

INSPECTION REPORT

CHILTERN EDGE SCHOOL

Sonning Common, Reading, Berkshire

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123245

Headteacher: Kevin Howarth

Reporting inspector: John Stephens
1699

Dates of inspection: 12th – 16th November 2001

Inspection number: 192991

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Allen Harris
Date of previous inspection:	10/02/1997

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22536	Keith Whittlestone	Team inspector	Science	
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3534	Ann Braithwaite	Team inspector	Physical Education, Equal Opportunities	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

Chiltern Edge Community School is an 11-16 mixed comprehensive school with just over 900 pupils. The school is set in a rural location in the south eastern part of Oxfordshire. However, two thirds of the pupils still come from urban areas of north Reading, which was historically part of the school's catchment area. The differing communities served by the school are relatively affluent, and there is high employment. At the time of the inspection 4.3% of the pupils were eligible for free school meals, which is a low figure compared to schools nationally. The pupils' levels of attainment when they enter the school are above the national average. There are 19.7% of pupils with special educational needs and 2.8% with statements of special need, both figures being in line with national averages. The school population is predominantly white, but there is a growing number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. Following the 1997 Ofsted inspection the school was awarded Beacon status.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Chiltern Edge provides a good standard of education for its pupils. Teachers work hard and the overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Pupils have positive attitudes towards the school, which cares for them very well. The headteacher, senior managers and governors provide good leadership and a clear direction for development. The school manages its finances well, and gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- The quality of teaching and learning is good, and enables pupils of all abilities and backgrounds to make good progress.
- Standards of attainment are well above the national average.
- There is effective leadership by the headteacher, leadership team and Governing Body.
- The professional development of staff is supported very well.
- Pupils are cared for very well, and enjoy coming to school.
- There are good relationships throughout the school, and the behaviour of the great majority of pupils is good.
- Provision for pupils with special needs is good, and they make good progress.
- There is an effective personal, social and health education programme.
- Links with the community, local schools and the tertiary college make a very good contribution to the pupils' learning.
- The moral and social education of the pupils are good.
- The quality of the information provided for parents is good.

What could be improved

- In Years 7-9 too many classes are taught by more than one teacher, and a small minority of Year 8 and 9 pupils do not always behave well in lessons.
- The assessment of the pupils' work is not sufficiently uniform across the school.
- Statistical information on the attainment of pupils is not used consistently to evaluate the school's performance and provide targets for improvement.
- Statutory requirements for teaching information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 7-9 are not met.
- The learning support assistants are not sufficiently involved in the planning of lessons.
- Some of the accommodation is in need of further refurbishment and improvement.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in February 1997, and there were five key issues for the school to address. The improvement since that inspection has been satisfactory.

Assessment: In 1997 assessment practice was found to be inconsistent and not properly understood by pupils. There is now a clear whole school policy and pupils have a good understanding of the process; practice is more consistent, but some improvement is still needed.

Teacher Appraisal: This is now done very well under the performance management system.

Heads of Department Management Roles: There has been good development here, and heads of department now have a proper management role.

Collective Worship: The school does not comply with statutory requirements.

Maintenance of the Teaching Areas: There have been some improvements, for example most science laboratories and the art rooms have been refurbished and six new classrooms are being built. Other areas of the building are still in need of improvement.

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
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	A	A	B	C

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

Standards in almost all subjects at GCSE are well above the national average, and none are below. Although the overall results at GCSE are average compared with similar schools, the percentage of pupils who gain five or more A*-C grades is above average. Girls perform better than boys at GCSE, but because boys achieve well in this school the difference is less than the national figure, and much lower than other Oxfordshire schools. Results in art are not consistent from year to year, and the pupils' 2001 GCSE mathematics results were below those they achieved in the other core subjects of English and science. In 2001 the school's results were below the target set by one percentage point.

Standards at the end of Year 9 are consistently well above average for the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. They are in line with standards achieved in similar schools. Standards reached in all other subjects are at least what would be expected from pupils of this age, with the exception of ICT. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress during Years 7-9. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.

Standards of written work are good in English. Pupils read aloud very well, and standards of speaking and listening are good. Standards of literacy are good across the school. Standards in mathematics are satisfactory overall, and more able mathematicians reach particularly good levels. Standards of numeracy across the school are improving, although the mental skills of the older pupils need development. Standards in science are good throughout the school, and on average pupils perform better than in English and mathematics. In ICT, standards are below average in Years 7-9, but above in Years 10 and 11.

Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall. This is always the case when they are taught by the curriculum support department, but not always in mainstream lessons if their individual needs are not supported effectively.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good - the pupils have positive attitudes, and parents report that their children enjoy school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Overall standards of behaviour are good, with the exception of a small minority of pupils, mainly in Years 8 and 9. Behaviour around the building is good - boisterous, but rarely aggressive.
Personal development and relationships	Good overall - pupils from all backgrounds mix and work well together. Relationships between staff and pupils are generally positive and friendly.
Attendance	Levels of attendance are satisfactory.

In most lessons the pupils respond well to the teaching. Although pupils behave well around the site, they drop too much litter. The level of fixed term and permanent exclusions is average for a school of this size. The school is free of racial tension. Pupils are mutually supportive, and listen well to each other's views. Pupils are keen to take on responsibilities. The School Council has a proper role. Punctuality to lessons is good.

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.

The teaching in English is good overall, and during the inspection no unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Expectations are high, and the work is suitably challenging. In mathematics teaching is satisfactory overall. Lessons are planned well, and there is a good range of teaching methods, but in some lessons the work is not sufficiently demanding and there is too much reliance on textbooks. The quality of teaching in science is good. Lessons are carefully planned, practical work is well organised and the teachers' expectations are generally high. In all three subjects the teachers have good subject knowledge.

The overall quality of the teaching in the school is good, and in more than nine out of every ten lessons observed during the inspection teaching was satisfactory, and in seven out of ten it was good or better. Teaching is equally strong throughout the school, with the exception of a few lessons in Years 8 and 9. There are no significant differences between subjects. Characteristics of the good teaching include thorough planning, demanding tasks, firm classroom management, a variety of activities and lessons which move at a good pace.

The skills of literacy are taught satisfactorily across the curriculum, and departments are increasingly taking account of pupils' literacy needs in their planning. Strategies to support numeracy are less well developed, but further training will take place as part of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy.

Most lessons are planned to meet the needs of all pupils, and those with special educational needs are normally well supported. However, learning support assistants are insufficiently involved in the teachers' lesson planning, which makes them less effective.

The pupils have good learning skills. They respond well to challenges, work effectively both independently and in small groups and are capable of sustained concentration.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is satisfactory overall, and meets the needs of all pupils. Extra-curricular provision is good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good overall and statutory requirements are met. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The social and moral education of the pupils is good, cultural education is satisfactory, but there are weaknesses in the provision for spiritual education. Opportunities are missed to build on the good practice of some departments in this area.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares very well for its pupils, and there is positive support at all levels for pupils' physical, social and emotional needs.

The school's partnership with parents is good - parents are supportive, and have largely positive views about the school. There are regular well-written newsletters for parents, and the quality of annual reports is good. Despite this, some parents do not feel properly informed about their children's progress, and the school should find out why this is. Parents evenings are well attended, and the parents association raises a lot of money for the school.

Although the curriculum is satisfactory overall, the provision of ICT in Years 7-9 does not conform to statutory requirements. There are too many classes in Years 7-9 which are taught by more than one teacher. The provision for personal and social education is good, as is the work experience scheme, careers education and curricular links with the local and business communities.

Pupils are particularly well supported by the school at times of change - transfer from primary school, GCSE options and transfer to Post-16 education. Pupils and parents report that there is very little oppressive behaviour such as racism and bullying, due to the school's effective management of this area. The systems of recording the academic progress of pupils are not sufficiently consistent, and heads of year are insufficiently involved. There are good mentoring opportunities for pupils, both from older pupils and through e-mails from members of the business community

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership and management of the school are good - the recently formed leadership team has made a good start - heads of department and year have an increasingly effective management role.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are closely involved with the school's development, and have a good knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses. They fulfil their statutory requirements with the exception of ICT in Years 7-9 and collective worship.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good overall - the monitoring of teaching and identification of development priorities are done well - some further work is needed in the use of performance data for evaluation purposes.
The strategic use of resources	Funding is used carefully to support the school's development priorities - financial control and administration are very good.

All staff are committed and work hard. The school has an adequate number of teachers, and the subject knowledge of specialist teachers is good. Recruitment problems have resulted in some classes being taught by non-specialist teachers. The level of resources is generally satisfactory, but there are some

shortages in technology, geography, religious education and drama. There have been some improvements to the accommodation, but some inadequacies remain, particularly in music, drama, technology and physical education.

The headteacher has a clear view for the strategic direction of the school. There is a shared commitment to succeed. The quality of development planning at whole-school and department level is very good. Systems for the professional development of staff, and the induction of new staff, are very good. The school's financial administrators have clear and effective systems for obtaining best value in the use of resources.

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 values promoted by the school. • Their children like coming to school. • Most of the teaching in the school. • The systems for supporting pupils when they transfer from primary school. • The way that the school cares for the pupils. • Extra-curricular clubs and activities, and drama and music performances. • The ways in which the school responds to their concerns. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The setting of homework and the use of homework record books. • Behaviour in Years 8-9, and particularly in Year 8. • Some aspects of the buildings. • The ways in which the school informs them about their children's progress.

The findings of the inspection agree with the items which please parents, and with some of the improvements suggested. The quality of the homework set is often good, but the homework timetable is not followed by all teachers. Behaviour is generally good in the school, but there are a few lessons in Years 8 and 9 where it is unsatisfactory. The use and checking of homework record books by tutors is not consistent. There have been some improvements to the building, but the quality of some areas does affect the teaching. The school provides good information for parents, but many still feel they are not sufficiently informed, and the school will need to find out why this is.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The attainments of the pupils when they enter the school are above the national average. In the National Curriculum tests in English and mathematics for pupils in Year 6, attainment in the higher Levels 5 and above also exceeded the national average. NFER tests of potential which the pupils take in Year 7 also indicate average levels of ability higher than those found nationally.

2. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests for pupils in Year 9 the standards reached in English were above the national average, and well above in mathematics and science. When performance in these three core subjects is combined, the Year 9 pupils at Chiltern Edge have reached levels well above the national average for three of the last four years, and above average for the remaining one. This indicates good progress from Years 7-9. There is no significant difference between the results of boys and girls. Assessments by teachers of attainment in the other subjects show standards to be at least in line with what is expected in all subjects, and often above. In geography standards are well above the expected level.

3. When the school's results in the core subjects at in Years 7-9 are compared with all other schools who have less than 5% of pupils eligible for free schools meals, the judgement is that levels of attainment are average in mathematics and science, and below average in English. The area served by the school has high levels of employment and income, and therefore the percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is low. This does not, however, adequately reflect the average levels of ability of the pupils when they enter the school, which are above average, but not well above. The comparison with other schools on the basis of free school meals is therefore difficult. In addition the school's percentage of pupils eligible for free schools meals is very close to five per cent, which would mean that a different range of schools would be used for comparison. It is therefore the judgement of this inspection that it would be more accurate to compare Chiltern Edge with schools in the next free school meal bracket, which is 5%-9%. In this case, a comparison with similar schools would mean that in 2000 results were average in English, and well above average in mathematics and science; and they would be above average overall.

4. At GCSE the school's percentage of pupils gaining more than 5 A*-C grades has been above the national performance by an average of 17.5% for the last five years. The figures for more than 5 A*-G grades have varied between average and well above average. Girls perform better than boys, but the difference is less than the national average, and is the least of any Oxfordshire secondary school. This is because boys generally achieve well in this school. In 2001 the school's target for pupils gaining more than 5 A*-C grades was 66%, and the achieved result was 65%. When the school's GCSE results for 2000 were compared with schools whose pupils achieved similar results at the end of Year 9 the 5+A*-C result was above average, and the 5+A*-G figure was average. However, in comparison with these similar schools, the Chiltern Edge figure for pupils gaining one or more A*-G grades was below average, which meant the overall results were average compared to similar schools. (At the time of the inspection comparative figures for the 2001 examinations were not available.)

5. Standards in English are above the national average throughout the school. Boys perform less well than girls, but the difference is less than that found nationally. Almost all pupils achieve a GCSE grade, which is evidence of the good progress made by pupils with special educational needs. Although standards in GCSE English language are similar to

those at the time of the school's last inspection in 1997, standards in GCSE English literature have risen. Standards of written work are good, and pupils write fluently and at length. Spelling and punctuation are generally good. In Years 10 and 11, pupils critical writing in response to literature is of a very high standard. The standards of reading are good in all years, and pupils read aloud very well, a skill not developed at the time of the last inspection. Standards of speaking are very good throughout the school, and standards of listening were good in almost all lessons seen during the inspection.

6. At the end of Year 9 the standards achieved in mathematics are broadly in line with those achieved in English and science. The more able mathematicians reach particularly good standards. The Year 9 pupils are good at learning, and applying new skills and methods. Some pupils have difficulty with basic number work, including percentages. Progress to GCSE is average, but in 2001 the percentage of pupils gaining A*-C grades fell, and as a result standards attained in mathematics were lower than those in English and science. However, one year's results are not necessarily significant, and the department is taking steps to raise standards again next year. In years 10 and 11 pupils work confidently in mathematics, although there are some weaknesses in basic mental skills. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls.

7. In science at the end of Year 9 pupils perform on average better than in English and mathematics. The standards of work seen during the inspection were good, and indicate that pupils achieve well in science from Year 7-9. They have a good grasp of a wide range of science topics, and increase their depth of understanding as they move through the school. There is no significant variation in the performances of boys and girls. This progress continues in Years 10 and 11, and pupils taking courses at the higher level show good knowledge and understanding of complex concepts. Lower attaining pupils make particularly good progress, although a small number, often boys, lack confidence in writing and scientific vocabulary. By the end of Year 11 most pupils can conduct reasonably sophisticated investigations.

8. In information and communication technology (ICT) there is a variation in standards attained by the younger and older pupils. In Years 7-9 all pupils can log on to a computer, retrieve saved files and manipulate data to suit the tasks set. However, many can do this when they enter the school, and the shortcomings of the cross-curricular approach in Years 8 and 9 mean that achievement is low. There is a better picture in Years 10-11, where both the core and GCSE courses promote higher standards. By the end of Year 11 most pupils are able to use the ICT facilities with confidence. Standards seen in lessons were average, but the percentage of pupils who gained an A*-C grade in the 2001 GCSE examination was well above the national average.

9. Standards in the 2001 GCSE examinations in the other subjects of the curriculum were all above the national average, with the exception of art, where they were average for the GCSE course, but below average for the GNVQ course. Standards in art have fluctuated over the years, and in 2000 they were above average. In other subjects good progress is made during Years 10 and 11, and consequently there is a rise in standards. In the 2001 results this was the case in design and technology, history, modern foreign languages, physical education, religious education and music. Standards in geography are very high throughout the school. Standards in drama are very good in the GCSE examination. Generally the standards reached at the end of Year 11 indicate that pupils have made good progress since they entered the school.

10. Standards of literacy throughout the school are generally good. Pupils are confident and fluent when speaking and are able to read a range of texts which challenge and extend their understanding. They listen well and can concentrate for extended periods of time. They

are able to adapt their writing to the varied demands of the curriculum. Standards of accuracy and presentation are good although a minority of pupils struggle with spelling, punctuation and syntax. The development of pupils' literacy skills is a priority for the school in its development planning.

11. Pupils' skills and knowledge in number work are improving, particularly in Years 7-9, where the implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy has helped pupils to consolidate and extend their oral and mental skills. Younger pupils have a sound knowledge of basic mathematical skills. They know facts by heart and can use a good range of calculation strategies. Older pupils are sometimes over-reliant on the use of calculators. In Years 9-11, mental skills are less secure, particularly in lower ability sets. Pupils' basic mathematical knowledge supports their studies in other subject areas. For example, Year 11 pupils make good use of ratios and formulae in their work on transformers in science, and they draw and measure accurately in design and technology. In lessons, pupils' oral skills are being well developed through the setting of collaborative tasks. However, key mathematical vocabulary is not sufficiently highlighted when introduced to pupils.

12. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall. Within the curriculum support department, pupils achieve well and make at least good progress. Teachers ensure work is clearly targeted at their needs, pitched at an appropriate level and they have the necessary individual support to ensure they learn effectively. Their work shows clear progress in skills of reading, writing and comprehension, as this can be seen in the well structured Youth Award Scheme and Certificate of Achievement course. In mainstream lessons progress is good where teachers plan to meet individual needs and where pupils are well monitored and supported.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

13. Pupils' attitudes to their work are good overall, which is an improvement on the satisfactory attitudes noted at the time of the previous inspection. Evidence from the pre-inspection parents' meeting and the questionnaire show that most parents feel that their children enjoy coming to the school, and that the school promotes positive attitudes. In most lessons, in all year groups, pupils respond well to the teaching. They are often keen enthusiastic and interested, as was seen in a Year 11 science lesson on building a transformer. Younger pupils in Year 7, designing packaging in a design and technology lesson, responded eagerly to their teacher's challenge. Pupils listen carefully, show interest and are keen to get on with the task set. They respond particularly well to lessons which provide challenging tasks, taught at a brisk pace by teachers with whom they have a clear rapport.

14. Pupils are keen to take part in lunchtime activities such as the choir, or to audition for parts in the school's musical drama production. There is a School Council, and the minutes indicate a genuine exchange of views taking place. Students are also given the opportunity to show prospective parents around the school. Each week different Year 9 pupils take part in community service, involving activities both in and out of the school. Year 11 pupils choose a charity to support each year, and organise a variety of fundraising activities. There is also a yearly sponsored walk, and all pupils and staff take part. Between £7,000 and £8,000 is raised, and is used for curriculum projects.

15. Behaviour, overall, is good, as was the case at the time of the last inspection. However, behaviour is not universally good. There are pockets of unsatisfactory behaviour, especially in Years 8 and 9, where, for example, a minority of pupils were unco-operative during the morning registration and tutorial session. Behaviour in lessons is usually good and not infrequently excellent, and is particularly consistent in Year 7. However, in a small minority of

lessons in Years 8 and 9 pupils did not behave well. This was usually when the teaching failed to hold their interest, or where the teacher was not sufficiently firm about acceptable boundaries. Concern over the behaviour of a minority of the older pupils in Years 8 and 9 was expressed at the pre-inspection parents' meeting.

16. Behaviour out of lessons varies from just satisfactory to very good, and is good overall. Pupils are courteous to visitors, asking if they need help in finding a particular classroom for example. In moving about the school, pupils are frequently boisterous and noisy, though rarely impolite. At break and lunch times, social interaction is lively and good-natured, and no instances of aggressive or challenging conduct were seen. However, pupils are not generally considerate about litter, and after breaktimes there is a considerable amount in the dining area and quadrangle, despite the adequate number of waste bins.

17. Over the preceding twelve months, there were sixty nine fixed period exclusions and three permanent exclusions, representing in terms of individual pupils thirty nine boys and eleven girls. These levels are average for a school of this size. The exclusion process is carefully monitored by the school's senior management and governing body.

18. The personal development of the pupils is good overall. The school is an inclusive community. Pupils of all abilities and ethnic origins mix well; the school is free of racial tensions and no overt sexism was seen. Relationships between pupils are good. They are supportive of each other in lessons and work well in pairs and groups when required to do so. In lessons, such as physical education and drama, where pupils are required to evaluate each other's work, they do so responsibly and maturely. Relationships between pupils and staff are generally cordial; and in most classes and tutor groups they are characterised by a positive rapport and good humour. In Years 10 and 11, many pupils are confident, mature and articulate. They are happy to play a significant part in the life of the school, such as acting as prefects and taking responsibility for school events like assisting with the Year 7 parents' evening, organising the Year 11 Ball and promoting the school's musical drama performance. In Years 10 and 11 pupils are beginning to understand the impact of their actions upon others, including those interviewed in the internal exclusion classroom, who were reflective.

19. Levels of attendance are satisfactory. Registration procedures are carried out effectively and the majority of pupils arrive on time. Little time is wasted in moving from lesson to lesson during the day, and pupils generally arrive punctually to their lessons.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

20. The overall quality of teaching is good. In more than nine out of every ten of the 184 lessons observed teaching was satisfactory or better. In nearly seven out of ten lessons it was good or better. Ten lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory, and three were poor. The quality of teaching was almost identical for younger and older pupils. There was little difference between Years 10 and 11. However for the younger pupils the strongest year was Year 7, where no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. The weakest teaching was in Year 8, where two of the thirty three lessons seen were unsatisfactory, and two were poor.

21. There were a number of common factors in the best teaching. In religious education, the best lessons had 'excellent relationships between pupils, and the teacher and pupils, a clear structure, firm discipline, respect for pupils and appropriate use of humour' and this would serve as a good description of successful teaching throughout the school. In lessons taught by specialists the teacher's subject knowledge was good, which added greatly to the ways in which they presented and discussed their subject. In geography, especially, there was also a passion for the subject on the part of the teachers, and through this they excited the imagination of the pupils. Teachers also used their subject knowledge when they planned

their lessons, and in the most successful lessons seen the quality of planning was very good. A particular feature of the best planning was the matching of the work to the learning needs of all the pupils.

22. Many of the lessons taught in the school are being structured in the way which is being promoted by the National Key Stage 3 Strategy which has been introduced into schools this term. This is seen in mathematics, where most lessons begin with a quick 'starter' activity to settle and engage the pupils. This is followed by the main teaching activity, and some tasks to consolidate the learning. The lesson then ends with a review of what has been learnt. A similar structure was seen in geography, where the teachers often begin the lessons with short tasks, such as quizzes or crosswords, intended to recap past learning. The effect is also to settle the pupils, calm the atmosphere, and prepare them for learning. Prompt and focused beginnings to lessons was an important characteristic of the best teaching. In English, science, geography, history and design and technology the teachers consistently state the learning objectives at the beginning of the lessons, so that the pupils are quite clear about what they should be learning. In the best lessons these objectives are looked at again at the end of the lesson for teachers and pupils to assess what learning has taken place. This is done particularly well in physical education lessons. In many subjects lessons normally start with a recap of previous learning, usually by questioning the pupils. This is an effective way of focusing attention.

23. In the successful lessons the teachers have high expectations of the pupils. It was noticeable that pupils in this school respond well to being challenged in their learning, and when disciplinary problems arose in lessons it was sometimes because the work was too undemanding. In a graphics lesson, the pupils' expectations were raised by giving each of them the examination criteria when they were completing sections of their folios. The pupils were told to use only the highest criteria, which ensured high quality work was produced for assessment. In addition, there was good quality work on display to act as an exemplar for their own work.

24. Pupils generally work well together in lessons, but this is not always sufficiently exploited by the teachers. Some lessons, although successful, are too controlled by the teacher, and too little responsibility is given to the pupils to work more independently. In English the pupils were often given the chance to explore ideas in groups, and in physical education and drama there were very good examples of pupils being given the responsibility to evaluate each other's work, which they did very well.

25. A further characteristic of the best lessons seen was the use of a variety of activities to maintain the pace and momentum of the lesson. For example, in a Year 8 lesson in English the pupils listened to a tape of the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales read in the original language, and were then asked to compare it with a modern version. There followed some written tasks, a whole class session to discuss Chaucer's use of humour, and finally the pupils read some of the verse aloud. This excellent variety and rigour was replicated in the best lessons in other subjects.

26. The main problem with the unsuccessful lessons observed was the behaviour of the pupils. However, the problem was not necessarily the pupils themselves, since many were behaving perfectly well in other lessons. In the unsatisfactory lessons the teachers failed to make behaviour norms clear, and to reinforce them as the lesson progressed. These lessons often lacked pace, did not vary the activities, and did not challenge the pupils. Sometimes planning did not make allowance for the range of abilities in the classroom. In some cases these lessons were planned quite well, but failed because the teachers were unable to focus the pupils on their learning at the beginning of the lesson. Given the number

of skilled teachers in the school, there should be no difficulty in providing models and strategies for teachers who are less successful.

27. The learning skills of the pupils in the lessons observed were judged to be good or better in six out of every ten lessons observed. A great many of the pupils are good learners. They enjoy being challenged and respond well. When encouraged to do so they are capable of working very well both independently and in groups. They can be responsible in the classrooms, for example when clearing up after practical lessons. Many show a real interest in the work, and are capable of sustained concentration. This is the case in core religious education in Years 10 and 11 for example, even though the subject does not lead to a qualification. The pupils are able to use their good speaking skills to develop ideas and contribute them to lessons.

28. The school has a document dated June 2001 which details how the various subjects plan for gifted and talented pupils in their teaching. Some of the strategies take the form of provision outside the classroom, such as residential courses in history and geography, school teams in physical education, occasional special events in design and technology and extension days at Henley College for mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. There is some identification of these pupils in teaching groups in some subjects, but few departments yet approach this issue systematically.

29. Generally the teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good, and in many lessons there is effective planning for these pupils. In science, for example, they are provided with help sheets and key words to enable them to progress at the same rate as other pupils. However, in some lessons, teachers expect pupils with special educational needs to do exactly the same work as the rest of the class, paying no attention to their individual education plans (IEPs) and expecting support staff to help them to understand. Learning support assistants rarely meet with teachers before lessons to be given guidance on key points in the lesson and on activities which could help these pupils with their understanding. Insufficient use is made of what these pupils know, understand and can do as a basis for lesson planning and few pupils are given short-term targets as an incentive to improve.

30. There has been an improvement in the assessment practices in the school since the last inspection. There is an assessment handbook, with clear instructions for assessing work and marking, and in-service sessions have encouraged the greater use of comments on pupils' work which will not just tell them how well they have done, but will help them to improve. In practice this is not yet a consistent feature of the assessment of the pupils' work. In geography marking is good. It is frequent, accurate and encouraging, and gives pupils a clear sense of how to improve. In art assessment is a developing strength of teaching, with a new system recently in place and consistently used to evaluate pupils' work including homework. Pupils receive helpful written comments including how to improve their work. Other departments are not so consistent, with some teachers providing full helpful comments, and others not doing so. There has been insufficient monitoring of this aspect of the school's work. Self-assessment by pupils is also not sufficiently developed. Day-to-day assessment while pupils are working in the classrooms takes place in the best lessons, but is also not a consistent feature of teaching.

31. At the pre-inspection parents' meeting the quality and frequency of homework was a concern of many parents. The finding of this inspection is that the setting of good quality homework is not entirely consistent across the school, and there is some tailing off in Years 8 and 9. However, in many subjects, English and mathematics for example, homework is set on a regular basis, and used effectively to extend learning. Generally the quality of homework in the school is better than many parents feel. However, many teachers clearly find the homework timetable restricting, and do not necessarily set work on the due night, which can

understandably lead parents to think it has not been set. The recording of homework by pupils can also be erratic, especially if their record books are not checked regularly.

32. The provision for the development of pupils' literacy skills is satisfactory. It will be improved when the audit of current provision is complete and further staff training undertaken to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the teaching of literacy across the curriculum. There are instances of good practice which exist at departmental level where teachers take account of pupils' literacy needs in their approach to their teaching. This was seen to good effect in geography where there are opportunities for extensive writing and pupils are encouraged to speak at length. They are often required to summarise what others have said and so develop their listening skills. Key words are displayed prominently, together with examples of high quality written work. Other subjects, such as design and technology and art, make good use of technical words and there are ample opportunities for speaking and listening in science where pupils discuss the results of experiments. History provides older pupils with demanding historical texts to extend their reading. Whole-school numeracy policies are less well-developed, but these are being introduced nationally next term as part of the Key Stage 3 Strategy.

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

33. The school emphasises the broad and balanced nature of the curriculum and the wish to encourage excellent intellectual, creative and physical activities. It is largely successful in meeting these aims. The quality and range of opportunities offered to pupils through the taught curriculum and through out of lesson activities is satisfactory overall. However, a significant number of subjects fail to use ICT sufficiently in their work, and the opportunities for covering all the programmes of study of the National Curriculum in ICT are not fully implemented in Years 7, 8 and 9. Therefore in these year groups the curriculum does not meet statutory requirements and is judged to be unsatisfactory. Statutory requirements are met in Year 10 and 11.

34. All pupils in Years 7-9 follow the full range of National Curriculum subjects. A second foreign language is offered to good linguists in Year 8. The time allocated to subjects is satisfactory but the arrangements for the teaching of drama are poor, with one lesson in Year 7 and drama as part of a creative arts option in Year 9. This issue of time for drama remains from the last inspection.

35. In Years 10 and 11 all pupils study a core of subjects. These are English, mathematics, science, a language and a technology subject together with physical education and religious education. A choice of two further subjects enables pupils to follow their particular interests and strengths. The choice of subject allows pupils to study a second language, one or more of the humanities, one or more of the arts, physical education or ICT. These are usually accredited through GCSE courses but some subjects also offer Certificate of Achievement courses. The school also has offered two General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ), in art and design and leisure and tourism, although this year there were insufficient students wishing to take the latter course. In addition a few pupils follow the Youth Award scheme (YAS). For the first time this year pupils in Year 10 could choose Core Enrichment as an option. This is intended for pupils wanting to place a greater emphasis on core subjects with the aim of achieving a higher grade. The communication of the nature of this course to pupils and parents was not sufficiently clear. In the event, recruitment missed the target group and pupils were accepted from outside the target range of potential C/D grades in GCSE. As a result, the lessons observed did not have the clear focus intended. Further consultation is needed with leaders of the core subjects about the nature of this course and a suitable scheme of work.

36. The great majority of pupils study nine GCSE subjects. A few parents expressed concern at the limit of nine subjects. However, the curriculum meets the needs of the great majority of pupils whatever their attainment and abilities and in this respect has improved since the last inspection.

37. The school offers a good range of extra-curricular activities. Discussion with pupils and responses from parents show they value this provision. In music there is very good curriculum enrichment through visits and workshops from professional musicians. Last year there was a very successful school production, after a period without any, and the music, art, drama and business studies departments were involved, in addition to a large number of pupils. There are visits to theatres and museums to stimulate and motivate pupils. In geography and physical education good use is made of field trips and outdoor activities to extend the experiences of pupils. The modern foreign languages department organises trips to Normandy and the Moselle, and exchange trips for pupils studying French and German. Take-up for these activities is good.

38. The Governors have recently approved a new policy to ensure equality of opportunity in the school. This is clear and thoughtful, and includes a statement to be discussed and agreed with all pupils about what Chiltern Edge school requires from them to ensure it meets the aims of the policy. However, there is inequality of access to the curriculum in a significant number of subjects, and for a significant proportion of pupils, because of the organisation of the timetable and staffing. Too many classes have more than one teacher for the same subject. The timetable runs on a fortnightly cycle and in the worst cases a pupil may be taught by three teachers in the cycle for the same subject. In many subjects classes are split between two teachers. As a result, planning for continuity and progression in learning and the assessment of progress are more difficult. Last year the senior management team set up a thorough review of the curriculum to ensure it meets the needs of all pupils. The review is continuing this year and the school has identified the problems of split classes as a priority.

39. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good overall and statutory requirements are met. Provision is better in the Curriculum Support Department where teachers have a very clear focus and pupils have appropriate learning programmes. This also provides a secure and welcoming base for students who feel the need for such a facility. However, the use of computers is only developing because new systems have only recently been purchased. In the mainstream school, although provision is good in some lessons, there are inconsistencies both within and across subjects. Learning support assistants make an effective contribution to pupils' learning but most have no prior knowledge of the lesson they are supporting. Few teachers provide support assistants with schemes of work or discuss strategies prior to the lesson. Some older pupils follow a Youth Award Scheme or Certificate of Achievement courses. These are suitable alternatives for pupils for whom some GCSE courses are inappropriate. Good additional support for readers is provided by a paired reading scheme where older pupils listen to younger pupils read. Provision for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties is mainly through the pastoral team, but there is insufficient involvement of the special educational needs co-ordinator.

