

INSPECTION REPORT

THE BUCKPOOL SCHOOL

Wordsley

LEA area: Dudley

Unique reference number: 103858

Headteacher: Mr Mike Lambert

Reporting inspector: Marjorie Glynne-Jones
2918

Dates of inspection: April 30 – May 4, 2001

Inspection number: 196811

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11-16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Brierley Hill Road
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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Martin Rider

Date of previous inspection: April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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2918	Marjorie Glynne-Jones	Registered inspector	English as an additional language	Information about the school The school's results and achievements How well pupils are taught How well the school is led and managed
9188	Jane McHugh	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
23393	Brian Dower	Team inspector	English	
17258	Chris Phillips	Team inspector	Mathematics	
3735	Jenny Maunder	Team inspector	Science Equal opportunities	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
13066	Mary Harrison	Team inspector	Art and design Special educational needs	
22524	Sylvia Innes	Team inspector	Design and technology Information and communication technology (ICT)	
19991	Peter Devereux	Team inspector	Geography	
20716	Reg Grogan	Team inspector	History Religious education	

13054	Michael Pennington	Team inspector	Modern languages	
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7926	James Bowden	Team inspector	Physical education	
13623	Jim Waddington	Team inspector		Vocational courses

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is in Wordsley, near the town of Stourbridge. It is a mixed comprehensive school that is smaller than most secondary schools, with 631 pupils on roll aged 11 to 16. The number of boys and girls is much the same, evenly balanced in Years 7 to 9 but not in Years 10 and 11. There are considerably more girls in Year 10 and considerably more boys in Year 11. Pupils are able to join the school during the year because it is not full, including pupils making a 'fresh start'. In the last year, the numbers leaving and joining the school amounted to the size of one class. The figures for the Year 7 intake in September 2001 show a rise. About a tenth of the pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds, more than in most schools. In the current year, the school has welcomed refugees who need to learn to speak English; no other pupils are at an early stage of English fluency. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is a little lower than in most schools; the proportion with statements of special needs is below the national average and reflects the local education authority figure. Pupils' special needs are mainly learning difficulties, with a small number who have vision, hearing or speech impairment. The school draws its pupils largely from local estates in areas of greater social disadvantage than is generally true nationally. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is above average. When pupils join the school, their attainment is well below average and their literacy skills are particularly weak.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school. Standards are improving and pupils' achievement is good overall. When pupils join the school, their attainment is well below average; but by the time they leave it has improved so that it is below average, not well below. This is because the teaching and learning are good; pupils are keen to learn and staff are strongly committed to helping pupils to succeed. There is good leadership and management, with a strong lead from the new headteacher. Governors support the staff well, carry out most of their responsibilities as required, but have not looked rigorously enough at school strengths and weaknesses. The school now gives satisfactory value for money, an improvement from the last inspection.

What the school does well

- Leadership and management are good
- The teaching is good
- Pupils achieve well and results are improving
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are good
- Attainment in art and design and design and technology is very good.

What could be improved

- Attendance
- Pupils' achievement in modern languages and, in Years 10 and 11, in ICT
- Pupils' skills in literacy and independent study
- Governors' knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The last inspection was in April 1997. Improvement is good. Year 9 results have improved at much the same rate as they have nationally, with girls' results rising a little faster. At GCSE, results show a rising trend at a slightly faster rate than the national rise; there has been a significant rise in results for five or more grades A*-C; the school received an achievement award for the substantial improvement from 1997. Teaching is significantly better than reported last time. Good improvements have generally been made in subjects, except in ICT. There is good improvement on three of the four key issues: the provision in geography, modern languages and music, teaching especially; the leadership and management by faculty heads, cohesiveness of staff teams and management of non-specialist teaching and monitoring arrangements. On the fourth issue, attendance, the improvement is satisfactory.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with				<i>Key</i>
	all schools			Similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	E	E	D	B	Well above average A Above average B Average C Below average D Well below average E

- Standards in Year 9 tests are average when compared with similar schools, while well below the national average for all schools.
- Year 9 results in mathematics are better than in English and science.
- Results are keeping pace with the rise in Year 9 national results, and at GCSE, are rising a little faster than nationally. Results at A*-C are improving significantly.
- Standards in GCSE examinations are above average when compared with similar schools, while well below the national average for all schools.
- The A*-C and points score targets were exceeded in 2000, although the target for at least one graded pass was not met.
- In the work seen, attainment overall is below the standard expected; there are strengths in mathematics in Years 7 to 9, design and technology, music and physical education where attainment at least reaches the expectation; and considerable strength in art and design.
- Pupils' achievement is good overall. Attainment is well below average when they join Year 7 and by Year 11, their GCSE results are below average. The strengths are in art and design and design and technology in Years 7 to 9 where achievement is very good; there is weakness at each key stage in modern languages and in ICT in Years 10 to 11, where achievement is unsatisfactory.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good; pupils are keen to learn and they listen and concentrate well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good; most pupils behave well at all times but a small minority of older pupils does not; pupils are friendly and polite to each other and to adults.
Personal development and relationships	Satisfactory; relationships are good but there are not enough opportunities for pupils to learn to work and carry out other school responsibilities independently.
Attendance	Unsatisfactory, although improved since the last inspection. It deteriorates as pupils move up the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged 11-14 years	Aged 14-16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good

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

- The good teaching meets the learning needs of all pupils well.
- At both key stages, teaching in English is satisfactory and in science it is good; in mathematics it is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, while good in Years 10 and 11.
- Teaching of literacy and numeracy skills is satisfactory in individual subjects, but because provision is not co-ordinated across the school, the effect is weakened.
- In 96 per cent of lessons, teaching is satisfactory or better and in four per cent it is less than satisfactory. There is good teaching, or better, in 67 per cent of lessons and very good or better teaching in 22 per cent.
- The strengths are in art and design, physical education and teachers' classroom management.
- The least developed feature is homework, although this is entirely satisfactory.
- Pupils learn well; their interest and concentration are often very good, but their skills in working independently are not strong enough.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory opportunities, but because the ICT curriculum does not fully meet requirements, the overall judgement has to be unsatisfactory. There are strengths in personal and social education, the contribution of the community and links with colleges; the lack of literacy strategy is a weakness.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory; pupils generally have full access to the same curriculum as other pupils; the way the school organises teaching groups supports these pupils well.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory overall; planned specialist support is regular and effective, but support for recently arrived refugee pupils is inadequate. The school is seeking to rectify this.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good for each aspect except the provision for spiritual development, which is unsatisfactory; opportunities are missed in assemblies and subject teaching. Staff provide very good role models.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good: there are strengths in supporting, assessing and checking on pupils' development and progress, and in achieving good behaviour; but weakness in work to improve attendance, although arrangements to put this right have recently been put in place.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	The partnership is satisfactory, but could be strengthened; parents think highly of the school. Many, 43 per cent, completed a questionnaire, which reflects their positive views.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good; generally good by senior staff and subject managers; the new headteacher is a very good leader and is employing effective strategies to consolidate and extend improvement. This is notable in the teaching.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory overall; thorough and successful work to achieve improvements since the last inspection; responsibilities are carried out as required, but not fully for the curriculum; the new chair of governors is working well with the headteacher to rectify this.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory; thorough work but not yet pulled together with sufficient rigour to ensure governors and staff have a very clear picture of school strengths and weaknesses.

The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory; staffing, accommodation and learning resources are satisfactory overall. The school takes care to achieve the best value from its financial and other management decisions.
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PARENTS’ AND CARERS’ VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way the school expects children to work hard. • Children make good progress. • Parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with queries or problems. • The teaching is good. • The school is helping children to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school working more closely with parents. • Parents being kept better informed about how children are getting on.

Inspectors agree with most of the comments made by parents. They do not think, however, that the school does enough to help pupils become responsible for their own work.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

Years 7 to 9: English, mathematics and science

1. The 2000 test results for all three subjects together were well below the national average for all schools. The gap with national results was much the same for boys and girls. These results reflect the attainment of pupils when they join the school in Year 7, which is well below average. When compared with schools whose pupils are drawn from similar backgrounds, the 2000 results are average. Year 9 results have been keeping pace with the national improvement; girls' results have closed the gap slightly.
2. In English, the 2000 results were well below the national average for all schools. English results have been improving faster than the improvement nationally. For girls, the rise has been faster than for boys so that their results are closer to the national average than boys' results. These results are below the national average for similar schools.
3. The work seen in English is, overall, below the expected standard. Pupils have improved the standard of their work from Year 7, which was well below the standard expected for pupils aged 11. This is good achievement. Pupils' work in Year 9 is at a better standard than would be suggested by the 2000 test results. The best developed skill is listening; pupils concentrate on the meaning of what is being said. Least developed are speaking skills, which lack confidence and fluency. Pupils' reading and writing skills show sound improvement, although their spelling and punctuation are weak.
4. In mathematics, the 2000 test results were below the national average for all schools. Results have been improving at much the same rate as they have been improving nationally. Boys' results are slightly closer to the national average than girls' results. These results are above the national average for similar schools.
5. The work seen in mathematics is at the standard expected for pupils aged 14. Pupils have improved the standard of their work from Year 7, which was below the standard expected for 11 year olds. This is very good achievement. As in English, pupils' work in Year 9 is at a better standard than would be suggested by the 2000 test results. Pupils know the formulae for calculating the areas of figures such as triangles, can calculate percentages and work with frequency graphs.
6. In science, results in 2000 were well below the national average for all schools. Results have been improving at much the same rate as they have nationally. The gap with national results is much the same for boys and girls, although girls' results have been rising slightly faster than boys' results. The 2000 results are below the national average for similar schools.
7. The work seen in science is below the expected standard for 14 year olds. Pupils have improved the standard of their work since joining Year 7 when their Year 6 results were well below average. This is good achievement. The standards in Year 9 are better than would be expected by the 2000 test results. Pupils' knowledge is better than their practical skills, mostly because they lack opportunities for planning their own investigations.
8. In all three subjects, the standards seen in the work of Year 9 pupils were better than shown by the 2000 results. There are a number of contributory factors. The

weaknesses in pupils' attendance, together with weaknesses in their literacy skills and ability to work independently, can have a detrimental effect on their performance in tests. Pupils in the current Year 9 have benefited from the notable improvement in teaching, specifically, from the focus in the previous term on good planning of the learning targets for each lesson and the review of the progress on the targets at the end of the lesson. This, combined with the teachers' helpful evaluations in lessons and on marked work, is ensuring that pupils have a good understanding of how well they are doing, a significant aspect of secure learning and successful performance.

Years 7 to 9: art and design, design and technology, geography, history, ICT, modern languages, music, physical education and religious education

9. The work seen in art and design and in design and technology is above the national standard for pupils aged 14. The achievement from the beginning of Year 7 is very good. In art and design, pupils respond perceptively to the art works they study and work skilfully and imaginatively with two- and three-dimensional materials. In design and technology, pupils develop good practical skills, take great pride in their work and finish it to a good standard. They have a clear idea of the features of good design.
10. In music and physical education, pupils are working at the expected standard for their age. In both subjects, achievement is good. In music, pupils can compose short pieces and perform them successfully on percussion instruments. When listening to music, they can identify some of the features. In physical education, pupils' swimming skills are good and they can plan, perform and evaluate swimming routines appropriately.
11. The work in geography, history, ICT, modern languages and religious education is below the standard expected for 14 year olds. In geography, pupils can describe the geographical patterns and human activities that bring about change, for example, to Brazilian rainforests. They find it more difficult to explain why changes happen and what the effects are on peoples' lives. Their achievement overall is satisfactory as it is in history. Pupils learn to use and analyse historical sources such as different accounts of the death of Thomas a Beckett, but their understanding of chronology is limited. In ICT, pupils have a very limited understanding of spreadsheets and databases but use the internet confidently to research their projects. Overall achievement in ICT is satisfactory. It is satisfactory in religious education. Pupils acquire a basic knowledge of Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. They understand some of the symbolism of religious ceremonies such as weddings, but do not extend this to develop an understanding of their religious significance.
12. All pupils take French or Spanish from Year 7. They can say and write sentences accurately but lack the confidence and knowledge to extend them. Few are able to speak without using text as a help. Pupils do not make the progress they should, and do not always receive sufficient guidance about how to improve their work. Achievement is unsatisfactory.

Years 10 to 11: school results at GCSE

13. The 2000 results were well below the national average for all schools. There is a rising trend in examination results, which are improving at a slightly faster rate than national results. Between 1999 and 2000, the improvement was good. In 2000, the school did better than its target for average points scores. When compared with similar schools, these results were above average. The pupils in the Year 11 group taking GCSE in 2000 included a high number with statements of special needs; the proportion in this year group was much higher than the national figure for all five years together.

14. There has been a significant rise in the proportion of pupils gaining at least five higher grades A*-C; this was particularly notable between 1999 and 2000. The school did better than its target by three per cent. Compared with all schools nationally, the results at A*-C are below average, but when compared with similar schools, these results are above average. Results for five or more A*-G grades have fluctuated, falling from 1996, but with a good rise from 1999 to 2000. In 2000, they were also below the national average for all schools, while matching the average for similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining at least one graded pass in 2000 was well below the national average, although average when compared to similar schools. There was a shortfall of four per cent in meeting the target.
15. In 2000, pupils from ethnic minorities did slightly less well than other pupils in gaining higher grades at GCSE, whereas they did slightly better in 1999. In both years they did much better than other pupils in gaining one or more graded passes.
16. When setting its targets for GCSE, the school took careful account of the attainment profile in each Year 11 group. When reviewing its targets, the school has the evidence from the 2000 results to take into account. The success in exceeding two of the targets, for average points and for five or more A*-C grades, suggests that these targets could now be more challenging. Given the 2000 results for one or more graded passes, which did not meet the target, the 2001 target remains suitably challenging.

Years 10 to 11: English, mathematics and science

17. The 2000 GCSE results in English were well below the national average. Boys' and girls' results were well below the respective national averages. However, the proportion of pupils gaining higher grades matched the average for schools with the same Year 9 test results in 1998. In the work seen, the standard is higher: below, rather than well below the national standard. Pupils write at length in a well-organised way, for example, when making detailed analyses of texts. The lack of fluency in their speaking skills continues from the previous key stage and their spelling and punctuation remain weak. Overall, achievement is satisfactory.
18. Pupils' mathematics results were also well below the national average in 2000. However, unlike English, they were also well below the average for schools with the same Year 9 test results in 1998. The gap between boys' results and the national average for boys is much greater than the gap in girls' results. In the work seen, attainment is better and below, not well below, the expected standard. The good progress made over Years 7 to 9 is not yet being extended into Years 10 and 11, but none-the-less, achievement at this key stage is satisfactory. Pupils extend their knowledge of probability from calculating simple examples to calculating the probability of two combined events. They progress from drawing simple line graphs to drawing scatter graphs and interpreting them to determine the extent of correlation.
19. Science results in 2000 were below the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining higher grades was significantly below the national average for all schools. However, this proportion matched the average for schools with the same Year 9 test results in 1998. Girls did much better than boys. In the work seen, standards are below those expected. Pupils achieve well over Years 10 and 11. They show a good understanding of electrical circuits and understand the relationship between resistance, voltage and current. Their skills of investigation improve, but remain the weakest area of their work.

Years 10 to 11: art and design, design and technology, geography, history, modern languages, music, physical education and religious education

20. The results at GCSE in 2000 were well above the national average in art and design and above average in design and technology. In art and design subjects, of the total of 38 entries, 34 gained a higher grade. In the work seen, standards are well above those expected nationally. Pupils use a variety of materials, techniques and methods effectively. They work on individual compositions in their own creative style, inspired by the work of artists such as Matisse. In design and technology subjects, 66 of the 104 entries were awarded a higher grade. The work seen is at the standard expected. Pupils have a good understanding of the design process and their practical skills are good, for example, when making items of furniture. They make sound evaluations of their work and improve it appropriately.
21. Geography and history results in 2000 were much the same as the national averages for points gained. The proportion of pupils gaining higher grades was above the national average in geography but below the national average in history. Achievement in both subjects is good. In the work seen in geography, standards are below those expected. Pupils' individual coursework projects are of a very high standard, but this standard is not reached in the rest of their work. This accounts in some measure for the difference between the standards seen in current work and the 2000 examination results. Over Years 10 and 11, pupils develop their understanding of social and environmental issues and explore issues in greater depth. However, they find it difficult to formulate a detailed justification for their viewpoint. In history, the work seen is below the standard expected. There is some good quality fieldwork on Dudley Castle. Essay technique is improving, but pupils do not include sufficient facts to substantiate their argument. In both these subjects, the standard of pupils' work is limited by weakness in literacy skills.
22. In the short GCSE course in ICT, results were below the national average in 2000. Of the 33 pupils who entered for the Certificate of Educational Achievement in the subject, most gained merits or distinctions. In the work seen, attainment is below the standard expected. Pupils can carry out tasks involving spreadsheets and databases, but rely heavily on the teacher for support. They use the internet competently. Standards in control are below expectations because the necessary equipment is lacking. Overall, achievement is unsatisfactory at this key stage.
23. Results were well below the national average in modern languages in 2000, with the gap between the results of boys and girls much the same as the gap nationally. The proportion of pupils entered for the examination was somewhat lower than nationally in French, while very much higher in Spanish, of which the proportion gaining higher grades was well below the national average. In the work seen, attainment in both languages is below the standard expected, although better in Spanish. Pupils know and recognise vocabulary in the topics they practise, but their skills in constructing the language for themselves are weak. Their listening skills are better. Achievement continues to be unsatisfactory at this key stage. The information about pupils' learning needs, which is gained from department assessments, is not used well enough to plan lesson activities appropriately for all pupils.
24. The numbers taking GCSE music in 2000 were too small for secure statistical comparisons to be made with national results. All pupils in the small group taking the examination gained a higher grade. In the work seen, standards are above those expected nationally. In Year 10, pupils already show good performance skills and they have a sound theoretical knowledge. Their achievement is good.
25. Physical education and religious education are not offered as GCSE examination subjects. In the work seen in physical education, attainment is at the standard expected for 16 year olds. There are no significant differences between the attainment of boys and girls. Pupils' good understanding of warm-up is maintained over Years 10 and 11. Their games skills are secure in

rounders and good in football. Achievement is good. Three-quarters of Year 11 pupils entered for the Dudley Certificate of Achievement in Religious Education in 2000. All passed and two-thirds gained credits or distinctions. Overall, attainment is below the standard expected because of non-completion of the course by about a third of pupils. However, in the work seen by those who have completed this course, attainment reaches the expected standard. These pupils make good progress in their understanding of moral issues. They show proper reflection in their essays on moral issues and an understanding of the religious point of view. They can produce reasoned argument for their own ideas. Pupils' achievement is good.

