

INSPECTION REPORT

ST CHRISTOPHER'S C of E HIGH SCHOOL

Accrington

LEA area: Lancashire

Unique reference number: 119791

Headteacher: Mr A Coates

Reporting inspector: Mr T Comer
15109

Dates of inspection: 15 – 19 April 2002

Inspection number: 194313

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

© Crown copyright 2002

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of pupils:	11-16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Queen's Road West Accrington Lancashire
Postcode:	BB5 4AY
Telephone number:	01254 232992
Fax number:	01254 234775
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	The Rev P A Smith
Date of previous inspection:	January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
15109	Mr T Comer	Registered inspector		What sort of a school is it? How high are standards? How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed?
11077	Mrs J Harrison	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
11508	Mr C Griffin	Team inspector	English English as an additional language	
10308	Mr J Paddick	Team inspector	Mathematics	
21866	Dr D Tracey	Team inspector	Science	
31680	Mr P Redican	Team inspector	Art and design	
11966	Mr J Clay	Team inspector	Information and communications technology	
31779	Mr V Harrison	Team Inspector	Design and technology	
23926	Mr D Howorth	Team inspector	Geography	
12362	Mrs L Hindley	Team inspector	History	
23709	Mrs A Powell	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
27665	Mrs A Lees	Team inspector	Music	
8329	Mrs G Salter-Smith	Team inspector	Physical education	
27803	Mr J Clark	Team inspector	Special educational needs Equal opportunities	
4193	Mr C Radley	Team inspector		How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?

The inspection contractor was:

North West Education Services Ltd
Cheshire House
164 Main Road
Goostrey
Cheshire
CW4 8JP

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	11
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	13
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	15
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	17
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	18
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	19
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	21
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	22
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	26

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Christopher's is a voluntary aided Church of England comprehensive school. It is average in size, with 945 boys and girls on roll, in roughly equal numbers in the 11-16 age range. The school is popular and oversubscribed. It is situated in the former mining and mill town of Accrington, which is in the highest 10 per cent of the national child deprivation index. Nevertheless, the school draws its pupils from a wider area and some children come from districts more affluent than the town itself. The proportion on the school's register of special educational needs and the proportion who have formal statements of need are both below average. The most numerous categories of need are dyslexia (eight children) and emotional and behavioural difficulties (16 children). The overall attainment of the annual intakes of pupils to Year 7 is about average but rising and the attainment of the 2001 Year 7 intake was above average. Few pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds and only one pupil is at an early stage of learning English. The pupil population is stable: over the past twelve months, five joined and 19 left the school at times other than Year 7 entry. 81 per cent of pupils remain in full-time education post-16. A further 13 per cent leave school to take courses of training. The remaining six per cent leave school for employment. The development of the school's work has been affected by the severe financial constraints also found at the time of the previous inspection.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school with a number of very good features. It benefits from very effective leadership and good management, which ensure an environment for learning characterised by high expectations. Pupils have very good attitudes towards school; they are receptive to their teachers and work hard. The teaching is good and pupils learn well and achieve above average standards. The school is efficient and gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Strong leadership provides an effective environment for learning.
- Pupils adopt the values taught by the school and have very good attitudes to their work.
- Teaching and learning are good overall and pupils learn and achieve well.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are very well taught.
- The school looks after its pupils very well.
- Pupils take part in a very wide range of extra-curricular activities.

What could be improved

- The school lacks a coherent programme of personal, health and social education (PHSE) for pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) is not used enough in many subjects to satisfy National Curriculum requirements in full.
- The timetable is inconvenient: 35-minute lessons are too short for some subjects.

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 January 1997, and has made a satisfactory overall improvement since then. The results of the national tests of Year 9 pupils have improved, in line with the national trend, and above average GCSE results have been maintained. The school has made satisfactory overall progress with the key issues for action arising from the previous inspection. Despite improvements in the school's ICT facilities and training for teachers, however, the application of ICT in most subjects of the curriculum still remains unsatisfactory. The provision of personal, health and social education is now on a better footing in Years 7 – 9 but it is still unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In other ways, the school has improved strongly, for example, in the teaching of music and of art and design. The system of assessment has improved well and enables progress targets to be set for all pupils in all subjects.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	All schools			Similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	A	B	B	B	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

Overall standards are above average and pupils achieve well throughout the school in relation to their earlier attainment. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as a result of the school's very effective provision for them. Gifted and talented pupils make particularly good progress in music, physical education and in art and design.

Overall standards are above average by Year 9. Standards are well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science, and are reflected in the results of the national tests in these subjects. Standards are above average in all other subjects, except ICT and French, in which they are average. Pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy and these skills underpin the pupils' good achievement in all subjects and provide a good foundation for their work in their GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11.

Overall standards are above average by Year 11 as reflected in the GCSE results which are usually well above average. In 2000 and 2001, the results were lower than in previous years and the trend in the results has not matched the rising trend seen nationally. However, the results were still above average in 2001 and met the governors' target. The school expects to achieve the ambitious target set by the governors for 2002.

Standards are well above average in English and above average in mathematics and science. Standards are above or well above average in most other subjects and are very high in the GCSE course in physical education. Pupils who do not take an examination course in an ICT-related subject are underachieving in ICT because they do not always have opportunities to apply and extend their ICT skills in other subjects.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils enjoy school and have very positive attitudes towards school and their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Pupils behave well. Permanent exclusion is very rare.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils make very good gains in their personal development and become mature and responsible young people. They participate enthusiastically in all activities and are very keen to take responsibility, for example, as prefects. Pupils from all backgrounds make friends easily and form very good relationships with other pupils and constructive and co-operative relationships with their teachers.
Attendance	Well above average.

Pupils' very good attitudes to the school make a strong contribution to their good academic and personal achievement.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Overall the teaching is good throughout the school and pupils learn and achieve well in consequence. The teaching is good in English, mathematics and science throughout Years 7 – 11. The strengths of the teaching are high expectations and effective management of the pupils. Teachers set homework regularly. They mark written work promptly and in such a way that enables pupils to improve the quality of their work. Pupils learn effectively and generally make good progress: they work hard, concentrate on their work and complete the tasks set for them. In mathematics, however, the boys' work is sometimes careless and some pupils, both boys and girls, do not always do their homework. Pupils make good progress in nearly all subjects but the teachers do not develop the pupils' computing skills consistently in all subjects.

The teaching of literacy and numeracy is very good and provides a good foundation for the pupils' learning in all subjects. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good and these pupils generally make good progress in consequence and succeed in their examination courses. Similarly, the school has good arrangements for teaching pupils with English as an additional language. The school identifies its gifted and talented pupils and these children do especially well in art and design, music and physical education because of the well taught extension activities which are planned for them.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory range of learning opportunities open to all pupils equally. The school provides a very wide range of extra-curricular activities in which many pupils participate. The provision for ICT is a weakness and the timetable of lessons is unsatisfactory.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good and very well managed. Learning support staff work effectively to ensure that these pupils make good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	At present the school has only one such pupil who is making the same good progress as others.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. The provision for social development is good and the provision for spiritual, moral and cultural development is very good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	A very good feature. The school looks after its pupils very well and ensures their welfare and safety. Pupils' progress is assessed accurately and monitored effectively. Pupils' behaviour, attendance and personal development are also monitored very effectively and appropriate action is taken when needed.

The timetable is inconvenient because 35-minute lessons are too short for some subjects, especially for practical lessons. Double lessons punctuated by lunchtimes affect the continuity of teaching and learning, for example, in food technology. The programme of PHSE lacks cohesion and structure in Years 10 and 11 and needs further development, for example, for drugs education.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The Headteacher and his senior colleagues provide very strong leadership and clear educational direction and have established an effective climate for learning. The school is well managed.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors do their work very well, especially in financial management. They are committed to the school, monitor its work effectively, set realistic targets for improvement and performance, and understand the school's strengths and weaknesses.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Examination and test results are used effectively to compare the school's performance with that of other schools, to set targets, and to inform the school's improvement plan.
The strategic use of resources	The funding for the school is well below average. Bearing this in mind, staffing is satisfactory although there are some large classes. Apart from the inadequacy of the school's library, resources for learning are satisfactory. The accommodation is cramped but improving.

Despite the effectiveness of the Governing Body, statutory requirements are not met in full for the teaching of ICT in a number of subjects, nor for all pupils in Years 10 and 11.

The school's financial management and control are very good. Because of the need to spend money carefully and wisely, the governors and senior managers of the school observe and apply the principles of best value very effectively.

The school has a good partnership with parents who have positive views of the school and support their children's learning well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching is good and their children make good progress. The school has high expectations of work and behaviour. The school is approachable. The school is well led and managed. The school looks after the pupils very well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home-school communication can be unreliable. Written comments in annual subject reports to parents do not always give a clear enough view of children's progress. They think that homework is inconsistent in its amount and regularity.

The inspectors share the parents' positive views. The inspectors also agree that 'pupil post' is sometimes unreliable. Although the annual reports are generally satisfactory, inspectors agree that comments could be more individual and clear in some subject reports. During the inspection, homework was found to be set regularly in all subjects and recorded in homework diaries.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

Standards in Years 7, 8 and 9

1. Pupils' attainment when they join Year 7 is broadly average for pupils of this age and they begin secondary school with an adequate foundation of basic skills. They achieve well in relation to their starting points in Year 7 and make good overall progress. By Year 9, overall standards of pupils' work are above average, taking into account the full range of subjects. Boys and girls achieve equally well. The school has effectively implemented national strategies in literacy and numeracy and these are having very positive effects on standards in all subjects.

2. The results of the 2001 national tests taken by the previous Year 9 pupils in English, mathematics and science were well above average overall, as they have been for a number of years. There is no significant difference in girls' and boys' performance. The trend of improvement in the test results over the period 1997-2001 is in line with the national trend.

3. Standards of the current Year 9 pupils' work in English, mathematics and science are similar to the test results: well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science. Standards vary little between subjects in Years 7 – 9. By Year 9, standards are highest in English, in which they are well above average. They are above average in all other subjects except ICT and French, in both of which they are average.

Standards in Years 10 and 11

4. Pupils begin their examination courses in Year 10 with above average overall attainment. They make good overall progress and generally achieve well, maintaining above average standards by Year 11. These good standards are reflected in the pattern of the examination results over a period of years, which are above or well above national averages. In 2001, although the results were the lowest for some time, they were still above average and in line with the target set by the governors. In 2001, the girls' results were very high but the boys' results indicated some underachievement. The boys' standards of work are presently higher than in the previous year, especially in English, but are lower than those of the girls in mathematics (see paragraph 7, below). However, there is no significant difference between boys' and girls' overall GCSE results over time and the boys' results are slightly more above national averages than the girls over the period 1997-2001. Over this period, the GCSE results have not risen, as they have nationally, but are expected to show a substantial improvement this year and the ambitious target set by the governors for 2002 reflects this expectation (59 per cent of pupils to achieve GCSE grades A*-C in five or more subjects).

5. Standards of the present Year 11 pupils' work are well above average in English, and above average in mathematics and science. Standards are very high in the GCSE course in physical education, as the examination results testify. Pupils achieve above average standards in nearly all other subjects. Standards are average in design and technology subjects, overall. Although standards are below average in design and technology resistant materials, this GCSE course tends to be taken by lower attaining pupils who are achieving well in relation to their capabilities. Standards are unsatisfactory in ICT for those pupils who do not take an examination course because the teachers in most other subjects do not make sufficient use of computers to develop the pupils' ICT skills. Pupils taking an examination course in ICT achieve average standards which, for the pupils concerned, are satisfactory.

Standards in English, mathematics and science

6. Pupils generally achieve well in English throughout the school. Standards of work are well above average and there are no consistent differences between the standards of boys and girls. Speaking and listening are well developed, reading is well above average and pupils make good progress in their writing. The 2001 GCSE results were lower than the school's results of the previous two years owing to a disappointing performance by the boys in that year. A few pupils underachieve in their writing because they lack control of standard English expression and are prone to errors. The GCSE English literature results were well above the national average but because far fewer pupils take this examination than in most secondary schools comparisons can mislead.

