

INSPECTION REPORT

PENKRIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Penkridge

LEA area: Staffordshire

Unique reference number: 124423

Headteacher: Mr Peter Singer

Reporting inspector: Dr Kenneth C Thomas
3390

Dates of inspection: 25 June 2001

Inspection number: 194128

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle deemed secondary

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 9 – 13 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Marsh Lane
Penkridge
Staffordshire

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Peter Davenport

Date of previous inspection: April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
3390	K Thomas	<i>Registered Inspector</i>		What sort of school is it? The school's results and pupils or students' achievements; How well is the school led and managed.
8989	M Romano	<i>Lay Inspector</i>		Pupils attitudes, values and personal development.
14704	J Cooling	<i>Team Member</i>	Geography.	
15465	T Parish	<i>Team member</i>	Science.	
4372	R Fordham	<i>Team member</i>	Religious education.	
19414	J Flisher	<i>Team member</i>	English; English as an additional language	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
31129	J Pickering	<i>Team member</i>	Art.	
15396	R Bulman	<i>Team member</i>	Modern foreign languages.	
12475	S Johnson	<i>Team member</i>	Music.	
19152	R Merryfield	<i>Team member</i>	History.	
22906	B Hodgson	<i>Team member</i>	Physical education.	
15051	L Kauffman	<i>Team member</i>	Information technology; Design technology.	
8756	P Hanage	<i>Team Member</i>	Mathematics.	How well does the school care for its students?

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Penkriddle Middle School is a school for boys and girls aged nine to thirteen, serving the village of Penkriddle and surrounding villages in Staffordshire. It is fully subscribed with 445 pupils on roll, which is larger than most middle schools. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, at 10.2 per cent, is below the national average. The one pupil with English as an additional language speaks and writes it fluently. There are no other pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. The standards of attainment of pupils coming into the school, although wide-ranging, are above average, overall. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, at 16.3 per cent, is below the national average, while the proportion of pupils with statements, at 3.1 per cent is above the national average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school, providing a good quality of education for its pupils. The headteacher provides very good leadership and this is reflected in the above average standards and an increasing commitment to further improvement. Good teaching promotes very good attitudes, behaviour and personal development and enables pupils to make the most of the good opportunities provided. Resources are very well managed and the school provides good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- The school ethos is one in which all staff and pupils work and learn together in an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- Good teaching succeeds in motivating pupils and leads to good learning and well above average standards in most subjects.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good, contributing well to their own learning and the sense of community in the school.
- Pupils' learning and interest in school are enhanced by a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities from which many pupils benefit.
- Pupils are provided with very good care and support and respond well to the very good opportunities for personal development.
- The school has established a good partnership with parents and parents provide the school with good support.
- The school makes good use of the community to support pupils' learning and has very good relationships with its partner schools.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- The leadership and management roles of teachers with co-ordinating responsibilities.
- The use of assessment information by subject co-ordinators in planning teaching and learning.
- The marking of pupils work.
- The information provided to parents about their children's progress in annual reports.
- Some aspects of the accommodation.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in April 1997 and has made good progress since that time. Standards of attainment in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 6 have risen at the same rate as the national trend. Teaching has improved, with more that is very good or excellent and almost none that is unsatisfactory. Most of the key issues identified for action in the last inspection report have been tackled successfully. School management has been strengthened and strategic planning has improved. Senior managers have a good understanding of their roles in monitoring and evaluation. However, more needs to be done in order to develop a similar level of understanding at middle management level. Although provision for art has improved, pupils are not receiving their full curriculum entitlement to the subject. Appropriate targets are set and the school is well placed to make further improvement.

STANDARDS

The table below shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on National Curriculum test results.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
End of Key Stage 2 tests	B	C	A	A

Key	
<i>well above average</i>	A
<i>above average</i>	B
<i>average</i>	C
<i>below average</i>	D
<i>well below average</i>	E

The school does well for its pupils and attainment in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 6 in 2000 was well above average both in comparison with all schools and with similar schools. As attainment on entry is, overall, above average, these results represent good progress and achievement through Years 5 and 6. Results in English and mathematics improved in 2000 to be above average in English and well above average in mathematics, both in comparison with all and similar schools, while the generally well above average results in science were maintained. Pupils continue to make good progress through Years 7 and 8 and standards are above expectations at the end of Year 8.

Pupils' literacy skills are good; they read and speak well. Although pupils' writing skills are not as well developed as reading and speaking, they are above expectations. Pupils' numeracy skills are also good, although, compared with literacy, there is less consistency in the development of these skills in all subjects. Attainment in information and communications technology is well above expectations.

Attainment in all subjects, other than art, is at or above expectations. Attainment is particularly high in French, music and geography. Attainment in history and physical education is above expectations at the end of Year 6 and matches expectations at the end of Year 8. In religious education and design and technology, attainment matches expectations across the school. Attainment in art is adversely affected by insufficient curriculum time for the subject in Years 5 and 6, so that attainment is below expectations. There are no observed differences in attainment between boys and girls. The school exceeded the targets set for 2000 by a good margin and it is likely that the targets set for 2001 will also be exceeded.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are enthusiastic and play a full part in the life of the school. Any unsatisfactory attitudes to learning found in Year 8 come from a very small minority of boys.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good behaviour makes a significant contribution to pupils' achievement. Exclusions are used appropriately and sparingly to maintain standards of behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils are thoughtful and respectful of each other. They readily accept responsibility and respond well to opportunities to develop independence.
Attendance	Good. The attendance rate is above average and the unauthorised absence rate is below.

The climate for learning is very good. Pupils' attitudes and the quality of the relationships amongst all groups are very good and are strengths of the school. Pupils work hard and are supportive of each other. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated with their peers. Regular attendance makes a significant contribution to pupils' progress and achievement.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 10-11 years	aged 12-13 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good

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

The quality of teaching is good across the school. Teaching is satisfactory or better in 98 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in over a quarter. As a result of good teaching pupils learn quickly and make good progress. Teachers know their subjects well and consistently teach lessons that are good or better. Lessons are planned to meet the needs of pupils, although there is a need to set more challenging tasks for higher-attaining pupils in a few lessons. Teaching is good in English, mathematics, science, design and technology,

geography, music, physical education and religious education and satisfactory in art and history. The teaching of information and communication technology (ICT) is very good, and consistently strong teaching in modern foreign languages has a significant impact on pupils' progress and achievement. There were only two unsatisfactory lessons, one in art in Year 7 and one in science in Year 8. The shortcomings in these lessons were insufficient control of some pupils, and teachers talking for too long, so that pupils became bored and disinterested. Marking is inconsistent and does not always show pupils how to improve their work. Numeracy skills are taught well in mathematics and teachers are generally alert to opportunities to develop pupils' numeracy skills in other subjects. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good both in normal lessons and when pupils are withdrawn for specialist teaching.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum is broad and balanced and, with the exception of art, meets statutory requirements. Very good range of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils are fully included in the school community, are confident and feel secure. Effective strategies for improving literacy are helping pupils with special educational needs to make good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The one pupil with English as an additional language has no language difficulties that require additional support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good provision for pupils' personal development. Very good provision for moral development. Good provision for social and cultural development. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Procedures for child protection and for ensuring pupils' welfare are very good. The school provides a supportive environment in which to learn, but there is insufficient use of assessment to support pupils' learning.

The school is a secure and safe place for pupils to learn. The very good range of extra-curricular activities is a demonstration of the school's commitment to providing pupils with as broad an educational experience as possible. Increasing use is being made of assessment information in monitoring and evaluating performance at a school level, but insufficient use is being made of this information to monitor and support pupils' learning at a subject level.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The school benefits from the very good leadership and clarity of vision of the headteacher. Subject and year co-ordinators are responding well to initiatives to further raise standards.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil their responsibilities conscientiously and well. They exercise very good oversight and do their best to obtain best value in the decisions they make.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Effective monitoring of teaching and learning by the headteacher but subject co-ordinators are not yet involved. Good analysis of test and examination results by senior management but not enough use by subject co-ordinators to see where improvements can be made.
The strategic use of resources	Good and better than the last inspection with a closer link between financial and school improvement planning.

The school has a hardworking and stable staff whose expertise and experience are well matched to the demands of the curriculum. Support staff are suitably qualified and there are good induction arrangements for staff new to the school. The school has adequate resources overall and makes effective use of them to meet the needs of the curriculum. The quantity and quality of books within the central library area is poor in relation to the size of the school and the needs of the pupils. The accommodation is generally sufficient for the schools needs. However, the accommodation for mathematics, food and textiles, French, geography and history suffer either from cramped rooms or interference when staff and pupils pass through. The accommodation for art is unsatisfactory. Current building work will improve facilities in science and add to the school's teaching accommodation. The school seeks to get the best value whenever buying goods and services.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school expects pupils to work hard and achieve their best. • The progress their children are making. • The approachability of the school. • The school is helping their children become mature and responsible. • The good teaching. • The good school management. • The good behaviour. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework pupils are given. • The closeness with which the school works with parents. • The information the school provides.

Inspectors support the positive views of parents. The amount of homework set is satisfactory and usually extends or consolidates the work undertaken in lessons. The general information the school provides is good. However, pupils' annual reports do not provide parents with sufficiently clear information about what their children know, understand and can do, and what they must do in order to improve. Inspectors judge that the school tries hard to work in partnership with parents and to involve them in the life of the school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils achieve well at Penkridge Middle School and results in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 6, which is the last year of Key Stage 2, are improving at the same rate as the national trend. The results of the 2000 tests show that the overall standards of attainment at the end of Year 6 are well above average, both in comparison with all schools and with similar schools. Given that standards of attainment on entry to the school, although wide ranging, are overall above average, these results represent good progress through Years 5 and 6. There are no groups of pupils for whom progress is unsatisfactory; pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Statutory targets for Year 6 in 2000 were exceeded by a good margin and as 2001 targets are about the same as those set for 2000, it is likely that these targets will also be exceeded.

2. Pupils' achievement in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is good. Results in English improved in 2000 to be above average both in comparison with all and with similar schools. A notable feature of these results was the good attainment by boys who not only performed better than boys nationally in the tests but also better than the girls. Inspection evidence indicates that standards in English are maintained through Years 7 and 8 so that attainment is above national expectations at the end of Year 8, when pupils transfer to the high school. Results in mathematics also improved in 2000 to be well above average in comparison with both all and similar schools. These standards are again maintained through Years 7 and 8, so that attainment is well above national expectations when pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8. Results in science are consistently very good. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests results were well above average both in comparison with all and similar schools. Although inspection evidence indicated that standards are slightly lower than those indicated by national tests, attainment by the end of Year 8 is above national expectations, with a significant number of pupils producing work of a very high standard. There are no significant differences in the attainment of boys and girls in mathematics and science.

3. Attainment in most other subjects is above national expectations, especially in French, music, geography, and information and communications technology, with no observed differences in attainment between boys and girls. Pupils start learning French in Year 6, which is one year earlier than is statutorily required and by the end of Year 8, many pupils attain levels at least one year in advance of those expected nationally. Attainment in history is above expectations at the end of Year 6 and matches expectations at the end of Year 8. The reason for the difference is a tendency towards over direction in teaching in Years 7 and 8, which restricts opportunities for independent learning by higher attaining pupils. Attainment in religious education and design and technology matches expectations across the school. While attainment in physical education matches expectations in Years 7 and 8, it is above in Years 5 and 6. This is due to the effects of specialist teaching in these years. Attainment in art is adversely affected by insufficient curriculum time for the subject in Years 5 and 6, so that attainment is below expectations both at the end of Year 6 and the end of Year 8.

4. Good standards of literacy enable the majority of pupils to make the most of their education. Staff development initiatives and the effective use of the literacy hour have helped teachers to gain a good understanding of issues related to literacy, and good examples of the development of pupils' literacy skills are seen in most subjects. Standards of reading are

good and much improved from the last inspection. Regular practice across a range of subjects leads to pupils becoming competent readers, able to understand texts and to identify different layers of meaning. In French, for example, pupils are required to read a wide range of source material and to make accurate notes and use summarising techniques. Speaking and listening skills are good. Pupils are articulate and able to speak with confidence in groups of all sizes. They are able to understand and use specialist vocabulary in, for example, mathematics, science and design and technology. Although pupils' writing skills are not as well developed as reading and speaking, they are above expectations. Most pupils can write in a range of styles and standards of spelling, punctuation and grammar are sound.

5. Pupils' skills in numeracy are good. The mathematics department has agreed standard methods of solution and these are well described in the departmental handbook. There is an emphasis in mathematics lessons on developing speed and accuracy and these skills help pupils' progress in other subjects. Pupils use their numeracy skills well in design technology and information and communications technology, for example in accurate construction and calculation. Spatial awareness improves as pupils move through the school and is satisfactory by the end of Year 8. In science and geography pupils use their numerical skills effectively to collect, interpret and represent data in the form of tables and charts. However, there is no common agreement among science teachers as to which methods of calculating should be used for standard routines. This can be confusing for pupils. The school is planning to develop a whole school numeracy policy to ensure consistency of approach in using and extending the good basic skills pupils learn in mathematics.

6. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Factors such as the very good ethos for teaching and learning in lessons, the good knowledge the teachers have of their pupils' needs and the supportive nature of other pupils all contributes to this. The one pupil with English as an additional language is a fluent speaker of English and has no need of additional support.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

7. Pupils are very enthusiastic about their school and behaviour is very good in lessons and around the school. The vast majority of pupils are keen to come to school and this is reflected in the attendance rate, which is good. This picture accurately reflects the views expressed by parents at the pre-inspection meeting, and through the questionnaire, that their children like coming to school. Pupils are punctual at the start of morning and afternoon sessions and lessons start on time. Pupils' high levels of interest and enthusiasm are seen in the large number of pupils who take part in the very good range of extra-curricular activities provided in the lunch hour and after school.

8. Pupils' very good attitudes in lessons have a very positive impact on their learning. Their eagerness to learn also contributes to the strong sense of community and very good relationships that are evident in the school. Pupils make very good efforts to achieve their learning goals, sustain concentration and respond very well when given appropriate challenges. Pupils display a developing maturity as seen in a Year 5 English lesson, for example, where pupils were examining the moral and social values of different cultures. They were attentive and displayed good listening and speaking skills as they extended their knowledge of Indian cultural traditions through mature discussion. Pupils identified as having special educational needs display very good attitudes to learning in mainstream classes and when, occasionally, they are taught in small withdrawal groups. They work co-operatively and their behaviour enables them to respond well to the opportunities offered, including the

extra help given by teaching assistants and others. Pupils with visual impairments and specific learning difficulties respond well to the strategies employed by the specialist staff.

9. Behaviour is very good in classrooms and around the school. This makes a significant contribution to pupils' achievement. Pupils contributed to the drafting of the school rules, which they know and understand well. Pupils are orderly as they move around the school, and they act in a very responsible way, for example, when they queue for lunch. The overwhelming majority of pupils show respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others, and this is a strength of the school. Very few instances of unacceptable behaviour were observed during the inspection. The few instances that were observed centred on a small minority of boys in Year 8 who find it difficult to maintain the high standards set by the school. In one Year 8 food technology lesson, for example, the challenging behaviour of these boys disrupted teaching and learning in the lesson. The school works hard to support pupils with challenging behaviour and strives to avoid the need for exclusions. Nevertheless, the behaviour of a very small number of pupils, and the disruption that these pupils cause to lessons, is such that it inevitably leads to exclusion from school. During the last school year it was necessary to make one permanent exclusion and six temporary exclusions. The total number of exclusions involved three boys and is below average for a school of this size. There are, however, very few instances of inappropriate behaviour and the developing maturity of the vast majority of pupils is evident in most lessons. The school takes a serious view of bullying, and the procedures for dealing with incidents of bullying are included in the staff handbook. Notices declaring that bullying is not tolerated are prominently displayed in classrooms and corridors. Parents are involved as early as possible if any instances are reported and bullying is discussed as a topic in personal, social and health education lessons. Pupils interviewed during the week of the inspection reported that, although occasional incidents of bullying had taken place, the school had dealt them with effectively. They were confident that any future incidents would also be dealt with effectively.

10. Pupils' personal development is very good. The school's good provision ensures that pupils develop into mature and sensible young people as they progress through the school. They are proud of their school and this is reflected in the smartness of their appearance when they come to school. They settle to their learning tasks quickly and show respect for their books and other equipment. The accent at the school is on praise for good work or effort and the rules of the school, posted in every classroom, include the aim 'through effort and encouragement to excellence'. Pupils' efforts are recognised through the awarding of merits, with merit certificates awarded at the Friday school assembly. Pupils make the most of the opportunities provided for them to accept responsibility and develop their independence. They willingly carry out duties such as register monitors, distributing and collecting resources in lessons, setting up the overhead projector and playing music at assemblies. They put away chairs and tables at the end of the day to make classrooms easier to clean without being asked. Through a very good 'Buddy' scheme, Year 8 pupils develop a sense of responsibility for pupils in Year 5. Year 8 pupils also provide support for pupils in Year 5 through the 'Bright Sparks' shared reading programme. Sporting events are organised through a house system, and pupils elect the four house captains and four vice-captains. There is no school council, but pupils are encouraged to express their views through personal social and health education lessons. The school recognises that there is a need to strengthen provision for pupils' personal development by providing a more formal channel for pupils to express their views. The personal social and health education programme makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. All year groups are allocated one hour each week for personal development and this is linked with year group assemblies that follow related themes.

11. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Attitudes, behaviour and personal development continue to be very good and a strength of the school.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

12. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good both in Years 5 and 6, and in Years 7 and 8. This finding endorses the view of 95 per cent of the parents who responded to the questionnaire. The quality of teaching is slightly better in Years 5 and 6, where 80 per cent of lessons were good or better, than in Years 7 and 8, where 70 per cent of lessons were good or better. Teaching is very good or excellent in 29 per cent of lessons in Years 5 and 6 and in 28 per cent of lessons in Years 7 and 8. There were only two unsatisfactory lessons, both in Year 8. One unsatisfactory lesson was in science and the other in art. Teaching is good in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, music and religious education and satisfactory in art and history. Teaching in modern foreign languages is good in Year 6 and very good in Years 7 and 8. Teaching in geography is very good at in Years 5 and 6 and satisfactory in Years 7 and 8. Teaching in physical education is good in Years 5 and 6 and satisfactory in Years 7 and 8. There are examples of excellence in teaching in modern foreign languages, science and geography. Teaching of this quality had a significant effect on pupils' progress and achievement in these lessons.

13. Pupils benefit from teachers' good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach and, in the case of French, the opportunity of being exposed to the language earlier than in some other schools. Teachers use their subject knowledge effectively to plan their lessons, provide clear explanations and give appropriate guidance to pupils. Good lesson planning in science, for example, helps to ensure that the good subject knowledge of specialist teachers is used to provide effective support for non-specialist teachers. This is having a positive effect on pupils' learning, particularly in Years 5 and 6. In English, teachers make good use of their subject knowledge to ask questions that challenge pupils to explain their ideas and think creatively. However, in some lessons, for example in personal, social and health education, teachers do not always take advantage of the opportunities that arise to ask supplementary questions that extend and deepen pupils' understanding. There are good examples of the teaching of basic skills in most subjects. The English department lays a good foundation for the development of literacy skills and the literacy hour is used effectively. There is a well co-ordinated and effective approach to the use of teaching and learning strategies that actively promote the raising of standards of literacy. In all classrooms, for example, there are displays of key words designed to help pupils to become confident in their own use of technical language. Pupils' reading skills are developed and consolidated through opportunities to read silently and aloud in many lessons. Pupils

develop their numeracy skills in many subjects. In mathematics teachers regularly include activities to improve recall and mental agility in their lessons. Numeracy is also developed through, for example, measuring and judging proportion in art and design and technology, and in interpreting data in geography and science. Teachers are generally alert to opportunities to develop pupils' numeracy skills.

14. Teachers have high expectations that are communicated clearly to pupils. This leads to good progress and achievement in most subjects. For example, in an excellent Year 5 geography lesson, pupils made rapid progress because of the enthusiasm and sense of enjoyment engendered by the challenging pace of the lesson. The high level of challenge is a common feature in the teaching of French. In an excellent Year 7 lesson, for example, pupils made rapid progress in response to dynamic teaching that ensured that the lesson moved at a good pace with numerous opportunities to develop oral competence and confidence through the intensive use of the language. In physical education, good progress is made because pupils respond very well to the high expectations of teachers in terms of discipline, behaviour and the need to work to the best of their abilities.

15. Teachers use a good range of strategies to enable pupils to learn and develop skills. Paired and small group work is used well in many subjects. In English, geography and history, for example, pupils are provided with numerous opportunities to engage in small group discussions. These activities help to develop pupils' self-confidence as they express ideas and challenge each other's thinking. In French, pupils benefit from regular opportunities to work with different partners in oral work. Small group work is used effectively to undertake investigations in science and to discuss ideas. Group work is also used effectively in physical education to develop pupils' skill levels.

16. Classroom management and organisation are good. Relationships between pupils and their teachers are very good and provide a good climate for learning in most classrooms. In most lessons, teachers create a very supportive atmosphere where all pupils, including those with special educational needs, feel secure enough to be able to offer suggestions, take risks and not be afraid of making mistakes. In mathematics, teachers use their considerable skills in class management to ensure that expectations of behaviour and classroom routines are well understood by pupils. This helps to create a purposeful learning atmosphere in lessons and makes a significant contribution to the progress pupils are making. Similarly in music, the skilful management of pupils and firm, but not oppressive, discipline are significant factors in the progress pupils are making. However, weaknesses in class management and lesson planning contributed to a lack of progress in the unsatisfactory lessons observed in science and art.

17. Teachers make good use of a variety of resources to stimulate pupils' interest and to make explanations clear. This underpins the development of new knowledge and skills and encourages progress. This was a particular feature of the excellent lessons observed in French and geography, for example, where the interest of pupils was stimulated by the pace and variation of the lessons and the effective use of resources. Visiting speakers are used well as part of the religious education and personal and social education programmes: for example, to increase pupils understanding of different faiths and cultural traditions. The careful selection and use of resources are features of geography lessons. The use of information and communications technology to support learning is inconsistent. Although good use is made of computers in science and design and technology, insufficient use is made computers for on-screen drafting and editing in English and for designing in art.

18. The marking of pupils' work is used well in some subjects to give pupils clear information on the standard of their work and on what they have to do in order to improve it. In French and music, for example, work is marked regularly and teachers' comments give pupils clear feedback. However, in several other subjects, there is a confusing range of marking procedures and inconsistency in the provision of comments designed to assist future learning. The marking of pupils' work in English, science and history, for example, is regular and mostly encouraging, but often lacks the constructive comments needed to enable pupils to improve. This was a weakness identified in the previous inspection report. Although 20 per cent of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire felt that pupils are given insufficient homework, inspection evidence indicates that homework is well used to consolidate and extend learning in most all subjects, apart from art and music.

19. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good. Pupils are mostly taught in normal classes, although some are occasionally withdrawn and taught in small groups by specialist teachers. Teachers have a good knowledge of their pupils and are aware of the general targets in pupils' individual education plans. Teachers take account of these targets in lesson planning and, as a result, pupils with special educational needs make good progress in lessons. For example, lesson activities are often short with achievable learning objectives so that concentration is maintained and pupils' learning is reinforced through experiencing success. In this way in one Year 8 English lesson, pupils were able to take part in a well-informed discussion on the nature of evidence in a dramatisation of life in Staffordshire in the 1930s. The teaching of pupils when withdrawn in small groups is good. Lessons have sharply focused objectives and are taught with skill and sensitivity. Good use is made of multi-sensory approaches to reinforce learning and sustain the interest of pupils throughout lessons. Effective use is made of teaching assistants in some, but not all, subjects to support pupils' learning. In a Year 8 English lesson, for example, a teaching assistant was used effectively, both to support a pupil who had been absent from school in the previous week, and to allow the class teacher to give additional individual support to a pupil with emotional and behavioural difficulties. However, in some science lessons, the contribution of the teaching assistants was mainly confined to handling apparatus.

20. The teaching of gifted and talented pupils is good, overall. Although these pupils are not at present identified within the school, lesson activities are well matched to the needs of pupils in most subjects. In addition in some subjects, such as science for example, higher attaining pupils are provided with additional investigations in Years 5 and 6. However, in geography and history there is insufficient challenge for higher attaining pupils in some lessons. The school is in the process of compiling a gifted and talented register so that the teaching and learning of these pupils can be more closely monitored.

21. The school has made good progress in improving the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection report. The quality of teaching was then judged to be good with some very good features. The strengths identified in the previous report have been largely sustained, while improvements have been made in most of the areas of weakness. At the time of the last inspection teaching was good or better in 66 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 20 per cent. It is now good or better in 75 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 30 per cent.

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

22. Overall, the school provides a good curriculum. The curriculum is broad and balanced, and the inclusion of French, which is not required to be taught in Years 5 and 6, enhances the curricular opportunities for pupils. The school complies with statutory requirements in all subjects other than art. In Years 5 and 6 art shares curriculum time with design and technology and even in Years 7 and 8 there is insufficient time on the timetable for the subject. This means that the national curriculum requirements for art cannot be covered. The school timetable is in the process of being revised so that increased curriculum time will be provided for art from the September 2001.

23. The school is committed to putting into practice its policy on equal opportunities. All pupils with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum. They receive nearly all their education in mainstream classes and receive effective support from a team of specialist support teachers and teaching assistants. The school offers opportunities for pupils to exercise responsibility and to take initiative. For instance, the many entries for the Parish Council poster exhibition on the subject of the lack of facilities for young children contributed to the decision to build a new play area in the village. Furthermore, the information and communication technology co-ordinator is training a group of Year 7 pupils to take over the updating of the school's website.

24. The weekly teaching time in all years is 24 hours with an additional hour for assemblies. This time is slightly above the recommended time for Years 5 and 6 and in line with the recommended time for Years 7 and 8. The curriculum is taught in five one hour lessons per day and while this enables good provision to be made for the daily literacy and numeracy hours, an hour is too long for some subjects such as French, and pupils sometimes find it hard to maintain concentration. Curriculum time for geography and history is limited in Years 5, 6 and 7. This leads to periods of time when one or other of these subjects is not taught, thereby disrupting the continuity of experience for pupils.

