

INSPECTION REPORT

WITTON PARK HIGH SCHOOL

Blackburn

LEA area: Blackburn with Darwen

Unique Reference Number: 119730

Headteacher: Mr J E Gosling

Reporting inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe
1025

Dates of inspection: 10th - 17th January 2002

Inspection number: 193216

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
School address:	Buncer Lane Blackburn Lancashire BB2 6TD
Telephone number:	(01254) 51445
Fax number:	(01254) 693699
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J R Fairless
Dates of previous inspection:	13 th - 17 th January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1025	Dr D A W Biltcliffe	Registered inspector	Equality of opportunity	Results and pupils' achievements; teaching and learning
9034	Mrs J W Biltcliffe	Lay inspector		Attendance
13452	Mr H Meggitt	Lay inspector		Partnership with parents
5038	Mr H Heller	Team inspector	Special educational needs; English as an additional language	Pupils' attitudes and values; school's care for pupils; leadership and management
11479	Mr J A Paine	Team inspector	English; drama	
1262	Mr R Heath	Team inspector	Mathematics	Efficiency: staffing, accommodation and learning resources
4607	Dr D E Ward	Team inspector	Science	
11190	Dr W M Burke	Team inspector	Art	
2491	Mr D Beaumont	Team inspector	Design and technology	
12470	Mr B M Greasley	Team inspector	Geography	Curriculum
8873	Ms C Evers	Team inspector	History	
4603	Mr A F Ryan	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
4829	Mr I H C Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
8645	Dr J D Ward	Team inspector	Music	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; assessment
13217	Mr M D Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education	
10448	Mr R Wilkins	Team inspector	Religious education	
1819	Mr R H Crowther	Team inspector	Business education; vocational education	

The inspection contractor was:

PPI Group Ltd
 7 Hill Street
 Bristol
 BS1 5RW

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This average-sized, mixed comprehensive school educates about 1050 pupils aged 11-16. The social and economic background of pupils is below average overall. The overall level of attainment of pupils on entry to the school at age 11 is well below the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is around the national average, but the proportion with SEN statements is around double the national average. About a quarter of the pupils come from families of ethnic minority heritage, but only one is at an early stage of learning English. The school was last inspected in January 1997.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Witton Park is a good school. It has many substantial strengths and few weaknesses. Although national tests indicate that pupils' overall standard of attainment is well below average on entry and at the end of Year 9, pupils' overall attainment is close to average in GCSE examinations. Their performance compares very favourably with that in most schools of a similar kind by the end of Year 11. Teaching is good. The school's management works very hard, thoughtfully and successfully, but the school's success is also a team effort. The school provides a good standard of education for pupils, has a warm sense of community and provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Most pupils make good progress in their studies during their time in school.
- Achievement in GCSE examinations has risen significantly since the last inspection.
- By GCSE, pupils' overall performance is much better than that found in most schools of a similar kind.
- The quality of both class teaching and pastoral welfare is high.
- Very good senior leadership and management move the school purposefully forwards.
- The school's concerted approach to improving pupils' reading and writing is paying dividends.
- The school's clear aims are successfully translated into action: *Achievement for All* is a reality.

What could be improved

- Still higher standards are possible, notably in mathematics, English, design and technology and geography.
- Better policies for giftedness, class organisation, performance assessment and personal education.
- The health and safety of pupils and adults as they move between the school's two sites.
- Statutory requirements are not met for daily collective worship or fully for information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 10-11.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress since 1997. It has improved substantially virtually all the weaknesses identified then. For example, the policy for improving literacy is being implemented very successfully. Senior management evaluates the impact of the school's policies very systematically. Classwork is, in most lessons, well matched to pupils' capabilities. Provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is a great success story. Links with parents are good. Music is now satisfactory overall. The spiritual and cultural life of the school is steadily improving, but the school is still far from providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. Most pupils attend well, but the poor attendance of a minority, despite the school's efforts, pulls the overall rate down.

Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 9 is roughly what it was in 1997, but their overall level of attainment in GCSE examinations has risen significantly over the last few years. Boys do as well as girls and both sexes make good progress overall. The school's teaching has improved further. The behaviour of pupils is good. The school shows a very good capacity to improve its practice. Its senior management works assiduously and successfully to improve pupils' education. This is a successful school as a result of a real team effort.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	D	C	C	A

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

The school's results in the national English, mathematics and science tests for 14 year olds were below average in 2000 and well below average in 2001. The highest result in both years was in English. The overall results were (unusually) below the average for schools of a similar kind (as measured only by the proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals), although average in English. Standards have remained broadly similar over the 1995-2001 period. By the end of Year 9, standards in the school are a little below average in most subjects. They are average, however, in English, art, history, physical education (PE) and religious education (RE) and above average in ICT. The majority of pupils of both sexes, including those with special educational needs, make sound progress in their studies between Years 7 and 9 as a result of good teaching and positive attitudes to work.

Overall results in GCSE were broadly in line with the national average in both 2000 and 2001, on the measure of the average points that pupils scored. They were below average for the proportion of pupils gaining at least five grades A*-C. The overall standard attained over the 1998-2001 period was, however, much higher than that achieved in most schools of a similar character. The strongest subjects in GCSE over the last few years have been science and ICT. English language, mathematics, design and technology, geography and history have consistently been weaker subjects. Overall, however, in view of the low overall standard on entry, the results represent a considerable achievement in most subjects. The majority of pupils of all backgrounds and earlier levels of attainment (although those who are gifted and talented could achieve still more), make good progress during Years 10-11. The table above well represents the scale of the school's achievement.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	A significant strength of the school. Most pupils respond very positively to the staff's trust and are friendly and courteous.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The vast majority of pupils behave well, are well disciplined, are amenable to reason and show respect for property.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are cordial. Pupils work together in easy harmony. They relate well to adults and happily take on responsibility.
Attendance	Most pupils attend well, but a significant minority do not, despite the school's best efforts. Punctuality for school is generally good.

Most pupils are pleasant, hard-working young people, displaying good personal standards and manners. They are optimistic about school and their own educational opportunities. Very few pupils play about and waste time. There is a strong community feeling around the school.

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 that strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching is good throughout the school. This results in most pupils making good progress and enjoying school. In well-taught lessons pupils make good progress through suitably demanding work, a brisk pace and a kindly but firm discipline. Unsatisfactory teaching is usually characterised by too much spoon-feeding and insufficient intellectual challenge. Overall, teaching is satisfactory in mathematics and geography in Years 7-9 and in mathematics, art and music in Years 10-11. It is very good in history and PE in Years 7-9. In all other cases it is good. The teaching of literacy is a strength. The promotion of numeracy is not good enough, but the school has plans to remedy this deficiency. Although its satisfactory teaching of gifted and talented pupils requires further sharpening, the school generally teaches all abilities well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The breadth and balance of the curriculum are good overall. Years 10-11 have two vocational courses and very good careers education.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	A strength of the school. The leadership, management, teaching and resources are of a high order. Specialists work closely with departments.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The only pupil at an early stage of learning English is making good progress. Children from bilingual homes learn without undue difficulty, but the school vigilantly monitors their progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	These aspects are well provided overall: moral and social education are good and stronger than (the still satisfactory) spiritual and cultural aspects. The personal education programme is, however, not well structured.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Another very strong feature of the school. The pastoral system is sensitive, substantial and effective. The supervision, mentoring and monitoring of pupils' welfare are wide-ranging.

Most curricular aspects are sound, although ICT does not meet fully statutory requirements in Years 10-11, because the strand of controlling devices is not taught enough. The teaching of literacy is very strong, but that for numeracy is not good enough. Careers education is very well provided, but the structure of the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is too loose. The school's family feel rightly gives pupils great confidence in school. The inter-school walkway is, however, a potential hazard.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Senior management is very effective and a considerable strength of the school. As a result, the school has clear aims, improving academic achievement, strong pastoral systems and a buoyant, optimistic tone.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are committed, concerned and well organised. They are aware of the school's broad direction, but light on monitoring performance.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The national system of performance management is in place. The school evaluates its policies and practices carefully. Academic monitoring is sound, but further refinement is needed.
The strategic use of resources	The school's priorities are thoughtfully identified and financed. Financial planning, monitoring and review are thorough.

The school is appropriately staffed and adequately resourced. Teaching, administrative and other staff work as a close-knit team. The accommodation is satisfactory overall and is being steadily upgraded: science and Learning Support are very well accommodated, but PE facilities are poor. The site is attractive, but any rain drenches those walking between the school's two sites. The school pays very close attention to obtaining the best value for its money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school's high expectations of pupils' hard work and level of achievement. The good progress that pupils make. The high quality of teaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More information about their children's progress and more opportunities to talk with subject teachers.

Inspectors' judgements support the views that parents express. The school enables most pupils to make good progress and achieve well, mainly as a result of good teaching and the vigilant monitoring of standards. It has successfully established a climate of hard work in class. Teachers' annual reports to parents about their children's attainments and progress are fairly clear, but direct parental contact with subject teachers is not sufficiently programmed into the school's annual calendar of events. Overall, the school is rightly held in high regard by parents and the wider community.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The standard of attainment of pupils in the school varies very widely. Overall, it is a little below that expected nationally of pupils by the end of both Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils' overall level of attainment is well below average on entry in Year 7 and in the national tests in Year 9. It is just a little below, but close to, average in GCSE examinations. This overall rise in attainment across Years 7-11 demonstrates that pupils generally make good progress during their time in school.

2. Since the last inspection in 1997, the level of attainment in the Year 9 national tests has risen, broadly keeping pace (except for the drop in 2001) with the rise nationally. The school's results in GCSE have also risen over the 1997-2001 period, again broadly in line with the rising national trend. Recent GCSE results are considerably higher than those in the early 1990s and represent a good achievement by the school.

3. When pupils come to the school in Year 7, although a minority are very able, high attainers, their overall level of attainment is well below average. It does, however, vary a little from year to year and has risen slightly over the last few years. The proportion of pupils reaching the basic yardstick of at least Level 4 in the Year 6 national tests, for example, was a little below average in 1997, 1999 and 2000. The proportion of high-attaining pupils joining the school has, however, been much lower than in a typical comprehensive school – only about two-fifths of the norm over the years 1996-1998, although rising to around two-thirds of what is typical in 1999-2001. In the national primary tests in 2001, about two-thirds of the pupils in Year 7 reached at least Level 4 and one-fifth reached at least the higher Level 5. Other sets of national tests administered by the school paint a similar picture.

4. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2001, the proportion of pupils who achieved the national standards of at least Level 5 or Level 6 was well below average in all the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. On the average "points" that pupils scored in these tests in 2000 and 2001, their attainment was close to average in English, but below average in mathematics and science. Over the 1995-2001 period the school's results have usually been in the range of 60-80 per cent of the national average. Since 1996 the trend of the school's results has been steady and close to, but a little below, the rising trend nationally: English results have (except in 1999) been a little higher than those in mathematics and science.

5. Girls are consistently a little ahead of boys overall in English by the end of Year 9, but boys' performance in the subject in this school is closer to that of girls than is generally the case nationally. Boys tend to do a little better than girls, however, in mathematics and science, although girls just edged in front of boys in 2000 in mathematics. The limited evidence available suggests that the school's intake has similar levels of attainment between boys and girls.

6. When the school's Key Stage 3 results are compared with those in schools which have a similar background (as measured solely by the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals), pupils in this school performed well above the group average for points scores in 1998, in line with the group average in 1999, but below average in 2000 and 2001. Over the last few years the proportion of pupils in this school reaching at least Level 5 or Level 6 in the national tests in all three subjects has been above what most schools of a similar kind achieve.

7. In the five other (non-core) subjects formally assessed at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2001, teachers judged the overall attainment of pupils as close to average in design and technology, history and in information and communication technology (ICT), but below average in modern foreign languages and well below average in geography. Inspectors consider that pupils' overall level of attainment is average in history and ICT, but below average in design and technology, geography and modern foreign languages.

8. The overall level of attainment measured by national tests is, however, only part of the story. A factor that acts adversely on any national comparisons of the school's results is the high proportion of pupils in this school with statements of special educational need. In most recent years, for example, around five to six per

cent of pupils have been educated on the basis of such statements – a proportion that is at least double the national average. Most of these pupils have serious learning difficulties. Only in the current academic year has the proportion of these pupils in the school fallen to the lowest figure in recent years of four per cent – a position that is still above average. A minority of pupils, too, do not make the progress they should on account of their poor attendance. Taking these factors into account puts an even more positive gloss on the school's performance.

9. The overall pattern of pupils' progress over Years 7-9 tells an optimistic story: the statistical evidence available from national tests suggests that most pupils make good progress during these years. Similarly, on the evidence of pupils' work and lessons seen during the inspection, inspectors judge that pupils' progress and achievement in their studies are good overall, as a result of thorough teaching and strong class management.

10. By the end of Year 11 in the GCSE examinations of 2000, pupils' overall attainment was fairly close to average – a little below the national average for the proportion of pupils who gained at least five subjects with grades in the range A*-C, but average for pupils' overall points scores. Although the 2001 results were a little lower than the previous year's, they were close to average overall, showed a substantial improvement on the position at the previous inspection and, importantly, indicated a good rate of progress by pupils from their attainment two years earlier.

11. The school's GCSE results have improved impressively over the 1994-2001 period. In 1994-1996, for example, the proportion of Year 11 pupils gaining five or more of the higher (A*-C) grades was 17-21 per cent. This proportion then rose significantly to a level within the range 32-40 per cent in 1998-2001, despite attainment levels at intake being broadly the same. Pupils' average points scores, too, rose substantially over the same period. The trend in the school's results over the whole of the 1994-2000 period was above the rising trend nationally.

12. The school's high achievement during this period was nationally recognised by the (then) Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). They gave the school in 1998 the accolade of being – at twentieth position – amongst the 50 "most improved" secondary schools nationally. This was mainly in relation to the fact that the proportion of pupils gaining at least five grades A*-C in GCSE examinations had risen from 17 per cent in 1995 to 40 per cent in 1998. This improvement in performance was achieved by the school playing to its strengths and reinforcing successful departments (as, for instance, by the full spectrum of ability taking GCSE information studies and the "double-GCSE", GNVQ course at Intermediate level in business education), whilst at the same time working steadily to improve lower-performing subjects. This process has further to go, in order to bring all departments up to the standard of the best.

13. There is, nevertheless, evidence of some slippage in progress over their school career of a small minority of pupils. The major factor in this underperformance is their poor or intermittent attendance, especially in Year 11. Those pupils who attend well generally reach a suitably high standard in GCSE. If the results of those Year 11 pupils with less than 80 per cent attendance – as well as those with well-recorded, serious learning difficulties – are excluded from the analysis, the overall results of the remainder are close to the national average. This represents a substantial rate of progress and achievement by pupils from their overall, well below average standard on entry in Year 7. The good (and improving) quality of teaching and the consistently high standard of pastoral care and guidance are major factors in this improvement in academic performance.

14. In the core subjects pupils' attainment of a grade in the range A*-C in GCSE in 2000 was above average in science (a substantial achievement), but well below average in English and mathematics (at around half the national average). In 2001 the science results were close to average (still a good achievement), but were similar to those of the previous year in the other two subjects. The school's task is now to raise the overall standard in English language (literature results are good) and mathematics by the end of Year 11 to match the higher standard achieved in science.

15. When pupils' performances in all the subjects they took in GCSE are compared with one another, pupils did significantly better in at least the last three years in science and ICT. Pupils have done worse than in most of their other subjects in the last three years in English language, mathematics, design and technology, geography and history. No pupil achieved the highest A* or A grades in either 2000 or 2001 in geography or music.

16. In this school, unusually, boys generally achieve at least as well as girls. Over the last five years, for example, as many boys as girls have achieved at least five grades A*-C. In the last six years boys have been much closer to what boys achieve nationally than girls have been to their national average. The school has not sufficiently researched the reason for boys' apparently good performance. The limited evidence available suggests that a major factor is simply that boys' attainment is at least as high as girls' when pupils come to the school in Year 7.

17. When the school's average point scores at GCSE are compared with those in schools with a similar "free school meals" background, this school's performance has been very much better than most in at least the last five years. By the same measure, pupils' overall performance was well above average in science in 2001, but below the group average in English and mathematics. The proportion of pupils gaining at least five grades A*-C was in line with the group average and the proportion gaining five or more grades A*-G was above average. Overall, this is a commendable set of examination results.

18. In work seen during the inspection pupils' standard of attainment varied widely, but their overall standard by the end of Year 9 was a little below that expected nationally. By the end of Year 11, too, the overall level of work is a little below average. Although the overall standard of work is below average in most subjects, it is above average in ICT by the end of Year 11. Pupils' standard of attainment is average overall in Years 7-9 in English, art and ICT; in Years 10-11 in science and business education; and throughout the school in history, physical education (PE) and religious education (RE).

19. As noted earlier, the overall rate of pupils' progress through the school is good. This applies equally to pupils who have special educational needs and to those for whom English is an additional language, as a result of sensitive, skilful teaching and very well organised and knowledgeable management at all levels. Pupils who are gifted and talented make satisfactory progress overall – not enough in English, but at a good rate in PE and (in Years 10-11) in modern foreign languages. They could achieve a little more overall by consistently challenging teaching and the comprehensive tracking of their progress. Pupils of Indian heritage perform best overall in the school. Overall, the school's "inclusiveness" is a considerable strength of its work, well exemplifying its motto of *Achievement for All*.

20. In English pupils' overall attainment is close to average by the end of Year 9. It continues to be so in English literature, but is a little below average in language work by the end of Year 11. Pupils' standard of reading varies widely, but is broadly average overall in accuracy and fluency. The strengths of pupils' written work are planning, handwriting and presentation. The redrafting and refining of work, as well as spelling, are of a lower but broadly average standard. The good standard of class discussion in Years 7-9 is not sustained at the same level in Years 10-11. Pupils generally listen carefully and use technical vocabulary competently.

