a schedule of lesson observations. Schemes of work have been rewritten recently to incorporate aspects of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy for numeracy.

Key Stage 3 Strategy – numeracy

126. The development of a whole-school numeracy policy has been identified as a strand within the school's improvement plan for 2000 to 2002. A clear strategy has been identified and shared with staff. The enthusiastic head of the mathematics department has initiated and led on the implementation strategy. She has been proactive in obtaining a range of documentation on the implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy generally, but particularly numeracy. In addition to briefings in whole-school sessions, documentation has been circulated around the school and particularly the mathematics department. Additional time has been allocated within the mathematics department, for whole team meetings, within which the implementation strategy for numeracy was drawn up. Initially the plan focused on developing, and implementing, a numeracy policy within the mathematics department. The school recognised, two years ago, the value of the numeracy strategy approach and piloted aspects prior to the official time-scale within secondary schools. The link governor for numeracy has recently been in school assessing the impact of the numeracy strategy within the mathematics department through a series of lesson observations.
127. Within the mathematics department a range of briefing and discussion sessions enabled the Key Stage 3 Strategy components to be shared, discussed, considered and an implementation plan to be drawn up. All the team has been involved and consequently there is a strong team commitment to the strategy. Staff have worked

together to rewrite schemes of work, develop approaches to teaching numeracy and produce mathematical resources. Staff attendance at a range of external training courses has helped to clarify understanding and sustain enthusiasm. Visits have taken place to primary schools to observe numeracy practice. Visits are scheduled to secondary schools to enable approaches to be compared and to judge the impact.

128. In mathematics, the scheme of work for Year 7 pupils has been rewritten to incorporate units based on Key Stage 3 topics. The units are based on the Key Stage 3 guidance and include all relevant examples from the strategy. There are numeracy objectives set within the scheme. All lessons observed during the inspection, in every year group, were well structured through the inclusion of the three-part lesson. Lessons begin with a brisk oral session that concentrates on developing pupils' competence and confidence in numeracy. Lesson objectives are shared with the pupils. A clear, brief recap of prior learning contextualises the learning objectives within a progressive framework. Lessons end with a plenary that reflects on the learning that the pupils have made in the lesson. Currently, plenary sessions lack adequate pupil involvement. The development of plenary sessions is on the schedule for development. Staff are aware that pupils need to be trained and encouraged to reflect on their work and judge how far they have met the learning objectives.
129. The current Year 7 pupils have been set in mathematics based on their mathematical results in national tests for 11 year olds and advice from primary schools. This has been extremely successful with only a few pupils moving due to inappropriate placement. This is a change of practice from previous years where pupils were in mixed ability groups for the first six months to allow for their mathematical capability to be assessed. The current Year 7 pupils have settled well and feel reassured that they would not need to be regrouped. Consequently, most have made good progress since joining the school. This strategy is beginning to contribute to raising standards of achievement and attainment. It has settled the pupils promptly on entry to the school, and removed the significant amount of holding time prior to pupils being appropriately set.
130. Additional funding has been allocated to the mathematics department to implement the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Appropriate textbooks and other resources, such as white boards were purchased. These have been appropriately used in all years. During the inspection, a range of strategies was used to develop numeracy skills, including paper based number games, playing cards, noughts and crosses and timed puzzles. Attainment targets have been set for all pupils in mathematics based on national expectations and have been converted into curriculum targets. Pupils' progress toward targets is monitored and reviewed with useful records being kept. Mathematical reports for pupils in Years 7 to 9 include a section on progress in numeracy. All these strategies make a positive contribution to pupils' learning.
131. Pupils demonstrate competent numerical skills across the curriculum. In science, pupils use standard column procedures for the multiplication and division of integers and decimals, they multiply and divide fractions and draw charts and graphs. In modern foreign languages, pupils convert time, use foreign currency and calculate change given when shopping. Pupils' ability in mental arithmetic is growing increasingly effective as the cumulative impact of the emphasis on mental skills in

mathematics lessons takes effect. Pupils in Year 7 identified approaches in mathematics that successfully built on their primary school experiences. Pupils in Year 10 recognised that teaching and learning methods had changed over the last two years and particularly since they were in Year 7. Pupils liked the three-part lesson and the consistency of approach between mathematics teachers. They particularly enjoy the mental mathematics sessions and the range of resources employed, notably the white boards. Pupils believe that consequently their numeracy skills have improved, they are more confident in four rule operations and their overall mathematical skills and attainment have improved.

132. The mathematics department has implemented the springboard programme. This has assisted pupils, who are below national expectations in Year 7, to make greater gains in their learning. To meet pupils' needs, the springboard programme has been adapted and incorporated into the schools' schemes of work. To accelerate pupils' progress learning assistants have been allocated to pupils on the springboard programme. The quality of teaching and learning on the programme is good and appropriately meets the needs of the pupils through collaborative activities that encourage pupils to articulate their learning. They clarify and consolidate their understanding and grow in confidence. Pupils on the springboard programme make good gains in their learning through the tailored approach offered by the learning assistant and an appropriate curriculum.
133. The quality of teaching of numeracy across the curriculum is satisfactory. A curriculum map of the use of mathematical skills across the curriculum has been drawn up and is being cross-referenced with the mathematics schemes of work. All departments completed a questionnaire and were interviewed as part of the process. The information collected will contribute towards the whole-school numeracy policy. Currently, the approach to teaching numeracy is not consistent across the school. Some departments are further ahead and have, within their subject development plans, noted their intention to develop a numeracy policy. After Easter there are plans for a session on numeracy during a whole-school teacher day during which the school's numeracy policy will be shaped. The school has yet to carry out the departmental audit required under the Key Stage 3 Strategy. Good progress has been made in implementing the Key Stage 3 Strategy within the mathematics department, but there is still much to be done to establish and operate.

SCIENCE

Overall the quality of provision for science is **good**.

Strengths:

- The standard of attainment of pupils both at the age of 14 and 16 is well above the national average.
- Both boys and girls perform equally well in science.
- The overall quality of teaching is good, with much that is very good.
- The relationships within lessons are very good.
- Teachers are well qualified and experienced, and are well supported by technicians.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement:

- Marking of pupils' work and comments for improvement.
- Monitoring within the department to promote a consistent use of established good practice.
- The accommodation for teaching science.

[Evidence for this report was gained from the observation of 18 lessons, together with the scrutiny of the work of representative pupils in each year group. Pupils were interviewed, and their work that was displayed was examined. Detailed discussions were held with the head of department.]

134. The standard of attainment in science is above average for pupils aged 14 and 16. In the National Curriculum tests in 2001, an above average proportion of pupils gained the level expected for average 14 year olds nationally. After a high point in 1997 attainment dropped, but was still above average and the trend has been upward since then. When compared with schools with similar socio-economic backgrounds the results are well above average. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, particularly when they have additional support in the classroom and there is no overall difference in the performance of boys and girls. Teachers' assessment of pupils' attainment is broadly in line with test results.
135. In the GCSE examinations in 2001 the proportion of pupils gaining a grade A* to C was above the national average by about ten per cent and was an improvement on the previous year, although this was also above average. In both years, no pupil failed to gain a grade, which is a significant achievement. Pupils who left school in 2001 entered Year 7 with average levels of attainment, made good progress from Years 7 to 11 and left with above average attainment in Year 11. Over the last few years there has been no overall difference in the relative performance of boys and girls.
136. In work seen during the inspection, pupils at the age of 14 were attaining levels higher than the national average. Most produced neat, legible work and drew diagrams carefully, but across the whole attainment range some drew carelessly. Pupils used a good range of scientific vocabulary and used correct terminology when writing. Fluency was aided by word lists displayed in laboratories and printed sheets some pupils receive when starting a new section of work. At this age higher attaining pupils understand the structure of the atom and know chemical symbols for some of the elements. They can write equations for reactions in words, understand the behaviour of light when it is reflected or refracted and know that inefficiency is due to unwanted forms of energy being produced. Lower attaining pupils make more mistakes, for instance, when measuring angles in optical ray experiments, spell less accurately and sometimes leave work unfinished.
137. By the age of 16, higher attaining pupils develop a good knowledge across a wide range of topics. They understand, for example, the circulation of the blood and the digestive system. They know the structure of the Periodic Table of the elements, understand the concept of valency and bonding and calculate work done, power or pressure by choosing the appropriate equation and substituting values correctly. Pupils understand the concept of the nuclear atom and the effects of radioactivity. Lower attaining pupils produce a good standard of work though recall of previous material is not always accurate.

