

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **ST MARY'S MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Puddletown, Dorchester

LEA area: Dorset

Unique reference number: 113897

Headteacher: Mr J F McCormack

Reporting inspector: Philip J H O'Neill  
3162

Dates of inspection: 21 – 23 May 2001

Inspection number: 196828

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle, deemed secondary

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 9 – 13 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Coombe Road  
Puddletown  
Dorchester  
Dorset

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr W Paul

Date of previous inspection: 2 June 1997

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
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			Equal opportunities	
13895	Angela Smith	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development Assessment Attendance Provision for the care of pupils Partnership with parents
18984	David Adams	Team inspector	Music	
11190	Winifred Burke	Team inspector	English	
18584	Martin Davis	Team inspector	Science	
30695	Geraldine Dinan	Team inspector	Art and design	
			Design and technology	
10244	Roger Freeman	Team inspector	Mathematics	
31821	Brian McCann	Team inspector	Physical education	
12116	Christina Morgan	Team inspector	Geography	
15576	David Nebesuick	Team inspector	History	
11720	Philip Winch	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
			Special education needs	
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

St Mary's Middle School is a voluntary aided middle, deemed secondary, school. With 415 pupils, of whom 206 are girls and 209 are boys, it is about average size for middle schools. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals, at 9.3 per cent, is below the national average. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs, at 36.9 per cent, is above the national average, while the proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need, at 1.7 per cent, is below the national average. There are very few pupils of ethnic minority origin and fewer than one per cent speak English as an additional language. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are average overall and represent the full range of attainment. The school serves a wide area; over 90 per cent of pupils travel to school by bus, taxi or car. Pupils come from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds but, in relation to measures of social advantage, are above average overall. A programme of building work is currently underway to extend the school's accommodation.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

St Mary's Middle School is an effective school where pupils, as a result of good teaching and support, achieve good standards. Despite some weaknesses in management, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Standards in English, science and design and technology are good and they are very good in art.
- Pupils experience a high proportion of good and very good teaching.
- Pupils behave well, respond to their lessons with enthusiasm and their positive attitudes support learning.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs who receive support is very good.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

#### **What could be improved**

- Standards in writing across the curriculum, and in music are not good enough.
- Strategies for teaching numeracy, in subjects other than mathematics, are unsatisfactory.
- Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are unsatisfactory.
- Beyond the provision of sport and music, the range of extra-curricular activities is unsatisfactory.
- Senior managers do not work as a sufficiently cohesive team to provide a clear sense of direction and purpose to the school.

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

The school's strengths outweigh its weaknesses.

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The last inspection took place in June 1997. Since then, standards have improved overall, particularly in English, science, design and technology and art. This has resulted from

improvements in the quality of teaching. The school has made satisfactory progress towards meeting the learning needs of the higher-attaining pupils. It has not made adequate progress on the use of assessment information to set targets for attainment for individual pupils. Development planning has improved considerably, with greater emphasis placed on the longer-term needs of the school. Subjects are now managed better. The school prospectus now provides all the appropriate information. Some weaknesses in management remain. There is a strong will to improve further.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11-year-olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
English	B	C	B	B
mathematics	D	C	C	C
science	C	B	B	B

**Key**

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

The 2000 National Curriculum test results in English and science for 11-year-olds were above the national average for all schools and above those achieved by pupils at similar schools. In mathematics, standards in the tests were average for all schools and for schools in similar circumstances. In English, girls performed a little better than the boys, in line with the national picture, whilst the results for boys and girls in mathematics and science were comparable. These overall good standards have been maintained since the last inspection and continue to show themselves in the pupils' current work. The overall trend in attainment in the tests, since the last inspection, has been broadly in line with the national trend.

In lessons and in work seen, overall standards achieved by pupils aged 11 and at the end of Year 8 are at the level expected. They exceed expectations in English, science and design and technology, and are well above the expected levels in art. In mathematics, geography, history, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages and physical education, pupils reach the expected national standard, but fall below that standard in music.

The pupils' standards of literacy across the curriculum are satisfactory, although writing is often weakened through mis-spellings and inaccuracies in grammar. Pupils join the school with low levels of handwriting and spelling. There is no strategy in place for the development of numeracy beyond the teaching of mathematics, with the consequence that there are missed opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their knowledge of number and measures.

The achievements of pupils, overall, are good in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. They come to the school with average attainment levels and steadily build up their skills in most subjects as a result of good teaching. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to the targets set for them in their individual education plans. Pupils



for whom English is an additional language also achieve well. Higher-attaining pupils and those with particular gifts and talents make good advances in their work in relation to their prior levels of attainment.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are happy in the school. They show enthusiasm for learning and take pride in their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The majority of pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They are courteous to visitors.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils respond well to what the school offers and have constructive relationships with each other and with staff. They show a good understanding of the impact of their actions on others.
Attendance	Good. The rate of attendance is above the national average and the rate of unauthorised absence is below the national average. Pupils arrive on time for lessons.

Pupils respond to the good teaching they experience by behaving well, taking their work seriously and seeking to refine and improve it through concentrated effort. They arrive in time for the start of school and for lessons. They have adapted well to the intrusion created by the new building works.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 9-11 years	aged 11-13 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good

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

The overall quality of teaching is good in both key stages and has a clear impact on the standards achieved, on the school's ethos for learning and on the progress made by pupils at all levels of attainment. Of the lessons seen, around nine per cent were excellent, 25 per cent very good, 37 per cent good, 26 per cent satisfactory and three per cent unsatisfactory. Teaching is excellent in art in both key stages. It is very good in science in Key Stage 3. It is good in English, mathematics, design and technology and information and communication technology in both key stages, and in science, history and physical education in Key Stage 2. Teaching is satisfactory in geography and French in both key stages and in Key Stage 3 in history and physical education. Music is unsatisfactorily taught in both key stages. The teaching of literacy across the curriculum is satisfactory, but numeracy is unsatisfactorily treated in subjects other than mathematics.

Strengths in teaching lie in planning, skilful explanations of tasks, dynamic questioning and positive relationships between the teachers and the pupils. Occasionally weaknesses arise through poor classroom management and ineffective use of assessment. Pupils at all levels of attainment are generally catered for well through the appropriate matching of activities to their needs.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	There is a wide and relevant curriculum that fully meets legal requirements. Setting and time tabling arrangements do not work to the advantage of all pupils. The range of extra-curricular activities is restricted to sport and music and is not always well organised.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory overall. The provision for pupils who are withdrawn for support is very good. Some pupils with special educational needs are not well served by the grouping arrangements.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The few pupils who speak English as an additional language are adequately supported in lessons.
Provision for pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' personal development is good. The school supports the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development very well. Pupils are offered good opportunities to reflect on matters of significance to them and on the impact of their actions on others. They are particularly encouraged to respect and value the culture of others.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school cares well for its pupils, providing them with a safe and secure environment.

The school has established satisfactory links with parents and is aware that more can be done to improve the involvement of parents in the work of the school. There is a satisfactory range of worthwhile learning opportunities. Statutory requirements are met fully. The enrichment of the curriculum through the study of French in Year 6 is a strength. The provision for the development of literacy is satisfactory. There is no coherent strategy for the development of numeracy across the curriculum, with the consequence that there are missed opportunities in most subjects for the use and development of number and measures. There is no planned provision for the highest-attaining pupils, though these pupils progress well in relation to their prior attainment. Overall, the school looks after its pupils well.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. There are strengths in the awareness of the need for change and the willingness to move forward. The majority of subjects are well led. There is a lack of coherence in the way senior managers work together.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are now forming themselves into a cohesive and more effective group. They have a good insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are now well placed to be effective in supporting the work of the school.

The school's evaluation of its performance	The school takes some measures to evaluate how well it is performing and relate its achievements to similar schools.
The strategic use of resources	Spending is clearly linked to the school's long-term needs.

There is an adequate number of qualified and experienced staff to teach the curriculum. There are weaknesses in mathematics where there is insufficient expertise to ensure the continued improvement in standards. Accommodation is satisfactory apart from that for music, where cramped conditions create difficulties for the management of groups. Resources are mainly at a satisfactory level, but are good in science and physical education. In English, there is inadequate access to computers.

Though leadership and management are satisfactory overall, there are weaknesses in the senior management team that get in the way of the rigorous implementation of school policies. The governors ensure that considerations of cost and value are invoked in all major items of expenditure, including the recruitment of staff.

### **PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the quality of teaching is good</li> <li>• the school expects their children to work hard and do their best</li> <li>• their children are making good progress</li> <li>• the school is approachable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the amount of homework and the consistency with which it is set</li> <li>• the information provided to parents about their children's progress</li> <li>• the way the school works with parents</li> <li>• the range of extra-curricular activities</li> </ul>

Inspectors agree that teaching is good and that the school encourages pupils to work hard and do their best. They also agree that the pupils make good progress in their work. They concur with the parents that the school is approachable when parents want to express concerns or make suggestions. Inspectors do not fully agree with parents about the amount of homework, but agree that there are some inconsistencies in the way it is provided. Though reports to parents meet statutory requirements, they lack detail about standards reached by the pupils. The school's assessment systems are not yet sufficiently developed to provide more detailed information on the pupils' progress. Inspectors concur to some extent with the parents' judgement about the way the school works with them. The school does not work sufficiently with parents to glean their perception of what it offers the pupils. Inspectors agree that the range of extra-curricular clubs and activities is unsatisfactory.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and pupils' achievements**

1. Overall standards achieved by pupils aged 11 and aged 13 years are at the level expected. They exceed expectations in English, science and design and technology, and are well above the expected levels in art. In mathematics, geography, history, information and communication technology and physical education, pupils reach the expected national standard but they fall below that standard in music. Differences in the standards reached across the subjects can be attributed mainly to the quality of teaching. It must be said, however, that weaknesses in monitoring the curriculum by senior managers are a further contributory factor to the unduly low standards in writing. There has been a good level of success at local and county level in competitive sport and games.
2. The 2000 National Curriculum test results in English for 11-year-olds were above the national average for all schools and above those achieved by pupils at similar schools. Over the last four years, both boys and girls exceeded the national average for their age group. Girls performed a little better than the boys, in line with the national picture. These good standards have been maintained since the last inspection and continue to show themselves in the pupils' current work. Pupils are confident in formal and informal speaking. They are good at exchanging ideas and giving grounds for their opinions. Most show a real interest in books and read confidently and fluently. There are weaknesses in writing: there are often inaccuracies in spelling, punctuation and grammar. This is true of pupils at all levels of attainment.
3. Attainment in the national tests for 11-year-olds in mathematics in 2000 was broadly in line with national standards and those of similar schools. The performance of boys and girls over the last three years has been just below that seen nationally and below that in both English and science. The shortage of relevant expertise in mathematics prior to September 2000 has adversely affected pupils' progress since the previous inspection. In lessons and in current work the same standards are evident. Year 6 pupils have a sound understanding of the properties of different triangles and find perimeters of simple shapes. Lower-attaining pupils have a more basic understanding of shapes.
4. Results in the National Curriculum tests in science for 11-year-old pupils in 2000 were above the national average. Boys and girls performed equally well in these tests. The proportion of boys and girls reaching the higher Level 5 was above average and well above the average for similar schools. Since the previous inspection in 1997, standards have risen significantly. The inspection of lessons and the pupils' work reveals the same good standards.
5. The overall trend in attainment in the tests, since the last inspection, has been broadly in line with the national trend.
6. Standards of literacy across the curriculum are satisfactory, but there are weaknesses in writing. Pupils use the appropriate technical language in art and design and technology when talking about their work. In most other subjects, however, there is a limited focus on the development of literacy, as the implementation of the literacy strategy is not monitored effectively. There is no strategy in place for the

development of numeracy beyond the teaching of mathematics, with the consequence that there are missed opportunities for pupils to apply and develop their knowledge of number and measures.