21. The school's very good literacy programme makes a clear impact on the work of most other subjects across the school. Pupils' overall standard of reading is slightly below average. Most pupils are fluent readers, but a significant minority are hesitant. Their competence in reading aloud varies across subjects. The standard in science, for example, is generally sound, partly because (as in geography) pupils have more opportunity than usual to read texts to the class. Pupils' overall level of understanding what they read is adequate, but a significant minority do not sufficiently understand the implications or deeper meaning of what they read: quite often the reaction of these pupils is "I don't understand what I have to do".

22. Pupils' standard of writing is a little below, but close to, average overall. A strength of written work is usually the above average quality of handwriting, general tidiness and presentation (except in design and technology). A notable feature is the care taken of exercise books: graffiti and trivial embellishments are very rare. Most stages of written work, from planning and drafting through to execution and revision, are good in ICT, RE and business education. Note-taking is infrequently practised and (partly) in consequence is below average in shape and content. The school's high attention to spelling, the widespread display of key words and the ready availability and use of dictionaries in some subjects result in the standard of spelling and punctuation being close to average overall.

23. Pupils are confident and relaxed in informal speech. Their overall quality of speaking in lessons, in contrast, is just a little below average. Most pupils speak audibly and in clear, standard English. They discuss issues in groups in an understanding and reasonably focused manner. They are, however, less confident than

normal in making and sustaining an extended point of view. This is partly because they do not get enough opportunity to engage in class debate. Their confidence in using subject-specific vocabulary is average overall: it is a strong feature of English and RE, but weak in mathematics and in design and technology. Most pupils listen carefully to their teachers and to one another.

24. Pupils' standard of numeracy in mathematics and across the curriculum is below average. Overall, pupils are more hesitant than usual in handling numbers mentally or in readily recalling basic number facts. The prime reasons for this are the lack of practice in mathematics and insufficient coordination of these aspects in subjects such as science, design and technology, and geography. The school does, however, have firm plans to move forward in the near future with a coordinated policy and staff training on this weakness. The overall standard of work in science is below average by the end of Year 9, but close to average at the end of Year 11: higher attainment and progress in Years 10-11 are particularly the result of thorough departmental planning, a clear focus on achievement and an overall good quality of teaching.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

25. Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development are a significant strength of the school. Pupils amply repay the trust that staff show in them by responding positively to the wide range of activities the school offers. They are friendly, courteous and, above all, optimistic about schooling and their own educational opportunities.

26. Pupils behave well both in lessons and in their movement around the school. Their attitudes and behaviour were good (and often very good) in four out of every five lessons seen; in only three per cent of lessons were they less than satisfactory. Despite the difficulties imposed by the distance between the school's two sites, pupils are generally well disciplined during circulation times and very few use this as an opportunity for mischief. Pupils are trustworthy, amenable to reasoned argument and show respect for property, including the fabric of the building. There is very little evidence of graffiti, although litter is a recurrent problem that the school works hard to contain.

27. Pupils' relationships with one another are generally cordial. There is no evidence of conflict or harassment across the boundaries of age, sex or ethnic origin. Indeed, the easy harmony evident across these various groups is a noteworthy feature of pupils' relationships. They also relate very well to teachers, non-teaching staff and visitors to the school. Those pupils on the register of special educational needs who experience social and behavioural difficulty see the school as a secure base in which they can work to the best of their abilities.

28. Pupils take up with enthusiasm the opportunities made available to them to assume responsibility. There is, for example, a sound prefect system that offers a range of interesting duties. Pupils serve as library assistants and school receptionists. Many older pupils act as mentors to support younger entrants, as they adapt to life in a secondary school. Year and school councils have recently been established and involve more than 80 pupils in representative work and consultation.

29. The number of pupils excluded is within the upper half of the range for a school of this size. The systems for determining exclusions are carefully graduated and only applied after a wide range of alternative measures has been employed.

Attendance

30. The attendance of most pupils is good. Despite the considerable efforts of the school, however, the attendance of a significant minority is poor, leading to a slightly unsatisfactory picture of attendance in the school overall.

31. The overall level of attendance in the last (2000-2001) academic year was 89.2 per cent, fractionally below the national "satisfactory" benchmark of 90 per cent and the national average of 90.9 per cent. The levels of both authorised absence (9.3 per cent) and unauthorised absence (1.5 per cent) were slightly worse than the corresponding national figures. The level of attendance is, however, a little higher than it was at the time of the last inspection.

32. The overall pattern of attendance is stable and has been within the 88-90 per cent range over the last six years. The range of attendance amongst the year groups is fairly close, too: in the last academic year, for example, it was best in Years 7 and 8 at just over 91 per cent and worst in Years 9-11 at 87-88 per cent.

33. The school staff work very hard, both internally and with a range of external agencies, to achieve a good level of attendance. The school has a thorough and comprehensive attendance policy and strong systems to sustain and try to improve pupils' attendance. Its prospectus, for example, emphasises to parents the importance of good attendance and punctuality. It has a thorough system for recording and analysing pupils' attendance and for consulting about the most effective ways of securing improvement – as, for example, through termly care panels.

34. The school has employed additional clerical, mentoring and educational welfare support to tackle the minority of pupils whose low attendance is a problem and those parents who do not regard regular attendance as important for their children's immediate welfare and long-term future. The low level of attendance of a minority of pupils is a handicap to the school as a whole, because it impedes the normal work of teachers and the progress of good attenders.

35. Punctuality for lessons is generally satisfactory, although the distance necessarily travelled between classes on the two sites often results in the loss of up to ten minutes' teaching time from at least two lessons in the day. Additionally, a few pupils are slow to go to lessons at the end of breaks. Punctuality in coming to school on time is, in the main, good. Overall, the school works very hard, and with great sensitivity, to sustain good attendance amongst its pupils.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

36. The quality of teaching is good overall throughout the school. It is at least satisfactory in nearly all lessons - satisfactory in about one quarter and good in three-fifths of them. Additionally, teaching is very good (and occasionally outstanding) in around one in every seven lessons. Two lessons out of the 223 inspected had teaching that was unsatisfactory and in three the teaching was poor. Three lessons were outstanding. The quality of teaching is very similar throughout the school.

37. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. In 1997 88 per cent of the teaching was satisfactory or better. Now 98 per cent of teaching is at least satisfactory and the amount of unsatisfactory teaching is only one sixth of what it was then. About half the teaching was good (or better) at the last inspection, but that proportion has risen to three-quarters. The amount of very good teaching has doubled to 15 per cent now.

38. Teachers' subject knowledge is good; it is secure even amongst non-specialist teachers. In most lessons this high level of competence enables teachers to choose appropriate themes and methods, to select successful ways of interesting pupils in the topics being taught and to explain facts and ideas quickly and confidently to pupils of different levels of ability. As a result, pupils generally enjoy their lessons, pay attention to what they are taught and make good progress. Occasionally, teachers are not specific enough in setting out precisely what they want pupils to learn, despite having sound background knowledge themselves.

39. The impact of this solid subject knowledge was well illustrated by an art lesson in Year 7. Here the teacher used his own skill in drawing to lead pupils on to consider and reproduce the structure of their own houses from different angles. Pupils' attention was immediately captured and held and their humorous responses showed their obvious enjoyment in what they were learning. Teachers' extensive knowledge and good organisational skills in PE, too, ensure that pupils learn sports techniques quickly and effectively. Teachers generally share their expertise with enthusiasm.

40. The basic skills of literacy are taken seriously by the school and taught thoroughly by a suitable variety of methods. The school has produced (and professionally printed), for example, its own extremely useful guide to subject-specific vocabulary across the curriculum, tabulating common subject words and leaving space for pupils to add a record of their own vocabulary – an imaginative and very helpful venture that deserves wider recognition. Key words are prominently and carefully displayed in classrooms – both words that are in common

use in different subjects as well as those relevant to particular lessons. The basic skills of literacy are particularly well taught in Years 7-9 in history, ICT and music; in Years 10-11 in business education; and throughout the school in English and RE.

41. In a Year 7 English lesson, for instance, “purpose”, “greeting” and “signature” were displayed for a lesson on informal letter-writing. Pupils are strongly encouraged to use dictionaries (as in English, history and Learning Support) to check on the spelling and meaning of words. The careful use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) enables pupils with special educational needs to make good progress in reading and writing in many subjects. Teachers generally pay careful attention to spelling, punctuation and presentation.

42. In contrast, consistent attention is not given to numeracy across the curriculum. There is insufficient attention overall in the school, for example, to the regular practice of mental arithmetic and the recall of basic mathematical facts. The result is that many pupils lack both competence and confidence in handling relatively simple number relationships. This holds back their numerical work in subjects such as science, design and technology, and geography as well as in mathematics.

43. Lessons are generally well planned. A consistent strength of the school’s practice is that the aims and outline structure of lessons are often written up – as, for example, on a whiteboard – to guide pupils on what they will be learning and for them to write them down. Most lessons are clearly and tightly structured. This has the advantage, in many cases, of helping pupils to consolidate their knowledge and understanding, step by step, and to gain confidence. Lessons are very well planned in English, history, ICT, RE, business education and Learning Support and in Years 10-11 in PE.

44. In a minority of lessons, however, the teacher’s grip on the lesson is over-directive and pupils are spoon-fed: teachers spend too much time “pumping in” information and pupils depend too much on their teachers’ ideas. In these circumstances pupils are weak at forward-planning for themselves: they carry out instructions carefully, but do not venture to think enough for themselves and are hesitant or inaccurate in tackling new issues or problems presented in a different way. This style of over-didactic teaching particularly restricts the development of gifted and talented pupils.

45. Most lessons start with a crisp revision of previous work covered. These introductions are usually well done in a brisk, cheerful way to introduce new ideas, reinforce past learning and arouse interest for what is to come. The most effective reviews draw heavily on pupils’ own views and memorisation, often orchestrated by the teacher, rather than by teachers simply telling pupils what they (should) know. The middle parts of lessons are usually well developed with a suitably meaty content, using a judicious blend of learning methods that incorporate paired or group exercises as well as whole-class explanation, discussion and presentation.

46. The greatest contrast is in the concluding parts of lessons. In most cases lessons are well rounded off in the last few minutes with a clear summary of what has been covered and a restatement of how the lesson’s aims have been met. Homework is then usually set that is suitable in purpose and amount. In a minority of cases, however, lessons peter out inconclusively and incorporate little or no opportunity to draw significant issues together, remove misunderstandings or reinforce concepts.

47. Teachers generally expect pupils to work hard and do their best. The vast majority set appropriately high standards for pupils to aspire to. In the best lessons teachers provide work that is well matched to pupils’ abilities and interests. They pose suitably stimulating and searching questions and expect rounded answers, correcting imprecise or sloppy thinking. Importantly, they do not accept superficial answers, continuing to probe pupils’ understanding by asking “why?” or “how?” and by seeking clear explanations or judgements. Pupils in such lessons have to think hard and carefully. Expectations are high in history, ICT, RE, business education and Learning Support.

48. In a minority of cases, in contrast, pupils could learn a little more. In a few instances, the issues being considered or the tasks carried out are too easy for the class as a whole or the highest attainers. Sometimes too much time is spent in simple copying from the board and too little on covering sufficient ground or depth. Greater intellectual demand is sometimes needed, so that pupils can aspire to, and achieve, the highest grades at GCSE.

49. Although a significant proportion of classes do not run for the full hour – and often for only 50 minutes owing to time being taken up by travelling around the split site – time is otherwise used satisfactorily in subject teaching, but unsatisfactorily overall in tutorial time. Teaching resources such as overhead projectors and whiteboards are used well and often imaginatively to illustrate or identify key features. Throughout the school, learning support assistants (LSAs) complement very well the efforts of the hard-working teaching staff: they are well guided, have thorough knowledge of pupils' needs and generally support the pupils to whom they are attached in sensitive and effective ways.

50. The management of pupils' behaviour is a strength of the school's teaching. The vast majority of teachers have a sound range of ways – some very imaginative or idiosyncratic – of ensuring that pupils behave thoughtfully, are fully involved in their learning and keep on the tasks set for them. In the best lessons there is never any doubt that teachers expect pupils to be courteous, well-disciplined and hard-working – and succeed.

51. Lessons are usually marked by a generous helping of humour and optimism. Teachers take seriously the school's motto, *Achievement for All*, and try to match work carefully both to course requirements and to pupils' interests. Pupils generally respond to these high expectations with diligence and courtesy. In only a few cases do teachers not secure full cooperation or attention from pupils, sometimes because they do not secure silence before they address the class.

52. Teaching is good overall throughout the school. It is very good in history and PE in Years 7-9. It is satisfactory overall in geography in Years 7-9; in art and music in Years 10-11; and in mathematics throughout the school. As a result of the good quality of teaching they receive, most pupils who attend regularly achieve well and make good progress in their studies both in lessons and over longer periods of time.

53. The work of specialist teachers for pupils with special educational needs is usually good and often very good. They are well trained and experienced and know the pupils and teaching materials thoroughly. They use an appropriate, but flexible, range of approaches, matching their teaching very closely to pupils' changing needs. Their handling of pupils is sensitive but firm. Pupils respond positively to such good teaching, generally welcome the challenges placed before them and sustain their learning throughout lessons. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, too, generally respond well in lessons.

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

54. The school's curriculum provides a good range of learning opportunities that mostly meet the needs of all pupils. It is enriched with very good provision to improve pupils' literacy skills and with high quality guidance for further education and future employment.

55. In Years 7-9 the breadth and balance of the curriculum are good overall. All subjects of the National Curriculum and RE are taught. All pupils study drama, information and communication technology (ICT) and either French or German.

56. In Years 10-11 a good range of curricular provision is offered. Pupils study the core subjects of English, mathematics, science, design and technology, PE, RE and either French or German. In addition, all pupils study courses in business and information and communication technology leading to the GCSE examination in information studies, or business studies, or the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) in business education. Health and Social Care (GNVQ) is suitably provided for those pupils who do not follow the GCSE science course. As reported at the time of the previous inspection, pupils' choice of subjects is limited to choosing one subject from three in each of two option groups. A small group of pupils for whom the full range of GCSE subjects is not deemed suitable attend work-related courses at a local college of further education.

57. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme is taught on three-four days each year, when the normal school timetable is suspended. In addition, the school has timetabled PSHE to be taught on three mornings each week during the 25 minutes that pupils spend with their form tutor. This arrangement is unsatisfactory: there is no coherent programme of work to offer underpinning for the subject

and the time that pupils spend with their form tutors is not used productively, because little or no PSHE is taught in practice.

58. The school has planned very effective provision to raise standards of literacy as part of the National Literacy Strategy. Additional time has been allocated to those pupils in Years 7-8 who have particular linguistic needs and for all pupils in Year 9. The school has appointed a literacy coordinator and produced an excellent word-bank booklet to support literacy in all subjects. Subject departments have successfully implemented strategies to develop literacy skills: these include a focus on reading, the display of key words and improving the quality of extended pieces of written work. The National Numeracy Strategy to raise standards in numeracy is largely undeveloped in the school: a coordinator has been appointed, but plans to improve numeracy in mathematics and other subjects, though firm, are embryonic.

59. The curriculum offered meets all statutory requirements except those for ICT in Years 10-11: the requirement to use ICT to control devices is not met fully enough. There are, however, firm plans to meet this requirement before the end of the present academic year.

60. The school's planned teaching time of 25 hours is in line with the minimum recommended by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES). This is, however, reduced by approximately at least ten minutes each day for those many pupils who need to move from one site to the other between lessons (when no extra time is allocated) and for Year 7 pupils by about ten minutes each lunchtime. All subjects receive an adequate allocation of teaching time except for GCSE RE: the one hour provided each week to teach RE in Years 10-11 is not enough for the course to be taught in sufficient depth. The timetable pattern is satisfactory for all subjects except geography and history in Year 7, where most groups are taught by two or three teachers. This pattern makes continuity difficult and slows progress for some groups.

61. All pupils have the opportunity to study the full range of subjects offered. Throughout the school pupils are taught in groups streamed by prior attainment. In Year 7 at least this is inappropriate: it prevents teachers meeting the needs of all pupils, as it is imprecise and not accurately tuned to individual pupils' aptitudes and attainment in different subjects. Elsewhere, this arrangement is broadly satisfactory, when work is matched appropriately to the differing needs of pupils. A few subjects offer an alternative accreditation for those pupils for whom the GCSE examination is not considered appropriate.

62. A clear process of consultation leads to generally good curricular decision-making and ensures that all views are carefully considered. There is, however, no written policy statement of basic principles to underpin this process. The curriculum is regularly monitored by senior managers through discussion with heads of faculties and lesson observations. There is a regular cycle of evaluation and review. As a result, plans for the future are thoughtful and appropriately focused. Schemes of work are generally of sound quality: they are very good in mathematics, ICT and business studies, and are good in English and PE.

63. A satisfactory range of extracurricular activities enhances the curriculum. Pupils visit the local area for fieldwork in geography and history, and for hill-walking; they also visit theatres. No residential visits have taken place during the last year, except for a weekend visit by gifted and talented pupils to Staffordshire. There are an orchestra, English groups for public-speaking and poetry, active science clubs and both mathematics and science weeks; a school dramatic production is being planned. A variety of sporting activities involves one fifth of pupils, who take part in a well-organised programme of inter-school fixtures and inter-form activities. They are well supported by the strong commitment of ten members of staff. Most subjects make good provision for study support to help with coursework, homework and revision.

64. Provision for careers education and guidance is of very good quality and its coordination is excellent. The careers education in Years 10-11 that is taught during eight days when the timetable is suspended is well organised and effective. Industry Day, for example, is attended by up to 30 people from industry, working with small groups of pupils. There is a programme of mock interviews for pupils. Impartial and well-considered guidance is provided by the school's careers officer. This is appropriately focused on those in greatest need, but there are good opportunities for other pupils to receive support. Two well-organised and informative evening meetings for parents are well attended.