40. A comprehensive programme of personal and social education is provided, and it has recently been reviewed and updated. The programme is well planned and supported by good resources including the use of speakers from a range of organisations. These lessons cover topics on sex education, drugs awareness and careers and health education. The programme is well co-ordinated and monitored across the school to ensure pupils receive a comprehensive and coherent experience that supports their personal development.

41. Work related education is good. The careers and guidance programme is well planned as part of the personal and social education course. Good use is made of external careers advice in this course. Work experience is a feature of the programme and is well used to help pupils think about the next steps in their education.

42. Links and liaison with local primary schools and further education colleges are very good and enhance the academic and personal development of pupils. There are productive links with the local business community, particularly in music.

43. Overall the school makes satisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social cultural education. However, this provision is not monitored closely at whole school level and opportunities are missed to build on the good practice in some departments. The ethos of the school does a great deal to support the social and moral development of the pupils but less for their spiritual and cultural development

44. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is unsatisfactory. Issues were raised at the last inspection about the need to provide a daily act of collective worship and the school still does not comply with regulations. The headteacher reports that accommodation does not enable collective worship for all pupils each day. Assemblies deal with moral and social issues but rarely have an element of spirituality or time for reflection. Form tutor times are used mainly for social and administrative purposes. Pupils study religious education throughout the school. This department is very effective in providing opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own beliefs and the beliefs of others and to explore ideas and feelings. In most other subjects this important area of school life is not well developed and schemes of work do not identify opportunities within the curriculum. An exception to this is the work in geography where teachers share their passion for the subject and encourage pupils to appreciate the marvels of the physical world.

45. The school makes good provision for pupils' moral development. Personal and social education lessons enable pupils to discuss a wider range of moral issues. For example, in a lesson looking at the 'Justice System' a good deal of interest was stimulated by visitors from the Crown Prosecution Service. In other lessons, pupils in Year 9 study the effects of substance abuse. In English, moral and social issues arise in discussions when studying 'The Canterbury Tales' and the descent into savagery portrayed in 'Lord of the Flies'. Pupils are encouraged to consider issues of right and wrong in their daily interactions and relationships with teachers and fellow pupils.

46. The provision for pupils' social development is good, and most subjects provide opportunities in this area. The School Council is an active body and an effective channel of communication between staff and pupils. This also gives pupils the opportunity to take responsibility within the school. Relationships throughout the school are good. The great majority of students are fully aware of the effect of their attitudes and behaviour on others. This is not the case with a small proportion of boys when their poor behaviour affects others in the class and slows progress for all. Group work and high levels of pupil participation are features of most lessons, and pupils of different abilities and racial heritage work in harmony. The numerous lunchtime and after school activities enhance the social development of pupils. Working with others to produce a good standard of performance is strong in music, drama and physical education. In English, Year 9 pupils gain insights into the social and moral issues of Victorian England through the study of Dickensian texts. In geography lively discussions are generated about the impact of development on the environment.

47. Provision for the cultural development of pupils is satisfactory. There is a programme of visits and exchanges, and visitors to the school widen pupils' horizons. Cultural awareness is fostered through clubs and visits to theatres and the school production. There

are well established links with pupils in other countries such as Burkina Faso, and the visit arranged by the modern foreign languages department contribute to this area. Some opportunities arise for pupils to consider and celebrate the diversity of British society and the wider world, especially in religious education where there is a strong emphasis on multi-faith issues, and in the study of literature in English in Years 10 and 11. In music pupils work with musicians from other cultures and traditions. This area of pupils' personal development is sparse in other subjects, and it rarely features in the displays of work throughout the school.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

48. Arrangements for ensuring pupils' welfare are good. The procedures for the induction of new pupils to Year 7 are particularly supportive. The tutorial system ensures that all pupils are well known to at least one member of staff. However, the daily tutorial and registration periods (lasting fifteen minutes in the mornings and five in the afternoons) are not always effectively used. Several were observed in which little useful interaction, beyond registration, took place between staff and pupils. There is positive support at all levels for pupils' physical, social and emotional needs. Heads of Year make time available for pupils in need of counselling. All heads of Year, who work with commitment, see their roles as primarily pastoral, and do not yet have a clear oversight of the academic development of the pupils. Once a week, a school health professional provides an informal, confidential drop-in counselling service for pupils who wish to discuss health, emotional or relationship related problems. Pupils are provided with good support at critical times in their school careers, when joining at Year 7, for example, when choosing GCSE options at Year 9 or considering post-GCSE choices at the end of Year 11. The necessary arrangements for dealing with child protection matters are in place, as are procedures for attending to pupils' medical needs. At the pre-inspection parents' meeting parents expressed a great deal of confidence in the school's care of the pupils.

49. Health and safety is co-ordinated by a member of the senior management team, overseen by a committee of the governing body. Procedures are in place for regular inspections of the premises and equipment, with risk assessments are carried out on all school activities. The health and safety aspects of work experience placements are checked and all pupils on work experience are visited at the place of work. Pupils are alerted to the health and safety implications of practical lessons in subjects such as science and design and technology. However, during the inspection, some health and safety hazards were noted, the most serious of which was the condition of some of the electric cookers in the food technology rooms.

50. There are good arrangements for monitoring attendance. Registration procedures are carried out effectively and registers are regularly monitored. Weekly lists are produced of pupils whose absence exceeds specified levels. School administration staff follow up unexplained absences. An education social worker is in close contact with the school, visiting two or three times a week. Punctuality is monitored through a 'late book'.

51. Procedures for promoting good behaviour are satisfactory. For the majority of pupils, good behaviour is a response to high expectations, good relationships within the classroom and interesting, stimulating lessons. Pupils are encouraged by a series of rewards, both for individuals and for groups. Year groups have recognition assemblies at which rewards are given out. For pupils who pose behavioural problems, a number of strategies are used, from 'timeout' cards (which permit pupils to absent themselves from lessons when they feel a loss of control is imminent) to 'report' systems, in which pupils' behaviour, effort or timekeeping are monitored lesson by lesson. These latter instances also involve parents. Much senior staff time is spent in managing behaviour problems, and a member of the senior management team is always on call. One classroom is in full-time use as an internal

exclusion room. During the inspection, the number sent to the room each period ranged from three to seven; in several period no pupils were sent. They are supervised by a rota of senior and middle managers.. The use of the room is effective at two levels, as disruptive pupils are prevented from further disrupting the learning of the majority and pupils sent there do not enjoy the experience. They do not have break times or lunch with the rest of the school. Referrals are carefully monitored by the pupil development team and, where they are frequent, further action, such as the involvement of an educational psychologist is considered. The system is expensive in terms of senior staff time, but is operating satisfactorily. At the parents' meeting there was evidence that parents had not been sufficiently informed about the function and intentions of this room.

52. The school is successful in eliminating oppressive behaviour. Through its personal, social and health education programme (PSHE), the school has promoted an inclusive community in which discrimination by ability, gender or ethnicity is largely absent. The necessary record of racial incidents has been set up, but to date has one entry only. Bullying is addressed through the PSHE programme, in assemblies and through drama lessons. Instances are monitored and, where appropriate, parents are brought in. Pupils and parents do not consider that there are significant problems with bullying in the school. A special school for pupils with severe learning difficulties has classrooms within the school and some of its pupils attend mainstream classes. The response to these young people by the mainstream pupils is generally positive.

53. Procedures for assessing and monitoring pupils' academic progress are satisfactory overall. Teachers keep their own records, such as mark books, together with test data from National Curriculum tests at ages eleven and fourteen, examination results and cognitive ability tests on entry to the school. Pupils' progress in individual subjects is collected by departments in a number of different forms and held in different ways. There is, therefore, no consistent, school-wide method of collecting, retrieving and using such information. Consequently, when Heads of Departments wish to review the effectiveness of their department's teaching in certain areas of the curriculum, they have to seek out the information they need. The information is readily available, but basically the school's current system is reactive rather than pro-active.

54. Heads of Year receive data on the academic progress of pupils, but the use of this data for tracking the performance of pupils is not currently a major part of their role. They do not have links to the school's administrative computer system in their offices. The school is presently seeking to develop a computer-based management information system which will provide the necessary data. The forthcoming appointment of the Head of Year 7 as Key Stage 3 Co-ordinator will help in this respect.

55. Overall pupils are cared for very well in this school. Much of the support is informal and based on the knowledge form tutors have of their pupils. Other support is more structured. For example, some prefects work as mentors with Year 7 pupils. Mentors from the business community work with pupils in Years 10 and 11, developing their confidence and the skills needed in the world of work. Contact with these mentors is maintained by e-mail, and will culminate in a personal meeting.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

56. The school has developed good links with parents. The majority of parents feel that staff are accessible and that they would have no problems in pursuing a concern with the school. Good information is provided both before their children join the school and during the child's school career. A helpful handbook is provided for parents of new Year 7 pupils and there is effective guidance regarding GCSE options in Year 9 and post-GCSE choices. Parents are notified of Year 10 coursework deadlines. They are invited to meetings to discuss such critical stages in their children's education. Regular newsletters written in accessible language keep parents informed of school activities. For families with Internet access, there is a school website, although the possibilities of this facility have not yet been sufficiently exploited.

57. Information on pupil progress is good. The annual reports provide an objective evaluation of the child's attainment and progress in each subject studied. Attainment is reported by reference to National Curriculum levels. Effort is graded and targets for the ensuing year are set. There is provision for the pupil's own view of the year and for parental comment on the report. Statutory requirements are met. In addition to the annual report, the school provides parents with an interim report, called a 'performance check'. This serves to alert parents to any incipient problems. Parents have one formal opportunity a year to meet staff. However, only in Year 9 is that meeting linked to the issue of a report. Consequently, some parents feel that they are discussing their children with insufficient knowledge.

58. Nearly a third of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire did not consider that they were well informed regarding their children's progress, and just over a quarter did not feel that the school works closely with parents. However, evidence from this inspection suggests that the quality of information provided for parents is good, and the school is striving for a close relationship. The geographically spread and varied nature of the communities which the school serves may be a factor in these differing viewpoints, since in one sense this is only a community school in name. It may also be the case that the school is not communicating the information in the way that parents want it. The school will need to consider a range of strategies for eliciting the views of parents on these issues.

59. Parental involvement makes a positive impact upon the work of the school. Parental consultation evenings are well attended, as are other meetings, such as the governors' annual report meeting. Parent governors are happy to advise parents over problems with school. Parents volunteer to assist with supervision on school visits. There is a School Association which works hard to raise funds for the school. Last year it raised £10,000, all of which was spent on materials which directly benefit pupils' learning.

60. Parents support their children's learning by supporting the school's homework policy. All pupils have a home-school diary, in which homework set is recorded. Both parents and tutors are expected to examine these diaries and sign them. Messages may be passed from home to school and vice versa in the diaries. They form an effective vehicle for home-school dialogue when used as intended. A number of diaries were examined during the inspection and their use, by tutors, pupils and parents, was found to be inconsistent. Parents attending the pre-inspection meeting observed that their children's tutors did not regularly examine diaries and that messages for staff produced no response. Examination of a sample of diaries confirmed that a number had not been recently checked by tutors. The examination also revealed that many parents did not sign the diaries and that in many instances, homework was not recorded. The diaries are useful in developing pupils' time management skills and a potentially valuable vehicle for home-school dialogue. Parents attending the Year 7 consultation evening (which took place during the inspection) said that they found the

diaries useful. The books used are a quality item and clearly not cheap. Closer monitoring is necessary, to ensure that the school gets full value from their use.

61. Parental overall views of the school are positive and supportive. They like the values the school promotes and the quality of care it offers to the pupils. The supportive arrangements for transfer from primary to secondary education are particularly appreciated, as is the range of extra-curricular activities, whether they are lunchtime clubs, sporting activities, drama productions or residential visits.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

62. The headteacher has been in post for nearly two years, the school having been led by an acting headteacher for the four terms prior to his appointment. He has a clear view of the strategic direction of the school, much of which is expressed in the mission statement which states that Chiltern Edge should be the leader in high quality learning through challenge, excellence and innovation.

63. Following the retirement of a longstanding deputy headteacher in July 2001 there was a restructuring of the leadership team, which now consists of the headteacher and five assistant headteachers, who act as deputy headteacher on a termly rota basis. This team has only been working together for a short time, but there are promising signs that it will be effective. There is a shared approach and clear sense of common purpose. This is supported by a very good division of responsibilities. Each team member has a headline role, and these cover staff development, curriculum, pupil development, the Key Stage 3 Strategy and resources. However, there is also a horizontal spread of responsibilities, so, for example, each member has some responsibility for an area of curriculum development, personnel issues and internal and external links. This is an effective structure for creating a team with a shared understanding of development priorities.

64. An important strength of the school's development planning is that it is clear and uncomplicated. In June 2000, the headteacher instituted yearly leadership conferences which take place in June, and involve the leadership team and governors. From the first of these, eight 'strategic imperatives' for the development of the school were decided. These cover teaching and learning, attainment, curriculum, staff development, finance, pupil motivation, and relationships with stakeholders. The headteacher has responsibility for two priorities, and then each member of the leadership team co-ordinates one. A particularly good feature is that the chair of governors is also responsible for one area, that of external links.

65. These eight priorities form the structure for the school development plan, which is a clear and accessible document. It covers three years, but is reviewed yearly at the leadership conference and a revised version is drawn up. The documents from the 2001 leadership conference show a very thorough review of progress. The evaluations from the various managers are rigorous, and very clear in their account of what was achieved and what still needs to be done. The success criteria in the plan are largely good, although sometimes are in the form of something having been completed rather than describing the effect on standards. The development plan has clear timescales and is properly supported by financial planning.

66. The eight imperatives provide the structure for planning at all levels in the school. They are used for development planning by departments, whose plan structure replicates the whole-school model exactly. This makes it very easy for the school to evaluate how the strategic plan is progressing in all areas of the school, and for staff to remain aware of the directions in which the school is going, and their part in the process. The quality of the planning documents at department level is very good. Further awareness of whole-school

issues is supported by the policy of linking the senior managers with the curriculum departments. There is a clear expectation of this role, including the requirement for four meetings each year, occasionally attending department meetings and assisting with the monitoring and evaluation of the department's work.

67. In addition to their involvement in school priorities through development planning, all staff are also members of one of seven innovation groups. These are chaired by the members of the leadership team and one of the heads of department, and cover a range of issues, including the Key Stage 3 Strategy, staff development and the sharing of good practice. The minutes from these meetings indicate a good level of staff involvement in the development of the school.

68. The quality of management and leadership by heads of department is good overall, and sometimes very good. In all cases they are providing a direction for the development of their subject, and aims and values are clearly articulated. The standard of development planning is high, and there is a strong focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. A particular characteristic of the leadership by heads of departments has been their strategies for encouraging teachers to work in effective teams. The level of monitoring of the work of teachers is good. This is carried out on a sufficiently regular basis by heads of department, in conjunction with their link senior managers. A yearly evaluation of results and progress with the development plan takes place between link managers and heads of department. Biannual monitoring by Oxfordshire subject advisers is built into the development plans.

69. Through its link activities the leadership team have a good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of teaching in the school, and are able to target support where necessary. The school is moving towards being an institution which is able to effectively evaluate its performance. At the moment the data which the school has on, for example, the attainment of pupils on entry to the school or the performance of pupils at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations, is not used with sufficient consistency to evaluate the school's performance. A very comprehensive booklet on the use of data has been produced by a member of the leadership team, and there has been some staff training. Heads of department, for example, are able to use the DfES Autumn Package of comparative data for evaluation purposes. There is not yet, however, sufficient consistency in the way that heads of department, and heads of year, use the data to both monitor performance and set targets for improvement.