138. Across the age and attainment range the quality of graphs is variable. While some pupils produce good graphs others join point to point instead of drawing a smooth curve or do not understand how to draw a line of best fit. Graph lines are not always a single fine line, scales are too small and gradients are calculated using very small triangles, reducing accuracy. The use of printed sheets structures the learning of pupils with special educational needs but the use of printed diagrams of apparatus or parts of the human body gives insufficient opportunity for the more able to practise and extend drawing skills.
139. The overall quality of teaching is good. In almost half of the lessons seen the quality of teaching was good and in one third it was very good or excellent. Good lessons were characterised by a brisk pace, well presented material and a variety of activities. Relationships in the classroom are very good. As a result, teachers waste little time controlling pupils and lessons are productive. Pupils feel free to ask questions and practical work is carried out co-operatively and safely. Where pupils have special educational needs, teachers take care to ask questions several times to make sure all understand and answers are stressed to reinforce learning. Teachers value each answer and praise pupils for their involvement.
140. Pupils' learning is good. Pupils enjoy their science, especially when doing practical work. They learn new facts, perform increasingly difficult experiments and extend their understanding of concepts as they progress through the school. Some 16 year olds, preparing for a practical assessment, were using computers to simulate their work, to familiarise themselves with the working procedure and anticipate any difficulties. Another group were following their plans to investigate factors influencing the amount of heat produced by a coil of wire when an electric current flows through it. Another group of pupils were learning about the industrial production of ammonia by studying a computer generated display. Younger pupils investigated how soils drain by studying grain size and comparing three samples. Some 12 year olds were planning their own experiments to find out which breakfast cereal produced the most energy. More able pupils in some groups are extended because teachers include more demanding work but this is not always the case. In some lessons, able pupils, progressing only at the same rate as the rest of the class, are unchallenged.
141. Teachers mark most pieces of work, though in some cases marking is superficial and uncritical. In some samples of marked work seen by inspectors, maximum marks were given to pupils' work which contained serious errors and teachers' comments, though praising and supportive, give pupils little guidance on what to do to improve their work.
142. One laboratory is not of an acceptable standard. It is a one-room building outside the main school block, approached by a steep flight of steps. The internal layout is unsatisfactory. There are no windows in the rear half making the back of the room gloomy and the position of the whiteboard makes it difficult for some to see. Pupils who have to use this room are at a disadvantage because they cannot carry out the full range of practical work and their progress is hindered.

143. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Test and exam results have remained above average and the trend is upwards. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and no unsatisfactory pupil behaviour was seen.
144. The management and leadership of this complex department are good. Teachers are experienced and well qualified with a range of specialist subjects. Older pupil groups move from one teacher to another to make use of this expertise. Several teachers carry significant responsibilities for other academic or pastoral areas of the curriculum and, as a result, are not all fulltime teachers of science. The rotation of pupil groups and deployment of staff are efficiently organised, as is the work of the laboratory technicians. The scheme of work is clear and helpful and model lesson plans give teachers good guidance. The development plan is well linked to the school's improvement plan. There is a need for the head of department to monitor the work of staff more rigorously to ensure that the standard of marking and feedback to pupils improves and that good practice, for example, in extending more able pupils, is more widely used by all staff.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths:

- Three-dimensional work in clay is good, so enabling pupils to investigate a range of images and techniques.
- There is an open-door policy which encourages pupils to work beyond their timetabled periods for art and design.
- Homework is used well to support class project activities and to reinforce target setting for individual pupils.
- The positive relationships forged between teachers and pupils greatly assist learning.
- The studios are organised effectively for the benefit of all pupils.

Areas for improvement:

- The way in which contextual information on art and design and artists is used to inform the practical work.
- The need for a deeper understanding of the arts of non-Western cultures.
- The use of subject related language in display work.
- The need to give greater emphasis to the visual and tactile elements in curriculum planning.
- Boys' achievements in the higher grades at GCSE.

[During the inspection ten lessons were observed. The work of a representative group of pupils from each year group was examined. Detailed discussions were held with the head of department.]

145. The standard of attainment in art and design of pupils aged 14 and 16 is in line with national averages and pupils make satisfactory progress. By the end of Year 11 in 2001, the number of pupils awarded A* to C grades in the GCSE reached national averages. This was somewhat lower than in the previous two years, from a percentage of the cohort which was much lower than the national average. There is a significant difference between the attainment of girls and boys, with the attainment of girls

continuing to rise, paralleled by a decline in boys' attainment. The average point scores achieved in art and design were approximately 0.5 points lower than the average for all subjects taken in 2001.

146. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 have an opportunity to engage with a range of themes and practical activities designed to increase their practical skills and, to a more limited extent, their knowledge of art and artists. Portrait drawing, and work investigating line and tone in Year 8 shows a sound understanding of applying those visual elements. Pupils in Year 9 have developed skills of clay modelling, exploring form in a sculptural manner. There is only limited evidence of pupils making connections between what they do and what artists do, or expressing opinions verbally about works of art. One Year 7 class showed a delight in colour and pattern through being introduced to the arts of Islam. Sketchbooks are used well for classwork and homework, for preparatory and research work to inform current projects. Pupils with special educational needs and those with particular talents make similar progress to others in their classes.
147. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are encouraged to develop an individual approach to project work. Sculptural work in clay is particularly successful, well supported by preliminary drawings. Girls show greater imagination in their work, and develop practical skills at a much higher level than boys. Great skill and imagination were shown by girls working on large ceramic pieces developed from studies of plants and other natural forms. Much of the ceramic work from boys was more timid in scale, although one boy was developing a large piece of abstract sculpture from found materials. There is very little evidence that the work of artists and designers is used to inform the practical outcomes of the pupils' work. However, ICT is used with all year groups to gather information about artists. Pupils are encouraged to use the departmental facilities for ICT to research the work of artists of their choice and to present their findings in a professional manner. This is usually done very well, but is an isolated exercise where personal opinions are not extended, nor is the research used to inform practical project work.
148. Pupils are quite enthusiastic about their work in art and design, and are willing to share ideas and resources with each other. There is a good working atmosphere in the studios, with pupils being willing and able to talk with confidence about their work in progress, but much less confident in talking about artists. They understand about the pace at which they have to work, and respond well to help and advice from their teachers. Their positive attitudes contribute to their progress overall. Some pupils express frustration with the fragmented way in which their timetable for art and design is organised, spending too much time with the distribution and retrieval of resources, and too little time on the practical aspects of their work.
149. The overall quality of teaching is good, with much that is very good. Lessons are planned to challenge pupils of all levels of ability. Teachers have good subject knowledge and an enthusiasm for the subject which underpins their authority in the studios. They present the lessons with clear learning objectives, enhanced at times with practical demonstrations to focus upon what is expected during the lesson. There is a good relationship established between the teachers and most of the pupils, which builds confidence and trust between them. Teachers give a high level of individual

support to the pupils. They encourage a healthy pace to each lesson, making good use of limited time for the practical work within 50-minute lessons. However, in just one instance, the quality of teaching dipped below the satisfactory level, mainly because of behavioural difficulties. Formative assessments are given during some lessons, which set clear targets for individual development. Homework is consistently set to encourage continuity to the learning process. The present method of curriculum planning, through a thematic approach to project work, does not ensure a systematic understanding of the visual and tactile elements of art, in Years 7 to 9.