65. Careers information for pupils is provided by a well-stocked and accessible careers library, maintained by six pupils who are working to gain a Careers Librarian Certificate. There are suitable computer programs for pupils to access careers information; these are available throughout the school on the computer network. All pupils in Year 10 participate for two weeks in a well-organised programme of work experience. The school is participating in a pilot programme, in association with the Education-Business Partnership, for this to take place in February this year. Pupils are well prepared and encouraged to arrange an interview with their employer before their placement. All pupils complete a diary and a skills booklet and are visited by a member of staff, while on the placement.

66. Links with the community are good. In addition to its close links with employers through the careers programme, the school welcomes a wide range of visitors during the year to speak with pupils – such as the Police Liaison Officer and local charity organisers. Very good relationships are enjoyed with contributory primary schools. There are regular visits by staff, social activities for pupils in Years 5 and 6 and a successful programme of induction for new pupils. Good links also exist with local colleges of further education, particularly through the careers programme. Connections with institutions of initial teacher training are strong and the school hosts the training of up to ten student teachers each year.

67. Overall, the quality of Learning Support provision is high. The skills and enthusiasm of both teaching and non-teaching staff make this faculty a significant feature of the school's provision. It is very well led and resourced, complies with DfES requirements and has a very positive influence across the work of the school. The mix of withdrawal groups and in-class support for pupils is flexibly organised and modified as necessary. The quality of provision and particularly the creative use of "corrective reading" are significant factors in ensuring that pupils generally make good (and often very good) progress.

68. The school's support for pupils for whom English is an additional language consists of one teacher and two bilingual learning support assistants (LSAs). They now largely work with pupils who are indigenous and whose linguistic needs are for the reinforcement of English idiom and specialist vocabulary. This provision works successfully. The school also consciously disseminates suitable teaching approaches to mainstream colleagues through team-teaching. This practice works well in the humanities and is being planned for other subjects. Most children who come from bilingual homes learn without undue difficulty. The school is, nevertheless, vigilant to monitor their progress, so that pupils are not disadvantaged by linguistic barriers.

69. The school's provision for gifted and talented pupils is currently under careful review. The evidence of planning, subject work seen and of examination performance of the most able pupils indicates that the matching of work for these pupils is not fully effective. A new project, funded by the *Excellence in Cities* initiative and still at a very early stage, is being used to make a fresh start in identifying suitable pupils and in providing suitable enrichment and extension activities. This project has been soundly launched, although the restriction of the cohort to pupils who are in top sets in all three core subjects is inappropriately restrictive.

70. The provision made for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good overall. The extent of provision for their spiritual development is satisfactory. This represents an improvement since the last inspection. Religious education provides a strong base for pupils' experiences. Six faiths are taught, particularly through discussion and reflection, in order to help pupils come to their own conclusions about guiding principles, values and beliefs. The school's orderly and tolerant ethos enables pupils of all faiths to discuss similarities and differences and to feel valued. Its strong emphasis on building pupils' self-esteem also contributes well to their spiritual development.

71. Provision for spiritual experience is also made in other subjects. In art, for example, pupils are encouraged to use their imagination in drawing. In PE pupils are taught to appreciate the benefits of fitness and in humanities they learn about the wonders of the world. The school, however, misses good opportunities for corporate spiritual experiences during assemblies and tutorial times by, for instance, not presenting enough art, literature and music upon which pupils could reflect.

72. Moral education is promoted very well. High standards of conduct are set by all staff, as they explain to pupils in clear terms what is acceptable conduct and social behaviour. Rules of conduct, which are well displayed in classrooms and pupils' homework journals, are referred to regularly by teaching staff. Staff are

particularly diligent at mid-morning breaks and lunch-times, and when pupils move around the split site. Clear messages about right and wrong are given out in assemblies and tutorial lessons.

73. The strong emphasis in RE on an awareness of world events gives pupils very good opportunities to think seriously about important moral issues. Moral issues are also presented and discussed in daily lessons – as, for example, the implications of the use of ICT. In PE pupils learn about rules, teamwork and fair play, and in history they consider the ethics of child labour and slavery. The personal and social impact of smoking is dealt with in science.

74. Provision for social education is good overall, with some very commendable features. The social inclusion unit, which incorporates Learning Support faculty, which incorporates social inclusion, serves as a very good focus for many pupils as an area for quiet activity at lunchtimes. The school has established an orderly ethos in which pupils socialise freely and without harassment. Boys and girls from a wide range of social and ethnic backgrounds get along very well together in the school.

75. Pupils work well together within daily lessons. Extracurricular activities also offer good opportunities for collaborative work and a variety of friendship groups. In particular, study support and homework clubs provide well for pupils' social development. The school provides only a limited range of residential visits for its pupils.

76. The school is attractively located within a parkland setting, but its split site does not have a strong aesthetic appeal and has many inconveniences. In spite of these disadvantages, most pupils enjoy the walk between the two sites – except in inclement weather when, for example, rain results in unacceptable conditions for many pupils. Pupils also value the open areas, the breakfast and dining facilities and the use of the library and adjoining spaces at lunchtimes.

77. Pupils are given good opportunities to experience responsibility. These include reception duties in the two blocks, prefect and library duties, and membership of year and school councils. Membership of the School Council is by election, organised on formal lines. Pupils also serve as monitors and work with senior citizens who attend a care club for sufferers from arthritis. They also have good opportunities to meet and work with children from a nearby special school.

78. Pupils' cultural development is satisfactorily promoted. The school is itself a multicultural community and, owing to a good ethos, organisation and routines, pupils are enabled to work and play together in an atmosphere free of tension. Religious education lessons provide sound opportunities for pupils to learn about traditions and ways of life which are different from their own.

79. Pupils experience a fair range of educational visits. These have included *The Clothes Show*, the Tate Gallery, industrial museums and the Octagon Theatre. An expected range of cultural experiences is provided in daily lessons. In history, for example, pupils learn about the indigenous population of North America. In art and music they study artefacts and musical pieces both from the Western European tradition as well as from India, China and Indonesia. Pupils have benefited from the presence of a visiting artist, a poetry week, dramatised history and public-speaking and short-story competitions.

80. The school falls far short of meeting the legal requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. This weakness was also identified as a key issue for action at the last inspection, but the school has been tardy in addressing the issue effectively.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

81. The quality of care provided for pupils is high. The school has devised many sound systems for ensuring that pupils feel safe and valued, but the key factor in this positive climate is the striking personal commitment of all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, to the welfare and success of all pupils.

82. The school has taken substantial practical measures for ensuring pupils' health and safety and for eliminating hazards, although its system does not include the recording of full and regular risk assessments over all areas of the school's activities. There is, however, one significant, external hazard consequent upon

the split site: the public roadway which runs between the north and south wings carries a regular flow of traffic and the dangers to pupils and staff are inadequately recognised by road markings or warning signs.

83. The systems in place for ensuring the pastoral supervision of pupils are substantial and are managed by a very experienced and committed team of pastoral leaders. They communicate very effectively with one another and readily involve other staff of the school in promoting pupils' welfare. The links with the Learning Support faculty and with education welfare officers are particularly effective.

84. Procedures and policies for ensuring child protection are good and the work invested in "Looked After Children", in liaison with the local authority's social services department, is of a high quality. The school works very hard to promote good behaviour and attendance. Staff intervene swiftly and effectively, if there is any incident or suggestion of bullying. This kind of harassment gives every indication of being a minor problem in this school.

85. Staff expend considerable effort and resources to provide individual guidance and counselling to pupils in need. Those who appear at risk of underperforming in their academic work are provided with individual mentors, both from within the school – including the non-teaching staff – and from external business and community sources. Other pupils experiencing social or emotional difficulty are helped by a variety of approaches: the Social Inclusion Unit is particularly effective in helping troubled pupils back into regular classroom activity. There is also a part-time school counsellor, who works flexibly and effectively with a wide range of pupils.

86. The programmes of study provided for children having statements of special educational need (SEN) fully comply with the requirements of those statements. The school has recently admitted two Year 7 pupils with physical difficulties; they are well supported to enjoy a full curriculum. The school's North Wing has had a lift installed, giving these pupils suitable access to all facilities. In the South Wing, however, the success of the school's positive enterprise is considerably hampered by the absence of a lift and other adaptations.

87. The school is currently rewriting its policy for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. The present policy provides clear guidance on the assessment, marking, recording and reporting of pupils' work. Within subject departments the quality of the day-to-day assessment of individual pupils' work is good overall. In RE it is very good in all aspects and particularly in the marking of pupils' work. Marking and the recording of assessment data are also very good in English, science and business education. In geography, assessment is unsatisfactory, because there is no coherent system to enable the department to identify the progress made by pupils in each year group.

88. In Years 7-9, assessments of pupils' work relate well overall to National Curriculum levels of study. In Years 10-11, assessments relate firmly to the requirements of external examinations and, as a consequence, give clear indications of the progress of pupils as well as providing targets for improvement. There is a common system of grading across the school that pupils understand well.

89. Overall, whole-school procedures for assessment are satisfactory, with such commendable features as its extensive bank of data. The school is currently reviewing these procedures, in order to make further, necessary improvements – as, for example, to identify clearly the criteria and benchmarks to be used for the precise assessment of individual pupils' progress. At present, there are weaknesses in evaluating pupils' progress within year groups and in the use of data to put pupils into streams in Year 7. Overall, the school does not have sufficiently detailed systems to enable it to judge accurately the performance and progress of subject departments and the whole school.

90. The format and content of interim and annual reports to parents are also under review, in order to inform parents and carers more clearly how pupils are getting on. The school has achieved some consistency between subjects and year groups by presenting common information about levels, grades, setting and effort. Overall, however, written comments on reports do not convey pupils' attainment and progress with sufficient clarity and detail or indicate often enough precisely what pupils need to do in order to improve their work.

91. *Records of Achievement* include a collation of evidence of pupils' attainments and successes in a variety of school activities from Year 7 onwards and are finally completed in Year 11. These also contain final examination results, pupils' personal evaluations of their strengths and weaknesses, and a collection of certificates awarded for notable achievements – as, for example, in the arts, sport and community involvement. These records are well collated.

92. Assessment procedures for pupils with special educational needs are very good. The range of tests and batteries used is appropriate to pupils' needs, and external specialisms are readily called in where needed. The Learning Support faculty runs the whole school's initial testing programme and provides sound recording and analysis of the data. This system has a direct and positive influence on the school's policy for the curriculum – and particularly for pupils with special educational needs. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for these pupils are of good quality and regularly used. Annual reviews are soundly conducted. The procedures for identifying and tracking the progress of gifted and talented pupils have satisfactory features, but require refinement.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

93. The school is held in high regard by parents. The responses from the pre-inspection survey of parents and carers indicated that they particularly feel that the school is well managed and that teaching is good. They are pleased with the progress their children make and that the school expects them to work hard. They find the school very approachable, but a small minority rated unfavourably the school's contacts with home.

94. The school works hard at establishing and encouraging its partnership with parents and has good procedures in place. The Year 7 induction process, for example, starts with an open evening and visits by staff to feeder schools. In June, pupils transferring in the following September spend a day at the school; an evening for new parents is also held at this time.

95. The school's prospectus is clear, attractive, well produced and informative: there is sufficient detail for parents to understand fully the aims, objectives and expectations of the school. The GCSE options booklet is a well-presented document and during each term an edition of *WOW (World of Witton)*, the school magazine, is issued to all parents and residents in the neighbourhood. The homework diary also provides parents with an easy opportunity to comment on, and track, their children's work.

96. The importance placed by the school on its links with parents is also emphasised to teachers in the *Staff Handbook* and the *Home-School Agreement*. The school displays a caring and welcoming atmosphere for pupils and parents. The school sets great store by ensuring that all inquiries, whether by telephone or in person, are dealt with quickly and effectively.

97. The curricular information issued to parents is in outline form only – as, for example, in the prospectus and the useful Open Evening brochure for prospective parents and pupils – and is not further extended until the Year 10 options have to be chosen. Annual formal reports to parents do not generally contain sufficient precision about the attainment and progress of pupils or what they should do to improve their work. They have, however, recently been supplemented by a helpful system of termly, interim reports that contain precise grades for attainment in each subject studied.

98. Since the last inspection, when parental links were identified as a weakness, the school has worked hard and made good progress in developing its partnership with parents and carers. It has taken many imaginative initiatives. These include a successful *Parents as Educators* programme that involves parents working with their children in school: three parents who have completed the course now work as support assistants in the school. Other initiatives such as *Family Literacy*, the appointment of mentors and a school counsellor are examples of good practice that have improved the school's partnership with parents.

99. A particular strength of the school is its close involvement with the parents or carers of pupils with special educational needs. It works very closely with them to support and review children's progress. Many parents follow the school's *Parents as Educators* course or come into group sessions and help with the work of the Learning Support faculty. There are very good (and often creative) links with external agencies. The Learning

Support faculty is vigorous in all aspects of its work. In particular, it is entrepreneurial in gaining access to appropriate specialists and in seeking funds to improve its facilities for the benefit of pupils and their parents. The school adopts a respectful but demanding approach to parents in supporting their children.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

100. The overall quality of the school's senior leadership and management is very good and a considerable strength of the school. The many distinctive features of the school, such as its recent improvement in academic achievement, its strong pastoral systems and its very effective Learning Support initiatives can all be traced back to clear vision and decisive action by senior managers.

101. The school has a set of clear and relevant aims that are widely publicised and expressed in direct, intelligible terms. There is a firm commitment to equality of opportunity and to a positive working climate of respect and value for all in the school. These aims are not mere paper aspirations. They are seen in action throughout the school and make a powerful contribution to pupils' development, self-esteem and achievement.

102. The school's commitment to social and educational inclusion is particularly notable and is implemented to the benefit of the whole community. These good aims result in a school that is buoyant and optimistic. Both adults and pupils have a sense of being valued. The result is a school that has become a true learning community, where teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, governors and (most) pupils see learning as a central and exciting goal.

103. The headteacher offers strong and effective leadership to the school. He shows a quiet tenacity of purpose and is an effective decision-taker. He is prepared to face, and often encourage, necessary change in policies and practices, but at the same time deals promptly with immediate problems. He has significantly shifted the ethos of the school towards the goal of improving pupils' attainment and progress, without impairing its strong personal and pastoral values. He is a wise delegator who provides a listening and supportive ear to his colleagues.

104. The senior leadership team has been recently enlarged. This has added new skills and vision to an already very capable team. The senior group has a good blend of skills and experience, is open to ideas from any source and is efficient and effective in devising and implementing policies. They work well together as a team and encourage other staff to contribute to their efforts.

105. Senior leaders hold staff to account for their work, but are supportive in time, resources, training and other development opportunities. This approach extends to the active encouragement and development of non-teaching staff, who are significant and effective partners in all aspects of the work of the school. Their close involvement in the support and mentoring of pupils is particularly noteworthy.

106. The quality and effectiveness of leaders of subject and pastoral areas vary from very good to (occasionally) unsatisfactory, but are good overall. They respond well to the opportunity to contribute to school policies and development. There is systematic monitoring and review of the teaching and management in each faculty and subject, conducted by the senior team. This is supportive, but also appropriately critical in drawing attention to areas that need improvement. The national performance management system, recently introduced, has begun well and is used to enhance the school's own self-evaluation procedures.

107. The governing body is, overall, a committed group, showing concern for the school's progress. Its business is well conducted. Governors make an important contribution to underpinning the school's achievements through sound financial planning and policy development. They are aware of the broad direction of the school's progress and of its main strengths and weaknesses. They do not, however, have in place a comprehensive system for analysing and interpreting the school's academic performance, in order to act fully as a "critical friend".

108. The quality of the school's planning for improvement is very sound. Planning procedures are well structured and sufficiently detailed. There are clear guidelines for faculty leaders to follow in developing

plans for their own areas of responsibility. Planning incorporates wide consultation and regular review that involves all staff and the governing body. The school's management has shown, in the period since the last inspection, a very clear capacity to plan effectively for improvement and to achieve necessary change. This capacity for improvement has been acknowledged at a national level by the DfES – a commendable achievement by the school.

109. The governors and the headteacher effectively and efficiently manage the school's finances. They are well informed on matters of income and expenditure. The daily routine of detailed tracking of spending is effectively delegated to the senior administrative officer, who provides governors with financial information of good quality to guide their decisions on spending. The few, minor recommendations to improve financial control in the recent auditor's report have been implemented.

110. The governors consider thoroughly how to achieve best value for money and ensure that expenditure is aligned to the improvements identified in the school's development plan. Alternative strategies are considered for the allocation of the budget, with the main emphasis put on improving standards and the quality of education provided for pupils. In a recent decision to upgrade a proportion of the school's computers, for example, governors passed over the cheapest quotation in favour of one that better fitted the school's needs. Equally, the governors decided that the school could itself maintain its extensive grounds more efficiently and reliably than other providers of the service.

111. The school makes extensive and effective use of electronic technology in a wide range of administrative and management functions – such as in monitoring loans from the school library and the use of mobile phones in the supervision of the school's site. Specific grants are well targeted towards their intended purposes – as, for example, in training staff to use ICT or to assist the school in implementing the national strategies for improving literacy and numeracy. The governors do not, however, have an adequate system to evaluate the longer-term effect and success of their spending decisions on the quality of teaching and pupils' learning.