7. The achievements of pupils, overall, are good in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. They come to the school with average attainment levels and steadily build up their skills in most subjects as a result of good teaching. The lack of a consistent policy for assessing pupils' attainment makes it difficult for some teachers to build systematically on what pupils already know. This is particularly true of the teaching of geography, history and music, where assessment is not used well to support pupils' learning. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in relation to the targets set for them in their individual education plans. However, though they achieve well in Years 5 and 6, this slows in Year 7 where setting arrangements adversely affect the progress made. Pupils for whom English is an additional language also achieve well. Higher-attaining pupils and those with particular gifts and talents make good advances in their work in relation to their prior levels of attainment.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

8. The school is an orderly community. Most pupils display good standards of behaviour both in lessons and around the school. Pupils have positive attitudes to school and they respond very well to the clear expectations of the staff. They are friendly, courteous and willing to talk to visitors to the school. The last inspection found that pupils behaved and concentrated well in lessons and were interested in their work and the school has maintained this strength. The incidences of pupils' exclusion from school are very low compared with those of other schools: the reasons for the exclusions are appropriate.
9. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good and when teaching is particularly stimulating attitudes are very good. This is particularly notable in Years 5 and 6. On most occasions pupils work enthusiastically and co-operate well with each other and other adults in the classroom. They arrive at school ready to work and the majority of pupils settle down quickly to the tasks set for them by teachers. They ask questions, are eager to give answers and demonstrate that they are capable of concentrating well and are interested in the work they are doing.
10. The pupils respond well to the opportunities to take initiative and responsibility; for example, each class has two representatives on the school council. Pupils develop their personal and social skills well through active involvement in the life of the school, for example, by acting as monitors in Year 8, and in all years by helping staff during the school day in running errands such as returning the registers to the school office. Additionally, older pupils in Year 8 act as mentors to some of the younger Year 5 pupils. Pupils use the library, books and other resources for independent research and reading to good effect. They extend their social skills through participation in the extra-curricular activities provided and are active in fund-raising for charitable causes.
11. Relationships are good and the pupils are open, friendly and courteous towards staff, each other and the many visitors. The majority of pupils are keen to work collaboratively, both in the classroom and in other aspects of school life. The good relationships between pupils and teaching staff make a significant contribution to the good learning and standards achieved by many pupils. Although there are some incidences of bullying, most pupils show respect for one another's views, beliefs and

culture and are caring towards each other. Pupils co-operate well with one another and are frequently supportive of each other's efforts.

12. Attendance is above the national average. The rate of unauthorised absence is lower than the national average. This is similar to the findings of the last inspection. As registration is quickly and efficiently carried out at the beginning of morning and afternoon sessions, pupils settle to lessons promptly. Providing their buses run to schedule, most pupils arrive on time at the start of the day.

## **HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?**

13. The overall quality of teaching is good in both key stages and has a clear impact on the standards achieved, on the school's climate for learning and on the progress made by pupils at all levels of attainment. Of the lessons seen, around nine per cent were excellent, 25 per cent very good, 37 per cent good, 26 per cent satisfactory and three per cent unsatisfactory.
14. Teaching is excellent in art in both key stages. It is very good in science in Key Stage 3. It is good in English, mathematics, design and technology and information and communication technology in both key stages, and in science, history and physical education in Key Stage 2. Teaching is satisfactory in geography and French in both key stages and in Key Stage 3 in history and physical education. Music is unsatisfactorily taught in both key stages. The teaching of literacy across the curriculum is satisfactory, but numeracy is unsatisfactorily treated in subjects other than mathematics.
15. The striking feature of much teaching is the teachers' meticulous planning and skilful explanations of tasks. The pupils respond by settling down to their work quickly, with the well-grounded assurance that they know what is required of them. They thrive in lessons when they know what counts as excellence in their work. They are successfully taught to listen and take turns in discussion, justify their opinions and give thoughtful consideration to the opinions of others. The quality of the teachers' questioning is a marked feature of the best lessons. Dynamic questioning is used to very good effect to remind pupils of what they have already learned and points the way towards further learning. It is also effective in encouraging the pupils to provide extended answers and risk more adventurous forms of expression. The quality of the relationships between the teachers and the pupils and the good climate for learning created in the classrooms are further strengths. There is sufficient homework to support independent study, but there are inconsistencies in the way that teachers provide homework.
16. Most teachers sustain a stimulating and aesthetically pleasing environment in which the pupils' imagination is given free rein. This was a key feature in all the teaching of art. For example, in a lesson in Year 5, the skill with which the teacher led the pupils to an understanding of the notion of the mind's eye and to the imaginative grasp of everyday objects was exceptional. The pupils' enthusiasm and animated interest in their work was palpable. They produced some quite outstanding work. The lesson was further inspired by the genuine acknowledgement of even the smallest success. This raised the esteem and the confidence of all the pupils who refined and improved their work with remarkable sensitivity and understanding of shape and colour.
17. Teaching is occasionally weakened by lapses in sustaining clear classroom routines and by unclear explanations of some aspects of the tasks. Lapses in the

management of group work also weaken a few lessons. Assessment, though used satisfactorily overall, is not used well in geography, history and music, with the result that teachers do not know the pupils' different levels of attainment well enough; neither do they provide clear feedback to individual pupils on how well they are achieving and how they might do better.

18. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs who are withdrawn from lessons is very good. Planning for pupils' learning is good and is rooted in a very good knowledge of the pupils' individual learning needs. Work provided for these pupils relates closely to their individual targets. In other lessons, learning support assistants give good support to their individual charges and, where possible, to others who are experiencing difficulties. There is close teamwork between the special needs co-ordinator, class teachers and support assistants. The pupils respond by acquiring a strong sense of achievement and eagerness to improve. They show real interest and curiosity and take pride in work where they know they have given their best efforts. In many lessons, such as those in mathematics, science, French and personal and social education, teachers match work to different levels of attainment. Working alongside their higher-attaining peers raises the self-confidence of pupils who experience difficulties in art. In humanities, however, work is not well matched to the needs of the lower-attaining pupils, with the consequence that their progress is slowed down considerably.
19. Pupils are good learners and make good use of the opportunities provided for independent work. They appreciate the efforts that many teachers are prepared to make to help them. They are particularly responsive to teachers who communicate a real enthusiasm for their subject. This is clearly the case in art and design and technology and in the specialist teaching of information and communication technology.
20. At the time of the last inspection, the quality of teaching was judged to be a major strength of the school. This continues to be the case. The use made of day-to-day assessment to support pupils' learning was deemed to be a weakness. There have been considerable improvements on this front but more remains to be done, particularly in humanities and music, where the teachers do not gather accurate information on the pupils' levels of attainment.

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

21. All pupils are provided with a satisfactory range of worthwhile learning opportunities. Statutory requirements are met fully. What is provided for the development of literacy is satisfactory and is steadily raising standards of attainment, except in writing, where there has been little improvement over the last few years. The curriculum is significantly enriched through the study of French in Year 6, a year earlier than in most schools. There are weaknesses in the management of the curriculum. There is no coherent strategy for the development of numeracy, with the consequence that there are missed opportunities in most subjects for the use and development of number and measures. There is no planned provision for the highest-attaining pupils. However, they progress well in relation to their prior attainment.
22. The school's commitment to providing equality of access to the full range of the curriculum for all pupils reveals itself in the good teaching of pupils with special educational needs who are withdrawn from lessons for special help. Otherwise, what

the school offers these pupils is satisfactory and improving rapidly under the excellent management of the special educational needs co-ordinator. The co-ordinator keeps good records. Individual education plans are developed in full co-operation with parents and teachers. All pupils on the special educational needs register are monitored regularly to track the progress which they make towards the targets set for them. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are also supported very well in establishing fluency in English. Pupils who attain at higher levels are adequately provided for, but this provision is not well planned. This is also true of the few gifted and talented pupils. Little account is taken of pupils with learning difficulties in the planning of lessons in the humanities. This means that occasionally some lower-attaining pupils make little progress, as they do not understand the work.

23. The grouping arrangements for teaching literacy and numeracy do not have a clear rationale. They do not work to the advantage of all pupils. One group of pupils in Year 7 who are nearly all included in the register of pupils with special educational needs are not as well taught as the others, with the consequence that they make slow progress in their work. The arrangement by which the work in literacy for one Year 5 group takes place in the last period of the day on three days of the week is unsatisfactory. The lower-attaining pupils have difficulty sustaining attention at this time of the day and make slow progress in their work. A further time-tabling anomaly arises in the teaching of science: one Year 6 group is taught one of their three lessons in the laboratory, whilst another is taught all three there. This disadvantages the former group in the development of practical skills.
24. There is very good overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is integrated with the teaching of religious education and the provision of collective worship for the whole school. Provision for the pupils' moral development is very good. Assemblies are sensitively organised and presented and bear witness to the quality of the school community and the commitment to leading pupils to value thoughtfulness and reflection. In other subjects, particularly in English, teachers relate issues arising in the books they read to their own deep personal concerns.
25. The headteacher and the staff provide very good role models for courteous and considerate behaviour. The pupils' response to this example ensures that the school's ethos for learning is sustained. Pupils' moral discernment is developed through good opportunities for reflection on the effects of their actions and the actions of others. There is good provision for the pupils' cultural development through their experience of art, music and poetry. Pupils are prepared well for life in a multi-cultural society and are aware of the cultural diversity represented in Britain.
26. The Key Stage 2 curriculum is strongly influenced by the objectives for the national literacy strategy. Time is allocated appropriately for the teaching of the other subjects. Nationally prepared guidelines are used effectively to ensure that learning objectives are well focused and time is used profitably. Literacy skills of speaking, listening and reading are developed effectively through the use of the technical language of other subjects.
27. The range of extra-curricular clubs and activities is unsatisfactory, thus bearing out the negative views of some parents and carers. What is provided mainly serves the needs of those pupils with sporting or musical interests. There is good level of provision for competitive sport and games, the participation rate is good and there has been some significant achievement at local level in football and netball. These



activities extend the opportunities for pupils to relate socially with one another and with pupils from other schools. There is a significant range of valuable visits to places of interest, including a visit to France for Year 8.

