

INSPECTION REPORT

MILL VALE SCHOOL

DUNSTABLE

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109663

Headteacher: Mrs F. A. Read

Reporting inspector: Mr J.M.R. Overend
12336

Dates of inspection: 19th to 23rd June 2000

Inspection number: 198999

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle, deemed secondary

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 9 to 13

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Wilbury Drive,
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Bedfordshire

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs. P. Hales

Date of previous inspection: 1st December 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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J.M.R. Overend	Registered inspector	Geography	Standards
			Leadership and management
			Staffing
R. Folks	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well school works with parents
			Accommodation
D. Macildowie	Team inspector	English	
		Equal opportunities	
P. Ingram	Team inspector	Mathematics	How well the school cares for pupils
J. M. Martin	Team inspector	Science	Resources
M. Gill	Team inspector	History	Curricular and other opportunities
		Physical education	
C. Worthington	Team inspector	Design and technology	
		Information communication technology	
S. Jones	Team Inspector	Music	
E. Barthaud	Team Inspector	Religious education	
J. M. Marshall	Team Inspector	Modern foreign languages	How well pupils are taught
J. Adey	Team inspector	Art	
J. Waddington	Team Inspector	Special educational needs	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Mill Vale School is a mixed middle, deemed secondary, school for pupils aged 9 to 13. It has 576 pupils on roll and is, therefore, larger than many other middle schools in England. The school, which is oversubscribed, draws its pupils from two different socio-economic areas that provide pupils of different levels of prior attainment on entry to the school. Many pupils of below average attainment join the school and there are few pupils of higher attainment. It has a smaller number of pupils (13 per cent) eligible for free school meals than the national average. Eleven pupils have statements of special educational needs and a further 176, slightly less than the national average, are on the register of special educational needs. There are slightly more pupils in the school who speak English as an additional language than in similar schools. Standards achieved at age 11 in English, mathematics and science are just above those achieved nationally. Pupils from the school are well prepared for transfer to upper schools at age 13.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school that has made many improvements since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching is good overall. Levels of attainment are rising. Attitudes and relationships are good. The governors and headteacher provide strong, effective and professional leadership. The school is well managed. Staff work effectively and successfully as a team to create a lively educational environment and to add value to pupils' educational experiences. Good financial management and a will to improve further ensure that the school provides good value for money

What the school does well

- Provides many opportunities to ensure that the personal development of pupils is very good.
- Behaviour and relationships are good.
- Is well managed and led.
- The quality of teaching is good and promotes learning of good quality.
- Raises the attainment of boys and has improving levels of attainment in English, mathematics and science.
- Provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities for pupils.

What could be improved

- The policy, practice and consistency of whole school assessment.
- The links between school and departmental development planning and the quality of some departmental plans.
- In-service training and support for non-specialist and less experienced teachers and other staff in the subjects they teach.
- The consistency with which homework is set and the level of challenge in that which is set.

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

The serious weaknesses identified by the previous inspection have been fully resolved. There are several other areas in which the school does well. In particular, these include the assessment and early identification of pupils with special educational needs, the encouragement of good behaviour and friendly relationships, the quality and range of learning opportunities provided within the curriculum and the maintenance of good links with other local schools.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was previously inspected in December 1997. Since that time much has improved. Attainment in English, mathematics and science at age 11, previously below, is now just above national averages. The attainment of boys equals that of girls and as such is better than the national position. The teaching of French is now good and as a result levels of attainment have risen. There is more monitoring of the work of the school by senior staff and governors and the collection of assessment information is good, though the current proposals for an agreed whole school policy for marking and assessment have still to be implemented. The behaviour of pupils, both in lessons and

outside the classroom is good. Development planning is more secure though the links between school and departmental development planning are not fully established. There is a more appropriate timetable for lessons but still some mismatch between teachers and the subjects they teach, and the school currently lacks an induction programme for new members of staff.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
End of Key Stage 2 tests	D	C	C	C	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

Standards of attainment especially in English, mathematics and science match the national averages and are improving in line with the national trend. The performance of boys is now equal to that of girls (which has been maintained) and in this respect is better than the national position. Evidence collected during the inspection week indicates that levels of attainment, in comparison to those achieved by pupils in similar schools, are higher than national statistics would suggest.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have a positive attitude towards school. They are friendly, polite and helpful.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in and out of classrooms is good. Only a small number of senior boys occasionally exhibit unacceptable behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	There are many opportunities for the personal development of pupils. Relationships are very good, pupils work well together.
Attendance	Is above the national average.

Pupils behave well. The number of exclusions is low. There are no permanent exclusions. Attendance is improving; pupils like coming to school. Pupils respect each other, their teachers and visitors. There is no evidence of bullying or racial intolerance. The school offers many opportunities for pupils to accept responsibility, to raise money for charities and to participate in sporting and musical events.

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.