112. The school is appropriately staffed. In several subjects some of the teaching is done by non-specialists, but this does not significantly hamper pupils' progress. The balance of male and female staff holding major posts of responsibility has improved since the last inspection. The provision and quality of technical support are good. Classroom assistants are sufficient to provide effective support to pupils with special educational needs. The programme of training to improve staff skills is comprehensively planned and well organised: it is well matched to both the school's priorities for improvement and the professional development of individual teachers. The induction of new staff – and, in particular, the programme for supporting newly qualified teachers in their introduction to the life of the school – is very good. The school has gained *Investors in People* status.

113. Administrative staff efficiently assist senior managers in the running of the school and provide a friendly welcome to pupils, parents and visitors. The responsibility given to learning support assistants (LSAs) is well justified by the high quality of their work. The site supervisors and maintenance staff work hard to provide a clean, safe and tidy environment in the buildings and grounds.

114. Overall, the buildings and grounds offer satisfactory provision for the teaching of the curriculum. Classrooms are mostly grouped together by subject and are attractive and welcoming. The recent refurbishment of some science laboratories has provided accommodation of high quality for the subject. Accommodation for Learning Support is very good, centrally located and very well used. In contrast, a room used mainly for drama is poorly maintained and lacks sufficient heating, and an art room is too small for the size of some groups of pupils who use it. The lack of window blinds in several rooms impedes pupils' learning, because they cannot read what is written on whiteboards, when the sun is reflected from them. Facilities for PE are poor. Buildings overall, in contrast, are generally in a good state of repair.

115. The school's split site presents health and safety risks that need urgent resolution. The site has a public road running through it; a tree-lined path between the buildings that is dark on winter mornings and evenings; and, unacceptably, affords no protection to pupils or adults in inclement weather. Girls' toilets have benefited from recent refurbishment, but those for boys are in need of similar improvement. There is good access for pupils with physical disabilities in the North Wing, but limited access for such pupils in the South Wing.

116. The library is relatively small, but contains a broadly adequate selection of books. There is a good selection of fiction and non-fiction books, but those to support a wider interest in subjects of the curriculum vary widely in quality and quantity: there are, for example, several books of lasting interest in mathematics, but too few in music. The library is carefully organised and is well used by pupils during lessons and for personal research. Books loans are high in Year 7, but low in Years 10-11. Access to ICT facilities is available in the adjacent computer room.

117. Learning resources (including the provision for ICT) are good overall for the effective teaching of the curriculum. A significant minority of computers, although suitable for pupils' learning in many subjects, require upgrading to meet the wider range of applications expected in some courses. The use of ICT is particularly effective in mathematics, business education and Learning Support as well as in the specialist ICT department. Textbooks are generally in reasonable supply, but are inadequate in both quality and quantity for the effective study of geography.

118. Taking into account the good quality of education provided, the sensitive effectiveness of pastoral care offered to pupils, the high calibre of management and the continuing improvement in the school's effectiveness, set against its above average income and expenditure, the school provides good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

119. To improve further, building upon the good quality of education that pupils already receive, the governors and senior management of the school should:

(a) raise still further pupils' attainments and progress by

- improving pupils' overall competence in mental arithmetic and in the recall of basic mathematical facts, in order to raise the standard of numeracy across the curriculum;
- continuing to lift pupils' overall achievement in English, mathematics, design and technology and geography to the good level achieved in most other subjects;
- extending the school's well-structured teaching to include more opportunities than at present for pupils to learn semi-independently, thereby increasing pupils' capacity to tackle new work confidently;
- ensuring that the programmes of study always meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils and that their progress is rigorously monitored across the school; and
- reorganising the system by which pupils are organised into teaching groups in Year 7, so that the blunt imprecision of streaming is removed.

(## 12 14 19 24 42 44 48 58 61 69 89 92 127)

(b) continue to improve the school's system of assessing pupils' attainment by

- finalising the list of criteria and benchmarks to be used for the assessment of pupils' progress;
- using the assembled data comprehensively to judge accurately the performance and progress of individual pupils, subject departments and the whole school.

(## 16 19 89 107)

(c) improve the use of tutorial time by either shortening the time for morning registration or producing for use within it a coherent programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) that is effectively followed by all staff and fully dovetailed with the rest of the school's PSHE provision.

(## 49 57)

(d) improve the provision made for the health and safety of both pupils and staff between the school's two sites by working closely with the appropriate authorities to

- demarcate the public road-crossing much more clearly with warning signs both alongside the road and on the roadway itself; and
- provide, within a reasonable timescale, a suitable covered walk-way, associated fencing and lighting, so that there is adequate bad-weather protection and a clear separation between public areas and the routeway between the school's two sites.

(## 76 82 115)

(e) meet statutory requirements by

- providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils – a weakness identified also at the last inspection and not improved; and
- ensuring that the ICT strand of controlling devices fully meets National Curriculum requirements in Years 10-11 (as the school has plans to do within the current academic year).

(## 59 80)

In addition to the key issues above, other less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the school's future plan of action. These are indicated in paragraphs 22 30-31 34-35 46 60 90 97 114 and in subject paragraphs.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	223
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	102

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	3	31	131	53	2	3	0
Percentage	1	14	59	24	1	1	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1050
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	320

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	42
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	283

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	246

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	49
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	50

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	9.3
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	1.5
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for 2000-2001.

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	103	96	199

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	41	46	46
	Girls	58	40	39
	Total	99	86	85
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	50 (68)	43 (54)	43 (48)
	National	64 (64)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	23 (25)	17 (24)	15 (13)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	42	52	45
	Girls	59	47	40
	Total	101	99	85
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	51 (68)	50 (52)	43 (61)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	19 (25)	13 (23)	15 (14)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

Percentages in brackets refer to 2000.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	100	96	196

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	29	92	95
	Girls	33	84	90
	Total	62	176	185
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	32 (39)	90 (91)	94 (96)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to 2000.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	36.6 (38.1)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

Figures in brackets refer to 2000.

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:	44	93
	Intermediate		
	National		n/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	153
Pakistani	93
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	804
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	4	0
Pakistani	4	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	46	6
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	66.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.7

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	13
Total aggregate hours worked per week	371

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.7
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	22.9
Key Stage 4	18.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	17
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	18.6

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
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	£
Total income	3,018,321
Total expenditure	3,034,455
Expenditure per pupil	2,929
Balance brought forward from previous year	205,403
Balance carried forward to next year	189,269

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1050
Number of questionnaires returned	128

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	44	44	8	4	0
My child is making good progress in school.	51	39	6	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	40	41	9	4	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	46	35	12	4	3
The teaching is good.	47	41	4	1	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	32	14	8	8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	42	46	6	2	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	57	38	4	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	37	42	6	4	11
The school is well led and managed.	50	33	0	2	15
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43	46	6	3	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	38	39	12	1	10

Other issues raised by parents

There were additional comments from parents on eight of the questionnaires returned.

Amongst the positive points mentioned were:

- pupils' enjoyment of school life; and
- pleasure at the overall ethos of the school.

Amongst the concerns expressed in questionnaires were:

- the incidence of bullying in the school by a minority of pupils; and
- a wish to see all subject teachers, not just form tutors, at parents' evenings.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES: YEARS 7-11

ENGLISH

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

Strengths:

- pupils' attitudes and behaviour.
- the overall quality of teaching.
- strong management of the department.
- good GCSE results in English literature.

Areas for improvement:

- pupils' overall level of attainment by the end of Year 9 and Year 11.
- the collation and use of attainment and progress data, especially at the beginning of Year 7.

120. On entry to the school in Year 7, the proportion of pupils who have already reached the benchmark of at least Level 4 in the national tests in their primary schools has improved since 1996 from being well below the national average to being just above it in 1999. The proportion then fell to again being well below average in 2001. Whilst there has been a rise in the number of pupils entering the school at the higher Level 5, the proportion has always been lower than the picture nationally: in 2000 and 2001, for example, it was just under half the national average.

121. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 have varied during the period 1997- 2001. They were close to average in 1997 and 2000, but in other years have been well below average. Although the overall attainment of girls is higher than that of boys, boys are closer to their national average than girls. When compared with the attainment of pupils in schools with similar socio-economic circumstances, pupils' performance in this school was well above the group-average in 1998, below it in 1999, but similar to that in other schools in 2000 and 2001.

122. In GCSE English language in 2001 the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C was well below the national average and below the average for pupils in a similar type of school. The overall proportion of A*-C grades obtained over the period 1997-2000 was well below the national average figures. Over the last three years pupils' performance in English language has been lower than that in science, but usually above that for mathematics. The overall performance of girls in GCSE is higher than that of boys. The school has not improved the level of its results in GCSE English language since the last inspection: pupils tend to do worse in language than in most of their other subjects. Most pupils (including those of ethnic minority heritage), however, make broadly satisfactory progress from their earlier levels of attainment.

123. In English literature, in contrast, the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C has been consistently well above average over the period 1997-2001: in most years candidates' results are broadly similar to what they obtain in their other subjects, but they were significantly better than most other subjects in 1999.

124. As they move towards the end of Year 9, pupils' current overall standard in English is close to average. When reading, most pupils use an appropriately wide range of reading approaches and skills, including skimming and scanning, and readily identify appropriate textual evidence to justify a point of view. Pupils in a Year 7 class, for example, competently extracted information from texts to answer questions. In another Year 7 class, pupils prepared a discussion on the theme "Television is killing conversation" and thoughtfully considered different points of view.

125. Pupils in a Year 8 class, studying the differences between tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, carefully considered the meaning and importance of such key ideas as structure and emotive language and

created their own lists of emotive alternatives in place of “to crash”, “to steal” and “to break”. In another Year 8 class pupils prepared to write a newspaper article, based on a chapter in *The Silver Sword*. They discussed the sequence of events and the intentions of Edek and then used a writing frame to help to organise their writing. A Year 9 class, having mapped the themes of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, such as those of chaos, ambition and the supernatural, thoroughly checked textual references to support their interpretations. In another Year 9 class, pupils satisfactorily considered the features of persuasive writing and then went on to deepen their understanding of language, audience and style by discussing the features of property brochures.

126. Pupils regularly work cooperatively in small groups to discuss aspects of language or literature. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 frequently study such key literacy aspects as those relating to spelling or the organisation of writing. Pupils in a Year 7 class, for example, revised their knowledge of prefixes before using small whiteboards to write their own word-lists, using the prefixes “uni-”, “bi-” and “tri-”.

127. Most pupils make satisfactory progress across Years 7-9. Teaching objectives from the National Strategy framework have been incorporated into current schemes of work. Pupils are now well used to teaching that is prefaced by specific objectives, so helping them to organise their thinking better. Pupils use appropriate terminology, when discussing parts of speech or, as in a Year 8 class, recognising textual features such as audience and purpose. Pupils’ progress in Years 7-9 is encouraged by teachers’ use of the advocated national teaching methods and lesson planning. During the inspection, for instance, pupils regularly used small whiteboards to try out spelling rules or sentence structure. The progress of the highest attainers, however, is not as great as it could be, because they do not experience challenging work, differentiated from the rest of the class, frequently enough.

128. By the end of Year 11, pupils’ overall level of attainment is below average, although most pupils make satisfactory progress. For example, Year 10 pupils, studying Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, extended their understanding of the behaviour of characters – in particular, the relationships between young men and women and the significance of such words “We should be woo’d, and were not made to woo”. Other pupils in a Year 10 class, studying *Othello*, deepened their understanding of Shakespearean language, in particular his use of offensive language, as they considered how the stage would be lit. The teacher in a Year 11 class helped pupils to revise the features of a persuasive text by using an overhead projector to identify the relevant features in a publicity letter for *Shelter*. Pupils understood nuances more, as they discussed the impact on readers of the choice of words such as “distracted”.

129. The quality of the writing of most pupils in Years 10 and 11 is near the national average. Pupils’ GCSE English course assignments in Years 10 and 11 are carefully prepared, using editing and proof-reading skills, to ensure that they are generally well organised and include appropriate textual references. More able pupils write with confidence, as they reflect on the literature they have read and express their point of view. Pupils who have special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language generally make good progress.

130. The development of good oral skills is evident in most of the lessons, although the overall quality of speech is a little below average. Pupils frequently create opportunities for extended oral discussions, though sometimes the quality of such talk is undermined by inaudible speech. The majority of pupils listen well and are confident in using literary terms.

131. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils in lessons are good throughout the school. Most pupils listen carefully to instructions and respond well to one other, especially in small group work. The majority of pupils take thoughtful interest in their work.

132. Overall, teaching is good throughout the school. Specialist English teachers bring a high level of understanding, expertise and enthusiasm to their teaching. Objectives for most lessons are written on large whiteboards and frequently pupils copy them into their workbooks. The implementation of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy has guided the long-, medium- and short-term planning of the department. At the beginning of lessons in Years 7 and 8 starter activities require pupils to respond in an interactive way, to improve their standards of spelling and aspects of writing. The recommended “four-part lesson”, which is being introduced systematically in Years 7 and 8 also helps to structure pupils’ learning well. Teachers

regularly use an overhead projector to model teaching points in lessons. This approach enhances teaching and enables key points to be highlighted, so that all pupils note how texts “work”. A Year 7 class, for example, seeing a formal letter on screen, identified for the teacher such features as the writer’s choice of words and layout, and categorised greetings as formal or informal.

133. Teachers clearly enjoy their teaching and set high standards for themselves and for the pupils they teach. They not only work hard in classrooms to help pupils to learn, but offer a range of additional teaching sessions outside the normal timetable. A wide range of extracurricular opportunities is offered to pupils: these include Poetry Week, in which the school takes part in the BBC “favourite poem” voting, a short story competition, public speaking and theatre trips.

134. Through the study of language and literature pupils reflect on the cultural, social and moral aspects of their work. A Year 9 class, for example, studying *Macbeth*, mapped out some of the key themes and included “chaos”, “ambition” and “the supernatural”, before going on to provide evidence from the play.

135. The department is well led and managed. Regular business meetings are held to ensure that the day-to-day administration of the department, including assessment procedures, is effective. The sampling of pupils’ written work and the moderation of examination work are rigorously undertaken, in order to ensure comparability of standards within the department. The use of the department’s assessment and pupil-tracking procedures enables teachers to identify pupils who require additional support, but the overall use of attainment and progress data is insufficient. Links between the department and drama need strengthening, so that common aims and aspects – such as the teaching of Shakespeare, the improvement of pupils’ speaking and listening, and the quality of assessment for them – can be shared constructively.

136. In other subjects across the curriculum pupils generally use a suitable range of reading approaches, although the fluency in reading requires some improvement and the use of skimming and scanning texts is not evident in all subjects. The overall standard of writing is just a little below average. Pupils’ handwriting and presentation skills, however, are good in most subjects. The display of specialist word lists in subject rooms is a helpful reference point for pupils, when undertaking writing tasks. The overall standard of speaking, and in particular pupils’ capacity to sustain a point of view in discussion, is a little below average. The vast majority of pupils listen well.

Drama

137. Overall, the quality of provision in drama is satisfactory. The subject is taught throughout Years 7-11. The proportion of pupils gaining a GCSE grade in the range A*-C over the period 1997- 2001 has been below the national average. Only a small number of pupils take the subject to external examination level.

138. By the end of Year 9, pupils’ attainment is close to average overall. In Year 7, pupils are introduced to a wide range of dramatic techniques and are encouraged to become reflective about their work. They listen carefully, follow instructions and respond well to the brisk pace of lessons. In a Year 7 class, for example, they made good progress, when working on a space theme, as they considered what they had done and how they needed to review body movement or speed of movement. In a Year 9 class pupils based their work on the painting, *May 3rd*, by Goya: they developed their roles well, as they considered the importance of facial expression and the use of voice for a presentation.

139. By the end of Year 11 pupils’ attainment is broadly average. In a Year 10 class pupils worked on the theme, Rites of Passage, and explored the significance and interpretation of such “symbols” as romantic love or alcohol. They considered their difficulties in sharing an interpretation and reviewed the ways in which their body language might be improved. A Year 11 class worked on the theme of joyriding: they reviewed their use of frozen images satisfactorily and applied their knowledge of stagecraft to the location of props.

140. The overall quality of teaching is good throughout the school. Lessons are well managed and structured, and include clear teaching objectives to reinforce the purpose of lessons. High expectations are rapidly established in class and pupils’ attitudes towards the subject are good throughout the school. Pupils enjoy their lessons and most are well behaved.

141. The drama department is well led and managed. Current schemes of work are being reviewed, in order to incorporate guidance from the Key Stage 3 National Strategy for English: written guidance on progression in drama across Years 7-9 is, however, required, in order to make the mapping of key skills and techniques possible. Regular, effective assessments are carried out of pupils' work. The department also encourages pupils to undertake regular self-evaluation of their work. As noted above, there are inadequate links between the department and English. Theatre visits, drama workshops and a drama club usefully widen opportunities for pupils.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision for mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Strengths:

- the use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning.
- the quality of teacher-pupil relationships and the management of behaviour.
- the high standard of a few pieces of work by gifted and talented pupils.

Areas for improvement:

- pupils' ready recall of basic number facts and their methods of mental calculation.
- more challenging work for gifted and talented pupils.
- the inclusion of more "problems" in using and applying mathematics in everyday settings.

142. The proportions of pupils who achieved either the basic standard or higher levels expected of 14 year olds in the 2001 national tests at the end of Year 9 were well below the national average. Based upon the average points scored by all pupils, the school's results were also well below the national average for all schools and were below average when compared with those of schools in similar social circumstances. The results during previous years have fluctuated, but have generally shown a slight upward trend since the last inspection in 1997; they dipped significantly in 2001. During this period very few pupils have achieved the very highest levels. Boys usually perform a little better than girls, contrary to the national trend where girls generally do better than boys.