150. Teachers provide opportunity for pupils to engage with artists' residencies and other projects which enrich their cultural awareness, and encourage pupils to take the opportunity offered for extra work by operating an open-door policy each lunchtime and after school. Year 11 pupils visit an art gallery as a part of their cultural development, which could be built in to the learning strategies in a more positive way as the stimulus for a unit of study. Although the curriculum plans include aspects of art from other cultures, there is little depth to the learning, so that knowledge and understanding of the particular cultures is rather superficial.
151. The use of formative assessment strategies by teachers contributes to the learning through target setting, and a clear understanding of what has to be done to improve. The criteria used for the award of grades for attainment is, however, not made clear to the pupils in Years 7 to 9. There is no apparent structure for monitoring the curriculum for art and design to effect changes in content and direction over time.
152. Since the previous inspection, the GCSE results have improved in the A* to C grades due to a stronger curriculum structure throughout both key stages. The three-dimensional opportunities are much improved, and indeed are now the strongest aspect of the department's work. The school has invested well in increasing the number and range of specialist books, although there is still a shortage of book resources in the painting studio.
153. The department is well led in a collaborative way that makes good use of teaching strengths. There is a shared commitment to the improvement of the skills and understanding of the pupils. The capitation allowance is focused clearly on the needs of the pupils, and the work of the technician clearly helps the smooth running of the ceramic processing work. The studios are well organised for the benefit of pupils and are enriched by displays of work from a wide variety of projects. The display work does not use the language of learning, and therefore not all pupils clearly understand the content. The corridor area is developed as an ICT and gallery area, and creates a strong feeling of commitment to the visual arts. As at the time of the last inspection, the scope of the work possible within the subject is constrained to some degree by a shortage of space. The art and design department is placed within a faculty of visual and performing arts, but there is no evidence of how this enhances the curriculum for visual art.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

The quality of provision for design and technology is **good**.

Strengths:

- The standards attained in food technology and textiles both at age 14 and age 16 are high.
- The standard attained in childcare at age 16 is also high.
- Work seen in lessons in resistant materials and graphics shows considerable improvement in the standard of attainment since last year.
- All pupils display a high standard of practical skills and have positive attitudes to their learning.
- The overall quality of teaching is good, with much that is very good.
- Pupils are given clear targets to aim for.
- The quality of management is good.

Areas for improvement:

- The need to raise attainment in resistant materials and graphics.
- The need to provide more opportunities for gifted and talented pupils to access higher levels of attainment in lessons, particularly in resistant materials.
- Further use of assessment data to improve curriculum planning and lesson strategies.
- Greater use of new technologies to increase learning especially in the wider application of computer aided design and manufacturing.

[During the inspection, 15 lessons were observed including pupils in every year group and a range of food, graphics, resistant materials, systems and control, textiles and child development lessons. The work of a sample of pupils in each year group was scrutinised, and discussions were held with the senior curriculum co-ordinator for technology and the teachers in charge of design and realisation and child development.]

154. Overall, the standard attained by pupils aged 14 in design and technology in the National Curriculum assessments in 2001 was in line with the average for pupils of this age. The standard reached in food technology and textiles was high, reflecting the high expectations and expert technical skills of the teachers. The standard reached in resistant materials, control technology and graphics was below average national levels. In the work seen in lessons during the inspection, pupils in Years 7 to 9 were continuing to work to a very high standard in food technology and textiles. They were also seen to be working to a better standard in resistant materials and graphics than indicated by last year's assessments. More able pupils in these two areas of the subject have too few opportunities to develop the higher order skills and concepts needed to reach Levels 6 and 7. In general, girls attained more highly than boys in Years 7 to 9. Pupils with special educational needs achieved well in relation to their starting point in Year 7.
155. In 2001, overall GCSE results for design and technology were below the national average. However, this generalised statement masks considerable contrasts between different constituent subjects. Pupils exceeded the national average results in food technology, textiles and child development. However, the results in resistant materials and graphics were below average. In the work seen in lessons in Years 10 and 11, the high standards in the successful subjects of 2001 were seen to be maintained. The staffing difficulties that led to low results in resistant materials and graphics have been resolved, and attainment in lessons was now in line with average standards. As in Years 7 to 9, pupils with special educational needs progressed well, thanks to well focused support linked to appropriate learning targets. In 2001 the relative standard of

attainment in design and technology was marginally below the average for subjects taken within the school.

156. Pupils demonstrate well-developed making skills in all the design and technology areas. Design skills are developed progressively; for example, in lessons observed, Year 7 were able to explain the difference between a 'design brief' and a 'specification'; in Year 8 lessons, pupils undertook an investigation of pastry or discussed product 'branding'. Year 9 pupils disassembled products or produced design proposals for a product produced from recycled material. This progression provides a sound basis from which to develop the designing and making skills of the GCSE courses.
157. Standards at the end of Year 11 in child development are above the national average. Teaching is a strength of this course; good subject knowledge is combined with detailed task planning, and assessment that encourages pupils to work beyond their target level. Pupils' attitudes are very good; groups of pupils were observed constructing a line of argument around the issue of breast or bottle feeding, they collaborated well and displayed a good level of understanding in their discussions.
158. Pupils are attentive in lessons and their attitudes to learning are very good; behaviour is very good and has a positive impact on health and safety issues in practical areas. Pupils collaborate well when undertaking group tasks and at other times are co-operative in the use of equipment. They communicate their ideas and understanding well and offer constructive criticism of their own and others' work. Overall, pupils make satisfactory progress in resistant materials and graphics and good progress in food technology, textiles and child care.
159. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Much of the teaching is very good and there were no instances of unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers have good subject knowledge and often encourage their pupils to aim for high standards. There is a strong team approach and a commitment to share good practice. Teachers have invested much time in providing additional support and extracurricular opportunities for pupils, and in developing and revising teaching materials such as, for example, a 'photo sheet' reference for pupils undertaking lathe work. The overall quality of teaching in all years is good. Much of the remainder is of satisfactory quality with more than half of the teaching observed being very good or better. Where teaching is particularly effective, pupils are provided with a task that is well defined, they can make clear links between the assessment criteria and their personal learning targets; and they are given expectations about the pace of their progress through the work. In the lessons where teaching was judged to be satisfactory, the main area for improvement is to provide more opportunities for more able pupils to work to higher levels.
160. Management of the department is good. Schemes of work are detailed and meticulously planned. In Years 7 to 9, teaching modules are themed and core skills are delivered simultaneously across all design and technology areas ensuring that all pupils can make similar patterns of progress from Years 7 to 9. Successful strategies are now in place to monitor the progress of pupils and to monitor the quality of teaching.

161. At the time of the last inspection, the department had developed end of module assessment sheets. These have been further developed to take account of the setting of subject specific learning targets for pupils in Years 7 to 9. This practice is encouraging pupils to take more direct personal responsibility for their progress.
162. Accommodation and resources are good but are inadequate for the whole school population; however, they do support the curriculum currently offered to pupils. The current provision of computers in resistant materials will not support the CAD/CAM resources in the department. Teaching and circulation areas are clean and well ordered. Display work in all areas of the department is high quality and is both informative and aspirational. In some lessons observed, display work was used directly to support teaching. The quality of the accommodation for design and technology is good, but there is insufficient space to enable all pupils in Years 10 and 11 to follow a GCSE course in one of the constituent subjects.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths:

- Standards of pupils aged 14 are above the national expectations especially with regard to pupils' understanding of environmental issues and sustainability.
- The teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good, especially the management of pupils, and therefore the behaviour and acquisition of knowledge are good.
- Behaviour in lessons is good because relationships between teachers and pupils are good and sometimes very good.
- Pupils make good progress using ICT to improve their understanding of geography.
- The new leadership and management of the subject are good, because new monitoring procedures have identified things that need to be improved.

Areas for improvement:

- Pupils do not have sufficient understanding of how to improve their own work.
- Pupils' understanding of key concepts in geography is not strong enough.
- Some pupils, especially girls, are not enthused by the subject.
- Opportunities for fieldwork and geographical enquiry are limited.
- Opportunities are missed to develop pupils' understanding of places, including their cultures.

[Evidence was gathered through observing nine lessons; through the scrutiny of departmental documentation; scrutiny of pupils' work including assessments and GCSE examination coursework; interviews with pupils and teachers.]

163. In 2001, standards at age 14 were just above the national average. The majority of pupils achieved Level 5 or above, and eight per cent achieved Level 7 and above. Standards of work seen also confirm these standards. Pupils' understanding of key terms, environmental issues and geographical processes are above national standards. In Year 7 work on the impact of open cast coal mining, pupils could write a letter to object to the development, not only asserting their views but offering evidence for them. Work in knowledge and understanding of geographical patterns and places is

in-line with national expectations. Whilst pupils in Year 8 can locate places on maps accurately, they lacked confidence in explaining what a place is like and why it is like it is. It is this deeper sense of place that is still in need of development from the last inspection. For example, pupils in a Year 8 lesson on weather and climate of the United Kingdom, could locate key cities, but they struggled to use the language associated with describing a place. Geographical enquiry and fieldwork skills are below expectations because there is insufficient opportunity for pupils to practise these skills, although the majority of pupils are clearly capable. Pupils are insecure in their understanding of the purpose and the underlying key concepts behind geography. There is no major difference between the achievement of boys and girls at age 14. Pupils of all abilities make satisfactory progress but it could be improved if there was more consistent planning for, and expectations of, pupils with different abilities.