25. In Years 5 and 6, the curriculum is good. All National Curriculum subjects together with personal, social and health education are taught, and, in addition, French is introduced into the curriculum in Year 6, a year earlier than for most pupils. On entry to the school, pupils are placed in mixed-ability forms and most of the teaching takes place in these classes except for mathematics, which is taught in groups formed on the basis of prior attainment. Daily literacy and numeracy hours provide a good foundation for the development of pupils' basic skills.

26. In Years 7 and 8, pupils continue to benefit from a good curriculum covering all National Curriculum subjects. Grouping on the basis of prior attainment continues in mathematics and is introduced in English and in science in Year 8. Subject specialists carry out most of the teaching in these years. The teaching of basic skills builds on the good foundation in Years 5 and 6. Strategies to promote the development of pupils' literacy skills are well integrated into subjects across the curriculum. All classrooms have displays of key words, which are used to improve pupils' own confidence with the specific language of different subjects. Both English and mathematics are currently revising their schemes of work to bring them in line with the new frameworks by September 2001. This work has been enhanced by the school's involvement as a pilot school in the national 'Transforming Key Stage 3' pilot project.

27. A discrete information and communication technology course covers all aspects of the National Curriculum programme of study, although the development of computer aided design and modelling is at an early stage. All pupils in Years 7 and 8 have one period of information and communication technology per week. In Years 5 and 6 the co-ordinator works alongside class teachers to promote the use of information and communication technology across the curriculum.

28. Curriculum provision for personal, social and health education is good. Class teachers teach the subject in two 30-minute lessons following assembly on two days each week. The co-ordinator provides a course plan and schemes of work and this, together with teachers' commitment to the course, ensures a good experience for pupils in the classroom. A particularly effective feature of the course is the way in which Year 5 and 6 class teachers relate the programme to work done in other subjects. For instance, a Year 5 unit of work about the Victorians provides interesting opportunities to compare diet, education and illness and disease. Sex education is undertaken initially in Year 6 and then developed further in Year 7. Education about the misuse of drugs takes place both in Year 7 and then in Year 8 as part of the work on developing decision-making skills. The school is aware of the need to revise the course to take account of the latest requirements for citizenship, and is currently tackling this as part of a wider review.

29. The very good range and quality of extra-curricular activities provide clear evidence of staff commitment to widening pupils' experiences at school. Extra-curricular activities are popular with pupils, often linked with class work and sport and help to increase pupils' interest in school. Pupils visit the theatre, museums and other places of cultural and historical interest. There are also residential visits to outdoor education centres and destinations abroad. For example, fieldwork and residential visits take place at Rodbaston Agricultural College, and Coven and Shugborough outdoor centres. Lunchtime and after-school clubs include chess, drama, science and gardening, and the information and communications technology rooms are very popular with pupils. There are particular strengths in extra-curricular musical and sporting activities. Many pupils take part in the school choir, orchestra and recorder groups and there are regular school musical and drama productions. Large numbers of pupils also participate in the extra-curricular sports programme, which includes a variety of clubs and inter-house and inter-school competitions in netball, hockey, soccer, rugby, basketball, cross-country and athletics.

30. The school enjoys very strong links with its partner first schools, the other middle school and the high school to which pupils transfer. These links support continuity in pupils' learning in all subjects. Curriculum links in science are exemplary and make a significant contribution to continuity in teaching and learning in the subject. Year 8 pupils work with pupils from the first schools when they make their induction visits and then act as 'Buddies' when they enter Year 5. The Year 5 co-ordinator and the special educational needs co-ordinator visit the first schools in June and these visits help to ensure that there is a complete transfer of information and that individual pupils' learning and pastoral needs are given appropriate attention. Very good curriculum links with the high school help to ensure continuity in learning when pupils complete Key Stage 3 in Year 9 in the high school. All Year 8 pupils transferring to the high school spend a day at the school in July. They meet their tutors and are involved in lessons, which are followed up at Penkridge.

31. The curriculum is enhanced by the very good links the school has with the community. There are close links with the local church, Staffordshire Partnership, the community police constable and Stafford College, which ran a course in information and communications technology for parents and carers at the school. The school makes effective use of the special

educational needs support service, education welfare officer, school nurse, educational psychologist, disability specialists and peripatetic music teachers to support pupils' learning. The school also has a bank, which is supported by the Yorkshire Bank.

32. Overall, the school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. Assemblies make some contribution to the spiritual dimension. They are held twice each week, one for the whole school and one for each year group. Both assemblies are of 30 minutes duration. There is no culture of prayer but the use of a brief period of reflection assists pupils to consider the importance of the assembly theme in their lives. The themes are reinforced during subsequent tutor periods. They tend to make a greater contribution to the moral and social development of pupils. The requirements for a daily act of collective worship are not met. This was also the case at the time of the last inspection. There is little evidence of any planning in departments for spiritual development, and the personal and social education programme does not make any significant contribution in this area. In some subjects, such as science for example, pupils are encouraged to reflect on the wonders of the universe and respect for human life. Personal responses to poetry and literature in English encourage reflection, for example, 'Skellig' by David Almond explores angels and other matters beyond our understanding. In music, feelings, emotions and reflective opportunities make a good contribution. In information and communications technology, pupils are often overwhelmed by their own success in developing animation. In religious education, there are many opportunities that assist pupils to consider and respond to questions about the meaning and purpose of life. However, insufficient use is made of the many opportunities in other subjects to reinforce this important aspect of pupils' development.

33. Provision for moral development is very good and a strength of the school. Opportunities are provided in many subjects, particularly in personal and social education and in religious education. In personal and social education, topics such as caring about others, environmental issues, drug abuse, friendship, behaviour and bullying all provide a good basis for discussion and the development of moral standpoints. The school has clear expectations of students knowing right from wrong and students respond well when they are corrected. Some subjects contribute well in providing opportunities for moral development. In physical education, there is good evidence of teamwork reflected in behaviour and attention to fair play, and in design technology, pupils consider the impact on society of recycling. Environmental issues are discussed in science and teachers encourage a positive attitude and are good role models for pupils. In English, opportunities to discuss moral issues are exploited well, for example, 'Henry's Leg' by Ann Pilling, explores attitudes towards class differences. In religious education, pupils are able to respond to aspects of morality using their knowledge of religious and ethical issues. In music, respect for the performances of others and for equipment adds to the development of moral principles. School assembly themes such as trust, truth and listening all contribute towards the moral development of pupils.

34. Provision for social development is good. The school provides opportunities to take responsibility and develop social understanding. The personal and social education programme provides many opportunities in this area. Topics include lifestyles, personal development and understanding, sex education, and family life. Assemblies make a significant contribution to social development. Topics such as making choices, politics, taking time to think and taking up new challenges are good examples. The school has recently registered with the local education authority for the 'Eco' schools initiative, focusing on safer routes to school and recycling. Pupils raised, through their own initiative, over £700 for the Red Nose Day appeal. Several subjects contribute towards social development. In Science, for

example, there are good opportunities to discuss key social issues such as conservation and recycling. Strong links exist with the French exchange school. Pupils collaborate well in group work, discussions and practical work in physical education, modern foreign languages, religious education, mathematics, English and information and communications technology. In music, there are numerous groups and activities that necessitate good teamwork.

35. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. The music department makes a strong contribution through its extra-curricular activities and participation in major festivals at such venues as Lichfield Cathedral and Birmingham's Symphony Hall. The English department and year co-ordinators organise frequent visits to theatres in Stoke-on-Trent, Birmingham and Wolverhampton. The pupils study a good range of literature, both pre-1914 and more modern texts. The school has strong links with a French school and there are regular exchange visits; in addition the school has contributed to the European Year of Languages project with poetry, artwork, song and folklore. In art, the pupils have studied Victorian art, Impressionism and such artists as Gustav Klimt, Picasso, and Hockney; these have been used as a stimulus for the pupils' own practical work. Pupils' awareness and knowledge of other cultures is developed in many aspects of the curriculum. For example in religious education the study of Islam and Sikhism helps pupils to develop an understanding of the nature of ethnic diversity and the significance of cultural and religious traditions. In design technology there is the study of Indian Batik design, the war images on Chinese Kites, Islamic tile designs, and multi-cultural influences on the food we eat. In art, there is an exchange of paintings with a Japanese organisation and cross-curricular links with music, history and geography in the study of other cultures. Examples of music from other cultures are played in assembly.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

36. The school takes its responsibilities for child protection and pupils' welfare very seriously, and arrangements for health and safety, child protection and general welfare are very good. The school provides a very supportive environment, where teachers, teaching assistants and all staff, know pupils extremely well. The headteacher is the designated person for child protection and all members of staff are aware of the arrangements for this. Links with the relevant statutory agencies, such as social services, the educational psychologist and the school nurse are very good. Health and safety monitoring and risk assessments are carried out regularly by the health and safety committee. Pupils are taught about safety in the use of equipment or materials, particularly in design and technology, science or art. Road safety, drugs education, sex education and health education are all taught appropriately in science or in personal social and health education. Sufficient staff hold first aid certificates and there is a well-stocked medical room provides suitable accommodation for pupils who feel unwell.

37. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good and the above average attendance rate has been maintained over the past four years. The SIMS computer system. is used to monitor pupils' attendance and the school is provided with effective assistance by the education welfare officer. Certificates are presented at school assemblies to pupils with 100 per cent attendance and an overall attendance certificate for the four years at Penkridge is presented when pupils transfer to the high school. The importance of regular attendance is also emphasised at parents' evenings and through newsletters.

38. Continuity in care is a feature of the school pastoral system, which is built on the role of the class teacher. Pupils are in contact with their class teachers every morning for registration

and for personal, social and health education or assemblies. This arrangement enables class teachers to develop a very good knowledge of individual pupils and their particular social and educational needs. Pastoral links with the first schools and the high school are very good, and pupils are provided with very good support at the time of transfer to the high school.

39. Behaviour in the school is very good and the school has a number of methods for recognising and promoting good behaviour, such as the award of merits, commendations and certificates. Pupils are proud to receive these. There are also appropriate arrangements for the application of sanctions when these are needed. Pupils contributed to the drafting of the school rules, which are prominently displayed in corridors and classrooms, and are fully aware of what is expected of them. Sanctions are applied as necessary and pupils generally feel that rewards and sanctions are applied consistently and fairly. The school is committed to maintaining pupils in mainstream education. However, the school is willing to exclude pupils whose behaviour threatens the well-being or impedes the learning of others. There are very few instances of such behaviour and so very few exclusions. When exclusions are made they are carried out according to local education authority guidelines, with parents fully consulted and given the right of appeal.

40. The school anti-bullying policy clearly states a commitment to protect individuals from victimisation and achieves a good deal of success in achieving this goal. The school makes a commitment to take action when any pupil threatens, intimidates or attacks another pupil verbally or physically. Bullying is covered as a topic in the personal, social and health education programme and the school maintains records of any reported incidents.

41. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are generally satisfactory, although there are weaknesses in some subjects. Assessment procedures are developing well at a whole school level. Information on pupils' attainment and progress is collected and analysed and this information is provided to subject co-ordinators, who are expected to use it in planning and target setting. However, the school assessment policy does not provide enough detailed guidance to ensure a consistent and systematic approach to assessment and its use in all subjects. As a result, assessment information is mainly used to allocate pupils to teaching groups. Nevertheless, there are examples of good practice in the effective use of assessment information in mathematics, science, music and information and communications technology, where a range of assessment information is collected and analysed to identify weaknesses, and to guide subsequent lesson and curriculum planning. These examples of good practice could be shared with English, art, design and technology, and religious education where these aspects of assessment practice are unsatisfactory. Although the overall quality of marking is satisfactory, there is a lack of consistency both

within and between subjects. The best marking provides pupils with clear information on the standard of their work and on what they have to do in order to improve. However, much marking consists of a series of ticks and brief comments that generally relate to effort and the presentation of pupils' work, rather than to what they need to do in order to improve it.

42. The school has systematic procedures for the identification and assessment of pupils with special educational needs. Individual education plans are carefully prepared and although the targets tend to be general rather than subject specific, teachers and teaching assistants have a good knowledge of their pupils' and their individual needs. Detailed records of pupils' progress are maintained by the special educational needs co-ordinator. However, because the information has to be retrieved from several cross-referenced files, the information on pupils' progress is not available in a form that allows teachers and others with monitoring responsibilities to obtain an immediate overview of the progress that pupils with special educational needs are making. All annual reviews of statements of special educational needs are well documented. The school is in the process of compiling a register of gifted and talented pupils and improving procedures for identifying and monitoring the progress of these pupils are included in the school development plan.

43. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection. The strengths in the care provided for pupils identified in the previous report have been maintained. The school is now moving rapidly forward in developing mechanisms for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic progress, and assessment information is beginning to be used more effectively at a school level.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

44. The majority of parents have very positive views of the school. These views were obtained from the questionnaires that were completed and returned by approximately one third of all parents and from the views expressed by parents at the pre-inspection meeting. As at the time of the previous inspection, parents are pleased with the quality of education provided by the school and there is a good partnership between the school and parents. The school enjoys a good reputation with its parents. Parents say that, because teaching is good, their children are making good progress. They believe their children's personal development is good because the school provides good support and guidance and provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. Parents say that the school is well led and managed and welcomes contact by parents. A minority of parents express concerns about the amount of homework, but inspectors found that homework is set regularly in most subjects and that the amount of homework is not excessive. Although some parents say that the school does not work closely enough with parents, inspectors found that the school makes considerable efforts to work with parents.