143. The proportion of pupils who achieved grades A*-C in the GCSE examinations in 2001 was well below the national average. Very few pupils achieved the highest (A* or A) grades and the proportion who achieved grades A*-B was well below average. The proportion of pupils who achieved a grade A*-G was also below average. Their achievements showed some improvement upon what they achieved at the end of Year 9. The results over recent years have, however, remained constantly well below the national average and have improved little since the last inspection. Based upon the average grade achieved by all the pupils in the school who were entered for the examination, pupils made less progress in mathematics than in many of their other subjects. In 2001 girls performed about the same as boys, although boys usually do better.

144. By the end of Year 9, the standard of work of a much larger than average proportion of pupils (about two-thirds of them) is below that expected of 14 year olds. About one pupil in three is on the school's register of special educational needs. Most pupils work at a steady pace in lessons and, with help, make satisfactory (and occasionally good) progress towards completing successfully the work expected of them. Their attainment is, however, limited by poor recall of number facts, forgotten skills and knowledge, and insufficient understanding of earlier work. Equally, they are soon baffled, when familiar skills are required in unfamiliar contexts.

145. Pupils in the top set generally make sound progress in a broad range of arithmetic, algebra, geometry and data-handling. In this set, however, there is a significant minority whose retention of previously learned skills is poor. For example, during a discussion of ways of solving pairs of simultaneous linear equations, uncertainty and a lack of understanding of how to manipulate simple algebraic equations, together with forgotten rules for handling directed numbers such as $6 - (-6)$, led too many pupils to make incorrect contributions and to an erosion of their confidence, despite the best efforts of their teacher. In contrast, a few pupils achieve high standards in extended mathematical investigations that require them to identify patterns and generalise their conclusions, using algebra.

146. Low-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs frequently make sound progress during lessons. They benefit from thorough and systematic teaching, employing practical and visual ways of helping them to understand abstract ideas. For example, one such set of pupils developed confidence in numbers to two places of decimals (such as 0.47) by counting the 47 shaded parts of a 100-square and the opposite skill of shading one-hundredths of the square to represent a given decimal number. Pupils for whom English is an additional language make similar progress to other pupils and are well integrated into lessons.

147. The attainment of pupils on arrival at the school in Year 7 is well below average. During their first year in the school they consolidate well much of what they learned at primary school and go on to extend their skills and knowledge towards the expected level. A good emphasis is placed in Year 7 upon numeracy: pupils' confidence in their ready recall of basic number facts and in methods of mental calculation is improving. Higher-attaining pupils, for example, make good progress in such work and their progress is regularly enhanced by using computers. Using this equipment, for example, a top set firmly consolidated their skills in estimating lengths of common objects and of reading points on scales to required degrees of accuracy. Their motivation was high and their learning was effective.

148. Pupils in the middle sets make steady progress, especially when their learning is based on practical and visual activities. In one lesson, for example, they consolidated their understanding of units of measurement, and their abbreviations, by considering the weights, volumes and lengths of the items in their teacher's lunch-box. Discussion of these items sharpened their accuracy of, for instance, estimating small weights (such as a packet of crisps) and units of capacity. Equally, low-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make sound progress, when their learning is based upon practical activities. Their progress is frequently hampered by poor understanding of the subject vocabulary. The use of word-bank books and the prominent display of key words is helping to remedy this weakness.

149. Pupils in Year 8 generally make steady, systematic progress during lessons and acquire a suitable range of skills and techniques of the subject. Nevertheless, their attainment is still below what it should be. Pupils' lack of retention of earlier work often impedes their progress. Occasionally, in their eagerness to complete a task, pupils do not read instructions with sufficient care and consequently become disheartened when they do not achieve the desired result. For example, in a well-structured lesson for pupils in the top set, computers were used effectively to investigate transformations of geometrical figures. The progress of several Year 8 pupils, however, was hindered, because they did not follow carefully the sequence of activities described on a worksheet.

150. By the end of Year 11 pupils' attainment is below average overall. Higher-attaining pupils generally achieve the standard expected of 16 year olds. They gain a good working knowledge of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry and data-handling, and use the skills they learn to solve successfully problems in everyday contexts. A few of these pupils show flair in completing extended investigations of mathematical situations. For example, one pupil (for whom English is an additional language) prepared a piece of GCSE coursework to a high standard. His work, entitled *Beyond Pythagoras*, extended this well-known theorem to generate sequences of three numbers that satisfied the theorem. He identified a hypothesis from his examples and used algebra to prove it.

151. Relatively few pupils are entered for the higher tier of GCSE examinations; the majority of pupils in the year group are entered for the foundation tier. Although pupils in the middle and lower sets learn many basic skills and routines, they lack confidence in applying them in unfamiliar situations. They have little sense of urgency or determination to make better progress, in order to gain a firmer understanding of the subject. In consequence, their attainment in GCSE examinations is below what it could be. For example, two sets of pupils in the lower half of the year group still needed to practise solving such simple equations as $3x + 7 = 28$ or in calculating the perimeter and area of rectangles.

152. Pupils' progress in Year 10 is unsatisfactory overall. Those in the top set have an over-reliance upon their teacher to the extent that they lack confidence in tackling problems in everyday contexts. They required much support from their teacher to understand a GCSE question that described the relative positions of four towns in order to draw a diagram. Having been reminded of Pythagoras's theorem, they went on to calculate successfully the required distance apart of certain towns. Equally, during a lesson for pupils in the second

set, where they revised the solution of simple linear equations, many did not have a confident recall of the techniques of the process. Several readily claimed that they “couldn’t do it”. Most managed the tasks after much thorough revision and practice. Pupils in the middle and lower sets make only steady progress in understanding relatively low-level work. Many lack confident recall of the most elementary number facts and do not have the basic numeracy skills of estimation and approximation to realise when their answers are absurd.

153. Overall, pupils’ attitudes to the subject are good. Most make a positive response to the teaching they receive and are cooperative in undertaking tasks. Many, however, are too ready to admit defeat and ask their teacher for help. They are willing to sit quietly and watch their teachers demonstrate skills and techniques. When asked, they are willing to answer questions and respond well to encouragement. Many pupils work hard and productively at practising routine skills and procedures. Almost all pupils write out their work neatly, but all too often problems that have several stages in their solution are presented as a sequence of unexplained calculations and mathematically incorrect statements; these fail to convey the pupils’ understanding, especially when the answer is wrong.

154. Behaviour in lessons is mostly good, because teachers work hard to maintain orderly classrooms and their vigilance and persistence are usually effective in containing small disruptions by a minority of pupils. A few classes are unpredictable. For example, a bottom set in Year 9 worked well and purposefully in one lesson and in their next lesson were badly behaved and uncooperative. Nevertheless, pupils generally respect their teachers and respond positively to admonition. Most form constructive relationships with their peers and teachers, and enjoy humour. They frequently help one another to clarify misunderstandings. Each week, for instance, a small group of pupils from a nearby special school for pupils with complex learning difficulties joins a lower set of pupils in Year 10: several constructive relationships have developed amongst the pupils.

155. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers are suitably qualified and range from those recently qualified to those with many years of experience. The teaching of routine mathematical skills and procedures is generally good. Procedures and methods are clearly explained and pupils practise them successfully, under close supervision. Teachers’ good subject knowledge enables them to make connections between different parts of the subject and to point out to pupils the common misconceptions, thus enabling them to avoid the usual pitfalls in answering certain kinds of questions.

156. The National Numeracy Strategy is being introduced in Year 7 and the methods of teaching advocated are helping to improve pupils’ basic skills. Similar methods are not, however, used with sufficient frequency in lessons for older pupils to enable them to improve their ready recall of basic number facts and to build their confidence and accuracy in mental methods of calculations.

157. Teachers’ subject knowledge, planning and expectations enable them to provide lessons with appropriate content at a suitable level. The weakness of too narrow a range of teaching methods, identified in the last inspection report, has been significantly corrected, but more needs to be done. Pupils practise skills and techniques frequently. Practical work is used well to help pupils to understand abstract ideas. Pupils in this school use computers much more frequently than in many schools to help them to learn more effectively. A set of pupils in Year 11, for example, worked productively and purposefully with a computer program that enabled them to study the effects of changing the values of the parameters in the equation of a straight line and of a parabola. This method of teaching raised pupils’ interest and improved their learning about graphs of standard functions.

158. A few opportunities now exist for pupils to investigate mathematical problems that require them to decide on lines of enquiry, justify their thinking and hypotheses, and reach general conclusions from their working. Such methods of learning mathematics are not used often enough in Years 7-9 and especially with gifted and talented pupils. Similarly, too few problems described in everyday contexts are given to pupils.

159. Many lessons include clear demonstrations and explanations of mathematical skills and techniques. Too often, however, such sessions lack opportunities for pupils to contribute to discussions. Teachers tell pupils the answers to questions, doing all the thinking for them and fail to develop pupils’ confidence and independence to tackle problems without immediately resorting to their teacher for help. In such lessons

questioning and discussion do not sufficiently challenge the majority of the class. Opportunities to extend high-attaining pupils are missed, because questions do not go beyond the routine level. These factors explain, in part, why GCSE results are not as good as they could be. Elements of these flaws in the teaching have not improved since the last inspection.

160. The vigilance, patience and care that teachers put into the development of good relationships with their pupils, together with effective strategies for handling misdemeanours and the judicious use of humour, generally ensure a reasonable climate for learning. The pace of lessons is frequently unhurried. In several lessons teachers alternate short bursts of teaching with the practice of skills to be completed in a challenging time. This strategy could be used more frequently to encourage pupils to learn at a quicker rate. Occasionally, an extra teacher provides good support to pupils' learning. Teaching resources, and especially ICT, are used well.

161. During lessons teachers make good, ongoing assessments of pupils' understanding and quickly clarify misunderstandings. Formal written assessments are made with sufficient regularity. Pupils' work is marked with reasonable frequency; brief, encouraging or challenging comments are occasionally added. Homework is generally set in accordance with the time-table, but too often all that is required is to complete work started in lessons. A significant proportion of pupils in Years 10-11 resist their teachers' best efforts to get them to complete it. Each pupil's progress is tracked and targets are identified.

162. The department is well organised and is generally managed efficiently. The scheme of work is very good. Pupils' performance from entry and throughout the school is not, however, sufficiently analysed for trends and for indications of strengths and weaknesses in teaching.

163. The general standard of numeracy of a large proportion of pupils is not good enough to support effectively their learning in mathematics and other subjects. Too few pupils, for instance, readily recall multiplication tables. Mental methods of calculation are unsatisfactory, with an over-reliance on calculators. This is because mental arithmetic has not been taught sufficiently or used frequently and systematically. Firm plans are in place to implement the National Numeracy Strategy across all subjects: this should, in the longer term, improve matters. In contrast, when it is appropriate to use calculators, pupils use them sensibly.

164. In science, design and technology, ICT, business education and, in a more limited way, geography and history, pupils draw and interpret appropriate graphs and, where necessary, recognise relationships between variables. In business education, in particular, pupils use ICT well to handle data in appropriate ways. Lower-attaining pupils find difficulty in handling basic numbers and measurements in the range of applications across the curriculum. For example, a set of lower-attaining pupils in a Year 7 science lesson were very confused by the units used in the measurements of volume.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths:

- the good quality of teaching.
- the attainment of boys in GCSE examinations.
- the effective leadership and management of the department.
- pupils' good behaviour in lessons.
- the availability of the health and social care GNVQ course for middle-attaining pupils.

Areas for improvement:

- raising the attainment of girls in Years 10-11.
- strategies for pupils to gain more grades A*-B in GCSE examinations.
- more opportunities in lessons for discussion and scientific debate.

165. When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their attainment in the subject is well below the national average at both of the national target grades of Levels 4 and 5. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall attainment in the national tests remains well below the national average at both Levels 5 and 6. In the Year 9 national tests in

2001, for example, only 43 per cent of the pupils reached Level 5, compared with 66 per cent nationally, whilst 15 per cent of pupils reached Level 6, compared with 34 per cent nationally. These results are, overall, in line with pupils' attainment three years earlier.

166. When compared with the performance of pupils in schools of a similar character (as defined by the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals), pupils in this school generally performed better than the group average in the Year 9 tests up to 2000, but below it in 2001. Boys and girls tend to do equally well. During Years 7-9 pupils' progress is satisfactory overall.

167. The majority of pupils in Years 10-11 follow the GCSE double-award science course. In the last four years the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C has been close to the national average and in 2000 was above average. Although the proportion of the highest (A*-B) grades obtained is below the national pattern, this is a good achievement by the school. Boys consistently do better than girls in GCSE examinations. When compared with results in similar schools, the department does particularly well. In 2002 the first group of 20 middle-attaining pupils will take the part 1 (equivalent to two GCSE grades) of the GNVQ health and social care course.

168. By the end of Year 9 pupils' overall level of attainment is below average. Relative to their prior attainment, however, this represents a reasonable achievement. Pupils acquire a suitable level of knowledge about a wide range of scientific principles, enjoying practical work and readily acquiring new skills. In a Year 7 lesson on magnetism, for instance, low-attaining pupils learned quite well the basic concepts of polarity and carried out suitable experimentation. A top set of pupils in Year 8 showed that they remembered very well the main messages of an earlier lesson about the effects of smoking and went on, through thorough questioning and discussion, to strengthen their knowledge and understanding substantially about health-related issues. Pupils generally handle equipment safely and correctly – as, for example, when low-attaining pupils in a Year 7 lesson on energy transfer used thermometers accurately and carefully.

169. By the end of Year 11 the overall level of attainment is close to average. In the best lessons pupils acquire a solid body of scientific knowledge and a firm competence in investigative work. These attributes were seen, for example, in a Year 10 lesson on osmosis. Through the use of potato samples that were immersed in different kinds of solutions, pupils had the opportunity to try out and experiment with variables, thereby acquiring in-depth understanding of the consequences of changing parameters. Top sets have above average competency in the use of graphs. Throughout the school, pupils readily engage in practical work and are willing learners.

170. Despite this good overall picture, there are areas for improvement in the next stage of the department's development. There is scope, for example, for giving pupils more experience in the planning of fair tests – choosing variables, making predictions and subsequently analysing findings. There is noticeably less opportunity for pupils to practise their numerical skills than usually seen. Pupils of high ability are not consistently exposed to penetrating scientific debate and interpretation. More opportunities are necessary to develop and extend pupils' curiosity and investigative repertoire. In a lesson on the refraction of light, for example, pupils were told the result before they handled equipment, removing the learning and excitement of finding the critical angle as the light ray exits a glass block.

171. Pupils make satisfactory progress in the subject in Years 7-9, but much more progress overall during Years 10-11. This increase in the rate of progress is largely the result of a greater proportion of particularly effective teaching. The best lessons were those with absolute clarity about lesson aims, detailed planning, a suitable variety of inputs, penetrating question-and-answer sessions and a comprehensive, though concise, oral and written summary of what had been learned. Generally, however, pupils have too few opportunities to discuss critically the results of their experiments – the removal of this weakness is an important key to the further lifting of standards, particularly in examinations.

172. In all years pupils are taught in sets. Lower-attaining pupils, many with frequent absences, generally make steady progress and in most years gain at least a grade G in the GCSE examination. The achievement of these lower-ability pupils, who often enter the school with low levels of literacy, is at least satisfactory and often good. Teachers reinforce pupils' literacy skills through reading passages aloud. The laboratories carry posters

of key words and in most lessons teachers stress the spelling and understanding of important scientific words. The department's literacy strategy is strong and effective, in contrast to that for numeracy (which is in its infancy).

173. Pupils with learning difficulties are supported in most lessons in all years with learning support assistants (LSAs) and support teachers. Pupils for whom English is an additional language receive additional help, where necessary. The LSAs try out innovative practices, such as selecting difficult words from the programmes of study and preparing spelling lists. These are then tested and marked during the lesson and instant feedback is given. Pupils with learning and physical difficulties value the support they receive and, as a consequence, make good progress, particularly in Years 7-9.

174. The majority of pupils display good attitudes to the subject. Many are enthusiastic, posing thoughtful questions. A minority are rather passive and happy not to participate with their full attention. Pupils particularly enjoy practical work and the comparison and discussion of the results of their experiments. Behaviour in class is generally good.

175. The overall quality of teaching is good throughout the school, but is slightly stronger in Years 10-11 than Years 7-9. Most staff have a large repertoire of teaching styles that are used to best advantage in middle sets. Good lessons are typified by brisk starts, the sharing of learning objectives, penetrating analyses, the inclusion of scientific and technological examples drawn from everyday life and a conclusion that checks out the gains made in learning during the lesson. Teacher-led demonstrations and practical work in groups are successful features of the department.

176. One outstanding lesson in Year 9 on neutralisation and reduction well illustrated these qualities. It had a very clear direction, a wide and imaginative variety of approaches, incorporated a short spelling test, practical work and two spectacular demonstrations, and concluded with a summary of learning gains. The lesson moved seamlessly from one section to another. The demonstrations were well chosen and not only reinforced the learning objectives stated at the beginning, but also entertained the pupils. This lesson additionally benefited from the availability of a digital projector, a recently refurbished laboratory with remote controlled lighting and blinds, and the presence of a very competent learning support assistant.

177. The department has a good blend of experience. Several staff exploit their sense of humour to considerable advantage, particularly with mid-range sets, promoting science as a subject worthy of study and its useful contribution to living in the modern world. The department clearly embraces the benefits that ICT brings. In several lessons ICT was used effectively to demonstrate scientific phenomena and to stimulate interest. Groups are regularly retimetabled to use the school's ICT suites, in order to gain access to the Internet or computer programs. There is, however, insufficient use of computers for word processing and the manipulation of data, particularly for older pupils.

178. The department is effectively led and managed. Although this split-site school operates with two suites of science laboratories, there is an excellent team spirit across the department. Team-teaching with middle and lower sets in Years 10-11 contributes to the friendly and collaborative atmosphere in the department. Teachers have their own laboratory and, in consequence, equipment has at times to be moved between the buildings. An extensive bank of both commercially produced and home-grown teaching material is available. Whilst risk assessments are carried out, based on national practices, their use needs continual vigilance to ensure consistency of operation. Two conscientious technicians serve the department effectively.