70. One of the team leaders has responsibility for two national initiatives, the school's Beacon status and the national Key Stage 3 Strategy. The Beacon activities are now entering their third year, and will continue the training of middle managers in Chiltern Edge and neighbouring secondary schools, using an outside consultant. In addition, some support for primary schools to help dyslexic pupils is funded, and the design and technology department offers in-service support for local primary and secondary schools. In addition to funding these activities the school has used some of the time of one of the leadership team to co-ordinate the activities, and to set up a room for in-service sessions. The funding has been used carefully, the activities have been properly monitored, and evaluations have been good. The Key Stage 3 activities are at an early phase of development, but an effective structure has been set up, and a very useful timescale for activities has been devised.

71. Systems for performance management are very good, and the accompanying documentation is clear and informative. The system includes observations of teachers in the classroom, and identification of their training needs. This latter aspect is done extremely well in the school. Training needs were identified from both the performance management scheme and from department development plans. These were then discussed with staff, and the centrally held budget used for funding the training. There are very good training application forms, which require staff to identify how the training will help them and the school. There is a

review form for use after the activity, which enables the professional development co-ordinator to monitor the quality of the training which staff receive. In addition, each member of staff, including administration and support staff, fills in a substantial yearly evaluation form, which includes a self-development pro-forma and a request for staff to offer expertise which might benefit colleagues. This is a high quality system for staff development, and this aspect of the school's work has been recognised by the recent award of Investors In People status.

72. The arrangements for the induction of both newly qualified staff (NQT), and staff who are new to the school, are good. The NQT programme is done jointly with a neighbouring secondary school, which is a good arrangement. Staff new to the school are invited to the sessions. There are very good booklets for both NQTs and new teaching staff, which give very clear details of the support available.

73. The governing body provides strong and properly critical support for the school. The minutes of the full governors meetings and the committee meetings show a genuine dialogue between governors and the school, with governors supportively questioning aspects of the work of the school. The governors are closely involved with the planning of the school's priorities, and some attend the annual session with the leadership team to evaluate and review the school's performance. The chair of governors has a very good knowledge of the school, and its strengths and weaknesses. There is a good relationship between the governing body and the school. There was a very good attendance at the Governors' Annual General Meeting last year, and parents appreciated the opportunity to talk in groups to discuss school issues. The chair of governors has identified a need for the governing body to assist in developing a more community feel to the school, and for governors to visit the school more frequently on an individual basis. At the moment there is no programme of visits by governors to departments and lessons. The governors fulfil all their statutory duties, with the exception of collective worship and the provision of ICT in Years 7-9.

74. Staff at this school are very committed, and work very hard. The school has an adequate number of teaching staff, and there is a good balance of experienced and more recently trained teachers. The subject knowledge of specialist staff is good. While the majority of lessons are taught by specialist teachers, some lessons in English, mathematics, history, religious education and drama are not taught by specialist teachers. This was also the case for some food technology lessons last term. This situation is in part a result of the difficulties the school experiences with recruitment of staff. National shortages are exacerbated by the school's position in an area of high house prices.

75. The management of the special educational needs department is good. Good support from the local education authority has provided a very thorough evaluation of strengths within the department and clear guidelines on areas for improvement. The school has already responded to some of the recommendations. Though learning support assistants are now on contracts, they are only paid for the hours they spend in lessons. They do not work during break times and as a result have insufficient involvement in the day-to-day liaison with both teaching staff and the special educational needs co-ordinator. This is crucial to the effective use of learning support staff and the provision for these pupils. The special educational needs co-ordinator is committed to a high quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs. However, she still spends too much time on administrative duties which could be carried out by support staff. As a result she has insufficient time to develop her monitoring role which would ensure more consistency of provision, particularly for pupils with higher levels of need. Accommodation is spacious and well used and combined with good practical and computer resources, provides an effective and stimulating learning environment.

76. The work of the teachers is very well supported by the learning support assistants, library resource assistants and technicians. There are, however, an insufficient number of

support staff, both for special needs support and for technical support in practical subjects. Some of the support staff do not feel that they are seen as having a very high status in the school, and they would like a forum for them to express their views; for example, regular meetings as a group with a relevant senior manager.

77. The level of resourcing in the school is generally satisfactory, but there are some curriculum areas in need of further support. All the ovens in the food technology room have faults, and there is a shortage of equipment in other technology areas. The provision of books and equipment in geography in Years 10 and 11 is inadequate, as are the resources throughout the school in religious education. While there are an adequate number of computers for use by pupils, they are not available equally across the different curriculum areas, although the computer suites can be booked. The use of computers to support learning in the school remains a weakness. The library is reasonably spacious, and has a recently installed computer suite. The bookstock is generally satisfactory, and there is a good range of children's fiction. In the art section there is little representation of the work of artists from other cultures. Pupils have access to the library before school and at lunchtime, and are sometimes sent to do research during lessons. The library is very ably administered by three part time assistants, who skilfully combine their library work with running a copying and print unit. An acting head of department manages the whole library resource, and has produced some useful documents, including a good development plan.

78. The school is set in a spacious site, but the quality of the school building is very variable. At the time of the inspection there were six new classrooms under construction, and these will be available to the school at the beginning of 2002. It will enable some departments to move to more adjacent teaching rooms, and also the removal of some of the temporary classrooms. Recent changes to the art rooms have resulted in much better facilities. Most of the science laboratories have been refurbished, although there is still scope for improvement, and three of them still need bringing up to date. Some of the teaching rooms are of a reasonable size and state of repair. There are, however, other areas where standards are being affected. The facilities for drama are inadequate, with no lighting and sound equipment. One of the music rooms is really just a foyer, and makes teaching whole classes difficult. The temporary classrooms suffer from condensation, and in one lesson observed a video recorder had to be dried internally with a hair dryer before it could be used. The sports hall changing rooms need modernising, and the sports hall itself is not always sufficiently clean, particularly when it has been used for an assembly. At the pre-inspection parents' meeting some concern was expressed by a few parents about the provision of toilets in the school. The positioning of the various toilet facilities round the site mean that the main ones can get rather crowded, and the school would like to be able to provide separate junior and senior facilities. However, the inspection found the current provision to be just adequate.

79. The school and governing body have made strenuous efforts to improve the buildings, but the maintenance of many of them is not economic, and a drain on the school's finances. For example, water runs off metal window frames and rots the wood underneath. As there is insufficient funding to replace the frames, the rotten wood is replaced, and the cycle begins again. The governors and management are continuing to investigate sources of funding to deal with the problems caused by the building. They are soon to draw up a ten year plan for the development of the site in order to promote a longer term view of improvement. However, the school could be made more attractive by a better standard of display in teaching rooms and public areas. Currently the quality of display is generally unsatisfactory.

80. The school runs very efficiently on a day-to-day basis, and the administrative staff are capable and efficient. The quality of financial management is very good. The school's level of funding is fairly low, and the income per pupil is within the lowest quartile nationally. However, the senior manager and senior administrator are careful and efficient with the available

funding, and have clear systems to obtain best value. They are starting to investigate benchmarking as means of comparing their finances with similar schools. A sum of about £80,000 is regularly carried forward, largely to deal with any problems which might arise from the buildings. The linking of funding to the school's development priorities is clear. In order to make the financial administration more efficient, and to free more of the financial managers' time, the school has entered into a contract for one year in the first instance with a financial management firm. This is costing £12,000, but the firm has produced evidence from their work with other schools that this sum will be saved through increased efficiency. It is too early to evaluate the success of this venture, but the school is pleased with the detailed financial statements that have been provided so far.

81. The attainment levels of pupils are above average on entry, and standards are maintained as they move through the school; in some areas they are improved. The number of students with special educational needs is average compared with national figures. Overall the teaching in the school is good, as is the pupils' personal development, and the care taken of the pupils. The school's effectiveness is good, and these factors considered in relation to the lower than average cost per pupil indicates that the school is giving good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to raise standards further the governing body, headteacher and senior managers should:

- (1) Improve the unsatisfactory behaviour in a small number of classes in Years 8 and 9, and the continuity of learning for these pupils, by:
 - Ensuring that the timetable for the next academic year eliminates, as far as possible, the number of classes in Years 7-9 which are taught by more than one teacher.
 - Targeting support for those teachers experiencing difficulty in order to improve the quality of their teaching.Paragraphs: 15, 26, 38, 88, 117, 118, 126, 144, 161, 174, 182

- (2) Monitor the assessment of pupils' work in order to ensure that all teachers are:
 - Following whole-school and departmental guidelines.
 - Marking written work regularly.
 - Giving pupils information and strategies which will help them to improve, including targets where appropriate.Paragraphs: 30, 91, 98, 112, 123, 127, 144, 166, 174

- (3) Use available data on pupils more effectively for self-evaluation purposes by:
 - Providing further in-service support for teachers on the interpretation and application of data.
 - Distributing relevant data to heads of department, heads of year, form tutors and subject teachers.
 - Creating more consistency in the way that all staff hold data and use it to evaluate their work and track the progress of pupils.Paragraphs: 53, 69, 155, 175

- (4) Ensure that the statutory requirements for teaching ICT in Years 7-9 are met by:
 - Mapping the delivery of ICT against National Curriculum programmes of study in Years 8 and 9.
 - Assessing all pupils in Years 8 and 9 against ICT attainment levels and use this to give guidance for targets.
 - Making sure that all subjects encourage pupils to use ICT in areas of work in line with the National Curriculum requirements for each subject.Paragraphs: 33, 85, 99, 118, 125, 145, 147, 159

(5) Improve the effectiveness of learning support assistants by:

- Matching the number of assistants to the needs of the pupils.
- Reviewing the deployment of assistants, and their patterns of work.
- Establishing closer contact between assistants and classroom teachers so that the assistants can have better prior knowledge of the content of lessons.

Paragraphs: 39, 75, 109

(6) Seek further improvements in the quality of the accommodation by:

- Using the proposed long-term plan for the development of the site to seek further sources of funding.
- Improve the quality of displays in the classrooms and public areas.

Paragraphs: 78, 79, 114, 127, 145, 166, 175, 190

(The school's current priorities include reference to issues 1,2,3,4 and 6 above)

In addition to the issues above, the governors should consider what action to take on the following issues mentioned in the report:

- The inadequate number of technicians for science, art and design and technology. (Paragraphs 76, 114, 118, 127)
- The breach of statutory regulation for collective worship. (Paragraph 44)
- The inconsistent use of tutor time. (Paragraphs 48, 60)
- The lack of opportunities for the spiritual development of the pupils. (Paragraphs: 44, 118)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	184
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	54

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	8	41	74	47	10	3	0
Percentage	4	22	40	26	5	2	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. [When the total number is substantially less than 100, add] Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than one [two, three, etc] percentage point[s]. [Where the total is close to or greater than 100, use only the first sentence.]

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	925
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	39

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	14
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	122

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	19
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	40

Attendance

Authorised absence

%

Unauthorised absence

%

School data	6.9
National comparative data	7.7

School data	1.0
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 (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	80	68	148

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	54	67	63
	Girls	55	56	52
	Total	109	123	115
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	74 (64)	83 (72)	78 (71)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	35 (25)	59 (48)	51 (35)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	49	61	57
	Girls	54	55	49
	Total	103	116	106
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	70 (75)	79 (79)	72 (66)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	39 (28)	51 (52)	41 (38)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	89	106	195

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	50	82	83
	Girls	69	103	105
	Total	119	185	188
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	61 (68)	95 (97)	96 (99)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	43
	National	38.4

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	N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	8
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	6
Indian	7
Pakistani	6
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	7
White	734
Any other minority ethnic group	23

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	3	0
Black – African heritage	1	0
Black – other	7	0
Indian	3	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	1	0
White	53	3
Other minority ethnic groups	2	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	49.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.4

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	261

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.4
Key Stage 4	20.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000
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	£
Total income	20255814
Total expenditure	2019384
Expenditure per pupil	2224
Balance brought forward from previous year	89785
Balance carried forward to next year	126251

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	10
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	14.6

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3.4
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	925
Number of questionnaires returned	291

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	55	8	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	28	59	5	1	7
Behaviour in the school is good.	14	59	12	3	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	14	55	23	5	2
The teaching is good.	22	64	5	0	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	14	47	26	3	11
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	43	44	9	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	40	51	6	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	14	50	22	4	10
The school is well led and managed.	20	59	8	1	13
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	26	59	7	1	8
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	22	46	17	3	13

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Teachers work effectively as a team to improve the quality of teaching and learning through the sharing of good practice.
- Teaching is good and often very good and enables pupils to achieve standards which are above the national average.
- Development planning provides a clear strategic direction for the work of the department.

Areas for improvement

- The allocation of staffing to teaching groups in Years 7, 8 and 9 results in many classes being taught by more than one English teacher.
- Information about levels of prior attainment is not being used to set pupils challenging but realistic targets to raise their levels of achievement.
- Marking does not give pupils sufficient guidance on how to improve their work.

82. Attainment in English on entry to the school is above the national average. At the end of Year 9, attainment at Level 5 and above in the 2001 National Curriculum tests was above the national average for boys and girls. This was the case at the time of the last inspection. The results were an improvement on those obtained in 2000 and significantly above those gained in 1999. Boys did less well in English than they did in mathematics and science; but the girls did better. The results were average when compared with similar schools.

83. In relation to the standards they attained at the age of 14 all pupils achieve very well by the end of Year 11. The proportion of pupils achieving a grade in the A* to C range in the 2000 English language examinations was significantly above the national average for all schools. This was the case for both boys and girls, although the girls' results at A* to B grades were better than those of the boys. Overall, the difference between the results of boys and those of girls is less than the national difference. All but a very few pupils achieved a GCSE grade in the subject which is evidence of the good progress made by pupils with special educational needs. In 2001 the proportion of pupils achieving an A* to C grade was similar to that achieved in 2000, again with the girls outperforming the boys. The results in both years are similar to the standards obtained at the time of the last inspection.

84. English Literature results in 2000 were above the national average in terms of the proportion of pupils achieving a grade in the A* to C range. The girls did much better than the boys in attaining the highest standards, but again the difference was less than that nationally. There was a marked improvement in the 2001 English Literature results for all pupils compared with those of 2000, although the gap between boys and girls remained. The results were also an improvement on those gained at the time of the last inspection, when standards in English literature were in line with national averages.

85. Standards of written work seen during the course of the inspection were good and similar in quality to the writing seen at the last inspection. Pupils write fluently and at length, and can change their style to take account of the readership. There is an appropriate range

of work undertaken, except that opportunities for creative writing are limited. Spelling, punctuation and the use of correct grammatical forms are generally good but there are pupils in all years who still need help with basic accuracy. Although the planning and drafting of written work is done well, pupils are not making enough use of computers in school to develop and present their writing in a variety of forms. The department is aware of this and is incorporating the use of ICT into all schemes of work. Pupils are able to structure their extended writing using paragraphs and can write complex sentences. In Years 10 and 11 pupils' critical writing on the set literature texts is of a very high standard. Examples were seen of Year 10 pupils writing with insight on the social and historical context of J. B. Priestley's play 'An Inspector Calls'. They went on to describe how suspense was heightened through the use of dramatic devices and what the unfolding moral and social issues revealed of the principal characters' values and beliefs. The writing was clear and the ideas well supported with textual references. Factual writing of a high standard was also seen in the form of diaries, letters, reports and autobiographical pieces. Younger pupils were asked to reflect on the most significant events in their lives and the people who had influenced them the most. The writing showed the young people's sensitivity to those key moments and their appreciation of what others had done for them.

86. Pupils' standards of reading are good in all years, as they were at the time of the last inspection. Pupils read aloud with appropriate expression and tone, a skill which was not well developed in 1997 at the time of the last report. Pupils in a Year 10 lesson showed they understood the distinctive qualities of writings from other cultures when reading aloud the poem 'Blessing' by Imtiaz Dharker. They were able to capture the rhythms and intonation of a native speaker. Pupils read with understanding from a range of texts which present increasing levels of difficulty and they understand that one piece of writing can have a variety of meanings. Year 10 pupils showed this in their insight into the complexities of Clive James's character from their reading of his 'Unreliable Memoirs'. They inferred far more about the nature of the writer than was immediately apparent from the recorded incidents of his childhood. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in their reading because of the effective systems which are in place to help them develop this skill.