28. The school's support for personal, social and health education is satisfactory. Sex education is taught effectively and prepares pupils well for making informed choices in their own lives. Drugs education and citizenship are discussed to good effect. Health-related issues such as smoking are appropriately covered.
29. Beneficial links have been established with the community and other local schools in the Dorchester area schools' partnership. Arrangements and provision for the smooth transfer of pupils between upper schools and St Mary's are good. However, the first schools share the Key Stage 2 curriculum with St Mary's: some pupils are currently experiencing a duplication of learning as they move from one school to the other. This weakness in collaboration disrupts the smooth pattern of learning and complicates the transition from the first school to St Mary's in some subjects. Links with the local church are strengthened by the school's involvement in the annual carol service.
30. Since the last inspection, the school's support of the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils has improved. The imbalance in the art, physical education and design and technology curriculum has been addressed very successfully. The arrangements for deciding pupils' teaching groups take account of pupils' prior attainment in a way that represents an improvement on what was noted in the last inspection. However, the rationale for grouping remains unclear. The range of extra-curricular clubs and activities has been reduced over the last few years. This is a cause of concern amongst the parents.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

31. There are many aspects of support for pupils' welfare that make a positive contribution to improving educational standards. In this respect, the pastoral care given by the year leaders is excellent. The school has a caring ethos in which pupils learn effectively and in which parents are made welcome. The atmosphere within the school is warm, welcoming and supportive. Arrangements to promote pupils' general well being are satisfactory. Pupils are offered good opportunities to receive help and support for personal difficulties. The teachers and learning support assistants are supportive of both the academic and pastoral needs of pupils, including those with learning and other difficulties. All staff are skilful at meeting the needs of pupils, know the pupils very well and work hard to maintain positive relationships. Health and safety around the school is mainly satisfactory, although there are some areas in need of attention to detail. The school's health and safety policy is also in need of updating. Fire drills are undertaken and accurate records kept, although there is no evidence that the school conducts in-depth risk assessments.
32. Appropriate child protection procedures are in place and a designated person with responsibility for this has just been appointed. Support from teachers and the learning support assistants is good both in and out of the classroom and this contributes positively to the well being and progress of all pupils. The arrangements for dealing with first aid, child sickness, accidents and emergencies are good and well understood by the pupils and staff. Support staff hold appropriate first aid qualifications. Supervision of pupils during the dinner breaks is appropriate. There is a good

programme for personal, safety and health education, which is taught well through dedicated lessons and through assemblies.

33. The school has well-developed procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour. High expectations for standards in behaviour are encouraged through a commonly understood and shared approach to the management of behaviour. This approach is well understood by the pupils. It is reinforced during and between lessons, break times and assemblies by the example of the adults working in the school. There is a positive approach in the use of gift vouchers to reward achievement, both academic and personal, and this captures the imagination of most pupils. There is very little bullying and harassment during the school day, but when it does take place teachers are effective in dealing with it and work effectively to avoid serious incidents.
34. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are good. Registers are completed and stored in accordance with statutory regulations. Group tutors and the headteacher actively follow up unauthorised absences. Pupils from the travellers' families are well supported. The school does all it can to compensate for these pupils' poor record of attendance.
35. The monitoring of pupils' personal development is satisfactory; teachers know and care for their pupils well. Class teachers are efficient in monitoring pupils' progress in personal development. Targets for improving personal skills are set by tutors, but these are not always revised when pupils are ready for fresh targets. Although pupils with the potential for high academic or skill-based attainment are identified, monitoring and provision to help these pupils achieve to their full potential are very limited. However, they continue to make good progress in their work in relation to their prior attainment.
36. The monitoring of the pupils' attainment and academic progress is under-developed. In many subject areas teachers know their pupils well and some useful assessment is undertaken, although in other areas of the curriculum this has yet to happen and there is insufficient use of National Curriculum levels. The school has a new marking policy that is used consistently by most teachers. Some pupils' work is not marked, but when marking takes place comments are often supportive and diagnostic. There are individual educational plans in place for pupils with special educational needs and teachers and learning support assistants have good knowledge of pupils' targets and work towards helping them achieve their goals. Arrangements for the annual review of pupils with statements are fully in place, and provision is appropriately specified in the statements.

#### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

37. Overall, the school enjoys effective links and partnerships with parents and the community: these make a positive contribution to pupils' learning. This judgement broadly reflects the findings of the last inspection, although some parents now express concern over the way they feel the school works with parents. The pre-inspection questionnaire and meeting with parents show that, overall, parents have a mainly positive view of the school and enjoy a sound relationship with teachers and the headteacher: they feel that the school is approachable and listens to complaints. Parents are generally satisfied with what the school provides, but some parents would like to see improvements in the quantity, quality and consistency of homework, the range of extra-curricular activities and the information provided to parents about their

children's progress. The inspection evidence suggests that, while the quality and use of homework are satisfactory and compare favourably with that found in similar schools, there are some inconsistencies in the way it is provided. Inspectors agree with parents that the range of extra-curricular activities is limited and caters mainly for those pupils with interests in music or sports.

38. The quality and quantity of information provided to parents is satisfactory. Newsletters to parents are frequent, providing information about events and issues whilst also celebrating the school's successes. The parents of new pupils are well informed through the useful prospectus and through meetings and personal interviews. The governors' annual report to parents provides another valuable source of information for parents, although most are reluctant to attend the annual parents meeting. Annual reports give parents details of their child's attainment and progress, although the information given does not always give a clear picture. Parents' twice-yearly meetings provide useful opportunities for discussion of their children's progress and attainment. Most parents attend the parents' meetings and feel that these evenings are useful. The school has an open-door policy for parents wishing to discuss matters or make complaints. This arrangement works well. Parents of pupils with a statement of special educational need receive appropriate information through an annual review: they are invited to attend meetings to discuss these. They are kept well informed and are aware of the targets set for their child.
39. The parents' involvement in their children's learning is satisfactory. Although some parents feel that the school does not work closely with them, the good attendance at parents' evenings shows that the school is active in its efforts to work with parents. Homework diaries act as effective links between school and parents and are checked by the tutors on a weekly basis, although the use of these is sometimes inconsistent. Many parents are very supportive of school productions and other activities. Some help in school, for example, with listening to the younger pupils read, others help with transport and supervision for extra-curricular activities and sporting events. All these links between the school and parents make a positive contribution towards the quality of pupils' learning at the school and at home.
40. There is a parent-led St Mary's School Association that is active in arranging and organising social and fund-raising events for the school. The programme of events includes car boot sales, Christmas bingo quiz night, end-of-term Disco and a Summer Fayre. Through events of this kind, the school association has raised the funds to provide the school with a number of items including picnic benches and microscopes.

#### **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

41. The leadership and management of the school are satisfactory. The headteacher, supported by a team of dedicated staff, has worked hard over the years to create a school where teachers and pupils feel at ease with their work. The high proportion of good and sometimes very good teaching lies at the heart of the school's success in sustaining a climate in which most pupils thrive. A key strength in the school is the quality of the leadership of departments, many of the leaders of departments developing imaginative ideas. In this respect, the art department is a real inspiration to staff and pupils.
42. The school is currently going through a time of self-criticism, driven by a growing awareness of the need to rethink the way the management of the school is conducted. Senior managers do not work as a sufficiently cohesive team to provide a

clear sense of direction and purpose to the school. This is now seen by staff and governors as an impediment to further progress. The arrangement by which the management of the school is split into two teams, one with a pastoral emphasis and one focused on teaching and the curriculum does not serve the school's purposes as well as intended, with the consequence that the implementation of the school's key policies is often inconsistent. Some teachers, including those in key positions of responsibility, feel distant from central decision-making. The inconsistent support provided for teachers does not provide sufficient encouragement and direction. This is particularly true of teachers new to the school: the support they receive too often depends on the good will of other teachers who are already heavily burdened. There is, however, a willingness to respond to the acknowledged weaknesses in management and this is a strength of the school. Despite these weaknesses in management, standards of attainment remain at a good level as a result of good teaching. In many cases, however, the standards achieved could be higher: this is particularly true of the pupils' standards in writing, which are clearly not good enough, and in music, where teaching is unsatisfactory.

43. The governors are very well led and are beginning to work closely with the school to address the acknowledged weaknesses in management. The first step in this direction has been the appointment of a new assistant headteacher. This is seen by all staff as a welcome injection of new life into the senior management team. The governors have recently established a good enough relationship with the school to put them in a position to hold the school to account for the standards it achieves and for the quality of the opportunities for learning provided for the pupils. Particularly notable are the many references to the standards achieved that are recorded in the minutes of their meetings, where there is evidence, too, of the governors becoming more involved in setting targets for improving attainment in English and mathematics. All of this bodes well for the future of the school and is already laying the foundations for much clearer direction and purpose.
44. Planning for the future development of the school is already improving, in that it is driven by a clear sense of the key issues the school needs to address. There is a real will to change and move forward. Many of the desired changes already show themselves at departmental level. For example, some key developments in information and communication technology are beginning to take root. Work with pupils with special educational needs is going from strength to strength under the very good leadership and management of the special educational needs co-ordinator.
45. Financial planning is good. The school's budget is well managed. The governors are provided with clear information on expenditure. They know the extent to which significant decisions about expenditure are linked to agreed priorities for development. They ensure that considerations of cost and value inform these decisions. Funding designated for special purposes, particularly that related to the support of pupils with special educational needs, is spent well. The most recent auditor's report found the school's financial systems to be in good order, apart from a few minor procedural matters, which have been addressed effectively. The school is well served by an efficient office: daily routines are clearly established and consistently maintained. The response to pupils who are injured or experiencing other difficulties is immediate and appropriate. Standards are clearly published and are well known to all staff. First contact with the school communicates a sense of order and purpose.
46. There is an adequate number of qualified and experienced staff to teach the curriculum. There are weaknesses in mathematics where there is insufficient

expertise to ensure the continued improvement in standards. However, the new assistant headteacher, soon to join the school, has significant expertise in mathematics. The arrangements for the professional development of teachers are inadequate, in that teachers' needs are not systematically identified nor clearly understood. Accommodation is satisfactory apart from that for music, where cramped conditions create difficulties for the management of groups. Resources are mainly at a satisfactory level and are good in science and physical education. In English, there is inadequate access to computers.