179. Under the aegis of the "gifted and talented" strand of the *Excellence in Cities* initiative, the department has begun to consider the strategies needed to enable more pupils to gain the higher A*-B grades in GCSE examinations. A further task is to determine the reasons for the lower attainment of girls than boys in Years 10-11.

180. Since the last inspection there has been steady progress in all aspects of the department's work. The head of department has collated an extensive bank of statistics that cover pupils' attainment throughout Years 7-9 and 10-11. Unified and moderated modular tests are used across the department and the results used to monitor pupils' progress. Target grades and marks are displayed in laboratories for Years 7-9.

Pupils appreciate this approach and feel that it encourages them to improve their work. They talk realistically about their achievements.

181. The department operates a policy of taking pupils out of school to places of scientific interest. These include, for example, the Faraday lecture in Manchester and museums. Revision sessions and, from time to time, major lecture presentations are offered in school. Science staff are major contributors to the school's sporting and non-sporting, extracurricular activities. The department also hosts regular visits from a local primary school and a special school to work with the school's pupils.

182. The department has nine, refurbished laboratories that are attractive and provide a purposeful, exciting learning environment. All rooms have excellent wall displays. Lists of key words, linked to the topics currently being taught, supplement these displays. The department is well equipped with three digital projectors and, in one laboratory, an interactive whiteboard. There is adequate equipment to support the teaching of the subject.

183. Sufficient textbooks are available for use in lessons, and higher sets throughout the school are issued with revision guides and exemplar-question workbooks. This level of provision is a contributory factor to the relative buoyancy of GCSE results. Teachers set homework regularly and work hard to ensure that work is handed in. Books are conscientiously marked with grades and suggestions for improvement. An extensive package of merit awards both encourages and rewards pupils for their work.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths:

- teaching and learning are good overall.
- the provision made for pupils' spiritual and cultural development is good.
- good enrichment opportunities are provided for gifted and talented pupils.
- good links exist with the local community.

Areas for Improvement:

- standards of attainment for Years 10-11 are too low.
- assessment procedures for Years 7-11 are ineffective.
- staff do not use ICT enough.
- the art technician has no health and safety training for ceramics.

184. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall level of attainment is average: it is in line with the national expectation in drawing, painting, ceramics and textiles, but below average for pupils' knowledge and understanding of the work of artists or of ceramic technology. The quality of work that is currently produced suggests that standards for this age range of pupils are similar to those recorded at the previous inspection.

185. In 2000, GCSE results were below the national average. In 2001, GCSE results were well below the national average for A*-C grades and below average for grades A*-G. In both years, pupils in this subject achieved significantly below what they achieved in most of their other school subjects. Girls achieved slightly better than boys, but at a level below the national average for girls. There has been a significant decline in standards since 1998. A higher proportion of pupils takes the examination than at the time of the previous inspection.

186. In Years 7-9, the majority of pupils make good progress in acquiring artistic skills. They currently work at a level that is broadly in line with national expectations for pupils of this age – with the exception of skills in ICT, where the standard is too low. In Year 7, pupils progress well – as, for example, when they were challenged to recall (and draw from memory) their homes, before checking the accuracy of their studies and making modifications through homework.

187. Achievement by pupils with special educational needs is particularly good – as, for instance, in a Year 8 lesson that was based on popular cartoon images. Team-teaching, using well-tailored methods,

resulted in curious, interested and well-motivated learners. Most pupils like practical tasks, but are reluctant to undertake research.

188. A characteristic of even higher-attaining pupils is their over-dependence on teachers for stimulus as well as a tendency to lose concentration when a task nears completion. This happened, for instance, in a Year 8 lesson that was based on the observation and recording of colour on a moth's thorax and wings. The teacher successfully overcame the pupils' inertia by offering fresh challenges for homework. This was the only occasion during the inspection where girls were heard animatedly discussing their ideas.

189. By the end of Year 9, boys are more ready to answer questions than girls. Ways of more actively involving girls in discussion or of encouraging all pupils to become more independent of their teachers are not consistently applied. In a Year 9 class based on portraiture, for example, reluctant learners among the boys were encouraged to face their problems and work through them, whilst girls who displayed a similar pattern of behaviour or motivation were less successfully challenged and, in consequence, made poor progress. In another Year 9 class, based on observational drawing of still-life groups, only the boys took an active part in the question-and-answer session preceding the practical work; many girls looked away from the images being considered. Their interest increased, however, when the teacher showed the work of a woman artist: in this case all girls focused their attention on the image under consideration, although no-one offered an opinion.

190. In Years 10-11 the majority of pupils exude an air of complacency. There is a reluctance to engage in research, too great a reliance on books and magazine imagery, and too little use of real-world experiences or experimental techniques. For example, well-stitched textile pictures conform to a house style rather than showing flair and individuality of approach. Pupils in ceramics produce well-constructed pots, but lack curiosity about the materials used. In another Year 11 class, a girl was prepared to experiment with her design, based on Egyptian imagery, but her teacher, concerned that she might "spoil" her work, gave her little encouragement to be creative.

191. The overall standard of work is below average by the end of Year 11. Teachers' under-expectation and a lack of willingness to experiment or to encourage similar creativity in pupils hold pupils back from gaining higher grades. Progress slows in Years 10-11. Greater overall achievement is dependent on more rigorous research, pupils learning with greater independence and – in some instances – better attendance.

192. Teaching is good in Years 7-9. It is satisfactory overall (though with weaknesses) in Years 10-11. Occasionally teaching is very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and know their pupils well. Literacy is satisfactorily promoted: key words are displayed in class, for example, and teachers write new technical words on the whiteboard. Pupils who respond to teachers' questions show good recall and understanding of the technical terms covered. Few opportunities exist, however, for reading aloud. The amount of written work is limited.

193. There are other strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Higher attainers in Year 7, for example, have experience of using digital cameras and manipulating images. Particularly careful planning of work is evident for those pupils in Years 7-9 with visual impairment or for those with behavioural problems who are being supported back into mainstream education. In contrast, teachers have not fully kept up with changes in the art curriculum. They lack, for example, training in ICT, insufficiently assess pupils' work against national levels and inadequately use assessment within art as a means of improving overall planning and learning.

194. The recent inclusion of all Year 10-11 pupils in the subject has not been sufficiently planned and reflected in modifications to teaching strategies or in the examination papers used. Whilst teachers clearly assess against GCSE quality criteria, not all use assessment creatively to raise pupils' expectations further. The result is that predicted grades become a ceiling rather than a springboard for further development. Younger staff lack sufficient training in positive behaviour management.

195. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good overall. Relationships are generally positive and pupils willingly undertake duties within the classroom. An exception to this was in a Year 9 class where the normal teacher was absent through illness and the teacher taking the lesson was inexperienced, lacking the strategies for dealing with challenging, lower-attaining pupils.

196. The department lacks leadership at present owing to the unfortunate illness of the head of faculty. This has adverse effects on support for the newly qualified teacher and, for example, on the development of effective assessment procedures to raise standards. The provision of ICT and audio-visual facilities is inadequate. One art room is too small for the number of pupils using it, so limiting opportunities for group work in particular. The newly appointed art technician has not had training in the health and safety issues of ceramics.

197. The department has good links with the community. Annual exhibitions of GCSE artwork are, for instance, displayed in the cathedral. Gifted and talented pupils in Year 7 are given suitable opportunities to use ICT, whilst others (as in the environmental bridge project) have worked with visiting artists. Spiritual and cultural opportunities are well promoted. Overall, however, unsatisfactory progress has been made in this subject, when considered in the light of the quality of provision reported at the previous inspection.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- the quality of teaching is good and improving.
- pupils with special educational needs make good progress.
- the new joint heads of department have improved leadership and management significantly.
- the strong departmental team spirit and a determination to improve standards further.

Areas for improvement:

- monitoring the quality of teaching and learning systematically and sharing good practice.
- the evaluation of each completed project and its moderation across the department.
- the content, interest and stimulus of schemes of work for Years 7-9.
- the quality of drawing and graphic skill across all sections of the department.
- greater continuity of teaching, in order to secure adequate progression in what pupils learn.

198. In Years 7-9 pupils' overall standard of attainment is below the national average. In recent years teachers' formal assessments have indicated that standards have improved steadily by the end of Year 9, with more pupils reaching the national benchmark of Level 5. Attainment at Level 6 is, however, well below average.

199. At GCSE level pupils' overall standard of attainment is also below average. Both boys and girls tend to underachieve in relation to the grades they obtain in most of their other subjects in school. This weakness has occurred over a number of years. The standard of work observed in lessons and an analysis of pupils' work folders also indicate an overall level of attainment that is below average. There is, nevertheless, clear evidence of continuing improvement in work with most materials and the potential for greater success in meeting the targets set for the 2002 GCSE examinations.

200. Attainment levels in work with all materials for GCSE are held back, because pupils have had limited experiences in the subject in Years 7-9. During these foundation years there is a lack of continuity in teaching through the department's use of a rotational system of organisation: after only a few weeks pupils have moved from one teacher and material to another, fragmenting their experience and encountering different expectations. These limitations have been compounded through long-term staff absence and difficulties in recruiting suitable supply teachers.

201. As a consequence of these weaknesses, pupils' skill in designing and making objects is lower than it should be, resulting in pupils being too dependent on their teachers rather than having an adequate degree of self-reliance in Years 10-11. In contrast, where there is continuity in teaching in Years 10-11 – as, for example, in textiles – many pupils attain grades in the A*-C range and most achieve in line with their ability.

202. As a result of recent changes in staff and more accurate targets in line with pupils' abilities, the quality of work is improving. The most able and talented pupils are beginning to produce work of a high

standard, particularly in graphic products and textiles. In resistant materials the projects undertaken are, in many cases, too large and unsuitable for the time available; here smaller, but more demanding, projects are required, so that teachers can focus more closely on issues of quality and improve the standard of work. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language make good progress.

203. Attitudes, values and personal development within the subject are good. They have improved significantly since the last inspection through a concerted effort by all staff to make work interesting. Relationships amongst pupils from all ethnic groups are good. Behaviour is mostly good: in the few instances where there is a lack of cooperation by pupils, teachers use the school's system of sanctions effectively.

204. In Years 7-9 the curriculum provided has many satisfactory features, but also weaknesses: the teaching of the processes of designing and making, for example, is not consistent enough, with the result that pupils do not acquire a coherent body of subject-specific knowledge, skills and understanding. There is, for example, a lack of clarity not only in how a specification is drawn up and used to guide the design process, but also in how it is then used to complete a technological evaluation, when testing the success of the product made. Similarly, although pupils produce a good range of potential design ideas, they are not taught how to develop and refine one of those ideas through to a simpler, yet more sophisticated, product.

205. Over the past few months the acting heads of faculty have worked hard to address the scheme of work for Years 7-9. The decisions taken are intended to provide more continuity of experience that will in time produce higher standards of work. Current plans need to place greater emphasis on the use of ICT, systems and control, and structures and mechanisms.

206. The quality of teaching is good overall. The department now has a settled team of teachers with complementary skills and expertise. They work hard, support one another and are determined to improve both pupils' level of attainment and the quality of their own teaching. All teachers have good subject knowledge and skills. They plan lessons carefully, generally set appropriate tasks and have a good range of resources. There is, however, insufficient emphasis placed on identifying clearly what pupils are to learn in each lesson and on assessing precisely the progress made during lessons. Teachers pay much attention to correct spelling and the accurate use of technical terminology, but miss many good opportunities in lessons to raise pupils' competence in numeracy.

207. In the most effective lessons teachers set clear learning aims and objectives. They use precise questioning both to reinforce earlier learning and to extend ideas in the current lesson. They sustain a brisk pace of learning and focus pupils' attention on creating high-quality products. In a graphics lesson, for example, on producing point-of-sale materials for the public on Caribbean cruises, the teacher quickly elicited from the group all the features of such a display and the relative importance of each feature. Alternative ways of illustration were explored as well as the nature of the colours and techniques that might be used. After a short time the whole class had all the information they needed to produce a range of good quality ideas and began to work with confidence. Similarly, in an ICT lesson with a lower-ability group on design, the teacher used a good set of support materials to explain rapidly what she wanted from the class, gave a good demonstration of how to access the software and set a tight timescale for the work to be completed. All the pupils were successful in achieving the desired end-product.

208. In less successful lessons pupils are not clear about precisely what they are expected to do and do not work fast enough. Occasionally, the work set is not appropriate to the ability of the group – and is usually too easy. There was no teaching seen that was wholly unsatisfactory.

209. After a very difficult period the faculty is now being led and managed by two experienced teachers. They have successfully restored morale and made a good start on turning the faculty round. They are aware of what is needed and have started to rebuild the faculty's policies, systems and procedures. Target-setting for pupils and monitoring the quality of teaching and learning have begun, but remain priorities for the department. A good start has been made on a necessary revision of the curriculum: more emphasis is required, for example, on work that uses systems and control mechanisms by exploiting the existing facilities for computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM). Leadership and management are currently satisfactory, but improving rapidly.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths:

- good teaching in Years 10-11.
- pupils enjoy their lessons and behave well.
- good attention to improving pupils' literacy.

Areas for improvement:

- the overall standard reached by pupils in the GCSE examination.
- the system of assessing pupils' work, recording results and using assessment data.
- leadership of the subject, in order to give a strong sense of direction.
- the quality and quantity of textbooks, atlases and maps.

210. Pupils' overall level of attainment by the end of Year 9 is below the national average. When teachers assessed pupils' work in 2001 at the end of Year 9, results indicated that standards were below those expected nationally, particularly at the higher levels. Since 1997 overall results have remained generally below the national average. During the inspection the overall standard of work seen was also below average. Girls and boys achieve broadly similar results.

211. By the end of Year 11 pupils' overall level of attainment is below average. Results in the GCSE examination in 2001 were well below the national average for the subject. No pupils achieved the highest (A or A*) grades. The results have remained broadly static since 1997 at a time when results nationally have been rising. Results gained by pupils in this subject are worse than those they achieve in most of their other subjects. There is little difference in the academic performance of girls and boys: girls achieved higher results than boys in 2001, but the reverse was true in 2000.

212. All examination results are analysed very carefully by the department. A strategy for improvement has been implemented, including additional support for pupils on their coursework and revision. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. They are keen, fully involved in lessons and receive good support and encouragement to complete work accurately; work is generally well matched to their needs. Pupils for whom English is an additional language make good progress owing to the good quality of the support they receive in class from teachers and from the learning support assistants who work with them. Higher-attaining pupils make satisfactory progress, but teachers do not develop sufficient depth of understanding in these pupils through rigorous questions and specifically designed materials.

213. Pupils have satisfactory basic knowledge of how landscapes are formed, how cities grow and of the natural environment. They find difficulty in explaining how geographical features are formed and why they change. Pupils in Year 8, for example, described clearly the patterns of rivers in Bangladesh and the effects of flooding. They found it difficult to explain why these floods occurred. In Year 9, pupils described the tropical rainforest of Brazil accurately, but were unsure of why such a dense forest is found there.

214. Pupils generally have a satisfactory knowledge of such geographical terms as "erosion" and "deposition" to describe the work of rivers. Higher-attaining pupils use them correctly in written work. In Years 10-11 pupils use simple geographical models to describe patterns such as land use in cities and the movement of water. Throughout the school pupils have a poor knowledge of where places are, as they are not encouraged to make sufficient use of atlases. They have a satisfactory knowledge of what a limited number of places are like.

215. All pupils extract information effectively from resource material such as textbooks, videos and diagrams. They generally write answers to questions accurately. Higher-attaining pupils write extended pieces of work fluently. In Years 10-11 pupils have a satisfactory understanding of geographical enquiry and a limited number of techniques for the collection and analysis of data and for drawing conclusions. Numeracy skills are rarely used and pupils' knowledge of the range of methods for displaying and analysing data is limited.

216. Overall the quality of teaching is satisfactory. It is good in Years 10-11. The preparation and organisation of lessons are good, so that lessons start promptly and move from one activity to another smoothly and at a brisk pace. A feature of all lessons is that the aims of the work are made clear to pupils at the start, so that they know exactly what they are going to do. The best lessons conclude with a brief review to assess whether these aims have been achieved. Lessons are carefully planned with a variety of well-structured exercises that are generally well matched to the attainment of pupils and taught at a lively pace, enabling pupils to make sound progress.

217. A strength of the teaching is the attention given to developing pupils' literacy skills; this is a significant improvement since the time of the previous inspection. In one lesson, for example, lower-attaining pupils were studying the tropical rainforest vegetation in Brazil. Using carefully selected photographs and diagrams, the teacher skilfully ensured that pupils understood the key geographical terms and gave them the opportunity to read aloud. Finally, pupils used a framework to continue writing an imaginary diary of a journey in the rainforest, using the knowledge and terms that they had learned during the lesson. Teachers have good skills in ensuring that pupils are always attentive, maintain their focus and that a productive working atmosphere is established.

218. Resources such as photographs and videos are well chosen, but often teachers fail to grasp the opportunity to exploit them fully by challenging pupils sufficiently through detailed study. The best lessons include a variety of such teaching methods and approaches as investigation, paired work and class discussion. The contributions made by pupils in enquiry work – as, for instance, in providing a series of questions to form the basis of a study – are often not followed up and used effectively. Appropriate homework is set.

219. Pupils learn well and make steady progress. Many lessons arouse their interest and curiosity through imaginative teaching, so that they assimilate information quickly and try hard to complete work accurately. Pupils maintain focus and concentration throughout, owing to skilful management by teachers and a good variety of work. Teachers expect good behaviour and careful, accurate work, with the result that pupils are attentive and well motivated, listen carefully, present work neatly and keep their books in good order. They cooperate effectively with each other, when working in pairs, and are generally keen to make a worthwhile contribution to lessons.