164. At the age of 16, the pupils attain GCSE grades that are in-line with national and school averages. 60 per cent of both boys and girls reached C grade or above in 2001. This represents an improvement from 2000 and since the last inspection. There is evidence of more able boys achieving very well in the 2001 results, but of middle and lower ability boys doing less well than expected. The geography co-ordinator is aware that the standard of coursework is the area that is most in need of improvement and there is evidence that this limits the performance of some pupils. This is due to the underdevelopment of enquiry and fieldwork in Years 7 to 9. Over the last few years, significantly fewer girls than boys have opted for geography. The main reason for this seems to be the pupils' lack of understanding of the purpose of geography and their lack of confidence generated by the over-reliance on testing as a means of assessment during Years 7 to 9. However, there is no evidence that this ultimately affects results at GCSE. In 2001, the average point scores gained by pupils taking GCSE geography were in line with the average for all subjects taken in the school.
165. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. However, it is good with pupils aged 11 to 14. This is largely due to better planning and clearer expectations with these pupils. There is very good management of pupils, which results in good behaviour, supports concentration and the ability to acquire knowledge. Lesson planning is good overall. Objectives are challenging. Good starter activities and methods are deployed with very good use of ICT and literacy approaches to support learning. For example, in one Year 9 lesson on population, the teacher had prepared an investigation into world population. The pupils were motivated by the website displaying the world population clock rising by 350 people in a minute. They used ICT to select appropriate information from a very good website and gathered information for a speaking and listening exercise, using presentation software.
166. What distinguishes the good lessons from satisfactory ones is the way the teacher approaches meeting the needs of pupils of different abilities to include them in the learning. Progress is affected either when objectives are pitched at one level, or when the teacher's intervention or methodology doesn't meet some pupils' needs. In one Year 11 lesson on the provision of services in Birmingham, pupils responded thoughtfully to the teacher's good questioning. Pupils made gains in knowledge of the pattern of service provision in a city, but the later tasks were too challenging and insufficiently exemplified for the lower ability pupils. In contrast, in a Year 10 lesson on water shortage areas of the world, the teacher prepared a challenging and

independent learning activity with a variety of texts to suit pupils' differing reading abilities, ensuring all pupils made progress.

167. Pupils' attitudes to geography lag behind their good behaviour and are only satisfactory. Whilst pupils show interest and enthusiasm during oral tasks, their productivity and pace of working is determined by the teachers' expectations. In one Year 8 lesson on the influence of clouds on weather, pupils responded thoughtfully to the teacher's good questioning. Pupils made gains in knowledge of key cloud formations but there was no evidence of support for pupils with special educational needs and no extension activity for the most able.
168. Teachers show a great deal of care for pupils and mostly mark their work with encouragement. Some marking clearly identifies strengths and targets for improvement. However, this is not consistent. There are some examples of very good marking especially in Years 8 and 9 where the teacher clearly identifies specific improvements in the subject. In order that pupils can understand how to improve, they need to be involved more in judging the quality of their own work and developing their understanding of how to improve. Pupils' knowledge of their own learning is weak, because teachers are insufficiently explicit about how to improve as a geography pupil. In a good Year 8 lesson on patterns of weather in the United Kingdom, pupils were enjoying and engaged in the numeracy activity, mapping and presenting graphs, but they were insufficiently clear about the key concepts behind what they were doing in this, such as the causes and effects of geographical patterns.
169. Teaching is contributing effectively to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Pupils have many opportunities to develop work with their peers and develop social skills as a result. Pupils debate moral issues in geography such as world population growth. The use of dramatic statistics gives pupils time to reflect on their place in the world. In one Year 7 lesson on the sustainability of resources, pupils were encouraged to reflect on the meaning of infinity and the impact of existing generations on their future. There is an insufficient opportunity to study cultural diversity in the United Kingdom and the wider world.
170. The leadership and management of the subject are good because after just one term the new subject co-ordinator has made a significant impact on ways of working. Management of the department has improved since the last inspection and is now clearer and less informal. It has focused on monitoring pupils' work and on improving teaching and learning and day-to-day assessment. This process has identified clear priorities for development so that the subject can improve. There is good deployment of staff, resources and accommodation, with displays creating a rich learning environment to show examples of good work. These are in turn used to motivate other learners. There are examples of well-designed new units of work, but they are not yet well established. Long term planning for the development of geographical enquiry and skills is less evident. This results in teachers planning lessons with insufficient emphasis on geographical skills and enquiry. There is good planning to implement the literacy strategy and evidence in lessons that this is making an impact. Strategies for numeracy development are less well developed, although pupils are taught to handle geographical data well. Overall, there has been good improvement since the last inspection, significantly in the areas of leadership and

management, especially monitoring, marking, teaching in Years 7 to 9 and the further development of ICT.

HISTORY

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

Strengths:

- The standard of attainment of pupils aged 14 is above the national average.
- Standards in GCSE examinations are above the average for schools nationally and in 2001 showed significant gain in A* grades.
- The overall quality of teaching is good.
- A relatively high proportion of pupils goes on to study history at AS-level and beyond.
- The teaching makes important contributions to raising standards of literacy through an emphasis on key words and the acquisition of specialist vocabulary.

Areas for improvement:

- ICT (especially in Years 10 and 11) is not used sufficiently to support learning.
- There is too much reliance on photocopied worksheets and notes in the GCSE course.
- Not all tasks are designed to fit the individual learning needs of all pupils.
- Marking provides too few pointers to guide pupils in improving their work.
- Arrangements for monitoring, long term planning and pupil target setting are incomplete.

[The evidence used for this report came from the observation of eight lessons, an interview with the deputy headteacher, an examination of the subject documentation and the scrutiny of the work of six representative pupils from each year group.]

171. Standardised teacher assessment scores at the end of Year 9 show that pupils' attainment at the age of 14 has been above the national average level over the last three years. This is confirmed by the work of pupils in Year 9 seen during the inspection. The standard achieved by pupils at the age of 16 has also been above the national average for the last three years. In the 2001 GCSE examinations there was a marked improvement in the number of more able pupils achieving A* grades. Pupils' overall GCSE grades at A* to C were around the average for the school as was the average point score.
172. The standards in work seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9 were above the national average expected level for pupils aged 11 to 14. Most pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the key events and changes in the periods they have been studying. They work particularly well with historical source material, for example, when investigating conditions in the workhouse and Victorian attitudes to the poor. In a study of Cromwell's campaign in Ireland, some Year 8 pupils asked perceptive questions about the differences in the conduct of warfare and grasped the significance of deeply rooted religious hatred. Pupils organise information successfully but have limited opportunities to engage in extended or empathetic writing. Use of ICT to support learning is underdeveloped although some Year 8 work on the English Civil War indicates the quality and range that pupils are capable of when allowed the opportunity for more independent learning.