45. Parents also felt that they are not always well informed about how their children are getting on, a view which the inspection team supports in part. The literature published for parents prior to joining the school and thereafter provides good quality information about the life of the school and its aims and values. Newsletters are sent out twice a term and provide parents with information about pupils' achievements and forthcoming events. Parents are provided with the opportunity to talk to teachers at the termly parents' evenings and there is an annual open day. These are well attended by parents. There is also an open invitation for parents to contact the school at any time they have any particular concerns. However, the annual reports are too complex and do not give clear targets for improvement. Comments provided in the reports are more often concerned with attitude and effort than with subject

specific information on what pupils know, understand and can do, and what they must do, in order to improve. Targets are included but are often of a general nature or relate to effort, and are rarely specific to the subject. The school is aware of this weakness in the reports and intends to improve them.

46. The school's links with parents are good. Parents come into school to help with organising the library and many parents help on school visits and sometimes with the supervision of pupils when they go swimming. Parents also help with the residential visits to Shugborough Farm and Chasewater. Every pupil has an organiser that serves as a useful means of communication between school and home. The school's home/school agreement has been in existence for five years, and the majority of parents have signed it. Parents give good support to the many school musical concerts and drama productions. They have also given good support to curriculum evenings on mathematics, literacy and information and communications technology, the latter being organised to coincide with the annual Governors Report to Parents. Parents are also welcome to attend the Friday assemblies at which pupils' achievements are celebrated. The prospectus and annual governors report to parents are informative and of good quality.

47. Parents make a good contribution to their children's learning. Some parents sign reading contracts which commit them to listening to their children read for five nights a week for an eight week period. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are fully involved in the reviews of their children's individual education plans and are appreciative of the support the school provides.

48. The school has a very active parent-teacher association, which is well supported by parents and teachers. The association runs a number of successful social and fundraising events, including an annual 'It's a Knockout' event, which is well attended by pupils, parents and members of the local community. The money donated to the school by the association has been used, for example, to provide a school minibus, the costs of a Year 5 'Victorian Day' and to subsidise school trips and visits.

49. The school has maintained the good relationships with parents noted in the previous inspection report. The good links with parents and the support that parents provide makes a positive contribution to pupils' achievement. Weaknesses in the annual reports to parents were identified as an issue for action in the last inspection report and still remain to be tackled.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

50. The overall leadership and management of the school are good and recognised as such by the overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire. The headteacher provides very good leadership and a clear educational direction for the school. The school mission statement provides a clear guide for policy, practices and procedures. The school has a strongly positive ethos and provides a well-ordered learning

environment in which there is an increasing commitment to continued improvement and the further raising of standards. This is evident in standards of attainment, attitudes, behaviour and relationships, all of which are very good. The school is very well placed to continue its improvement.

51. The senior management team is effective and has been strengthened by the appointment of a new deputy head in the last school year. The headteacher has a clear understanding of the importance of self-evaluation to school improvement and is providing good leadership in the development of self-evaluation strategies within subjects. This is seen, for example, in the monitoring of teaching and learning through formal lesson observations by the headteacher, which the school now plans to be extended to include other members of the senior management team and subject co-ordinators.

52. The head and deputy head have a good understanding of the need to use a wide range of sources of information in the process of monitoring and evaluating the work of the school. The school is, for example, establishing a comprehensive assessment database and increasing use is being made of this information by the senior management team. Detailed analyses of pupils' performance are provided to subject co-ordinators. However, the use of this information by subject co-ordinators to set targets and guide subject development planning is at an early stage of development. Not enough use is being made of assessment information by subject co-ordinators to identify any areas of underachievement by individual pupils and to set targets for improvement. Subject co-ordinators are not, for example, generally aware of the usefulness of national value-added tables to measure progress through the key stages. Senior management recognises the need to develop this aspect of the role of subject co-ordinators.

53. The overall quality of management provided by subject co-ordinators is satisfactory. Leadership in mathematics, science, information and communications technology and music is very good and has positive effects on pupils' achievement. Inspirational leadership in French, complemented by the high level and commitment of teachers, is having a significant effect on teaching and learning in the subject. However, most subject co-ordinators are only now becoming aware of the importance of their roles in monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. Although it is planned that lesson observations by subject co-ordinators are formalised as part of performance management, there has been an over-reliance on informal methods of monitoring teaching and learning. Because of this there has been inconsistency in the implementation of school policy, for example the school assessment policy, and insufficient sharing of good practice. The management and co-ordination of special educational needs is good. The requirements of the Code of Practice are clearly understood and the governing body is kept well informed on special educational needs matters. However, although the special educational needs co-ordinator has line management responsibility for the support teachers and teaching assistants, she does not have the opportunity to monitor their work when they are supporting pupils with special educational needs in lessons. There is also no opportunity for the special educational needs co-ordinator to meet with support teachers and teaching assistants on a regular basis to monitor the progress of the pupils they are supporting and to plan their future work.

54. The governing body is very effective and highly supportive. With the exception of the curriculum provision for art and a daily act of corporate worship, it meets its statutory responsibilities. Governors take a keen interest in the work of the school and provide the school with a substantial amount of specialist help and advice. Excellent relationships exist between the governing body and the senior management team. Governors receive regular detailed reports from the head and other members of staff, and have a good level of

awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The quality of financial management and planning is good. Governors are actively involved with the head in financial planning and monitoring, and are given good support by the school secretary. The school has effective procedures to ensure that the principles of best value for money are applied in the use of its resources, and all additional funding received by the school is used for the intended purposes. Action has been taken to attend to the very few minor issues raised in the most recent auditor's report.

55. The expertise and experience of the teaching staff are well matched to the demands of the curriculum. There is a very good spirit of teamwork amongst all staff and this is a strength of the school. Almost half of the teaching staff is employed on a part time basis, and although this can present timetabling difficulties, these are outweighed by the expertise these teachers provide. There are good induction arrangements for staff new to the school. An appropriate professional development programme is in place and this is being linked with performance management. Technical and support staff are appropriately qualified and play a very valuable role in, for example, design and technology, science, information and communication technology and special educational needs. The secretarial, clerical, catering and buildings' maintenance staff go out of their way to extend a warm welcome to visitors to the school. They make a significant contribution to the general ethos of the school.

56. The school has a satisfactory range of resources to meet the needs of the curriculum. As a result of careful planning and good management of the school's finances, the overall quantity and quality of learning resources has improved since the last inspection. The level of spending on books and equipment is now in line with allocations per pupil of similar schools nationally. Specialist facilities required in subjects such as science, art, design and technology and physical education have been added or upgraded, and the opportunities for pupils to work with computers have greatly increased.

57. In order to improve resources for information and communications technology the already cramped accommodation for the school library has been modified. While this has led to the development of a well-used independent learning centre with a suite of networked computers the available space for books has been reduced. The quantity and quality of books within the central library area is insufficient to meet the needs of the pupils. The school has made a conscious decision to remove out of date book resources from the library. Good use is made of the County Library loans service to supplement the school's stock of both fiction and non-fiction. The school has identified the need to develop central learning resources further and an additional classroom with computer facilities is due to open in September 2001.

58. Within subject areas, the resources are good in English and modern languages and very good in music. All other subjects have a satisfactory level of books, apparatus and equipment. In geography and history good use is made of the local environment for fieldwork and investigations. The school has made effective use of additional funds to promote initiatives such as the national literacy and numeracy strategies. Spending on resources is targeted to priorities both in the school development plan and in subject plans. The learning resources available to the school are efficiently managed and, with the good example set by staff, pupils use books and equipment responsibly and effectively.

59. The overall quality of the school's accommodation is satisfactory, although there are weaknesses. The school stands in extensive, attractive grounds that are well used for physical education, sports and as social areas at breaks and lunchtimes. The building is in good condition, although it is small for the number of pupils it contains. The site manager and

team maintain the premises to a high standard of cleanliness and repair. There is a noticeable absence of litter and the good quality of decoration and excellent displays of pupils' work in classrooms and corridors reflects the care of staff and pupils for their environment. The administration suite is adequate although a lack of office space has become apparent, as management responsibilities have increased. The school was originally built to an open plan design, which has since been modified with partitions. This has been to the benefit of some subjects but detrimental to others. Music, resistant materials and physical education have good accommodation and most general classrooms are adequate for the numbers they contain. Other subjects including mathematics, food and textiles, French, geography and history suffer either from cramped rooms or interference when staff and pupils pass through. The close-knit design of the building and subsequent alterations have caused some inadequacies in heating, ventilation and access to natural light. This is particularly apparent in art, where accommodation is unsatisfactory, and in information and communications technology, which shares its main accommodation with the library. There is a general lack of storage space, so that some books and equipment are kept in corridors and open areas. Current building work will improve facilities in science and add to the school's teaching accommodation.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

60. In order to raise standards further the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- Ensure that all teachers with co-ordinating responsibilities clearly understand and implement their management responsibilities for:
(*Paragraphs: 41, 43, 52-53, 68, 93, 108, 124, 14, 149*)
 - * identifying and sharing good practice.
 - * monitoring and supporting development work in their areas of responsibility.
 - * ensuring that all agreed school policies and plans are implemented consistently by all teachers.

- Improve assessment policy and practice by.
(*Paragraphs: 41-42, 52-53, 68-69, 101, 105, 108, 116, 120, 141, 147*)
 - * providing subject co-ordinators with clear guidance on assessment practice and ensuring that all subject assessment policies are in line with the school policy and implemented consistently.
 - * ensuring that there are clear expectations about how subject co-ordinators should use assessment information with their subject teams.
 - * ensuring that assessment information is used by teachers to set attainment targets at the beginning of each year and that these are shared with and clearly understood by pupils.
 - * establishing procedures and timetables for monitoring pupils' progress and attainment in all subjects, and for making judgements about whether pupils are doing well enough.
 - * ensuring that curriculum planning takes account of assessment information, so that learning activities are matched to the attainment levels of pupils.

- Ensure that the marking of pupils' work in all subjects provides pupils with clear guidance on the level of their work in terms of national standards and how to improve their work.
(*Paragraphs: 18, 43, 68, 89, 101, 105, 108, 112, 116, 120, 147*)

- Ensure that reports to parents provide clear information in all subjects on the standards their children have attained, the progress they are making, and what they must do in order to make further progress.
(*Paragraphs: 45, 49, 89, 101, 123*)

- Continue to press the case for improvement to the accommodation and, in particular, the accommodation for art.
(*Paragraphs: 59, 95, 102, 113, 116, 132*)

- In addition, paragraphs:
 - * *3,16-17, 22, 54, 97-99, 101, 103, 118* (teaching and learning in art);
 - * *32* (provision for spiritual development);
 - * *57* (school library);
 - * *3, 20, 42, 98, 99, 101, 112, 116* (provision for the gifted and talented);
 - * *54* (daily act of collective worship); and
 - * *91, 99, 101, 118, 121* (computer resources).

include weaknesses that have not formed the basis of 'Key Issues' identified above. The school should consider including these in the governor's post-inspection action plan.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	98
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	52

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	23	46	23	2	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y5 – Y8	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	445	N/A
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	47	N/A

Special educational needs	Y5 – Y8	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	15	N/A
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	77	N/A

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	19
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	25

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.0
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	0.4

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	53	47	100

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 4 and above	Boys	50	44	52
	Girls	39	39	44
	Total	89	83	96
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 4 or above	School	89 (73)	83 (64)	96 (92)
	National	75 (70)	72 (69)	85 (78)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 4 and above	Boys	33	40	40
	Girls	31	32	34
	Total	64	72	74
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 4 or above	School	64 (58)	72 (66)	74 (67)
	National	70 (68)	72 (69)	79 (75)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	445
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	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	6	1
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: Y5–Y8

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	21.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	20.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y5–Y8

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	221

Deployment of teachers: Y5–Y8

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	82.1
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Average teaching group size: Y5–Y8

Key Stage 2	23.9
Key Stage 3	23.0

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	989,603.00
Total expenditure	970,195.00
Expenditure per pupil	2,166.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	61,350.00
Balance carried forward to next year	80,758.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	445
Number of questionnaires returned	145

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	50	39	8	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	51	45	1	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	54	6	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	32	48	18	2	0
The teaching is good.	47	48	2	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	34	53	11	2	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	52	42	3	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	32	1	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	30	52	13	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	46	46	2	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	47	47	3	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	43	46	5	0	6

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

ENGLISH

61. Pupils' attainment in English at the end of Year 6 and Year 8 is above that expected for their ages and has improved since the previous inspection. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 6, performance was above the national average and above that found in similar schools. These results showed a big improvement on recent years to be broadly comparable with the standards achieved in mathematics, although below the standards achieved in science. A notable feature is the good attainment by boys who not only performed better than boys nationally in the tests but also better than the girls. This was mainly due to their very good reading which are the results of the department making a conscious effort to find texts, which interest boys. The effective use in one lesson of a football report to study the difference between fact and opinion is a good example of this strategy. Although both boys' and girls' writing skills are above average, they are not as good as their reading skills. The school is responding to this by focusing now on the improvement of writing skills across the curriculum. By the end of Year 8, attainment in English continues to be above average and there is no significant difference between boys and girls.