220. The curriculum is sound and complies with national requirements. The scheme of work is satisfactory. The small programme of fieldwork in Years 7-9 does not sufficiently support the examination coursework in Years 10-11 and the use of ICT does not fully exploit pupils' skills. The assessment of pupils' progress is unsatisfactory. Marking varies from the superficial to the very conscientious that has comments informing pupils of what they have done well, what needs to improve and how they can do better. There is, however, no cohesive, consistent and structured system of assessment to support pupils' progress from Years 7-11. Teaching resources are insufficient. There are not enough maps, atlases and textbooks for lower-attaining pupils generally or for pupils overall in Years 10-11. These deficiencies were reported at the time of the last inspection and insufficient progress has been made in addressing them.

221. Leadership is weak: there is no strong sense of direction for the department. Standards have remained too low since the time of the last inspection and the weaknesses identified at that time have not been tackled effectively. In five of the eight classes in Year 7 and in two in Year 8, teaching is split between two teachers and in a further two classes it is split between three members of staff. This arrangement results in a lack of continuity and slows progress. The staff teaching the subject work hard, however, and teaching is generally effective. Clear direction – and the rigorous and consistent implementation of plans to redress the deficiencies – are required to raise standards.

HISTORY

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

Strengths:

- teachers plan lessons and manage pupils very well.
- teachers expect pupils to work to the best of their ability.
- most pupils make good progress.
- pupils' attitudes to the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement:

- the scheme for assessing pupils' work and progress in Years 7 to 9.
- the use of ICT.
- the use of fieldwork and the local environment in Years 7-9.

222. By the end of Year 9 pupils' attainment overall is close to that expected nationally. A smaller proportion of pupils than normal, however, achieve the highest standards. This is a similar picture to that reported at the time of the last inspection. Most pupils begin Year 7 with attainment below the national average. In 2001 teachers assessed their pupils as a little below the national average by the end of Year 9.

223. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection by the end of Year 9 was broadly average, although relatively little was of the highest standard. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. The highest-attaining pupils usually make good progress as a result of appropriately demanding work set by their teachers.

224. The proportion of grades A*-C that pupils obtained in the GCSE examinations was below the national average in 2000 and well below it in 2001. Only a very small proportion of pupils achieved the highest A or A* grades. The proportion of pupils who achieve A*-G grades has, however, been broadly in line with the national average for the past five years. This is a similar standard to that reported at the last inspection. Pupils have tended to perform worse in the past in this subject in GCSE than they do in most of their other subjects. The overall standard of the work of pupils currently following the GCSE course in Years 10 and 11 is, however, in line with that expected nationally; higher-attaining pupils make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs reach below average standards, but make satisfactory progress.

225. Pupils in Years 7-9 generally have sound, and in some cases good, knowledge and understanding about the past. They explain the causes of events and motives for actions satisfactorily. In a wide sample of work seen from pupils in Year 7, for example, they explained clearly the reasons why the Normans won the Battle of Hastings and why they subsequently needed to build castles. The higher-attaining pupils clearly understand that many people in the past had values and beliefs very different from those of today. Lower-attaining pupils describe the past reasonably successfully and see similarities and differences between past and present – as, for example, in work on housing conditions in the nineteenth century. Their generally low level of literacy, however, often restricts their ability to record their knowledge and understanding adequately in writing.

226. Most pupils in Years 7-9 use sources adequately to extract information about the past. Although the lowest attainers struggle to see more than simple information in sources, higher attainers make valid deductions about what the information implies. In their interpretation of a picture source as evidence of hostility between whites and native Americans in the mid-nineteenth century, for instance, the highest-attaining pupils in Year 9 showed good knowledge and understanding of the conflicting beliefs of the native Americans and white people.

227. The overall standard of work currently seen in Years 10 and 11 is broadly in line with the national average, although few pupils reach the highest standards. Most pupils taking GCSE have at least sound knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. Pupils in Year 10, for example, competently

described and explained the dangers of coal mining in the mid-nineteenth century. They used a range of sources, including text and pictures, to select and collate information to explain why government legislation was needed to improve the conditions in mines. The short presentations made by a small number of pupils on this topic showed good understanding of the issues and were generally delivered in a clear and confident manner.

228. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 11 identified relevant information in sample examination questions well and showed clear understanding of what made a good answer. Some, however, found it quite difficult to write their own answers to the standard they wished. In a sample of work seen, higher-attaining pupils evaluated competently the reliability of sources as evidence and wrote well at length. Lower attainers' written work, whilst adequate in terms of content, was often poorly expressed and contained many spelling errors.

229. Teaching is good overall. It is often very good, especially in Years 10-11. Teachers know their subject well and communicate it effectively, so that most pupils acquire at least satisfactory knowledge and understanding about the past. Lessons are very well planned and teachers take careful account of the pupils' abilities. The work for lower attainers and those with special educational needs is appropriately matched to their abilities. This is an improvement since the time of the last inspection. The work for higher attainers is sufficiently challenging to enable them to try to reach the highest standards. The aims of lessons are written on the board at the start of each lesson and copied by pupils into their books. As a result, all pupils know what they should achieve in class.

230. An appropriate variety of teaching methods, including individual study, work in pairs and whole-class teaching, ensures that pupils have good opportunities to learn in a range of different ways. Lessons are sometimes broken into a series of short activities of different types, interspersed with short feedback sessions, in which teachers check pupils' progress carefully. This structure was particularly successful in a lesson with pupils in Year 11 about how to write a good examination answer. The teacher had identified an area for improvement from the pupils' mock examinations and worked through sample answers with them, asking them to mark the answers and check with the examination board's marks. This process led to good progress by a group of lower attainers. Some very good whole-class teaching helped low-attaining pupils in Year 8 to begin to understand well the difference between describing an event and explaining it.

231. Teachers expect their pupils to work hard. They maintain a good working environment with friendly but, when necessary, firm discipline. Most pupils have a very positive approach to their work and behave very well. These are important contributory factors to their good progress. A small minority have a less than positive attitude and, as a result, make limited progress. Most pupils listen very well to teachers' instructions and explanations. When working individually, pupils concentrate on the task in hand and, when working in groups, do so very cooperatively. Many show strong interest and want to improve their knowledge and understanding. There is clear mutual respect between teachers and pupils.

232. The subject meets the statutory requirements for Years 7-9. The leadership and management of the department are good and give a very clear sense of direction to the subject. The head of department, in post for only four days at the time of the inspection, has identified an appropriate list of priorities for improvement and has begun to implement them. Schemes of work are being rewritten. The scheme of assessment for pupils in Years 7-9 is being reviewed and new assessment tasks have already been written for Year 7. These promise to improve the level of accuracy in teachers' assessments in Years 7-9.

233. There is a good ethos for learning throughout the department and a strong commitment to improving the performance of pupils taking examination courses. The department offers alternative accreditation for those pupils who enjoy the subject, but for whom the GCSE examination is too demanding. The subject is a popular option in Years 10-11 and numbers choosing it have been rising steadily over the past four years.

234. Overall, the provision of resources is good. This is an improvement since the time of the last inspection. The department now has sufficient suitable textbooks of good quality. The department makes insufficient use of ICT and the local environment to enhance pupils' learning and experience. There are now, however, some visits made to local museums, the lack of which was identified as a weakness at the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths:

- the emphasis on high standards, disciplined behaviour and personal responsibility.
- high attention throughout to pupils' literacy, keyboarding skills and ready access to computers.
- a brisk pace and suitable challenge in all lessons.
- the high quality of teaching, management, learning resources and technical help.
- national accreditation in ICT for all pupils in Year 11.

Areas for improvement:

- statutory requirements are not fully met in Years 10-11 for experience of controlling devices.
- the standard reached by high-ability pupils by the end of Year 9.
- a planned programme for the replacement and extension of both hardware and software.
- close monitoring of exactly what ICT is taught across all subjects.

235. By the end of Year 9 pupils' overall level of attainment is generally close to average. Over Years 7-9 most pupils make sound progress and at the end of Year 9 achieve the nationally expected standard. This represents a good achievement, because pupils' overall standard is assessed as well below average on entry to the school in Year 7: only a minority of pupils, for example, are assessed as having reached the national benchmark of Level 4.

236. In 2001, teachers' assessments indicated that the proportion of Year 9 pupils reaching the national Level 5 was average. There has been considerable variation, however, over the last four years in teachers' assessments of the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5. Few pupils reach a level higher than 5. In 2001, for example, only five per cent of pupils were assessed as having reached Level 6 (nationally 21 per cent) and none reached Level 7 or above (nationally five per cent).

237. All pupils in Years 10-11 take an external examination course in ICT. By the age of 16, pupils' success in GCSE is above the national average. In 2001, for example, about two-thirds of pupils achieved GCSE grades in the range A*-C in the subject. Higher-attaining pupils also take an Intermediate GNVQ course in business education: in 2001 37 of the 40 pupils entered gained accreditation at Intermediate level, a good achievement. Overall, pupils do better in ICT than in most of their other GCSE subjects.

238. By the end of Year 9, pupils are competent and confident in the efficient use of ICT applications, including word processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets and database software. By this stage most pupils touch-type with accuracy, pace and confidence. This aspect is a strength of the subject in the school. In Year 7, pupils learn about basic ICT terminology, load and save work correctly and use a keyboard efficiently. They know about passwords and networks and how to log onto the school network to access their work files.

239. Pupils in Year 8 continue to build their skills in efficient touch-typing and know satisfactorily how to use spreadsheets and databases to handle information, carrying out enquiries and entering data. They use multiple applications to produce a report: they learn, for example, how to create a chart from a spreadsheet and how to paste this into a word-processed account of a task. They reflect thoughtfully on their uses of ICT, its benefits and limitations, and how it is used in society. In Year 9 they begin to learn satisfactorily about the use of ICT in business environments in preparation for their Year 10 GCSE coursework.

240. In Year 10 pupils work towards GCSE and GNVQ courses in business education and ICT. They extend their word-processing skills by designing a range of business-related documents. They create, for instance, a range of business data and word-processed documents, such as a range of different memoranda and reports. Some pupils designed attractive menus, illustrated with clipart, for a breakfast business meeting.

241. Overall, work in Years 10 and 11 demonstrates pupils' increased capability to use ICT effectively and with insight, integrating several ICT tools effectively to carry out a planned project. Most pupils, for example, produce coursework that incorporates graphics programs, spreadsheets, databases and information saved from the intranet within word processing and desktop publishing. In Year 11, pupils extend their understanding of the applications of ICT in a broader and more sophisticated range of business and social contexts, developing increasingly more complex and effective applications of ICT tools. Pupils learn, for example, to create advanced formulae and multi-chart types for their coursework.

242. Most pupils make sound progress in acquiring or extending their ICT skills. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress because of the intensive and sensitive help of teachers, well-structured learning resources and the effective support of the faculty's two learning assistants. Higher-attaining pupils also make satisfactory progress overall by moving more quickly than others onto work that requires a wide use of ICT skills. They also tend to work outside lesson times, receiving good support from teachers. The highest attainers, however, require still more opportunities for challenging work by the end of Year 9 through such means as designing multimedia presentations and information systems, working with computer-controlled devices and (along with other pupils) greater access to such peripheral devices as digital cameras, scanners and colour-printing facilities.

243. Most pupils in Year 7 make good progress in their studies by quickly learning to use both the network and the computer keyboard efficiently, so increasing the pace and accuracy of their text-based work. In Year 8 they improve their understanding, speed and technical accuracy in using industry-standard software such as e-mail and multimedia applications as well as the Internet. Pupils in Year 9 continue to make good progress by, for instance, extending their knowledge of spreadsheets beyond handling and organising data to the development and testing of scenarios and models.

244. Pupils' progress in Years 10-11 is enhanced by the more extensive and challenging range of work undertaken and in the level of self-evaluation that they apply to their work. Their folders show thoughtful evaluations and reviews of their ICT work as well as different approaches to achieving the required results in coursework. Most pupils make sound progress in acquiring a suitable level of self-accountability, showing responsibility and persistence in producing coursework to ever more specific and demanding criteria.

245. Pupils show a ready willingness to work hard in lessons and to participate thoughtfully and with concentration in discussions. They take considerable pride in the range of work they produce. They demonstrate persistence in drafting and producing improved versions of their work. They take increasing responsibility for their own progress and for maintaining their work files on the network. Pupils' annotations on work files demonstrate their increasing understanding of the need to reflect upon, and critically evaluate, the quality and accuracy of their work.

246. The quality of specialist teaching and learning is good overall throughout the school. Some teaching and aspects are very good and none is unsatisfactory. Teachers use praise and the recognition of achievement very well. Good teaching is characterised by a brisk pace, a highly disciplined yet pleasant classroom climate and high levels of expectation. Teachers intervene in a timely and constructive way to extend pupils' ICT capability. The quality of teachers' subject knowledge, lesson planning and classroom management are high.

247. Lessons are carefully structured with well-defined introductions and appropriately timed sequences of activity. Very effective plenary sessions synthesise and reinforce what has been taught. Teachers make very effective use of departmental computers, which are of variable quality. Teachers intervene sensitively and effectively to encourage pupils and to identify any problems.

248. The department of five teachers is well led and managed by an experienced member of the senior leadership team. It has a strong professional ethos. All staff are subject specialists and share a dedication, energy and enthusiasm for developing pupils' skills and capability in the subject. Departmental documentation and materials are of a very high standard. The development plan is comprehensive and realistic, complying with all current subject requirements – as, for example, with measures to protect pupils from undesirable materials on the Internet. The department's plans, produced in collaboration with other subjects, form an imaginative, long-term vision for ICT at the school. Some aspects of the programme of

study – such as working with information systems and control – require further work across the school. The team is working well and progressively to realise these aims.

249. The school has made good progress in ICT since its last inspection. It has a comprehensive development plan and a detailed scheme of work and assessment. All pupils now have separate, timetabled ICT lessons. A wider range of ICT accreditation is on offer to pupils in Years 10-11. Inappropriate hardware is being phased out and the school now has a clear policy on acquiring only industry-standard hardware and software. The school has installed a school-wide network, with up-to-date software of good quality in some rooms, and broadband access to the Internet for pupils and staff. Two new ICT rooms have been created. All staff have achieved ICT certification through a training course. Over the last two years two-thirds of the staff have also completed the *New Opportunities Fund* ICT-training programme; it is planned that the remainder will receive training by the end of 2002.

250. Despite the school's commitment to the wide use of ICT in all subjects – with associated training and much improved hardware – there is inconsistency in the application of ICT within departments. Some now use ICT to enhance pupils' knowledge and skills, whilst others do little. At present, the school does not entirely fulfill the statutory requirements for ICT in Years 10-11, because there is not enough teaching of computer control and information systems. Although the provision for computer-control is indicated within the planned schemes of work for science and for design and technology, it has yet to be fully implemented. The school does not have adequate monitoring and evaluation of the contribution of all subjects' use of ICT.

251. The use of ICT outside the specialist department is variable and improving, but has gaps. In mathematics, for example, Year 7 pupils regularly use a range of stimulating programs to enhance their knowledge – as, for example, when pupils learn about decimal-place theory or play games against the computer to help to consolidate their understanding. Pupils in Years 10-11 use LOGO and graphing software to help them to understand and model the properties of geometric shapes and to revise for examinations.

252. In design and technology pupils use ICT to help their designs of electronic circuits and sometimes use computer-aided design (CAD) software to create two-dimensional work. In modern foreign languages pupils use a range of ICT, in a well-equipped room, to increase their understanding and fluency in languages. The science department is beginning to use ICT to increase pupils' scientific understanding and curiosity. Work on computer-control and on sensing data with hand-held computers is planned for later in the current academic year. The use of ICT in art is unsatisfactory.

253. Although the provision of computers is good overall, a significant proportion of them are close to becoming obsolete; a planned programme of replacement is required. The narrowness of one teaching room, the comparatively limited number of up-to-date computers and the lack of effective window-blinds in the ICT teaching rooms are limitations on pupils' progress within an otherwise good picture.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths:

- the department's good teaching ensures that pupils achieve well.
- the department's good use of ICT.
- pupils' improved writing skills in GCSE coursework.

Areas for improvement:

- the evaluation of what pupils have learned by the end of lessons.

254. On entry to the school in Year 7, pupils learn either French or German and the languages rotate in alternate years. Teachers' assessments of pupils' standards at the end of Year 9 in 2001 suggested that pupils' overall level of attainment was below the national average. In the previous three years pupils had been assessed as close to average overall.

255. Pupils' overall level of attainment by the end of Year 9 is currently below average, but consistent with pupils' earlier standard of work. Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of the foreign language that teachers use in many lessons. They extract information successfully from conversations that they hear on cassette – such as identifying the speakers or school subjects, or matching up the leisure activity to the day and time shown in the textbook.

256. In 2001 the proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A*-C in the full-course GCSE examination in French or German was significantly below the national average for the subject. This represents a drop from the previous year's results, but the school's sets of data show that there were fewer higher-attaining pupils in this year group than in previous years. The proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A*-G was above the national average in French and in line with it in German. The proportion of pupils who are entered for the GCSE examinations in French and German has increased year by year. Overall, pupils achieve well in Years 10-11.

257. Pupils' oral skills are reasonable and carefully developed in class. In a Year 7 class in French, for example, pupils asked and told one another their birthdates. In a Year 8 German class dealing with their daily routines, pupils threw dice and spoke the corresponding sentence on the board. Higher-attaining pupils in a Year 8 French class spoke confidently and showed a good knowledge of places in town and the activities that could be undertaken there, using the *on peut* construction. Pronunciation is generally satisfactory.