Teaching is good in almost two thirds of lessons and satisfactory in over nine out of ten. It is particularly good in English, mathematics, religious education and personal, social and health education. Although good in half the lessons in science, there is a greater proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. Good teaching is the result of thorough planning, the use of a variety of techniques in each

lesson, appropriate specialist knowledge and good class management. Good teaching is found in all subjects. The teaching of literacy and numeracy has been integrated well into the curriculum and is found in many lessons other than English and mathematics. When teaching is good pupils learn well and make significant progress in their studies.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced. It meets all statutory requirements and there is good continuity with upper and lower schools.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school makes good provision for the full range of pupils with special educational needs.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	These pupils are fully integrated into school and have no need of additional support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is good. Pupils' cultural development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Standards of care for pupils are high.

The school has been successful in its determined effort to improve the spiritual development of pupils and to provide opportunities for reflection within lessons. Social development is promoted by the many opportunities to participate in visits and extra-curricular work. The ethos of the school and the programme of personal, social and health education promote high moral standards but cultural education is not developed to the same standard. There are good links with parents who provide active support and practical help for the school. Parents welcome the access they have to the school. Teachers know and care for their pupils well.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, supported by senior members of staff provide strong, responsible and effective leadership and management.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil all their responsibilities and meet all statutory requirements. They are well organised, effective and take great interest in all aspects of school life.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Monitoring of the work of the school by the governors, headteacher and co-ordinators is good but the outcomes are not yet fully integrated into future planning.
The strategic use of resources	Good use is made of the resources available to the school, though the growing number of pupils is placing increasing pressure on accommodation.

Current allocations of staff to classes do not always provide the best match between expertise and

requirements. The whole staff works well as a team under effective leadership from the headteacher. The school applies the principle of best value in its financial and strategic planning and currently provides good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The improvement in standards since the last inspection. • Good quality teaching. • The provision for pupils with special needs. • Teamwork among staff. • The open access they have to the school and the way their concerns are dealt with. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The behaviour of a minority of boys. • More challenge in homework.

Inspectors agree with those aspects of the school that please parents most. There is evidence that the behaviour of a small minority of boys is sometimes unacceptable. Despite concerns raised at the meeting of parents and through the return of questionnaires, there are many extra curricular opportunities and the school makes every effort to communicate the progress of pupils to parents. Homework is not always a regular feature of pupils' work and when set is not always sufficiently challenging.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Levels of attainment achieved by pupils when they enter the school at the beginning of Year 5 are low and below the national average for other schools. Two out of five pupils joining the school have reading ages that are below their chronological age. Few pupils of high levels of attainment join the school at age nine. Tests administered by the school at the beginning of Year 5 show that only about 15 per cent of pupils achieve results above the mid point of the score range and that the level of attainment of pupils entering the school is falling. Almost 30 per cent of pupils in the school are included in the register of special educational needs. There are significant differences between the standards achieved in the two wards from which the majority of pupils are drawn. Over 50 per cent of pupils come from a ward that is less advantaged socio-economically and have levels of attainment in English and mathematics that are significantly below those of pupils from the other ward.
2. By the end of Key Stage 2, when pupils take public tests in English, mathematics and science, the standards achieved are broadly in line with national averages. In 1999, 77 per cent of pupils reached level 4 of the National Curriculum in English, 72 per cent reached level 4 in mathematics and 86 per cent reached level 4 in science. These results are much improved since the time of the last inspection and have risen annually since 1997. Results at level 5 of the National Curriculum are below the national average and are a reflection of the fact that fewer higher attaining pupils join the school at age 9. In particular, unlike the national position, the attainments of boys at the age of 11 now equal those of girls. This is largely due to the special effort the school has made to raise the attainment of boys in English, mathematics and science. In these subjects the performance of boys is above that achieved nationally.
3. On the basis of evidence seen during the week of the inspection, particularly in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, the attainment of pupils from Mill Vale School, when compared to that of pupils from schools with similar backgrounds, is better than that suggested by national statistics. Levels of attainment on entry are lower than in similar schools and comparisons of performance using existing criteria do not fully take account of the differences between the two very different socio-economic halves of the area from which pupils are drawn.
4. There is a discrepancy between the outcome of assessments by teachers at the end of Year 6 and the results obtained in national tests. This is matched by the difference between the attainment of pupils in public tests and the levels of attainment seen in lessons during the week of the inspection. In some lessons teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. Levels of attainment in lessons are often unsatisfactory. Overall they were unsatisfactory in almost one lesson in three and attainment was particularly low in lessons in Year 7. Attainment was less satisfactory in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 2. Current arrangements in which pupils are placed in teaching groups according to their prior attainments often result in groups, composed of pupils of lower attainment, being judged to reach standards that are unsatisfactory. In addition, low attainment is partly the result of the number of occasions when temporary or supply teachers, with little expertise of teaching the subject, teach lessons, or when teachers have less experience of the subjects they are required to teach. In these circumstances too little professional support has been

made available to staff in recent years. In lessons there are close correlations between the quality of teaching and the standards achieved.