87. Speaking skills are very good. Pupils of all ages are articulate and can adapt their speech to a range of situations. They are well prepared for, and successful, in the annual public speaking competitions and the confidence they gain is apparent in the clear way they express themselves in lessons. In a Year 7 lesson pupils were able to give a brief, succinct account of a book they had read and the features which made it memorable. They did so without hesitation and conveyed the essential features of the story in simple, clear language. By the end of Year 11 standards are well above national expectations and pupils can structure their talk for different purposes and use Standard English in formal situations. They are able to illustrate what they have to say with telling examples and anecdotes and use a range of words appropriate to the subject under discussion. Standards of listening were good in almost all lessons seen. In the best lessons pupils concentrated and reflected on the points made by others, and their learning was enhanced by their attentiveness when explanations were given and questions asked. Year 8 pupils made good progress in identifying the origin of English words from how they were spoken by concentrating on the teacher's pronunciation. They understood how words are formed by social and cultural influences, and develop and change with time.

88. Pupils achieve standards above the national average because the teaching is often good or very good. Teachers are well qualified and have a sound knowledge and understanding of their subject and teaching techniques. They plan effectively, setting appropriate and challenging learning objectives which are made clear at the start of each lesson. Expectations of the level of work and pupils' behaviour are high and the pace of

learning matches the quality of the teaching. However, teaching is less effective when classes are taught by more than one teacher.

89. Teachers communicate an interest in and enthusiasm for the subject. Lessons are well structured with a variety of activities to maintain pace and momentum. Pupils in a Year 8 lesson on Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales' had to listen to a tape of the Prologue being read in the original language which they compared with a modern translation. Annotation exercises followed with question and answer sessions on the verse structure. There was then whole class discussion on Chaucerian humour and the lesson finished with pupils reading aloud. Pupils enjoyed the lesson because they found the variety and rigour of the work stimulating.

90. Pupils learn well because teachers explain things clearly, and then use questioning to test the pupils' understanding and challenge them to think analytically. There are good relationships in the classrooms and pupils are attentive and responsive. The teaching ensures that all pupils are challenged, supported effectively and fully involved in the lesson. The pace of learning is good and pupils work well collaboratively. Homework is used on a regular basis to consolidate and extend learning. This was seen in the work undertaken at home by Year 11 pupils on William Golding's 'Lord of the Flies'. The subject had been well researched and the result was that some of the writing was of a high standard.

91. The marking of pupils' work, although regular and detailed, does not give them sufficient guidance on how to improve, and this is an issue which the department is addressing. Effective systems are in place to record and monitor pupils' progress, as was the case at the time of the last inspection, but the department now needs to use information about pupils' previous levels attainment in order to set realistic but challenging targets to raise achievement.

92. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department provides clear educational direction with the focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning through the sharing of good practice, and the adoption of national initiatives to raise attainment. Her style of leadership has created a sense of unity and common purpose, and she is supported by committed and capable colleagues who work well as a team. Development planning is good and takes account of the school's academic, personal, social and cultural aims. The department has responded well to the current national Key Stage 3 initiative, and is incorporating the strategies into its schemes of work. The department has maintained the standards identified as strengths at the last inspection and has successfully addressed the small number of issues which needed attention. The department is now well placed to raise standards further.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**

Strengths

- Pupils in Years 7-9 make good progress and standards are high.
- Teachers plan well-structured lessons and employ a good variety of teaching strategies to engage and include their pupils.
- Pupils with SEN make good progress.
- The school has responded positively to the recommendations of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy for Mathematics.

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of pupils achieving GCSE grades A* - C is not high enough.
- In lessons, pupils often receive inadequate guidance on how to complete and present their work and this leads to inconsistent standards.
- There are some unsatisfactory aspects of assessment, such as the quality of marking in pupils' books and the limited use of pupil performance data to inform target setting.
- There is insufficient use of ICT.

93. The mathematical attainment of pupils on entry to the school is above the national average. Pupils in Years 7-9, including those with special educational needs, make good progress and by the end of Year 9 attainment is well above average when compared to all schools nationally, and above average when compared with similar schools. Over the last three years, there has been a rising trend in attainment in Year 9 although standards dropped slightly last year. Between 1999 and 2000, in the national tests, the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 or higher rose significantly from 72% to 83%, compared with the 2000 figure of 65% for all schools nationally. The school's figure for 2001 was 78%. Over the same period, the proportion of pupils reaching Level 6 or higher rose from 48% to 59%, compared to 42% nationally. In 2001, the figure was 57%.

94. The performance of pupils in mathematics in Years 7-9 is generally in line with their performance in English and science. More able mathematicians perform well. In 2000, 28% achieved Level 7 or higher, compared with 19% nationally, although the figure dropped to 23% last year. In the present Year 9, pupils are generally good at learning and applying new skills and methods. A class studying geometric transformations made good progress as they explored examples of enlargements. The pupils' understanding of spatial concepts supports their work in other subjects. For example, in a Year 9 geography lesson, pupils successfully applied their mathematical knowledge in a lesson on gradients. Some Year 9 pupils still have difficulties with basic number work, including percentages.

95. In Year 11, most pupils are entered for GCSE and gain grades A* - G. In 2000, 56% of candidates gained GCSE grades A* - C, well above the national average of 47%, but below average when compared to similar schools. The progress of pupils who gained grades A* - C in 2000 was average when compared to the progress of pupils in other similar schools. However, in 2001, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A* - C fell to 53% and as a result pupils now perform significantly less well in mathematics than in English or science. This is an area of concern which has been recognised by the school.

96. In Years 10-11, pupils work confidently on most aspects of the subject. Their number work is generally accurate although there are some weaknesses in basic mental skills. Pupils working on the higher level GCSE course handle algebra effectively; but those working at intermediate level are less secure and confident with this topic. Pupils at Foundation level have a good understanding of measurement and handling data that helps them with project work in other subjects, such as with the Year 11 Youth Award Scheme. Overall, attainment is generally consistent across different aspects of the subject and there is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls.

97. The quality of teaching in mathematics is satisfactory overall. Lessons last for one hour, so most teachers plan carefully to provide a good variety of activities that will maintain the pupils' interest involvement. For example, in a very good Year 10 lesson, pupils enjoyed collecting and analysing their own data on reaction times. Teachers use a range of teaching strategies, including the use of practical, investigative and collaborative tasks, and this helps to engage and motivate their pupils, particularly in lower ability groups. Teachers are keen to try new ideas. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils used a paper number slider to practice multiplying and dividing decimals. The way that teachers structure the lessons is particularly good. Most lessons have at least four parts. A typical lesson begins with a quick 'starter' activity that often helps to settle and engage the pupils. Next comes the main teaching activity, usually followed by appropriate consolidation tasks. Finally, most lessons end with useful review sessions. Homework is used effectively to support pupils' learning. Teachers work hard to maintain disciplined classrooms. Relationships in lessons are mainly good and teachers use lots of praise to encourage the pupils. As a result, most pupils behave well and work hard. In the best lessons, teachers set interesting work that stretches the pupils' thinking.

98. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, pupils are insufficiently challenged, particularly where the teacher places too much reliance on the use of the textbooks. In some lessons, teachers fail to match tasks closely to pupils' mathematical and organisational abilities. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on statistics, the work set as was too easy. They do not give sufficiently clear instructions to pupils on how to complete a task. As a result, the pupils are unsure about what standard of work is expected of them. This sometimes leads to untidy and inaccurate work. In some classes, pupils' written work is not monitored closely enough and so standards deteriorate. Some books are carefully marked and teachers make supportive comments. However, standards of marking are unsatisfactory. Too many books contain work that has not been marked nor acknowledged by the teacher. Written corrections are rarely done.

99. Overall, pupils are interested in their work, they are able to maintain concentration for long periods and most achieve their objectives. There is insufficient use of ICT to support to teaching of mathematics, although a successful lesson was observed in which pupils used a graphing package to generate linear graphs. This activity helped to raise attainment, as pupils had to describe their own findings.

100. The head of department has only recently been appointed and has made a purposeful start. The department operates in an inclusive way that supports all pupils, as is evident in the lesson planning. The staff has responded very positively to the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. Teachers have adopted the Key Stage 3 Numeracy Strategy's *Framework for Teaching* to guide curriculum planning and to support assessment. This represents a significant development since the last OFSTED inspection. The progress made by the department since the last inspection has been satisfactory, although improvements in monitoring and the use of data have been limited. A departmental audit has recently been completed leading to a development plan that has identified appropriate key issues. There is a good team spirit in the department and the head of department is keen to provide the strategic leadership that will help to address the key issues.

SCIENCE

Overall provision in science is **good**.

Strengths

- The teaching is good, and pupils enjoy their science lessons.
- There are high standards of attainment which are well above the national average.
- There are good schemes of work.
- There is very good leadership and management of the science department.
- The monitoring of teaching is good.

Areas for improvement:

- There are not enough learning support assistants or technicians.
- The use of statistical information to monitor pupils' progress is not fully developed.
- There is insufficient use of computers.
- The remaining laboratories are in need of refurbishment, and the science facilities are too spread.

101. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment in science is well above national expectations and has risen slightly over the last three years. Pupils' results in the 2000 National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average. The number of pupils reaching the expected Level 5 and above was well above the national average for all schools and above average when compared with similar schools. Results of teacher assessment were below test results. There has been a slight improvement in standards over the period 1997-2000. There is no significant variation in the standards of boys and girls and pupils have achieved better in science than in English or mathematics. In 2001 the National Curriculum Test results at the end of Year 9 were well above the county and national figures, with boys doing slightly better than girls.

102. The standard of work seen during the inspection in Year 9 was good and supports the view that pupils achieve well from Years 7 to 9. Pupils have gained a good grasp of a wide range of science topics and improve their depth of understanding by the end of Year 9. High and middle-attaining pupils can use word equations effectively to explain how chemical reactions occur and can use the particle theory when describing the effect of temperature on the rate at which solids dissolve, and they can relate this to the weathering of rocks. A group of lower-attaining pupils could describe the differences between a compound and a mixture but found some of the scientific vocabulary confusing.

103. In the GCSE examinations in 2000, results in science overall were well above the national average. The department provides two courses to match the needs of pupils. All pupils study the Salter's Science course and are entered for the double award in science with the number of pupils gaining grades A*-C being well above the national average. All the pupils taking GCSE gained grades A*-G with the performance of boys and girls being similar. Overall results have been similar over the last three years. GCSE Double Award science results for the school in 2001 were well above national averages, with boys achieving significantly better than girls.

104. Pupils are offered either double award or Science Plus course in Years 10 and 11. All pupils achieve well by the end of Year 11, but low-attainers make particularly good progress owing to help provided by science teachers and the classroom assistants. A small number of

lower attaining pupils, particularly boys, lack confidence in writing, scientific vocabulary and planning skills.

105. Pupils taking courses at the higher level show good knowledge and understanding of complex concepts. They can explain the structure of DNA, triplet codes leading to mistakes and mutations and can confidently discuss the use of x – rays. Middle and lower-attaining pupils can describe clearly how enzymes are used in the production of soft – centred chocolates and relative properties of materials to uses in the construction industry. By the end of Year 11, pupils are able to carry out investigations involving a number of variables and collect accurate data, which they analyse effectively, using good graphical skills. Their reports show that they have good presentational skills and that some pupils are using the Internet effectively to research topics.

106. Pupils show a positive attitude to science. Most are keen to answer questions and are interested in the tasks set. Question and answer sessions mostly generate one-word answers and thus miss opportunities to challenge pupils. Where longer answers are encouraged, pupils show that they are capable of more in-depth responses, as was demonstrated in the review of biological plasmids with a Year 11 class. However, there are limited opportunities for them to express their own ideas and to research topics of interest to them.

107. Throughout the school, pupils generally behave well and work safely and sensibly in the laboratories. They collaborate effectively and handle apparatus with care. Pupils are very polite and forthcoming to visitors and talk confidently and positively about their experience in science. Occasional chattering and interrupting of the teacher was observed especially in Year 10. Since the last inspection, standards in science have improved. The introduction of the Science Plus course in Years 10 and 11 is meeting the needs of the lower attaining pupils whilst the use of ICT is becoming an important tool in extending pupils' experience of science.

108. The quality of teaching is good in science and some very good teaching was observed in Years 7, 8 and 11. Almost 80% of the lessons seen were judged to be satisfactory or better with over half of the lessons being good or very good. Lessons are very carefully planned and include a wide variety of teaching methods, including video clips, demonstrations and practical tasks to help pupils understand the ideas involved. Many lessons start with questioning about previous work. This is an effective method of focusing pupils' attention, but opportunities are missed to listen to pupils explaining their own ideas. Practical work is well organised and, with the support of the laboratory technicians, pupils are able to achieve meaningful results in practical work. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, enabling them to illustrate their lessons with examples of the application of science to everyday life, leading to some lively discussion.

109. Class management is mostly good and lesson objectives outlined at the beginning of the lessons are generally summarised before the close. In a small minority of lessons, where there is a lack of variety in the tasks provided or where pupils are not actively engaged in learning, some pupils lose concentration and show their lack of interest. Teachers' expectations are generally high. The provision of good-quality extension material for high attainers is limited, although help sheets are provided for low-attainers. Teachers' expectations of pupils with special educational needs are good. Pupils receive help from science teachers and learning support assistants and are provided with help sheets, writing frames and key words to enable them to make progress at the same rate as others in the group. However, the level of support teaching is insufficient which makes heavy demands on teachers.

110. When teachers monitor the progress of pupils within a lesson they improve skills and knowledge. For example, Year 11 increase their understanding of transformers because the teacher circulates and asks them searching questions as they conduct their experiment. In the most effective lessons, pupils are aware of their current level of achievement, the target they have been set and the criteria they need to meet to achieve their target.

111. Homework is not set regularly in some classes, particularly lower attaining groups. In Years 7 to 9 homework frequently involves completing tasks begun in class or providing the opportunity for pupils to check their understanding. Homework is generally marked in insufficient detail for pupils to understand how to improve their standard, but this is not always the case.

112. The science department is very well led and effectively managed. The head of department has initiated a management structure, which is having a positive effect on planning and the delivery of the curriculum. Documentation is very detailed and policies, with the exception of the homework and marking policy, are fully implemented. Subject performance is rigorously monitored by the head of department, the key stage co-ordinator and the link manager from the senior team.

113. Support is available for Year 11 pupils at lunchtime drop-in sessions where they can complete course work. A recent review of teaching allied to professional development in assessment has enabled teachers to share best practice and this has proved effective. Teachers are well qualified and have a wide range of expertise. Teachers have received training in the use of ICT to support science teaching and they are extending their use of this in the classroom. No use of ICT was observed during the inspection because of a virus which affected the department's computer facilities. The very effective link with Henley College provides opportunities for all pupils to extend their experience of science.

114. Whilst there has been some improvement in the accommodation since the last inspection it is still poor. There are sufficient laboratories and all classes are taught in specialist rooms. However, some laboratories have an outdated, inflexible layout. There are insufficient technicians to assist the teachers. Overall there has been good improvement in science since the last inspection

ART AND DESIGN

Provision for art is **good**

Strengths

- Thorough planning of lessons within a well designed scheme of work.
- Pupils receive plenty of individual attention, enabling them to develop their own skills and expressive ideas.
- Good focus on developing pupils' practical and visual skills.
- Good marking and assessment of pupils' work.
- Effective team of specialist art teachers who have accomplished many recent improvements, with capacity to continue improving the department.

What could be improved

- ICT is insufficiently used, both for researching art and design history and for image generation and manipulation.
- There is too little references to other artists and designers to inform the development of pupils' work.
- The department does not use a sufficiently wide range of cultures and traditions, beyond European artistic traditions.
- A small but significant minority of pupils has poor behaviour and response to art lessons.

115. In the 2000 GCSE art examination 68% of pupils gained A* to C grades, which was above the national average. The trend of GCSE art results over the previous three years has been inconsistent, with good and bad years. This erratic trend continued in 2001, when results were again well down. Over these years the percentage of pupils opting to take art in Years 10-11 has declined. This has coincided with a period of loss of specialist art teaching staff and difficulties in recruiting supply cover during long-term absences. These problems are now resolved. With new specialist art staff and leadership, the department has begun the process of recovery.