258. In their written work pupils reach an appropriate level. For instance, higher-attaining pupils in French in Year 8 write interesting facts, in short paragraphs, about their own town. In Year 9, higher-attaining pupils in German practise the use of inversion and use the perfect tense in writing about daily events in a diary. They learn soundly to put adverbs of time, manner and place into the correct order. Average pupils in French in Year 9 can link a country or a leisure activity with the perfect tense to complete short passages. Many accents are, however, omitted from the past participles of *-er* verbs. A weakness is that few pupils complete corrections or redraft work in order to improve its accuracy.

259. Pupils' overall attainment by the end of Year 11 is below average in both French and German. Pupils show a sound knowledge of the specific vocabulary for different topics and of key words and constructions. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 10 in French, for instance, revised the titles of directors and managers in a French company and then, from cassette, noted their names and spelled them out. Results improved as the cassette progressed. Lower-attaining pupils in a Year 11 French class practised using the *on peut* construction with places. Pupils have a reasonable standard of pronunciation, when reading aloud. Written work appropriately complements and supports pupils' oral questions and role-play work. In Year 10, pupils have a good knowledge of different occupations, expressed in French or German. In their writing about the French educational system, higher-attaining pupils in Year 10 printed out a school report from computers.

260. Pupils' written coursework is a strength of both languages. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 11, for example, write at length about holidays, using different tenses correctly. The best of these contain very few mistakes. All of these pupils demonstrate a very good range of vocabulary and phrases, and use inversion, adjectival endings and subordinate clauses competently. Their reports are interesting to read. Lower-attaining pupils in French in Year 11 produce less detailed reports than in German, but they have been taught their constructions well, using ones that have been covered in earlier years. Their use of different tenses and vocabulary is appropriate.

261. In both languages the achievement and rate of progress of most pupils are satisfactory in Years 7–9 and good in Years 10-11. The department takes an active part in developing literacy in Years 7-9 by, for example, speed-reading, the regular testing of key words and highlighting the use of verbs. Following the success of its strategy to improve coursework, the department's focus in Years 10-11 is, appropriately, on improving speaking skills. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in Years 7-9 and good progress in Years 10-11: the classes for these pupils are small and support for them is very good.

262. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in class are good. They listen well, for instance, to cassettes in comprehension exercises. They work cooperatively in pairs and apply themselves well to the tasks they are set. They respond sensibly to games and competitions.

263. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers have a substantial knowledge of the subjects and make good use of the foreign language in most lessons. This helps pupils to develop their linguistic understanding securely. All lessons start with revision that might include a written or oral test. In a Year 9 German lesson, for example, a class of pupils with special educational needs was tested at the beginning of the lesson and again at the end: every pupil had improved. Teachers appropriately introduce different activities and skills to maintain pupils' concentration and interest. As a result, pupils work productively and at a good pace. In a Year 8 French lesson higher-attaining pupils, working in pairs, successfully linked up 20 sentences about places in town with the corresponding activities.

264. Teachers employ a wide variety of approaches and resources successfully – such as flash cards, pupils' working in pairs, suitable games and competitions. In a Year 7 French lesson pupils successfully used cassettes to record rugby scores and to ring dates on the calendar. Relationships and the management of pupils in class are good. Homework is set regularly. Teachers' marking of pupils' work is satisfactory overall, but comments made in exercise books in Years 7-9 often do not identify specifically enough the ways in which pupils can improve. Not all lessons end with a crisp check of what has been retained by pupils.

265. The department meets statutory requirements for teaching the National Curriculum. Leadership and management are very good overall. The amount of time devoted to the subject in Years 7 and 9 is a little below the national average. Pupils in Years 7-9 are provided with half-termly assessments of their levels of attainment, which they then record in their exercise books; this enables pupils to measure their progress and to set themselves realistic targets. In Years 10-11 pupils are appropriately given a target grade for the GCSE examination. Learning resources within the department are very good.

266. Progress since the previous inspection has been good. The range of entry at the lower end of the GCSE examination has been extended to include an extra GCSE set. The coursework element of the examination has been trialled and extended, resulting in improved scores in GCSE. A suitable programme of action to improve pupils' performance in the oral component of the examination is now in place. Pupils tend to achieve better results at GCSE in French and German than in many of their other subjects in the school. The majority of teachers in the department have received training in the use of ICT; this has resulted in the effective implementation of ICT into the teaching of modern foreign languages.

MUSIC

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

Strengths:

- the high quality of instrumental teaching.
- the assessment of pupils' work in some lessons in Years 7-9.

Areas for improvement:

- the management of pupils in class.
- sharing with pupils the criteria and procedures for assessment in all lessons.
- the incorporation of all policies in the departmental handbook.

267. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9, their overall attainment is below the national average. Pupils perform, compose and improvise, using tuned, percussion instruments and electronic keyboards. Pupils gain reasonable familiarity with the music keyboard and some play simple melodies, using all fingers. Most have to rely on the letter names of notes that are printed on the instruments. They have some familiarity with staff notation and a broad understanding of the way chords are built up.

268. In one lesson on "broken chords", for example, pupils in Year 9 listened to a fanfare and identified the notes of the chord on which the fanfare was constructed. They then went on to practise playing broken chords on glockenspiels. At this stage they also learn about common structures for songs – as, for example, the chorus-verse-chorus form as well as "hook line" and "intro". They study well-known popular songs and write their own words to fit into acknowledged patterns. Those who learn to play instruments attain the early grades in Associated Board examinations.

269. Pupils' overall attainment by the end of Year 11 is below the national average. In the 1999- 2001 GCSE examinations, taken together, four out of ten pupils gained grades of B or C. Six pupils gained grades lower than C and none gained the highest A or A* grades. Up to 2001 only one or two pupils took the GCSE course. In 2001 there was a significant increase in numbers and this is being maintained: in the present Years 10-11 there are 24 candidates.

270. In work seen during the inspection the overall standard of performance, composition and listening was below the national average. In one lesson pupils were presented with a series of examples of music from the romantic period and twentieth century to help them to recognise and identify stylistic features. This exercise drew on their prior knowledge and skills in recognising male and female voices, instrumentation and such features as polyphony and counterpoint. One pupil performed in a piano duet.

271. The quality of learning in Years 7-9 is sound overall. Pupils enter the school with a general educational attainment that is well below average and with very variable levels of musical attainment and experience. Many pupils do not recall facts easily and need much repetition and reworking of material. In spite of this, they respond well to good lessons, particularly where material is taught in manageable units and when revision is frequent. This was particularly noticeable in one lesson in which pupils were asked to recall an ancient instrument – the hybrid cornett. Their recall was good, because their initial experience was made especially interesting.

272. Most pupils are interested in their lessons and come into class expecting to learn. In a lesson in Year 8, for instance, pupils were pleased to learn some Indonesian words in connection with their study of the Balinese Gamelan. In this lesson they played their own version of a gamelan piece, using glockenspiels to recreate the metallic, gong-like sounds of the gamelan orchestra. Pupils with special educational needs are well involved in all class music activities; where work is especially geared to their abilities, they progress as well as their peers.

273. In Years 10-11 pupils make satisfactory progress. A significant number join the GCSE course with very modest skills and knowledge. The course is challenging for all pupils, but especially so for those who join as complete beginners. During the inspection, pupils in a Year 10 class were introduced to score-reading, in which they were required to follow the melody line from *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*. This provoked them to ask, for example, how one can tell which is the melody in a score of several staves and whether instruments had been invented in 1750.

274. Overall, pupils' attitudes to learning are good throughout the school. In most classes pupils wish to get on with their tasks. They especially enjoy practical work. Some classes contain a substantial number of pupils who need very firm and clear structures within which they can work. A significant number, mostly boys, have not acquired by Year 9 the habit of learning independently. These pupils tend to resort to irrelevant chatter and comments which, if not firmly checked by the teacher, slow down the pace of the whole lesson.

275. Teaching across all year groups ranges from satisfactory to very good: it is good overall in Years 7-9 and satisfactory in Years 10-11. Teachers have good subject knowledge and expertise. The teachers in the department have complementary skills which they use to good effect. Often these skills are used to demonstrate how a piece should be played or sung, to accompany pieces or to direct pupils in listening tests.

276. In some lessons (and especially in Years 7-9) good attention is paid to the teaching of literacy and to understanding the technical language of music. In one music room the teacher and pupils have gone to great pains to produce these terms on computer and display them very attractively. All lessons are planned and prepared well; in the best lessons, sections are carefully timed. Teachers have at least satisfactory expectations that pupils will work hard and behave well. Behaviour is best in those lessons that are pitched correctly for pupils' abilities. There are, however, weaknesses in teaching. In a minority of lessons pupils are allowed to talk, to make noises over the teacher's delivery or to make irrelevant interruptions that restrict the progress of other pupils. Otherwise, pupils are managed effectively. A team of visiting instrumental teachers gives lessons to about 60 pupils. This represents a growing trend and is an improvement since the last inspection.

277. The day-to-day assessment of pupils' work is satisfactory overall. The department now makes assessments of the National Curriculum levels reached by pupils. This is a good feature of the provision. One

teacher uses a very well thought out system of regular testing that shows clearly how effective learning has been in previous lessons.

278. The leadership of the department is satisfactory overall. Much hard work has been done to improve the overall provision of music since the last inspection. Standards, teaching, resources and accommodation, together with an increased recruitment of GCSE candidates, are examples of these improvements. The department now needs to improve further the class teaching of all pupils and to raise the profile of music in the school through more frequent live performances.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- the high quality of teaching.
- teachers have good relationships with their classes.
- the subject is well organised and administered.

Areas for improvement:

- the teaching of gymnastics.
- some aspects of accommodation.
- more emphasis on pupils using ICT.

279. By the end of Year 9, most pupils attain an average standard of performance. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, show a sound rate of progress in improving, for example, their basic basketball skills. They also make satisfactory progress in understanding the principles of fitness and how the body functions better as a result of careful exercise. Girls in Year 9 have a good standard of skill in netball. The standard of boys' gymnastics in Year 9, however, is below the expected level: many pupils are unable to control their body weight effectively or to appreciate essential body tension in gymnastics.

280. Examination results in GCSE are below average. The proportion of pupils gaining GCSE results at A*-C is low, but the A*-G pass rate is in line with the national picture. Most pupils show steady improvement in their understanding of theoretical principles, as is clearly seen in well-prepared lessons about fitness and the effects of regular exercise upon it. Teachers' marking of work is thorough and incorporates useful information to help pupils to improve their writing. There are, however, a number of examples of unfinished work in pupils' books, despite the fact that teachers have made written comments about the work. Pupils do not use any aspect of ICT to help them to present their written work effectively.

281. By the end of Year 11, most pupils reach the level of performance in practical work expected for their age. In basketball, for example, pupils show consistently good performance in such basic shooting skills as the lay-up shot and clearly improve their passing skills. Boys are generally stronger at basketball than girls. Gifted and talented pupils generally progress at a good rate.

282. Teaching is good overall. Most of it is good and much is very good (occasionally excellent), especially in Years 7-9. Teachers are all specialist trained and have good subject knowledge. The best teaching is meticulously prepared and has very clear objectives that are carefully shared with classes. Teachers use a range of teaching styles that give pupils opportunities to both plan and evaluate their work. In the occasional instances when two teachers and learning support assistants work together, all pupils (and particularly those with special educational needs) make substantial progress. Careful support is given to pupils with special needs, so that they are always fully involved in lessons; they generally make good progress. Just occasionally, however, poor organisation and low expectations of pupils result in low standards, especially when too many pupils are inactive at one time.

283. The leadership and management of the department are good. Departmental policies and schemes of work are well documented and up to date. A new assessment scheme, running since 2001, links pupils' performances to National Curriculum levels. Care is taken to keep pupils on the GCSE course fully informed

about their progress, attainment and predicted grades. Targets are set for these pupils. There are good displays of information in the department, particularly to celebrate pupils' achievements. No ICT facilities are specifically allocated to the subject, but teachers make very good use of ICT for administration.

284. Since the previous inspection, improvements have been made to the curriculum so that it now offers an appropriate range to pupils. Some improvement has also been made to facilities – most notably the provision of a fitness room on the stage in the school hall. There are, however, still considerable inadequacies: indoor teaching spaces are far too small for large classes and ceilings are too low. These factors lower standards in all the major indoor games. The school's playing fields are still badly drained.

285. About 20 per cent of the school's pupils regularly take part in the good range of extracurricular provision offered, although the short lunchtime break restricts, in practice, the overall extracurricular programme.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths:

- the high quality of teaching and learning in all years.
- pupils achieve well, reaching the average standard required by the Agreed Syllabus.

Areas for improvement:

- insufficient teaching time for the full GCSE course in religious studies.

286. There are no national standards for RE at the end of Year 9. In work seen during the inspection, however, pupils' attainment by the end of Year 9 was in line with the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus for their age. Most pupils have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding, for example, of the richness and diversity of religion, of the place of Christianity and other principal religions in the country, and of their origins and distinctive features. They have a sound grasp of religious language, concepts and ideas. They understand why the beliefs of practising members of faith communities are important to them and how they shape their lives. Their skills in making a personal response to religious questions are, however, weaker than their knowledge and understanding.

287. In the GCSE full-course examination in 2001 the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C was in line with national norms for the subject. In comparison with the national pattern, pupils' achievement was a third of a grade better than in the average of the other subjects they took. Over time, there has been a marked improvement in the subject that has exceeded the national trend of improvement.

288. In work seen during the inspection, the overall attainment of pupils in Year 11 was in line with the expectations of both the Agreed Syllabus and the GCSE examination. Most pupils show an appropriate knowledge and understanding of the Christian and Muslim faiths. Their skills in evaluating different religious and secular responses to ethical issues, such as those surrounding the concept of the sanctity of life or the environment, are sound.

289. Both boys and girls of all levels of ability achieve well by the end of Years 9 and 11, because they are taught well and work hard. They make good progress both in lessons and over time. Pupils' attainment is low on entry to the school, but by the end of Year 9 their knowledge, understanding and skills have developed to the point where they can, for example, grasp the highly abstract concepts of Samsaric existence and Moksha in Hinduism.

290. Pupils maintain this good progress in Years 10 and 11. For example, their skills have developed sufficiently by the end of Year 11 for them to be able to compare and evaluate complex philosophical arguments concerning the existence or otherwise of God. Pupils achieve well in Year 11, despite the small amount of time (below half of that for other comparable subjects) that the school allocates to teaching the GCSE examination course. Inevitably, this shortfall in provision has an adverse impact on the breadth and depth in which pupils

study the syllabus and places a “glass ceiling” on how well they can achieve, despite good teaching. Teachers and pupils are under constant pressure just to meet the basic demands of the syllabus.

291. The quality of teaching and learning was good in all lessons observed. Where teaching is strongest, teachers have a good grasp of their subject, know clearly what they wish their pupils to learn and routinely share their aims with them. They plan their lessons very well to achieve their aims and engage and hold pupils’ interest through a good variety of enjoyable and challenging activities and tasks that are well matched to their individual needs.

292. Year 7 pupils, for example, made good gains in understanding the Old Testament creation myths, because the teacher caught their attention through a stimulating cartoon video and then led them to grasp the key ideas through a well-planned sequence of individual, paired and whole-class activities. In conclusion, pupils made a personal response to the stories through creating illustrated diaries of the days of creation. Again, Year 9 pupils were led, step by step, to a good understanding of key Muslim beliefs about Allah through a well-balanced combination of brainstorming, discussion, reading and written work. The topic was brought alive and pupils’ understanding of Islamic culture was extended, through the good use of a video of practising Muslims from different cultures speaking of the impact of their beliefs on their lives.

293. Lower-attaining pupils learn well, because teachers carefully plan to break work down into manageable units, are very attentive to their individual needs and create an ethos in the classroom in which they feel secure and valued. Pupils with special educational needs are not afraid to ask for help or to contribute to lessons, because they know that their peers will listen to them with respect. Pupils from minority ethnic and faith backgrounds also learn well, because teachers fully involve them in lessons and value the unique contributions they can make. This was well evidenced in a Year 9 lesson where a Muslim pupil felt able to use the Arabic language in a discussion of the Five Pillars of the Faith.

294. Teachers do much to promote pupils’ learning through developing their literacy skills. They widen pupils’ vocabulary through the display and explanation of the key words for each lesson’s aims. They pay constant attention to developing pupils’ skills in correct and effective usage of the English language. They also encourage pupils to develop their ICT skills through use of the Internet for research.

295. Teachers set worthwhile homework that extends pupils’ learning in class and, through excellent marking, help pupils to understand how to raise the levels of their attainment. This good teaching is underpinned by teachers’ high expectations of pupils and by the very good relationships, based on mutual respect and caring, that they foster in the classroom. Pupils behave well, work hard and learn well because it is expected of them.

296. Where teaching is less secure, work is not always well enough matched to the differing needs of pupils. There is, for example, insufficient extension work for the highest-attaining pupils. Teachers do not always provide opportunities at the end of lessons for pupils to review how far they have achieved their learning objectives. In Years 10 and 11, because of a lack of time, teachers cannot provide pupils with enough opportunities for exploring ideas in discussion or for developing the skills of independent learning, research and enquiry.

297. The quality of leadership and management is very good. The recently appointed head of faculty has a clear vision of the educational direction that the subject should take, in order to raise standards further. She has successfully improved work in key areas and has moved the subject on in a short space of time. The very good support she gives to non-specialist teachers has borne dividends in producing a positive team ethos and a consistency of good practice that characterise the faculty.

298. There has been significant improvement overall since the previous inspection. Pupils’ levels of attainment have been raised by the end of Years 9 and 11. This is because the quality of teaching has been raised and because the faculty has developed good quality schemes of work, effective assessment procedures and very good literacy and numeracy strategies. It has also improved the provision of learning resources. The low time allocation for the GCSE examination course needs to be increased, however, if pupils are to achieve their full potential by the end of Year 11.