62. The work seen during the inspection confirms these good levels of attainment. All pupils, including lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs, have very good speaking and listening skills. They are articulate and speak with confidence in groups of all sizes, whether they are describing events or plots of novels, or exploring ideas and giving their opinions. They speak at good length partly because their teachers are skilled at asking open-ended questions that encourage pupils to think for themselves. Even the youngest pupils in school listen to each other and to the teacher with attention and respect and respond thoughtfully with their own ideas.

63. Standards of reading are good and much improved since the last inspection. Pupils read accurately both for information and for pleasure. Lower-attaining pupils are able to talk about the plot and characters in their reading books. Average and higher attaining pupils are able to use inference and deduction and identify different layers of meaning. They read and respond well to poetry. One Year 6 class studying the poetry of William Blake suggested alternative interpretations and were able to describe and give reasons for their preferences. The department works hard to ensure that pupils read widely and many parents are also involved, agreeing to listen to their children read regularly. As they move through the school, pupils are introduced to a good range of more demanding literature. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 study Shakespeare, Chaucer and a range of poets who were writing before 1914. Work seen during the inspection indicates that understanding of plot and character, structure and language is above average and that all pupils achieve well.

64. Although pupils' writing skills are not as well developed as reading and speaking, they are above average and pupils write fluently and with confidence. By the end of Year 6 all but the lowest-attaining pupils write in correctly punctuated sentences, using paragraphs to structure their work. During Years 7 and 8, these skills develop further and by the end of Year 8 almost all pupils have a good understanding of how to write for different purposes and audiences. The highest-attaining pupils write some quite sophisticated stories showing an ability to use structural and linguistic features to engage and sustain a reader's interest.

65. These good standards of literacy have their foundation in the good use made of the literacy hour. This is supported by effective strategies in many other subjects. For instance, word walls in most classrooms encourage the use of subject terminology, and the use of frameworks and models helps pupils to structure and improve their writing.

66. Pupils display very positive attitudes towards their English lessons. Their interest, involvement, good behaviour and levels of concentration promote good achievement. Pupils are enthusiastic, they want to participate in activities and are willing to explore ideas, to learn from listening to others and to think for themselves.

67. The quality of teaching and learning in English lessons is good. In the lessons observed during the inspection, teaching was very good in 31 per cent, good in 46 per cent and satisfactory in the remainder. When planning lessons, teachers take account of the needs of different pupils and ensure a good range of activities which interest and involve pupils and enable the clear objectives for learning to be met. The planning of lessons takes account of the needs of different pupils and ensures a good range of activities to meet the clear objectives for learning and to interest and involve pupils. The very good relationships between teacher and children create a secure and open environment in which pupils feel confident to take risks, offer alternative ideas and test hypotheses. Teachers' use of open-ended questions draws out pupils' own ideas, helping them to think creatively and become more independent in their learning. Group work is used to good effect. Discussions are structured so that pupils talk with a purpose, remain focused and explore and deepen their understanding. Lessons are conducted at a good pace, ensuring that pupils work productively, but also include opportunities for pupils to reflect on what they are learning. For instance, in a lesson on Mary Shelley's poem, 'The Deserted House', the teacher used an overhead projector to unveil the poem line by line to the class, asking them to visualise silently what the poem suggested to them. This successfully encouraged pupils to use their imagination and to develop their critical thinking about how the poet achieved her effects.

68. English teachers use homework well to consolidate and extend class work. In one lesson, pupils had already prepared a list of advantages and disadvantages to a new bypass. This meant that all pupils were able to participate and also required all pupils to think for themselves. The use made of information and communication technology has improved since the last inspection and all classrooms display pupils' work enhanced by its use. However, there is room for improvement in the use of computers to draft and edit on screen. A relative weakness of teaching is the use of assessment. Marking is inconsistent and does not always show pupils how to improve their work. Opportunities to help pupils learn from each other's successes and failures by reading out work in progress are rarely taken.

69. This weakness is reflected also in the department's overall procedures for assessing and tracking attainment and achievement. Although teachers know their pupils well, there is at present no systematic approach to monitoring pupils' progress. This in turn leads to pupils who are not clear about their standards of attainment. However, the department is aware of this and is in the process of implementing new procedures that will ensure that there is a clear picture of pupils' attainment and progress, and systems to enable them to use that information in the planning of the curriculum. The school's involvement in the national pilot project 'Transforming Learning in the Foundation Subjects' has supported the department in this work and in the development of new schemes of work to meet the new

framework for teaching English in Years 7 and 8. The need to monitor teaching and learning has been identified as a development priority. Training in the skills required is due to start in the autumn term. This is an experienced and competent department, which is well placed to move forward and make further improvements in standards through a more consistent and rigorous approach to its procedures.

MATHEMATICS

70. Pupils are achieving standards in mathematics that are well above national averages, and these standards have improved since the last inspection, particularly in the last two years. Good progress has been made on resolving the few issues raised in the last inspection report. The strong leadership and management of the mathematics co-ordinator has been a key factor in this overall improvement.

71. The standards reached by pupils at the end of Year 6, and also at the end of year 8, are well above national expectations for the relevant age groups. Results in the Year 6 National Curriculum tests have improved and the 2000 results are well above national averages. They are also well above averages for similar schools. The school's 2000 results are particularly good for the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5. Teachers' assessments were lower than the test results. However the school feels this is due to teachers being cautious when assessing pupils on the borderline between two levels. Mathematics assessment records are clear and detailed, and pupils' work seen during the inspection was carefully and accurately assessed.

72. By the end of Year 6 higher attaining pupils can calculate the area of a triangle and can use the equivalence between fractions, decimals and percentages to solve problems. They are able to convert one metric unit to another. Average-attaining pupils can add and subtract numbers with two or three places of decimals, work out multiples, factors or squares of numbers and calculate fractions of amounts. They are able to calculate the mean, median and mode of a set of data. Lower-attaining pupils are able to identify different three-dimensional shapes from a description of their properties and most can recall their multiplication tables with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

73. By the end of Year 8, higher attaining pupils can use Pythagoras' theorem to calculate unknown sides or angles in right-angled triangles and write numbers in standard form. They are able to use percentages to work out given problems and simplify, then solve linear algebraic equations. Average-attaining pupils can divide numbers in a given ratio, draw and interpret diagrams showing different kinds of correlation and plot straight-line graphs. Lower-attaining pupils are able to interpret bar charts or straight-line graphs and obtain information from these graphs to answer questions; they can calculate areas of rectangles and recognise simple equivalent fractions.

74. Throughout the school standards are consistently high in all aspects of mathematics. Pupils are also equally good at explaining and recording their methods of solution. A contributory factor to this is the emphasis in teaching on making sure pupils understand what they are doing and asking them to explain their answers.

75. Good use is made of assessment and the amount of individual monitoring and support given to pupils helps them all to achieve well and make good progress. There are no significant differences in standards reached or progress made by boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to others in their classes. The grouping of pupils throughout the school according to prior attainment, with smaller numbers in the groups for lower-attaining pupils, helps teachers to provide suitable tasks and activities for different groups. Pupils' performance in tests, for example, is carefully analysed to identify the topics in which they need more practice.

76. Pupils in the current Year 8 achieved test results at the end of Year 6 that were in line with national averages. The big improvement in standards for this year group, to well above expectations now, has been helped by the creation of an additional teaching group for mathematics. This small teaching group has been specially targeted to give pupils additional support in order to 'catch up'. The arrangement has proved to be effective.

77. Pupils' attitudes are very good and they clearly enjoy their mathematics lessons. Their very good behaviour, hard work, thoughtfulness and concentration help them to make progress. They come to lessons well prepared, settle down quickly and move sensibly around the sometimes cramped classrooms. Whether they work on their own, in small groups or as a whole class, they are co-operative and pleasant. They rarely waste time, and if they do they respond quickly to the teacher's quiet reminders. All these factors contribute to a positive classroom atmosphere in which they can learn and practice their skills.

78. The quality of teaching is consistently good. There was no unsatisfactory teaching in the nine lessons seen. In one lesson the teaching was satisfactory, in two the teaching observed was very good and it was good in the rest.

79. Effective planning provides a clear framework for lessons and imaginative strategies are often used to enthuse pupils with a love of mathematics. This is shown by their eagerness to take part in discussions, by their concentration and hard work and by a pride in producing good written work. Teachers are experienced and know their subject well. They expect pupils to work at a suitably high level for their previous understanding. In one Year 6 class, for example, pupils enjoyed trying to work out a complex problem, which involved them in choosing from a wide range of techniques and resources, such as diagrams, counters and visualisation, in order to model the task and reduce it to manageable proportions for solution. Teachers help pupils to learn by ensuring that explanations are provided in suitably short steps with pertinent everyday examples. The use of colourful models of shapes also helps to develop pupils' understanding of mathematics. Teachers use and emphasise correct mathematical terminology from the beginning of Year 5. They expect pupils to use this vocabulary correctly. Skills in mental arithmetic are taught using a number of methods designed to improve accuracy and increase speed of response, for example computer generated games to test pupils' recall of multiplication tables. However, even when teaching is good, the plenary session at the end of a lesson, when topics covered in the hour are reviewed and learning consolidated, is often not as good as the introductory part of the lesson. The pace of lessons is usually brisk, but occasionally it slows, due to too much time spent on one particular activity when pupils are ready to move on.

80. In all lessons teachers have established clearly understood routines, which lead to an orderly and pleasant working environment. This very good class management is an important factor in helping pupils to make good progress, as the clear focus is on learning mathematics. Homework is used effectively to help pupils make progress by reinforcing topics covered in class.

81. Teachers in all years have taken part in numeracy training, including the Key Stage 3 pilot project training for Years 7 and 8. The impact of this is helping to raise standards. Departmental planning is good, building well on national frameworks and resources. The mathematics co-ordinator, who has been in post for about two years, provides very good leadership and management and is well supported by an effective team of teachers. Staff feel that her guidance and support has been invaluable in helping them to prepare their work and to teach well. This joint planning, and monitoring of work in the subject through the co-ordinator's team teaching, is helping to share good practice across classes and is another important factor in raising standards.

82. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and there is some good practice in the use of information and communications technology. Since the last inspection, changes in school computer systems meant that much of the software was out of date or could not be used. Because of this, the use of information and communications technology declined. However as a result of involvement in the Key Stage 3 pilot and better computer provision in the school, the use of information and communications technology has now improved. However, this is recognised by the department as an area in which further progress needs to be made. Curriculum planning was identified as the main area for improvement in the last inspection report and good progress has been made in this respect.

SCIENCE

83. End of Year 6 National Curriculum test results in 2000 were well above the national average. Results have followed the national trend of gradual improvement for several years. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls.

84. When pupils start at the school their attainment is above average. Standards of work inspected at the end of Year 6 show above average standards in knowledge and understanding and well above average skills in experimental science. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6 is good. Standards of work by the end of Year 8 are above expectations, although there is a wide range from below to well above, with a significant number of pupils producing work of a very high standard. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 8 is good overall and very good in experimental science.

85. In Years 5 and 6, pupils' work on paper absorbency, soil drainage and sound, demonstrate thorough understanding of fair testing together with developing skills in the recording of observations. Pupils are also becoming able to draw conclusions about what their observations mean. In Years 7 and 8, these skills extend into the ability to form

hypotheses. Year 8 work, in which pupils measured the amount of carbon dioxide given off by various reactions, demonstrated their ability to recall earlier work on burning and compare and contrast the rates of reaction. The work of higher-attaining pupils on displacement reactions is of a high standard.

86. Boys and girls achieve similarly. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. The withdrawal of small numbers of pupils from each Year 6 class to receive targeted support from the science co-ordinator, is very effective and these pupils make very good progress. The support provided for pupils with statements of special educational need is not always used to best effect, particularly during teacher led work. Pupils who may be particularly gifted, although not identified within the school, are provided with additional investigations in Years 5 and 6. Provision for gifted pupils in Year 8 is through placement in teaching groups based on prior attainment.

87. The behaviour of pupils is most often excellent and this is due to good classroom management by teachers, as well as pupils' own very good attitudes. Pupils enjoy their work and are keen to participate in experiments. Behaviour in one Year 8 class is more challenging than others and difficulties are sometimes accentuated by inappropriate teaching strategies. Most pupils produce extensive work that is well presented. Some lower-attaining pupils produce less work and this is partly due to insufficient structure being provided for them to which they might add their own contributions. Consequently, their work appears to lack organisation and poor presentation skills lead to inadequate diagrams, charts and graphs.

88. Teaching is good overall, with some that is very good and occasionally excellent. Teaching was unsatisfactory in one of the lessons observed. In addition to the sampling of lessons in all years, a considerable amount of pupils' written work was scrutinised and evidence from this was taken into account when considering teaching. Particular strengths are teachers' planning, expectations and methods. These include quite demanding question and answer sessions to set the scene and short but focused summaries to ensure the main points of lessons have been understood by most pupils. In the better lessons pupils acquire significant knowledge and understanding, consolidate or learn new practical skills and are clear about what they have learnt. In otherwise satisfactory lessons the science content is sometimes lost in time-consuming activities such as drawing and colouring in. In the one unsatisfactory lesson observed, inappropriate behaviour by pupils was linked to overlong inputs from the teacher. Once pupils became involved in the practical part of the lesson, behaviour improved. Although pupils could answer questions about their observations, the standard of their work was below expectations and below the standards being achieved in another class designated as being of lower attainment.