5. Standards of attainment seen in the work of pupils in exercise books and in projects, which are based on more practical approaches to learning, are often better than those seen in lessons. This is especially true in geography where the understanding of geographical principles and quality of completed work shows a greater depth of knowledge of the topics studied and the ability to use information accurately. It is also the case in French where there is a firmer grasp of the attainment target in writing than in those of speaking and reading.
6. By the end of Year 8 when pupils leave school, attainment is satisfactory (bearing in mind levels of attainment on entry) and the school is able to pass on information to upper schools which indicates that value has been added to pupils' educational store. In tests at the end of Key Stage 3, pupils from Mill Vale School achieve results that are comparable to the national situation and sometimes above, particularly in English, mathematics and science.
7. The attainment of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory or better in all core subjects and these pupils are achieving at least as well as those in similar schools. Improving levels of attainment and good progress by pupils with special educational needs is a feature of the school. Standards of oral work are at least satisfactory and often better. Writing is weak but numeracy is a strength, especially in Years 5 and 6. Levels of attainment, particularly those of boys, are improving in all three core subjects and though those of girls have not declined, the school does not sufficiently address the poor attainment profiles of some girls. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are well integrated into the school. They are sufficiently fluent in English and do not need any additional support to reach the same standards or make the same progress as other pupils.
8. Pupils make good progress in English, mathematics and science from the time they enter the school as their levels of attainment move from below average to average overall. Progress is similar in English and mathematics but slightly below that achieved in science.
9. A whole school policy for the development of literacy has been in place since March 2000. Several subjects, including science, religious education and geography, encourage the accurate use of their special vocabulary by displaying key words in the classroom and providing pupils with subject glossaries. Pupils are required to present written information in several different forms such as notes, diagrams, reports and projects in history, geography and religious education. In French, at Key Stage 3, pupils are able to practise their skills in letter writing, dialogues, advertisements and poetry. These good opportunities for writing in different ways are available in many subjects other than English, although very little written work is done in art or music. In religious education, pupils are frequently asked to read aloud their own work to the class. History provides a good range of well chosen reading collections suited to different levels of attainment and, in French, the use of dictionaries by all pupils is actively encouraged. Teachers in mathematics and geography use good questioning techniques to encourage pupils to speak clearly, and making oral reports is a strong feature of work in history. In their French lessons pupils listen to audio and videotapes to stimulate their spoken language and develop good listening skills. Improvised plays on topics such as the 'Black Death' enliven their study of history. Overall, provision for developing literacy is good in the majority

of subjects.

10. Pupils of all ages show good speaking and listening skills in many lessons. They are keen to take part in discussions in religious education and geography, and they show maturity in their questions and answers. In history the higher-attaining pupils offered fluent descriptions of their recent visit to the battlefields of Flanders. Even when not fluent, pupils read aloud with confidence in history and religious education. Presentation of written work is very good in French and satisfactory or good in all subjects where it is required. The standard of projects is above average for all pupils in history and geography, where very substantial pieces of writing, for example on Dunstable Downs, are often well word-processed and graphically illustrated. The overall level of attainment in literacy across the curriculum is above average.
11. The provision the school makes for the development of numeracy is satisfactory. Mathematics makes a good contribution to this provision but contributions from other subjects are weaker. In French, comparisons are made between British and continental sizes of clothing and prices are compared. In science data is recorded in tables but graphical work is incomplete because lines of best-fit are not included. Graphs are drawn to show the size of cities in history and information from practical work in the field is tabulated and presented graphically in geography. The different numbers of beats in a bar are noted in music and long jump measurements are taken in physical education. Pupils learn well in mathematics especially with more practical tasks. They work accurately with fractions, solve simple equations and, in Key Stage 3, successfully apply Pythagoras' theorem. They participate with confidence in practical tasks such as organising orders from a catalogue, use costs from railway timetables to plan journeys and use information communication technology to work with spreadsheets and databases.
12. At the end of Key Stage 2 attainment in science is good and satisfactory at the end of Year 8. The attainment of boys slightly exceeds that of girls. Investigative skills are less well developed than theoretical knowledge. Attainment in science is similar to that in mathematics and better than that in English. Attainment has been improved by the introduction of the Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education programme (CASE). As a result, for example, pupils can effectively plan their own experiments to find, with valid results, why salts are soluble. This approach is particularly successful in providing challenge for higher attaining pupils. The quality of learning overall is satisfactory. In Key Stage 2 pupils develop knowledge of a broad range of science topics, understand simple scientific principles and can use keys to identify plants and animals. By the end of Year 5 they can confidently explain how animals are adapted to their environment. In Year 6 pupils gain good understanding of the processes involved in human reproduction. Attainment is hindered, however, in Key Stage 3 because a number of pupils fail to retain knowledge previously gained and have a weak understanding of basic concepts. At the end of Year 8, for example, some pupils have difficulty in identifying the position in the body of major organs and in understanding their function. In both key stages pupils use scientific vocabulary accurately and can present the results of their experiments clearly.
13. Attainment is satisfactory in geography and history in both key stages. Pupils learn well in geography when they play a full part in the lesson and through practical activities which form a significant part of the geography curriculum. They make simple deductions about traffic and places in a Year 5 study in Toddington and subsequently progress to more advanced work on Dunstable Downs which requires

them to develop social as well as geographical skills. Learning is less satisfactory, especially in Years 7 and 8 when the teacher dominates lessons, for example, in a lesson to establish the main physical features of Italy. Learning is good in history especially in Key Stage 3. Pupils have a good range of research skills in history, which enable them to collect and assimilate data and to express their findings through writing of good quality. They are able to empathise with human experiences in history such as the 'Black Death'. They have a good grasp of the detail through which human activities affect daily life in ancient Egypt and of information that enables them to assimilate accurately the differences between the theatre in Tudor and modern times. In religious education attainment is satisfactory in both key stages and in line with that expected by the locally agreed syllabus. Pupils retain information well and are able to interpret information about religious beliefs and practices and fluently talk about moral and social issues.