116. By the end of Year 9 overall attainment is in line with expectations for the ages of the pupils. In Years 10 and 11 attainment is below expectations for the GNVQ course and in line for the GCSE course, therefore a little below expectations overall. The same judgement about both standards was made in the last inspection in 1997. These overall judgements contain a wide range of attainment, from below to above expectations, seen in the work of individual pupils. Throughout the school pupils' practical skills are good, and they handle paint, graphic media and printing processes with confidence. Sketchbooks and other work show a growing ability to understand colour, tone, line and texture, and the way artists and designers exploit these visual elements. For example, Year 9 pupils were observed coping successfully with subtle concepts about pictorial space and composition. Year 10 pupils were observed researching a range of artists to gain insights, for example, about colour and working methods, to enrich the development of their own work.

117. The quality of teaching in Years 7-9 is good, and satisfactory in Years 10-11. A range from unsatisfactory to very good teaching was seen during the inspection. Strengths of teaching are the well planned and prepared lessons and the quality and quantity of individually negotiated, detailed and evaluative support that all pupils receive. This enables pupils to pursue their own ideas and develop their own individual expressive, creative work, especially in Years 10 and 11. In the best lessons, class teaching was brisk, pupils were left in no doubt

about what was acceptable work and behaviour, work was well pitched to engage the interests of the pupils, and the teacher's individualised support enabled pupils to make progress. This included pupils of all abilities, all cultural backgrounds, and pupils with special educational needs. In the one example of unsatisfactory teaching seen pupil behaviour was not so well managed, so a small number of pupils were able to spoil the learning atmosphere of the lesson. Assessment is a developing strength of teaching, with a new system recently in place and consistently used to evaluate pupils' work including homework. Pupils receive helpful written comments including how to improve their work.

118. Although most pupils' attitudes to art are good, there is a small minority of pupils whose attitudes are fairly negative, even when teachers make great efforts on their behalf. These pupils are slow to note the recent improvements in the provision of art that the majority have appreciated, now that the subject has benefited from new leadership. The period of decline followed by an improving trend has occurred since the last inspection in 1997, so the subject is now back to where it was then, but with much better potential for continued improvement. Studios have been improved by some major redevelopment, new courses at GCSE and GNVQ have been successfully introduced and the sequence of projects in schemes of work throughout the school now provides good continuity and development opportunities. Art staff are working as an effective team to continue the improvements. The subject is well resourced for practical work, although there is insufficient technician time, but needs better resources for art and design history. Work is still needed to improve the use of ICT, and to consider how art teaching helps pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, in particular the development of multicultural aspects of art and design.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- All teachers in the department work very hard, and have very good subject knowledge and expertise in the delivery of the subject.
- Teachers work well as a team and use a good range of photocopied material to support pupils of all abilities.
- Pupils attitudes and behaviour in lessons are usually good, sometimes excellent.
- The department is involved in Beacon School link activities.

Areas for Improvement

- The large number of classes in Years 7-9 taught by two or more teachers needs to be reduced.
- Food practical lessons are too short.
- New resources and equipment are needed in all workplaces.
- Class sizes throughout the school are too large and need to be reduced.
- ICT facilities are poor.

119. In the assessments at the end of Year 9 the percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 and above has risen from 65% in 1999 to 75% in 2001. For the last two years boys and girls have achieved equally, but no pupils have achieved the highest levels. The levels reached in 2001 are just above the national average. In Years 7-9 all pupils make at least satisfactory progress whilst some make good progress. They all experience a wide range of processes

and skills. In a Year 7 novelties topic pupils use acrylic or wood to make a key fob. Their design ideas had been very carefully sketched with good annotation. Materials of different colours had been glued together to give a stripy effect to the design. The shapes had been very carefully cut out by hand and finished to a very high standard. Pupils of all abilities had achieved success and many were exceeding their expected levels of achievement.

120. In a Year 8 textiles group pupils were making and printing T-shirts with a logo. Pupils had used the design process well to arrive at their designs. They were able to choose from a wide variety of methods for printing their logos and took a pride in producing work of good quality. Pupils were challenged to work quickly in the available time and their behaviour and attitudes were very good. Pupils with special educational needs were fully integrated into the lesson with support. In a Year 9 cultural food topic pupils had researched four different meals from a country of their choice. They had cooked two meals and had evaluated both meals to arrive at the meal which provided the most satisfaction to those eating it. The quality of the food produced in the lesson was very good, despite the poor equipment being used. A variety of meals were cooked and all turned out well. Pupils' attitudes were mature throughout the lesson and a lot was achieved.

121. At the end of Year 11 the percentage of pupils achieving GCSE A*-C grades for technology was 60% in 1999, 52% in 2000, both figures being above the national average. In 2002 56% of pupils attained A*-C grades. In 2000 girls achieved higher grades than boys, but in 2001 the gap had narrowed to 17%. Graphics achieved exceptional results, whilst electronic products, food technology, textiles and resistant materials were below national averages.

122. In Years 10 and 11 pupils work within the subject of their choice. The majority of pupils make satisfactory progress, whilst some make excellent progress and produce work of the very highest quality. In a Year 10 resistant materials lesson pupils were learning how to use metal working equipment to measure and mark out accurately on steel. Through the teacher's very good subject knowledge pupils learnt how to use the equipment carefully. They also used their numeracy skills to calculate dimensions and enjoyed taking part in the demonstrations. Special needs pupils showed understanding. In a Year 10 textiles project for a one-off gift item pupils were producing design sketches of their ideas and researching a variety of production methods. They were working to the examination marking criteria and were being well prepared for their major project. Homework was set as part of the research process and required analysis to be undertaken on products available in shops. High standards were being promoted. In a Year 10 electronic products lesson pupils were experimenting with capacitors. Very good clear demonstrations were given in order that pupils could understand how capacitors work. They were then able to carry out timed experiments with charged capacitors. By the end of the lesson all pupils understood how capacitors worked and how they were used in real world applications. In a Year 11 graphics lesson work of high quality was seen. Pupils had completed a mini project designing and making pop-up books. Many different graphical skills and techniques had been used in the design sketches which were of consistently excellent quality. Practical outcomes had been very carefully made. All pupils were working above their expected levels.

123. The quality of teaching and learning in this subject is good overall, with some very good and excellent teaching observed. A variety of teaching methods is used. Many lessons start with clear objectives listed on whiteboards. Demonstrations are well prepared with backup booklets of good quality and photocopied research material readily at hand to help pupils of all abilities. In a Year 10 electronics lesson the teacher-produced booklet showed very clear circuit diagrams with clear steps for the practical part of the lesson. This saved considerable time and allowed the teacher to cover much more work at a very good pace. In a Year 11 graphics lesson the examination criteria had been copied for every pupil to use

when completing sections of their folios. Pupils had been told to use only the highest criteria levels and this ensured high quality work was produced for assessment. High quality project work was displayed in the showcase for pupils to observe and high quality exemplar folios were on wall displays. All of these challenged pupils to achieve success. In textiles and food rooms similar displays were available. The pupils' literacy was also supported in textiles, where keywords were displayed. Pupils' diaries also contained lists of design and technology keywords. Teachers used their very good subject knowledge to plan effective lessons, and individual education plans were used in lesson plans to help pupils with special needs achieve success. High standards of behaviour were insisted on, although on occasions the behaviour of a minority of Year 8 boys was unsatisfactory. In Years 7-9 there is insufficient emphasis on collating folio pages in the correct order and evaluating practical products. In some lessons the teachers give pupils detailed comments on how they can progress to higher levels, but this is not a consistent feature of the department's practice.

124. Good relationships between staff and pupils was a feature of nearly all lessons observed. Pupils were polite, well mannered and keen to work. Pupils learn good social skills in this subject. They develop responsible attitudes and can work independently. They are confident and able to work independently on their design or practical work. In a food practical lesson, where time is at a premium, pupils had mature sensible attitudes when it came to clearing up utensils. In this situation, when attitudes are so positive, teachers are able to teach well and pupils make good progress in lessons.

125. All pupils have access to an adequate curriculum. In Years 7-9 they experience various aspects of the subject including resistant materials, graphics, food, textiles and electronic products. However limited use is made of ICT. Stand alone computers are old and the software is not compatible with the new network but they are used to give effective control technology demonstrations. The Year 9-11 scheme of work provides for a good coverage of the programmes of study apart from a knowledge and understanding of structures. In Years 10-11, all pupils are able to choose one option from resistant materials, food, textiles, graphic products or electronic products. In graphics, ICT is used as an aid for the top quality presentation of folio work but facilities are very limited. Many pupils use their own computers at home for researching and word processing. The department is involved in the Neighbourhood Engineering Scheme with four local companies and has links with the Oxford Trust which supports workshops and gives grants for GCSE project work. A lunchtime club operates regularly.

126. The department is well managed and works well as a team. Departmental documentation and schemes of work are good. The department is aware of national strategies for literacy and numeracy and is planning for them. Line management and the monitoring of teaching is taking place and is well documented. Progress has been made on developing and introducing a new system for assessing and recording pupils' work. However, the lack of resources, the lack of adequate technician support and the issues of split and large classes need to be addressed quickly as these significantly affect achievement.

127. The quality of teaching since the last inspection has improved considerably. All lessons observed were satisfactory or above this time. Marking is still inconsistent but a new policy has been introduced and is being used effectively in some areas. Rooms are still unwelcoming and heavily used, and no investment has taken place since the last inspection. Some equipment is unsafe and must be replaced as a top priority. Technician support has not been improved. ICT equipment is now completely out of date and is inhibiting the quality of pupils' work. Teacher monitoring strategies have been introduced and are working well, but monitoring of pupils' work remains unsatisfactory.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Very good management of an experienced, committed team has led to consistent, high-quality teaching.
- The department achieves very good results.
- Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

What could be improved

- Provision for ICT is inadequate.
- The third teaching space is unsatisfactory and limits teaching and learning.
- The provision of books and equipment in Years 10-11 is inadequate.

128. At the time of the last inspection, pupils' standards in geography were in line with the national average; they are now well above it. Particularly noteworthy is the improvement in GCSE results, which in the last five years have risen from just below the national average to well above it.

129. In the national assessments at the end of Year 9, the proportion of pupils achieving the nationally-expected standard is well above average. The gap between boys' and girls' performance is smaller than the national gap because boys achieve very well. The apparent slip in results in 2001 is the result of more rigorous assessment and greater demands of pupils, especially of those achieving the higher levels.

130. At GCSE, the proportion of pupils choosing geography is in line with the national average, and the proportions achieving graded (G+), higher (C+) and top (A/A*) results are all well above average. Pupils with SEN achieve well. The number of pupils who achieve below Grade E is well below the national average proportion, and almost every pupil achieves a grade. As at age 14, the gap between boys' and girls' performance is narrower than the national gap. Pupils on average achieve slightly better results in geography than they do in their other subjects.

131. The standards of current work are above average, and well above in Years 10-11. When they arrive in Year 7, pupils' mapwork skills are good, but their knowledge of places and their ability to carry out an enquiry are poor. The first units of work in Year 7 consolidate their map skills, use atlases to improve their knowledge and teach enquiry skills through an enjoyable piece of work on the school environment. Their knowledge of places shows improvement, but is still weak. By the end of Year 9, pupils can carry out investigations fluently, setting out their aims and hypotheses, collecting data, analysing and presenting it well in map and graph form, and drawing sensible conclusions which test their hypotheses. Their knowledge of places has improved further and is satisfactory. Mapwork skills and the way pupils of all abilities present their work are both above average. In their work on tourism, pupils recognise and present the conflicting viewpoints of various interested parties, and use their skills of interpreting maps and photos to make sensible decisions about locating tourist attractions. Pupils with SEN complete all work, while very able pupils complete extension tasks using graphs.

132. Standards of work in Years 10 and 11 are high. In an excellent Year 10 lesson, pupils described theories of land use in cities, and critically examined differences between the theories and applied them to complex case study materials using maps, photos and census

data. By the time they approach GCSE, pupils in Year 11 can compare the landscapes developed on different rock types well, and use sophisticated techniques, such as triangular graphs and systems analysis, to compare industries and more- and less-economically-developed countries. Their knowledge of geographical vocabulary is very good and they use technical language accurately. Pupils' work is presented very well, gaining them credit in their coursework and helping them produce notes which can be revised easily for the examination. Progress for pupils of all abilities is therefore good throughout the school.

133. Pupils' attitude to their work is good and in many classes, especially in Years 10 and 11, very good or excellent. Behaviour is generally good and pupils are keen to learn. They willingly give full answers to questions and show sustained concentration. Opportunities to learn are maximised by prompt lesson starts and quick settling to work. Pupils enjoy geography at Chiltern Edge because it is well taught and motivating, because they have good relationships with their teachers, and because they experience success.

134. Teaching is almost always at least good and, in half of the lessons seen, very good or excellent with many strengths and no significant weaknesses. This is a great improvement on the satisfactory picture at the time of the last inspection. The teachers are all specialists with a great love of teaching the subject. Their subject knowledge is very good, and they use this expertise to excite pupils' imagination and anticipate their difficulties. Lessons are very well planned, and the teachers often use short, lively tasks such as quizzes or crosswords to settle pupils and recap key information. Aims are made clear, and there is a purposeful recap at the end to check whether these have been fulfilled. Consequently lessons have a clear focus, and pupils know what they should be learning. Expectations of behaviour and effort are high. Teaching is usually conducted at a brisk pace; on the rare occasions when the pace drops pupils lose concentration and their learning is interrupted.

135. The teaching is consistent across the department, and this helps raise standards since pupils know what to expect. The teacher choose appropriate teaching methods, and vary them in order to motivate and engage all pupils. There is a need for the development of greater independent learning skills on the part of the pupils. The department produces its own, very good, resources. Teaching and planning for literacy (especially writing) and numeracy are very good: A great variety of styles of writing is encouraged and planned for, and geography plays a very full part in developing pupils' numeracy.

136. Marking is good throughout the department; it is frequent, accurate and encouraging, and gives pupils, especially those in Years 10-11, a clear sense of how they are doing and how to improve. Pupils in Years 7-9 would benefit from the very good procedures for setting performance and improvement targets which take place in Years 10-11.

137. The curriculum complies with the requirements of the National Curriculum. Although there has been improvement in the department's use of ICT since the last inspection, the provision is not as varied as it should be and ICT resources are inadequate. Pupils' work contains internet-derived images, graphical presentation and word-processing, but insufficient examples of the exciting material available from, for example, weather satellites, data-logging, tectonic sites and multi-media work which would reinforce pupils' ICT skills and enhance their learning in geography still further.

138. Modules of work are well chosen and put together into a well-planned course with an excellent scheme of work. This clear document guarantees that skills are taught progressively. Homework is properly planned into the courses. The department makes a good contribution to pupils' social, moral and cultural development through its work on the environment, the link with Burkina Faso and residential fieldwork,

139. The department is very well led and managed, which can be seen in the high quality of the teaching the shared commitment to higher standards and the consistent GCSE results. The work of the department is monitored and analysed very well. There are sufficient well-qualified, experienced and well-trained specialists to teach the subject. The quality of purchased resources is satisfactory in Years 7-9, but unsatisfactory in Years 10-11, where there are barely sufficient texts and geography is poorly represented in the library. Equipment for fieldwork, weather study and ICT is inadequate, as is the map stock. Other equipment, such as overhead projectors, TV and video, is barely sufficient and is ageing. The quality and quantity of home-produced resources is very good.

140. The two recently-refurbished rooms provide satisfactory environments for learning geography. The third room is unsatisfactory; but is shortly to be replaced. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The test and examination results, and the quality of teaching, have improved markedly. Assessment, a weakness in 1997, is now a strength. The issues for improvement raised in this report have been recognised by the department and feature in its development plan.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Standards in Years 10 and 11 are good and improving; the latest results above national averages.
- Pupils' knowledge of key concepts have been developed well.
- Evidence of good use of sources and that more-able pupils can make and defend judgements.
- Teaching is good in Years 10-11.
- Aspects of departmental leadership and management are good.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning in Years 8 and 9 are sometimes unsatisfactory.
- ICT is not used consistently across the department to enhance pupils' learning and standards.
- There is no fully fledged scheme of work in Years 7-9 to co-ordinate the work of the department.