Years 10 to 11: vocational courses

26. GNVQ programmes were established in 1999; there are no results as yet to compare with national figures.
27. Work was seen in health and social care, leisure and tourism, ICT and manufacturing. Attainment in health and social care and in leisure and tourism is at the expected standard. It is also generally at the expected standard in ICT, although the standard of skills is better. Achievement is good. The amount of recorded work in manufacturing is limited. In each course, pupils' analytical skills are weak. Their limited speaking skills restrict the benefits to their learning of extended discussion. Attainment in literacy and numeracy is below the expected standard, for example, showing in formal report writing and the work with numerical data. Over Years 10 and 11, pupils become increasingly confident in researching information and planning projects. They develop greater independence in their work.

Years 7 to 11: whole school

28. In the work seen, although overall standards are below those expected by Year 9, this none-the-less shows good achievement from pupils' attainment on entry, which was well below the expected standard for 11 year olds. The work seen is, overall, below the standard expected for pupils aged 16. Over Years 10 and 11, pupils sustain the improvement they made over Years 7 to 9 and their achievement continues to be good overall. Pupils from ethnic minority families make satisfactory progress appropriate to their individual levels of attainment. There was evidence in the work seen in about half the curriculum subjects, that pupils who speak English as an additional language make satisfactory progress. For pupils recently arrived in this country however, learning English for the first time, this was not yet being achieved because of lack of provision.
29. Pupils with special needs generally make satisfactory progress over each key stage in building on their prior attainment. When they are withdrawn from class lessons for teaching in the learning support department, their progress is usually good, as seen for example, in a Year 7 religious education session and a Year 11 English group. Sometimes, pupils with special needs make very good progress in sessions, for example in the Year 9 'reading recovery' (HARP) programme. When aided by support teachers in subject lessons, their progress is good. There are times when the response of pupils with behaviour difficulties affects their progress and that of other pupils, despite being managed well by teachers, as seen, for example, in a Year 8 PSHE lesson and a Year 10 mathematics lesson. Pupils with special needs make similar progress to other pupils in the class lessons taught by subject teachers, even where a support assistant is not present. This is satisfactory in all years in English, mathematics, history, and modern languages, and in geography in Years 7 to 9. Their progress is good in design and technology, ICT, music, physical education in all years and in geography in Years 10 and 11. It is very good in art and design; on occasion in this subject, pupils with special needs achieve better than others do in GCSE work. In 2000, some pupils with special needs were successful

in GCSE examinations in several subjects and in the Certificate of Achievement in English and humanities.

30. Gifted and talented pupils make satisfactory progress although their work is not always well planned to stretch their abilities. Individual pupils have not yet been identified for support because this area of the school's provision is in its infancy. In design and technology and ICT, these pupils make good progress because they are appropriately challenged and supported. In music, they make good progress because instrumental staff support their progress in performing and in their general music knowledge. In art and design, these pupils make very good progress because each has specific individual targets, as do all pupils taking the subject. In science, geography and French, gifted and talented pupils do not make equally good progress as other pupils because the learning opportunities are not always tailored sufficiently to their needs.
31. Pupils have low literacy skills on entry to the school. Although, in many subjects, progress is made in learning technical vocabulary and developing appropriate structures for coursework, many pupils have continuing difficulties with spelling, punctuation and structuring sentences. They lack fluency and coherence when speaking to an audience, for example, to the rest of the class. In mathematics, writing can be limited and inaccurate and few opportunities are available for pupils to explain their work. When pupils work with a variety of texts and have to organise, interpret and summarise information, they make satisfactory progress. This happens in geography, where writing skills are well developed in coursework by Year 11. In history, the standard of essay writing has been improved by the use of writing frames or outlines. In most subject lessons, pupils concentrate on what is being said; in art and design and music, listening is regarded as a strength. Overall, however, literacy skills remain weak for a significant number of pupils. Procedures have not been in place to pull together the work to improve literacy in a strategic way. The school is well aware of this and planning suitable action.
32. Pupils' ability to apply their mathematical knowledge and skills is adequate for their work in most other subjects. For example, pupils make good use of measurement in athletics and in design and technology, where they appreciate the need for accuracy in order to produce a well-fitting product. In art and design, pupils use and understand scale and proportion and they make effective use of measurement when working on pattern and perspective. As they move up the school, pupils show increasing confidence in handling a range of statistical data in geography, although there are few opportunities for the manipulation of data using formulae. In science, higher attainers are held back by poor graphical skills.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

33. Pupils show good attitudes towards learning. In lessons, the majority show an interest in the tasks set, listen and concentrate well; pupils are keen to learn. On occasion, their response is very good. For example, in a Year 8 Spanish lesson, pupils were enthusiastic and confident when responding to the teacher's challenge to attempt to spell new words by sounding out the letters. Pupils' response benefits strongly from good teaching and from the very good role models of courtesy and respect for others provided by all the staff.
34. With few exceptions, behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils with specific learning needs and those who display challenging behaviour often show a willingness to learn and they work hard to achieve the targets set by their teachers. They are not always successful in achieving the level of self-discipline shown by the majority, but skilful management of their behaviour by staff ensures that any disruption of learning is kept to a minimum. Other pupils, while tolerant of the difficulties these pupils face, appreciate the consistent, firm approach of the new headteacher and the attention paid to high standards. In assemblies, behaviour is exemplary.

Relationships are generally good. The school is a harmonious community in which adults and pupils respond to each other with warmth and concern. Pupils usually get on well with each other. This is true for all groups, including pupils from ethnic minorities and pupils with special needs. With some exceptions, it is true for boys and girls, although they do not always choose to sit in mixed groups in lessons. Opportunities for pupils to organise and make decisions about their own learning are not provided equally well in all curriculum areas. When such opportunities do arise pupils' response is good. For example in physical education, pupils devise and lead aspects of the warm-up activities; they show a clear respect for the capabilities of others and ensure that all can participate to the best of their ability.

35. Pupils with special needs show equally good attitudes to learning as other pupils and behave equally well overall. In design and technology, ICT and music, their response is good, and in art and design, very good. Pupils with behaviour difficulties are particularly well integrated into lesson activities in art and design and design and technology. When pupils are taught or supported in small groups by learning support staff, their response is very good as seen, for example, in a Year 7 'reading recovery' lesson.
36. Behaviour around the school is generally good. Pupils are polite to visitors and friendly to one another; they are keen to create a good impression of their school. Even in narrow corridors and stairways, the problems that can occur when large numbers of pupils are moving round the school are kept to a minimum. Lunchtimes in the dining room are pleasant occasions. However, in situations such as break times in the playground, where fewer adults are around, the behaviour of a significant minority can be unsatisfactory. On occasion, some boys show disrespect for girls by making inappropriate comments and both groups can resort to physical means to show their reaction. The amount of litter dropped by pupils in outside areas is unacceptable. This was seen to happen even when the offenders were standing near to litter bins. Maintenance staff collect rubbish on more than one occasion during the day in order to keep the environment clean. The number of fixed term exclusions is a little above the average for schools of a similar size. There have been no permanent exclusions in the last year, which is better than the national picture.
37. The level of attendance is unsatisfactory. Unauthorised absence is above the national average and the overall rate is well below the national figure. An immediate improvement was achieved after the last inspection, but despite this, the attendance rate remains below 90 per cent. The figures for the current year so far indicate no further improvement. However, a number of pupils in each year consistently achieve good levels of attendance and are rewarded for their efforts. Attendance is better in Years 7 and 8 where it is at a satisfactory level, but gradually deteriorates as pupils move up the school. This has a detrimental effect on the attainment and progress of pupils in Years 10 and 11. A particular group of disaffected Year 11 pupils, mostly boys, have had poor attendance throughout their time in the school. All pupils are affected by the attendance rate because of the time spent helping pupils to catch up after being absent.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

38. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. It is now good at each key stage. In 96 per cent of lessons, teaching is satisfactory or better; at the last inspection this figure was 80 per cent. The proportion of good teaching has risen from 40 per cent to 67 per cent. There is very good or excellent teaching in 22 per cent of lessons, compared with 10 per cent previously, a little more in Years 10 to 11 than in Years 7 to 9.
39. In all subjects, teaching is at least satisfactory, and in most it is good. Subject strengths are in art and design and physical education, where the teaching is very good so that pupils learn very effectively. There is room for improvement from the satisfactory overall quality of teaching

and learning in English, and, in Years 7 to 9, in mathematics, geography and modern languages. The generally good teaching in science at each stage is resulting in only satisfactory learning. This is because teachers' expectations are not always sufficiently high for pupils of all attainment levels and pupils put only satisfactory effort into their work, not good effort.

40. All the teaching in Years 10 to 11 is at least satisfactory. The five lessons in which teaching was not satisfactory were in Years 7 to 9; one of these had poor teaching. The subjects involved were mathematics, science, drama, modern languages and religious education. The reasons were weakness in class management, unsuitable planning and a boring approach, slow pace and insecure subject skills. In all these lessons, the result was unsatisfactory learning, and in most of them, unsatisfactory behaviour.
41. One of the reasons for the quality now being achieved is that the different contributory skills that go to make up good teaching are nearly always equally good. The best feature is the skill with which teachers manage their classes. This is at least good overall in all subjects except history in Years 7 to 9 and mathematics, where it is satisfactory. For example in physical education, the teacher spots the slightest hint of inattention and immediately offers a specific work challenge to bring the individual pupil back on task so that learning is not interrupted. In art and design, all the other strong features of the teaching such as planning, clear learning targets, very good demonstrations and probing evaluations of the work in progress, combine to ensure that pupils are far too interested and challenged to offer anything other than their best effort. A strength in music is the way all resources are used to the full so that pupils are either all working with instruments to make music themselves, listening to recorded music or watching the teacher's skilful demonstrations on piano, keyboard, African drum or using the voice. The least developed feature, although this is quite satisfactory overall, is the use of homework; there are good arrangements in science and music, and very good arrangements in art and design. For example, substantial tasks in music for Year 9 homeworks included composing their own 'calls' using mnemonics. This extended and consolidated the work in the lesson and, because it could be carried out either by singing or playing, could be achieved by all pupils. In general, the teaching methods help all pupils to learn well. However, the work does not always provide the best challenge for gifted and talented pupils and higher attainers.
42. All the characteristics of learning are good overall. Pupils usually acquire new knowledge and skills in lessons, except in modern languages where this can be impeded by teachers' lack of specialist skills. In this subject, pupils' pace of working improves in Years 10 and 11 where there is more specialist teaching. Across the school, pupils' interest and concentration are good, often very good, but their independence as learners is weaker. There are a number of reasons: in particular, the lack of a school approach to developing literacy and numeracy skills restricts pupils' ability to carry out work under their own steam. In turn, this restricts their ability to handle test and examination situations to the best effect and so has a limiting effect on results. Opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their work in pairs and groups are not planned regularly and frequently enough. Pupils have a very good idea about how well they are getting on in art and design, history and physical education. They are helped by good feedback from teachers about how to improve their work, which is very well done in art and design and physical education. In geography, pupils are, to a limited extent, clear about how they are getting on, although the evaluations they receive about their work are not properly linked to National Curriculum levels.
43. Generally, the quality of teaching and learning in subjects is equally good at each key stage. In history, however, while teachers' subject expertise is a strength in Years 10 to 11, it is only satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 where there are non-specialist contributions to the teaching. In these lessons, the area needing strengthening is the use of historical sources to ensure that pupils' learning is securely based. In geography, sound teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9

improves to a good standard in Years 10 and 11. Teachers provide better challenge for higher attainers in GCSE work and pupils apply themselves with greater effort and commitment at this stage. The good quality of individual coursework projects is the result.

44. Lesson planning in modern languages is unsatisfactory. This is often true in lessons taught by non-specialist teachers or part-time staff. In these lessons, the lack of confidence in using the foreign language results in pupils hearing too much English spoken; work is not well matched to different learning needs, including those of higher attainers. As a result, pupils make insufficient progress in skills which holds them back. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in modern languages improves from satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, to good in Years 10 and 11 where a greater proportion of the teaching is by specialists.
45. A strong feature in most lessons is teachers' use of the learning targets for the session. At the beginning, these were made very clear to pupils and usually written on the board. At best, the teacher frequently referred to them as the lesson progressed so that pupils could see clearly how well they were doing. At the end, there was usually a review of the progress that had been made in achieving them. Some excellent teaching was seen in art and design and also in modern languages. In art and design, pupils were given excellent advice and guidance on how they could explore and work with sketch books. This was done very effectively through demonstration of eight different techniques for doing so, for example using wax crayon and ink. Pupils were inspired to take up the challenge for homework, much encouraged by the amount of progress they had made in the lesson. In modern languages, a group of lower attainers, with a high proportion of pupils with special needs, was enthused by the fun of being involved in a range of lively and motivating activities. The result was that pupils made very good progress in the lesson, almost all co-operating fully throughout. Using a microphone, they took on the role of a well-known weather forecaster and prepared his book for 'This is your life'.
46. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are generally learning effectively. Those now established in the school receive specialist support. However, such specialist support is not available for recently arrived refugees who are learning to speak English for the first time. In mathematics, art and design, ICT and music, teachers communicated effectively enough with these pupils, through signs and gestures, to enable them to make sound progress. However, in those lessons where learning was dependent on language, particularly in English, they were not able to participate because work had not been planned specifically for them.
47. Across the subject departments, the work in lessons is suitably planned for pupils with special needs so that they learn well. Because the level of challenge for these pupils is very good in art and design, their learning is very good. In design and technology and ICT, pupils with special needs are appropriately challenged and supported and so they learn well. In English and mathematics, teachers know how to support pupils in meeting their targets but in history and religious education, not enough support is given. There is appropriately adapted equipment available for activities in physical education. Across subject departments, not all teachers fully understand the use of general education plans for pupils whose learning needs are similar. As a result, the learning targets are sometimes not used effectively to help pupils make progress.
48. The quality of teaching for those pupils withdrawn for specialist support from special needs teachers is good overall. In the very good teaching, teachers use skilful questioning techniques and are competent in teaching basic skills; they are enthusiastic and teach the lessons at a brisk pace. These qualities help pupils to maintain their concentration and motivation and boost their self-confidence. Work is generally planned very well to match individual learning needs, for example, in Year 9 'reading recovery' sessions. Good teaching ensures that time is used well and includes short periods for activities balanced with short periods when pupils have to listen.

This strategy helps pupils to maintain their interest, for example, working well in a Year 7 mathematics session. The contributions from support teachers and the learning support assistant are good and ensure that pupils with special needs contribute in lessons. However, there is only one recently appointed learning support assistant. This is insufficient for the level of need in the school.