14. Attainment in art is sound but pupils' understanding of the work of individual artists and their use of the vocabulary of art is less satisfactory. Their painting is well developed and skills of drawing and working in a variety of media mature by the end of Year 8. Three-dimensional work in Year 7 shows a sensitive approach to making models of peppers in clay. Attainment is, however, limited because pupils have little opportunity to use their own initiative and no homework is set in art.
15. Levels of attainment in modern foreign languages, especially those of boys, have improved since the last inspection. Pupils have good skills of listening and understanding in French, but although they speak willingly and confidently, their skills of pronunciation and intonation are less well developed. They write well in different forms but reading skills are not sufficiently well developed.
16. Key Stage 2 pupils compose successfully in music, using patterns to obtain good effects such as the sound of a clock; they sing with enthusiasm and can play parts accurately when working in ensembles. They listen well to each other so that they come in at the right point in the music but individual instrumental skills are less well developed. These skills are extended in Key Stage 3 where pupils play individual parts successfully, they develop a sense of harmony and texture in their compositions and make good use of staff notation in their work.
17. There are a significant number of high achieving pupils in physical education. Pupils model stretching routines correctly in preparation for long jump practice. Most pupils clear long jump distances of between two and a half and three and a half metres but few use their arms effectively to give added impetus to their jumps. Boys display satisfactory hand eye coordination to develop cricket fielding techniques and girls catch and throw accurately over short distances. Older pupils anticipate the movement of the pace and bounce of the ball in tennis practices well; almost all pupils produce satisfactory ground strokes and the most able can use them to sustain long rallies.
18. Levels of attainment in design and technology are not as high as in other subjects because pupils are not given sufficient opportunities to make progress in basic skills. Using resistant materials little progress is made from making simple bookends in Year 5. Pupils are not able to make progress in joining materials in textiles. Progress is also inhibited by the fact that pupils do not undertake sufficient research for their tasks and tend to evaluate the process rather than the finished product. The standards they achieve in graphics are below average though there are examples of the good use of graphics in other subjects such as mathematics and geography. The

provision of dedicated teaching in information communication technology in Years 5 and 6 ensures that attainment and progress is satisfactory although pupils do not practice using the keyboard often enough. They are beginning to carry out sophisticated tasks such as the design of an advertisement for an audience in ancient Egypt. These skills are carried through into Years 7 and 8 as shown by the construction of a programme to advertise a production of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Pupils in these years make good use of information communication technology in mathematics, geography and history but attainment and progress are more limited than in the previous key stage because information communication technology is not utilised by all subjects, for example science, as envisaged by the curriculum. As a result standards are not high enough at the end of Year 8.

19. Levels of attainment have improved since the previous inspection and since the visit of Her Majesty's Inspectors in November 1998. The attainment of boys in the core subjects and standards in French are much improved but there are too many lessons where pupils do not achieve as well as they could.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

20. The pupils have positive attitudes to school and their behaviour is good. Personal development and relationships are very good. The majority of pupils take advantage of the many extra-curricular activities the school provides. Attendance is just above the national average and improving slowly.
21. Pupils enjoy coming to school and taking part in the many and varied activities of the school. They make the most of the opportunities provided. Their behaviour in lessons is good overall with only a small minority of senior boys showing signs of disinterest. This occurs in the few cases where the teaching is less effective. The vast majority of pupils expect to work hard, show enthusiasm in their lessons and respond well to the teachers. They are friendly, self-assured, courteous and reliable and make visitors feel welcome. Their contributions to lessons are exemplified by the eagerness with which they join in question and answer sessions and the way they work together collaboratively. During discussions, pupils explore their own and other people's feelings and beliefs, and learn to understand how their actions can influence others. They are willing to listen and consider other points of view.
22. When travelling between lessons, pupils do so quickly and in an orderly fashion and even where the corridors are narrow and in the one-way systems, are disciplined and well behaved. Pupils are helped in this by door and stair monitors, and by pupils who of their own initiative hold open doors, as they did for inspectors. School assemblies are a good example of orderly behaviour. Pupils enter the assembly hall class by class and sit down quickly and quietly. They stand as required in three sections and the whole exercise illustrates the orderliness and organisation within the school.
23. At morning breaks and lunchtimes, this orderliness and organisation is once again demonstrated. Lunchtime supervisors are efficient in their duties and the pupils respond very well to the staggered arrangements for the use of the hall and dining room. In the playground, there is a range of activities, including football and netball. The most popular of these is football with lots of energy and enthusiasm being expended by both boys and girls. Groups of pupils can be seen around the school grounds socialising very well with each other, illustrating that relationships within the school are very good. School staff operate as a friendly and supportive team, they set a good example for the pupils. Relationships between staff and pupils are very

good. No oppressive behaviour was seen during the inspection although there were examples of high spirits at times that were efficiently dealt with by duty staff and lunchtime supervisors. There have been no permanent exclusions from the school recently and the number of fixed term exclusions is low.

24. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to take initiative, accept responsibility and for personal development. This is a strength of the school. Pupils readily accept these opportunities and undertake them with enthusiasm. There are many examples of this including the duty team who take pupils back to their classrooms after break and lunchtime, carry out reception duties, including the receiving of visitors, working in the library, litter picking, running the school bank and looking after lost property. Pupils also organise and take responsibility for many aspects of their own variety show, including arranging auditions and stage and front-of-house management. Pupils have the opportunity to do their own research in the library using reference books, CD-ROMs or the Internet. There are many clubs and societies in the school and these are very well supported by pupils.
25. Attendance is just above the national average. It has improved since the last inspection and has improved slightly since last year. Unauthorised absence is well below the national average. Registration is computerised and complies with statutory requirements. The school works very closely with the education welfare officer in monitoring attendance. There is little evidence of lateness to school or to lessons.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

26. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection and it is now good. Teaching is good or better in two thirds of lessons and in almost one in five it is very good. It is satisfactory in over nine out of ten lessons. Unsatisfactory teaching (7 per cent) occurs mainly where temporary or supply teachers teach classes. The best teaching is found in Year 5, where 30 per cent is very good or excellent. The weakest teaching is found in Year 7, where 52 per cent was good or better but 12 per cent was unsatisfactory. Overall, there was little difference in the quality of teaching between the two key stages. The quality of learning in lessons matches closely the quality of teaching.
27. Teaching is strongest overall in English, history and religious education. In religious education, 60 per cent of teaching is very good or excellent, and in English teaching is very good in almost half the lessons. Teaching of good quality is also found in personal, social and health education. In the other core subjects, teaching is good in mathematics and satisfactory in science. Examples of good quality teaching are found in all subjects.
28. As a result of good teaching, pupils' learning is enhanced at least satisfactorily in all subjects. The quality of learning is particularly good in English, history and religious education. Pupils are enabled to acquire more skills, knowledge and understanding and the extent to which they use their own intellectual, creative and physical efforts is good.
29. The main strength of the teaching lies in the high expectations that most teachers have of their pupils. This is particularly so in English, mathematics, French, history, music and religious education. Pupils know what is expected of them, they respond to these expectations with enthusiasm and hard work and their levels of achievement

rise accordingly. Where expectations are lower, as in some design and technology lessons for example, this results in a poorer quality of finish in the work of pupils.

30. Planning is good in most subjects; in history and physical education it is very good. Where planning is best, it takes account of pupils' prior knowledge and their specific needs, activities are varied and there is a careful progression throughout the lesson. In science, although lesson planning is good, long term planning is less secure; some topics do not follow a logical development and work that is too complex is introduced too soon. In information communication technology planning is good in Key Stage 2, but the cross-curricular approach in Key Stage 3 does not always ensure continuity or progression in the development of skills as not all subjects provide opportunities for pupils to use information communication technology in lessons. Sometimes, as in art, objectives are not clear, teaching styles are limited and some aspects of the subject are insufficiently developed.
31. Class management is another strength of the teaching. Lessons are conducted purposefully and usually at a brisk pace, objectives are shared with pupils and progress is reviewed at the end of the lesson. This is particularly true of English, mathematics, science, French, history and music. Relationships are good; teachers know their pupils and take an interest in them. Pupils are aware of this and respond with enthusiasm, concentration and hard work, thus raising their levels of achievement. Where there is too much teacher exposition, as is sometimes the case in French and geography, concentration is less well sustained; and when, in English, the teacher dominates the discussion, pupils are more inhibited. Teachers deal with the few cases of challenging behaviour by boys in Key Stage 3 calmly and skilfully.
32. In general, teachers use a wide variety of teaching styles and activities to engage the interest of the pupils and to motivate them. In English there is good use of group work to encourage pupils to learn from each other, and to promote independent study. In mathematics and science, pupils extend their knowledge and understanding through investigations. In geography, teaching is enhanced by the effective use of pupil-centred tasks, particularly fieldwork, so that pupils learn by participating. The insistence in French that pupils use French to communicate in lessons brings a good response and increases their linguistic confidence. In art, however there are few opportunities for independent learning, and knowledge and understanding are limited. In design and technology, the balance between practical work and theoretical work is not well struck, and too little time is devoted to design and research.
33. The needs of most pupils are met through good planning and the use of appropriate methods, materials and tasks, particularly in English, physical education and religious education. There is, however, an unspoken assumption in some subjects that grouping pupils according to their prior attainment ensures that pupils will be taught at the right level. The result is that lower-attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, and higher-attaining pupils are less well served. In lessons which are too directive and where the same task is set for all, there is an over-reliance on individual attention from the teacher and the use of learning assistants to bring the pupils to the required level, as is the case in science, French and sometimes in geography. Sometimes, there is a lack of planned opportunities in those same subjects for pupils to extend their knowledge and skills. In history, English and religious education the practice is good.
34. The quality of teaching for pupils with special educational needs is good. It is well planned, tightly structured and informed by individual education plans that are