7. Overall, pupils achieve well in mathematics. Standards are above average in Year 9 and Year 11 because of consistently good teaching. Standards in arithmetic and algebra are well above average and even the weakest pupils are competent in arithmetic and go on to succeed at GCSE. However, the teachers do not do enough in Years 7 – 9 to develop pupils' mathematical thinking through investigation and problem solving and this aspect of the subject is underdeveloped. The boys' work is sometimes careless and a minority of pupils, especially boys, do not show enough working and some of their written and graphical work is below their capability. The proportion of pupils preparing for the higher tier GCSE examination is on the low side and this may restrict openings for some pupils to study mathematics at sixth-form level.

8. Boys and girls achieve well in science and standards are above average throughout the school. Pupils' understanding of biology, physics and chemistry is above average in Years 7 – 9; although practical and investigative science is a weakness at the start of Year 7 it improves rapidly owing to good teaching and is well above average by Year 11.

Pupils with special educational needs

9. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets set for them. These pupils generally reach the standards they are capable of and achieve well in relation to their earlier attainment at the time of joining Year 7. The early identification of pupils with low literacy skills and the good support they receive, both in class and in withdrawal groups, enable these pupils to catch up with other pupils. Pupils with special needs make good progress in Years 10 and 11 and succeed in their GCSE examinations. Gifted and talented pupils make good progress, especially in art and design, music and physical education.

Pupils with English as an additional language

10. A handful of pupils have English as an additional language but there is currently only one pupil who is at an early stage of learning English. Provision for such pupils is effective and their needs are carefully assessed and met. When needed, the school makes use of the local authority's specialist support service. All pupils whose first language is other than English make the same good progress as others.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

11. Pupils are enthusiastic about school, which they enjoy. Pupils have very good attitudes towards school which make a strong contribution to their academic and personal progress. They generally take pride in their work.

12. Behaviour is good overall. Only one pupil was permanently excluded over the past year. Relationships are very good. Pupils are pleasant and friendly towards one another and pupils of all backgrounds and of different ethnic groups mix harmoniously together. Pupils say that they feel safe in the school and that teachers deal with rare incidences of bullying swiftly and effectively.

13. Attendance figures are well above the national average and pupils are punctual to school and to lessons.

14. A large number of pupils take part in sports, charity work, the school newspaper, Young Enterprise, or in school productions, such as the recent performance of *Joseph and His Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. A good number avail themselves of opportunities for extra classes provided in many subjects.

15. Pupils' personal development is very good despite an inadequate programme of PHSE for Years 10 and 11. Pupils learn very good inter-personal skills and respond positively to opportunities to take responsibility. The school council makes decisions about matters of importance to pupils. Prefects help with the smooth running of the school; for example, by assisting teachers to supervise pupils during break and lunchtimes.

16. Pupils with special educational needs are generally willing to learn and respond well to their teachers in lessons. In withdrawal groups, they sustain concentration and are always willing to ask and answer questions. They co-operate effectively with teachers and learning support staff. They mix well with other pupils and are fully integrated into the daily life of the school; for example, they are well represented in the school's musical productions and in inter-school sporting fixtures.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

17. Overall the teaching is good. It is good throughout the school and pupils therefore learn effectively. The main strengths of the teaching are the teachers' consistently high expectations of pupils' effort and achievement, their good subject expertise, and their good teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, not only in English and mathematics lessons, but also in other subjects. Pupils work well in class, make good progress and achieve well. Teachers set homework regularly, which complements and extends the work done in lessons. The teachers' management of pupils in lessons and discipline are very effective and pupils co-operate well and meet the teachers' expectations. The weakness lies in the lack of application of ICT in Years 10 and 11 to enhance pupils' learning in most, but not all, subjects.

18. Teachers' good subject expertise is evident in a range of subjects. For example, the modern languages teachers speak their special languages fluently and the consistent practice of them in lessons encourages the pupils to speak them and develops their listening skills effectively.

19. The consistently effective teaching of literacy ensures good standards of written work in all subjects. Pupils apply their good numeracy skills effectively in their learning subjects such as art and design, geography and science. However, in history, the use of graphs, charts and diagrams could be extended more to interpret data when substantiating judgements.

20. Computers are used effectively in the teaching of pupils with special educational needs. Teachers also apply pupils' ICT skills effectively in design and technology and physical education but do not generally make sufficient use of computers to support and extend pupils' work in other subjects, for example, mathematics. Pupils' ICT skills, therefore, are not developed sufficiently well overall, as was also found in at the time of the previous inspection, and this is an important issue for the school's development.

21. In English, science, geography, history and art and design, teachers prepare materials that are particularly well matched to pupils' individual needs and attainment levels and this ensures that all pupils make good progress. However, this feature could be improved in some other subjects; for example, in ICT lessons, the level of work and supporting worksheets are not always well matched to the pupils' capabilities and attainment levels. In music, teachers need to challenge the higher attaining pupils more consistently in Years 7 – 9 and, in design and technology, some lessons lack pace and challenge.

22. Teachers' marking of pupils' written work is satisfactory overall and could be improved further in some subjects. Pupils' work is marked very well in English, history and physical education to show pupils how to improve, with strengths and weaknesses in writing clearly identified. However, marking could show the pupils' strengths and weaknesses more clearly in science. Regularly reviewed target grades give the Year 10 and 11 pupils a clear understanding of their progress, for example, in geography, although in design and technology some pupils are unsure of the progress they are making. In mathematics, however, the marking of written work is inconsistent: some marking is very good but some of the teachers' comments lack sufficient detail and do little to help pupils to improve. In music and modern languages pupils need to become more familiar with the National Curriculum levels of attainment or the GCSE criteria for assessing the quality of their work.

23. In English, the teachers help pupils to organise their work well and prepare for examinations, and this is particularly effective in the crucial Years 9 and 11. Pupils work hard on their extensive and challenging assignments because the teachers have high expectations of them. Imaginative tasks set for pupils encourage them to apply their intelligence and arouse their curiosity.

24. In mathematics, the teaching of numerical skills is very effective and gives pupils much practice in mental arithmetic. Lessons are well planned and the teachers' questioning identifies areas that need further explanation so that the pupils learn effectively. Generally, teachers prepare pupils well for the national tests and GCSE examinations. However, relatively few pupils are taking the higher tier GCSE course and it would be sensible for all pupils who may need to take a course of mathematics at sixth-form level to study the higher tier GCSE topics which give the necessary grounding in algebra. Boys tend to be careless and do not always show sufficient detail in their working to achieve the GCSE grades of which they are capable.

25. The science teachers explain aspects of the subject clearly, using every-day examples effectively to put across difficult ideas, such as electrical current. Homework is set regularly and is an important factor in consolidating the pupils' knowledge and understanding of this subject.

26. The best and most effective teaching is found in GCSE courses in drama, physical education, German and music, in all of which pupils learn very effectively and achieve high standards. In drama, the teaching shows excellent subject expertise and pupils respond confidently and positively to the teacher's high expectations and, despite the unsatisfactory teaching accommodation, they make very good progress. The teaching of GCSE physical education is characterised by teachers' secure subject expertise and high expectations of pupils' behaviour, effort and improvement. Pupils rise to these expectations and make rapid progress. Teachers use practical demonstration of skills and techniques effectively and encourage pupils to work independently and Year 11 pupils coach others in rounders and cricket. German lessons ensure that pupils learn at a brisk pace and the teachers make skilful use of resources to revise vocabulary, explain grammar points and as a starting point for discussions and for oral work generally. A particular feature of the music teaching is that the teachers are practising musicians whose expertise enriches lessons and out-of-school musical activities. Consequently, pupils acquire very good performing and composing skills, especially in the GCSE course. The accommodation is unsatisfactory, however, and some lessons have to be taught in the hall.

27. Teaching is good in nearly all other subjects. Teaching and learning are good in ICT lessons. The ICT teachers have a thorough knowledge of the subject and encourage pupils to undertake independent research. Pupils enjoy their ICT lessons and work hard. Some Year 11 pupils work exceptionally hard on their personal projects and most GNVQ pupils spend extra time on their work at lunchtimes and after school. However, teaching of ICT is no better than satisfactory overall because of the failure of teachers of other subjects to exploit the pupils' ICT skills sufficiently.

28. Pupils with special educational needs are well taught. Teachers have a sound knowledge of each pupil's needs, from the information provided by the learning support department. Special needs support assistants are deployed effectively to support pupils and monitor their learning in lessons, for example, in mathematics, and work very effectively in special needs classes, providing good individual help to pupils

so that they can experience success. Specialist ICT programmes are exploited effectively to help pupils improve their reading and spelling skills. However, more could be done to allow pupils to use these special programmes before and after school. At present, there is only one pupil for whom English is an additional language although, in the past, there have been others. The provision for such pupils is good and well organised. Pupils are carefully assessed and their needs suitably met. When appropriate, the school makes use of guidance from the local authority's specialist support services. Inspectors are satisfied that these pupils are well taught, learn effectively, and make the same progress as other pupils. A number of pupils are identified as gifted and talented in art and design, music and physical education and make good progress in these subjects.

29. The school is responding well to the requirements of the National Literacy Strategy. Subject departments generally enhance literacy needs through the planning of lessons and have their own literacy policies. The teaching of literacy is very good overall and is good in all subjects, and very effective in history. Pupils do not have enough opportunity to use the library to enhance their learning, particularly their research skills, and role of the library in the teaching of study skills has not been addressed explicitly enough in the school's literacy policy.

30. The National Numeracy Strategy is well established. Pupils' numerical skills and competence in other areas of mathematics are developed so strongly in Years 7 – 11 that they encounter very few problems in applying their knowledge and understanding in all subjects of the curriculum. Graphs, numerical work, and the use of algebraic formulae in science pose no difficulties for most pupils. The same applies to measurement, units and the use of scale in physical education and design and technology. Equally, few difficulties are encountered in other subjects such as geography and history in the interpretation of graphs, charts and statistical data.

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

31. This is an inclusive school that provides equally for boys and girls of all abilities, aptitudes and backgrounds. The arrangements for grouping pupils in classes enable teachers to focus the work on the full range of attainment.

32. The quality of learning opportunities is generally satisfactory but the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory overall because the arrangements for ICT do not fully meet National Curriculum requirements and there is no proper programme of personal, health, and social education (PHSE) in Years 10 and 11.

33. The school has formally notified the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority of the governors' decision to disapply the requirements of the National Curriculum in respect of the study of a modern foreign language or design technology subject in Years 10 and 11. This has been done to enable pupils, with parental approval, either to follow a broader range of humanities or to choose a second modern foreign language.

34. The school's lesson timetable is inconvenient and the 35-minute lessons are too short, especially for practical subjects. Since the previous inspection, however, the time allocation for music and PHSE has been increased in Years 7 to 9. The overall breadth and balance of the curriculum is now satisfactory throughout the school. Beyond normal lessons, additional help (catch-up) is given to pupils in Years 7 and 8 who have not yet achieved the National Curriculum level expected for their age (Level 4) in English, mathematics or science, to enable them to catch up. Similarly, 'booster classes' are provided in the same subjects for the benefit of Year 9 pupils who are not on target to achieve the minimum expected level (Level 5).

35. The use of ICT to support learning is very uneven, and the teaching of mathematics, music, art and design, geography and English does not fulfil National Curriculum requirements for the application of

ICT. This is partly because of insufficient opportunities to use the computer suites and insufficiency of computers within the subjects departments, although some teachers have acquired second-hand computers from local businesses and upgraded them. Subjects are, therefore, at different stages in their development of ICT and some teachers still lack confidence in the application of computer technology to their subject work.

36. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good: it is thorough and very well organised and, together with good teaching, ensures that the pupils make good progress. These pupils have access to the full range of National Curriculum subjects. In Years 10 and 11, all pupils with special educational needs take GCSE examinations and some follow a 'life skills' course. A number of pupils benefit from work placements and extended work experience. Some pupils in Years 7 – 9 are withdrawn from lessons for help with reading, spelling and other basic literacy skills and a small minority of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties receive effective specialist help to manage their behaviour.

37. Teachers give generously of their time out of school hours to provide a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, especially in music and drama, team games and sports. Most pupils participate. Other activities include Christian Union, a wide range of choral and instrumental activities, participation in regional and national competitions, such as an Eisteddfod, musical and dramatic productions. Extra classes are available to help pupils with their work in subjects, such as mathematics, science and design and technology. There is a school bank and the school also offers a Young Enterprise programme to widen pupils' understanding of the world of business. Foreign visits, and formal pupil exchanges with two French schools help to broaden pupils' horizons. Teachers take pupils to museums, galleries and places of historical interest. These visits stimulate interest in their work, for example, in history and enrich the pupils' knowledge of their culture and heritage. In geography, however, fieldwork and enquiry methods are not used enough in Years 7 – 9.

38. The provision for PHSE is satisfactory in Years 7 – 9 but is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Although elements of PHSE, such as sex education and drugs education, are taught in religious education, science and careers lessons, this provision lacks overall planning, structure and an evaluation of its effectiveness. PHSE has been detrimentally affected by staffing difficulties and has until recently lacked effective co-ordination. It also lacks sufficiently high status in the school to attract an enthusiastic, middle-management ranking co-ordinator of high calibre to establish it properly in Years 10 and 11 and to develop it well. It is taught in Years 7 – 9 in morning form-time by teachers, many of whom lack the specialist skills and confidence to teach PHSE well, particularly elements connected with drugs and sex education. Nevertheless, under the temporary guidance of an experienced and effective deputy headteacher, a programme is now in place for Years 7 – 9 which has a range of experiences to help to develop pupils' self-awareness, self-management and self-evaluation skills as well as an awareness of social and moral issues important to young people. In Years 10 and 11, there is no such coherent programme to build systematically upon the work done in Years 7 – 9.

39. Careers education and guidance have a generous allowance of time in Years 10 and 11 but are again in the hands of teachers who lack specialist knowledge. Time would be more effectively used if careers education was taught by a select group of teachers with a particular interest in the work, rather than, as at present, by those simply available. The school benefits from the regular services of a Careers Officer, who offers both pre-arranged and on-the-spot interviews for pupils. Year 10 pupils have a good programme of work experience which they enjoy and find beneficial. However, a reappraisal of curricular planning would present a timely opportunity to incorporate PHSE, careers and work-related education as a whole.

40. The school has constructive links with its local community; for example, the police and fire service visit the school frequently to assist in PHSE, and local firms offer help with computers and occasional teaching. Every year a 'Futures Evening' for pupils in Years 10 and 11 and their parents provides an opportunity for them to seek information from more than 20 or more institutions of further and higher education, and training providers through whom most pupils seeking employment are placed. Similarly,

close links with primary schools help to smooth the transition to secondary education. For example, as part of an effective induction process, Year 6 pupils visit the school for a 'taster day' and meet their new teachers in the summer term. Providers of post-16 education have very effective partnerships and strong links with the school.

41. Since the previous inspection, the school has strengthened its spiritual education to live up to its mission statement. This has been achieved by undertaking a review and audit of the contribution made by individual subjects to the development of pupils' spirituality. Another significant initiative is the introduction of a chaplaincy team which works closely with year groups, plans worship and communion, and provides an individual, pastoral service. Collective worship is based on whole-school weekly themes, which present pupils with challenging areas for reflection, self-evaluation and thought for others. Spirituality is a very strong feature of the school.

42. The moral education is also very good, with staff instinctively setting very good examples for pupils to emulate. The school's approach is based on faith into practice, appropriate punishment followed by forgiveness, which enables pupils to differentiate between right and wrong in a secure environment which supports their self-esteem. In lessons, pupils are faced with consideration of moral dilemmas and how to tackle contemporary problems, for example, the preservation of rain forests despite the need to raise living standards of the indigenous population.

43. Provision for pupils' social education is good despite the weakness in the provision for PHSE. Pupils often work in small groups or pairs and this gives them opportunities to share and to collaborate. Extra-curricular activities and visits to theatres and places of interest also serve to develop pupils socially as well as culturally. Field trips and residential visits are organised both in this country and abroad. Pupils have opportunities to accept significant responsibility as prefects, form captains and mentors; the school has an active and effective school council; pupils readily volunteer to act as receptionists and guides for school functions; pupils raise money for charities at home and overseas.

44. Provision for pupils' cultural development is very good. Pupils are taught to respect and understand their own heritage and traditions and the ethnic, religious and cultural diversity of modern Britain. They increasingly explore other cultures; for example, in English lessons, pupils study a broad range of literature from different cultures and times and a particular feature is the study and writing of poetry. In art, pupils benefit from visits by artists in residence, visits to art galleries, and they study the art of other cultures, for example, Indian and Australian. Pupils listen to a great variety of music ranging from popular and light music to the works of great composers, and are introduced to the music of other cultures.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

45. The school looks after its pupils very well and they learn in a well-ordered and caring environment. The school has effective procedures to ensure the pupils' welfare, and child protection procedures in place which fulfil legal requirements. Teachers and other staff understand the child protection procedures clearly and the co-ordinator and year heads all have received training. Health and safety procedures have improved since the previous inspection and there are now effective procedures in place for risk assessment. A wide range of support strategies helps pupils who are experiencing personal or academic difficulties. Pupils' personal development is monitored very well. Two independent mentors from the local Youth Service and the school nurse run 'drop in' clinics at lunchtimes providing pupils with confidential avenues of personal support which they value.

46. Effective induction procedures help the new Year 7 pupils to adjust quickly to the school. Pupils begin their personal progress files and their records of self-assessment in Year 7 and add to them as they move up through the school.

47. The procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic progress have improved since the previous inspection and are now good. Form teachers and year heads maintain records, which meet requirements and maintain a clear oversight of individual pupils' progress.

48. Procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs are very good. These pupils are identified from their National Curriculum scores at the end of Year 6, from the tests that pupils take on joining Year 7, from teachers' observation and from information provided by primary schools, parents and external agencies. All pupils are tested for reading and spelling at the start of Year 7, and those who require extra support receive this help in small withdrawal groups. The school's learning support assistants know the pupils well and pupils learn effectively in all subjects. Individual education plans make pupils' learning and behavioural difficulties clear and set appropriate targets. These plans are constructed in consultation with parents, pupils themselves, learning support assistants and subject teachers, and are reviewed at least twice each year.

49. The school has a satisfactory system for assessing pupils' progress, which has considerably improved since the previous inspection. Test scores made at the time of the pupils' joining Year 7 enable the school to predict their GCSE grades, to identify underachievement, and to set challenging value-added targets for each of them. A termly audit of progress gives pupils a clear indication of whether their work is satisfactory or whether they are underachieving. The learning support department monitors the progress of pupils with special educational needs and records of their progress. Pupils' progress is discussed at weekly meetings of specialist staff and formally reviewed with parents and pupils at least twice a year. The mentors work effectively with selected pupils to increase their motivation and raise the standards of their work. However, each subject department has its own grading system and pupils are not always aware of their comparative performance across the different subjects. For example, pupils are not aware of their National Curriculum levels in English, modern languages or music.

50. Procedures to improve and maintain attendance are very effective. Registers are taken promptly and this encourages punctuality. The year heads consistently follow up absence and, working with the education welfare officer, monitor emerging attendance problems very effectively. Parents are very pleased with the action the school takes to minimise the effects of unavoidable and long absence.

51. The school expects good standards of behaviour and maintains very effective discipline. A few parents expressed concern about a possible drugs problem but the inspectors could find no evidence of this. Measures to deal with bullying are effective. Pupils can talk with confidence to their teachers about their personal problems.

52. Pupils are generally very content with the school but they say that they would like to have lockers in which to keep their heavy bags and other belongings. At present, there are no safe places to leave these bags unattended during the day. However, the school is overcrowded and, at present, no space can reasonably be spared to accommodate lockers.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

53. The school consults parents and listens to their opinions. A home-school partnership agreement is in place. Effective links between school and home are established early on at the new intake evening and with the "welcome to school" booklet. Regular newsletters and the school newspaper give a good insight into school life and activities.

54. Parents are pleased with the school. They believe that their children make good progress, that expectations of effort and achievement are high, and that the teaching is good. Parents find the school approachable and that they can discuss their concerns with teachers. They are pleased that their children enjoy coming to school and are very well looked after. Parents praised the office staff, who provide a welcoming and patient first point of contact. However, some parents have reservations about

the effectiveness of communications between school and home, information about their children's progress, and about the regularity of homework.

55. The inspectors agree with parents' positive views. The inspectors also investigated the parents' concerns. They found that that homework is a good feature and that it is regular and recorded in pupils' homework diaries. Inspectors also consider that communications between school and home are generally satisfactory but agree that there are some shortcomings; for example, letters sent by 'pupil post' do not always reach home. The annual progress reports meet national requirements and generally give a satisfactory picture of progress, but inspectors find that the subject comments could be clearer and more personal. The school has recognised that reports could be improved and now sends home an interim snapshot of progress for each child to complement the more formal annual report.

56. Parents take a keen and very supportive interest in their children's education. Annual consultation meetings with the teachers are very well attended. The school is currently considering whether to introduce further opportunities as parents are limited to eight appointments and so cannot meet all of their children's teachers. The Friends of St. Christopher society is thriving and raises funds to supplement the school's resources; for example, by funding the school's minibus. The annual financial appeal raises an impressive £20,000.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

57. The school is very well led by the headteacher and senior staff and it is well managed. The headteacher provides clear direction for the school, and staff and governors are committed to providing a good education equally for all of their pupils, regardless of background, aptitude or ability, and are determined that the school will do its best for them.

58. The effectiveness of the work of the headteacher, senior staff and governors are important strengths of the school. The aims of the school are well understood and underpin a very strong ethos for learning, which reflects high expectations for effort and achievement. The senior staff set excellent examples for other staff to follow. They all have substantial teaching commitments in addition to their management responsibilities for the leadership of the school.

59. The senior management team comprises headteacher, two deputy headteachers and two assistant headteachers, which is a large enough complement to meet the school's needs effectively. The headteacher and deputy headteachers are set personal performance targets, which are drawn up, monitored and evaluated by the governors.

60. The governors fulfil their responsibilities effectively and their committee meetings are well attended. The Governing Body helps to draw up the school's development plan and is fully involved in the review of its success. Individual governors have oversight of child protection, equality of opportunity, links with parents and the community, health and safety, pupils' records of achievement, sex education and special educational needs. They support the work of the school very well and have a good grasp of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. Governors receive annual reports from subject heads, which do much to ensure governors' understanding of the school's performance. The governors receive subject reports and set statutory targets for GCSE, which are achievable yet challenging. The governors' work is particularly beneficial in financial management and in ensuring that the school achieves best value. All statutory requirements are met except those for ICT in a number of subjects.

61. A system of performance management is fully in place which enables the headteacher to monitor the performance of individual teachers and to set them personal targets for improvement. The senior staff monitor the students' achievement regularly; for example, through 'form inspections' which also involve the form teachers and heads of year, and which analyse the quality of teaching and learning, identifying how improvements can be made.

62. Middle management responsibilities are carried out well. The leadership and management of special educational needs are very good. Heads of subject observe lessons to monitor the quality of teaching in order to show how to improve teaching and learning, although this should be more rigorous in science, modern languages and in design and technology subjects.