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

49. The curriculum provides a suitable range of learning opportunities at each key stage. An emphasis on mathematics in Years 7 to 9 is helping to raise standards in the subject. The investment of time for art and design in Year 7 is contributing significantly to the high standards being achieved. There is, however, a shortcoming in the Year 9 curriculum where drama is not offered. In Years 10 to 11, the range of opportunities has been helpfully extended to provide vocational courses, although the time allocations for these are well below those recommended. Two GNVQ courses were introduced in Year 10 in 1999 and two in 2000. In other ways, the school's endeavour to incorporate work-related opportunities into the Key Stage 4 curriculum has resulted in some shortcomings. A high proportion of pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not have any modern languages experience. In the current year, this is true of design and technology, but will be rectified in the next academic year. Across the school, arrangements for teaching pupils in ability groups generally work well, and are often particularly successful in mathematics.
50. Good curriculum provision overall is made in art and design, geography, history, religious education and, in Years 10 and 11, in music. However, requirements for the ICT curriculum at each stage are not fully met. Although pupils receive satisfactory specialist ICT lessons, there is insufficient opportunity for the use of ICT in other subjects. Not all pupils gain experience in control and measurement in ICT. Because of this, the overall judgement about the curriculum has to be that it is unsatisfactory.
51. The provision for gifted and talented pupils, resulting from the school's general arrangements for higher attainers, is mostly satisfactory. Specific policy has yet to be developed; it has not been determined on what basis pupils will be identified for support. Very good arrangements are in place in art and design and good arrangements in design and technology, ICT and music. However, provision is not satisfactory in mathematics, science, geography and modern languages where planning does not take enough account of the capabilities of higher attainers.
52. Arrangements for teaching literacy skills across all subjects of the curriculum are unsatisfactory. There is no whole school, co-ordinated strategy. As a result, although basic skills are soundly taught, largely through individual subject approaches, this does not amount to the major and common thrust of the school's work that would be expected given pupils' weak literacy skills when they join Year 7. There has been some progress in raising staff awareness of literacy issues. A policy is now in place, with guidance on how to introduce key words, how to lead class discussions and how to check the readability level of the subject texts being used. There is agreement on how pupils should present their written work and a common approach to the marking of literacy errors. However, these approaches are not carried out with equal rigour by all subjects and the good practice that exists is not shared. The work of the literacy co-ordinator has been limited by a restricted brief for the job.
53. For pupils who speak English as an additional language, there is planned specialist support that is regular and effective. This has helped the pupils now established in the school to learn well. However, there has been no increase in the level of support for teachers in response to the

needs of refugee pupils who have recently joined the school. The school is actively seeking to rectify this.

54. The school's approach to supporting the development of pupils' numeracy skills in all areas of the curriculum has been effective. A numeracy policy has been developed and methods of teaching mathematics have been discussed with the whole staff. For example, in history, when lower attainers in Year 8 had difficulty in deciding whether 4000 out of 18000 troops were a majority, the teacher explained how the calculation could be simplified. Year 10 pupils had difficulty in finding the gradient of their graph in science until the teacher explained the method and made sure that all pupils understood how to do it.
55. The provision for special needs is satisfactory throughout the school. Those in the basic skills support group follow the same curriculum as other pupils, appropriately planned to meet their needs. Those on the reading recovery programme in Years 7 to 9 are withdrawn from lessons, usually English. This is done on a rota basis so that pupils do not always miss the same lesson. The need to keep this system under constant review has been identified through the departments' monitoring programme. Pupils' individual education plans are not used equally well across subject departments to help them meet their personal targets, a weakness identified in the department's review. The school's organisation of teaching groups by levels of attainment has a positive effect on the progress of pupils with special needs. They benefit additionally from the opportunity to work in mixed ability groups, as happens in art and design. Older pupils with behaviour difficulties attend the local college on one day a week and undertake additional work experience. Pupils with special needs have the opportunity to study for a variety of accredited courses: GCSE, Certificates of Achievement in English and humanities and GNVQ courses in leisure and tourism and health and social care. These arrangements reflect the school's commitment to giving all pupils the opportunity to succeed.
56. There is a satisfactory range of extra-curricular activities that broadens pupils' learning and contributes well to their personal development. It includes academic, musical and sports activities as well as inter-class competitions and recreational activities. During the last twelve months, approximately one quarter of the pupils has represented Buckpool in inter-school competitive fixtures. In music, the many opportunities for singing and instrumental activities are largely taken up by girls. There is good provision of study and revision sessions. For example, a homework club for Year 7 pupils is run on two early mornings a week. It is held in one of the new ICT rooms, so that those pupils who do not have a computer at home have an equal opportunity to use ICT and the internet for their homework. Over the recent Easter holiday, Year 11 revision sessions were run in all subjects, staffed by teachers from the school.
57. The school makes good provision for pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE) which is helpfully focused on raising self-esteem and developing revision skills. There is good practice in the way the programme links with assembly themes. Heads of year work well as a team to ensure that all pupils have equal access to information. This area of the curriculum includes sex education and drugs education as required. A review to update provision and raise the status of the programme is appropriately planned for the current year. Pupils' ability to evaluate and reflect upon the issues covered in the PSHE programme is often hampered by weak literacy skills. The readability of worksheets is not always considered thoroughly enough, so that work is often left uncompleted in pupils' folders.
58. In Year 10, pupils participate in a two-week work experience placement where they begin to appreciate the demands of the workplace. For a few pupils, disaffected with school life, this has been extended in partnership with Dudley College to include work-related learning in Year 11. Those involved have participated in a project to reclaim a piece of land on the school premises in order to create a pond, to be used as a science resource and a quiet area for pupils.

As a result of the skills learned on this course, these pupils have applied to enrol on further education courses at Dudley College when they leave school at 16. Good links with the careers service enable pupils to receive individual advice on the range of opportunities available to them. A good display of pupils' work in the GNVQ base highlights the range of opportunities available in health and social care. Although careers awareness is offered as part of the PSHE curriculum, little guidance is available for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9.

59. Good pastoral links with local primary schools help pupils to settle easily into Year 7. Induction days at Buckpool are well established. Primary schools use the swimming pool so that pupils are familiar with the school site long before they actually join Year 7. There is helpful liaison about special needs that leads to a smooth transfer from Year 6 to Year 7. The information gained is used in the preparation of pupils' individual learning plans. Subject links however, are not developed satisfactorily. Some departments, for example special needs, English and mathematics, are now working closely with primary colleagues to raise standards by ensuring that pupils' learning continues without interruption when they transfer to the school; this is not true of all departments. By contrast, the school has good links with local colleges and industry. Particularly good is the support this has given to pupils in Year 11 by enabling them to take work-related courses where it is judged they would benefit from a modified curriculum.
60. There are good links with the local community. People from the local community make very good use of school premises. A local playgroup and Lifelong Learning Centre share the school's facilities. Working relationships are good. Some staff from the centre are employed in the school and several act as supportive mentors for Year 11 pupils. There is an effective 'buddy system' in which adults help pupils with their reading; the centre was active in the recruitment of the buddies. For pupils thinking of a career in the leisure industry, the centre arranges work experience placements that take advantage of the good swimming pool facility. However, the potential benefits to pupils' learning of such links have not been explored well.
61. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is suitably provided for overall. This is good for moral, social and cultural development, but unsatisfactory for spiritual development. Teaching in religious education gives some opportunities for pupils to reflect on such issues as injustice and how it may be overcome. In art and design, pupils explore spirituality in visual form. For example in Year 7, Asian pupils celebrating the Muslim festival of Eid received greeting cards made by other members of the class. However, in the majority of subjects, opportunities for reflection are overlooked. The contribution to pupils' spiritual development of 'Thought for the Day', the worship planned for form periods, is weak. In assemblies, opportunities for spiritual content and reflection are lacking, although assemblies can be stimulating occasions. For example, the challenge of remembering a sequence of events through humorous 'mind pictures', with the focus on revision skills, had younger pupils on the edge of their chairs, showing their pleasure in the challenge of the task.
62. There is good provision for pupils' moral development. The school's ethos, expressed in many of its policies, promotes values that help pupils to distinguish right from wrong. For example in physical education, extra-curricular and competitive activities encourage a sense of teamwork and fair play. In religious education, there are good opportunities for discussion of moral issues such as abortion, arranged marriages and euthanasia. All adults in the school provide good role models of fairness and consistency. Pupils are made aware of the wider implications of their individual actions. In history, they explore other people's views about historical figures and form their own opinion, for example, on whether Cromwell was a hero or a villain. The school council provides opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for school matters. Support for a range of charitable organisations, including the Poppy Day and Children in Need appeals, helps pupils to develop an informed and caring attitude

towards those who are less fortunate than themselves. At Christmas, pupils collect food to make up hampers for distribution to senior citizens who live locally.

63. Good provision is made for social development to which the PSHE programme makes an important contribution. The school premises are used every day and all day by people of all ages. This provides invaluable opportunities for pupils' social development. The school actively supports the development of social skills and there are high expectations of good interaction between adults and pupils. Pupils work effectively together, boys and girls and pupils of different ethnicity and those with special needs. In art and design, music, religious education and other subjects, there are opportunities for work in pairs and small groups through which pupils manage their own learning effectively and develop in maturity. Social skills are effectively developed through visits by younger pupils to Blackwell Court in Bromsgrove; to the local education authority centre Astley Burf; and by older pupils to La Fosca and other places in Spain. Field trips and visits include opportunities for residential experience. Extra-curricular activities make a positive contribution to pupils' personal and social development, for example, through musical performances and residential trips. The newly formed school council is already having an impact on the school community. It is currently reviewing the school's system of rewards and sanctions, and learning about committee protocol and citizenship. Pupils took part in a secret ballot to decide whether to donate some of the council's funds to the school's paper recycling project.
64. Provision is good for cultural development. Visits are arranged to art galleries, theatres and museums; groups of pupils have visited the Tate Modern and the Dome. Younger pupils have benefited from visits to several art galleries in London. Curriculum 'enrichment days' effectively introduce pupils to wider cultural experiences. For example in food technology, an Asian member of staff gave a cookery demonstration. Pupils exercise their talents in several music groups and bands and regularly participate in local performances. A Youth Theatre, the Handicapped Children's Theatre from Stourbridge and other drama companies visit to perform in the school. The Luke religious group visits and puts on productions at Easter and Christmas. Through religious education, the pupils develop a broad appreciation of Christian, Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu festivals. For example, Year 9 pupils explored the way marriage is celebrated in different faiths. Wall displays in corridors and teaching areas celebrate a broad range of cultural activities. Through accessing information about other peoples and countries on the internet, pupils' cultural understanding is effectively broadened.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

65. There is strong commitment to the care and support of pupils. This shows through well co-ordinated systems through which the pastoral co-ordinator, heads of year and form tutors carry out their responsibilities. Pupils feel that they are encouraged and supported by staff who know them very well as individuals. The school is very effectively working to raise pupils' self-esteem to support them in making confident, informed and responsible personal decisions. Opportunities are well taken in assemblies to help pupils recognise that, as individuals, they have choices and can acquire the personal skills necessary to succeed. 'You can' is an ever-present theme.
66. Arrangements for ensuring that the school is a safe and supportive environment are satisfactory. There are good procedures for dealing with child protection matters about which staff are adequately informed. Maintenance staff ensure that the building is kept meticulously clean and the litter dropped at break and lunch times, literally a blot on the landscape, promptly cleared away. Much needed refurbishment of the toilet blocks is under way. The health and safety policy however, although comprehensive, does not make clear enough the areas of responsibility and lines of communication in the school. Regular safety checks are carried out,

but formal risk assessments are not up to date. Issues are not always identified or tackled with sufficient rigour. For example, the use of the school playing field by members of the public to exercise their dogs poses a risk to pupils' health. Some of the yellow markings on stairs, which aid pupils with a visual impairment, are worn. The shower facilities do not provide the privacy expected by boys and girls; this has a negative effect on standards of hygiene.

67. As they move through the school, pupils' academic progress and personal development are monitored well. This enables staff in each subject to set individual targets that are aimed, successfully, at raising attainment. Good systems are now established for collecting assessment information in order to keep track of pupils' progress. However, these systems are not co-ordinated to full effect so that trends in the progress of different groups of pupils can be monitored. A helpful start has been made through analysing the GCSE results of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds in comparison to other pupils' results. A weakness persisting from the last inspection is that pupils' records are stored in several places round the building, which inhibits their timely and efficient use when queries are raised. Assessment procedures in subjects are good overall. This includes both particular strength in art and design but also weakness in ICT where arrangements are not co-ordinated across all subject departments as they need to be in this subject. The good arrangements are in science, design and technology, geography, history, music and religious education. Information learned from pupils' assessments is generally used to good effect to check the suitability of planning and make changes where necessary. It is used very well for this purpose in art and design.
68. The progress made by pupils with special needs is centrally monitored and recorded each term. Pupils' skills are tested when they join the school. With the information received from primary schools, the results are used to set appropriate learning targets for them. The records of pupils' progress on their targets is not always detailed enough to be really helpful in checking that they are making the best progress possible. This is achieved well where the targets are specific. Subject departments do not contribute substantially to the monitoring, although this is done very well in art and design. Heads of year monitor the targets of pupils with behaviour difficulties. Teachers receive satisfactory information about specific physical disabilities. The provision identified on statements of special need is in place; the statements are reviewed annually as required. The good links with outside agencies help to support pupils well.
69. Good monitoring of behaviour is well established. There is an extensive record of staff efforts to deal with an extremely disaffected group of Year 11 boys, for example, through reorganising tutor groups to minimise the disruption caused by these pupils. This action, part of a comprehensive strategy to improve behaviour across the school, means that generally, in all Year 11 groups, pupils are now able to work to the best of their ability without disruption. Parents and pupils commented that the immediate action taken by the new headteacher over poor behaviour has resulted in a more purposeful atmosphere in the school. This was very clearly in evidence during the inspection. The fact that staff consistently follow school guidance on discipline is a strong contribution to this. Younger pupils know that there is some bullying but say that teachers sort it out quickly. They are clear about what they can do about it themselves. Older pupils commented that there is bullying among younger pupils, usually name-calling and 'teasing' but that it does not happen in Year 10. If it did, they have complete confidence in teachers to deal with it suitably. They feel certain that there is no racism.
70. Procedures for achieving good behaviour and reducing the incidence of bullying are currently under review. Members of the student council are discussing their ideas of a fair and just system of rewards and sanctions with other pupils and senior staff. Pupils have expressed concern about the current system of detentions, which they think is not consistently applied by staff.

71. Regular attendance at school is expected, but not yet achieved. Irregular attendance has a negative effect on the attainment of all pupils, not just those who do not attend. Since the 1997 inspection, the school has done much to emphasise the importance of regular attendance and reduce unauthorised absence. It has introduced systems to monitor each pupil's attendance rate. Working closely with the educational welfare officer and local colleges, staff have put considerable time and effort into supporting a small number of chronic non-attenders. Through these efforts, a number of individual successes have been achieved, notably with Year 11 pupils. Similar efforts are now being targeted at pupils with irregular attendance in Year 10. A system of 'first day calling' is in operation which has had a positive effect on the attendance of some pupils. However, its effect has been limited by the small amount of staff time allocated for this purpose which has necessitated checking up only on a sample of pupils. Registration procedures are understood, but not always adhered to by all staff. They are not being carried out as required. As a result, it is not possible for the school to identify with certainty who is on the premises at any one time; the efficiency and effectiveness of attendance monitoring is undermined. The headteacher recognises this weakness which is a health and safety issue. Action has been taken to bring about improvement. An appointment is shortly to be made to a new full-time clerical post devoted to attendance; and the school is investigating more efficient ways of registering pupils.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

72. Parents' response to the inspection questionnaire, as well as the comments by the small number at the pre-inspection meeting, show that they are very supportive of improvements since the last inspection. This was shown by the high proportion of questionnaires which were completed, 43 per cent. Parents are appreciative of the good teaching, the approachability of the staff and the way the school expects their children to work hard. They would like the school to work more closely with parents and keep them better informed about their children's progress.
73. Pupils' homework diaries are regularly signed by tutors and parents. They provide a useful communication tool that enables parents to support their child's work in school. The attendance at parents' meetings is good. Currently, there is no active Parents Association in the school. There are good relationships with parents of pupils with special needs who attend annual reviews. Parents' views are taken into account when individual needs are being identified and they receive advice on how to help their children with reading and spelling. Their involvement is making a positive contribution to their children's experience in the school. However, the school has recognised that its links with parents over attendance need strengthening and is taking action to make improvement.
74. Information provided by the school for parents about their children's progress is generally satisfactory, but there are differences in practice between departments. For example, not all subject reports clearly tell parents where their children's strengths and weaknesses lie or whether their progress is sufficient. Following recent consultation with parents, pupils and staff, progress reports have been reviewed and are currently being revised. Good features, such as the inclusion of individual targets, are being retained. The additional information requested by parents, for example, about their child's behaviour and attitude in lessons, is being included. The prospectus is an attractive, well-produced booklet that contrasts with the rather dull annual report to parents. However, both of these omit much of the required information. For example, the prospectus omits information about attendance and details of the governing body membership are omitted from the annual report. The school newsletter and an information booklet for parents about GCSE courses are of very good quality.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

75. The new headteacher has been in post since January 2001. He leads a strongly committed and extremely hardworking staff. In almost every subject, the improvement in the areas of weakness identified at the last inspection has been good. This reflects the good departmental leadership and management that are now generally evident, although the school's arrangements for the management of ICT are unsatisfactory. Changes to bring about improvement will take effect in the next academic year. There is ample documentary evidence showing the painstaking attention given to making the improvements required by the key issues. Since taking up his appointment, the headteacher has shown strong leadership in pulling together some of the developments already under way, so that common approaches across all departments have been established. The strategy he used in his first term, observing teaching by all members of staff and arranging an interview with each one, not only enabled him to get to know staff well as individuals, but also gave good insights into areas needing attention. Combined with his enthusiasm and confidence-building approach with staff, this has been particularly successful in consolidating and extending the improvement in the quality of teaching. The improvement is significant. The headteacher is held in the highest regard by staff and pupils alike.
76. Progress since the last inspection has been good overall. On the issues concerned with attendance and the use of ICT in all areas of the curriculum the progress is satisfactory. The good progress on monitoring shows in two ways: in the regularity with which heads of subject now carry out their responsibility for checking the quality of teaching; and particularly, in the systematic monitoring of teaching by all staff undertaken by the headteacher in his first term. However, the aspect of this key issue focused on evaluating effectiveness persists as a weakness. The school's performance management procedures deal with this. The good progress on the issue concerned with building cohesive staff teams shows in the strength of the shared commitment to bring about improvements in subjects and the success in doing so. Work on each of the four key issues was undertaken by a group of staff and governors and carried out with exceptionally thorough attention to detail. The process did accumulate, however, an excessive amount of paper in which it is not always easy to discern a clear sense of direction and priority. Subsequent development planning utilised the framework of the action plan. It is rendered less effective than it might be because the arrangements for monitoring and evaluation are not always focused clearly enough to move things on at a good pace. The need for improvement which sharpens this is recognised.
77. The governing body is accustomed to receiving quite long termly reports from all school managers, heads of subjects and year groups. These have kept governors up to date with events and activities. Heads of subject have made an annual presentation at a governing body meeting. Governors keep an eye on the results of Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations through discussion of the yearly report of results, as published in the annual report to parents. They are aware of the school's performance in comparison with other schools. However, the governing body has not received an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses identified through the school's monitoring, for example through lesson observations and sampling of pupils' work. This means that, although they give careful attention to the information provided by the school, governors are not in a position to contribute to the school's development on the basis of a rigorous analysis of its performance. They do not have a clear and detailed picture of school strengths and weaknesses. The new chair of governors is keen to develop the work of the governing body in this respect. He is working closely with the headteacher, with whom a very good working relationship is established, to identify where procedures need to be adapted or instigated. For example, a strategy for the governors' curriculum committee to carry out its responsibilities is being put in place with immediate effect.