47. The commitment to improvement is evident throughout the school. It is revealed in the willingness of teachers to embrace new initiatives and the openness of the school to the findings of the inspection. The impetus to improve has been held back to some extent by the lack of clear lines of communication within the school. For this reason, the school has moved forward slowly since the last inspection. Some of the weaknesses identified then remain, for example, weaknesses in the monitoring of the implementation of the school's policies, particularly those relating to the curriculum.
48. Given the standards achieved, the quality of teaching and the good range of learning opportunities, despite some weaknesses in management, the school provides satisfactory value for money.

#### **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

49. In order to raise standards, the school should take the necessary steps to:
- (1) Improve standards in writing by:
    - implementing the literacy policy across the school;
    - placing greater emphasis on accuracy in grammar, spelling and punctuation;
    - taking measures to redress the poor handwriting demonstrated by many pupils when they join the school.  
(Paragraphs 53, 55, 57)
  - (2) Raise standards in music by addressing weaknesses in teaching, providing appropriate support and in-service training. (Paragraphs 120, 121, 123)
  - (3) Develop strategies for teaching numeracy across the curriculum, ensuring that their implementation is rigorously monitored at senior management level.  
(Paragraph 68)
  - (4) Develop consistent procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress and monitor their implementation rigorously.  
(Paragraph 36)

- (5) Extend the range of extra-curricular clubs and activities beyond the current provision of sport and music.  
(Paragraph 28)
- (6) Address weaknesses in the way the school is managed by:
- gathering reliable information on the difficulties experienced by staff under current management arrangements and using it to initiate change;
  - exploring ways of rectifying the acknowledged difficulties in the way the current layers of management work, looking particularly at the relationship between the responsibilities of year leaders and heads of departments;
  - involving all staff in key decisions about the school's development;
  - improving communication across the school through, for instance, holding more effective staff meetings;
  - improving the support provided for the managers of subjects;
  - reconsidering the role of the deputy headteacher in the context of the new appointment of assistant headteacher.
- (Paragraph 42)

The following are further matters for the governors' consideration in preparing their action plan:

- Information and communication technology is under-used across the curriculum.  
(Paragraphs 56, 67, 98, 118, 107, 124)
- The grouping arrangements for the teaching of literacy and numeracy do not have a clear rationale.  
(Paragraph 23)
- Not all pupils have equal access to the science laboratory for lessons.  
(Paragraphs 23, 71)
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory in music.  
(Paragraphs 46, 123, 126)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	87
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	52

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9	25	37	26	3	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils on the school's roll	415
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	39

Special educational needs	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	7
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	169

English as an additional language	No. of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No. of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	17
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

### Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	5.9
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	0.4

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

### ***Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2***

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	2000	45	64	109

<b>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	30	33	37
	Girls	55	44	60
	Total	85	77	97
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	78 (74)	71 (70)	89 (85)
	National	75 (70)	72 (69)	85 (78)

<b>Teachers' Assessments</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	30	31	34
	Girls	53	45	50
	Total	83	76	84
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	76 (75)	70 (71)	77 (83)
	National	70 (68)	72 (69)	79 (75)

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



### **Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	415
Any other minority ethnic group	

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y5 – Y8**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	21.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.5

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y5 – Y8**

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	171

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y5 – Y8**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	86.6
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y5 – Y8**

Key Stage 2	22.6
Key Stage 3	23.2

### **Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	1	
Other minority ethnic groups		

*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	654937
Total expenditure	645931
Expenditure per pupil	1648
Balance brought forward from previous year	32876
Balance carried forward to next year	41882

## **Results of the survey of parents and carers**

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	335
Number of questionnaires returned	305

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	32	59	6	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	31	60	8	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	25	60	7	3	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	14	57	21	6	2
The teaching is good.	25	67	6	1	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25	51	19	4	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	42	6	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	48	44	5	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	20	53	21	4	2
The school is well led and managed.	33	52	7	4	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	34	55	6	2	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	15	52	22	7	4

### **Other issues raised by parents**

Some parents expressed concerns about bullying.

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

### **ENGLISH**

50. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average overall, although standards of writing are not good enough: there are too many inaccuracies in spelling and grammar. Above-average standards result from good teaching in Years 5 to 8. Pupils' achievements by the ages of 11 and 13 years are good in relation to standards on entry. Pupils' very positive attitudes contribute to their good learning throughout the school. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in Years 5 and 6 but this slows in Year 7 where setting arrangements adversely affect the progress made.
51. National Curriculum test results in 2000, for pupils at the end of Year 6, were above the national average for all schools and above those achieved by pupils at similar schools. Over the period 1998-2000, both boys and girls exceeded the national average for their age group. Girls performed a little better than the boys, in line with the national picture. The changes in attainment over the past three years are broadly in line with the national trend.
52. Teaching and learning in English are generally good in Years 5 to 8. In the lessons seen, teaching was always satisfactory and, in over 90 per cent of cases, good or better. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject and arouse pupils' interest through stimulating activities. This is reflected in the pupils' enthusiasm for their work and the keenness with which they answer teachers' questions and put forward ideas of their own. Pupils' progress is good because teachers provide tasks that challenge them to move forward in their knowledge, understanding and skill. In all year groups, they listen well and make connections with earlier learning. Their attitudes, behaviour and personal development are often very good. This is particularly evident when the focus is on words and their purpose in written texts when, for example, pupils in Year 8 evaluate a chosen author's work and present their ideas to the class. Where teachers' expectations are very high, pupils are keen to take part in lessons. All pupils are given the opportunity to express their ideas. This was evident, for instance, in the Year 6 work on haiku, where the spiritual, moral, social and cultural experiences offered motivated all pupils to write effective poems which evoked powerful visual images. Equally, where marking is rigorous and hand-written feedback to pupils is focused on improvement, pupils respond well and writing improves.
53. Not all teachers are rigorous in their assessment procedures and the standards of pupils' handwriting and spelling reflect variations in the teachers' expectations, both within the discrete English provision and in other subject areas. There is a clear intention to plan for the needs of all pupils, although the setting arrangements in the upper years and timetable arrangements in Year 5 do not always help teachers fulfil their plans. In one class in Year 7, where the majority of pupils have special educational needs, the teacher and learning assistant have difficulty attending to all their needs. In this case, progress in acquiring library skills is slow. Access to good library facilities promotes independent study skills for the majority of pupils, with computers used well for research purposes. Teachers' lack of expertise in using programs such as Power Point, together with limited opportunities to use the information technology room, prevent pupils from making the best use of computers for word processing or for visual presentations.

54. Pupils are usually very confident when talking to their teacher or visitors or when taking part in discussion but are less good in formal presentations. They express themselves clearly when working in pairs or groups, listen to each other attentively and are happy to read aloud. Higher-attaining pupils from Year 5 onward discuss ideas sensibly and argue logically. In Years 5 and 6, pupils with special educational needs are well supported, either by special help given through withdrawal from lessons or through support within the classroom. They are given plenty of opportunity to take part in a range of speaking and listening tasks. Pupils in Year 7, however, receive much less support. The use of drama is limited in the lower years.
55. Pupils enjoy both factual and fictional books. The majority read accurately and fluently. Most pupils express interest in the books they have chosen for themselves from the school library. Whilst there are recommended book lists, in some instances, the range of books read is rather limited. The emphasis on silent reading provides few opportunities to read to an adult and this limits assessment of individual strengths and weaknesses. Where inspectors listened to pupils reading, they found younger pupils ignoring words that they did not understand, whilst older pupils lacked strategies for skimming and scanning their chosen text in order to increase their efficiency as readers.
56. The breadth and balance of written work seen is good, including, for example, stories, plays, reviews and letters. In Year 6, the best written work is a credit to the pupils concerned whilst the Year 8 poetry anthologies on display and the evaluations of books studied are also of above-average standard. Stress on self-reflection and the involvement of pupils in assessing their own work is a strength of the work in Year 8. Word processing is largely used in homework assignments where it enhances presentation, otherwise information and communication technology is not used well to support learning. The quality of handwriting and spelling is unsatisfactory, even within the work of individual pupils. This is not limited to lower-attaining pupils or to those with special educational needs.
57. The English co-ordinator has not been in post for long but has already proved a very good professional leader as well as an adept manager of resources. The special educational needs co-ordinator has excellent knowledge and understanding of the pupils in her care. She works closely with the English co-ordinator. Enrichment activities, such as the whole-school poetry day and access to a poet in residence, have had positive effects on the life of the school. Standards have improved since the last inspection although weaknesses in writing still remain. The co-ordinator's concern about the standards of writing and the need for more consistent assessment and moderation procedures for awarding National Curriculum levels to pupils' work and for reporting the results to parents is justified by the findings of the inspection. The governors have been most supportive in providing extra resources but progress in moving the subject forward has been impeded by the lack of regular meetings for teachers of English, the current setting and timetable arrangements and inadequate access to computers.

## Literacy

58. The use of literacy to support learning across the curriculum is satisfactory. Many teachers already display or reinforce key words, for example in design and technology and art, but there are still subjects like mathematics and music where this is not evident, although pupils are taught and use mathematical language confidently. Differences in teachers' expectations and the lack of vigilance in marking have an adverse effect on pupils' standards of spelling. In some history books, several important historical terms were found to be incorrect, for example 'Magna Carter', whereas one history teacher provided writing frames and stressed reading skills. Weaknesses in the spelling and handwriting of lower-attaining pupils were noted in science, where spelling errors were not always challenged. Pupils with special needs were taught how to hold their pens correctly and to form their letters before being encouraged to speed up the process whilst still maintaining a legible hand. The same provision is not offered to middle or higher-attaining pupils who still show inconsistencies in their handwriting. In a Year 5 mathematics lesson, a wide range of writing skills were observed with some copying accurately, from the board, the headings for each column whilst others were having difficulty in forming some letters. In science, pupils were left to find their own level of handwriting with little guidance offered by their teacher. A few Year 6 pupils made good use of home-based computers when preparing their interesting accounts of local village communities but these are the exception.