89. The marking of pupils' work is inconsistent. It ranges from extensive comments, which provide pupils with good guidance on how their work can be improved to superficial ticks and, in some instances, work being marked as very good when it obviously is not. Insufficient distinction is made between standards and effort and it is sometimes unclear what a pupil must do to improve. This is also the case with the school annual reports to parents on pupils' progress.

90. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is inconsistent. Pupils are required to write quite extensive reports about their work and explain observations or make deductions in class. Writing extends to stories, for example the glorious descriptions of food passing through the digestive system. Pupils' writing is also displayed on the school web site. Pupils make good use of technical words, although it is school policy not to correct every spelling mistake made by pupils and so some misspellings remain uncorrected in books. Pupils' numerical skills are

used when appropriate, and pupils are generally competent with decimals and percentages. However, the lack of a consistent approach to the development of pupils' numerical skills leads to inconsistencies and line graphs, for example, are drawn in a variety of ways, some of which are inappropriate. There is also inconsistency in the measurement of volume. The correct units in most situations are cubic centimetres and all teachers should adhere to these.

91. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and is enhanced by the high proportion of practical work undertaken. Work with computers has been developed well and could improve still further if additional resources were available. Teachers do well with the equipment they have and some work is well presented using computers, for example, the scale used to identify acidity and alkalinity in Year 7. To allow pupils to aspire to higher levels of attainment in information and communications technology within science, other, more versatile software is needed. Such sensors as are available are used effectively with good software to present graphs on fluctuations in light and sound levels but there are insufficient for independent work.

92. The monitoring of pupils academic performance in all years is good. Good use is also made of assessment information to modify the curriculum. The science co-ordinator is driving standards upwards through a careful consideration of what test and other assessment information indicates. The setting arrangement in Year 8 is an example of this.

93. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The co-ordinator and assistant co-ordinator are first and foremost raising standards in the school through their own teaching and through written and practical support to non-specialist teachers. The co-ordinator is also leading a number of initiatives that are raising the profile of science in the school. Involvement with the 'Transforming Key Stage 3' pilot project is particularly significant as only two middle schools are involved in the country. The co-ordinator does not have a significant formal role in monitoring teaching, and inconsistencies in, for example, some of the teaching of science, the use of teaching assistants and the marking of pupils' work stem from this.

94. An exemplary aspect of the co-ordinators' work is liaison with the first schools and with the high school. Frequent meetings and close collaboration between teachers helps to ensure that continuity and progression in pupils' science education is very good.

95. There are sufficient teachers to teach the science curriculum and the recent appointment of a technician has helped to maintain the very good standard of practical work. This is an improvement from the time of the last inspection. Accommodation is currently unsatisfactory due to conditions arising from the building of additional classrooms. The lighting and ventilation in one of the laboratories is poor, teaching space is cramped and a food technology room has to be used for experiments. Nevertheless, due to the efforts of teachers the restricted accommodation had no adverse effect on teaching and learning. However, there will still be a number of deficiencies in the accommodation for science when the building work is completed. The room used as a second laboratory is too small, as are the general classroom spaces. These spaces are also inappropriate for practical work of the level undertaken in the school.

96. Since the last inspection, standards have not only been maintained at a well above average level in comparison with national standards but have continued to rise in line with the national trend. Management of the subject continues to be very good and there is a strong commitment to further improvement.

ART AND DESIGN

97. Standards of attainment in art have improved since the last inspection but they remain below expectations. Standards of attainment are below expectations at the end of Year 6, with little difference between the attainment of girls and boys. The pupils' limited grasp of the basic skills of drawing from observation, basic colour mixing and personal research reduces the quality of the work they are producing. There is good evidence of progress in the way the pupils look at and appreciate shape and composition, but a well considered set of work based on drawings of coke bottles and food cans, repeated in the manner of Andy Warhol, was less effective due to the pupils' difficulty in capturing ellipses. Sketchbooks are under-used and the investigative quality of some classwork is greater than that in sketchbooks. These younger pupils lack knowledge of critical studies and few are able to name famous artists or recognise their work. Standards of attainment remain below expectations by the end of Year 8. The attainment of girls is now generally better than that of the boys. Paintings based on bicycle parts illustrate the increasing ability of the pupils to create original compositions based on drawing, while work inspired by and derived from photographs of water, continues this theme of innovative compositions. This work is approaching, and in a small minority of cases, exceeding expectations. Work produced in response to music engaged the pupils and has opened up new, spontaneous and challenging ways of original working. Still life drawings with evidence of pupils capturing form, space and some texture, clearly illustrates that pupils have creative skills and are increasing their knowledge and understanding of the subject. Most drawing is in pencil, with few examples of pupils experimenting with other materials, or larger scale drawings. The use of multicultural art, including the work of aborigines, for inspiration, and the appearance of three-dimensional work are improvements since the last inspection. The quality of all this work is reduced due to a general lack of personal research, first-hand investigation and experimentation in sketchbooks.

98. The achievement of the pupils is satisfactory. Allowing for the varied, often limited experiences they have had when they arrive in the school, their achievement is satisfactory by the end of Year 6. They continue to achieve at a satisfactory level and by the end of Year 8 are producing paintings and drawings close to national expectations but their progress in other disciplines, such as three-dimensional work and textiles, and especially information and communications technology is unsatisfactory. Those pupils who have special educational needs make satisfactory progress in art, although there are no procedures for identifying their special artistic needs. Pupils who are gifted and talented make satisfactory progress. There are no arrangements for pupils to receive homework matched to their attainment levels and there insufficient challenge is offered to the highest-attaining pupils in some lessons.

99. Teaching and learning in art is satisfactory and represents an improvement since the last inspection when it was unsatisfactory. Teaching and learning in Years 5 and 6 is satisfactory but the best teaching and learning occurs in Years 7 and 8 where it mainly satisfactory and occasionally good. The teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject is a strength of the department, as is the way they plan their lessons. A feature of the subject is the way lessons are introduced with clearly defined learning objectives and guidance on how the pupils might proceed. In a good lesson in Year 7, for example, pupils were interested in the teacher's presentation when she explained weaving and the possibilities it offered. The way pupils worked together in pairs was positive and well managed. The balance between the technical and the creative content of the lesson led to rapid gains in knowledge and understanding. Further gains were limited by the pupils not having the sketchbooks containing their working designs available for reference. Occasionally lesson introductions

are too long and pupils spend too long listening when they are keen to begin. Underdeveloped basic skills of drawing and painting, the use of information and communications technology and knowledge of critical studies in Years 5 and 6 is a serious stumbling block to pupils' learning, magnified as the pupils move into Years 7 and 8. In the one unsatisfactory lesson seen, Year 7 pupils spent too long working from a worksheet dealing with the theory of simple weaving techniques and insufficient time weaving. In this lesson the pupils were inventing weak, unimaginative designs instead of referring to their sketchbooks, where in previous weeks, they had made drawings and prepared designs.

100. Pupils enjoy art and their good behaviour is based on very good relationships with their teachers. The pace at which pupils work is an improvement since the last report but in almost every lesson the girls are quicker to start and are more able to sustain good levels of concentration than boys. Occasionally the attitudes and behaviour of older boys interferes with the creative atmosphere of lessons and the learning of the class. Similarly casual conversation in lessons sometimes rises to levels that prevent pupils reflecting on their own and their classmates' work. The use of specialist words relating to art and design makes a good contribution to pupils' literacy skills, while working with perspective and the use of repeat patterns contributes to pupils' numeracy skills. Homework is not used regularly to reinforce class work and represents a missed opportunity to extend the pupils, particularly those who would benefit from tackling more demanding tasks.

101. The curriculum in art is narrow and weighted heavily towards two-dimensional painting and drawing. There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to work with clay, textiles or other three-dimensional processes. The lack of opportunity for pupils to generate, manipulate and record images through the use of computers remains a breach of statutory requirements from the last report. Insufficient time is allowed in Years 5 and 6 to allow delivery of the National Curriculum, although this problem has been recognised and will be resolved in the next school year. The department's arrangement for exchanging pupils' work through an organisation in Japan promotes multicultural understanding. There are no opportunities for pupils to visit galleries and museums or to work with artists and craftsmen in residence. Pupils' work is carefully assessed according to school guidelines but the information gained is not used to broaden or refine the curriculum in art or to guide teaching and learning strategies. Pupils are unsure how well they are doing relative to national standards, or how they might improve their work. Annual reports do not contain targets for improvement.

102. The staffing of the department has improved and the majority of pupils benefit from specialist teaching. The art accommodation is unsatisfactory and interferes with learning. The main teaching area is an awkwardly shaped, open-plan area, subject to constant through traffic. It lacks heating and ventilation and is uncomfortable in both summer and winter. The poor lighting prevents pupils having a clear view both of their work and the examples of work the teacher uses to illustrate lesson activities. The furniture is old and the tops of tables carry evidence of previous activity. The sink is too small to allow a class of children to clear away their art equipment efficiently. The pottery area is too small to allow the subject to be taught effectively and the lack of an extractor fan to remove the fumes during kiln firing causes concern. The art area is presently undergoing refurbishment, which should resolve some, but not all, of these problems. While the resources for learning are satisfactory there is a need for considerable investment if pupils are to experience the broader range of processes, including the use of computers, which are now commonplace in art education.

103. Although standards have improved since the last inspection, there is scope for standards to be raised further through the raising of expectations of pupils and teachers alike, particularly in terms of research and investigation, and the use of sketchbooks.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

104. Pupils enter the school with limited experience of design and technology. By the end of Year 6, standards of attainment are in line with national expectations. Pupils are achieving well in the programmes of study for Years 5 and 6 and they gradually establish good knowledge and understanding of the subject. They are able to work to a design brief and produce a folio of ideas, research and sketches as they engage in the full design process. Across the four elements of the subject; resistant materials, food technology, graphics and textiles, pupils respond well to the consistent emphasis on the making of quality products. In a Year 5 lesson, for example, pupils engaged in a range of tasks that made use of all of their senses and helped to establish a full understanding of the term texture. In this lesson, pupils' literacy skills were underpinned by the learning of several words to describe different textures. Similarly in a Year 6 lesson, pupils investigated the historical link to Chinese war kites, as they designed and made their own sled kite with amazing scaled up graphics. An additional target in the lesson was the development of teamwork. Pupils' excitement visibly mounted as different teams built and decorated their kites in preparation for a test flight. Teamwork developed well in the lesson and pupils employed their literacy and numeracy skills effectively to improve their final product.

105. While standards in Years 7 and 8 continue to be in line with expectations for this age range, there are several emerging strengths. In Year 8, for example, the accuracy and presentation of pupils lettering is particularly good, with some pupils producing homework of an exceptionally high standard. Good use was made of this work to challenge other pupils to achieve work of a similar standard. This is a significant improvement from the time of the last inspection when pupils' drawing skills were identified as a weakness. Pupils show steady improvement and progress is good. In textiles, work in batik enables pupils to experience designing from other cultures. At this stage, pupils' strengths are in building up new skills such as, for example, being able to analyse the content of products in food technology. The introduction of folios has improved pupils' design work and sketching and annotation show increasing maturity as pupils use their design sheets effectively. Pupils in all years understand the marking system, but the lack of use of National Curriculum levels in grading pupils' work makes it difficult for them to measure their progress against national standards. New challenging assessment profiles are in place in design technology, but no provision is made for pupils to assess their own work.

106. Teaching is good overall. Teaching is consistently good in Years 5 and 6 with some that is very good. In Years 7 and 8 there is an equal balance of satisfactory and good teaching. Teachers plan effectively together and complement each other's skills. Because of this the teaching and learning strategies ensure that pupils are active in lessons and that lessons move at a good pace. This helps to sustain pupils' interest and enthusiasm throughout lessons. Pupils with special educational needs are able to gain in confidence because teachers take account of their Individual Education Plans when planning lessons and use teaching assistants effectively to support them as they set about their tasks. This was seen for example in a Year 6 lesson where pupils were designing refreshments for the audience at a puppet show. Effective planning and good support helped to ensure that pupils with special educational needs had a full understanding of the target audience and were able to engage purposefully in the set task. Numeracy and literacy skills are taught well, and

effective use is made of glossaries to ensure that pupils develop an understanding of technical terms. Teachers are confident and innovative in their use of computers for personal record keeping and presentation, and use computers well as a tool for learning; for example the photographic evidence of pupils' excellent metalwork designs, shown by the mini-beasts screen on the school's web page.

107. Pupils' attitudes to design and technology are very good. Personal development is very good because pupils are taught how to make choices, work independently and improve their organisational skills as part of every module of work. Behaviour is generally good with the exception of a minority of Year 8 boys whose immaturity has a negative impact on the progress of their class in some lessons.

108. The subject co-ordinator has only recently been appointed and is part-time. Nevertheless, good progress has been made in the leadership and management of the subject since the co-ordinator took up post. New performance management targets have been set to take the department forward and a very good action plan has been devised to tackle the issues identified in the previous inspection report. This is necessary because some of the issues identified in that report, such as monitoring the progress of the highest-attaining pupils, providing constructive comments in marking, and the monitoring of teaching and learning are still weaknesses.