78. While the governing body carries out most of its responsibilities effectively there are some areas in which the school does not comply fully with requirements. The overall judgement about compliance, therefore, has to be that it is unsatisfactory. Although there are suitable arrangements for providing a daily act of worship for all pupils through assemblies and tutor groups, in practice this is not happening. The ICT curriculum is not complete. The arrangements for discontinuing design and technology in Years 10 and 11 are inappropriate and are to be put right for the next academic year. Arrangements for the formal review of health and safety procedures are not in place. There are omissions from the prospectus and the annual report to parents.
79. The budget information given in Part C of this report reflects the total income and expenditure for the school and the Centre for Lifelong Learning, whose director is a member of the school's management team. When separated out, the figures show that the amount spent on each pupil is above the national average, not well above as the figures indicate. Pupils benefit from the additional income generated by the school. Financial management is good. A recent audit, February 2000, found that systems of control were excellent, although it reported some slippage in implementing the pay policy then current. The new finance officer, in post for two terms, is with the headteacher and governors overhauling internal procedures to improve the availability of budget information. Grant monies are used properly for the purposes specified. Decisive action taken by the headteacher in the Spring term, diverted funding to deal with the serious Year 11 disaffection problem. The action was highly strategic and cost-effective, in that everybody benefited. The disaffected pupils, other pupils and staff all had a better deal as a result: an excellent example of best value. The action was inclusive in that the particular needs of this group of pupils were met in a productive way so that their opportunity to succeed was strengthened.
80. In the last term, pupils, the student council, parents and staff have been consulted about their vision for the school and planned improvements. This is to be followed up with an open meeting for parents with the new headteacher, for which the date is published. Prior to this, governors had discussions with pupils of all abilities about their views of the school. They noted concerns about school meals, depressing parts of the building, showers and copying in lessons. All these points have received, or are receiving, attention. The school has taken effective action to spend less on maintenance and decoration while improving the quality and rate of the work carried out. Pupils appreciate the improvements. A similar exploration is under way with regard to cleaning. A thorough analysis of all pupils' assessment results is made for each year of entry from 1993 and gives value-added judgements and predictions. This is extended to looking at boys' and girls' attainment on entry from 1998 in terms of Key Stage 2 results. Not all departments are handling this information confidently as a working tool to help with planning. In mathematics, this is done very well.
81. Overall the school is adequately resourced. There is some weakness in the staffing for modern languages where there are insufficient specialist staff to teach the curriculum. There is some non-specialist drama teaching. Staffing for special needs is inadequate for the number of pupils identified as needing support. The school is in the process of establishing technician support for ICT. In religious education, there are insufficient textbooks for the Key Stage 3 curriculum. Computer provision, however, is a little better than in most schools. Subject accommodation is generally well suited to need, with the exception of one science laboratory that is no longer fit for its purpose. The library is too small and the special needs base lacks a separate space for interviews and confidential discussion. Good arrangements for newly qualified teachers and experienced staff new to the school support them well. New technology is being used well in English, mathematics, art and design and design and technology but is a weakness in geography. Laptops are available for pupils with special needs and the school uses effectively a commercial literacy and numeracy package. At a school level, pending the successful

installation of the local authority's management system, good use is being established of self-generated, year-on-year records of pupils' assessments.

82. The management of special needs provision is satisfactory. The co-ordinator provides members of staff with information regarding individual learning needs and disabilities and meets twice termly with link teachers from each department. Areas for development have been appropriately identified through internal review in which the special needs governor is appropriately involved. Specific funding for special needs is properly utilised and further monies added from the school's finances. However, the whole-school role of the co-ordinator has not been sufficiently developed; this shows in the inadequate time allocated for overseeing special needs provision. Since the last inspection, there have been improvements to special needs policy and resources, including those in the library. A learning support assistant has been appointed and staff development provided on special needs planning. Further training is needed to follow this up.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

83. To raise standards further and strengthen the improvement in pupils' achievements and self-esteem, senior staff and governors should focus on the following priorities:

** action being taken by the school*

- (1) Improve attendance further through
 - Implementing a rigorous first-day-calling procedure *
 - Ensuring that attendance procedures and records meet requirements
 - Strengthening the partnership with parents *
 - Building further pupils' sense of achievement and self-worth *
 - Providing a Key Stage 4 curriculum that is flexible enough to support well all pupils' aptitudes and aspirations *
 - Making the most of the opportunities afforded by the presence on site of the Centre for Lifelong Learning.

(Paragraphs 37, 71, 73)

- (2) Raise achievement further in modern languages and, in Years 10 and 11, in ICT through
 - Modern languages*
 - Improving the quality of teaching by providing training for non-specialist staff to increase their confidence and skill in using the language in lessons
 - Ensuring that the tracking of pupils' progress is rigorously carried out *
 - Raising the status of languages in the school *
 - Maintaining the good development work being led by the new head of department *
 - Providing the opportunity for all pupils to take appropriate accredited courses in Years 10 and 11.
 - ICT*
 - Ensure that the subject is fully equipped to teach the curriculum in all years, particularly in Years 10 and 11
 - Strengthen the role of the co-ordinator in ensuring that ICT is fully provided in all subjects of the curriculum *
 - Implement procedures across all subjects for assessing pupils' attainment in ICT.

(Paragraphs 3, 11, 17, 21, 27, 31, 34, 42, 52, 57, 88-90, 93-95, 111, 115, 118, 132, 141, 142, 150, 169, 173, 200, 204-207)

- (3) Improve pupils' literacy and independent study skills through
 - Implementing literacy policy equally well in all subjects and courses
 - Strengthening literacy policy in relation to speaking and writing skills that involve explanation and argument *
 - Implementing a school policy on pupils' learning, researching and revising skills
 - Providing further staff training and guidance on these
 - Ensuring that this skills development is fully incorporated into all subject planning
 - Focusing lesson monitoring on these issues for specified periods
 - Strengthening provision of homework and other study clubs where possible
 - Ensuring that feedback in lessons, the marking of work and pupils' annual reports clearly identify what pupils need to do to improve and how to do it
 - Involving parents in setting and reviewing their children's learning targets.

(Paragraphs 11, 12, 22-3, 30, 40, 44, 49-51, 67, 78, 157-161, 164, 166-170, 175, 177)

- (4) Ensure that the governing body is fully informed about school strengths and weaknesses through
- Implementing strategy through which each committee of the governing body carries out its responsibilities *
 - Formalising the regular review of health and safety
 - Strengthening the monitoring programme to ensure that the effects of provision on pupils' learning and progress are rigorously evaluated
 - Involving governors, perhaps as linked governors, in department review meetings at which the findings of monitoring are evaluated
 - Implementing a mechanism for the school to report its findings from monitoring to the governing body at stages throughout the academic year
 - Ensuring that all development planning is informed by rigorous evaluation from monitoring
 - Ensuring that the views of pupils and parents continue to be sought and taken into account
 - Ensuring that the governing body keeps up to date with statutory requirements and national guidance.
- (Paragraphs 77-8, 96, 118, 177)

COMMUNITY LINKS

The report on this additional feature of the inspection is included in the section on pupils' learning opportunities.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	143
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	56

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	22	43	30	3	1	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons. The figures are rounded up and may not add up to 100.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	631
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	128

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	99

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	44

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	19
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	23

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	9.4
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	2.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2000	55	76	131

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	16	28	26
	Girls	43	40	30
	Total	59	68	56
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	45 (32)	52 (55)	43 (29)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	11 (13)	26 (22)	7 (5)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	19	28	25
	Girls	42	38	30
	Total	61	66	55
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	47 (46)	50 (60)	42 (37)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (80)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	14 (16)	25 (18)	5 (5)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	54	62	116

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	13	43	48
	Girls	30	58	60
	Total	43	101	108
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	37 (26)	87 (79)	93 (90)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	34 (27)
	National	38.4 (38.0)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	2
Indian	2
Pakistani	41
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	572
Any other minority ethnic group	11

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7– Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	37
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7– Y11

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	147

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73
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Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11

Key Stage 3	25
Key Stage 4	21

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	17	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income school and adult learning centre	1,651,992
Total expenditure school and adult learning centre	1,637,893
Expenditure per pupil (excluding learning centre students)	2510.98
Balance brought forward from previous year	22,417
Balance carried forward to next year	36,516

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	631
Number of questionnaires returned	274

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	26	57	12	5	0
My child is making good progress in school.	36	56	5	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	22	56	10	4	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	60	11	4	2
The teaching is good.	23	63	7	1	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25	53	16	4	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	33	54	7	4	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	50	44	3	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	22	53	16	4	5
The school is well led and managed.	25	52	9	1	13
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	26	60	9	3	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	29	44	11	3	13

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

ENGLISH

84. GCSE results in 2000 were well below the national average for all schools. The proportion of both boys and girls gaining a higher grade A* to C was well below the national average but when compared with similar schools these A*-C results are average. Overall, standards are similar to those reported at the last inspection. They show a significant improvement on the 1999 results. In English literature, girls' results in 2000 were close to the national average while boys' results remained well below average. This imbalance in the attainment of boys and girls was also true of the English language results and has been a marked feature in English over the last five years.
85. Pupils' results in the Year 9 national tests in 2000 were well below the national average and below the average for similar schools. This has been the pattern over recent years although, in 2000, there was an improvement from the 1999 results. This rise in performance from 1999 to 2000 was greater than the national rise. Girls consistently gain higher results than boys at the age of 14.
86. The standards seen in the work of Year 9 pupils was better than shown by the 2000 results. There are a number of contributory factors. The weaknesses in pupils' attendance, together with weaknesses in their literacy skills and ability to work independently, can have a detrimental effect in their performance in tests. Pupils in the current Year 9 have benefited from the notable improvement in teaching, specifically, from the focus in the previous term on good planning of the learning targets for each lesson and the review of the progress on the targets at the end of the lesson. This, combined with the teachers' helpful evaluations in lessons and on marked work, is ensuring that pupils have a good understanding of how well they are doing, a significant aspect of secure learning and successful performance. This is true in mathematics and science, and in science is also true in relation to the GCSE results in 2000.
87. Most pupils, including those from ethnic minorities and those with special needs, make satisfactory progress over each key stage as a result of the sound provision made for them. The exception is those pupils who are regarded as gifted and talented. For them, the work provided is not always sufficiently challenging. How well pupils learn in lessons is determined by the quality of teaching. They make significant gains in knowledge, understanding and the development of skills when there is rigour and pace to the work.
88. In the work seen at each key stage, standards are below national expectations. Pupils achieve satisfactorily in relation to their prior attainment. Many have poor writing skills on entry to the school but by the age of 16 can write a detailed analysis of set texts and extended prose which is organised and well presented. This is a result of highly structured lesson plans and teaching techniques that are suitably varied to take account of pupils' individual learning needs. Many pupils, however, still have insecure skills in spelling, punctuating and structuring sentences. This weakness in basic skills persists from the last inspection.
89. Pupils improve their reading skills as they move through the school. The accelerated reading scheme enables hesitant readers to become more confident. Simplified texts are appropriately used for pupils with special needs. Pupils for whom English is an additional language make satisfactory progress in their reading as a result of well-targeted support. Given that large numbers of pupils have very low reading ages on entry to the school, satisfactory progress is made in developing this skill by the time they leave.

90. Standards of speaking are varied and overall, well below those expected nationally. Although some pupils are confident, far too many are unable to speak at length. Pupils generally are not fluent speakers. They use short phrases in answer to questions and are reluctant or unable to explain ideas or describe their work using more than a single sentence. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, pupils were asked to think of an item which reminded them of home and explain its significance. Although all had a valued possession, they could not explain why it prompted memories of home; they did no more than tell their classmates what the item was. Pupils do not have good enough opportunities to engage in debate and discussion as part of the English programme and therefore miss out on a valuable learning opportunity. When working in the security of a small group or in pairs, they talk about their work and argue a point, but this confidence vanishes when the audience is large or unfamiliar. Achievement is unsatisfactory in this key skill. Listening skills, however, are good. Pupils show consideration when others are speaking and concentrate on what is being said. For example, Year 8 lower attainers had to read aloud the sentences they had written showing that they could use new vocabulary correctly. Each reader received the undivided attention of the class and, as a result, all made gains in learning.
91. Pupils have good attitudes to their work and show respect towards each other and to staff. Behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils from ethnic minorities and pupils with special needs are well integrated into lesson activities and individual differences are respected.
92. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. In Years 7 to 9 it is often good. This is much the same picture as reported at the last inspection. English teachers are knowledgeable about their subject and prepare well. Their supportive but firm approach in lessons and their understanding of individual pupils' strengths and weaknesses, help all pupils to make progress. A particular strength is the use of varied techniques to suit individual pupils' learning needs. For example, the use of computers in Year 11 allowed lower attainers to make significant progress in distinguishing fact from opinion in a text on foxhunting. This was because the technology enabled them to work independently and at their own pace. Good behaviour was seen in all lessons because of teachers' effective classroom management. Pupils are clear about what is expected of them because teachers explain the lesson targets and put them on display. Every teacher is skilled in these techniques.
93. Some good teaching was observed from which all department staff should be able to benefit. In a Year 8 lesson on analysing texts, which pupils had brought from home, the teacher used follow-up questions to challenge pupils' initial responses and develop their critical awareness. As a result, good progress was made. Not every member of staff uses questioning well to develop pupils' understanding. Too often, teachers accept a superficial answer and fail to build upon pupils' initial responses. Not all lesson planning is sufficiently rigorous to challenge every pupil in the class. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, pupils had to produce a booklet for primary pupils joining the school in September 2001. The emphasis was on how the writing would be structured. Insufficient time was given for pupils to recall and articulate the thoughts and feelings they had when they were in Year 6 and faced with the same change. An opportunity was lost for pupils to reflect on a common experience; the work became rather mechanical and the pace pedestrian. Not enough thought has been given to the structuring of lessons so that sufficient time is allowed for reviewing how well the learning targets have been met. Opportunities for pupils to work independently and use their own initiative have been neglected. They lack encouragement to work creatively and develop their own ideas and opinions.
94. There is no whole school, co-ordinated approach to developing pupils' literacy skills. The good practice which exists is not generally applied and the work of the co-ordinator has been limited by a restricted brief. There has been progress in raising the awareness of staff. A literacy policy

is now in place with appendices on how to introduce key words, how to direct class discussions and how to check the readability level of set texts. There has been agreement on how pupils should present their written work and there is a common approach to the marking of literacy errors. This work now needs to be taken forward with the support of all staff if there are to be significant improvements in basic literacy skills.

95. The head of department gives sound leadership and management. Aims and values are clearly articulated. There is a clear direction to the work of the department and a commitment to raising achievement. Staff new to the department are well supported and good professional relationships prevail. Systems are in place to monitor, evaluate and develop teaching; all staff are involved in lesson observations on a regular basis to share good practice. Appropriate documentation exists and the improvement plan rightly identifies teaching and learning, ICT, basic skills and literacy as the issues to take forward. The areas for further development are the weaknesses identified in teaching and the poor basic skills shown by many of the pupils.
96. There has been satisfactory progress on the three issues reported at the last inspection. Appropriate schemes of work are now in place for all pupils and the department's development plan is an effective working document for improving teaching and learning. Provision for the multi-cultural aspects of the subject and pupils' spiritual development is now satisfactory and continues to receive attention. The department's assessment procedures work well, but insufficient use is made of comparative performance information for monitoring pupils' progress on a regular basis.