63. The school compares its performance with that of other schools, both locally and nationally. For example, GCSE performance is compared with that of similar schools and with national averages. Targets are set for all subjects and for individual pupils, and teachers work hard to ensure that these targets are met.

64. The school's improvement plan provides a good framework for improving the overall quality of education, set in a timescale of three years, and is linked to training for staff. The plan's chief priorities are appropriate: to implement the new behaviour management policy; integrate chaplains more closely into school life; widen the school's strategy for raising standards in Years 7 – 9; develop the curriculum for Years 10 and 11; introduce the teaching of citizenship; ensure a balanced budget; manage the new building project, achieve Investors in People status; improve communication with parents. The planning includes a suitable timescale, development costs, evaluation and accountability. However, the strategic planning for the provision for pupils with special educational needs is not set in a suitable timescale, nor is it costed.

65. The national strategies for literacy and numeracy have been implemented effectively. The management of the English and mathematics departments leads the whole-school literacy and numeracy groups with representatives from each subject. Literacy and numeracy are standing items at middle management meetings.

66. Staffing is adequate in most subjects. Although the school has an unfavourably high pupil-to-teacher ratio, the quality of teaching is good, nevertheless. The school has a good number of classroom support assistants, and satisfactory technical support for practical subjects which has improved since the previous inspection.

67. Procedures for the induction of newly appointed staff are effective. Further training for teachers effectively supports their professional development and special educational needs support assistants undergo specialist training courses.

68. Although great strides have been made in improving the accommodation since the previous inspection, there remain inadequacies in practical accommodation for science, limited indoor provision and poorly drained playing fields for physical education, and unsuitable accommodation for music. However, the school has been successful in bidding for capital funding to address these inadequacies and to make other further significant improvements, for example the provision of a new library area.

69. Overall, learning resources are satisfactory and adequately support pupils' learning and progress in the curriculum. However, despite the improvement in resources for ICT since the previous inspection, there still remains a need for more computers. The present library is inadequate in space and in bookstocks for the size of the school, and is largely unavailable for use by pupils because of staffing difficulties, although these problems are currently being solved.

70. The school's lesson timetable does not work well. There is a significant loss of teaching time owing to movement of pupils between single 35-minute lessons. Although many lessons are timetabled as doubles, single lessons are too short for effective teaching of practical subjects, such as music, geography and physical education. Another disruptive factor in the timetable is the number of double lessons split by the lunch break, which can affect continuity, for example in food technology.

71. As at the time of the previous inspection, financial management is effective and secure, and financial planning is now very good. The governors, together with the headteacher and bursar, monitor the budget very carefully. The most recent auditor's report confirms that financial systems and

procedures are well maintained and provide a good level of internal control. This year the school has successfully achieved its target to clear an outstanding deficit, which had been planned for in more difficult times. The school is committed to, and very effectively applies, the principles of best value, constantly seeking to ensure that it obtains good value, a good example being the school's complete takeover and significant improvement of the catering service, and the very thorough and detailed, independent surveys of parents' and pupils' views which they have commissioned. Specific grants are used appropriately for the purposes for which they were intended.

72. Administration runs smoothly, contributing effectively to the overall efficiency of the school. ICT is used very effectively to support the school's administration.

73. Taking into account the very low level of funding for the school, pupils' attainment at the beginning of Year 7, their social background and the school's environment, the ethos of the school and the effectiveness of its overall provision, the school gives very good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

74. In order to raise the school's performance further, the governors, headteacher and senior staff should take the following action.

(1) Plan and organise a coherent programme of personal, health and social education for pupils in Years 10 and 11, and monitor and evaluate its effectiveness;

(paragraphs 15,32,38 and 39)

(2) Improve pupils' achievement in ICT in Years 10 and 11 and ensure that National Curriculum requirements are fully met in all subjects by

- applying pupils' skills and extending them in all subjects,
- and monitoring and evaluating the success of the action taken;

(paragraphs 5,17,20,27,35,60,77,92,101,103,112,119,127,129-134,143,160)

(3) Improve the effectiveness of the school's lesson timetable

- ensuring that lessons have sufficient time for efficient teaching and learning
- and minimising the time lost at lesson changeovers.

(paragraphs 34,70,91,112,121)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

148

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

41

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	5	23	78	40	1	0	0
Percentage	3	16	52	27	1	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

Y7 – Y11

Number of pupils on the school's roll	945
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	41

Special educational needs

Y7 – Y11

Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	14
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	106

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	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	19

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.3
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	83	92	175

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	66	71	69
	Girls	76	70	68
	Total	142	141	137
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	81 (74)	81 (79)	79 (78)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	50 (36)	61 (58)	34 (45)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	54	67	66
	Girls	75	61	70
	Total	129	128	136
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	74 (80)	74 (78)	78 (78)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	32 (44)	63 (59)	36 (44)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	89	82	171

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	38	97	88
	Girls	53	77	81
	Total	91	164	169
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	53 (59)	96 (97)	99 (98)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	42.3 (43.4)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	4
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	936
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	33	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: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	49
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.3

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	297

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	0.79
---	------

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	23.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	2168186
Total expenditure	2097885
Expenditure per pupil	2225
Balance brought forward from previous year	-166929
Balance carried forward to next year	-96628

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	7

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	945
Number of questionnaires returned	324

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	52	3	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	43	51	5	0	1
Behaviour at the school is good	36	52	8	2	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	35	41	17	6	1
The teaching is good.	35	54	6	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	34	45	15	6	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	45	42	6	3	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	49	47	3	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	35	44	16	4	1
The school is well led and managed.	41	45	6	2	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	41	45	7	3	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	39	46	7	1	7

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well and overall standards are well above average and rising.
- Expectations are high.
- Teaching is good and pupils learn effectively.
- Literacy is very well taught.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is effective.
- Standards in GCSE drama are high.
- The subject is well managed and is improving well.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning.
- Too few pupils are entered for GCSE English literature.
- Some pupils in Years 7 – 9 do not understand the progress they are making.

75. Overall, pupils are achieving well throughout Years 7 – 9. Standards of the current Year 9 pupils' work are well above average and high standards are reflected in the school's national test results. The 2001 results were well above the national average, as they have been for the past four years, and were also well above the average of schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. There are no significant differences between the results of boys and girls. A very high proportion of pupils reach well above the National Curriculum level expected for pupils of their age. In many lessons seen during the inspection, confident and fluent oral contributions were notable features and pupils responded well to the teachers' open-ended questions which encouraged the pupils to express their ideas freely. Standards of reading are well above average and the highest attaining pupils show insight and maturity of thought; for example, when they contrasted Lessing's *Through the Tunnel* with Thomas' *A Child's Christmas in Wales*. They explained clearly the impact of the writers' use of techniques, such as extended metaphor, and they enjoyed and responded with assurance to this challenging assignment. The average pupils have a secure understanding of the themes and events in their set Shakespeare texts, but are uncertain when called to analyse the impact of language on the reader. Most lower attainers read fluently but with little expression. However, they can, for example, outline the plot of *Macbeth* and understand the narrative and can explain how Shakespeare's language conveys the mood of panic of Macbeth and his wife after Duncan's murder. Most pupils make good progress in their writing: they learn the skills of organisation and paragraphing and improve their accuracy. The range of vocabulary and the syntax of higher attainers are very good. Average attainers lack flair for language but their accuracy and clarity are reliable. Lower attainers make spelling and punctuation errors, but their writing conveys meaning clearly.

76. In Year 11, standards are also well above average and, overall, pupils achieve well throughout Years 10 and 11. The results of the 2001 GCSE English examination were broadly in line with the national average and were better than most schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. However, the school enters significantly more pupils than most schools and, bearing this in mind, the results were actually above average. The 2001 results were lower than the school's well above average results of the previous two years owing to the disappointing performance of the boys who significantly outnumbered girls in the year group. The GCSE English literature results were significantly above the national average, maintaining the standards of the previous two years. However, in contrast to GCSE English, the school's entry rate is significantly below the national average and not as high as it should be. Standards have risen since 2001 owing to much better achievement from the current Year 11 boys.

Standards of speaking and listening are well above average. All pupils make effective spoken contributions to lessons. Their coursework also shows well above average standards of reading and writing. Most pupils have produced a series of substantial, well-organised, clearly expressed and accurately written assignments. The higher attaining pupils sustain mature analytical writing in challenging assignments; for example, when contrasting how different poets present the theme of death. Like their counterparts in Year 9, higher attainers in Year 11 are motivated by such tasks. The average pupils write accurately and their work is characterised by appropriate paragraphing and a sense of purpose. Some pupils, usually boys, do not always give sufficiently detailed examples or comments when these are expected and this lowers their reading assessment grades, but their written style is concise and direct. Some pupils who are capable of a GCSE grade C in their writing assessments fail to do so because they make too many errors and lack control of standard English expression. Some of these pupils' work is well below average because of the frequency of their mistakes; nevertheless, they still communicate their intention effectively.

77. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as shown by their Year 9 test and GCSE examination results in English. They benefit from teaching methods and resources that are well matched to their needs because of good liaison between English and special needs staff. This is clearly shown by the very effective arrangements the school is making to support below average Year 7 pupils with the teaching of progress units from the National Literacy Strategy. Overall, the teaching of basic skills, including numeracy, is good. However, although information and communication technology is often used very effectively, some pupils lack opportunity to use computers in their work because these resources are not available to them. At present, there is only one pupil for whom English is an additional language although there is a very small number of pupils who have settled from other countries. Provision is good and well organised by the co-ordinator for special educational needs. Pupils' needs are carefully assessed and suitably met. Scrutiny of work shows that all of these pupils make progress as well as other pupils.

78. The attitudes of the pupils are good. Occasionally, a very small number of less well motivated pupils, usually in the middle classes, show a lack of interest but respond better when the aims and purposes of the tasks are made clear and the pace of the lesson is good. More consistent application of the features of the National Literacy Strategy will further assist this process. Pupils in Years 7 – 9 respond well to their teachers; however, they are seldom clear about their standards in relation to National Curriculum levels and potential targets and do not have sufficient knowledge of the criteria to meet their targets.

79. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. The teachers' subject expertise is a strength; consequently, the pupils make good progress in organising their writing, analysing literary techniques and writing in a range of *genres*. Teachers' subject expertise helps pupils to prepare well for their examinations. Year 9 and 11 pupils receive very good guidance, which helps them to do full justice to their knowledge, skills and understanding in examination answers. Pupils work hard because the teachers have high expectations of them. Their exercise books and coursework reflect frequent and extensive assignments, completed both in class and at home. A strength is the way that the teachers match materials and methods to the learners' needs; for example, higher attaining Year 11 pupils wrote descriptive pieces as a result of analysing high quality modern examples of the genre (Lodge, Kesey). Again, Year 7 pupils responded enthusiastically when analysing features of fiction for young children and the open ended nature of this task enabled the pupils to give full rein to their intelligence and curiosity. Lower attaining Year 9 pupils benefit from very clear expectations and the use of short-term tasks, for example, when they analyse passages about the development of English. The marking of the pupils' work is also very good, especially in Years 10 and 11, with strengths and weaknesses clearly identified.

80. The English department has made a good overall improvement since the previous inspection. Standards are higher now and there is less 'over-directed' teaching. GCSE drama has been successfully established. The subject is well managed and its leadership is good and is fully committed to maintaining and raising standards. Teaching and learning are systematically monitored and evaluated in order to

make improvements. The teachers show the highest standards of professional commitment and keep abreast of new developments through frequent in-service training.

Drama

81. The 2001 GCSE examination results were well above average, as they were in the previous year. These standards are matched by the current Year 11 pupils who are achieving very well in Years 10 and 11. The pupils do very well to reach such high standards, given that they have little experience of separately taught drama in Years 7 – 9 compared to pupils in other schools.