## MATHEMATICS

59. Pupils join the school with average levels of attainment. By the age of 11, attainment is broadly in line with national standards and those of similar schools. The performance of boys and girls over the last three years has been just below that seen nationally and below that of both English and science. The shortage of specialist teaching staff prior to September 2000 adversely affected pupils' progress since the previous inspection.
60. Year 6 pupils usually express clearly their good understanding of properties of different types of triangles and quadrilaterals. Pupils, using their good facility for number, translate Egyptian numbers into Arabic ones, do an addition sum and then convert the answer back again. Lower-attaining pupils explain clearly how they would draw a net from a model pyramid, using a ruler and protractor carefully to draw one.
61. Attainment at the age of 13 years is also in line with national standards. Year 8 pupils demonstrate a good understanding of number when calculating the percentage increases with the inclusion of value-added tax, and when estimating areas of composite shapes. Higher-attaining Year 8 pupils show a good understanding of algebra when rearranging formulae and plotting both linear and quadratic functions.
62. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. The school's policy of creating an additional set in Year 5 enables classes to be smaller in order that these pupils receive additional support. The pupils involved benefit from the very positive approaches by the teachers and assistants who work very well as a team. Pupils gain in confidence and improve their self-esteem as they achieve success. For example, they improve their vocabulary as well as working out the properties of shapes as they sort them into regular and irregular triangles and quadrilaterals: they develop a good foundation on which to build. However, the two-hour lesson for Year 5 pupils is not in their best interests, as some pupils begin to tire and concentration becomes difficult.

63. Pupils' behaviour is good. Many show a natural enthusiasm for learning. They are keen to share their knowledge with the teacher and with each other. They work very well in groups when building model pyramids and sharing theories. They listen attentively to their teachers and to one another. Most are prepared to have a go at challenging questions: however, a few have no real sense of urgency and are prepared to let others do the thinking for them, if they are allowed to.
64. Teaching is good and occasionally very good or excellent. It is characterised by lessons that are planned in detail and presented with enthusiasm and energy. All teachers have adopted the three-part lesson, following the implementation of the national numeracy strategy. Teachers are adept at capturing the pupils' interest by, for example, by using a talking 'Clanger' who introduces scale drawings.
65. Mental arithmetic, at the start of lessons, consolidates earlier work and links well with the main part of the lesson. Pupils' thinking skills are enhanced when they use individual whiteboards, but when these are not available this phase of the lesson is not sufficiently challenging. The use made of questioning is effective, especially when the teacher listens carefully to pupils' answers so that each response is valued and developed further. Most teachers use their voices well to enthuse pupils and to inject pace into the lesson. Relationships with pupils are good: they are put at their ease, enabling them to ask questions to gain further understanding. They enjoy their teachers' touches of humour. The quality of marking and teachers' own records are variable and often lack sufficient detail for pupils to be aware of the progress they are making or for teachers to identify individual strengths and weaknesses. Teachers frequently miss opportunities during the plenary session to reinforce what pupils have learned.
66. Leadership is very good. The new co-ordinator gives a clear sense of direction to his colleagues, who not only welcome his support, energy and enthusiasm for mathematics, but work together as a team to raise the levels of attainment for all pupils. New, carefully-structured schemes of work have been written by the co-ordinator, catching up on recent developments. There are discontinuities in what is taught as a result of poor timetabling, which changes setting arrangements at the end of Year 6 and again at end of Year 7. The distribution of lessons in Year 7 has a further adverse effect on pupils' learning.
67. The co-ordinator has introduced useful assessment and marking policies and a structured and coherent action plan. He supports his colleagues well. However, he has insufficient non-teaching time to fulfil all his monitoring responsibilities. Pupils miss opportunities to use and develop their written and oral communication skills in relation to their mathematical experiences and understanding. They also have very few occasions to enhance their mathematics using information and communication technology.

## **Numeracy**

68. Standards of numeracy are satisfactory. However, the school lacks a coherent strategy for the teaching of numeracy across the curriculum. Since the arrival of the new mathematics and numeracy co-ordinator, the structure of the work taught within mathematics lessons has improved. All teachers involved are gaining in confidence as a result of the quality of support and guidance they have received since September 2000. Good teaching has improved pupils' familiarity with number. Work in Year 5 in

number work provides pupils with the necessary foundations to support not only other aspects of mathematics but also to measure, record, locate and calculate within other subjects. The lack of a whole-school strategy results in opportunities being missed throughout most of the curriculum to refine and hone pupils' skills.

## SCIENCE

69. Overall attainment is good, and sometimes very good, because pupils are very well taught. Pupils come to the school with average levels of attainment. By the time they are aged 13, attainment is above average, with a significant minority well above average. Results in the science national tests for 11-year-old pupils in 2000 were above the national average. Boys and girls performed equally well in these tests. The proportion of boys and girls reaching the higher Level 5 in the science National Curriculum tests is above average and well above the average for similar schools. Since the previous inspection standards have risen significantly. At the age of 11, what pupils know and understand in science is good. Higher-attaining pupils know well how forces can make objects float or sink. They understand that a liquid exerts an upward force. Many pupils show a good knowledge of the main differences between plant and animal cells. All, including lower-attaining pupils, understand well how to separate substances, for example by chromatography. All pupils at this age take accurate measurements. By the age of 13 years, the oldest pupils in the school also have a good knowledge and understanding of science. Higher and many middle-attaining pupils understand clearly the difference between mass and weight. Most pupils have an at least satisfactory understanding of energy transformations. Pupils measure accurately; most understand the need to repeat measurements and to find the average to improve accuracy. Thirteen-year-olds have above average investigation skills for their age. These are learned in a series of well-planned experiments to develop an understanding of how to plan a fair test, to predict its outcome, to measure, record and evaluate what they have discovered. However, the quality of many pupils' written work is unsatisfactory. Although the scientific content is good, standards of written work, its presentation, handwriting and spelling are too often unsatisfactory. At times, graph work is also unsatisfactory. There are some unfilled gaps in the exercise books of some lower-attaining pupils, adversely affecting their learning.
70. Pupils achieve well in all years. They make good progress up to the age of 11, acquiring a good level of understanding within the biology, chemistry and physics strands of the National Curriculum. They achieve well because they are well taught by enthusiastic and experienced teachers. Above the age of 11, achievement is often very good. Pupils gain a good understanding of series and parallel electrical circuits, with more able pupils applying their understanding very well in new situations. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. Their needs are clearly identified by the school. They make good progress because teachers and additional in-class support staff have a detailed knowledge of how these pupils are best supported. This is as a result of effective co-operation with the special needs co-ordinator. The quality of teaching is very good overall and has improved significantly since the last inspection. In the lessons inspected, it ranged from good to excellent. Teachers apply their very good subject knowledge well and often employ very effective teaching methods. As a result, pupils learn very well. Pupils' interest and concentration are at least good and sometimes very good. In all lessons, teachers ensure that all pupils work hard by using many very good strategies. Very good class management had a positive impact on learning in most lessons.

71. Pupils are well informed of the progress they make. Homework plays a regular and important role in pupils' learning. Not enough attention is given to encouraging and rewarding good presentation of written work or accurate spelling. The range of teaching methods, often good, is constrained because 9-year-olds learn science in classrooms and some 10-year-olds have limited access to the science laboratory. This reduces the range of pupils' learning opportunities. However, an additional science laboratory is included in the building programme. Teachers use the lesson time well, but learning by the younger pupils, although good, is not as high as that of 12 and 13-year-olds. The quality of lesson planning is a particularly good feature. Teachers build effectively on the pupils' prior knowledge; for example, pupils aged 9 understand the functions of the heart and blood circulation. This enables all the pupils, including those with special needs, to make good progress when learning about the effect of exercise on their heart rates. A class of 10-year-old pupils were seen to make very good progress in their understanding of the importance of a good diet. This was because the pupils were challenged to produce balanced menus, applying previous knowledge. During lessons, teachers use good questioning. Work is marked regularly, but teachers do not give sufficient clear guidance to pupils on how to improve their work.
72. Boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 13 learn very well because they enjoy their work and are taught well. Learning takes place at a very good pace because teachers manage their time well. Pupils acquire very good practical skills, measuring and recording their results accurately. They are taught well about how to carry out a fair test. Many make good progress evaluating how the results of an investigation match their predictions. However, the consolidation of skills in investigation is not well integrated into science lessons. Excellent planning in a lesson of 12-year-old pupils enabled them to make very good progress in understanding food chains and food webs. Learning was very good because the plans recognised that pupils have different levels of prior knowledge. As a result pupils worked very productively, concentrating well. A pupil with special needs was given good support by the teacher and learned well how energy is transferred between living things in a food chain. Another pupil with special educational needs produced good examples of food chains. This was because a learning support assistant gave him effective and encouraging guidance. In the lesson, in a well-organised discussion, pupils also gained a good insight into the moral issues surrounding human impact on food webs.
73. The department is very well led and managed. There is a clear sense of vision, with a shared commitment between those who teach science to provide all pupils with opportunities to acquire and apply scientific knowledge well. There are very good links with the upper school to ensure that pupils experience a smooth transition into the final years of secondary education. Links with first schools are not rigorous enough. A small proportion of work first encountered in first schools is unnecessarily repeated at the middle school. The support for science from the senior managers at the school is satisfactory. However, the links are not as effective as they should be; for example, the department, representing a core subject, has not been asked to join English and mathematics on the school's curriculum group. The arrangements to help new teachers to understand the expectations of teaching science in a middle school are unsatisfactory.