173. The standard of work currently being produced in Years 10 and 11 is also above the standard normally seen for 15 and 16 year olds. Pupils master the content of the GCSE course well and relish opportunities to demonstrate their factual knowledge through revision quizzes. They have, for example, a good understanding of the development of the Nazi regime in Germany and a detailed knowledge of the control methods used by the followers of Hitler. They use historical sources selectively and confidently deploy relevant information to support well argued responses to examination type questions. The reliance on printed handouts and very focused activities such as preparation for answering examination questions can limit the opportunities for more independent study and extension work beyond the limited resources provided by the teacher.
174. The overall standard of attainment of pupils is good at the end of both key stages in relation to their starting points. They build successfully on earlier work and so make effective progress. They increase their historical knowledge and develop a range of relevant skills. Pupils develop the ability to interpret conflicting evidence well from Years 7 to 9. This provides a solid foundation for examination success at the end of Year 11. Pupils enjoy history lessons and their positive attitude to the lessons underpins good achievement in all years.
175. The overall quality of teaching and learning in all years is good. Teachers deploy a range of teaching methods which are effective in introducing new knowledge and higher grade historical skills. They consolidate and extend understanding well, for example, the use of sources to highlight aspects of life in Nazi Germany. Lesson planning is generally sensitive to the learning needs of pupils, although differentiation in both key stages is underdeveloped and depends mainly on the teacher's support or the loosely targeted deployment of commercially produced resources. Lessons are taught at a brisk pace and pupils are well managed. In all years, marking provides pupils with insufficient guidance about how to improve their work.
176. A very experienced and dedicated team of teachers have maintained standards during a long period without a curriculum area co-ordinator. A great deal of departmental documentation and some management practice exist only in an embryonic form. Planning and co-ordination are either done by individual teachers or on an essentially informal basis. At present there is no action plan, linked to a system of monitoring, to form the basis for a determined push to raise standards further.
177. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. High standards have been maintained in all year groups despite a reliance on a succession of temporary supply teachers. Lessons are now more structured and have more clearly defined learning outcomes. Pupils are helped to understand and use key words and concepts well. As a consequence, pupils now have a clearer understanding of what is expected of them and teachers' expectations have risen. Monitoring of lessons by members of the senior management team has made a significant contribution to raising standards of teaching. The learning resources used in Years 7 to 9 have been enhanced although those used in Years 10 and 11 remain limited. The limited use of ICT is still evident in all years.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- Teaching in the GNVQ course enables pupils to make good progress in the acquisition of ICT and independent learning skills.
- Teaching in cross-curricular ICT is good, with particular strengths in geography, religious education, and music, making a positive contribution to the development of pupils' skills in research and in communicating information.
- Effective management promotes enthusiastic and motivated pupils with positive attitudes to ICT.
- The ICT resources in specialist ICT rooms, the library and some subject areas are good.

Areas for improvement:

- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their data handling skills or to use modelling with spreadsheets.
- Assessment arrangements do not cover all elements of ICT at age 14.
- Sometimes pupils' opportunities to use ICT to extend and enrich their work are limited by weaknesses in the capabilities of the teacher to support them.

[Four lessons were observed where ICT was being taught as an examination subject. A further 12 lessons were seen where ICT skills were being developed within the context of different subjects. Representative work from pupils in each year group was seen. There were detailed discussions with the ICT co-ordinator.]

178. Since the last inspection the school has implemented the strategy of ICT being taught through all the subjects of the curriculum. Teachers are working hard to improve their own ICT skills and to provide opportunities for communicating information from electronic sources. The use of ICT is well-embedded in geography and religious education. In music, pupils are experiencing modelling techniques with their composition. Measurement and data logging are continuing to develop in science and geography, and there is provision for control both in design and technology and in mathematics. Overall, the use of spreadsheets for modelling is under-developed, and the lack of an appropriate database for use in Years 7 to 9 means there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop data handling skills. These are required elements within the National Curriculum.
179. Since the last inspection, the school has introduced the GNVQ Part One course in ICT in Year 10. This is a popular course and standards seen in lessons and in pupil portfolios show high quality work for both middle and higher ability pupils. Pupils were completing their first assignments for assessment at the time of the inspection. A significant majority of pupils were working towards the intermediate level, which is above their predicted target in other subjects, largely due to their good achievements with practical skills and developing analytical skills. Pupils were seen to be producing a range of business documents to a high standard based on their growing awareness of real world documentation. The minority of pupils likely to take foundation level generally have good practical skills but are yet to develop skills to analyse and explain their work at a higher level.

180. The overall standard of attainment at the end of Year 9 in ICT is broadly in line with the national average standard. In a Year 9 geography lesson, the most able pupils are able to extract information from the web, relate it to their knowledge and understanding from previous lessons and were developing a real sense of purpose. Pupils of middle and low ability use the Internet to gather relevant information, and many pupils make use of cut and paste techniques for both text and images. Where they are less discriminating in the selection and refinement of this information, attainment is below expectations. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 show standards to be higher than predicted from their level of ability in Year 7. However, this assessment is not based on the full range of required skills. The lack of opportunity for pupils to develop skills across the complete range of software indicates that the current standard of assessment is generous.
181. The overall quality of teaching in the GNVQ course is good. In some instances it is very good. Teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge and are enthusiastic in their teaching. Lessons are well planned and many contain a diverse range of tasks which actively support the use of the on-line resources, and this maintains pupils' interest and engages them in learning. As a consequence, pupils know what they have to do, and how to do it, and are becoming good independent learners. All pupils are highly motivated. Pupils with English as a second language, along with many other pupils, take class work home on disc to continue with and complement their studies. There is little apparent difference in attainment of boys and girls.
182. Teaching of ICT within subjects across the curriculum is usually good. Lessons are well planned. Learning objectives are shared with pupils both for ICT and the host subject. Sometimes these learning objectives are not reviewed and consolidated at the end of a lesson, however. Effective use is made of the Internet. In religious education, pupils use the Internet along with other electronic sources of information and the school library for research. Pupils seek and select information which they use, for example, in the preparation of an extended story, such as the life of Martin Luther King. Across the curriculum, all pupils are able to combine text and graphics, with the more able pupils developing a good sense of presentation to suit different audiences. Teachers make regular checks on individual pupils' progress in lessons and provide pupils with good support and guidance. In some lessons, the acquisition of new skills varies with the level of the teacher's capability. Even so, the support from the ICT technician is well used to help pupils learn such new skills as scanning images and using software to rotate and place the image on their documents. Such support also helps teachers develop their own skills further. Learning is often consolidated when pupils support each other. In many lessons there is positive support for literacy through the explanations and the expectation that pupils will use ICT to highlight key words. In mathematics and French, pupils are enthusiastic about the use of ICT and subject specific software is used well to enhance learning.
183. Overall the management of ICT is satisfactory. The ICT co-ordinator is leading an audit of cross-curricular provision, and there is active support through in-service training for a number of subject teachers who are still developing their skills. As a result, usage of ICT is growing, and schemes of work are starting to include possibilities where ICT can be taught across the curriculum, used to enhance learning, and to ensure that pupils make progress in the development of their ICT capability.

There is a strong commitment to the provision of opportunities for research activities and communicating information by many subjects in Years 7 to 9.

184. However, the use of modelling with spreadsheets is as yet under-developed, and there is a lack of opportunity for pupils to develop skills using a database. Pupils are therefore not yet receiving their full entitlement of access to the programmes of study for ICT throughout Years 7 to 11. Assessment at age 14 is not yet rigorous enough because of the lack of provision for all elements of ICT, and as a result reports do not comment on the full achievement of ICT by pupils. There are significant aspects that require prompt action to rectify.
185. Since the last inspection, computer facilities have grown, and pupils and their teachers benefit from the high level of up-to-date resources for ICT, with four specialist computer rooms and the deployment of computers amongst subject areas. The ICT technician is helping the ICT co-ordinator and special educational needs co-ordinator by writing databases for specific administrative purposes. Computer clubs at lunchtime and after school are popular with pupils who wish to continue with class work, and prefects take responsibility to sign-in and manage pupils under the supervision of the librarian or teachers and this has a positive effect on learning.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths:

- All pupils have the opportunity to study two modern foreign languages.
- Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are above national expectations.
- Results in GCSE German have risen over the last three years and are well above average.
- Lower ability pupils make good or better progress in both languages.
- Teaching is good overall and very good in one third of lessons.

Areas for improvement:

- Results in GCSE French have fallen and are well below the national average.
- Boys do not do as well as girls at GCSE, particularly in French.
- Some accommodation is unsuitable.

[All pupils study French or German in Year 7, and both languages in Years 8 and 9. In Key Stage 4 pupils study French or German to GCSE, except for a small number who take an entry level German course. More pupils continue to study German than French. A small number continue with both languages. Evidence for this report came from the observation of 14 lessons, the scrutiny of work of representative pupils in each year group, and discussions with the head of department.]

186. The standard of attainment of pupils aged 14 in modern foreign languages is above average. In teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9, the percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 in 2001 was well above the national average. These standards were confirmed by inspection evidence. Pupils make good progress from Year 7 to Year 9. This is a creditable achievement, since the study of two languages in Years 8 and 9 reduces the amount of time allocated to each.