82. Pupils perform with very good audience awareness; project well; and communicate character very effectively through tone, movement and gesture. They are at ease in the lessons and join in warm up activities with great enthusiasm; their teamwork is of a very high standard. They stay in role with great concentration when performing and provide an attentive and supportive audience when watching. These qualities were all apparent during a Year 10 lesson on 17th century witchcraft based on Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.

83. The teaching is very good and shows excellent subject expertise. The pupils respond positively to the teacher's high expectations. Accommodation is unsatisfactory and lessons take place in the hall, dining area and a classroom, but a drama room is included in new building plans. This will enhance standards further through the provision of better defined performance areas and the use of blackout and lighting to provide a better ambience for performance.

Application of basic skills in other subject - literacy

84. Standards of literacy are well above average and support pupils' learning effectively in all subjects. Literacy is well taught in most subjects and especially well in history. Pupils make good progress in their reading and writing; they read fluently and expressively, and standards of comprehension are above average. Most pupils' writing is clear and well organised. Their planning and paragraphing aids the effectiveness of communication of their knowledge and understanding - a key factor in their examination success. Spelling errors are generally corrected, for example, in mathematics and geography, but not always in physical education.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- Teaching is good and pupils make good progress throughout the school.
- Numeracy is very well taught and strongly developed
- Management and organisation of the subject are effective.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to mathematics.

Areas for improvement

- In some lessons the pace of pupils' learning slows when pupils become restless.
- There is insufficient emphasis of investigation and problem-solving and use of ICT.
- Some pupils, especially boys, do not show enough working in their written answers.

85. The school's results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well above average, and considerably better than at the time of the previous inspection. Results have followed a rising trend since the previous inspection and indicate that pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9.

86. GCSE results are usually above average in most years but were average in 2001 when pupils tended to do better in their other GCSE subjects than in mathematics. Girls' results were above average but boys' results were below.

87. Current standards of work are above average in Year 9. Pupils achieve well as a direct consequence of the quality of teaching. Their standards in arithmetic and algebra are well above average and support their work in geometry and statistics well. Higher attaining pupils have successfully begun their study of trigonometry, and can solve algebraic simultaneous equations. Average pupils are competent with addition, subtraction and multiplication of fractions. Their algebraic skills have developed well to enable them to handle equations and expressions involving brackets. Even the lowest attaining pupils handle questions involving addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of whole numbers with reasonable competence. However, in Years 7 – 9, there is not enough emphasis on mathematical investigations and consequently this element of pupils' work is insufficiently well developed. Whilst most pupils' written work is logical and easy to follow, a minority, especially boys, do not show enough working.

88. Standards are also above average in Year 11 and better than those of the previous year, as indicated by the 2001 GCSE results. Pupils achieve well because the teaching is particularly effective in enabling pupils to master the GCSE topics. Above average standards in arithmetic and algebra support the pupils' work and learning effectively in geometry, trigonometry, statistics, investigation and problem solving. The highest attaining pupils are achieving well and, for example, understand surds, negative and fractional indices, and how to solve quadratic equations. These pupils are moving confidently towards GCSE grades A* and A. Average pupils can apply their knowledge effectively; for example, when using trigonometry to solve right-angled triangles. These pupils' work and practice examination questions are consistent with GCSE grades B and C. The lowest attaining pupils are also GCSE candidates; these pupils have reasonable numerical skills and most of their work is consistent with GCSE grades F and G. or better. However, some pupils' written and graphical work is below their level of understanding of the subject. Their graphs and geometrical figures lack precision and their responses to questions set in text or mathematical symbols lack sufficient detail to enable a GCSE marker to award full credit for method.

89. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as they move through the school. Many of these pupils begin their studies of mathematics in Year 7 with a feeble grasp of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division of whole numbers, yet by Year 11 they successfully achieve lower GCSE grades.

90. Pupils' attitudes to mathematics are generally good throughout the school and have a positive effect on their learning. Consequently, the learning atmosphere in most classrooms is good or very good. Pupils listen well, concentrate on their work, try hard, and ask for help confidently and boldly. They sometimes become restless when the teaching does not fully engage their concentration or interest. A minority of pupils should have better attitudes towards tackling and finishing homework.

91. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school, maintaining the quality found at the time of the previous inspection. This good overall quality of teaching enables pupils of all levels of attainment to make good progress. Teachers constantly work to improve pupils' numerical skills, particularly through explanation and practice of mental arithmetic, and this enables pupils to work through examples quickly. Pupils master the mathematical topics effectively, revising and extending them progressively as they move through the school. Although teachers explain carefully how to set out written work in a logical manner, they do not always ensure that pupils' work contains sufficient detail. Marking also varies in quality, from very good and helpful, to lacking sufficient detail. Teachers manage their classes well, and there is a sense of progress and urgency about the work. Explanations are clear and careful questioning identifies areas that need further emphasis to ensure that the pupils master them fully. Classroom

assistants work very effectively in special needs classes, providing good individual help to pupils so that they can experience success. However, teachers do not use ICT sufficiently to support and extend pupils' work in mathematics. In some lessons, there is too much talk and explanation from the teacher, leaving the pupils with insufficient time to practise and consolidate what they have learned. Teachers prepare pupils well for the national tests at the end of Year 9 and GCSE in Year 11. Where the school timetable assigns lessons of only 35 minutes to mathematics, it limits the effectiveness of the teaching and experience that can be provided for the pupils in the time.

92. The management and organisation of mathematics are good and above average standards have been maintained over several years. The head of department leads his team by example in the classroom; however, there is scope for more delegation of management tasks to other members of the team, for example, the monitoring of pupils' work. Staff morale is very good and teachers are particularly keen to ensure that pupils reach their potential. Improvements since the previous inspection are satisfactory, especially considering the effective incorporation of the National Numeracy Strategy into the school's work. However, there has been insufficient improvement in the use of ICT, and insufficient development of work in investigations, problem solving and using and applying mathematics, especially in Years 7 – 9. Relatively few pupils, about a sixth of them, are taking the higher tier GCSE course. The school would do well to ensure that all pupils who may need to take a course of mathematics at sixth-form level study the higher tier GCSE topics, which give the necessary grounding in algebra.

The application of basic skills in other subjects - numeracy

93. Pupils' numerical skills and competence in other areas of the subject are developed so strongly in mathematics that the pupils encounter very few problems when using and applying their knowledge and understanding in other subjects. Graphs, numerical work, and the use of algebraic formulae in science pose no difficulties for most pupils. The same applies to measurement, units and the use of scale in design and technology. Equally, no difficulties are encountered in other subjects in the interpretation of graphs, charts and statistical data, for example, in geography or history.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Results of national tests and GCSE examinations are above average.
- The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are well taught.
- Practical science is well developed.
- The teaching is consistently good.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient use of ICT in lessons, particularly for data-logging.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning is ineffective in Years 10 and 11.

94. Standards are above average in Years 9 and 11. These standards are due to consistently good teaching combined with positive pupils' attitudes. Overall, pupils' achieve well throughout the school taking into account their attainment on joining Year 7.

95. The results of the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were above average. Although results over the past four years have varied, they have been consistently above average. However, they are lower than in the results of the English and mathematics tests. In Year 9 pupils' understanding of biology, physics and chemistry is above average for their age. Standards in experimental and investigative science are relatively weak in Year 7 but improve rapidly across the age range due to the

many opportunities pupils get to develop their investigative skills. For example, by Year 9, pupils can devise an experiment to compare the heat output of three different fuels, controlling the variables carefully.

96. The majority of pupils take GCSE double award science although a small number of pupils take GCSE single award science. Standards in Year 11 are above average overall as reflected in recent GCSE results. Over the last four years results have been consistently above average; although they were lower in 2001 compared with those of previous years they were still above the national average in double award science. All pupils entered for GCSE single award science achieved at least a G grade and most did better. Experimental and investigative skills continue to improve across this age range and are well above average. For example, pupils are able to produce detailed experimental data on rates of chemical

reactions. The evaluation and analysis of their results is very thorough and, as a result, they achieve high standards in this aspect of science. Standards in biology, chemistry and physics are above average and improving. Pupils reach broadly similar standards in each of these aspects of science.

97. The basic skills of numeracy and literacy are well taught and contribute significantly to the good progress pupils make in their lessons. Year 7 pupils are taught the advantages of displaying data from their experiments graphically which enables them to interpret and analyse their results clearly.

98. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets set for them owing to effective teaching. Learning support assistants work competently to facilitate the pupils' learning. Pupils with English as an additional language and gifted and talented pupils make the same good progress as other pupils in the school.

99. Pupils are well behaved in lessons and have positive attitudes towards science. They carry out practical work safely and carefully. However, some lower-attaining pupils can become restless towards the end of theory lessons and this slows the pace of the lesson.

100. Teaching and learning are good overall. In Years 7 to 9 the monitoring of teaching and learning is helping to raise standards although this does not yet extend to Years 10 and 11. Teachers have a good understanding of science and explain key concepts in science clearly. For example, in a lesson for Year 7 pupils, the idea of current and voltage in a circuit were explained by means of suitable analogies, such as a race round a track with hurdles. Most lessons have clear learning objectives, which makes the teaching more effective because pupils have a good understanding of what they are expected to learn. The pupils' interest in science is enhanced by the effective use of resources; for example, a mobile planetarium engaged the interest of Year 8 pupils when they were learning about the solar system. Pupils are interested in their work and they concentrate well in lessons. Homework is set regularly and is an important factor in consolidating the pupils' knowledge and understanding. Marking of pupils' work is accurate and regular but could be more informative in terms of the pupils' strengths and weaknesses in order to raise standards of work.

101. Numeracy and literacy skills are well taught. Pupils' good numeracy skills help them to make good progress; they manipulate formulae confidently and display their work effectively using graphs. Pupils' good literacy skills and vocabulary are enhanced through teaching the technical language of science. The provision of equipment for ITC and its use have improved since the previous inspection but there is no hardware for data-logging.

102. The subject is very well led and its management is satisfactory but teaching and learning are not monitored effectively in Years 10 and 11. Assessment of pupils' work at the end of topics is thorough and accurate and assessment data enables teachers to set targets for pupils and to measure their progress. The science club attracts a number of pupils out of school hours. Since the previous inspection, good standards are being maintained.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- GCSE results have improved since the previous inspection.
- Teaching is good, and as a result, pupils achieve well.
- There is a vigorous approach to the use of materials in lessons.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' cultural development.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough use of ICT.
- There is not enough work on a large scale.

103. The results of the teachers' National Curriculum assessments of the previous Year 9 pupils were above average. The standards of the current Year 9 pupils are also above average and pupils are achieving well in relation to their starting points at the beginning of Year 7. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. Pupils make good progress in their skills in drawing, painting and in three-dimensional construction, especially when working with card, paper, string, and fabrics. Their masks based on the study of gargoyles, and mobiles based on the work of Alexander Calder, are well made and create lively displays in the classroom. They make good progress in their skills of composition, and their use of colour is bold and bright. They work from observation confidently and make lively and expressive chalk pastel drawings of birds, which capture the essential attitude and character of the subject. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because there is an imaginative approach to materials which interests them; for example, folded and crumpled kitchen foil is used to make pictures based on architecture. However, pupils do not use ICT enough to support and extend their work, and much of their work is too small to develop their broader handling skills.

104. Pupils taking the GCSE course achieve well and, in Year 11, standards are well above average. GCSE results have risen substantially since the previous inspection, when they were well below average, and reflect strongly improving standards. The results in 2001 were above average, and three-quarters of pupils achieved a grade C or better. Both boys and girls did better than the national average, and the boys' results were well above average. Pupils make good progress in their three-dimensional work; for example, producing unusual wire sculptures which express the fragility and brittle qualities of insects. Pupils' drawing becomes more vigorous and adventurous, and their figure work combines confident use of line with rich textures achieved by using rubbings and collage. Some still life drawings are developed further by the use of plaster and cloth to build up strikingly rich textures and thick *impasto*, in the style of Bomberg and Auerbach. Pupils' sketchbooks are lively and are used well for experimenting with materials. Painting continues to show high levels of skill in composition and the use of colour although large-scale approaches are not used often enough to fully develop and exploit the pupils' well above average skills. Gifted and talented pupils are identified and achieve well, as a result of the good teaching, and the extra time and extension activities which are planned for them.

105. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are consistently good. Pupils behave well because the active nature of the lessons interest them and because of the teachers' expectations.

106. Teaching and learning are consistently good. A strong feature of the teaching is the vigorous use of materials and processes which captures the pupils' interest and develops pupils' media-handling skills; for example, in one lesson, a mixture of paint and sand was applied with a palette knife to create very thick *impasto* effects. Again, in another lesson, pupils used wire, paper and glue effectively to create imaginative shapes based on insect forms. Lessons are well prepared and move at a brisk pace. Teachers have good subject knowledge and provide individual pupils with advice. Literacy and numeracy skills are reinforced well. Key subject vocabulary is used consistently, and practical measuring and estimation skills are used effectively; for example, in three-dimensional constructions. At times, however, pupils begin to chatter and lose concentration for short periods.

107. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, and standards have improved throughout the school. The quality of teaching has improved and pupils achieve well as a result. Leadership and management are good and successfully focus on raising standards. Whilst the accommodation is satisfactory overall, the rooms are too small for the larger classes, especially when working with a materials in a larger scale. The subject makes a very good contribution to pupils' cultural development, with a good range of gallery visits and active workshops used to extend pupils' knowledge and understanding of the world of art. For example, Year 10 pupils spent a day at the Tate Gallery in Liverpool making drawings of examples of British sculpture. Pupils study the work of a wide range of artists, including Jenny Saville, Morandi and De Stael, and this helps pupils to develop their own art. In addition, the art of other cultures, including Indian and African art, is used to stimulate ideas, especially in drawing and painting.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths.

- Standards of practical work are good.
- The teaching is good overall.
- The use of assessment data to monitor progress and set targets is good.
- The teachers work together well, sharing planning and development.

Areas for improvement.

- Monitoring teaching and learning needs to be more purposeful.
- CAD/CAM is not exploited sufficiently and pupils lack experience with control technology.
- 35-minute lessons are too short for this practical subject.

108. Standards of work in Year 9 are above the national average overall and the results of recent teachers' assessments indicate similar standards. Pupils achieve well and make good progress in Years 7 – 9. Practical work is a good feature and the better design folders are neatly presented. The use of colour and shading is good and examples of this were seen in a graphics project in Year 9 and some interesting designs in Year 8 pupils' work in textiles. In Year 7, pupils' work is good in an exploration of Chinese patterns. Pupils' work in an electronic badge project includes some good drawings of symbols and circuits. Some work is weaker, mainly amongst lower attaining pupils, owing to a lack of research ideas, drawings out of proportion and poorly annotated, poor handwriting and spelling errors. Some of these pupils have difficulty in recalling previous work and naming items of equipment correctly.

109. Standards of work of present Year 11 pupils are variable but average overall, as reflected in the GCSE results, which are in line with the national averages. There is no significant difference in the standards achieved by boys and girls and the subject compares favourably with other subjects in the school. All pupils, including those with learning or behavioural difficulties, make good progress overall and achieve well, particularly in their practical work in resistant materials and electronics, in relation to their earlier attainment. The GCSE results vary considerably between the different technology subjects but some very good work can be seen in all of them and standards in graphics, textiles and electronics are above average. GCSE resistant materials tends to be taken by lower attaining pupils and, for that reason, standards are lower in resistant materials than in the other technology subjects and this brings down overall standards to average overall; nevertheless, these pupils achieve well in relation to their capabilities. The use of clip-art to research patterns and themes in textiles, the use of photographs and an appreciation of architectural features in a graphics project, and neat drawings in a food technology project researching alternative breakfasts are all examples of good work. Pupils have made some very good free-hand drawing in their research of traditional clocks in resistant materials lessons, and pupils'

work in textiles has benefited from the influence of African culture in their designs for cushions. Where the work is weaker, there tends to be an over-reliance on commercial material for research, a lack of depth in developing ideas, evaluations being too descriptive or the work is incomplete. Practical outcomes, however, are generally good and this is a strength.

110. Pupils have good attitudes to work. They respond well when challenged and work well in groups. There are some instances of inattention when pupils are slow to respond to the teacher's instructions.

111. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are well supported in the department and pupils talk confidently about their work. Pupils do best in practical work and make good progress in this aspect of their work. Some other lessons, although satisfactory, lack pace and challenge. Most lessons have a good mix of activities and this helps to motivate and interest the pupils. Although lesson objectives are usually shared with the pupils and good plenary sessions are also a feature of the better lessons, teachers' expectations are not sufficiently clear in some other lessons and pupils sometimes lack understanding of how well they are learning. All teachers give generously of their time out of school hours to help pupils with their work.

112. The leadership of the subject is satisfactory but monitoring of teaching and learning needs improvement. Pupils have insufficient experience with control technology and CAD/CAM and, with better application of these, would achieve higher standards still. Curriculum time is on the short side in Year 8 but pupils still make good progress. The 35-minute lessons are too short and split lessons over lunchtime are unhelpful for practical lessons, particularly in food technology. The accommodation provides a good learning environment and good display of work supports the learning. A technician gives valuable support across all areas of the department.

113. The school has made a satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection. The GCSE results have risen in line with the national trend; the accommodation has improved but the resistant materials area is in need of refurbishment. ICT resources have improved and the assessment system is much better.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and pupils learn effectively and achieve well.
- Standards are above average and the GCSE results are steadily improving.
- Good use of data to set targets and to check pupils' progress.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT and fieldwork is not extensive enough in Years 7 to 9.
- The 35-minute lessons are too short.
- Too many classes are taught by more than one teacher.

114. The standards of pupils' work in Year 9 are above average and are reflected accurately in the teachers' assessments. In relation to their average standards at the start of Year 7, the standards reached represent a good overall achievement. Pupils make good progress through Years 7 – 9; they increase their knowledge and understanding of different places from a local to a world scale and develop their skills of map-reading and photograph interpretation well. By Year 9, lower-attaining pupils draw accurate climate graphs and describe the patterns of temperature and rainfall, and those of average and higher attainment successfully relate these patterns to different climate regions. Pupils' understanding of the causes and effects of global warming is not as detailed as it should be, particularly for higher-attaining pupils, because they have less time than other classes in Year 9.

115. The pupils who choose to study geography to GCSE are drawn from the whole ability range and their overall attainment is average at the beginning of the course. Pupils achieve well in this subject and, by Year 11, their standards of work are above average. GCSE results have steadily improved since the previous inspection. In 2001, they were above average and the proportion of pupils who achieved the highest (A* and A) grades was greater than the national average. The girls achieved higher GCSE results than the boys in 2001 and the difference was much greater than found nationally. A number of boys underachieved in that year but the difference between the current standards of boys and girls is much less marked than the 2001 examination results suggest.

116. In their fieldwork on river channels, Year 11 pupils collect, present and analyse data to test a number of hypotheses. Higher attainers get virtually full marks for their lengthy accounts that are well written and include valid conclusions. They are aware of how they could extend and improve their findings. Middle attainers make errors in their calculation of river discharge but nevertheless achieve above average standards. The work of the lower-attaining pupils is less detailed and sometimes incomplete but their standards of work are still average. All Year 11 pupils are engaged in fieldwork and this practical aspect of the subject has helped to motivate the pupils. Higher-attaining pupils apply their knowledge of industrial location effectively, for example, to account for the location of the chemical industry of the British Isles. Lower attainers begin to understand the complex moral and social issues associated with the exploitation of natural resources, for example, in Amazonia, and have a balanced view of the need to conserve the rainforest whilst improving the standard of living of the people of Brazil.

117. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Teachers and classroom assistants work very well together to ensure that pupils are interested, concentrate on their work and learn at a good pace. Because of this, pupils sometimes achieve average standards; for example when Year 7 pupils completed work on the location of London.

118. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. The high level of interest shown in their learning enables lessons to proceed quickly. Very good attendance means that there are very few gaps in their work and almost all work is completed. The presentation of their work shows a determination to achieve well. Year 11 pupils benefit from very good preparation for GCSE in the form of impressive files of notes and completed past examination questions help the pupils to revise effectively.

119. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen and the quality of teaching and learning ranged from satisfactory to excellent. The teachers have very good subject expertise and know exactly what their pupils need to do to achieve well in the GCSE examination. For example, in an excellent lesson, Year 11 pupils increased the depth of their knowledge and their understanding of the examination topic on the river Ganges basin, listening intently to the teacher's superb explanation of how they could achieve full marks. Regularly reviewed target grades give the Year 10 and 11 pupils a clear understanding of their progress. Fieldwork and enquiry methods are not used enough in Years 7 to 9. Lessons make use of up-to-date technology but pupils in Years 7 – 9 lack opportunities to use ICT and, in this respect, statutory requirements for the subject are not met in full.

120. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are well taught. The use of technical language is gradually developed and pupils write for a variety of purposes, for example, reports, letters and poetry.

121. Many lessons in Years 7 to 9 are single periods. These are too short and there is insufficient time to engage pupils actively in the lesson or to consolidate their learning. This pattern of short lessons reduces the efficiency of teaching and learning. Also, too many classes in Years 7 and 8 are taught by more than one teacher.

122. Leadership and management of the subject are good. Teaching and pupils' work are monitored and assessment data is being used well, especially in Years 10 and 11, to monitor pupils' progress.

Improvement since the previous inspection has been good and, in particular, standards have risen. The head of department manages a difficult staffing situation very well and helps part-time and non-specialist teachers to maintain high standards, especially in the shared classes.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average throughout the school.
- The teaching is good.
- Attitudes and behaviour are very good.
- The school's literacy strategy is applied consistently and effectively.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT in teaching and learning is insufficient.
- The assessment of work in Years 7 – 9 does not use National Curriculum levels.
- The minuting of departmental meetings needs to be more thorough.

123. Standards of Year 9 pupils' work are above average and show that pupils achieve well in relation to their attainment at the start of Year 7. Most pupils identify the key issues in source material, and the higher attainers select, evaluate and organise their evidence to present their findings coherently. Individual research work, for example, on the Accrington Pals in World War 1, shows a mature understanding of the concepts of suffering, patriotism and service to one's country, and the conflict between these and other ideals. The focus on the teaching of historical skills and the analysis of source material provides a sound foundation for further studies in the subject.

124. Standards of the Year 11 pupils' work are also above average and the GCSE results are consistently above national averages, reflecting a good overall achievement. The girls' GCSE results were particularly good last year. Although boys and girls reach similar standards, the girls' examination results reflect their commitment to detail and their competence in evaluating and organising their findings. Most pupils have a constructive approach to the study of a wide variety of complex source material and become more skilful in independent research. They can discern the key factor of the interpretation of evidence before making specific judgements. These skills were clearly exemplified in some individual assignments on the effects of the Vietnam War on civilians both in Vietnam and the USA; they showed a good understanding of the political, economic and social consequences of the war and the short and long-term effects in a global perspective.

125. Throughout the school, most pupils achieve good standards of organised written work as a result of good teaching and working to well-structured writing frames. The presentation of their work is such that very little correction is necessary. The accurate matching of work to differing attainment levels and the effective application of the literacy policy underpins the strategy for the raising of standards.

126. The attitude and behaviour of most pupils are consistently very good. In response to well-planned and well-structured lessons, which create a good working environment, the pupils show a high level of commitment and concentration. They have a clear understanding of the work in hand; they know what to do and how to set about their tasks in a structured and organised way. This increases their levels of expectation and encourages them to work hard, confident that they can achieve a good level of knowledge and understanding and present their oral and written responses to best effect.