141. By the end of Year 9, standards are in line with national averages overall, but are uneven. Pupils in Year 7 make mostly good progress. Most have good recall of key facts and several pupils are able to offer precise insights into the struggle for power in the Chinese court at the time of Empress Wu. Such pupils take time to think their answers through and do not blurt out comments unthinkingly; this is not always the case in Years 8 and 9. However, the several examples of good work on the Tudors and Stuarts in Years 8 and 9 demonstrate that chronology and factual recall are being developed appropriately. There are also instances where pupils' sense of what is right and wrong, and therefore their spiritual and moral development, is well supported when teachers encourage them to respond to the drama of historical events and their consequences for individuals and groups. However, in some cases the attitudes of Year 8 and 9 pupils towards their work is unsatisfactory. They sometimes lack concentration and too readily speak without thinking. They could, therefore, achieve more than they do. Standards, behaviour and attitudes to learning remain good in Years 10-11. In the main, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

142. In Years 10 and 11, pupils' standards are now good and improving. In the 2000 GCSE examinations 39% of pupils gained grades A* - C, which was below national averages. However, in 2001, results improved substantially, with 74% gaining such grades, against a provisional national average of 64%, with 44% gaining grades A/A* and with little significant differences in the success rates of boys and girls. In Years 7-9, the teacher-assessed results in 2001 were lower than the previous year. Sixty three per cent of pupils gained or exceeded the target level in 2001 as opposed to 90% in 2000 when there were also significantly more pupils gaining the higher levels. However, this change is likely to reflect the more demanding approach to teacher assessment and standardisation the department has recently introduced.

143. These trends are born out in the standards observed in lessons and in the samples of pupils' classwork examined in the course of the inspection. In Years 10-11, pupils' knowledge and understanding of key concepts such as 'autocracy', and their use of source material have developed well. In class discussion, significant numbers of pupils are confident enough to offer sensible comments about the state of pre-revolutionary Russia, and their work on the 'New Deal' at the time of President Roosevelt and of Britain's recent history of social and parliamentary reform is generally detailed and accurate. There is evidence of good quality use of sources and also evidence that more able pupils are developing the skill to make and defend judgements, although this is not yet established in all cases. A significant number, for example, are able to link ideas into well-structured paragraphs but few write structured essays.

144. The quality of teaching is mostly sound-to-good, a similar judgement to that made in the last inspection report. Much teaching is good but it is more consistently effective in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have good knowledge of their pupils' needs and generally use their subject knowledge to plan effective and well-structured lessons. In the best lessons, behaviour norms are well-established, teachers' expectations that pupils will work purposefully and with concentration are clear and consistently reinforced, and teachers know that when they make teaching challenging, their pupils will respond. In these successful lessons teachers seek to develop pupils' literacy skills by offering less able pupils writing frames to structure their work and by encouraging younger pupils to read challenging texts aloud and supporting them well when they encounter technical concepts and terminology. Marking is designed to help pupils improve and targets to support this improvement are regularly written into pupils' books, although this practice is not consistently followed by all staff. Examples of this kind of effective teaching were seen throughout the school. In a minority of lessons, however, the teachers' ability to establish consistent standards of good behaviour is less successful and their range of teaching methodologies is too narrow.

145. The leadership and management of the department are sound and, in many respects, they are good. The department has responded very well to the need to raise GCSE results. By analysing pupils' answers in previous years' examinations, it has been able to identify and address necessary improvements in pupils' skills and its success here reflects the excellent effort, commitment and sense of purpose of the acting head of history. The department has introduced standardisation meetings to ensure that the grading of pupils' work follows a consistent interpretation of the required curriculum, reports to parents meet legal requirements and are of good quality. Appropriate amounts of homework are set and the history curriculum offers satisfactory breadth and balance. Staffing difficulties at the time of the inspection have restricted the range of educational visits. Opportunities to develop pupils' use of information technology have been increased but the use of ICT as a teaching aid, other than for personal research, remains underdeveloped. All staff have been observed teaching and targets set. Staff new to the department have been well-supported. The management of professional development within the department is good as is the department's day-to-day administration. Resource levels are adequate but some

accommodation is shabby and not conducive to raising pupils' expectations, and has an adverse effect on teaching quality and pupils' standards. There is not a detailed scheme of work to guide the work of the department, and class teachers do not as a matter of course receive the kind of detailed information on pupils' prior performance to ensure, from the start of the academic year, that all make maximum progress.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Some of the teaching is very good.
- There are excellent examples of GCSE coursework.
- Clubs and library ICT resources are well used.
- Homework is used to good effect.
- There are very good worksheets which integrate well with the software.

Areas for improvement

- The ICT National Curriculum is not fully implemented in Years 7-9.
- A functioning cross-curricular approach is not widely implemented.
- There is a lack of computer aided work in the pupils' projects across the curriculum.

146. In the 1997 inspection, most pupils achieved good standards in ICT. Pupils had a positive attitude towards ICT which helped enhance their attainment. The number of computers was below the national average. The school identified the need to provide adequate access to all students, as the use of ICT in some subjects was very limited. Since then, there has been an improvement in the provision of good quality ICT equipment. However, general access by other subjects to the ICT rooms remains poor. There is an effective booking system, but it is not well-promoted.

147. Teacher assessments in 2000 showed that 89% of pupils were at Level 5 and above at the end of Year 9. This is well above the national average. Standards reached in lessons observed in ICT show that in Year 7 most pupils are achieving Level 5 in the lessons observed, which is above levels expected for pupils of that age. All pupils are able to log on and retrieve saved files with confidence and manipulate data to suit the tasks set. The school relies upon a cross-curricular approach in Year 8 and Year 9. However, this approach is not successful, and by the end of Year 9, there is very little evidence to show that there is any improvement on the progress made in Year 7, or to support the school's assessments. There is no clear overall trend in promoting ICT within other subjects and pupils are not receiving their national curriculum entitlement in Years 7-9.

148. In Years 10-11, pupils can opt to take Computer Literacy and Information Technology Stage 1 (CLAIT) or full GCSE ICT courses. Forty three percent of pupils passed GCSE with grades A*-C in 2000 which is below the national average; provisional figures for 2001 show that the A*-C figure has risen to 72% which is well above the national average. All pupils take a good core ICT course in Years 10 and 11. Pupils are using a wide variety of software ranging from word-processed programs with advanced features such as text boxes, tables, digital pictures and word art to desktop publishing and spreadsheets. CD ROM information sources are available on the network for pupils to access through the library and many use the Internet with good effect to extract information for projects. Pupils have their own e-mail accounts. By the end of Year 11 most pupils have shown that they are able to use the ICT facilities with confidence, particularly where they have well defined assignments to follow. Standards observed in lessons were average. The attitudes of pupils towards using computers is usually positive, and pupils are keen to use them. Behaviour is generally good, but in some lessons pupils' chatter is distracting to other learners.

149. Open access to clubs and organised access to the library enable frequent use of the computers by pupils. They have good access to resources such as the Internet and e-mail. However, the amount of material displayed on walls and in pupils' work across the curriculum is minimal. Although the school has recently had to deal with a computer virus attack, the lack of computer-aided work within pupils' projects is a cause for concern.

150. Teaching ranged from satisfactory to excellent in the lessons observed, and it is good overall. In the best lessons, the teacher has very good control of the classroom, inspiring enthusiasm and interest and raising pupils' expectations. Worksheets and teachers' instructions are generally clear and easy to follow. The work is structured to enable the least able to obtain good results, while extension work for the most able stretches them, enabling pupils to achieve above average levels of attainment. The pace of lessons ranges from satisfactory or good, allowing pupils to progress at a satisfactory rate. Written advice on the standard of work achieved and how improvements can be made is very good. Feedback in Year 7 includes an assessment of the pupils' attainment level. Teachers are generally responsive and sensitive to the needs of the pupils.

151. Homework is set in all ICT classes. The standard of homework is good and teachers' comments enable pupils to make judgements about their progress and targets set for improvement.

152. The head of department is newly in post, but has already made an impact in terms of preparing the way for assessment tracking processes and cross-curricular co-ordination. He recognises that there is much to do to implement the National Curriculum requirements in Years 7-9. ICT is a popular subject and now has the foundation to grow throughout the rest of the school.

153. Accommodation is adequate, but the Business and Information Technology room (BIT) is split into two areas which causes some problems with class control. Most teachers have attended in-service training in basic computing, but this has not been reflected in the way ICT has been promoted across the curriculum.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in Modern Foreign Languages is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards in Years 10-11 are above the national average in French and German
- The provision offers opportunity for the more able, dual linguists.
- The subject contributes significantly to extra-curricular activities, and supports the cultural and social development of pupils.
- The department is led effectively.

Areas for improvement

- There is unsatisfactory behaviour in some lessons.
- Support for pupils with special educational needs is not always effective.
- In Years 10 and 11 pupils are hesitant at communicating in the target language.

154. Standards in French and German at age 14 are in line with those expected in the National Curriculum for modern foreign languages. At age 16, GCSE grades A*-C in French and German are significantly above national averages, with girls out-performing boys in both subjects. This was the case at the time of the last inspection and no significant shift has taken place in this respect. The figures depict a trend of stable, well above average GCSE performance over several years. In French and German, pupils' achievement over time is above average overall throughout the school.

155. Most pupils are able to work with the target language (i.e. French or German) as the classroom language. They can take part in choral drills, respond in the target language to simple questions, conduct short dialogues and take active part in role plays. Their knowledge of vocabulary is improving as is their ability to pronounce words and phrases. Their grasp of the grammar of the modern foreign language studied is becoming firm, although this is more evident in German than in French. Pupils produce a good deal of written work involving a variety of topics, exercises and worksheets. Their independent, unaided writing is still at preliminary stages, however.

156. At the age of 16, pupils' attainment overall is above average, as reflected in their GCSE results. However, variations between ability groups are noticeable. The work of lower ability pupils tend to be less sustained both in range and in quantity and less attractive in presentation and care of their books. In Years 10 and 11 pupils understand classroom instructions in the language studied, and respond in phrases or sentences. Their pronunciation is largely accurate. Nevertheless, pupils show hesitation in communicating naturally in the target language. While much of the written work seen is in response to specific tasks or homework, many pupils can also produce written work involving paragraphs or larger passages. The majority of them complete their course work in line with the requirements of the examining bodies for higher grades. The study of a modern foreign language contributes to pupils' literacy skills but ICT-linked language work is limited, and little evidence was seen of numeracy work in lessons or during scrutiny of pupils' written work.

157. Generally, pupils' behaviour is satisfactory in language lessons. However, instances of disengagement and unsatisfactory behaviour were noted in some lessons. These have the consequence of disrupting learning and diluting the effectiveness of teaching. While pupils' attitude to modern foreign languages is generally purposeful, a minority lack enthusiasm for the languages they study, with a few expressing resentment at having to study a language. In Years 7-9, while most pupils take care of their exercise books and worksheets, their standards of handwriting are not always satisfactory. In particular, lower

ability and many SEN pupils tend to be less committed. The pace of their learning is usually constrained by their short concentration spans and by their expressions of frustration. On the other hand, dual linguists demonstrate enthusiasm, commitment and a willingness to make sustained effort, which contribute to their success.

158. Both in French and German, teaching is satisfactory overall, though a small proportion of lessons were unsatisfactory, either through ineffective behaviour management or inadequate learning support for pupils with special educational needs. In more than two-thirds of the French lessons observed, teaching was good or better, while in half the German lessons observed teaching was good or better. Teaching contributes to pupils' learning through clear prior planning based on the knowledge of the pupils learning needs and their learning styles. Their knowledge of the languages they teach is good and by using the target languages in lessons, they serve as valuable role models. Teachers employ a variety of strategies and activities to motivate their pupils. Their expectations are high for all pupils, including those in lower ability groups and those with special educational needs. They take pupils' prior learning and ability and aptitude into their lesson planning; their pace is usually measured; they use necessary equipment, such as OHP and tape recorders, to facilitate learning. Lessons are interesting and appropriately challenging. They follow the schemes of work and the requirements of the examining bodies. Teachers' marking and feedback are sound and consistent. Homework forms an integral part of their teaching. Their class management is generally confident, but not always effective in a minority of cases.

159. When teaching is satisfactory or better, pupils remain responsive, and much learning takes place both during the lesson and over time. Where teaching proves unsatisfactory, it is mainly due to issues arising from class or behaviour management, as noted in a higher set Year 11 German lesson. Moreover, where there is effective support for SEN pupils, as observed in one lower ability Year 9 French lesson, the language teacher's strategies and activities involve and motivate all pupils. Inadequate or ineffective learning support to SEN pupils, on the other hand, results in disruption to and consequent limited learning by the whole class, as observed in a lower set Year 9 German lesson.

160. Both in French and German, most pupils are motivated by a positive attitude to language learning. They take care of their exercise books, undertake homework, take part willingly in a variety of classroom activities, and work with other pupils, when necessary. In lessons and over time, progress made by pupils in both languages is generally satisfactory, with pupils in higher ability groups and dual linguists making more sustained progress over time.

161. The department is managed well. Procedures for staff monitoring and staff performance management are in place. Arrangements are made for supporting new or less experienced teachers. Staff work collaboratively in the planning and delivery of the curriculum. Regular analysis and review of pupils' performance data feed into the setting process as well as the selection of pupils for the dual language programme. There are consistent approaches to assessment and monitoring pupils' progress. The department reinforces pupils' social and cultural awareness through its schemes of work and its educational visits and exchanges abroad. The management of pupils' behaviour is also viewed as a whole-department issue. The department's resources are adequate. The teaching of some groups by more than one teacher impacts adversely on teaching and learning.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Good teaching in Years 7-9 that lays the foundation of skills, knowledge and understanding for Years 10-11.
- Very good attainment at GCSE, with results continuing to rise over the last three years.
- Very good use of ICT in the classroom to support learning and to support record keeping.
- Very good extra-curricular opportunities available for pupils to enrich their musical life in the school.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils do not fully understand how the system of assessment works.
- There is unsatisfactory accommodation which hinders the further development of instrumental provision, access to larger GCSE classes in the future and use of space for group work.

162. The attainment of students on entry to the school is above average, and this level is maintained at the end of Year 9. The progress made by students with special educational needs is satisfactory. Students perform competently on keyboards and their aural skills are well developed. The department places emphasis on teaching basic literacy skills, which has a marked effect on listening and appraisal. Students are able to use technical and descriptive language to successfully describe and appraise music they hear. This was observed when Year 9 students listening to 'Lieutenant Kije' were able to evaluate how musical elements are used to change or express a mood. These same students, after learning to play the melody, had access to ICT to generate multi-layered arrangements of the melody. No singing was seen in lessons during the inspection.

163. GCSE results were well above averages in both 2000 and 2001. Results have continued to rise for the past three years. There were no A* grades in either year but the number of students gaining A grades has doubled. During the inspection it was only possible to see one lesson in Years 10-11 which is not sufficient evidence to make judgements on attainment during lessons.

164. Students' attitudes in music lessons are satisfactory. They are confident and eager to answer questions and show appropriate levels of interest, particularly in practical activities. They help each other when working together on keyboards, although many have a tendency to talk too much in-between the activities. In Year 8, on occasions the immature behaviour of some students affects their own progress and that of a small group of others.