detailed and regularly reviewed by teachers and learning support assistants. The use of a 'small steps' approach is particularly effective for building basic literacy and numeracy skills for pupils with special educational needs. Teaching materials that are appropriate to the levels of attainment of the pupils are of good quality and contribute positively to pupils' learning in geography, history, science and religious education but these are not readily available in all lessons. Elsewhere there is an over reliance on learning support assistants to raise the attainment of pupils with special educational needs. Within lessons, care is taken to build up concepts and skills in a sequential manner but sometimes insufficient emphasis is placed on learning objectives and the recognition of pupils' achievements.

35. The day-to-day assessment of pupils' work is very good in French; marking is positive, helpful and detailed, with indications for improvement. It is often linked to National Curriculum levels, so that pupils know where they stand in relation to the targets set. Practice is also good in English, history and music. In design technology and religious education, there is a degree of self-assessment, thus involving the pupils. Although some marking follows procedures common to several departments, this is not universally the case and there are too many variations in practice across the school. Pupils are not always made aware of the levels of the National Curriculum they are reaching although there is increasing use of these levels in some departments. As a result, pupils have some difficulty in equating standards between subjects, knowing what standards they are achieving or what they need to do to improve. Pupils, also experience some difficulty in equating the standards they are achieving in one subject with those in another.
36. The setting of homework, especially in Key Stage 2, and its quality has been criticised by some parents. Currently where homework is set regularly, as in English, mathematics and history, it is not always challenging. In some other subjects this is not the case. For example, in art, design and technology, information communication technology and religious education, homework is set on an irregular basis or not at all and in science the homework is not sufficiently demanding.

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

37. The curriculum is broad and balanced. It includes all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education, complies fully with all statutory requirements and provides a good range of opportunities, both within and outside the curriculum, for pupils to learn. With the exception of three pupils who do not follow a course in French, all pupils, including those with special educational needs follow, and have equal access to, the whole curriculum and to extra-curricular activities.
38. Other than for English and mathematics, for which pupils are grouped according to their prior levels of attainment, pupils are taught in mixed groups at Key Stage 2. At Key Stage 3 grouping according to the prior attainment of pupils is extended to all core and foundation subjects. All other subjects are taught in classes of pupils of different levels of attainment. The progress of pupils in groups based on their previous attainment is closely monitored and pupils are moved as necessary. The balance and organisation of the curriculum has been improved significantly since the last inspection. Teaching time, at 25 hours per week adequately meets requirements for Key Stage 3 and is well above average for Key Stage 2. The time allocated to subjects is appropriate other than for French at Key Stage 3 which has a little less time than recommended, but this has not had an adverse effect on the quality of

teaching or learning. The five one hour period day has assisted the school in securing continuity of learning in all subjects. More time is provided for religious education and personal social and health education, and information communication technology is now taught as a discrete subject at Key Stage 2 but the entitlements of pupils at Key Stage 3 are not always met.

39. Since the last inspection the majority of schemes of work have been revised in order that they better meet the needs of non-specialist teachers. Policies for literacy and the use of information communication technology are now impacting effectively on learning in some subjects. To date the policy on numeracy has largely influenced learning in mathematics. A pilot project for the support of gifted children has had insufficient time to influence learning. Learning is enriched by a number of cross-curricular themes, for example in English and history, but currently there is no overarching strategy in place to develop cross-curricular work. Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils has improved. It is still not incorporated into the schemes of work of some subjects and there continues to be no overall strategy to support and monitor provision.
40. The school continues to provide a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities. The great majority of curriculum areas contribute, although there are particular strengths in sports and music; high quality fieldwork supports learning in many subjects including geography and history. Participation rates are high; for example, over half of all pupils participate in sports activities.
41. Educational links with upper schools are well structured. They involve all curricular areas and include moderation of assessments of pupils' work, appropriate allocations of curriculum topics in Key Stage 3 and regular meetings between subject departments. Collectively these links contribute very well to the continuity of learning. Links with feeder lower schools are relatively weaker but developing well. There are particularly productive links in science, music and physical education.
42. The quality and range of links with the community are satisfactory overall. Links with the local community are developing, but improving links with the local community does not feature in the aims and objectives of the school. Links are strengthened by the use made of local visitors such as the 'War Man', Second World War soldiers and local clergy. Pupils provide help at a local home for the elderly and the help given to a local special school is much appreciated. Good links have been developed with local churches and the choir takes part in the annual Dunstable carol procession. Feeder schools use the Mill Vale facilities for plays and sports days but there are very few links with local industry.
43. The personal, social and health education course is well structured. There are systems in place for planning and review which both secure consistency and allow for some flexibility in teaching. Teaching in lessons observed during the inspection was good overall. Sensitive issues, for example education on drug awareness, are covered by visiting specialists. A good range of resources supports learning. Since the last inspection the personal, social and health courses have been further refined and even more improvement is sought through the involvement of the school in the 'Healthy Schools Project' and with the development of learning about citizenship.
44. Provision for the spiritual development is good and has improved significantly since the last inspection. There is a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. School assemblies offer pupils an opportunity to reflect, to pray and to celebrate through

music. Most subjects contribute, though not always explicitly; for example, there are good contributions from English and history, and religious education makes a satisfactory contribution overall. The school's 'Zone Club' makes a valuable contribution to those pupils who wish to develop their knowledge and understanding of different Christian faiths. The 'Easter Activities Day' makes an important contribution with all Year 5 pupils participating in a range of activities to celebrate Easter. Three local church leaders provide regular inputs into assemblies, to religious education lessons, (which are provided for all pupils), and to the pastoral needs of pupils where appropriate.