127. The teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and objectives are presented in such a way that pupils clearly understand what is to be learned. Illustrations from present-day, world

situations are used effectively to explain concepts being taught about past events; for example, Year 8 lower attaining pupils, in a lesson about the rights and wrongs of the Royalist and Parliamentary sides in the Civil War, explained why or why not they supported a local football team. This immediately captured the class's attention and imagination and created a good basis for understanding some of the reasons why people supported the side that they did. Teachers take pupils to museums and places of historical interest, such as Helmshore Industrial Museum and the Housing Industrial Towers, both of which are rich in the Victorian heritage of Accrington. These visits stimulate interest in Victorian studies, and enrich the pupils' knowledge of the local heritage. Teachers guide their pupils stage by stage through the key points of the lesson effectively, reinforcing learning and ensuring that pupils understand each step before moving on. Teachers prepare pupils well for examinations by teaching the techniques of answering questions effectively. Work set for pupils is well matched to their differing attainment levels and this ensures that every pupil makes good progress. The consistently effective use of the school's literacy policy ensures a good standard of written work. However, ICT skills are not developed sufficiently well in this subject, as was also found in the previous report. Pupils' good numeracy skills are sometimes drawn upon in lessons, for example, to interpret data to substantiate judgements, but this needs to be further developed. The marking of written work identifies strengths and weaknesses and shows pupils how to improve their work. Pupils are involved in the evaluation of their own work, and this gives them a clear picture of the progress they make.

128. The subject has improved satisfactorily since the previous inspection. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory but there is a need to link assessment more clearly to National Curriculum levels in Year 9, and this was also reported at the time of the previous inspection. Minutes of departmental meetings are not minuted so that there is no accurate record of important matters under discussion and the decisions made which would provide a basis for identifying key points for future development.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Pupils have a good foundation of technical skills, laid in Year 7 and Year 9.
- A high proportion of pupils achieved grades A* and A at GCSE in 2001
- Pupils use the Internet well for independent research.

Areas for Improvement

- ICT is insufficiently exploited in pupils' learning in most subjects.
- Work is not well matched to the needs of all pupils in some lessons.
- The requirements of the National Curriculum in ICT are not fully met in Years 10 and 11 and a minority of pupils is underachieving.

129. The overall standards of the current Year 9 pupils' work are average. Pupils acquire good technical skills in using computers for analysing and presenting information, for modelling and for presenting their work, but this is not sufficiently applied to their work in other subjects. Consequently their ability to select how to approach different tasks and to design presentations for specific audiences is insufficiently well developed and the teachers' own assessments of pupils at the end of Year 9 do not take sufficient account of this. Similarly, pupils learn about the potential of ICT to measure, record and control events but do not learn to do this practically, for instance, by using data-logging in science. Pupils do not consider alternative layouts sufficiently in order to address specific audiences, for example when designing exhibition labels. The limitation of using only black and white printing, for reasons of economy, limits pupils' ability to use colour in the design of their presentations. Pupils use computers well for independent research, particularly the Internet. Higher attaining pupils and those with good computing

skills find the work too easy. They do not make the progress that they could because all pupils generally work at the same level. Similarly, the lower attaining pupils find the work too hard and tend not to complete their tasks. Nevertheless, teachers' help for individual pupils works well so that, overall, pupils achieve satisfactorily.

130. In the past, a small number of pupils chose to study ICT to GCSE. The GCSE results in 2001 were broadly average overall. However, nearly a quarter of the pupils achieved the highest grades (A* and A), which is well above the national average, and these pupils achieved better results than would have been expected from their assessments in Year 9. Although the overall results indicated that there was also some underachievement, they were an improvement on those of the previous year, which were well below average. The examination results of boys and girls are similar.

131. Standards of the current Year 11 pupils taking the GCSE course in ICT are average and slightly higher than indicated by the examination results in 2001. There are again some individual studies of the highest standard which are thoroughly developed to meet a specific need and are very well presented. Pupils make good use of screen-shots to explain how their work develops, although the printing of finished documents, such as hotel menus, is less good. In Year 10, the pupils are taking a GNVQ course in ICT rather than the GCSE course, and this new course has attracted a much larger group of pupils than in previous years, some of whom are working at Intermediate and some at Foundation level. Standards in the first two units of the GNVQ course are broadly average, but because pupils are attempting this double course in the time normally allocated to a single GCSE course, in addition to some out-of-school time, few are achieving marks necessary for distinctions and some have changed to a different GCSE course. A small but important number of pupils who are not taking an examination course in ICT or business studies do not experience ICT frequently enough fully to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum programme of study, which is, of course, unsatisfactory. Taking all Year 10 and 11 groups into consideration, pupils are achieving satisfactorily overall, although the small but important minority is underachieving.

132. Teaching and learning are good in ICT lessons. In other subjects, however, teachers do not exploit or extend the pupils' ICT skills sufficiently well or frequently enough and this is unsatisfactory. National Curriculum expectations for ICT are not met for pupils in Years 10 and 11 not taking an examination course, nor for the specific ICT requirements in subjects, especially English, mathematics, music and geography. However, ICT lessons are well prepared, teachers have a thorough knowledge of the subject and encourage pupils to undertake independent research. Pupils enjoy their ICT lessons and most of them work hard. They work independently on their research projects but are less independent in the making of decisions, for example, about the design of their work. Pupils collaborate well with one another. Some Year 11 pupils work exceptionally hard on their personal projects and most GNVQ pupils spend extra time on their work at lunchtimes and after school. Pupils take care to present their work attractively and effectively. Pupils' work is marked well and pupils complete self-assessment sheets. However, the level of work and supporting worksheets is not always well matched to the pupils' abilities and attainment levels. In some lessons, teachers give insufficient attention to the application of techniques; for example, when pupils drew different graphs from the same information the teacher missed the opportunity for pupils to discuss which of the graphs presented the information most clearly.

133. The management of ICT courses is good but the co-ordination of the ICT work in other subjects is unsatisfactory. There is an urgent need for the totality of pupils' ICT experience to be planned as a whole and to ensure that all pupils have the required experience of using computers, especially in Years 10 and 11. The pupils' experience of ICT in Year 8 lacks continuity and this impedes their progress, although more curricular time is given for ICT than at the time of the previous inspection. Although resources have improved substantially, the lack of sufficient up-to-date computers and software, until very recently, has restricted pupils' learning opportunities and depressed teachers' expectations. Progress since the previous inspection, therefore, has been unsatisfactory.

Key Skills: Information and communication technology across the curriculum

134. The use of ICT in other subjects is generally unsatisfactory. There are exceptions, however: in physical education lessons, pupils use computers effectively for presentation, research and analysis of performance; in design and technology, pupils use appropriate software for graphics and manufacture as well as for presenting their project work although the subject lacks the facilities for CAD/CAM. Computers are also exploited well to teach pupils with special educational needs. In most other subjects, however, the use of ICT is very patchy and dependent on the inclinations of individual teachers; consequently, many pupils make little or no use of ICT outside their ICT lessons. Several subjects do not meet the National Curriculum requirements for ICT as set out in the respective subject programmes of study. However, some subjects have good plans to begin using ICT in the near future, for example science, which plans to introduce data-logging later this year.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Standards are rising.
- Teaching is better and standards are higher in German than French.
- Pupils have good attitudes and achieve well.

Areas for improvement

- The monitoring of teaching and learning should be more rigorous.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to use ICT.
- Teachers should make greater use of National Curriculum levels to assess pupils' work in Years 7 – 9.

French

135. All pupils in Years 7 – 9 study French. Boys and girls generally achieve well in relation to their starting points in Year 7, and gradually build up their knowledge of basic grammar and vocabulary and regularly practise each skill. Standards of work in Year 9 are average and closely match the teachers' assessments. Pupils speak with good pronunciation and most respond readily and answer simple questions with a phrase or sentence. The higher attaining pupils use the past tense competently; for example, to say what they did last weekend, although some still need written support from the teacher. Pupils adapt models to write sentences and the more advanced pupils can write a paragraph, sometimes with references to both the past and the future, but more opportunities to write freely and at length need to be provided. Pupils develop comprehension skills quite well, picking out details from tapes and printed texts in the course materials but opportunities to read short stories and so develop reading skills further are not yet planned for on a regular basis. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and benefit from being well supported in smaller sized classes.

136. The majority of pupils in Year 11 take French to GCSE, apart from a significant proportion of lower attaining pupils who do not study a language beyond Year 9 and some very high attaining pupils who choose to continue with German rather than French. The GCSE results were average in 2001. Overall, pupils achieve well in French and standards of work are above average by Year 11. Standards are higher than the most recent examination results suggest. Factors contributing to this improvement are more consistently good teaching with a clear focus on improving writing skills, and more attention to boys' achievement in relation to their potential. The highest attaining pupils write with a high degree of fluency and accuracy on a wide range of different topics and many pupils show a reasonable command of different tenses in their written accounts and descriptions, despite some inaccuracies. However, a small number of lower attaining pupils, mainly boys, do not achieve as well as they should because they do not understand the written instructions in French. Comprehension skills continue to develop well. All pupils identify some information from tapes and texts and pupils in the higher classes deal with much longer extracts and can often recognise different viewpoints and attitudes. All pupils are well prepared

for the GCSE speaking test and can give a presentation on a subject of their choosing. Higher attaining pupils speak confidently about holidays, expressing opinions of previous holidays and giving reasons for where they would like to go in the future.

137. Attitudes towards French are good. Pupils come prepared to work hard. They enjoy working in pairs and groups and boys participate as keenly as girls in oral work. They learn their vocabulary and revise well for tests. Behaviour is good. There is good support for the annual school exchange to France, which contributes significantly to pupils' social and cultural development.

138. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and is sometimes very good. Teachers know and manage pupils very well and have good working relationships with them. Teachers plan their lessons well using resources that catch pupils' interest and activities that involve them, thereby helping them to memorise vocabulary quickly and to improve oral confidence and pronunciation. This was clearly shown in a Year 7 lesson, introducing vocabulary for the layout of a house, in which a bag of objects from around the home was used to very good effect to help pupils learn quickly and commit to memory the words for the different rooms. Expectations regarding the tier of entry for GCSE are suitably high and pupils are encouraged to do their best. Time is used very effectively in both single and double lessons. Teachers speak French fluently and consistently, which encourages greater use of French by the pupils and develops their listening skills further. Marking and assessment are good overall, with very good practice in Years 10 and 11. However, there is some inconsistency in Years 7 - 9 relating to the frequency of use of National Curriculum levels.

German

139. Higher attaining pupils begin German as a second language in Year 8. They progress quickly and develop all the skills well. Standards in Year 9 are above average and represent good achievement over time. Pupils show ready understanding of instructions and pick out specific details and opinions from what they hear and read. Their pronunciation is good because new words are drilled routinely and they have good opportunities to practise speaking. They speak and write accurately in sentences because they build up their knowledge of grammar and learn to apply the rules correctly. Pupils write paragraphs and can use the past tense, for example to give an account of a past weekend. Some of the most advanced pupils reach a higher level because they can also make successful reference to the future.

140. Standards of work in Year 11 are well above average and closely match the recent GCSE results. Of particular note in 2001 was the very high proportion of grades A* and A grades achieved by half the pupils entered for the examination. Pupils' achievement is good in relation to their starting points at the end of Year 9. They reach high standards because they work very hard and because the teaching is consistently very good. They write and speak fluently and accurately on a range of topics, such as their home town, school or leisure pursuits, using different tenses appropriately and displaying a good command of quite complex grammar structures. They are fully accustomed to hearing German spoken consistently in lessons and to working in the foreign language and this contributes significantly to their oral confidence and very good pronunciation. They develop their comprehension skills well and can identify factual and abstract information from tapes and printed texts. Numbers opting for German have doubled since the previous inspection and reflect pupils' enjoyment of the subject.