187. Standards at age 16 have risen overall since the last inspection. The great majority of pupils are entered for GCSE examinations, and for the last three years none has failed to gain a grade. This is better than in most secondary schools. In German, only nine per cent of the pupils who were entered achieved less than a grade D, against a national figure of 27 per cent. However, the proportion of pupils achieving a grade between A* and C has been falling in French, and is now well below the national average. In German, in which more pupils were examined in 2001, the results have been rising over the last three years, and the percentage achieving a higher grade is well above the national average. There is a considerable gap between the proportion of boys and girls achieving grades A* to C in both languages, but particularly in French. In 2001, 22 pupils took an entry level course in German, and all were awarded a distinction. Standards seen in lessons generally reflected the 2001 results. Pupils' overall progress in Years 10 and 11 is good.
188. Pupils' listening skills are generally well developed. They understand and respond to teachers' use of the foreign language, including instructions for tasks, or presentations of new words and structures. Older pupils cope well with detailed descriptions, complex task instructions and dialogues. For example, a Year 11 class understood and talked about the disagreements between parents and teenage children which they heard. In speaking, progress varies between teaching groups. All manage well with simple, structured exchanges, often with accurate grammar and pronunciation, especially in Years 10 and 11. Most pupils perform well in less directed tasks, use different tenses from Year 9, and more complex sentence structures. In both key stages pupils have few opportunities to give spontaneous, personalised responses and, in some classes, to develop accurate pronunciation.
189. Reading comprehension is satisfactory. Year 9 pupils could identify whether someone was writing about their television viewing in the past, present or future, and Year 7 pupils correctly coloured a picture according to the information in a passage they read for homework. In Years 10 and 11, pupils understand short passages in French or German and can pick out key information, such as details about hotel facilities. In some classes, a focus on literacy skills helps pupils to cope well with longer, more difficult passages. For example, a Year 10 group can read postcards, which involve a range of different tenses, and newly introduced vocabulary in different contexts. Standards in writing are mainly good. Pupils are able to copy new language items accurately, and presentation is usually very good. They cope well with closely structured writing tasks, for example, rearranging letters to make words in Year 7; writing short passages about daily routines in Year 8; and writing lengthier pieces such as letters with the aid of prompts in Years 10 and 11. More able pupils write accurately with less support, when opportunities are provided.
190. Lower ability pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress from Years 7 to 9, often in all four skills, and are able to recall much previously learned vocabulary. In Years 10 and 11 they progress very well, and many gain grades at GCSE that represent a considerable personal achievement. More able pupils are working considerably above the national average, but have too few opportunities to use language creatively, in less highly structured tasks. In lessons there were no notable differences between the performance of boys and girls, except where a very small number of boys displayed a lack of interest.

191. The overall quality of teaching is good, and was very good in a third of lessons seen. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Planning was generally good and sometimes outstanding: activities were designed to build up knowledge and understanding gradually, and were firmly based on pupils' starting points. As a result, a brisk pace was maintained and the lesson objectives were achieved by all. Other good features include the extensive use of the foreign language by the teacher, which helps to develop pupils' listening skills and understanding. Pupils were expected to use the language whenever possible, for example, to ask for equipment, a new book, or permission to use English. Some lessons included motivating pair work, for example, Year 7 pupils asking each other about pets in German. In a Year 10 class, pupils rose to the challenge of having one minute only to recall and practise a dialogue about buying a train ticket before performing. Homework is interesting, relevant, and suitably challenging. Major strengths of the department are behaviour management and relationships: teachers generally set high standards for all aspects of pupils' work and behaviour, value their efforts, and treat pupils with courtesy, to which they respond very positively. Pupils feel safe to try, without fear of criticism or scorn. Support for lower ability pupils is often very good, and includes targeted questions and help, and varying the demands of tasks or materials. For example, pupils with poor organising or literacy skills, in a Year 8 French lesson, had vocabulary lists to complete, rather than copy everything from the board, which helped them to record the words correctly and quickly. In one instance, the quality of teaching dipped below the satisfactory standard because of difficulties in integrating language and ICT activities.
192. The subject makes good contributions to the development of pupils' literacy skills, and increasingly supports their achievements in ICT, for example, in word processing and desktop publishing. Pupils' personal development is enhanced by the opportunities to learn about different cultures, to consider different viewpoints, and to develop further their social and communication skills.
193. Learners in both key stages, and across all ability ranges usually show very positive attitudes to the subject. They respond well to the secure routines in lessons, are attentive, and begin all tasks quickly and willingly. Their written work is very well presented, helping them to learn and revise the work they have covered. Pupils co-operate well and help one another. They talk confidently about their work and their progress.
194. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The department is very well led and managed, and teachers co-operate well as a team. They have worked hard to establish good assessment systems and are becoming skilful in target setting for pupils. Further work on this, and on marking policy, are already planned. The head of department monitors the teaching provision effectively through lesson observations, looking at pupils' work, and analysing assessment data. She is very clear about the direction that the subject team needs to go in and has a secure understanding of how the subject's needs fit within the school's overall priorities. Staffing is adequate, and support staff, including learning support and foreign language assistants, are generally well used. Accommodation is variable; some rooms are too small and place constraints on the teaching and learning, but all are well used, with lively and relevant displays. Resources are sufficient in number but many items need to be replaced.

MUSIC

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

Strengths:

- Pupils achieve very high standards in all years.
- Pupils make very good progress.
- Teaching is of a consistently high quality.
- Assessment and target setting arrangements are very successful.
- ICT is used very well to support learning.
- There is a very wide range of extracurricular activities provided.

Areas for improvement:

- The quality of accommodation.
- The quality of some acoustic instruments used in the classroom.

[Evidence for this report was gained from observing seven lessons, looking at samples of written work and compositions, speaking with pupils, hearing pupils perform and having discussions with the head of department.]

195. Pupils' attainment is above the national average throughout the school. Teachers' assessment information from Year 9 indicates that most pupils achieve the nationally expected standard and many substantially exceed it. Each year a significant number of pupils take GCSE examinations and overall, fare better in music than they do in their other subjects. There are no significant differences in the attainment of boys and girls.
196. Standards in every year are high. In Year 7, most pupils can perform confidently in a group, and listen to each other in order to keep together. They can compose simple melodic ideas and put them into sequence. They have a good sense of rhythm, developing and repeating short musical patterns. In Year 8, most pupils can improvise within a structure, and the more able pupils are able to do so with a strong sense of style. In Year 9, many pupils can compose effective melodies and some can improvise stylish accompaniments to them. In all years, pupils are able to appraise their work and by Year 11, are able to write critically and reflectively about their compositions.
197. Pupils make very good progress in the subject. There is a very effective system of logging work on diary sheets. Homework is used to consolidate learning and to enable pupils to reflect and set targets for the next lesson. In this way, they can quickly pick up on what they need to do next. Rapid progress is made because learning activities are well sequenced. Singing activities are well structured, and pupils are encouraged to improve through focus on breath control diction, and control of dynamics.
198. The department's ICT facility is used to support learning for all pupils. For instance, in a Year 8 class, pupils were able to create a piece of Indian music, and achieve an outcome of greater sophistication and complexity than could be achieved on acoustic instruments. Less able pupils are able to handle the software, following templates set up by the teacher. More able pupils are able to expand their work beyond these parameters and develop individual styles. The department has mapped pupils'

learning against the ICT levels of attainment so that progress can be measured against the assessment criteria of both the music curriculum and the ICT curriculum. The department places an appropriate emphasis on the development of literacy. Key words are displayed and pupils are both questioned about their meaning, and encouraged to use them in their own discussions. In a Year 10 lesson, paired discussion enabled pupils to talk freely to each other about similarities and differences between two pieces of music.