## **ART AND DESIGN**



74. Standards at the ages of 11 and 13 years are consistently very good and often excellent. This exceeds national expectations and marks very good improvement since the last inspection. Art and design is a real strength of the school.
75. By the age of 11, pupils express themselves fluently in a variety of visual and tactile ways. They explore and quickly gain very good control of a wide range of dry graphic mark-making media, such as charcoal, pencils, pastels and crayons, as well as paint. In addition, they learn to form a variety of materials very well, such as clay, plaster and plastic sheet, by using modelling, casting and vacuum-forming techniques to express ideas in three-dimensional form. Throughout the school, pupils use sketchbooks very successfully as a developmental tool to research, to record and extend ideas and to try out new techniques. Pupils have very good knowledge of artists and craft-workers from a wide variety of traditions, mainly European, African, Indian and Australian. They critically analyse these works and use their observations to incorporate new techniques and ideas into their own work, making useful comparisons. As a result of this very focused way of working, all pupils, high, medium and slower achievers, develop an intelligent use of line, tonal values, form and understanding of spatial issues in their own work.
76. Pupils in Year 5 develop their imagination by closely observing natural forms, such as dried roots and twigs. They make lightly sketched, accurate representational drawings, in a larger scale, using mathematical skills of estimation and comparison. They then imagine figurative possibilities, using the drawn shapes, and extend these sketches into drawings of dragons, monsters, dinosaurs or aliens. They add limbs, tails, wings etc. All pupils produce highly individual work, based on close observation, through careful attention to detail: they develop their imaginative capabilities very effectively. Many pupils incorporate humour into their work, by distorting, elongating or shortening limbs to create, at will, fearsome caricatures or friendly baby monsters. Pupils with special educational needs in other subjects particularly enjoy the tasks and, though well identified in the teacher's planning, are indistinguishable from their peers because of the very high expectations and carefully sequenced, step-by-step teaching methods used, which ensure that all pupils fully understand the task and feel included.
77. Pupils in Year 6 further develop their imaginative creatures, by building upon skills learned in Year 5, this time extending ideas into three-dimensional form. After watching a video of large reptilian creatures, crocodiles, lizards and dragons, they make preparatory sketches, using books and photographs, to research outline shapes, colours, decorative and textural markings and scales. Pupils take great pride in their sketchbooks, which they use to inform most pieces of work. They enjoy the tactile elements of working in clay and feel confident working in this structured and sequenced manner. This helps them to notice the small developments in their own progress and identify what they need to do to improve further. They know the importance of keeping models moist and workable between sessions and take great care to avoid accidental damage to each other's work by careful handling and storage. Pupils admire the work of others, offer friendly advice and respect ideas expressed.
78. By the age of 13, pupils have refined and extended their own creative repertoire and developed good levels of appreciation of the work of other artists. Boys and girls attain at equivalent levels. Pupils with special needs meet national expectations and sometimes exceed them. They thoroughly enjoy their work, looking well beyond pure technicalities to the embodiment of feeling and meaning. Often these pupils are buzzing with creative ideas and take a real pride in their work. Pupils in Year 8,

closely examine the meaning and nature of 'metamorphosis' (developmental change over time). They do this by researching major themes, which they select from the work of African and Aboriginal artists. They discuss and compare photographs and drawings and know the meaning of the symbolism used in each. They adapt their preliminary drawings to inform their paintings, using a fusion of ideas from these cultures and their own. This is a difficult concept for this age group to grasp. Many pupils choose to work in the style of the central desert 'dot' painters, and experiment with paint application techniques based on using carefully proportioned spots of colour in a similar manner to the Aboriginal tradition. Pupils respect cultural beliefs by making only approximations and not copies of the original Aboriginal works, because they know it is considered bad form within the tradition to use, and therefore steal, the ideas of others. This effectively helps pupils to know that many cultural traditions share a similar moral code. Pupils listen reverently and enjoy the rhythms of didgeridoo music playing in the background, which helps to create feelings of 'magic in the air' and contributes to the atmosphere in the paintings. In this way, pupils learn to tolerate and value differences in other belief systems, which in turn helps them to understand their own place in our increasingly pluralist society.

79. The quality of teaching in the subject is excellent and has improved very significantly since the last inspection. Teaching is characterised by the very high expectations, which are shared with pupils, and expert knowledge of the subject. The clearly detailed planning caters for all levels of attainment. A wide range of well-chosen teaching strategies ensures that all pupils understand what is expected of them. The real key to success is the open-ended questioning and lively class discussions, which precede the structured, step-by-step demonstrations and clearly laid-down ground rules for correct workshop practices. The teacher's personal enthusiasm for all aspects of the subject is a highly motivating factor in lessons. This promotes curiosity and excitement, keeping pupils focused and busy. At times the atmosphere is truly inspirational, with many pupils extending concentration and effort over long periods and taking a responsible interest in their own development. Excellent organisation and skilled management of pupils ensure that no time is wasted. The pace of lessons is brisk and purposeful, ensuring that pupils' attitudes remain positive and behaviour is very good. Planning is well structured so that at the end of each lesson pupils are invited to share ideas and evaluate each other's work intelligently, in a positive and friendly manner. They make comments and recommendations for improvement as part of assessment. Opportunities for pupils to practise speaking skills are built into this arrangement. Pupils speak knowledgeably and clearly, and use appropriate vocabulary. They listen carefully to each other, taking criticism well.
80. The co-ordinator fulfils the responsibilities of the role very efficiently and knows exactly what developments are needed to improve standards even further. The learning environment has been carefully nurtured by the co-ordinator to encourage creativity: it is stimulating and welcoming. This helps to hold pupils' interest, encourages imagination and provides a secure environment for serious study. A profusion of unusual plants abounds, there are well chosen works of art and artefacts from a variety of cultures and these inform pupils' ideas and work. Pupils' finished work is well displayed and celebrates their best efforts, whilst providing encouragement to others to reflect upon and emulate them. Care has been taken to preserve the best examples of pupils' work, using photographs and photocopies of the originals. This has formed a useful bank of marked work, which is often used by teachers and pupils as a guide to monitor and improve standards. Links between the co-ordinators for art and for information and communication technology are good. Their collaboration in

planning has been beneficial to pupils, the majority of whom generate and modify images appropriately, using a computer.

81. The school values the contribution which the subject makes to pupils' achievements but has not done enough to support the teaching. The subject has been allocated no technician. No in-service training has been allocated for the co-ordinator to develop professionally. In heavily resourced, whole-class practical lessons, such as clay workshops, and for written research and recording work, there is no classroom support available for pupils with special educational needs.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

82. Standards at the ages of 11 and 13 years are consistently good and much of the work displays some very good features. These standards exceed national expectations and this represents good improvement since the last inspection.
83. By the age of 11, all pupils have acquired good levels of practical capability when using a wide range of tools, materials and techniques. They produce lively and informative annotated drawings and plans to outline their ideas, predictions and intentions. For most projects, pupils work from planning to making to evaluating. This way of working helps them to focus attention, build confidence and organise their work in a businesslike manner. This is remarkable because not all pupils enter the school with the same prior experience. For some, it is the first time they encounter more resistant materials, such as wood and acrylic sheet, as well as specialist cutting and forming tools.
84. Pupils in Year 5, made replica three-dimensional models of a medieval siege weapon, which helped them to make links with knowledge gained in history. They also reinforce concepts learned in mathematics and identify electricity pylons, bridges and half-timbered dwellings in the vicinity, containing triangular structures incorporated for strength. Pupils compare similarities between these real structures and their own models, where they use cardboard triangles to reinforce timber joints. Boys and girls make equally good and sometimes very good progress in lessons. This results from good planning of lessons.
85. In Year 6, pupils build on the knowledge gained previously, when they make bread. In this context, they learn about the importance of fibre in their diet and set about creating tempting as well as nutritious flap-jacks. They use mathematical adaptations to the basic recipe successfully. When cooked and cooled they test their creations on other pupils before making detailed evaluations of the most popular varieties.
86. By the end of Year 8, pupils develop their designing and making skills and extend their knowledge and understanding in a variety of ways. Occasionally they approach projects by first disassembling existing commercial products and critically evaluating the various methods of manufacture, the suitability of materials used and the value for money achieved. This was the case when pupils in Year 7 produced individual products, based on a brief to design and make a bag to hold small items safely. They worked hard to ensure that their handmade patterns matched their design intentions, making small modifications in the light of discussion or through trial and error. All pupils use the sewing machines safely and effectively. They discuss style preferences, choose appropriate materials and apply decorative finishes such as tie-dyeing and a range of different stitch patterns or beads. They also consider which type of fastener would be most suitable.

87. Pupils in Year 8 carefully followed instructions, using a technical manual, when exploring the characteristics of a commercially available construction kit. They work sensibly in twos and threes, discussing and predicting how four different moving mechanisms might be put together. They learn the correct names for each example, crown and pinion, universal joint, bevel gears and worm and wheel. All pupils enjoy and take justifiable pride in their work. Pupils with special educational needs in other subjects are not disadvantaged, because teachers use good demonstration techniques, explain all tasks clearly and set high expectations for them. Pupils receive good levels of oral feedback throughout lessons, which helps the lower-attaining pupils in particular to increase in confidence and work as equals, alongside their peers.
88. The quality of teaching across the subject is good and often it is very good. This shows good improvement since the last inspection. The best teachers encourage all pupils to arrive at individual solutions to design briefs. They do this through very careful planning and thoughtful application of appropriate teaching strategies. All teachers encourage pupils to work together in a spirit of companionable co-operation: this results in pupils developing respect for their own and each other's work. Teachers who are responsible for work in resistant materials, food and fabrics, and control technology are well qualified and have high expectations for pupils' achievements. These teachers co-operate well and have a good knowledge of what they teach.
89. The subject is well led and managed. The co-ordinator has good ideas for developing the subject further and has worked very hard and enthusiastically to enrich pupils' experience of the subject. There is a good system for keeping a record of pupils' achievements. Photocopied and photographic examples of pupils' finished models, projects, written work and critical evaluations enable all teachers to agree marking levels and track standards from term to term. This also helps to ensure that all necessary strands and programmes of study are covered in depth. Monitoring of teaching has begun and teachers receive good levels of feedback to help them improve.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

90. At the time of the last inspection, pupils' attainment matched and sometimes exceeded national expectations. During the current inspection, geography was only being taught in Year 5, although discussions with pupils and a scrutiny of their work indicate that standards are still broadly in line with national expectations in both key stages.
91. In lessons in Year 5, there is an appropriate emphasis on the development of geographical skills. Most pupils use four figure grid references to locate features in their immediate locality. More able pupils identify key features from aerial photographs and relate them to ordnance survey maps of the local area. For example, they follow the course of the River Piddle on the map from its source to where it meets the sea. Most pupils use the appropriate geographical vocabulary to identify different parts of the river, including meanders, mouths, and flood plain.