Drama

97. The curriculum provision for drama is inadequate. The subject is taught in Years 7 and 8, but not in Year 9; it has not been offered as an option choice in Year 10, although it will be in the next academic year.
98. Standards are high when teaching is stimulating and challenging and the pace of work brisk. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on the transportation of slaves, pupils had to illustrate through role play the effect of confinement on behaviour. Their performances showed insight and they made good progress in understanding the nature of such suffering and the degradation it inflicted. This lesson was taught by a specialist. Standards are poor when the subject is taught by a non-specialist. In a Year 8 lesson, the objectives were not communicated clearly and the methods used were inappropriate for the content. Pupils' concentration lapsed and little progress was made.
99. The recently appointed teacher in charge of the subject has secured significant improvements over a short space of time that have raised the subject's status in the school. Appropriate schemes of work are now in place for both year groups and a well-attended drama club meets on a regular basis. Large numbers of pupils are involved in the annual school production. They express interest in studying the subject beyond Year 8. Accommodation is satisfactory, but resources are limited.

MATHEMATICS

100. Pupils' performance in the GCSE examinations in 2000 was well below the national average for all schools but was average for pupils from schools with a similar intake. Overall, pupils did less well in mathematics than they did in their other subjects; this was true for boys. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades A*-C has doubled over the last four years. In 2000, girls achieved more of these higher grades than boys, and all girls who sat the examination achieved a grade; a small proportion of boys did not. In 2000, pupils out-

performed their predicted grades by an average of approximately one fifth of a grade; for ethnic minority pupils, this was by one whole grade.

101. In the Year 9 tests in 2000, pupils' performance was well below the national averages for both boys and girls, but well above the average for schools with a similar intake of pupils. Over the last four years, the trend in results is much the same as the national trend, with the school's results moving closer to national averages. The performance of boys is slightly better than that of the girls.
102. The work seen in Years 7 to 9 is, overall, at the standard expected nationally. Pupils with special needs make sound progress. There is considerable variation between the work of pupils in different years and teaching groups which appropriately reflects pupils' prior attainment. For example, lower attainers in Year 7 have difficulty in subtracting a pair of two-digit numbers, while other pupils in the same year can confidently add and subtract decimals and solve simple linear equations. From results generated in an investigation, Year 8 pupils can find a two-step rule and express it algebraically. By the age of 14, most pupils know the formulae for calculating the areas of rectangles, triangles and circles and can use these to solve problems; they can calculate a percentage of any quantity and can draw and interpret frequency graphs. The higher attainers can factorise algebraic expressions, use and apply Pythagoras' theorem to solve problems and solve problems involving inequalities. Pupils' achievement over their first three years in the school is very good. They enter Year 7 with standards well below national expectations and they make good gains in understanding.
103. For pupils in Years 10 and 11, the standard of work seen during the inspection is below national expectations. Again there is some variation, with the highest attainers producing work at the expected standard by the age of 16. For example, the higher attainers can work with ratio and use 'standard form' to work with numbers of any size. They solve problems involving bearings, inequalities, areas and volumes. They solve quadratic equations graphically or by using the formula and can use a calculator effectively to solve problems involving trigonometry. The work seen in the middle groups in Years 10 and 11 shows that they can calculate simple probability, plot a straight-line graph given its equation, and solve problems involving direct proportion. Lower attainers know and use properties of quadrilaterals and triangles to calculate unknown angles and can substitute numbers for letters to evaluate expressions. Over Years 10 and 11, achievement is satisfactory. Pupils enter Year 10 with standards that are close to national expectations and maintain this level throughout the two years. For example, they progress from drawing simple line graphs in Year 10 to drawing scatter graphs and interpreting them to ascertain the extent of correlation in Year 11. Similarly, pupils extend their knowledge and skills of probability from calculating simple probabilities to calculating the probability of two combined events. Pupils with special needs continue to make sound progress.
104. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are good; they are very good in some lessons, but sometimes are less than satisfactory. Generally, pupils show interest in their work and are fully involved in the tasks; at best they are enthusiastic. They behave well, are polite and helpful, and have developed good working relationships with their teachers and with their peers. However, in three lessons, pupils showed little interest or involvement and their behaviour was unsatisfactory. Teachers used effective strategies in two of these lessons to ensure that work was not disrupted, but in the third lesson, poor behaviour impeded learning.
105. There was supply teaching in the department during the inspection. Teaching is satisfactory overall; it is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. There are some good and some very good features; in one lesson in Years 7 to 9 was teaching unsatisfactory. Lessons are well structured and planned with clear learning targets that are explained to the pupils. There is

a good balance between the time pupils spend on listening and the time they spend on doing their own work. Teaching is interspersed with activities that often have a time limit, which helps to achieve the best concentration. Teachers follow the scheme of work, which is linked to the text book, and plan appropriately for pupils' needs. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and expect them to do well. They regularly assess pupils' attainment according to departmental policy and keep useful records. The good match of activities to pupils' needs shows that teachers make use of these records to plan the next steps in learning, although this is not always clearly stated. Homework is regularly set and marked, sometimes, but not always, with helpful comments and suggestions on how pupils can improve their work. At the end of each lesson, the teacher discusses whether the learning targets have been met, or goes over the content of the lesson. All of these features make a positive contribution to pupils' learning.

106. In the best lessons, teachers use a variety of methods and resources to help pupils learn. For example, using a short game to increase understanding of positive and negative numbers; presenting knowledge in an unusual or memorable way that will facilitate recall at a later date; using ICT to demonstrate procedures or to make repetitive practice more efficient. They also challenge their pupils by providing tasks that make them think for themselves, as well as by setting or agreeing time limits to keep them on their toes. Teachers use searching questions to ensure that all pupils understand a new concept or topic. They follow up a correct answer, by going on to ask the pupil 'How do you know?' and then asking the rest of the class, 'Does that make sense?'
107. All teachers have good subject knowledge and show this both by their confident delivery and by their ability to explain concepts in different ways in order to help all pupils to learn and understand successfully. They use every opportunity to improve pupils' basic skills of numeracy and literacy, the latter by the use of key words, and help with spelling, reading and interpreting texts. A particularly effective strategy was asking pupils to read out the lesson targets as well as some of the questions. The classroom displays of technical vocabulary and mathematical facts and shapes are effective in creating a stimulating environment for learning.
108. Pupils' learning is satisfactory overall, and good in Years 7, 8 and 9. Generally, pupils put a lot of effort into their work and are interested in what they are doing. For example, all the pupils in a Year 7 lesson put considerable effort into understanding and applying a new skill which enabled them to find the length of a rectangle, given either its area or its perimeter. Both the task and the pace of the lesson were challenging and pupils had to concentrate fully to keep up. However, some pupils find it difficult to sustain concentration during a long task, or throughout the lesson, and it is on these occasions that the teachers' skill in organising activities into short, separate sections becomes so effective. Good attitudes to work also enable higher attainers in Year 11 to make good progress. However, for most pupils in Years 10 and 11, learning is no better than satisfactory. They do not always apply sufficient effort, especially when the unsatisfactory behaviour of a minority claims the teachers' attention and slows the pace of the lesson. Pupils with special needs learn as well as their peers overall, supported by the class teacher's knowledge of their learning needs. There is insufficient evidence from which to judge how well pupils for whom English is an additional language learn mathematics.
109. The school has developed a numeracy policy and methods of teaching mathematics have been shared with the whole staff. This approach to support the development of pupils' numeracy skills in all areas of the curriculum has been effective. For example, in history, when lower attainers in Year 8 had difficulty in deciding whether 4000 out of 18000 troops constituted a majority, the teacher explained how the calculation could be simplified. In science, pupils in Year 10 had difficulty in finding the gradient of their graph until the teacher explained the method and made sure that all pupils understood how to do it.

110. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory, with some good features. In the following areas it is good. The priorities for development (principally raising standards and further development in the use of ICT) clearly show the direction in which the department wishes to move forward and are entirely appropriate. In adopting and implementing policies that reflect those of the school, the teachers show a shared commitment to work as a team and their subject expertise ensures that improvements can continue. The introduction of elements of the National Numeracy Strategy is an example of this commitment. A good start has been made on the use of ICT, in particular the commercial package for lower attainers. The department has good staffing, and good, well-maintained accommodation that provides a stimulating setting for learning. There are adequate learning resources and each pupil has his or her own textbook. Leadership and management are satisfactory in the following areas. There has been some effective monitoring of teaching. There is clear evidence that the department has monitored its progress in meeting the targets in the subject development plan. Analysis of the results of assessments is now being carried out more fully, although some of this is at an early stage. So also is the use of the results of this analysis to adapt planning and methods.
111. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Pupils' performance in the tests at age 14 has been rising steadily towards the national average and the proportion of pupils attaining the higher grades in GCSE has doubled. There is greater use of numeracy skills, especially in Years 7 to 9, and calculators are used appropriately. Pupils apply their problem-solving skills to other areas of the mathematics curriculum to extend and broaden their knowledge and understanding. They apply their investigative skills to develop their mathematical reasoning. The quality of teaching has improved. Lessons are well structured and teachers use an appropriate variety of teaching methods to help pupils to learn. There is a sound assessment policy, fully implemented. However, some pupils are still very reliant on the teacher; they do not have enough opportunities to work independently and to think for themselves, especially in Years 10 and 11. Planning does not yet make the best use of the new ICT facilities.

SCIENCE

112. GCSE results in 2000 were below the national average for all schools. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher A* to C grades was significantly below the national average. However, when compared with similar schools these results are above the national average. Girls' performance was much better than that of the boys overall. The 2000 results show a slight decline from those of 1999, but were an improvement over those of 1998. Pupils do less well in double science than they do in their other subjects and this compares unfavourably with the national picture. This is true for boys' results.
113. Results in the Year 9 tests in 2000 were well below the national average for all schools while below the average for similar schools. In the past few years, girls have achieved better results than boys at this stage. Between 1996 and 2000, test results improved steadily until 1998, dropped sharply in 1999, before rising again in 2000. During this period, except in 1998, results were consistently well below the national average. Results in science were not as good as those in mathematics, while similar to those in English.
114. In the work seen in Years 7 to 9, standards are below those expected nationally. However, they are better than those indicated by pupils' results in the national tests in 2000. There has been a good improvement in standards since the last inspection, most of which has been in the past year, so that standards are now closer to the expectation, although still below it. Pupils' practical and investigative skills are not as strong as their science knowledge and remain poor. This is because there are too few opportunities for them to make their own predictions, or define problems based on scientific knowledge and understanding. They seldom plan their own

investigations and evaluate their results. Pupils are generally good at carrying out experiments planned by the teacher. In these they record observations, take accurate measurements and present data in the form of charts and graphs. The standards of pupils' work are held back however, because tasks do not sufficiently incorporate applications to everyday life. For example, Year 8 pupils know about the process of photosynthesis (glucose production in plants) but have a very limited understanding of its significance for the plant, other organisms and the environment. Many pupils lack confidence in using basic scientific terminology; although teachers help pupils to develop their literacy skills appropriately, this is not done rigorously enough. Pupils' numeracy skills are below average. Their ICT skills, although improving, are not well developed because of the lack of opportunity to use computers, particularly for data-logging. None-the-less, by the end of Year 9, pupils' achievement is good in relation to their prior attainment in the subject, which, when they join the school as 11 year olds, is well below average. Pupils for whom English is an additional language and those with special needs make sound progress.

115. Standards in the work seen in Years 10 to 11 are below those expected nationally, although better than those suggested by the results in recent examinations. Pupils continue to achieve well. They have at least a satisfactory knowledge of the topics they are studying. Many pupils in Year 10 have a good understanding of electrical circuits and understand the relationship between resistance, voltage and current. This is better than would be expected in relation to their prior attainment. However, weak numeracy and graphical skills often hinder their progress in analysing and interpreting the data they collect through experiment. Middle and lower attainers, including those with special needs, reach the standards expected of them. However, as in Years 7 to 9, a significant number of higher attainers achieve less well than they should because the tasks they are given are often insufficiently demanding. Pupils' practical and investigative skills improve, but are below their attainment in other areas of science. In some lessons, pupils do not express themselves clearly when answering spoken or written questions. Spelling and sentence construction are often weak, particularly among boys.
116. Pupils have a good attitude to their work and carry out practical experiments safely. Behaviour is good overall. In Years 7 to 9, pupils are enthusiastic experimenters and are keen to ask and answer questions. Good relationships lead to effective collaboration in practical work. However, in Years 10 and 11, pupils show less positive attitudes and behaviour. In a small number of lessons, the behaviour of a minority of pupils is poor and the work of the class is disrupted. When teachers provide challenging tasks, pupils respond well, use their initiative and show good commitment to their learning.
117. The quality of teaching is good at each stage. There is more good teaching in Years 10 to 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Where there was unsatisfactory teaching it was mostly in Years 7 to 9. The differences in teaching quality between lessons produce marked differences in the pupils' responses. In the most effective lessons, teachers' good knowledge and expertise is combined with high expectations, enthusiasm and effective planning. These give pupils confidence so that they respond positively and try hard. In the better lessons, teachers challenge the pupils with carefully constructed questions to make them reflect and think critically. Through such questioning teachers check out how well pupils understand the work. This happened in a Year 7 lesson where the pace was quick so that learning was effective; pupils made good progress in their understanding of how plants and animals are adapted to survive in their particular environment, what animals eat and how energy is passed through the ecosystem. In this lesson, pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development was encouraged well, as it is generally. Pupils considered the beauty, balance, order and fragility of environments and how these can be seriously damaged or destroyed by human beings. While pupils are taught in ability groups, there is still a wide range of attainment in many classes. Teachers' expectations

for pupils' achievement in a significant number of these classes are focused on the middle to lower levels of attainment so that the higher attainers in these classes are not stretched enough. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, time was wasted in trying to control the class, the pace was slow, and insufficient learning of any depth took place. However, even in some satisfactory lessons the pupils were too passive, so they did not learn through experience and their progress was slow. Overall, learning is satisfactory at each key stage. It is not as good as the teaching is because teachers' expectations are not always sufficiently high for pupils of all attainment levels and pupils put only satisfactory effort into their work, not good effort.

118. Leadership and management are good. Significant changes have taken place very recently which indicate that necessary improvements can be made. The new head of department has a good understanding of the department's strengths and weaknesses and is drawing up suitable plans to tackle underachievement and improve the quality of teaching and learning. While planning, monitoring and evaluation have been insufficiently rigorous to raise standards, this is now changing. A new and better scheme of work has been introduced for Years 10 to 11, although still in need of further refinement; a new scheme of work is being produced for Years 7 to 9. Pupils in Year 7 are grouped by attainment. Boys and girls are expected to work together in an attempt to help raise boys' standards. This appears to be working. Reports to parents, although containing detail about pupils' attitudes, do not give sufficient detail about their scientific skills, knowledge and understanding, or about how these can be improved.
119. The laboratory technicians provide good support for the teaching of science. Basic equipment is adequate, but there are shortages of larger items such as top pan balances and power packs. Shortage of resources for ICT and lack of textbooks at each key stage restrict pupils' progress. While laboratory accommodation is satisfactory overall, one laboratory is in need of major refurbishment, including an overhaul of plumbing, electricity and gas supply. The layout in this laboratory restricts the range of lesson activities. The quality and quantity of pupils' work on display creates an attractive working environment.
120. Overall, there has been good improvement since the last inspection. Year 9 test results and results at GCSE have improved. The quality of teaching, then mostly sound, is now good. Assessment and recording procedures have improved so that now there is a centralised computer system to allow for better tracking of pupils' progress. However, this is not yet co-ordinated across the department and the results of assessments are not used to check on the effectiveness of curriculum planning. The development of ICT is moving at a faster pace but the lack of equipment still hinders progress.

ART AND DESIGN

121. GCSE results were well above the national average in 2000. The performance of girls was well above the national average for girls and higher than the performance of boys. The number of boys taking the GCSE examination was too small to make reliable comparisons with national averages. The results are slightly better than those in 1999 and significantly better than the 1998 results. They represent a significant improvement since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades A*-C was well above the national average. Pupils achieved better results in art than they did in their other subjects and this compares favourably with the picture nationally. Trends over time show that both the boys' and the girls' standards are improving and the gap between them is closing. Work seen during inspection reflects this trend. The 2000 Year 9 teacher assessments showed attainment close to that reported nationally. This was a significant improvement from 1999 and a slight improvement from 1998.