GEOGRAPHY

109. Standards of attainment in Year 5 are high and above the national expectation for the majority of pupils. No Year 6 classes were studying geography at the time of the inspection, but examination of samples of pupils' work shows that, at the end of Year 6, overall standards remain above the national expectations for pupils aged 11. In Years 7 and 8 standards are in line with national expectation. Standards seen in lessons, combined with the analysis of pupils' work and the assessments made by teachers, indicate that at the end of Year 8 standards overall are consistent with national expectations for pupils aged 13. There is no significant difference in the standards achieved by boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. In Years 5 and 6 in particular these pupils benefit from the well-planned lessons and where provided the effective use of teaching assistants.

110. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is consistently good and often very good. Pupils listen carefully to the teacher and relationships are very good. When the lesson requires pupils to work together they co-operate well. In Year 5 teachers skilfully harness the enthusiasm of pupils and this enhances their personal development. Occasionally in Years 7 and 8, pupils are not challenged sufficiently either by the pace of the lesson or the level of the work and when this occurs they become too passive and are not actively engaged in the lesson.

111. Teaching is good in Years 5 and 6 with some that is very good and, in one lesson excellent. Teaching in Years 7 and 8 is satisfactory. Teachers manage pupils well and give very good support for the school's aims, values and policies. The teaching in Year 5 by class teachers is very good and in one lesson was excellent. In the most effective lessons the planning reflects the wide range of pupils' individual learning needs and the lesson activities and resources are closely matched to the pupils' levels of attainment. Opportunities to develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are taken and good use is made of information and communications technology. In one Year 5 lesson, for example, pupils gained a very good understanding of the stages of development of a river. Pupils are able to apply their knowledge to produce creative writing. The completion of well-chosen case study of the

river Trent made excellent use of a computer program. Pupils understand what they have to do and are provided with opportunities to work independently, in groups and as a whole class. In a Year 8 lesson, pupils looked at the contrast between two regions within a country in the European Union and were provided with a good range of resources including video material and well-designed activities. They were able to identify the main physical and human characteristics of the Brittany region in France and could explain the reasons why different groups of people would wish to live in the region, while others would be attracted to move to large cities such as Paris.

112. Where the teaching is satisfactory rather than good there is insufficient emphasis on geographical terms and concepts and progress in lessons is slower because the time spent on less demanding tasks is too long. The rate of progress particularly for higher-attaining pupils is below their potential, and opportunities are missed to extend their learning through more demanding work that challenges them to produce more detailed oral and written answers. Pupils' work is regularly marked in line with school policy but comments on the work are sometimes too generalised to help pupils to understand what they need to do in order to improve their work. At the end of Year 8 assessment is used to relate pupils' performance to National Curriculum levels but this is largely for transfer information to the local high school.

113. The curriculum leadership provided by the subject co-ordinator is good and the support given to other teachers is effective. Schemes of work for all year groups have been developed and there is good liaison with partner schools. Pupils gain from the case studies and fieldwork based on the local area and there is good support within the lessons for whole school strategies to raise standards of literacy. Since the last inspection, the subject has made greater use of information and communications technology, as facilities in the school have been improved. One of the main teaching rooms for geography has the disadvantage of being a through way for access to adjacent classrooms. Overall, despite some limitations in the accommodation, the subject makes good use of its facilities and resources and there is an abundance of good quality displays of pupils' work. Arrangements are now being made to monitor teaching and learning more systematically and the development plan identifies the need to review, within the context of whole school procedures, how pupils' work is assessed and how assessment information is to be used to guide planning and target setting. Overall the subject has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

HISTORY

114. Standards of attainment are above national expectations in Years 5 and 6, and in line with expectations in Years 7 and 8. During their first two years at the school pupils make good progress in acquiring a knowledge and understanding of selected aspects of Victorian Britain, Ancient Egypt and Greece, to produce well-presented and imaginative work in a variety of formats. Particular strength is evident in the organisation and communication of information, and in historical enquiry. In a Year 6 lesson on Greek cities, for example, pupils identified artefacts, books, museums, an electronic encyclopaedia, the Internet and site visits, as possible sources of evidence. Pupils' grasp of chronology is less secure; for example, a group of pupils with special educational needs in Year 8 could identify units of immediate and historical time and the meanings of AD and BC, but could not accurately place the ancient Greeks within this spectrum.

115. In Years 7 and 8 the quantity of written work, in pupils' books is less than in many secondary schools. This is partly because there is a high proportion of tabular, diagrammatic and illustrative work, but mainly it is the result of significantly less curriculum time allocated

to the subject than is the case in the majority of secondary schools. Strengths include historical enquiry and confident and articulate oral contributions. In a Year 8 lesson on the slave trade following a fieldwork visit to Bourneville, for example, pupils were able to accurately recall details about Cadbury and question his reputation as a caring employer. However, there is scope for greater rigour and precision in the use of historical terminology, and the development of a more questioning approach about the origin and purposes of source material. The high quality displays of pupils' work provide examples of very good extended and analytical writing in technically accurate English.

116. The quality of teaching is satisfactory with a number of good features. Good classroom management and control ensure a prompt start to lessons and a favourable learning ethos. Teachers monitor and support individuals and groups well and consider carefully the different attainment levels of pupils in designing and selecting resource materials. Lower-attaining pupils, as well as those with special educational needs, learn most effectively and make most progress in lessons where teaching assistants are deployed. Books are marked regularly and display much supportive and occasional diagnostic comment. However, insufficient use is made of attainment grades that relate to national levels and some errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar pass uncorrected. In some lessons, opportunities for independent and individually paced learning were pre-empted by lengthy introductions and an over reliance on teacher directed instruction. Occasionally expectations of potentially higher-attaining pupils are too low as, for example, when tasks are set that require purely descriptive, rather than analytical answers. Teaching takes place in a number of classrooms in which high quality display exemplifies and supports learning but pupils' find it difficult to maintain concentration in one teaching room, which serves as a thoroughfare to other areas of the school.

117. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good throughout the school. Pupils respond positively to their teachers and co-operate well with each other. In one class their eagerness to be invited to answer the teacher's questions, or contribute something of their own to the lesson, was almost overwhelming. Pupils take care and pride in the presentation of their work, and support each other's learning well. The subject co-ordinator is supportive and enthusiastic and gives clear direction for work in the subject. The issues raised in the previous inspection have been tackled successfully and good progress has been made in the incorporation of information and communications technology into the programmes of study. The co-ordinator is aware of the need to review assessment policy and practice in order to monitor and support progress more effectively, and in tends to develop a greater diversity of teaching and learning strategies to further raise levels of attainment.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

118. Standards of work in information and communications technology (ICT) in Years 5 and 6 are above expectations. Pupils are taught ICT by their class teachers with support from the ICT co-ordinator and teaching assistants. Pupils are enthusiastic about their work with computers and develop confidence in their use. This is seen in Year 5, for example, in their access to the satellite workstation. Although there is no formal assessment of pupils' attainment on entry, teachers develop a good knowledge of pupils' skills through observation and try to build on these in lessons. There is an effective approach to the application of computer skills in English, mathematics and science where teachers are most confident in the use of ICT. Because the national training programme, provided by an external agency, proved to be unsatisfactory, it was abandoned after the first group of teachers had received

the training. As a result, there has been a delay in the training of other teachers and this is restricting the use of ICT in some other subjects, and in particular in art.

119. Pupils make good progress in Years 5 and 6 because they are provided with planned, weekly access, which is well supported by the ICT co-ordinator. Teaching assistants play an important role in supporting pupils with special educational needs. Pupils work well together as they share computers and exchange ideas. This was well illustrated, for example, in Year 5 lesson where pupils worked in pairs to modify clip art images by enlarging, rotating and flipping the images as they designed an undersea collage. Many of the higher-attaining pupils were adventurous and used additional attributes such as the 'spray can' icon to enhance the background to their collage by adding sand. The ICT curriculum is carefully planned to encourage pupils to appreciate the wide range of communication, data handling and problem solving functions of computers to help with their learning. For example, a criminal database task, which involves pupils working from a database of hypothetical crimes, helps pupils to understand how computers can be used to solve crime. The task also makes a significant contribution to the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills, and to their understanding of law and order.

120. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 and 8 and attainment at the end of Year 8 is well above national expectations. Teacher assessments show that by the time pupils transfer to the high school, 86 per cent of pupils are reaching Level 4 and 36 per cent are reaching Level 5, which is the expected standard at the end of Year 9. Year 7 pupils have worked effectively on the development of the school web site. The content is imaginative and informative and puts the school and its provision on a national platform. Information and communications technology is taught through discrete lessons in Years 7 and 8 and this underpins the very good progress pupils are making in these years. Lesson activities maintain and develop the skills taught in Years 5 and 6, and provide additional challenge through programme simulations, control, modelling and information handling. Well-planned tasks are often placed in an everyday setting and this encourages pupils to develop a greater understanding of the impact of computers on society. However, insufficient use of self-assessment by

pupils, and a lack of understanding by pupils of National Curriculum levels, restricts opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning. Pupils are not, for example, provided with a checklist so that they can keep a record of the development of their skills both in and out of school.

121. There is increased use of computers in other subjects in Years 7 and 8 and the development of pupils' skills is further underpinned by the enthusiastic use of the ICT rooms during the lunch hour. Pupils build on their past skills and enjoy the challenge of technically exacting but enjoyable tasks. Whole screen animation of a selected scenario encourages them to use their imagination, while refining movement of their image by using the 'onion skinning' technique. However, a lack of computer-aided design and computer aided manufacturing restricts progress in art and design and technology, and limited data logging equipment restricts progress in science.

122. Pupils' have very good attitudes and enjoy the challenge of computer work. They learn quickly from their mistakes and modify their work accordingly. Behaviour is consistently very good and this is because pupils respond well to the high expectations of teachers. Pupils' personal development is very good, although some boys mirror the influence of some computer games by selecting consistently destructive scenarios for images as part of their animation. Pupils with special educational needs achieve particularly well and their self-esteem is enhanced as they produce work of a similar standard to their peers.

123. The quality of teaching is good in Years 5 and 6 and very good in Years 7 and 8. Teachers have a wide range of experience and this is reflected in effective lesson planning to meet the needs of pupils of all attainment levels. Good feedback to pupils, provided during lessons and through the marking of pupils' work, gives targets for improvement. However similar targets are not included in the annual reports to parents. Specialist teachers are confident in their own computer skills and some confident teaching is also seen in design technology, mathematics, science, English, modern languages and the humanities. An audit of teachers' computing skills has been carried out to determine future training needs. Effective use is made of ICT in the excellent displays of pupils' work that are seen in corridors and teaching rooms around the school.

124. Subject co-ordination is very good. Good use is made of nationally recommended units of study within the subject schemes of work. There is close liaison with the other middle school and the high school and this helps to ensure good progression and continuity in pupils learning when they transfer to the high school. However, due to teaching commitments, the co-ordinator has only limited time for monitoring teaching and learning in the subject. Good use is made of entitlement visits by the county advisory service. However, the co-ordinator is insufficiently involved in decisions related to teachers' training needs and the monitoring of the development of teachers' ICT skills. The recent appointment of a part-time ICT technician has improved support for teaching and learning through enhanced maintenance of equipment. The cataloguing of the software has also made it easier for teachers to access resources. Building work currently in progress will improve accommodation, particularly with regard to ventilation and access to teaching rooms.

125. Good improvement has been made since the time of the last inspection and standards have continued to rise. Most of the issues identified in the report have been tackled successfully. The overall provision of computers has improved, although there are still deficiencies in some subjects. These are recognised in the development plan, which provides a good basis for future development of the subject.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

126. Pupils start learning French in Year 6, which is one year earlier than is statutorily required. This provides them with a good start from which they make very good progress. Pupils acquire a useful vocabulary and a range of structures that form a firm foundation for development in the following two years. By the end of Year 6, pupils have learnt to exchange greetings and courtesies. Most talk informatively about themselves, their school life and the surrounding locality. They know the names of various snacks and drinks, and how to order them in a café. While much of their course is based on speaking and listening, pupils read single words and short phrases and record key items in writing.

127. Most pupils in Years 7 and 8 have good levels of attainment and many boys and girls are very good at French. Many pupils attain levels at least one year in advance of those expected nationally, while the rest are at least in line. Pupils increase the range and complexity of their personal statements, describing their family and home life. By the end of Year 8 they express their opinions clearly in speech and writing on topics such as fashion, leisure and entertainment. Pupils of all abilities, including some with special educational needs, distinguish between the past, present and the future, using tenses appropriately to describe events or propose leisure activities. Higher attaining pupils speak and write in complete and often complex sentences. Reading skills are generally well developed, so that many pupils understand demanding unedited texts dealing with wildlife or the choice of a holiday destination. The quality and variety of pupils' writing is very good across the age range. There is, overall, a refreshing spontaneity and confidence in written communication. Pupils summarise the stimulating tasks they perform in class in styles ranging from brief jottings and grammar notes to lengthy descriptive passages, poetry, faxes, and informal letters.