199. Within a secure and engaging learning environment, pupils behave and respond extremely well. There were a number of lessons seen where the attitude and behaviour of pupils were outstanding. On several occasions pupils were seen and heard to be talking about their learning as they left the room. Pupils value music and take their work very seriously. They respect and discuss each other's work positively. They talk enthusiastically about what they do in lessons and particularly enjoy the practical activities. Teachers take opportunities to draw out moral aspects of music making as they arise: for instance, in a Year 10 lesson on disco music, the discussion explored the legality of borrowing and copying other composers' ideas. Pupils have highly developed social skills, are able to interact positively with each other in groups and resolve minor differences without undue fuss. The music curriculum enables pupils to experience a range of cultures through planned topics within the curriculum, such as the Indian music project in Year 8, and through special projects developed in collaboration with visiting artists.
200. The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 11 is usually very good with many outstanding features. Teaching is characterised by well-structured lessons that include a range of well-paced activities. Time is always used very efficiently and tasks are clearly explained so that pupils know exactly what to do, and why they are doing it. Learning objectives are always shared at the start of lessons and reinforced at key points. No time is wasted: pupils are given something to do whilst the register is being taken at the start, and learning is recapped as they depart. Teachers have high expectations and, through effective questioning techniques, ensure that learning is consolidated. In Years 10 and 11 in particular, probing questions are effectively used to extend pupils' insights into the music being studied.
201. In Years 7 to 9, short, focused tasks are set within clearly defined time limits that are adhered to. Activities are planned carefully to ensure that everyone can contribute and achieve. In group work, less able pupils are given simple parts to develop, and their contribution is valued by the teacher and others in the group. Extension activities are available for the more able. The management of the classroom and its resources by the teacher is always excellent. Little time is wasted moving to and from groups, or giving out resources. This is done efficiently despite the cramped conditions in which some classes have to work.
202. Assessment is a very strong feature of the department's work. Pupils write, review and refocus their individual targets, and in each lesson there are clear objectives against which they can measure their progress. Detailed information is also recorded by the teacher, creating a substantial body of evidence against which judgements can be securely made in formal assessments in Year 9. Through the reporting system,

pupils and parents are fully informed about strengths and targets for development, but there is often no statement about the progress of individual pupils since the last report.

203. The department is very effectively led. The head of department has a clear vision of the direction in which the department is moving. Departmental policies are implemented consistently, and follow school policy. The head of music also has a role in overseeing and developing arts activities in the school. This role has enabled pupils to access a wide range of arts experiences. Links with partner primary schools are very strong and strategies exist which enable new pupils to be quickly integrated into the musical life of the school. A scholarship scheme encourages talented pupils to learn to play instruments. Arrangements for pupils to continue their programme of learning from Years 6 to 7 is well developed. The two members of the department work effectively together, sharing some developments and taking individual responsibility for other areas according to their own strengths and interests.
204. Accommodation for music is poor. One classroom is very small and L shaped. Sound pollution is a major problem. Listening activities are adversely affected by interruptions from sounds in nearby rooms, and in a Year 11 lesson, a pupil was unable to hear what she was playing because of another instrument being played in the next room. There is inadequate provision of practice rooms for the peripatetic instrumental teachers, and for groups of pupils to work. When classes divide into groups, some pupils have to work in a corridor or on a landing at the top of a flight of stairs. This creates a safety hazard. This was the only major issue raised in the last inspection, and it has not been addressed. In all other respects the department has maintained the high standard recognised in the last inspection report.
205. The department is well resourced. Plans are in hand to upgrade the quality of some of the acoustic percussion instruments used in the classroom. In particular, the sound made by the small glockenspiels is not of good quality. Some of these instruments also have a limited range of notes which restricts what can be achieved.
206. The improvement since the last inspection has been good. The significant strengths reported upon in the last inspection have been maintained and in many instances improved upon further. Music enjoys a very high profile in the school. The department is able to provide tuition on a wide range of instruments, and a huge range of extracurricular activities is offered. At a wind band rehearsal observed, the direction by the teacher was of a very high professional quality. Teachers devote much time and energy in nurturing these groups, which cater for the needs of a wide range of performers. Taped evidence demonstrated that choral groups perform to a very high standard. Pupils enjoy participating in musical rehearsals, concerts, competitions and foreign tours. The social opportunities that such participation brings are very highly valued by pupils and parents alike.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- Pupils progress well from Years 7 to 9, and many continue to make good progress in Years 10 and 11.
- Those pupils who follow a GCSE course in Years 10 and 11 achieve results that are above the national average.
- Pupils are very enthusiastic learners and participators in physical education activities.
- Relationships between pupils and staff are very good.
- Very appropriate support is given to pupils with special educational needs.
- There is an outstanding range of out-of-hours learning activities available.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement:

- Inadequate indoor accommodation and poorly maintained external facilities.
- Development planning lacks detail and arrangements for monitoring and evaluation.

[The evidence for this report was gained from observing eight lessons, from a detailed discussion with the head of physical education, from the analysis of records and documents and from other discussions with teachers and pupils.]

207. The standard of attainment in physical education reached by most pupils aged 14 is in line with average national standards. This represents a considerable achievement as the standards achieved by the majority of pupils when they enter the school at age 11 are below national average. Most pupils continue to make good progress and by age 16 they also attain satisfactory standards. Rising standards of attainment in GCSE are in line with national trends and are being achieved by a much larger proportion of pupils than in most schools. Overall, recent GCSE results match the national average. The GCSE course is a very popular option with a quarter of pupils in the year group following the course. In 2001, the percentage of pupils gaining A* to C grades was well above the national average and in line with the average standard for the school. A small minority of pupils enter Year 7 with attainment above the national benchmark Level 4 and a large proportion are still at the lower Level 3. In particular, pupils in Year 7 find it difficult to send and receive the ball accurately and consistently in games activities such as hockey. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and those from ethnic minority groups, make satisfactory gains in knowledge, skills and understanding from the beginning of Year 7 to the end of Year 9. Higher, average and lower attaining pupils, continue to make good progress in Years 10 and 11 in both National Curriculum (non-examination) and GCSE courses.
208. In work seen during the inspection, pupils in Years 7 to 9 were making good overall progress. In Year 7, girls were persevering in practices to improve the dribbling and pushing skills in hockey, even though the surface of the playing area was uneven. In Year 8, boys were collaborating in groups of threes and fours to improve their handling skills and to perfect loop and inside passes in rugby. Year 9 pupils were able to play the recognised form of doubles in badminton, scoring accurately. Higher attaining pupils considered and adopted specific tactics in order to gain advantage over opponents.

209. In work seen during the inspection, pupils in Years 10 and 11 continued to increase their knowledge, and skills. Boys and girls worked hard in health-related exercise lessons and developed further understanding of some principles of training. In the GCSE theory lesson observed, effective teaching enabled pupils in Year 10 to experience the effect of different types of motivation on performance and the acquisition of skill. In a GCSE practical football lesson observed, pupils improved their ability to select appropriate skills in order to find space and time to shoot at goal. They transferred these skills into small-sided games very effectively.
210. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are very good. In Years 7 to 9, all pupils engage readily in learning tasks. They work with enthusiasm and sustain concentration, working collaboratively even when the condition of the playing surface inhibits learning. For example, Year 9 pupils persevered in hockey trying to send, receive and travel with the ball consistently and accurately across poorly maintained (uneven) areas of field. Pupils also show respect for others, equipment and resources. In Years 10 and 11, almost all pupils were co-operative and worked productively. For example, Year 11 boys and girls engaged in individual group and independent learning tasks in health related exercise lessons to meet personal targets and learning objectives. A small minority of boys was inattentive and unwilling to respond to the teacher's requests. In the GCSE theory lesson observed, pupils were keen to contribute and prepared to risk answering questions even when they were not completely confident of having the correct answer.
211. The overall quality of teaching in physical education is good. In the best lessons, planning provides a framework for learning with clear objectives that are shared with pupils. Relationships between teachers and pupils are a particular strength. Pupils are afforded respect which they return. There is mutual trust and confidence between pupils and staff which provides a firm foundation for learning, especially among pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. There is a brisk pace to lessons and teachers use good subject knowledge effectively to guide and support individual pupils in their learning. Learning tasks are closely matched to pupils' attainment. Teachers have very good knowledge of the pupils in their classes which they use to ensure that high, average and lower attainers are given appropriate challenge and opportunities for success. Pupils are also given the opportunity to reinforce and extend knowledge through teaching others. In the least effective lessons, the pace of learning is slowed as pupils wait their turn to complete tasks and class management fails to ensure that all pupils can see demonstrations. Student teachers are at times given insufficient support in ensuring that all pupils are attentive and co-operative.
212. Learning opportunities within the curriculum are limited by minimal time allocation, (50 minutes for some lessons), restricted indoor accommodation and poorly maintained outdoor facilities. In particular, the hard play area is unsafe: the surface is unstable and holes, broken glass, mud and broken fencing present hazards to pupils and staff. The playing field is poorly maintained, fouled by dogs, and littered with rubbish, including drinks cans. These hazards have to be removed before learning can begin. Storage space in the sports hall and the hall is inadequate. The equipment and furniture placed at the end of the hall reduces teaching space and presents a hazard to pupils. The changing rooms provide sufficient space but there are too few showerheads to enable pupils to shower after lessons. By contrast the provision of

out-of-hours learning activities is a strength. A broad range of activities is well supported by boys and girls. There is a high level of commitment from staff and very effective links with the community, including the use of adults other than teachers. The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, operating at bronze, silver and gold level, is very successful; and good use is made of the school's residential centre.