122. The work seen in Years 7 to 9 indicates that pupils are working above the standard expected for pupils aged 14. This shows very good improvement since the last inspection, when standards were below those expected. Pupils in one group are studying the work of Henry Moore. They are designing and making sculptures in clay, inspired by his style, and acquiring new skills and knowledge when working with this material, including the technique of burnishing. Higher attainers are more imaginative and adventurous with their reclining figure positions and sculptured forms. Several pupils have difficulty with the relative size and proportion of the shoulders and neck, but work hard to overcome this with guidance from the teacher. Other pupils have been studying the work of Alberto Giacometti. They are sculpting figures inspired by his style, using armatures and papier-mâché. Pupils who find three-dimensional work particularly challenging use a simple straight armature for a standing figure, while those with a higher level of skill work on more complicated armatures for figures in a variety of positions. Pupils can work out the proportions of the human body and are confident and pleased with their work. Their two-dimensional work on portraits shows an understanding of facial proportion. Many pupils use colour boldly and in an exciting way for example, when painting a portrait in the style of Gustav Klimt. Sketchbooks are used well for exploratory work. At the last inspection there were reported weaknesses in exploring visual images in sketchbooks and using the work of other artists. Both areas are now appropriately emphasised.
123. Pupils in Years 10 to 11 are working at standards well above those expected for pupils aged 16. In preparation for their examination, all pupils have specific targets to improve each piece of work; they are aware of how the work is currently graded and what grade could be achieved in the future. They are working on individual compositions in their own creative style, inspired by the work of different artists and cultures. These influences include Henri Matisse and art from North American Indian, Aztec and Egyptian cultures. Pupils effectively use a variety of materials, techniques and methods. Examples include mixed media, paper collage, clay, paint and scanned images of their own work. Many pupils have produced very good tonal work in pencil and paint. Their colourful and powerful work on portraiture shows a high level of skill. Exploration work in sketchbooks is very good and imaginative.
124. Pupils' standards on entry into Year 7 are below those expected. Taking this into account, their achievement by the age of 14 is very good, so that standards are above the expectation. Further improvement is evident in Years 10 and 11 where standards are well above those expected. Overall, pupils' achievement from Year 7 to 11 is very good. Gifted and talented pupils and those with special needs make very good progress in art and design. Pupils with special needs sometimes make much better progress than other pupils do, as shown for example, in their high grades for GCSE coursework. This is because teachers have very high expectations of every pupil, use very good assessment procedures and set specific personal targets for most pieces of class work and homework. There is insufficient evidence to comment on the achievement of pupils for whom English is an additional language.
125. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are very good. They listen very well to the teachers' instructions and concentrate very hard on their work. When, in Year 9, they work in pairs on Giacometti inspired sculptures, they show how well they can relate to each other and discuss their work. Pupils behave and respond very well. This is because teachers believe in their ability, have high expectations of them, manage them very well and motivate them through a stimulating curriculum and very good classroom management.
126. Teaching is very good. In one lesson it was excellent and in several lessons it was good. Notable features of the excellent teaching include a high level of discussion, which guides pupils' understanding about how they can effectively improve their work. There is a high level of challenge and pace in lessons that keep pupils entirely focused on the tasks. Teachers are highly skilled at encouraging pupils to succeed. These factors enable very good learning to take

place. Pupils' learning is usually very good. Pupils work hard and productively, keeping on task and maintaining their concentration throughout the lessons. This results from teachers' very good skills of class management and their enthusiasm for the subject.

127. There are numerous strengths in the teaching. Teachers know their subject well; this includes non-specialist teachers' knowledge of the particular level at which they are teaching art and design. As a result, pupils now achieve and learn very well, a reported weakness at the last inspection. Teachers now plan very well for the whole curriculum, for specific projects and for individual lessons. This ensures that all aspects of art and design are covered and pupils' skills built up and appropriately reinforced. At the beginning of lessons, teachers identify what the class will learn and this is written on the board along with the homework. There is constant reference to specific words and meanings, helping pupils with their basic literacy skills. The tasks challenge pupils' creativity and imagination. Teachers expect pupils to work very hard and behave very well. They inspire pupils and convince them that they can achieve, teaching them the specific skills that enable them to do so. This is achieved through using appropriate methods and techniques, including very good demonstrations that help pupils gain good knowledge and understanding. Homework is regularly set and constructively marked and pupils receive very good guidance on how to explore their own and other artists' work in their sketchbooks. This reinforces and extends their learning, which is very good overall and reflects the quality of teaching. Teachers encourage independent learning and use very good resources to do so, including pupils' work, for example in Year 9 sculpture. Very good class management has a very positive effect on pupils' attitudes and learning. There is mutual respect between pupils and teachers. Where teaching is good rather than very good, the pace is usually less brisk. On occasion, not enough time is left for tidying up, and on one occasion, a specific technique was not fully explained.
128. Provision for gifted and talented pupils and for pupils with special needs is very good. This is mainly because teachers effectively assess pupils' knowledge, understanding and levels of attainment. They give very specific individual targets for most pieces of work, including homework. Because of this, pupils know exactly where they are and what they have to do to improve.
129. Leadership and management of the department are very good and provide clear direction for the subject. High quality assessment procedures and target setting are a significant factor in the improved standards. Information from assessments is used very effectively to check the appropriateness of lesson planning, for example for improving sketchbook techniques in Year 10. All pupils have an equal opportunity to succeed in the art department. Good opportunities are planned for literacy and numeracy and teachers constantly use subject specific language. Very good learning resources have a positive affect on learning and achievement. Staffing and accommodation are now good: there are very good professional development arrangements for non-specialist teachers and art rooms now offer a stimulating environment. Displays in the department and round the school are excellent.
130. Improvements since the last inspection have been very good. Standards of attainment and the quality of teaching have improved significantly. All the criticisms reported then have received effective attention. The curriculum is now good. Programmes of work have been re-written and there is an appropriate range of two- and three-dimensional work. ICT is used well; this is better in Years 10 and 11 than lower down the school. The department acknowledges that ICT is not yet fully developed. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is now very good with good links to many faiths and cultures. For example, Year 7 pupils were working on Mendhi designs using batik technique. In previous lessons, pupils of the Muslim faith had discussed their special festivals with other pupils. All completed a piece of writing about the festivals of Eid and Ramadan; they designed, made and exchanged Eid cards.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

131. GCSE results in 2000 were above the national average for all schools. Pupils do better in design and technology than they do in their other subjects and this compares favourably with the picture nationally. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades A*-C was well above the national average, as were girls' results. Boys' results were above average. All pupils gained at least a grade G. This is a significant improvement on the satisfactory standards reported at the last inspection. Improvements are largely the result of good teaching and pupils' very positive attitudes to learning in the subject. The results of the 2000 Year 9 teacher assessments were above those reported nationally and there has been steady improvement since the last inspection.
132. In the work seen, standards for pupils in Years 7 to 9 are above those expected nationally. Pupils are introduced to good design work in Year 7 and begin to develop good skills of gathering and analysing information to support their projects. They have good practical skills, take great pride in their work and persevere to finish it to a good standard. Pupils have a good awareness of the features of good design and a good knowledge of the consumer market. They demonstrate this in Year 9 when they work in groups to make items such as trinket boxes, photograph frames and key holders, using wood, plastic and metal. They decide how to approach the task and choose the methods and resources they need. They modify their ideas to improve them as they are working during practical lessons. At the end of projects, they evaluate their work, noting what difficulties and successes they encountered and what could be done to improve their work further. Standards of written work are not as high, but pupils communicate their ideas effectively through good working drawings.
133. Pupils' standards in the work seen in Years 10 and 11 are at the expected level. Standards overall are lower than in the previous year. School records of the much smaller group taking the subject in the current year show a lower proportion of predicted A*-C grades. Both the number and attainment range of pupils currently taking the subject have been affected by a change in the option system at Key Stage 4. This change is to be discontinued in the next academic year. Pupils have a good understanding of the design process and good practical skills. When making products such as items of furniture, they are able to improve quality and design through evaluating their work, both during and at the end of projects. The coursework folders of higher attainers show thoroughly researched topics in depth and detail, which are presented clearly. Lower attainers produce less sophisticated and detailed work, but the clear course structure enables them to make an appropriate response to assessment criteria. Their achievements reflect the high standards expected of all pupils and the good standard of teaching. Pupils undertake challenging projects which make them think and give them reasonable expectations of successful completion. For example, a pupil in a Year 11 graphics products lesson made attractive educational materials for young children and gained valuable insights into the needs of the target group through thorough research. When pupils plan meals in food technology lessons, they draw on their good knowledge of nutrition and the needs of different groups of people.
134. Standards are good because pupils are highly motivated and prepared to persevere to achieve them. Their attitudes and behaviour are very good. They make good use of computers to present coursework and can present their research findings in the form of graphs and charts. Those with special needs and gifted and talented pupils make good progress throughout the school because they are appropriately challenged and supported effectively by teachers who know their needs well. Pupils from ethnic minorities are well-integrated into lessons and make similar progress to others. There is not enough evidence to judge the progress made by pupils who speak English as an additional language.

135. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is very good. Pupils make clear gains in relation to their level of attainment when they join Year 7. Their progress in the acquisition of skills is particularly evident in Year 7 when they are introduced to a wide range of hand and machine tools which they learn to use safely and confidently. Pupils enter lessons expecting to make good progress and they learn to manage their time efficiently. They are highly motivated and because behaviour is very good, the teacher does not have to waste any time gaining order and discipline. Pupils learn new technical vocabulary for each project and are encouraged to use the new and relevant words. They recall work from previous lessons and so build skills and knowledge of materials and processes. They learn to measure, mark and cut out materials accurately, recognising this as important to the making of well-fitting products. In Year 9 group work, pupils consolidate and extend their learning in all practical aspects of the subject when they undertake a mini-enterprise project to make a range of products.
136. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11. Pupils continue to develop their skills and knowledge of tools, materials and processes that they use to achieve high standards in examinations. Their results are often higher than predicted. They take pride in what they do and strive to produce work that has a good finish and is of practical use, for example, a computer desk. They work with a greater degree of independence when conducting research and show increasing maturity in the care they take over their work. Pupils do not make enough progress in their learning about control and computer aided manufacture because resources for these are inadequate.
137. The quality of teaching is good; it is never less than satisfactory and sometimes very good. The significant rise in standards over recent years, which in 2000, placed pupils' results well above the national average, is due to the effectiveness of the teaching methods. Teachers have good relationships with pupils, which lead to co-operative and productive working. They have high expectations of them to which the response is very positive. Pupils trust teachers to enable them to achieve highly in the subject. They are encouraged to work creatively. For example, after learning about the construction of fabrics, a Year 7 group designed a piece of fabric combining a range of unusual materials such as plastic, yarns and twigs. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they use effectively to plan lessons that inspire and challenge pupils to reach high standards. They make a good contribution to pupils' development of literacy and numeracy skills. This is done through the use of writing frames to assist in the expression of ideas, through careful introduction of new words and through insistence on accuracy in measuring and marking materials. Pupils are encouraged to use the school's ICT facilities to improve the presentation of projects, particularly for GCSE coursework.
138. Leadership and management are good. The head of department has a good knowledge of the quality of teaching gained through careful monitoring and there is a strong, shared commitment to improve further. Systems for assessing pupils' work are good. Effective use is made of the information from assessment to monitor pupils' progress and plan work that is suitable for all. The head of department has a good understanding of how to analyse information and use it to further the development of the subject and the progress of pupils.
139. The department's progress since the last inspection has been good. The quality of teaching and the standards achieved by pupils have improved. Accommodation has improved and there is now a new, well-designed and well-equipped graphics room and some improvement to workshops. However, the workshops and food rooms are still small for the numbers of pupils taught in them, although pupils are able to work safely because they are well managed and well behaved.

GEOGRAPHY

140. The results in the GCSE examination in 2000 matched the national average for all schools. The proportion of pupils gaining higher grades A*-C was above the national average and all pupils achieved at least a grade G. The results in 2000 were well above those of previous years. Boys' results were below the national average for boys, while girls' results were well above the average performance of girls nationally. In 2000, teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 showed attainment well below that recorded nationally. While this was a slight improvement on the results in 1999, it was lower than in previous years. Boys' attainment has shown an improvement recently but the performance of girls has shown a significant decline.
141. Standards in the work seen are, overall, below national expectations for pupils aged 14. Pupils develop an understanding of environmental and social issues in geography. For example, they consider the impact of economic change in the rainforests of Brazil and assess the competing demands on land-use in the Mediterranean. Pupils can describe the geographical patterns and physical and human processes that bring about change. However, they find it more difficult to offer explanations of how these processes can lead to similarities and differences between the particular environments studied and how these can affect the inhabitants. Year 7 pupils developed an understanding of how the increase in world population within their lifetime might be predicted from a graph in the textbook; they discussed the likely effects on the environment and on people's lives. In Year 9, pupils identified the relationship between highland areas shown on map of England and Wales, and the general distribution of National Parks. They began to identify some of the conflicting claims on land-use in these areas and how they could be resolved. Higher attainers have better written communication skills and can begin to offer suggestions about the sustainable management of these environments. They can identify further issues and questions. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory at this key stage.
142. In the work seen in Years 10 and 11, overall standards are below those expected for pupils aged 16. This overall standard is not as high as suggested by the 2000 results although there are strengths in the work, particularly in the standard of pupils' investigative projects, which is above the expectation. These projects by higher attainers show sustained levels of commitment and very good skills in collecting, analysing and presenting information. Achievement is good: pupils attain higher standards by the end of Year 11 than would be expected from their earlier attainment. They develop further their understanding of social and environmental issues, both locally and further afield. They begin to understand why areas that were economically important in the past change and how these changes can account for differences in population. For example, good use is made of the local area, through fieldwork, to illustrate and explain changing land-use patterns in the Black Country and the effect on the quality of local services. However, many pupils remain insecure in their knowledge of terms and their understanding of processes. They find it difficult to describe the interactions between physical and human processes and to produce a detailed justification for their answers.
143. Pupils for whom English as an additional language achieve similar standards to all other pupils. Those with special needs make satisfactory progress over Years 7 to 9. Particularly effective classroom support is given to individual pupils with special needs. A pupil with temporary difficulties with handwriting has the use of a laptop computer. Over Years 10 and 11, pupils with special needs make good progress; their good concentration and effort helps them to improve well their skills, knowledge and understanding. Higher attainers make satisfactory progress at each key stage but could attain higher standards. Boys and girls make much the same amount of progress in Years 7 to 9, but in Years 10 and 11, girls' progress is better.
144. In all years, pupils develop a good geographical vocabulary and use it appropriately. For example, Year 11 pupils used technical language to describe their knowledge and understanding of wetland environments. The majority of pupils develop sound mapwork skills and can interpret data presented in various types of graphs at the expected standard. As part of

geographical enquiry, many use ICT confidently and effectively to research and present their findings; they can integrate diagrams, images and other data into the text.

145. Attitudes to learning are generally very good. Pupils show an enthusiasm for their lessons and are keen to learn. Many put much effort into completing fieldwork and redrafting coursework. Overall, behaviour is satisfactory with good levels of concentration among the majority of Year 11 pupils revising for examinations. Teachers make the work interesting through using a variety of activities. As a result, most pupils, at all levels of attainment, including those with special needs, are encouraged to do their best and want to contribute to lessons. Pupils' relationships with their teachers are good. They work well together and respect each other's contributions.
146. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall and good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers' command of their subject is good, with well-chosen examples and a good variety of questions to test and extend pupils' knowledge and understanding. Literacy and ICT skills are taught well, particularly in Years 7 to 9, for example through reading aloud in class, improving standards of writing and using computer software to enhance the presentation of work and develop research skills. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory overall. Planning is generally satisfactory, although there are not enough activities to challenge higher attainers. There are examples of good planning for Years 7 to 9 that incorporate local fieldwork. Teachers' expectations are good, showing in the brisk pace of work in lessons and the way teachers set out to involve all the pupils. Teachers manage the pupils well and create a stimulating environment for learning. For example, Year 8 pupils were introduced to ways of recording the weather. Part of the lesson was conducted outside to develop an understanding of how cloud cover can be measured. Pupils were encouraged to work collaboratively to record their findings. Additional support for those with special needs was unobtrusive, yet very effective. As a result, pupils at all levels of attainment responded with enthusiasm. They developed new skills and made significant gains in their understanding. However, the attainment grades used are not fully related to National Curriculum levels so that pupils cannot be clear about what it is that they have to do in order to raise their standard. Across the year groups, homework is used well to consolidate learning and extend the work in lessons. In Years 10 and 11, the emphasis on fieldwork and coursework supports pupils' learning well.
147. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The department monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the teaching well so that clear priorities for improvement have been established for which there is good planning. Good assessment arrangements enable staff to track pupils' effort, attainment and progress over a variety of tasks.
148. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The management of the subject and the quality of teaching and learning have improved. Standards of GCSE work have been raised, although standards in Years 7 to 9 remain below expectations. Assessment procedures that were unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3 are much improved. Most lessons are now taught by specialists who show an enthusiasm for the subject and a commitment to raising standards.

HISTORY

149. In the GCSE examinations in 2000, results were close to the national average for all schools. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades A*-C was below the national average. Girls gained a greater proportion of A*-C grades than boys; the figure was close to the national average for girls. Almost a quarter of pupils, mainly girls, gained a grade A, which was a significant improvement on previous years. Pupils do slightly better in history than their average in all other subjects. The school's assessment of standards in history at the end of Year

9 showed about half the pupils reaching the expected level of attainment, which was below average when compared with the teacher assessments reported nationally.