165. Teaching is good overall. In all lessons students' performance is linked to developing their listening skills. Work is usually appropriately matched to students' abilities and the teachers' keyboard and other musical skills are used excellently in the classroom to improve students' knowledge and understanding. Teaching is well planned with suitable teaching styles and an interesting range of practical musical activities. Questioning is used well to challenge and assess students' learning. Good support is given to students with special needs, especially when a learning support assistant is present. In a Year 8 lesson a special needs student made good progress in performance and was confident enough to perform in front of the class. Good teaching together with appropriate use of resources and detailed planning ensure that most students make good progress in Years 7 to 9. Teachers ensure that in all lessons students have opportunities to develop many important musical skills,

although singing is not an integral part of all units of work. This is an area identified by the department for development. Computer work is used very effectively to develop computer-generated composition. The emphasis on the use and understanding of musical vocabulary has a direct impact on the high achievement at GCSE. This can be seen in students' synopsis of their compositions in Year 11. In the one or two occasions where teaching was unsatisfactory it was due to poor control of behaviour by the teacher.

166. The department is very well organised with good schemes of work to support teaching. Work is planned to support those students who have good musical talents, and support staff are effectively integrated into lessons to support pupils with special needs. The department has developed promising assessment systems, which are used to support students' learning and progress, including self-assessment sheets for the students. However, at present the students do not fully understand the system. The accommodation is poor. The department staff have decorated the main teaching room and this has provided a pleasant learning environment. However, the second teaching space, which is basically a foyer, is far too small to be effective. Development of instrumental provision and access to larger GCSE groups is hindered by the small space. There are problems with noise and space for group work, which is exacerbated when visiting instrumental teachers are in school. This poor accommodation also contributes to discipline problems in unsatisfactory teaching.

167. Leadership in the department is very good and has a positive impact on the quality of standards and extra-curricular work. About 250 students have instrumental lessons each week, which is a very high number in relation to the size of the school. The opportunities for extra-curricular activities are very good and students have access to perform in a variety of instrumental groups and ensembles. Teachers from outside the music department lead extra curricular groups well, such as the girls chamber choir. Links have been made with a local company who have sponsored the department and enabled them to buy a range of very good resources, which are used effectively. Students from the senior orchestra are to play at the companies board meeting. Pupils from the local partnership primary schools have the opportunity to play in the junior orchestra and more able students from Chiltern Edge have the opportunity to play with an adult community orchestra. For the first time in many years, many students have recently had the opportunity to take part in the musical 'Grease' and at present are working towards a performance of 'Bugsy Malone'. Students have had several workshops involving professional musicians from a range of musical styles and cultures, and such opportunities for performance have a good impact on the cultural and social development of students.

168. Since the last inspection, attainment in Years 7-9 has improved and results at GCSE have risen. Since his arrival the head of department has set up very good initiatives that have developed the breadth of provision of music in the school and had a positive impact on standards.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall the quality of provision for physical education is **good**

Strengths

- Standards of attainment are good especially in Years 7-9 and GCSE courses.
- Most pupils have good attitudes to the subject.
- There is clear leadership for the subject and staff work well as a team.

Areas for improvement

- Schemes of work need bringing up to date.
- There is insufficient monitoring of teaching to encourage the sharing of good practice that exists in many lessons.
- The cleanliness of the sport hall is unsatisfactory.

169. Teacher assessment at the age of 14 shows that almost all pupils attain the expected standard for their age. This is above the proportion that reaches the expected standard nationally and represents good attainment. The proportion of pupils attaining above the expected standard is in line with national figures. Inspection evidence supports this assessment of good standards in Years 7-9

170. In GCSE examinations in 2000, the proportion of pupils gaining higher grades, A* -C, was significantly above the national average. The proportion gaining A* and A grades was higher than the national figure. The numbers of boys and girls entered each year varies so comparisons are necessarily accurate. In the last three years, results have been above the national averages and have risen each year. Pupils performed as well in physical education as they did in other subjects. Results in 2001 were outstanding, with all pupils except one attaining a higher grade.

171. By the end of Year 9, pupils can play a number of games to a satisfactory standard. They know and apply the rules of these games consistently. Good standards of performance were observed in girls' gymnastics in Year 7 and boys' badminton in Year 8 and rugby in Year 9. Pupils know how to prepare for activity using a suitable range of stretching exercises. But these activities are usually lead by the teacher and opportunities missed for pupils to take the initiative for themselves. Equally when given the opportunity pupils can plan activities in response to tasks set by the teacher. This was shown in a Year 7 gymnastics lesson when pupils worked on sequences selecting from a range of movements and developing them on large apparatus. Pupils can observe carefully and make judgements about the quality of what they see. This is particularly effective when they are given careful guidance about how to make these evaluations and use them to coach others. In this way all concerned have a clear understanding of how to improve their work. A good example of this was seen in Year 8 badminton when boys coached one another as they learnt how to serve. This not only improved their practical skill but also reinforced their knowledge and understanding of the key learning points when serving. Pupils enter the school with a wide range of experience and many demonstrate a good standard in their work in Year 7. This level of work is sustained throughout, and represents satisfactory achievement for pupils of all abilities, including those with identified special needs.

172. In Years 10 and 11, pupils in general physical education lessons make satisfactory progress and attain average standards of performance. Pupils have the knowledge and understanding of how to prepare themselves for activity but this has not developed sufficiently from earlier work. They still rely on the teacher to lead these activities and do not take sufficient responsibility for their own preparation. There is satisfactory development of skills

learnt in earlier years. Pupils play a full game and have satisfactory understanding of the rules and tactics of the traditional games. The level of performance in games is better for boys than girls. When new activities are started, for example girls' football, satisfactory progress is made in acquiring these new skills. Pupils' ability to plan and then evaluate their work remains inconsistent because teaching does not always develop these aspects of the work. Standards in Year 11 GCSE classes are good. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of topical issues in physical education such as 'Women in Sport'. Workbooks show a good knowledge of anatomy and physiology and technical terms are used accurately. These students have good skills of independent study and research.

173. The great majority of pupils have good attitudes towards the subject. There are high levels of participation in lessons and behaviour is good. Classes respond quickly to instructions and concentrate on the tasks they are set. Group work is a feature of most lessons and pupils work well together regardless of race or ability. They show care and concern for others and work safely when for example they set out large pieces of gymnastic apparatus.

174. The quality of teaching overall is good. Some very good teaching and some that was satisfactory was observed but the majority was good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use this to plan activities that help pupils develop skill and understanding in a wide range of activities. Lessons are started through links made with previous learning and at the end of the lesson what has been covered is discussed with pupils. In this review teachers often comment on how well pupils have done and this reinforces the main points to be learnt from the lesson. In many lessons teachers make good use of questioning to confirm students' understanding. In these discussions good use is made of technical language that supports pupils' skills of literacy. In the best lessons pupils are given opportunities to observe and comment on work they are doing. In the great majority of lessons teachers manage behaviour well and organise groups of pupils and equipment efficiently. Then lessons run smoothly and pupils of all abilities make progress. Poor behaviour by a minority of boys in Year 10, and to a lesser extent in Year 8, often requires attention from the class teacher. Teachers generally manage this unsatisfactory behaviour well but this takes time and results in slower progress for all pupils. During lessons teachers use their good skills of observation to provide accurate coaching and comments to pupils about their performance. On some occasions this feedback is too general and does not match sufficiently the ability of the pupils and move the learning on. Pupils of all abilities work hard and are motivated to do so by praise and encouragement from teachers.

175. Leadership and management of the department are good. The new head of department has a clear view of what needs to be done to improve provision for physical education. A strength of the department is the commitment of all the staff to improvement. The priorities identified for improvement are appropriate and being implemented systematically. The targets set for the subject based on the prior attainment of pupils are appropriate and likely to be achieved. The schemes of work need revision to support greater consistency in the teaching particularly the planning and evaluating aspects of pupils work. The assessment system introduced this term is working well and includes pupils' self-assessment of their progress. It is not yet used by teachers to plan for groups and individuals in classes and as yet there is insufficient data to help when staff are reviewing units of work. The curriculum provides a satisfactory range of activities for both boys and girls and is supported by a good range of clubs and competitive activities. There is some inequality of access for pupils in Year 9 studying a second modern foreign language, who have less time than the others for physical education. The range of experiences and continuity of learning for these pupils is affected by this. Plans are in place for the use of ICT in the subject but the use of ICT in lessons is unsatisfactory because of lack of access to appropriate equipment. In the last twelve months there have been several changes in the

staffing of girls' physical education and the management of the department has changed from two heads of department to one overall. Some girls have had several temporary teachers and this has limited the number of activities covered. Staffing is now stable and standards for girls should improve in these activities. Accommodation for physical education is adequate but the sports hall is dirty and the changing rooms need refurbishment.

176. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The standard of teaching has improved and is now good and standards are above national averages. GCSE results have improved in the last three years. Time allocated for physical education in Year 11 has been increased. However the issue of time allocation for pupils in Year 9 taking a second modern foreign language remains as does the condition and cleanliness of the sports hall.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Standards in GCSE are well above national average.
- There is some good specialist teaching which enables pupils to make effective progress in religious education.
- There is excellent leadership and management of the department.
- Pupils' have genuine enthusiasm and interest in the subject throughout the school, and there are excellent relationships between teachers and pupils.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient specialist teaching, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Accommodation is poor and provision for ICT is inadequate.
- Pupils do not have access to a wide range of good quality resources of bought resources, although resources developed by teachers are of a very high standard.

177. Overall the standards achieved by the majority of pupils at the end Year 9 are in line with the expectations of the Oxfordshire Agreed Syllabus. There are no significant difference between boys and girls but attainment for higher achievers is above expectations. Opportunities for all pupils to reach their potential are good. For example, more able pupils are given extension tasks on Christianity and Hinduism which are taken from previous GCSE exam papers. These originate in the section of the exam which require a considered and thoughtful response to a religious or moral issue and which must show consideration of more than one point of view.

178. At GCSE attainment is above average, with no significant difference between boys and girls. During the last inspection, attainment at GCSE was in line with national averages. During the last three years the percentage of pupils gaining grades A* - C has been well above the national average, and the figure has risen from with 72% in 1999 to 85% in 2001. A particularly impressive feature of the most recent results is that nearly 60% of pupils gained A*-B grades. Value-added data for last year indicated that many pupils achieved above their predicted grade in religious education. This is commendable as the results reflect a wide range of ability.

179. There appears to be a high correlation between high standards of achievement in GCSE and quality of teaching, which is supported by very positive attitudes towards the

subject. Despite a reduction in option subjects from three to two, 47 pupils opted for RE in Year 10. More able pupils are effectively challenged and whilst GCSE groups are mixed ability, it is noticeable that many higher ability students opt for the subject. This suggests that in Years 7-9 there is academic rigour which challenges and motivates such pupils. All GCSE pupils are taught with the aim of achieving the highest grades. The aim of extension tasks is to add depth and breadth of understanding, rather than increase content. At GCSE, the department enables pupils to achieve high grades by enabling them to demonstrate their ability to make connections between various areas of the syllabus and demonstrate a wider appreciation of what it might mean to belong to a faith group. Pupils are successfully encouraged to recognise that there is a diversity within religious traditions and form coherent judgements on religious issues based on evidence.

180. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow a core non-examination course. For the majority of these pupils attainment is above the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus, with no significant difference between boys and girls. Those pupils who do not reach their potential are taught by non-specialists.

181. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good or very good. In Year 8, good class control creates an orderly environment, enabling pupils to ask clarifying questions and thereby extend their understanding of Hindu beliefs. Pupils have a good understanding of Hindu beliefs, relating to reincarnation, samsara, dharma and moksha. Teachers provide well planned opportunities for pupils to read aloud in order to consolidate their understanding. A well structured lesson on Hindu worship developed pupils knowledge of Puja and enabled them to look for similarities and differences between worship in other religions. In all lessons, pupils showed a real interest in their work and sustained good levels of concentration. They understand what they are doing and how well they have done. However, more opportunities are needed to enable pupils to assess their own learning and reflect on what they have achieved. Those lessons which focused around assessment tasks were especially effective in promoting this. Although the quality of written work was good more opportunities should be provided for pupils to engage in extended writing.

182. In Years 10-11 (Core religious education) pupil progress was best in those lessons which were taught by specialist teachers. These lessons were characterised by excellent relationships, clear structure, firm discipline, respect for pupils and appropriate use of humour. Pupils, in turn, showed high levels of empathy and sensitivity for differing viewpoints, enabling them to fully appreciate and understand Jewish food laws. In these lessons pupils showed a real interest and enthusiasm for the subject and sustained good levels of concentration throughout. Pupils commented on the usefulness of the course even though it did not lead to a recognised qualification. They showed particular interest in the relationship of belief to moral issues. Specialist teachers were effective in dealing with complex questioning to moral and religious issues. Where pupil progress was unsatisfactory this was largely due to lack of specialist knowledge, slow pace, poor control and insufficient attention given to checking pupils' understanding. These lessons were well planned but not effectively executed.

183. In GCSE religious education, the teacher's firm discipline, combined with a good sense of humour and respect for pupils, enabled the latter to make effective progress and acquire confidence in formulating perceptive questions. Pupils are making effective gains in their knowledge and understanding of Hindu beliefs and beginning to understand the social and emotional aspects linked to Divali. This is evidenced in their good oral responses and written work.

184. Pupils' attitudes to religious education range from good to very good in Years 7-9, with evidence of good listening skills, willingness to learn and a genuine enthusiasm for the

subject. In Years 10 and 11, attitudes were unsatisfactory in only one lesson, where pupils displayed poor listening skills. This was again linked to non-specialist teaching. In other lessons, pupils expressed a very positive approach to the non-exam course.

185. The management of religious education is excellent, ensuring clear direction for the development of the subject. The department has clearly articulated aims and values which support those of the whole school. There is ongoing monitoring, evaluation of schemes of work, assessment and teaching. In particular, the ongoing work on assessment linked with eight levels, is to be commended. The impact of effective leadership and management are evident in the consistently high standard of teaching, excellent examination results and well planned schemes of work.

186. The last inspection report was very positive. The department continues to thrive because of its commitment to high standards. The issues from the last report have been acted on but the provision of adequate text books and the development of ICT still need to be fully addressed. The resources produced by teachers are of a very high standard.

DRAMA

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

Strengths

- The quality of the specialist teaching is good.
- Standards at GCSE are well above average.
- The subject is well led.
- There are good monitoring and assessment procedures.

Areas for improvement

- Drama is not offered in Year 8.
- Accommodation is inadequate.
- There are insufficient learning resources.

187. The quality of the teaching in drama is good but provision is poor in terms of the allocation of curriculum time, accommodation and resources.

188. Standards in the GCSE examinations are well above the national average and have been so for some time. The proportion of pupils obtaining a grade in the A* to C range in 2000 was extremely high when compared to the national figure, with boys and girls achieving very good results. In 2001, the standards were again well above average. The quality of the work seen with older pupils during the course of the inspection was equally impressive and showed a command of dramatic technique and an ability to work collaboratively and evaluate performance. There is no curriculum time for drama in Year 8 and so the satisfactory standards attained by pupils in the latter part of the autumn term of Year 9 represent good progress.

189. The quality of the specialist teaching seen was good and accounts for the very high standards in public examinations. There is very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and teaching methods, and lesson plans are in place to meet the needs of all pupils. The work is challenging but delivered in such a way that all pupils make significant learning gains. Varied teaching techniques are employed to take account of pupils' capabilities and previous levels of experience. A particular strength is the ability of pupils to evaluate their own and each other's work and this is because the learning objectives have been so clearly communicated. This was also seen in the teaching undertaken by non-specialist staff.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject are good. The youngest pupils are enthusiastic about their work even though they cannot study drama in Year 8, and the subject is oversubscribed in the Year 9 options.

190. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department provides clear educational direction and effective support to the non-specialist teachers. She has adapted the schemes of work to take account of the fragmented curriculum time provided for the younger pupils and has arranged and led a range of theatre visits and workshops to broaden pupils' education experience of drama. Good monitoring and assessment procedures are in place with pupils having regular access to their own record cards. The head of department has limited opportunities to develop the subject, however, because of a lack of resources and poor accommodation. This was commented upon at the time of the last inspection and the school has made no progress in tackling the issues. Accommodation remains inadequate with no facility for staging or lighting and there is no access to the hall in lesson time. The resource allocation is limited and is barely sufficient to supply the necessary books. These are issues which must be addressed as a matter of urgency.