213. Physical education is well led and managed. There is a clear division of responsibilities in the department and working procedures are well-established and clearly understood by pupils and staff. High expectations of all are matched by a clear (yet realistic) vision for development. The physical education curriculum has been thoroughly planned and organised to make the most of the reduced time allocation, and the inadequate accommodation and facilities. At present, development planning lacks sufficient detail and there is no formal system for monitoring the quality of teaching. Some use is made of ICT to support learning in physical education. This needs to be developed to extend opportunities for pupils to evaluate and improve their own and others' performance.
214. High standards reported upon in the last inspection in physical education have been maintained. The majority of pupils continue to reach Level 5 by the age of 14 and the proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in GCSE remains above the national average. The quality of teaching continues to be good overall and pupils with special educational needs are very well supported. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour remain positive and there is clear focus on learning throughout the department. Further work remains to be done to ensure adequate time allocation and improved facilities and accommodation for pupils in this subject area. The award of a Sportsmark to the school justifiably recognises the strengths in this subject.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- A high standard of attainment by age 14, and above average GCSE results in religious education.
- Energetic and imaginative teaching that is of a very good quality.
- Enthusiastic pupil responses.
- Good use of ICT to enrich and extend learning.
- Many valuable opportunities to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- A clear focus on raising the performance of boys.

Areas for improvement:

- The curriculum time available in Years 10 and 11 for non-examination course pupils is insufficient to meet the needs of the agreed syllabus.
- A greater focus on subject-specific target setting in reporting is needed.
- The accommodation in a time-expired temporary building is inadequate.

[Evidence for this report was gained from the observation of ten lessons, together with the scrutiny of the work of representative pupils in each year group. Pupils were interviewed, and their work that was displayed was examined. Detailed discussions were held with the head of department.]

215. The overall standard of attainment in religious education is above average for all pupils aged 14 and those who study the subject at GCSE to age 16.
216. The standard of attainment at the end of Year 9 is high according to teachers' assessments. The evidence of classroom observation and work scrutiny indicates that the standard attained in Years 7 and 8 is also high. Many pupils discuss religious experience and religious ideas in a manner consistent with the attainment target of 'learning from religion' rather than just that of 'learning about religion', and so they are being propelled, or propelling themselves, into the higher grades specified by the Dudley agreed syllabus pilot assessment proposals. Much of the highest attainment was observed at an oral level. The evidence is that many pupils are responding to the challenges of religious education in a very positive manner, to the degree that their oral attainment is outpacing a written capability that is itself above average. In other words, the inclusive and encouraging nature of the curriculum is enabling pupils of all abilities to succeed well.
217. In GCSE religious studies in 2001, this school secured a 55 per cent pass rate for grades A* to C and an overall pass rate of 93 per cent. These figures reflect a consistent pattern in recent years. Results were in line with national averages and were achieved with an entry level that was much higher than the national average. However, within these results the girls secured a 70 per cent pass for grades A* to C as compared with the boys at 27 per cent. In overall terms the girls secured a 98 per cent pass as compared with 85 per cent for the boys. A much higher proportion of pupils study religious education at GCSE than in most schools nationally. Evidence of prior attainment revealed that these results were broadly in line with expectation and that the results were skewed by a reluctance of able boys to opt for examination courses in religious studies. Lesson observations and scrutiny of written work confirmed that standards of attainment are high in the present Years 10 and 11 because they explore religious ideas and moral viewpoints in a very sophisticated manner and apply this knowledge well to sensitive and controversial contexts. The evidence from Year 10 is that the levels of conceptual awareness are higher than in Year 11, so attainment levels are rising. These standards of attainment are mirrored in the non-examination courses provided in Years 10 and 11 but the range of attainment is limited by the amount of curriculum time available to this provision.
218. Attitudes to religious education are consistently at least good, and generally very good or excellent. Pupils of all kinds clearly are responding very positively to the encouraging atmosphere generated in lessons. This means that progress is always good throughout both key stages because pupils generally are highly motivated and wish to achieve well in religious education. Their positive attitudes are reflected by a determination to proceed with their work, which adds a momentum to the pace of lessons; the sensible manner in which sensitive and controversial issues are encountered and discussed; and the manner in which they use prior learning and wider experience to inform their present work. Pupils take issues of social concern and religious experience extremely seriously. One particular example that illustrates this is the decision of some Year 10 pupils to sponsor a Third World child financially as an extension of their response to work on Christian Aid.

219. The overall quality of teaching in religious education is very good. Teaching is often very good or excellent. Its range of outstanding qualities is extensive. This has been developed from the strong foundations identified at the last inspection but it has also been further influenced by the department's role in initial teacher training. An energetic and imaginative approach to teaching blends together a strong emphasis on learning objectives and study skills. Careful use of appropriate terminology and promotion of fluent prose aids understanding and also assists progress greatly. Strong teacher knowledge of the subject and the appropriate use of teaching and learning strategies, within a highly encouraging atmosphere. Two particular strengths are the department's commitment to the use of ICT within the curriculum and a determination to focus on improving the attainment of boys. There is great sensitivity in the teaching and learning approaches adopted. Pupils in Year 10, for example, who were being confronted by the horrors of the Holocaust were visibly supported and counselled as they struggled with their emotional response to the enormity of the suffering which they were beginning to recognise. Pupils studying key moral issues of modern times, such as abortion and suicide, were sensitively guided into recognising the religious context in which such issues could be considered. Homework is always of a constructive nature and builds on the work in classrooms. Assessment is another particular strength of the department. Teachers are seen continually to check on pupil understanding during the lessons, and the assessment commentaries provided at the end of homework and assessment exercises very clearly and thoroughly identify strengths and weaknesses and areas for improvement. Subject-specific target setting is less well developed in the various forms of reporting to parents.
220. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum is fully meeting the teaching and learning requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. It has breadth, in terms of the coverage of world faiths alongside the study of Christianity. Pupils are seen to be exploring the detail of religious experience but are also being guided to see that the interpretation of religious experience can provide important lessons for their own life approaches. There is also rigour and relevance because there is depths to what is being covered, partly at least because of the good use of time, and also because of the linkage being made between the topics being addressed and present-day events and experiences. In GCSE religious studies, the syllabus requirements are fully met and the rigour and relevance mentioned previously occur with greater intensity. In the non-examination religious education in Years 10 and 11, this pattern continues but the time allocation is below recommended levels and so the curriculum available is inadequate to be fully compliant with statutory requirements. Throughout the various learning programmes in religious education, spiritual, moral, social and cultural education are a particular strength of the provision and, indeed, the impact of these on attainment and attitudes is very pronounced. There are many opportunities for pupils to explore their feelings and emotional responses to such contexts as how religious people deal with moral issues and make their judgements in such areas as abortion. The work relating to the Holocaust illustrates very firmly the determination of the department to explore issues of right and wrong. The extension of moral learning into such areas as the plight of the street children of Brazil is a good example of social awareness raising. The pupils are also being given a strong grounding in the beliefs and religious practices of people in a variety of world faiths as well as Christianity and as a result they are receiving a good cultural awareness of peoples of other areas both within and beyond the United Kingdom.

221. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The leadership in religious education is strong and well informed, and it is rooted in teamwork. All strategies are monitored and evaluated, so that their effectiveness can be assured. This is a department of subject specialists and they use their resources well, although the classrooms in which they largely teach are extremely run down. This department has responded fully to the commentary provided by the previous inspection report and the departmental plan reveals that it has a clear programme for future action. The department's adoption of, and incorporation in the curriculum of, ICT is a working example of how this developmental process has proceeded and is continuing to proceed.