150. In the work seen, attainment at age 14 is below national expectations. Pupils are achieving satisfactory standards of work given the difficulties many of them have developing their ideas in writing. Girls are doing better than boys and are more consistent in completing assignments. Pupils in the higher teaching groups in Year 9 are making good progress and reaching the expected standards in their essays on the effects of British imperialism and the causes of the First World War. Most pupils are improving their ability to organise historical information, helped by the use of writing frames and project guides, but many tend to include too much irrelevant, descriptive material. Through regular practice in lessons, pupils make good progress in their ability to use and analyse historical sources. For example, Year 7 pupils were able to identify discrepancies in different accounts of the murder of Thomas a Beckett. By Year 9, higher attainers are using source material to write authentic diaries of life in the trenches during the First World War. They are beginning to evaluate the usefulness and reliability of sources as varied as war poetry and the television programme, 'Blackadder'. Lower attainers are more limited in their use of historical evidence. For example, in Year 9, they could only extract basic information from written sources on the Hitler Youth but gained a better idea of the movement's appeal from video material. Good planning ensures that all pupils are able to develop a variety of skills in the subject. Where many have difficulty is in making links between events within and across historical periods; they show a limited sense of chronology. For example, some Year 8 pupils learning about the Jacobite rising of 1745 had difficulty tracing back Bonnie Prince Charlie's claim to the throne to the events of 1688.
151. At age 16, attainment in the work seen is, overall, below national expectations. Girls are achieving higher standards than the boys, some of them making significant gains on their earlier predicted grades. Achievement overall is good. The high standard of fieldwork preparation seen in Year 10 lessons results in most pupils producing good quality coursework on Dudley Castle. Most of the Year 11 GCSE pupils have produced thorough notes on all the topics, giving them a good basis for revision. The well-structured revision programme is consolidating pupils' learning and giving them valuable practice in examination technique. In one productive session on the rise of Hitler, pupils showed good factual recall of events in Germany between 1929 and 1933; effective questioning by the teacher drew out all the relevant information they need in the examination. Through regular practice in writing timed essays, pupils are improving their technique but still need to include more relevant facts to substantiate points in their argument. A small group of pupils has been working at a lower level for a Certificate of Achievement in history. Those who have completed the course are achieving standards appropriate to their level of attainment.
152. Pupils' attitudes towards the subject are good across the school; behaviour in lessons is mainly good. Generally, pupils maintain their concentration, apply themselves to tasks and work well together in small groups. For example, Year 7 pupils enjoyed their detective work on sources and Year 9 pupils were interested in comparing their lives with those of teenagers in Nazi Germany. Pupils on the GCSE course adopt a serious attitude to their work, whether preparing for fieldwork in Year 10 or revising for examinations in Year 11. Motivation remains high among the remaining pupils on the Certificate course, who are finding out information on World War Two to present to Year 9 pupils. The arrangements for teaching groups allow lessons to be pitched at the right level for pupils, but in practice the needs of higher attainers tend to be served better because of the academic nature of the assessment tasks. In some groups where there is a wide range of attainment, the work is not sufficiently matched to pupils' different learning needs. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are fully involved in learning and make similar progress to other pupils.

153. The quality of teaching in history is good overall. It is more variable in Years 7 to 9, where non-specialist teachers lack expertise in the use of historical sources, but consistently good on the examination courses taught by subject specialists. Teaching is effective in the lowest groups, where teachers are using simplified materials and advancing pupils' learning in small steps to cater for individual needs. Planning is thorough, starting each lesson with a statement of the learning targets and reviewing them at the end, to consolidate pupils' learning. There is a strong focus on historical skills, so that pupils develop well the ability to explain the causes and effects of events and to analyse historical evidence. In some lessons teachers provide too much commentary on the historical sources before pupils have had the opportunity to examine them. Basic skills are taught well. Careful attention is given to subject vocabulary and general literacy using glossaries and by providing clear guidance about what pupils should include in their extended writing. Most lessons move along at a good pace, setting pupils challenging tasks. There is room for further development and more efficient organisation of the department's resource bank of materials to meet the needs of pupils at different levels of attainment. Assessment of pupils' work is a particular strength of the teaching, both in the regular, constructive marking of books and in the detailed comments and targets on test pieces. This constructive criticism of work means that pupils know exactly what they have to do to improve and is having a significant effect in raising standards. Although teachers prepare pupils well for examinations, boys' underachievement persists.
154. The head of department provides good leadership, giving appropriate support to those colleagues who are not history specialists. Schemes of work are up to date with changes in the National Curriculum. They include suitable use of ICT that will increase opportunities for independent learning. History has made great strides with common assessments to test the range of skills in the history curriculum. The practice of keeping a portfolio of assessed work for each pupil is good. This has improved teachers' ability to track progress in the targets set after each piece of work. These strategies are having a direct effect on raising standards across the school. There is a strong commitment to building on these achievements to enable pupils to do even better.
155. Strong teamwork within the humanities area has made it possible to make good progress on the development issues raised at the last inspection. Monitoring of teaching and learning has considerably improved; this is ensuring a more consistent approach by teachers and an equal opportunity for pupils to succeed. Resources are now satisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

156. In the GCSE short course in 2000, results were below the national average for short courses. Fewer than one quarter of pupils gained a higher grade A*-C. Of the 33 pupils who were entered for the Certificate of Educational Achievement (COEA) in 2000, most gained merit or distinction grades. There has been a steady improvement in attainment for the COEA since the last inspection. Pupils are following a full GCSE course in Year 11. The school has recently introduced GNVQ courses at intermediate level for pupils in Year 10 so that, from the current year, all pupils will have the opportunity to take a public examination in the subject.
157. In work seen, standards in Years 7 to 9 are below those expected. Pupils have very limited understanding of spreadsheets and databases and usually require significant help from teachers to complete tasks. They reach higher standards in word-processing tasks and can desk-top-publish information to a satisfactory standard, combining text and pictures, for example to design logos. Higher attainers change lettering size and style to suit the exercise and communicate information effectively. Most pupils are confident in using the internet to research information. Attainment in measurement and control is restricted by the lack of suitable resources to teach these aspects of the subject.
158. The work seen in Years 10 and 11 is below the expected standard. Pupils have satisfactory skills and knowledge for using computers in other subjects to present their coursework effectively. They demonstrate satisfactory standards when they do so. For example, Year 11 pupils give computer presentations on ecosystems in science lessons to revise for their GCSE examinations. In specific ICT lessons, they carry out tasks using spreadsheets and databases to a satisfactory standard but a significant minority rely heavily on teachers to support them. Pupils use the internet confidently and competently to research their projects. Standards in control and measurement are well below the expectation. This is because there is insufficient equipment and not all pupils have opportunities to experience these aspects of the subject.
159. Achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Schemes of work, which have been developed and introduced in the current year, are already beginning to have a positive effect on standards. Teachers of other subjects are increasingly extending the skills and knowledge of pupils effectively when they use ICT resources to enhance their own subject teaching. Pupils make good gains in their skills of desk-top-publishing and they respond positively to opportunities to present their work attractively and communicate information clearly. They are encouraged to write accurately which makes a useful contribution to literacy development. They learn to set out work for a variety of purposes such as letters and meeting agendas. Pupils make satisfactory progress in learning to use computers as a research tool as an alternative to books. However, they do not make enough progress in measurement and control because of the lack of resources.
160. Pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory. Although pupils continue to develop skills to research projects and to desk-top-publish their work for other subjects, not all follow the full National Curriculum for the subject. Pupils are keen and interested to learn and often return to computer rooms in lunch periods to complete coursework when staff give generously of their time to support their progress. Pupils following GNVQ and COEA courses make satisfactory progress with the range of work required of them, which includes the use of spreadsheets and databases. They come to understand more of the use of computers in wider society and the role of ICT in business and industry.
161. Pupils with special needs make satisfactory progress throughout the school because they are well supported through the use of specialist programmes for numeracy and literacy. There is not enough evidence to judge the progress of pupils for whom English is an additional

language. Gifted and talented pupils make satisfactory progress over Years 7 to 9, but their progress is limited over Years 10 and 11 by the lack of equipment.

162. Behaviour in lessons is very good and pupils have very good attitudes to learning. This makes a significant contribution to the progress they make in lessons, which is often good.
163. The quality of teaching is good overall, and occasionally very good, both by specialist ICT teachers and teachers of other subjects. No lesson observed was less than satisfactory. Teachers plan lessons effectively to motivate and interest pupils. They give very clear guidance about how to carry out tasks, with the result that pupils can work confidently. Very occasionally, introductions to lessons are too long and pupils can become restless. Good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject are communicated to pupils. Learning targets are made clear at the start of lessons, so that they understand the relevance of the work. Progress is reviewed at the end to ensure understanding and consolidate learning. Teachers have good relationships with pupils and manage them well, which means that time in lessons is used effectively and efficiently. However, despite the benefit to pupils of good teaching, their achievement is limited by the lack of equipment for the control aspects of the curriculum, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
164. Overall, leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. Although there is a nominated co-ordinator for the subject, the running of the department has been shared between a group of teachers. Individuals in the group have been successful in taking the subject forward in the current year and are highly committed to improving standards. However, the system is inefficient of time and the use of ICT across the curriculum is not sufficiently monitored or supported. During the inspection period, computer equipment was unreliable, restricting pupils' progress and taking up far too much staff time. There is no technical support but an administrative assistant makes a very effective contribution to managing the non-technical side of resources. The lack of an on-site technician means that teaching staff spend too much of their time on technician tasks. The school is aware of this and there are plans in hand to improve the situation. The curriculum does not meet statutory requirements because the programmes of study for measurement and control are not followed by most pupils in Years 10 and 11. Although systems are not fully in place for the assessment and monitoring of the progress of pupils, there is emerging good practice. Teachers of other subjects have positive attitudes to using ICT and there is a shared commitment to improve standards. All departments have formal plans for the use of ICT and a system to provide access to computer rooms is being established.
165. Improvement has been unsatisfactory since the previous inspection. This is true of standards, the management of the subject and the co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum. The quality of teaching has improved and accommodation is now good. The school now has a higher ratio of computers to pupils than is the case nationally.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

FRENCH AND SPANISH

166. The school enters fewer than half of the year group for French or Spanish at GCSE. Results have improved recently from a previously very low level. In 2000, overall results were well below the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades A*-C was well below average, but significantly better than in previous years because of the improvement in Spanish. In each language, the gap between the results of girls and boys was similar to the gap nationally. Results across the full A*-G range have improved to the national average. In relation to their results in all other subjects, pupils' performance in French was poor. This compares unfavourably with the national picture.
167. In 2000, the Year 9 teacher assessments were close to those reported nationally. They showed nearly two-thirds of Year 9 pupils reaching the expected standard of level 4 or above. However, the school's assessments have been misleadingly high for three years. In 2000, most pupils were at least one level below the level at which they were assessed.
168. In the work seen, standards in Year 9 are below expectations in each language. Average attainers write and say sentences accurately, but are unable to extend these confidently. Some more gifted pupils are on course to achieve the national standard by the end of the year. They are beginning to use the past tense and can construct paragraphs describing home, family and personal interests. They understand detail in dialogue and short text. Lower attainers recognise words and short phrases in speech and text and, with support, can write sentences. Working from memory is a major difficulty. Pupils lack frequent enough testing without their books. Few can speak independently without the support of a text, particularly in French.
169. Standards in the work seen in Year 11, although higher in Spanish, are below expectations in each language. Pupils know and recognise vocabulary in the topics they practise, but have little ability to construct the language for themselves. Listening skills are generally stronger, so that most pupils can extract relevant detail from short tape extracts and text. Attainment is low because pupils' literacy skills are weak. Pupils are not achieving as well as they should. They are over-reliant on the teachers' support. Their self-confidence is low, especially in oral work, and few become independent in one of the skills. A small number of higher attainers are working at an above average standard. One or two gifted pupils are on course to achieve a higher grade at GCSE. For example, in Spanish, they are writing arguments for and against smoking and describing completed household chores.
170. In both languages, achievement is unsatisfactory at each key stage. In view of the low base at which most pupils enter the school and their continuing difficulties in literacy, many achieve satisfactorily, for example, those with special needs. This is so because effective teaching enables them to learn well in lessons and in some cases to reach GCSE standards. However, most pupils in Year 9, the more gifted in particular, have not progressed quickly enough since Year 7 to reach the expected standard. In Year 11, the writing and speaking skills of the more gifted pupils are still relatively undeveloped. In earlier years, these pupils were not trained well enough to memorise what they learnt in order to recall it later. Where there is underachievement by gifted pupils, by many boys and by a small number of pupils with special needs, this is because information from assessments is not used well enough to identify specific individual needs or plan appropriately for them in lessons. There is not enough evidence to make a judgement about the progress of pupils for whom English is an additional language.

171. Never-the-less, there are signs of improvement. Pupils are beginning to achieve well in Year 8, especially in Spanish. Good teaching is giving pupils the confidence to participate more willingly and to remember what they have done, so that pupils move more quickly through the National Curriculum levels. More specific targeting in marking and pupils' self-assessments are increasing pupils' knowledge of how well they are doing. In Years 10 and 11, there is more regular, structured support and guidance for coursework, for example on the development of writing skills and enrichment of content.
172. Attitudes to learning in class are satisfactory overall; pupils are noticeably more enthusiastic in Spanish. Pupils behave well in all lessons. They are co-operative and courteous. They usually listen and respond as required in oral drill and questioning. The samples of written work, however, show that many boys in the middle and lower groups in Years 8 and 9 lose interest in completing tasks and presenting their work legibly. Those pupils who choose to continue their study to GCSE do well, but many elect to drop their modern language after Year 9. This is a matter of concern.
173. Teaching is satisfactory overall. It is consistently good or better in Spanish, but less consistent and occasionally unsatisfactory in French. This improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection is a significant feature of the department's progress. The strength is the successful management of behaviour through calm authority and purposeful, well-designed tasks. Teachers also contribute successfully to the improvement of basic literacy skills and use ICT imaginatively to teach vocabulary and presentation skills. As a result, pupils learn well enough to compensate to some degree for their weakness in literacy. Marking is regular and encouraging; it contains specific targets that help pupils to know what they need to do to improve.
174. Where teaching is at its best, in Spanish, teachers have the necessary expertise to conduct lessons predominantly through the language. This challenges pupils to understand the spoken language at pace, and shows that communicating in the language is achievable and can be fun. In Year 8, in an outstanding lesson on weather phrases, with half the class on the special needs register, learning was very good because, by very careful and imaginative planning, pupils were enabled to achieve oral standards average for their age. The teacher had prepared a sequence of ten-minute activities, challenging pupils first to chant together questions about the weather. Then, individually, prompted by symbols around the room indicating different types of weather, they had to say in complete phrases what the weather was like. Next, they had to pretend to be a well-known weather forecaster (with microphone) presenting the weather at the front of the class, alongside a map of Spain. Such teaching has high but realistic expectations of what all pupils can achieve with appropriate support.
175. Some teachers of French, however, do not have the confidence to use the language throughout the lesson, or the skill to plan activities in which pupils speak French for real purpose. In such lessons, there is too much English spoken and pupils are not challenged or enabled to develop their skills.
176. Leadership and management are good. The head of department has brought thoroughness, determination and greater consistency to the team. In particular, she has made a significant improvement in curriculum planning and has raised teachers' expectations for pupils' achievement. There is now a shared commitment to improvement and the capacity to succeed. However, the school's provision for modern languages in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory. Too many pupils are allowed to discontinue their study at age 14 because no realistic alternative to GCSE has been established.

177. Progress since the last inspection has been good. Standards have improved at GCSE, so that they are now similar to the national average for pupils gaining a graded pass A*-G. There is evidence of good achievement being established in Years 7 to 8, notably in Spanish which was a weakness at the last inspection. The department is now well led. Popular visits to France and Spain are helping to revive interest and enthusiasm for the subject. Classrooms are now stimulating places for work. Book provision is better, and much good work has gone into producing cards for various vocabulary and phrase games, for example a 'domino' game in Year 9 Spanish, which involves practising the past tense and its meanings. However, not all pupils have equal access to the ICT facilities. The department does not analyse its results enough by gender, and although monitoring has improved, it is not always rigorous enough. There are still areas of weakness in some of the teaching which have not been improved through the sharing of best practice. Not enough attention has been paid to raising the levels of teacher competence in the language and confidence in teaching through the target language. There is insufficient use of the overhead projector, which contributes to the excessive use of English in lessons.