141. Pupils have very good attitudes towards learning German. Pupils enjoy what they do and maintain a high level of concentration and effort throughout the lessons. They are well motivated and take much pride in the presentation of their written work. Behaviour is excellent. GCSE pupils, of whom a good number intends continuing German in one or other of the local sixth forms, have excellent attitudes and their support for the German visit to the Rhine valley in the autumn term was high.

142. Teaching and learning in German are consistently very good. Lessons are thoroughly planned, relationships are very good and pupils are well managed, which ensures that pupils learn effectively and at a brisk pace. Skilful use is made of overhead transparencies to revise vocabulary, explain grammar points and as a stimulus for oral work. This was clearly demonstrated in an excellent Year 11 revision

lesson on the topic of school. After a quick-fire oral brainstorming session to focus pupils' attention on the key words and main points to be exploited, pupils engaged in an impressive discussion in pairs, confidently asking pertinent questions and giving original and lengthy replies, spurred on by the teacher to vary the range and complexity of the language used and to develop their answers by drawing on other topics as appropriate.

143. Leadership and management of modern languages are good and improvement overall since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Teachers work hard together as a team and regular monitoring has led to an improvement in teaching style and quality. However, the process needs to focus more clearly on raising standards. Assessment practice is good overall but, although teachers have a good understanding of assessment criteria, insufficient reference to National Curriculum levels in Years 7–9 leaves some pupils unclear about how well they are doing and what they need to do to move up to the next level. Opportunities for pupils to use ICT in modern languages are too infrequent.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Music has improved strongly since the previous inspection.
- The teaching is good overall and very good in Years 10 and 11.
- Standards are above average.
- Extra-curricular activities are of very high quality and appeal equally to boys and girls.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment needs to be streamlined and involve the pupils more, allowing them to build on their strengths and improve their weaknesses.
- There are insufficient computers to develop pupils' composition skills, particularly in Years 7 – 9.
- Lessons in Years 7 – 9 are too short for rigorous development of practical skills.

144. Teachers' assessments of the Year 9 pupils' attainment in music in 2001 indicated that the proportion of pupils reaching the level expected at that age was average when compared to national statistics. However, it is likely that attainment is being under-estimated by the teachers because the current Year 9 pupils' work is above average and represents a good overall achievement in relation to their earlier attainment, when they joined Year 7. The results indicate that higher attaining girls and boys achieve equally well, but girls achieve more highly than boys amongst the average and lower attainers. This is not significantly different than from what is found nationally, however.

145. By Year 9, pupils' compositions range from simple and straightforward melodies to interesting and adventurous ones with more complex rhythms, for example, for a spy story in a project on music and the media. Taped examples show that these compositions generally have a coherent structure within which pupils can vary the character. Performances are confident, with the *ostinato* played steadily. Pupils accommodate each other with subtle changes of speed in order to keep together. They listen carefully and their appraising skills are strong. They are perceptive listeners and use their very good knowledge of music to support their listening. They use musical terminology in their discussions and writing on music. Evaluations of their own and others' work are perceptive and articulate. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are very successful in this practical subject and make good progress.

146. Standards of the Year 11 GCSE pupils' work are well above average and represent a very good achievement from their starting point at the outset of the course in Year 10. Very few pupils take GCSE in music and comparisons with national averages must be treated with caution. Nevertheless, the

overall results were very high in 2001 and all pupils passed the examination. There is no significant difference between the results of boys and girls. Many Year 11 pupils compose with flair and imagination. Some use software scoring and exploit the more realistic instrumental *timbres* available although one or two pupils find composing difficult. The standard of musical performance is well above average; taped examples reveal very good technical control of tone and intonation. The pupils' playing and singing is stylish and expressive and a video of their concert shows that many of them play with a good sense of occasion. In ensemble work, their ability to play together well is impressive and their diaries indicate that they listen widely. Year 10 pupils have very good aural skills, supported by very good knowledge of musical techniques and terms, which they use confidently in the lessons.

147. Pupils behave very well in class and their attitudes to music are very good. They are interested and enjoy what they do, staying behind at the end of the lesson to discuss their activities further. Some 250 pupils take part in a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. Some of these pupils are gifted young musicians who are very committed to these activities, which are supported by very good instrumental lessons. The number of pupils learning to play an instrument, currently about 200, is rising.

148. Teaching and learning are good overall and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is never less than satisfactory. Teachers have very good knowledge and skills in their subject; they are practising musicians and as such enrich the lessons and extra-curricular activities with their expertise. They are good role models and, as a result, pupils are acquiring very good knowledge and good performing and composing skills, both in and out of lessons. Teachers challenge their pupils effectively in the majority of lessons, but should ensure that this is consistently so, especially with the higher attaining classes. For example, the questions about pop music failed to challenge and probe a bright and lively Year 8 class. Methods vary and are appropriate, particularly in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9, there is insufficient time in short lessons for practical activities to yield worthwhile development and refinement in compositions and performances and this adversely affects pupils' progress.

149. Teachers set a very good pace in the lessons and pupils work quickly. There is a well-established ethos of effort and pupils concentrate well on their work. This is particularly impressive in listening sessions although in a long, desk-based lesson for Year 9, pupils' concentration began to flag a little. Homework is set appropriately and regularly and often involves further development of listening skills. Assessment is currently detailed but the process is cumbersome in Years 7 to 9. Pupils need to be involved more and become familiar with the National Curriculum levels of attainment or the GCSE criteria for assessing the quality of their work.

150. Some lessons are taught in the hall because there is no permanent second classroom and this limits what can be done and means that keyboards must be carried from one place to another and this further encroaches on the lesson time available. The department has three computers with appropriate software and there are plans to develop the use of ICT further with the addition of keyboards for computer work. These are to be provided by a generous donation from the parents, who support the department in very good measure.

151. A recent initiative for talented pupils will provide opportunities to work with a local composer. The choirs and bands have had considerable success in local and national competitions and the pupils have travelled abroad to perform. The choir's visit to sing in Montserrat Basilica is a cherished memory for the choir. The quality of the extra-curricular activities is very high and the wide range appeals to both boys and girls, particularly the jazz and concert bands. Productions and concerts are regular features of the school life and these are avidly supported by parents and others from the local community. Teachers, parents and governors are also involved in performances. These experiences rely on the hard work and commitment of the departmental teachers and particularly the head of department, whose leadership, management and vision for music is very good. Music has improved very well since the previous inspection when it was one of the weakest subjects and is now one of the strongest. Pupils are justly proud of the standards and successes achieved. Music provides very good spiritual, social and cultural development for its pupils.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Standards are very high in the GCSE course
- Standards are above average in Years 7–9 and well above average in non-GCSE Years 10 and 11
- The teaching and learning are very good
- Pupils participate in a very good extra-curricular programme which encourages high standards
- Leadership is very effective and the subject is very well managed

Areas for improvement

- The 35-minute lessons for pupils in Years 7–9 are too short
- Unsatisfactory accommodation restricts pupils' progress in indoor games
- A shortage of specialist staff leads to some unsatisfactory teaching

152. Pupils' overall attainment is average when they begin Year 7. Pupils achieve well and, by Year 9, standards are above average in games, athletics and gymnastics. Pupils are confident evaluators of performance: the higher attaining pupils can analyse their performance in depth and suggest improvements, often without prompting by the teacher. For example, in a Year 9 rounders lesson, a higher attaining pupil, on her own initiative, correctly suggested to her partner that she change the point of release in her bowling action in order to make it more accurate. Lower attaining pupils often take longer to establish their physical skills but they know what the basic techniques are and can help others to improve. Pupils have a secure knowledge of health and fitness; for example, they know how to warm up before lessons and do so on their own on many occasions.

153. Standards in Year 11 are well above average and those who take the GCSE course reach very high standards, as reflected in the school's impressive results in examinations. Very high GCSE results have been maintained almost consistently since the previous inspection and the most recent results are the highest yet. The proportion of pupils reaching the highest grades (A* and A) is very high and there have been no failures. There are no significant differences in the standards of girls' and boys' work, which represent very good achievement. The high standards are achieved because the quality of teaching is very good overall and because pupils have very positive attitudes to the subject.

154. The GCSE course pupils have a secure understanding of theoretical elements. They understand social and moral issues linked to sport and they write well-reasoned arguments; for example, on the effects of the media on sport. These pupils have a very good understanding of fitness and the principles of training and the higher-attaining pupils carry out perceptive evaluation of their training plans. Pupils reach high standards in their practical work.

155. Pupils not taking the GCSE reach well above average standards and achieve very well. Pupils plan relevant exercise programmes using their knowledge of fitness and the principles of training. Many pupils confidently assume a number of roles in sport, for example, umpire, coach or tournament organiser. Pupils reach high standards in variety of activities, especially in the games that they continue from Years 7 – 9, such as rounders and cricket.

156. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented make good progress. Teachers know pupils' individual special needs well and adapt equipment and tasks accordingly to ensure that all pupils make the good progress of which they are capable. Gifted and talented pupils have been formally identified and the very good range of extra-curricular activities and good links with local sports organisations ensure that they can reach the highest standards.

157. Pupils are enthusiastic, enjoy lessons and are eager to improve. Over half of the pupils are keen to take part regularly in the very good range of activities provided beyond lessons. For example, during the week of the inspection, more than 80 Year 9 pupils participated in an inter-form competition based on the theme of the Commonwealth Games. GCSE pupils learn their work conscientiously and are prepared to make the extra effort required to reach the highest grades. Behaviour is very good and positive relationships are based on mutual respect and maintained through teachers' calm, firm and friendly approach.

158. The teaching is very good overall. It is good in Years 7 – 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11 and the difference in quality leads to better learning in Years 10 and 11 and accounts for the difference in standards achieved. In particular, teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 because, in Years 7–9, pupils do not always receive enough guidance on what to do to improve their work, especially when taught by non-specialist teachers. Teaching is generally characterised by teachers' high expectations of pupils' behaviour, effort and improvement. Pupils rise to these expectations, come safely prepared for physical activity and work hard. They learn very well and make rapid gains in skills, knowledge and understanding. Teachers use a very good range of teaching approaches based on secure knowledge and understanding of the subject. Teachers use practical demonstration of skills and techniques effectively. They question pupils very well, which helps to build on what pupils have already learnt and which deepens their understanding for example, of the mechanical principles underlying throwing techniques in athletics. Teachers ensure that pupils have plenty of opportunities to evaluate performance. They encourage pupils to work independently. For example, Year 11 pupils plan and then coach practices in rounders and cricket. Teachers pay good attention to developing literacy through emphasising the use of technical language and important words are clearly displayed in the GCSE classroom. Numeracy skills are used frequently and a good start has been made in using ICT extensively as part of teaching and learning. For example, pupils in Year 10 word process their personal training plans; all pupils record athletic performances on a spreadsheet and pupils studying GCSE are expected to use CD-Rom and the Internet for research. Homework extends and develops knowledge and understanding and pupils conscientiously complete the tasks. Work is marked thoroughly and useful comments ensure that pupils know how well they are doing and what to do to improve.

159. The subject has improved well since the previous inspection. Very high GCSE results have been maintained and standards overall have improved. The quality of teaching has improved and there are more opportunities for pupils to plan, evaluate and work independently. Teaching and learning are monitored regularly; schemes of work have been improved and they underpin good approaches to teaching and learning. Assessment strategies have improved and are effective for GCSE; however, in core physical education lessons, pupils are not fully aware of the criteria on which they are assessed.

160. Much of the improvement is due to the very good leadership and management of the subject, which provides very clear educational direction with a clear focus on improving teaching and learning and raising standards. The right priorities for improvement are identified and there is a clear commitment to improve. Accommodation and the timetable are unsatisfactory. Very limited Indoor facilities restrict progress, especially in indoor games. Outdoors, litter and dog fouling are hazards on the playing fields and the hard area is very slippery in damp conditions. In Years 7 to 9, the 35-minute lessons have an adverse effect on the overall quality of learning because they are too short to consolidate work and the lesson is sometimes rushed.