92. The quality of work in pupils' books, however, is more variable. In Year 5, there is a heavy reliance on worksheets, colouring-in and other activities, such as word-searches, which do not promote the development of geographical skills and understanding. There is little evidence that tasks are well matched to pupils' abilities: lower-attaining pupils struggle to complete tasks that they do not understand. Equally, an under-emphasis on writing skills and opportunities for pupils to use their own experiences and knowledge of the world leads to a lack of challenge for more able pupils. In Year 6, this pattern is repeated and there is less work recorded in pupils' books. Although some pupils have performed independent research into local villages, these projects are undertaken at home and are insufficiently linked with work completed in school.
93. In Years 7 and 8, there is good coverage of a range of topics with evidence of pupils undertaking independent investigations in several areas. In Year 8, pupils explore settlement patterns and environmental issues in some depth. They use a wide subject-specific vocabulary and make good use of the locality to make topics meaningful and relevant. Pupils are encouraged to work through enquiry to explore geographical hypotheses through the collection, recording and analysis of data. Most of the work demonstrates a good understanding of patterns and processes in physical, human and environmental geography. Within this generally good picture there are some concerns about the quality of provision for lower-attaining pupils: there is evidence from the inspection of their work to suggest that tasks are not always well understood or completed.
94. The quality of teaching in Year 5, the only year in which lessons were observed, was never less than satisfactory and in half the lessons observed it was very good. The lessons were planned with clear and specific geography objectives, designed to develop pupils' geographical skills and help them make effective connections between different aspects of the subject: for example, between map work and a study of the local river.
95. In the lessons where teachers concentrated on a specific objective, with appropriate resources provided, pupils developed a good understanding of the connections between aerial photographs of the river valley and ordnance survey maps. Where teachers attempt to cover too many disparate issues within the lesson, learning is less effective. Where appropriate support is provided for less able pupils, they made good progress. Where tasks are not well matched to pupils' prior attainment and understanding, a significant number of pupils struggle to achieve the set task. This is often masked by the grouping arrangements, where higher-attaining pupils are expected to help less able pupils. In these lessons, the teachers rely on a limited number of pupils to answer questions, but do not provide alternative materials or use alternative teaching strategies to involve pupils who demonstrate limited understanding of previous learning.
96. The quality of marking in geography across both key stages is poor. Some work is unmarked, some is ticked with no correction and most lacks the informative comments that would help pupils evaluate and improve their work. Separate assessment procedures have been proposed for each key stage. There is little evidence, however, to suggest that assessment procedures are understood by the pupils, or that they are used consistently or effectively by teachers to guide planning. Too often, the same task is presented to all pupils at the same level so that the higher-attaining pupils find the work too easy and the lower-attaining pupils find it too difficult.

97. Geography is taught with history as part of a humanities curriculum. There is little evidence in the scrutiny of pupils' work of the inter-relationship of places, themes and skills being actively promoted. The humanities department is satisfactorily led by a geography specialist, who provides good support and advice for colleagues; for example, by producing teaching materials. Although some monitoring of teaching and learning has taken place, this has been insufficiently rigorous in ensuring effective learning.
98. Effective liaison with the first schools ensures that pupils do not repeat topics; year group planning ensures comparability of provision in parallel classes. The school has recognised a need to review and refine the existing curriculum in the light of national initiatives. There is insufficient use made of information and communication technology.

## **HISTORY**

99. Based on the scrutiny of work and lesson observations, pupils' attainment at the ages of 11 and 13 years is broadly in line with the national expectations. The attainment of girls and boys is not significantly different.
100. By the end of Year 6, pupils are introduced to a range of historical skills including the use of and development of timelines, the consequential development of a range of events and the interpretation of primary data. Pupils use photographs in conjunction with memoirs to interpret the similarities and differences between various source materials. The handling of the different forms of historical data is impressive. Pupils, in the first two years, are able to work effectively as individuals, in pairs and in small groups to develop their historical understanding. Pupils empathise with people in an earlier time. The activities provided in Year 6 developed both enthusiasm and a deeper understanding of the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. The lesson was matched to the different levels of attainment mainly through the judicious use of structured questioning and the opportunity for pupils to answer appropriately. There was some evidence of the use of a range of written tasks for pupils at different levels of attainment. Progress overall is satisfactory; however, it is slower for students with special educational needs and particularly so in their writing.
101. At the end of Year 8, study skills, particularly in handling a range of written evidence, are strengthened by examining original posters, coded letters and historical maps. There is also a greater emphasis on developing oral skills through structured questioning. More complex historical themes are studied, introducing different moral and ethical values such as the condition of black slavery in America and the issues of tolerance and persecution in the religious conflicts in the reign of Elizabeth. These themes deepen historical judgements and provide the opportunity for pupils to debate complex and difficult arguments. Their understanding of the reliability and validity of primary evidence is strengthened through the study of these topics. There is a greater emphasis on note taking and the selection of written data using writing frames. There is little evidence at this stage of matching the task to the different learning needs, with the consequence that progress, for some and particularly the lower-attaining pupils, is limited.
102. Teaching is satisfactory overall and in about 30 per cent of lessons it is good. It is better in Years 5 and 6. There is evidence in the Year 6 classes of the use of the recent visit to the Tutankhamun Museum to reinforce the value and importance of

historical discoveries and the linkage of practical activity and book-based learning. In most lessons there is a sound recapitulation of previous work leading to the reinforcement of historical understanding. Pupils know that they can rely on teachers as a secure source of knowledge and help, even when they are not history specialists. Throughout the lessons there is ready praise for worthy efforts and good contributions. In Years 5 and 6, most lessons have a secure structure, which gives pupils a good chance to develop their knowledge and skills.

103. In Year 8, there is a tendency to over teach and to provide only a limited opportunity for pupils to actively participate in the lesson. Questions to pupils require factual recall rather than the analysis or interpretation of the themes. Historical opinions are teacher-directed, with the consequence that pupils do not have the opportunity to offer and test their own opinions. Such an approach does not offer the range of necessary learning opportunities for either the gifted and talented or those pupils with special educational needs.
104. Generally, teachers use a sound range of strategies to stimulate pupils' interest in history. The field trip to Dorchester, for example, was used most effectively in Year 6 to establish enthusiasm for the ancient Egyptians. The range of teaching strategies used encourages historical empathy and pupils showed a high degree of involvement and identification with the key issues. In the best lessons, pupils' attention is caught right at the beginning and is held through a series of well thought-out and varied activities. For example, pupils in Year 7 became very involved in decoding the Babington letter and in discussing its significance for the future of Mary, Queen of Scots.
105. All seven teachers observed are professionally qualified; however, none are specialists in history. Teaching assistants are used effectively with pupils with special educational needs. Monitoring of teaching is not fully developed as a tool for improvement. The current marking scheme is not linked to the National Curriculum skills or levels and at present is not effectively supporting progress, learning or achievement. Assessment is mostly supportive, but does not inform the pupils of what to do next to improve.
106. Relationships between teachers and pupils and between the pupils are good. Many examples of pupils listening to each other were observed, and co-operation amongst pupils in all years is good. In several lessons, pupils were seen working very effectively in pairs or in small groups. The level of enthusiasm and involvement, particularly in the earlier years, was marked. In Year 8, many pupils are passive and do not join in discussion. In some classes, humour is used effectively to illustrate a complex historical point and to develop knowledge and understanding.
107. The subject is satisfactorily led. Most of the positive elements identified in the last inspection have been maintained and the improvements have been at least satisfactory. A review of the current curriculum is being undertaken. Insufficient use is made of information and communication technology. There is still work to be done in the areas of monitoring and assessment and the development of a wide range of study materials suitable both for the gifted and talented and for pupils with special educational needs.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

108. Pupils aged 11 and 13 years reach the levels expected nationally for their ages. This represents a considerable improvement on the standards noted in the previous inspection. Pupils are taught in class groups in a dedicated information and communication technology room and are taught very well. It is assumed that all teachers will use and extend the skills acquired in these lessons through the subjects. This latter arrangement is not well managed due to overall weaknesses in the implementation of agreed curricular policies, with the consequence that the standards are held back. The use and application of information and communication technology across the subjects is underdeveloped. However, there are some good standards of use in science, art and design and technology in both key stages. In these subjects, pupils make good progress in the development of confidence and skill in a range of relevant applications. For example, pupils in Year 6 use relevant software well to illuminate their study of mechanisms. Additionally, they learn to control movement, light and sound. Pupils in Year 5 explore patterns and relationships sensitively in their artwork, using graphics' packages. Year 7 pupils create holiday brochures to a good standard, refining and improving the appeal of their creations through the use of computer-aided design programs. Towards the end of Year 8, most pupils create a web page that includes graphics and links to other areas within the same page. Higher-attaining pupils use automated routines to control events on their page in order to make it accessible to a wider range of users. Lower-attaining pupils work at a more basic level, but understand the uses of web pages in communication. The highest-attaining pupils are real enthusiasts and take every opportunity to extend the range of their skills. They reach very high standards of sophistication in the handling and manipulation of computer-based information.
109. Pupils of all ages have positive attitudes and their response to information technology is good. They enjoy using computers and take pride in displaying their work. They appreciate the point and purpose of information and communication technology in the home and in the work place. Standards of behaviour are very good. Relationships between pupils when working together at computers are constructive; they learn to share and to take turns while they gather information. Pupils with more advanced skills help their peers. In artwork in particular, they take great care in refining and improving their work through the manipulation of design and colour.
110. The quality of teaching is good in the lessons taught by specialist teachers. The high level of the teachers' expertise in these lessons ensures that pupils at all levels of attainment are appropriately challenged by the work. It also communicates to pupils high expectations of what they can achieve. The pupils, in turn, work with real intensity and are almost impervious to distraction as they develop their skills, working independently or in pairs. The teachers are quick to detect when there are difficulties in learning and respond by providing expert help and an abundance of encouragement. These lessons, taught in the dedicated computer room, provide the pupils with the main source of contact with computers. The strengths in teaching were particularly evident in a Year 6 lesson when pupils were manipulating graphics from Clip Art to create animated slides. The teacher's explanations and demonstrations were crisp and crystal clear, thus ensuring that the pupils knew exactly what to do. The pupils were quick to seek help when they needed it, knowing that it would be immediate, good humoured and encouraging. With increasing confidence and enthusiasm, the pupils produced some admirable creations.
111. Teachers generally do not use information technology well enough to support other subjects. They do not maximise opportunities for pupils to use computers, particularly



in literacy and numeracy lessons. This is not as a result of unwillingness to do so, but follows from weaknesses in the overall management of the curriculum.