128. The quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory. Most lessons are good or very good, and a substantial minority of teaching is excellent. Teachers are fluent in French, presenting their pupils with an authentic model of language to emulate. They engage their pupils' enthusiasm with lively lessons comprising short, interesting activities that keep them involved and on task. Hard work by teachers since the last inspection has eliminated weaknesses that existed at that time. The confidence of lower attaining pupils in speaking and writing has increased. Learning support assistants also speak French, keeping pupils with special educational needs well involved in lessons, often working with specially adapted materials. Teachers are adept in the use of conventional resources and have supplemented bright, published materials with an extensive battery of visual aids. Lessons are briskly paced, usually comprising an engaging sequence of teacher-led and independent activities. Pupils assimilate and memorise new language thoroughly by joining in complementary exercises that reinforce and consolidate vocabulary and structures.

129. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils and place great reliance on mutual support, personal motivation and maturity. Most pupils learn well in this way. They enjoy developing themes such as finding the way or arranging to go out, so that the practical applications of their skills and knowledge are apparent. The content and format of lessons are immaculately planned, as is the place of each in the scheme of work. In recent years, the department has explored and collated numerous fresh and practical ways of presenting and exploiting standard topics such as household pets or tourist information. Teachers reinforce, though mime, games and competitions, grammar points ranging from prepositions to the use of infinitive constructions.

130. The atmosphere generated in lessons is lively, good-natured and correspondingly productive. Only very occasionally does the concentration of a minority of pupils falter or a class react listlessly. Teachers manage their pupils largely through humour, challenge and the appreciation of effort and achievement. They monitor progress and attainment informally by eliciting individual and whole class responses. Where possible they share assessment with the pupils themselves, whether encouraging comments from classmates or supplementing their own marking with useful advice. Teachers keep parents well-informed and involved with detailed reports adapted to the purposes of the department. Their use of homework to prepare and extend lessons is judicious, although portfolios of work samples and colourful displays reflect hours of creative work in pupils' own time.

131. Pupils benefit from a thoughtfully constructed curriculum that is taught with imagination and flair. Teachers enrich their very good provision in class by running a successful exchange with a French school and particular events for the European Year of Languages. Their developing use of information and communications technology is starting to add a further important dimension to the pupil's learning.

132. The excellent management of French is due to the years of commitment, hard work and inspirational leadership of the subject co-ordinator, complemented by the commitment and enthusiasm of her colleagues. They have produced detailed, informative documents, rich in ideas, which clearly guide teachers, their assistants and newcomers to the school. Relations within the subject area, with the Governors, managers and partner schools are cordial and productive. The local education authority regularly shows its support for, and appreciation of the high standards achieved in the school, that have continued to improve since the last inspection. A few improvements, such as a move to less cramped accommodation and the acquisition of an interactive whiteboard, would further extend the work in this very successful subject.

MUSIC

133. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 6 and the end of Year 8 are well above national expectations. Notation skills are very good throughout all years. Pupils learn to read music by playing the recorder in Year 5 and these skills are developed so that pupils can read from the stave without using letter names written under the notes. In composition work, the melody writing shows musical correctness as well as a feeling for structure. Performance standards are very high, both in class and in extra-curricular activities. Ensemble skills are well developed with the pupils showing a good sense of rhythm and the ability to hold independent parts; for example, a Year 7 class rehearsed four separate parts to a Pavane and then split into small groups to perform as an ensemble. By the end of Year 8 the pupils are able to control keyboards and play simple melodies using fingering systems. Pupils sing confidently with good strong tone and clear diction, although the singing is sometimes

lacking in pitch definition. The part-singing is a strength both in class and in the school choir. Pupils who play instruments perform well, with many taking part in central musical activities organised by the Local Education Authority. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls, and all groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs, are achieving well in relation to their prior attainment.

134. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Approximately half of the lessons seen were very good and the remainder were good. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen and this consistency is a great strength. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and the instrumental teachers have very good specialist skills. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives and a good balance of activities. Explanations are clear and pitched at the right level for the pupils. Management and control of pupils is very good, discipline is firm without being oppressive. The teachers have high expectation and this results in challenging work being set, for example a Year 6 class performed an arrangement involving six independent parts. Most of the tasks set are designed to allow pupils to perform at different levels and this means that pupils with special needs can participate fully in the activities and make good progress. The lessons have a good pace and this results in productive working with pupils making good progress both within lessons and from one lesson to another. There is insufficient use of homework as a means to consolidate and develop pupils' knowledge and skills. The good classroom management facilitates a high concentration level, with pupils collaborating well and working in groups independently of the teacher. Pupils have a good attitude to music and enjoy their music making; this is evident from the large percentage of pupils who take instrumental lessons and the good support for extra-curricular activities.

135. The subject is very well co-ordinated and led by a hardworking part-time teacher who gives up a lot of her own time. The instrumental teaching is well co-ordinated and the extra-curricular activities very well organised. Resources are well managed and used very effectively in lessons with every pupil often playing an instrument. The schemes of work are detailed and well laid out; assessment is systematic and carried out effectively; the marking of work is thorough and conscientious. The school is highly involved in county and partner school events and the co-ordinator often acts as area organiser for these activities.

136. Since the last inspection the school has made significant improvements to the accommodation and the resources for learning. The high standards of attainment and quality of teaching reported at the last inspection have been maintained.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

137. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 6 are above those seen nationally, while standards at the end of Year 8 are in line with expectations for the age group. Pupils in Year 5 have good batting and fielding skills and there are few pupils who have yet to master a basic swimming stroke. The standard of swimming of the majority of pupils is above the level expected for this age group. They show good technique in the front crawl, with effective arm and leg action, and correct breathing. Pupils in Year 6 in striking ball games are competent in batting and able to hit in a selected direction. They field well and return the ball with accuracy. In Year 7 pupils are able to use a three-stride pattern in hurdling, but few possess good hurdle clearance technique. Pupils in this year have a satisfactory understanding of relay takeovers, and are able to gauge the incoming runners speed and use the appropriate type of baton changeover. Pupils have a good understanding of the rules of cricket and rounders. In cricket in Year 8 pupils' batting and fielding skills are satisfactory, although only a few pupils are able to bowl with good line and length. However pupils have sufficient

skill to be able to play a competitive game and show their knowledge of the rules. In athletics, pupils' skills in javelin throwing pupils are moderate as they have only recently been introduced to this event.

138. Pupils make progress in lessons as they increase their range of skills. Particularly good progress is made when pupils are given the opportunity to engage in self and peer evaluation. Pupils respond well when they are given responsibility for equipment and when leading the warm-up at the start of lessons. In swimming pupils of all attainment levels are making good progress. Lower-attaining pupils build up confidence in the water and are making good progress in the acquisition of correct swimming technique. Average and higher-attaining pupils make good progress as they refine their techniques and are able to increase both speed and distance in their swimming. In Year 7 rounders, pupils make good progress as they increase throwing distance through the use of overarm throws. Improved fielding technique also gives them confidence in fielding hard rounders and cricket balls.

139. Pupils have very good attitudes. They are well equipped and smart in appearance in their school physical education uniforms. Pupils are very positive about the subject and eager to participate in lessons and extra-curricular activities. They work enthusiastically in lessons and have very good relationships with one another and with teachers. They co-operate well in small groups and are able to play organised games with little intervention by the teacher. At lunchtimes, pupils take responsibility for cricket equipment and organising their own games with a great sense of responsibility. This makes a good contribution to their personal development.

140. Teaching in Years 5 and 6 is mostly good with some that is very good. In Years 7 and 8 teaching is mostly satisfactory with some that is good. A strength of all teaching is the teachers' subject knowledge, which helps them give clear and concise explanations and demonstrations. This is a significant factor in helping pupils learn new skills and improve existing ones. Lessons are well-planned and appropriate activities and games are used effectively to help pupils learn. A simple but effective game in Year 5, for example, not only contributed to the development of pupils' batting and fielding skills, but also encouraged pupils to think about tactics and the use of team work in fielding. In long jumping the teacher created good opportunities for pupils to evaluate each other's work and this helped them to improve their performances. In a Year 5 swimming lesson, a range of activities for lower-attaining pupils helped to maintain their motivation levels and this led to good work rates. Where teaching is satisfactory, pupils make less progress than might be expected because there is some repetition of activities that have been taught in previous years. In a Year 7 hurdling lesson, for example, more time could have been spent on teaching clearance technique than on the stride pattern, which had been done previously.

141. The good range of activities in Years 5 and 6 is enhanced by outdoor education for all pupils in these years. Some pupils in Year 7 are able to build on this through an optional outdoor education course. However there is some imbalance in the curriculum with dance being taught only in Year 5. The range of extra-curricular activities is very good, with inter-house competitions for all pupils and inter-school competitions for higher performers. There is a strong commitment by teachers to provide these additional opportunities for their pupils. Co-ordination of the subject is satisfactory. There is a comprehensive handbook and subject development plan. However, the co-ordinator is insufficiently engaged in the monitoring of teaching and learning and the sharing of good practice. Insufficient use is also being made of National Curriculum levels in assessment and curriculum documentation does not provide clear guidance on progression in learning activities.

142. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection. Standards of attainment have been maintained. Teaching is good and pupils' interest and enthusiasm for the subject has been maintained. However, further work needs to be done with regard to curriculum provision for dance, and the use of assessment.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

143. Standards of attainment at the end of Years 6 and 8 are in line with expectations. However, some pupils attain standards that are above and well above expectations, particularly in Year 5. This provides a very sound basis for improvement in future years.

144. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, attainment in Years 5 and 6 is consistent with expected levels. There are many good examples of pupils developing their knowledge and understanding of religious language, principles and concepts such as creation, commitment and rites of passage. They make sense of what they study and can relate it to their experiences of life. In Year 5, pupils develop an understanding of the importance of commitment in Christianity, Sikhism and Islam. Pupils in Year 6 demonstrate a good knowledge of creation and provide useful links with everyday experiences. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, although the provision of work more closely linked to their attainment levels would further enhance the progress they are making. The use of key words, technical language and good discussion work makes a very good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills and oral competency. Overall, pupils' learning is good and achievement is satisfactory.

145. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, attainment in Years 7 and 8 reaches expectations. In Year 7, pupils demonstrate a developing understanding of religious language and principles such as Christian symbols and aspects of Sikhism. They are able to link biblical material with everyday life. A good example of this was the way in which the Exodus from Egypt was related to the plight of modern day refugees. In Year 8, there are signs of the beginnings of an analytical approach and evidence for the development of appropriate attitudes and values. Learning from religion is a key feature in this year group. The conversion of Saul provided a valuable way for pupils to develop an understanding of how people's lives can be changed by experiencing key events. Pupils display confidence in discussion work and there are many examples of good creative writing.

146. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. They behave very well, are generally well motivated and apply themselves to the work. They collaborate very well with each other and work at a productive pace. The relationships between teachers and pupils is very good, and teachers support individuals both academically and personally.

147. Teaching is at least satisfactory in all lessons, good in most and occasionally very good. None of the seven teachers who teach the subject are qualified specialists, although the subject co-ordinator has had the benefit of an extended course provided by the LEA. Nevertheless, teachers are secure in their knowledge of the subject and display confidence in the use of material and resources. Planning is good, and this places lessons firmly in the context of prior learning. Lesson aims are shared with pupils in most cases. Teachers make good use of questioning to consolidate current learning and to review previous work. They use a suitable range of strategies to enable pupils to learn from, as well as about, religion. This assists pupils to maintain their interest and develop understanding of religious principles and concepts. Resources are well used, especially worksheets. These enable most pupils with different needs to learn appropriately. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour very well. Extension work and homework are used to good effect in allowing pupils to reflect on the knowledge they have gained in class. Teachers usually make helpful comments when marking pupils' work. However, marking does not provide pupils with clear guidance on what they must do in order to improve their work. Furthermore, insufficient use is made of assessment to guide the teaching and learning, and the planning of new work. Teachers do not set detailed targets against which pupils' progress can be measured. Consequently, pupils are unclear about the standards they are reaching and what they need to do to improve. This has been recognised as an area for improvement.

148. The curriculum in all years is broad and balanced and meets the needs of pupils and the requirements of the Staffordshire Agreed Syllabus. Schemes of work are well planned and appropriate. They are linked to the fundamental aims of the syllabus and designed to increase pupils' knowledge and understanding of religion. Religious education makes a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. The content of the curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to respond to religious beliefs and practices, and some opportunities for reflection. In lessons, the teaching encourages pupils to explore their personal views about religious and moral issues, and work on three major religions necessitates discussion about the cultures that support them, so preparing pupils for life in a multi-faith and multicultural society.

149. The subject is co-ordinated effectively and with a clear sense of purpose. Pupils are provided with a good diet of religious education in all years. The subject co-ordinator, although a non-specialist, approaches the task with enthusiasm and commitment. There is good support from others teaching the subject. The subject is well organised and planning is good, but there is insufficient monitoring of teaching and learning by the subject co-ordinator. Support and in-service training for all teachers of the subject is needed to further enhance provision. Documentation is generally satisfactory. The subject development plan identifies appropriate priorities and provides a good basis for future development. Teachers would benefit from regular formal meetings that would provide opportunities to share good practice and to more closely monitor pupil achievement and progress. Accommodation is satisfactory with very good displays that celebrate pupils' achievement. Curriculum resources are generally satisfactory. The addition of library material would provide a further useful resource for pupil research.

150. Since the last inspection, attainment in all years has been maintained. Improvements have been made in planning and in the schemes of work. However, the issue of assessment remains to be tackled. There has been a significant improvement in the contribution religious education makes to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.