MUSIC

178. In GCSE in 2000, the six pupils entered all gained a higher grade A* to C. These results continue the 100 per cent pass rate in 1999 when there were three entries. The number of entries for GCSE continues to rise, with 18 pupils in Year 11 and 23 pupils in Year 10. In the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music examinations three string players, all girls, achieved pass grades. The school's 2000 teacher assessments in Year 9 were below the average reported nationally.
179. In the work seen in Years 7 to 9, attainment reaches the nationally expected level and achievement is good. Pupils in Year 7 can compose a short melody in a given structure and clap a range of rhythmic patterns. Year 8 pupils can identify and demonstrate the key features of a jig through listening and then performing on a keyboard. Pupils in Year 9 effectively perform and record a class samba piece using a range of traditional and classroom instruments. They respond effectively to set calls and fills. A substantial majority of the pupils use percussion instruments successfully and can compose and perform samba-style pieces. Higher attainers confidently improvise rhythms and play solo in small group and class performances. Lower attainers and pupils with special needs are unsure of the names of instruments; they have a limited knowledge of staff notation and the elements of music. Classroom observations and a review of portfolios of work indicate that a small, but significant number of boys underachieve at this key stage. None-the-less, overall, achievement is good from Year 7.
180. Standards in the work seen in Years 10 and 11 are above those expected nationally. Pupils' achievement continues to be good. In Year 10, they have a sound theoretical knowledge and well-developed performance skills. They improvise effectively within a pentatonic framework and are able to use the elements of music to enrich their compositions. The great majority of the pupils, including those with special needs, make good progress building on their previous learning.
181. Pupils have a very good attitude to music and enjoy lessons and extra-curricular music activities. They are very well behaved and older pupils are committed to obtaining good examination results. Pupils collaborate well, particularly in composition and performance work. Music activities are all inclusive: boys and girls of all abilities, Asian pupils and pupils for whom English is not the first language work well together. Relationships between pupils and with teachers are mature and productive. Pupils are courteous and trustworthy and handle with care the expensive instruments and resources they use. They show respect for their own and each other's contributions and performances.

182. The quality of teaching, including instrumental tuition, is good. Two of the teaching staff and the six visiting instrumentalists and vocalist are accomplished musicians, with a secure knowledge of the subject. They successfully impart much of their enthusiasm to the pupils who show good interest and concentration. Lessons are well planned, with teaching and learning targets clearly identified. This enables the pupils to approach their work with confidence and make good progress. Care is taken to match the level of work to the needs and abilities of individuals or groups, particularly in Years 7 to 9. As lessons proceed, work is effectively assessed according to the department's assessment policy, although there is room for improvement in the marking of pupils' work to include individual targets. Detailed assessment records for each pupil help to ensure appropriate future planning. The quality of teaching makes an important contribution to pupils' social and cultural development. For example, pupils have a good understanding of African, Indian and Latin American music. However, opportunities for music's contribution to pupils' spiritual development are being overlooked in lessons and assemblies. Teaching is most effective when lesson targets are explained to pupils at the start and when time limits are set for activities. Teaching is less effective when only a limited range of activities is included in the 50-minute lessons.
183. Seventeen girls and one boy benefit from instrumental and vocal tuition. Up to 100 pupils, mostly girls, benefit from a wide range of extra-curricular activities including choirs, bands, guitar ensembles and drum workshops. School productions such as 'Grease', concerts, carol services in the neighbouring church and joint activities with local secondary schools involve large numbers of pupils. These contribute to the broadening of pupils' musical experience and effectively complement class lessons.
184. The department is well managed and enthusiastically led. Standards are carefully monitored. The Key Stage 3 scheme of work is well rooted in the National Curriculum. However, full coverage of the range of activities expected is limited by the way the school allocates time for music over Years 7 to 9. Although, overall, the allocation is only slightly below the national figure, in Years 7 and 9 it is low. Accommodation is spacious, bright and welcoming and has a positive effect on pupils' response. Resources are generally good, but there is a lack of tuned percussion instruments for class activities. The use of ICT is being effectively developed within the department.
185. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards have improved largely as a result of good quality teaching.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

186. Physical education is not offered as a GCSE examination subject. The 2000 teacher assessments for pupils aged 14 were much the same as those reported nationally for pupils of this age. There is no data available to show whether there were any differences between the assessments of boys and girls.
187. Attainment in the work seen in lessons in Years 7 to 9 is at the national standard. By age 14, most pupils are on course to achieve appropriate levels for their age. Achievement in swimming is good. Pupils swim well and are developing their competencies in planning, performing and evaluating small group routines in synchronised swimming. This progress has taken place in two terms and is commendable since, on entry, 21 per cent of pupils in Year 7 were non-swimmers. Good arrangements are made for Asian girls to take swimming. Although some of the less physically able struggle at tennis, they are developing their use of correct grip and therefore their basic stroke play is starting to improve.

188. In the course that all pupils follow in Years 10 and 11, standards are broadly as expected nationally. There are no significant differences between the standards of boys and girls. By age 16, achievement in games is good. Pupils' individual skills and understanding of fielding placements are secure in rounders. Their individual skills and techniques in association football are good, but tactical awareness in terms of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of opponents is less well developed. Many boys have good individual and teamwork skills in basketball. Their use of the lay-up shot is good and they confidently plan team tactics such as the use of zone defence. Pupils benefit from the department's planning in which short units of work are balanced with in-depth studies.
189. Across all years, pupils have a good understanding of the principles and procedures of warm-up. They name the muscle groups being stretched and take responsibility well for leading warm-up activities. Although no pupils identified as having special needs were observed with additional help, they are well supported, integrated into activities and make good progress. Grouping arrangements in Years 8 and 9 and the level of challenge offered in most lessons also enable the more physically able to make good progress. All groups of pupils achieve well, improving their attainment when they join Year, 7 which is below the national expectation, to reach the level expected nationally for their age group. There is not enough evidence to make a judgement about the progress of pupils for whom English is an additional language.
190. Pupils respond very well to the consistently high expectations of teachers in terms of discipline, behaviour and their ability to work to their best. They work very well together as pairs, in small groups and in teams, both in lessons and in extra-curricular activities. Pupils show clear respect for the capabilities of others. Their very positive attitudes and working relationships, together with very good standards of behaviour, help promote a very positive learning atmosphere in lessons which enables all to make good progress. In a Year 11 boys' basketball lesson, for example, learning was characterised by pupils' excellent working relationships, their maturity in taking responsibility for aspects of their own learning and their ability to rise to the pace and physical challenge on offer.
191. The quality of teaching is very good overall in all years. There are no significant weaknesses and this is having a positive effect on pupils' achievement over time and the progress they make in lessons. Pupils are involved in planning, performing and evaluating in the best lessons. In a Year 7 gymnastics lesson, for example, this deepened pupils' knowledge and understanding of both symmetry and asymmetry in their pair sequence work and improved the quality of their performance by the end of the lesson. Pupils are made further aware of their capabilities because teachers circulate well and offer constructive praise and criticism throughout the lessons. The effectiveness of this was evident in a Year 10 association football lesson, where pupils were involved in devising their own group heading practices for pupils of differing ability.
192. Clear introductions to lessons ensure that pupils are made fully aware of what is expected of them. Very effective and appropriate demonstrations ensure that they know what they have to do to make progress and develop their skills and techniques. In a Year 9 tennis lesson, for example, the teacher's analysis and demonstration of the skills required for basic stroke play helped motivate a group of less physically able pupils and improved their skills standard by the end of the lesson. The planning of lessons, which includes a structured variety of activities, is indicative of teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of the games and activities being taught, as is their effective use of questioning and structured group discussions. This allows the teachers not only to establish what pupils know and understand, but also enhances pupils' speaking and listening skills and ensures that they understand the terminology being used.

193. In the small number of lessons where the teaching was less effective, though none-the-less satisfactory, the few non-participants were not always fully involved in whole group introductions and demonstrations and there were no opportunities for pupils to be involved in pair work coaching or in peer evaluation. In a Year 8 athletics lesson, for example, these were missed opportunities for deepening pupils' knowledge and understanding of the techniques required for safe shot putt. At the end of the lesson, pupils were told what they had achieved rather than being given the opportunity to make their own evaluations.
194. Overall, this is a well-led and purposeful department that makes a significant contribution to the life of the school. Good accommodation enables the staff to provide a good range of indoor and outdoor games and activities throughout the year. A particular strength is the on-site heated indoor swimming pool. However, shower arrangements do not provide the privacy expected by boys and girls and this has a negative effect on standards of personal hygiene. There are currently no courses through which pupils can achieve formal qualifications. A range of extra-curricular activities extends provision for physical education. As a result of the support of physical education teachers, individual pupils have gained representative honours at district level in association football and athletics. Two boys have achieved representative honours at county level in rugby union and the boys' under-16 team is district basketball champion. The range of opportunities available means that the subject makes a very positive contribution to pupils' personal development. Although assessment procedures are well-established, little use is made of the information, for example, to show how different groups of pupils achieve or to help in the planning of the curriculum.
195. Progress since the last inspection has been good. Standards have at least been maintained and the quality of teaching and learning is now very good. The needs of the more able as well as of those pupils identified as having special needs have been given suitable attention. Formal monitoring and evaluation of the work of department has been improved. All other positive aspects have been maintained and the department has the capacity to improve further.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

196. Religious education has not been offered as a GCSE subject. Instead, pupils have been entered at the end of Year 11 for the Dudley Certificate of Achievement in Religious Education. The number of pupils entered increased from half the year group in 1999 to three quarters in 2000. All received the award and nearly two thirds achieved credits or distinctions. There are no national comparisons for these results but, at a local level, the standards, although rising, remain below expectation.
197. Attainment in religious education at age 14 is below the expected standard, but pupils are working at standards that reflect satisfactory achievement over the key stage. Many pupils start their studies in Year 7 from a low knowledge base, combined with a low level of literacy skills. Over Years 7 to 9, they catch up on basic knowledge of Christianity and two other major world religions, Islam and Buddhism. Higher attainers make good progress and are achieving appropriate standards of work. In Year 9 assessed work on rites of passage, they made informed comparisons between different religious ceremonies marking birth, coming of age and death. Many pupils however, are not producing this level of analysis and reflection in their written assignments. In the Year 9 lessons on Christian marriage, most pupils were able to understand the symbolism of the wedding ceremony, but few appreciated its importance to Christians as the foundation for their marriage. Pupils are able to conduct their own enquiry into religious practices, such as the Year 8 internet search of ways in which Easter is celebrated in different countries, but some pupils download information fairly indiscriminately. Pupils are forming their own views on moral issues in the light of religious teachings. In a thought-provoking lesson on injustice in the world, Year 8 higher attainers expressed their concern in

poignant speeches persuading people to accept responsibility for the world's poor and oppressed. Lower attainers are still at the stage of identifying the issues. Achievement is satisfactory.

198. Attainment by age 16 is, overall, below expectations as up to a third of the present Year 11 have not completed the Certificate of Achievement course, some through poor attendance and others as a result of involvement in vocational courses. Those pupils who have satisfied the course requirements show standards in line with those expected. Their achievement is good at this stage. They have made good gains in their understanding of moral issues, taking account of religious teachings and expressing their own views. In a Year 11 class discussion on the question of frozen embryos, pupils put forward reasoned views on both sides of the debate, aware of Christian teaching on the sanctity of life. Similarly, in their essays on moral issues, pupils show proper reflection; they understand the religious point of view and produce reasoned argument for their own ideas. Their spiritual awareness was evident in some of the poems produced in a lesson on the subject of death and dying. In Year 10, all pupils are studying for the GCSE short course in religious education. An early start to the course in the summer term of Year 9 has speeded their progress and standards of work are in line with expectations. In a lesson on Christian attitudes to conflict, pupils showed good knowledge of the conditions of a 'just war' and an appreciation of the pacifists' line of argument. Their written work lacks sufficient depth at this stage but more detailed assignments are planned when the study units are revisited in Year 11.
199. Pupils show a healthy attitude towards their religious studies across the school. In Years 7 to 9, they are attentive and work well together in small groups. Behaviour is good or better in most lessons. Year 8 pupils behaved sensibly when given the opportunity to walk round the room to look at diagrams of the ideas produced by different groups. Teachers are making good provision for the spiritual and moral development of their pupils. In class discussions, pupils show a concern for justice and fairness and are honest and open with their teachers in talking about religious ideas and their own beliefs. Muslim pupils benefit from the inclusion of Islam in the Key Stage 3 curriculum but opportunities to broaden the religious base are not always taken on the GCSE course. A generally positive approach to work was evident in Years 10 and 11. Pupils expressed their appreciation of the opportunities that lessons present for discussing issues relevant to their lives, allowing them to think through their own position. Year 11 pupils were maintaining a serious approach to the lessons, even though the course had technically finished.
200. The standard of teaching is good overall, even though there is no subject specialist on the team. The expertise developed by the team of teachers in Years 10 and 11 is producing consistently good lessons. In Years 7 to 9, teaching was unsatisfactory in just one lesson, where progress was slow because too much time was spent defining abstract concepts with lower attainers. Overall, teaching was very good in a quarter of the lessons which ended with impressive pupil presentations of their work in class. Teachers plan their lessons well and focus pupils' learning with clear targets, stated at the outset and reviewed at the end. They manage their classes well, establishing the right atmosphere in which pupils feel confident about expressing their views. Teachers make good use of discussion techniques and brainstorming; they use video material effectively and explore issues further with probing questions. Where discussion was not so successful, it lacked a specific agenda to focus pupils' talk as well as sufficient stimulus material at the right level. The best lessons were characterised by a variety of activities and high expectations for what pupils were to achieve in the fifty minutes. On occasion, lessons lacked sufficient pace, pupils remaining fairly passive, absorbing information for most of the time. The expertise of support teachers could be used to better effect if they were more involved in the planning prior to the lesson.

201. In the absence of a religious education specialist, there is good management of the subject by the head of humanities, who has worked hard to raise the status of the subject. A colleague has done valuable work developing the curriculum for Years 7 to 9, including opportunities for the use of ICT to support pupils' learning. Goodwill and commitment from the humanities team have kept the subject moving forward in line with developments in history and geography. The adoption of the Dudley eight levels for assessing pupils' progress in religious education is enabling teachers to set more specific targets for pupils, but the process still needs to be applied consistently. Resources for teaching the subject have improved in Years 10 and 11, where the new GCSE course is well supported by textbooks, but texts are in short supply for younger pupils. There is scope for improving other learning materials to cater for the needs of both higher and lower attainers.
202. Since the last inspection, the department has made good progress. Standards have been maintained, although they are still affected by pupils' absence in Years 10 and 11, a school issue. The new schemes of work have produced a more balanced curriculum and the GCSE short course is up and running. Religious education now has parity with other humanities subjects as regards lesson time and academic status. There are no longer any breaks in the continuity of teaching, as happened when it was taught on a modular basis. Leadership from a subject specialist is still missing on the humanities team and is needed to support the development work already started.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

203. These courses were first taught at the school in 1999. There are as yet no final results to compare with national results. The courses offered are health and social care, leisure and tourism and manufacturing. There is also an on-line ICT course which is taught jointly with another school. All programmes other than manufacturing are offered at both intermediate and foundation levels. Currently, manufacturing is provided at foundation level only. These courses are popular with pupils.
204. School records of assessments show that pupils are making good progress. This is true for health and social care where there is an improving number of merits and distinctions at each level. Pupils' progress in leisure and tourism is satisfactory, sometimes good. In manufacturing, where pupils are working towards a pass standard, achievement is below that expected. Year 10 pupils are making better progress than Year 11 pupils. In the separate skills courses, pupils do less well in communication skills, for example report-writing, and numeracy skills than in their other courses. Because the numbers taking each course are relatively small, the performance of boys and girls cannot easily be compared.
205. In the work seen in Years 10 and 11, pupils are gaining knowledge and understanding in health and social care and leisure and tourism at the expected standard. In ICT, pupils' skills are at the standard expected and often above it. There is little documentary evidence of work in manufacturing. Pupils generally lack confidence in analysing and talking about their coursework at the expected standard. However, during their course programmes, they become better at learning for themselves and seeking information.
206. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers use time and materials well and ensure that there is effective collaboration with support staff. Homework is followed up well in lessons. Teachers manage their pupils well and group work is carefully planned and controlled in health and social care and leisure and tourism. Sometimes, lessons are presented too slowly, for example in manufacturing. In this course, opportunities for pupils to speak and discuss are limited, which in turn, limit the development of their communication skills. By contrast, practical work in manufacturing is well organised. This is appreciated by pupils who show strong interest in activities such as vacuum moulding. Teachers have a clear knowledge of the courses they teach. There are good links with agencies such as the local hospital and work places involved

in the leisure and tourism industries. However, the school's links with manufacturing and industry are relatively weak.

207. Pupils' poor literacy and numeracy skills have a limiting effect on their learning. The school is working to make improvements. For example, there are carefully planned group discussion activities in lessons in health and social care and leisure and tourism. Pupils with special needs make satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11. The presence of support staff who are usually teachers within the GNVQ area helps their learning considerably.
208. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils in lessons are good. This helps them to learn and make progress. Boys and girls work well together in groups, for example in a customer care discussion in Year 10.
209. Leadership and management of these work-related courses are satisfactory. However, the school has not made the same arrangements for the co-ordinator to manage them as are provided for heads of department to manage their subjects. The twelve staff involved are working systematically to make the changes required nationally, although, for example, without opportunities for timetabled meetings. This situation is being put right in the next academic year. Sound progress is being made in recording how well pupils are doing and keeping samples of work for comparison. However, the checking of individual progress is patchy: it is satisfactory in health and social care and leisure and tourism but not in manufacturing. Arrangements for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning are not sufficiently in place. Few teachers have experience of work outside teaching and there are very few opportunities for pupils to follow up aspects of their courses outside lessons, for example, through visits. The school is aware of this as an issue for attention through professional development. Classrooms are of good quality, with helpful wall displays. However, the displays lack examples of marked work so that pupils can get a good idea of the standards expected. Resources are improving, but on all courses there is a lack of newspapers, current information and video material. Some ICT lessons were interrupted by technical difficulties.