112. Although resources for the subject have improved considerably since the last inspection, they remain unsatisfactory. There are too few computers, with the consequence that in most lessons pupils share a computer. Though this does not always have a detrimental affect, in most lessons it slows down the progress of those who share. The leadership provided by the co-ordinator is very good but her work is impeded to some extent by the lack of clear direction and support from senior managers. The documentation to support the teaching of the subject is excellent.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

### **French**

113. Pupils begin to study French in Year 6, a year earlier than in most schools. This gives them a sound basis for starting the National Curriculum schemes of work in Year 7.
114. Attainment at the age of 13 is in line with national expectations. Eleven-year-olds reach satisfactory standards. The achievement of pupils, including those who are gifted and talented and those with special educational needs, is satisfactory.
115. By the age of 11, pupils listen carefully to the teacher's questions – for example, about sport and leisure activities, and respond satisfactorily, though a few pupils find it hard to concentrate for more than a few minutes. They speak clearly when asked questions about themselves, but find pronunciation difficult. They read words and short phrases with understanding and use their exercise books to check on words they cannot remember. Many pupils do not remember what they learnt several weeks ago, though more able pupils have better recall. Written work is well presented. Pupils copy words and phrases, sometimes with a few errors, and complete sentences selecting the correct word from a list. They learn new vocabulary and spellings and are gaining in confidence when speaking French, though they are slow to improve pronunciation.
116. By the age of 13, pupils' listening skills improve. They listen well to one another in paired work and to a tape of French spoken at normal speed, understanding the gist of what is said. More able pupils grasp much of the detail. These pupils speak confidently about themselves and their likes and dislikes. Pupils of average and lower ability are more hesitant because they still find pronunciation difficult. Generally, they make themselves understood. More able pupils read aloud fluently and with understanding, while others struggle with longer words such as 'l'ordinateur' and lose some of the meaning. In writing, pupils complete sentences with appropriate words, paying good attention to spelling. They refer to their word lists and dictionaries to check on vocabulary linked to clothes, sports and transport, and compose a paragraph on what they did in the holidays. Many pupils find different tenses hard to use. Pupils learn to use familiar words in unfamiliar settings, to ensure adjectives agree with nouns, and to write the correct form of the verb with the different subject pronouns. They learn to link sentences together in a short paragraph, though extended writing is not well developed. They learn to answer questions orally in longer sentences and to read words without English pronunciation.
117. Teaching and learning in French are satisfactory. In two-fifths of lessons they are good. Teaching has some very good features. The teacher's good knowledge of the subject enables her to ask searching questions to assess how much pupils have

understood and to extend their thinking in French. Lessons are well planned with a variety of activities to improve pupils' listening, speaking, reading and writing. Sometimes, opportunities for pupils to speak more are missed and this slows improvement in pronunciation. Paired work, however, is successful in developing listening and speaking, as in a Year 7 lesson where pupils questioned one another using a picture worksheet. Insufficient use is made of French as a teaching medium, and many pupils lack the confidence to speak in long sentences. In-class assessment is a strong feature of teaching. For example, in Year 8 lessons, the teacher tested pupils' understanding of sports and leisure vocabulary through questions on a tape. This encouraged pupils to listen carefully to French spoken at normal speed and to think quickly. In a Year 7 lesson, the teacher made effective use of an overhead projector to test pupils' spelling of colour words. The teacher deals quickly with weaknesses arising from the tests and this is helping pupils to improve. Marking is regular, though spellings are not always corrected and pupils repeat errors.

118. The teacher has worked hard to revise schemes of work in line with the recently revised National Curriculum. Units of work have in-built assessment procedures, which are well applied and enable the teacher to assess achievement in the four modern language skills. This information is used well in reports to parents. The teacher in charge of French teaches all but one Year 6 class. She offers good support to the newly-qualified teacher of this class, whose teaching she has monitored well. Opportunities for professional development through observing experienced teachers in other schools are insufficient, and this is a particular disadvantage for a teacher in a small department. A variety of resources is well employed, but difficulty of access to computers means that very little use is made of information and communication technology, which restricts teaching and learning methods, as does a lack of a television and video in the French classroom.
119. The subject is well led and managed. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Speaking skills are more developed, though pronunciation is a weakness. More able pupils are given more difficult work and there is good use of different work for pupils with learning difficulties. The pace of lessons is good now, though some opportunities for pupils to read aloud are still missed. Resources are adequate. Given the teacher's willingness to develop her teaching skills further and her commitment to her pupils, the capacity for further improvement is good.

## **MUSIC**

120. There is no evidence to indicate standards of attainment on entry to the school. By their knowledge and understanding of musical terminology and their general approach to practical music making, a few pupils, in both key stages, demonstrate the level of attainment expected of their age group. Attainment for 11-year-olds falls below national expectations. However, most pupils in all years are still working towards national expectations in this subject. Attainment in Year 7 and, especially, in Year 8, is, for many, well below that expected.
121. Pupils in Year 6 lack the basic skills to produce a performance of a calypso. Year 7 pupils are unable to follow basic musical notation and chord progressions so that providing appropriate accompaniments and counter melodies to a set ground bass proved unachievable objectives. Year 8 pupils were not able to fulfil their true potential when composing music for an advertisement because there was minimal musical input and direction to the set task. In the work seen, there was little evidence of progression, but this was an inevitable product of tasks being an unrealistic

challenge to many. Many pupils are keen to answer questions, but do so at a very fundamental level. Though boys are reluctant participants, class singing is approached with some enthusiasm, but with insufficient attention to the integration and development of proper vocal techniques. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

122. Attitudes to and behaviour within the subject indicate a mixed response. Generally, groups work well together and are supportive of each other within set tasks. Nevertheless, behaviour and concentration vary considerably, especially when the pace of the lesson slows, task objectives are unrealistic and the classroom becomes overheated during summer days. Pupils are more often willing and compliant, rather than demonstrating a real enthusiasm for the subject.
123. The sole teacher, in charge of the subject, is newly qualified and keen to do well. Nevertheless, the overall quality of teaching is unsatisfactory at present. Basic musical skills in all aspects of the attainment target are not efficiently or rigorously taught and there are many missed opportunities to promote the subject and enthuse pupils to handle the raw materials of the same. Class activities can be focused too long at a particular topic. For example, a Year 7 class spent a considerable proportion of a lesson on listening and appraising work, which was in itself an inappropriate task for the year group. Many pupils' concentration lapsed and the quality and quantity of responses dropped, as did the interest in the topic in general. Though the limitations of space are coped with adequately, the accommodation, at present, lacks sufficient space for successful management and effective outcomes from work in small groups. Expectations are somewhat unrealistic, bearing in mind pupils' prior attainment, and there is insufficient modification of teaching strategies to cater for disparate teaching groups. Classroom management requires careful consideration in order to involve all pupils, at all levels, in a useful musical experience during their lesson time, and to maximise such time for group activities based on clear and realistic musical expectations.
124. Pupils' work is not assessed in relation to the new levels of attainment in the National Curriculum. These requirements, although met by the programme of study, need reviewing to permit the interests and strengths of pupils and teacher to be integrated and realistic targets to be set for future planning. Pupils are not sufficiently involved in self-assessment.
125. The work of the department is enhanced by a good programme of extra-curricular activities which were very poorly attended during the inspection period. A significant proportion of pupils attend peripatetic instrument lessons, though there is little evidence of acquired instrumental skills being utilised within classroom performing and composing work. There is no evidence of the use of information and communication technology, though there are plans to introduce this aspect of work within the provision of new music accommodation and resources.
126. The leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. This is having a detrimental affect on the standards achieved. There has been insufficient support for teaching from senior managers. Accommodation is cramped, making it difficult to teach large groups.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

127. Standards of attainment are in line with national expectations at the ages of 11 and 13 years. A similar picture emerged at the time of the last inspection. There are no

significant differences in the attainment levels of boys and girls. Most of the lessons observed during the inspection involved developing athletic skills, but lessons in tennis, cricket and rounders were also observed. Whilst pupils are given the opportunity to experience a wide range of different activities within the unit on athletics, the time spent on each is insufficient to enable them to attain above average standards.

128. In Years 5 and 6, pupils develop confidence and improve their skills in a range of different activities. Younger pupils send and receive a ball competently over a short distance. They are also improving their athletic skills of running and jumping. By the time pupils leave the school at the end of Year 8, they are much more assured in what they do. Records indicate that standards in swimming are above average. Some individual pupils attain above-average standards in gymnastics, tennis and cross-country. Recent team successes include the Year 6 girls' netball team who won the county cup and the Year 7 team who won the south west Dorset area cup. Year 5 boys came second in the area football championship, whilst the Year 8 basketball team finished runners-up in the area tournament.
129. In relation to their prior attainment, most pupils are achieving well. For example, learning was good in two Year 5 lessons involving athletics and games skills. Progress was very good in a Year 6 tennis lesson. Pupils on the register of special educational needs, who are fully integrated into all physical education lessons, progress at least as well as others. One pupil receives in-class support in physical education. This support is very effective and results in improved participation, confidence and enjoyment for the pupil concerned. Younger pupils, in particular, benefit from the provision of modified equipment that enables them to make good progress when meeting a new activity for the first time.
130. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teaching and learning are good or very good in about 75 per cent of lessons. Most lessons are purposeful and well organised with highly structured activities. Relationships are positive and encourage learning. Class management is good. Demonstrations are used effectively, with the result that pupils understand clearly what is required of them. Resources are used well to ensure that all pupils are actively involved and make progress. This combination of effective management, progressively demanding activities and purposeful teaching was clearly evident in a Year 6 tennis lesson. The pupils responded enthusiastically to the teaching they received and learning was very good as a consequence of clear explanations of basic skills and clear feedback. In several lessons, pupils are encouraged to lead warm-up activities and they do so confidently.
131. Lessons judged to be no better than satisfactory were weakened because pupils spent far too much time sitting down watching others rather than taking an active part. In one lesson, the task set was not suitable for all pupils. Opportunities for evaluation by pupils are missed in some lessons. In a few lessons, teachers do not give enough guidance to help individual pupils improve their level of performance. Overall, the response of pupils to the teaching they receive is very good. They are eager to participate, always wear correct kit and are interested in what they are doing. Behaviour is at least good in all lessons and it is frequently very good.
132. Co-ordination of the subject is good although the co-ordinator, who has been at the school for almost three years, has been monitored only once by senior staff. Her own high teaching commitment also means that she has very little time to monitor the work of her colleagues. All relevant documentation and schemes of work are now in place,

leading to clearer planned progression in the programmes of study between year groups. Swimming forms part of the curriculum for all year groups, with the result that there are virtually no non-swimmers by the end of Year 8. The subject co-ordinator, supported by two other colleagues, provides a good range of extra-curricular activities at lunchtime and after school. During the inspection, activities involving athletics, tennis and rounders were well supported by younger pupils. Year 8 pupils attend a two-day outdoor and adventurous activities course at Weymouth. As a consequence they experience activities such as climbing, canoeing and orienteering.

133. Since the last inspection the amount of time allocated to gymnastics and dance has been increased. This ensures that an appropriate balance is now maintained between games and the other elements of the curriculum. Other improvements have seen the introduction of much smaller groups for games and a re-organised timetable of extra-curricular activities. A revised system of assessment that incorporates the new level descriptors at Years 7 and 8 has just been introduced. It has been in operation for only a very short time and it is too early to judge its overall effectiveness.