45. Provision for moral development is good and more comprehensive than at the time of the last inspection. This is supported by the schools' ethos, which communicates high expectations, and by staff who are positive role models for pupils. Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the differences between right and wrong. Individual responsibility and consideration for others feature strongly in assemblies and in personal, social and health education lessons. These lessons are also a focus for a substantial amount of fund raising for charity, both planned and spontaneous, for example, the recent Mozambique floods. An excellent contribution is also made through religious education, for example, through the in depth study of the moral codes of the major religions. Valuable contributions are provided within English, French, history and music. For example, in history the themes of human rights and responsibility feature in the study of conflict.
46. The curriculum for pupils' social development is good. Pupils have many opportunities to work independently and to refine their interpersonal skills by working in pairs and groups. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop and exercise a sense of responsibility. For example, 30 Year 8 pupils perform monitoring duties. Many pupils are encouraged to become involved in the support and supervision of pupils from the local nursery, first and special schools during visits to the school. The broad range of extra-curricular opportunities provides many simulating and challenging situations to foster development. Many subjects including English, geography, history and physical education make important contributions. Provision is better than at the time of the last inspection.
47. Provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory and opportunities are more diverse than at the time of the last inspection with more subjects contributing. Pupils enjoy a range of theatre visits. They study stories and poems from many different cultures and good awareness of other cultures is gained through learning in history and geography. There are visits to France and Belgium in support of language development and pupils learn to play African and Chinese music. Work created recently, with the support of an artist in residence, has been displayed both at St Albans Cathedral and in the Milton Keynes shopping centre. There is, however, little evidence of multi-cultural development in the school.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

48. The school has good procedures for child protection and for ensuring the welfare of its pupils. Their welfare and safety are supported by a system in which heads of year, class teachers and all teachers know their pupils well. The heads of year are responsible to the headteacher and deputy headteacher and this group of six teachers ensures that school policies to promote the well being of pupils are followed. The headteacher is the responsible person for child protection and there is

also a designated governor. Procedures for child protection are good and follow the Local Education Authority (LEA) guidelines. The Local Education Authority carries out health and safety audits and no health and safety problems were observed during the week of the inspection. Modifications to roads in the neighbourhood of the school are being carried out as part of the Bedfordshire 'Safer Routes' project.

49. Procedures for the monitoring of pupils' academic performance and personal development are satisfactory. The school has not yet put in place an agreed policy for assessment and has not modified procedures in subject departments to be consistent with the current proposals. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school are currently measured using local authority tests but there are plans to use a national test, which will give more accurate baseline information, from next year. A comprehensive database is kept of pupils' attainments on entry to the school, of results in national tests and of information that is passed on to upper schools on transfer at the age of 13. A whole school marking policy is under consideration but at present only the English and French departments use marking which directs the future progress of pupils. The governing body has set whole school targets for attainment in the core subjects but insufficient use is made of the levels of the National Curriculum to provide targets in other subject areas.
50. Although good overall, day to day assessment practice varies in different subjects. It is good in English, mathematics, French, history and music. In English and music, academic performance is related to National Curriculum criteria and levels. In English and mathematics, pupils are grouped for teaching by attainments in those subjects at Key Stage 2. At Key Stage 3, attainment in both these subjects is used to group pupils and is extended to groupings for French, geography, history, and religious education. In science and physical education, however, procedures for assessment are weak and in design and technology they are cumbersome and under review. Design and technology does provide some opportunities for self-assessment by pupils and these opportunities are also present in history. In information communication technology, assessment at Key Stage 2 is good but at Key Stage 3 where the subject is taught across the curriculum, there is inconsistency between information provided by different subject departments. For example, there is an upper limit of the level that can be awarded in geography and this has an effect on overall gradings.
51. The use of assessment information in curriculum planning is satisfactory. It is good in English and is used in music to provide extension work for higher attaining pupils. For example, the school used assessment information from English and mathematics in deciding to provide an extra teaching group in Year 6 and to arrange teaching groups in Year 8. In French, work has begun to link assessment and curriculum planning in the long term. In other subjects, the linking of assessment to curriculum planning is unsatisfactory and the school recognises that this must be resolved.
52. The personal development of pupils is monitored effectively by class teachers and records are held by heads of year. Good information is received from lower schools when pupils enter and this is monitored and assessed as pupils develop within the school. Arrangements for educational support and guidance for pupils are good because of the commitment of teachers, who know the pupils well. The school has good procedures for informing parents of the academic and personal progress of pupils and this is appreciated by many parents. At the time of the inspection, a new report format was being used. Parents know that they have ready access to the

school and will be contacted in case of difficulties.

53. Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are good. Registers are marked correctly and teachers check on pupils missing from lessons. The proportion of pupils attending school during the week of the inspection was high and no pupils absented themselves from lessons. Punctuality to registration and classes is good. The school works closely with the education and welfare officer, who visits the school on a regular weekly basis.
54. Procedures for promoting good behaviour are effective. The school has an appropriate behaviour policy, which is supported by a balanced combination of rewards and sanctions that help to promote a positive atmosphere. Staff supervise pupils before and after school and during break and lunchtime. All teachers have high expectations of the standards of behaviour in class. The school acknowledges the problem of the unacceptable behaviour of a small number of boys and is seeking ways to resolve the problem in the interest of other pupils. Procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour are good. Pupils feel that the small number of bullying incidents are effectively dealt with by the school.
55. Pupils with special educational needs have access to a broad and balanced curriculum and are well integrated into the life and work of the school. There are close links between the co-ordinator for special educational needs and subject departments. The welfare and attainment of pupils is monitored and supported well as a result of the active, whole-school involvement in the review of individual education plans. Parents are positively encouraged to participate in the drawing up and review of these plans, which all teachers are made fully aware of. Parents comment favourably on the level, frequency and relevance of information on pupils' educational progress. Strong informational and curricular links with both lower and upper schools ensure that the welfare of pupils on transfer is important. The school is currently addressing the weaker links between some parents and the school by creating more opportunities for contact.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

56. A good partnership has been established with parents who are supportive of the school, though few are directly involved in actively contributing to pupils' education in the classroom. A wide range of information is sent to parents to keep them well informed. A number of parents help with visits and extra-curricular activities. There is a strong school association that organises many events (including discotheques) for the pupils, and raises valuable funds for the school. These additional funds, which include income from the school shop, run by parents, have enabled the school to purchase a school mini-bus, computers and playground equipment.
57. The parents feel that the school has improved since the last inspection and they are happy with the standards, attitudes and values that the school promotes. They have concerns about the behaviour of a small minority of boys but do not think that attendance and punctuality are a problem. A significant number, both at the meeting for parents and through returned questionnaires, expressed concern about the setting of homework, which is inconsistent between subjects and sometimes lacks challenge. They are pleased with the way the school responds to their suggestions and complaints, and feel that staff form a strong a team that works in the interest of pupils. The school is very approachable and deals satisfactorily with the concerns of

parents. It continues to seek ways to work more closely with parents, for example, in the efforts it is making to address the weaker links between the school and parents of pupils with special educational needs. The concern of some parents that there is an insufficient number of extra-curricular activities for pupils is not borne out by inspection evidence which indicates a wide and varied range of extra-curricular activities. These are very well supported by the pupils.

58. Regular newsletters are sent out to parents together with many letters to keep them well informed. The school prospectus and annual report of the governors to parents are very informative and meet all statutory requirements. In addition parents have two opportunities each year to discuss their children's progress. The annual pupil reports are of a good standard and include an element of self-evaluation by pupils and individual targets agreed with the school. Parents particularly like the interim progress reports they receive halfway through the year. The school continually seeks to improve the standard of reporting to parents and has adopted a new, more informative format for the next cycle of reporting.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

59. The school is well led and managed by a committed team of governors and the headteacher. Together they have created a climate in which pupils successfully learn and make progress. The good quality of leadership and management together with an effective team of co-ordinators has helped to raise standards of attainment and provide a learning environment in which pupils can make progress. The headteacher and governors provide very good and effective educational direction and purpose for the school and have the will to ensure that the school continues to improve.
60. The governing body plays a full and active part in the management of the school and fulfils its responsibilities extremely well. It has a well-organised committee structure that forms the basis of all its work and through which all major decision-making takes place before final ratification by the whole governing body. In this way the governors play a full part in financial review and budget-making, curriculum decisions and development planning, staffing and policy-making. Monitoring of the work of the school since the last inspection has improved. The governing body requires reports from subject departments on a regular basis but there are few permanent links between the governing body and subject departments. Appropriate targets for improvement have been set and all statutory responsibilities of the governing body are fully met, as are requirements for information for parents and the provision of religious education and a daily act of collective worship for pupils.
61. The governing body gives good support to a headteacher who provides strong leadership within the school, has a high profile among pupils and staff and is well regarded by the lower and upper schools that have links with Mill Vale School. Parents acknowledge that the current success of the school is largely the result of the commitment of the headteacher and the dedication and teamwork of the staff which arise from management of high quality and the professionalism of the headteacher. She has played a significant role in ensuring that the school no longer has serious weaknesses.
62. A clear set of aims and objectives and a useful handbook of procedures for staff assist daily administration and guide the management of the school. During the week of the inspection the school ran very smoothly each day despite some difficulties of staffing. There is a good ethos of industry and purpose, and pupils move about the

school in an orderly fashion.

63. Levels of communication within the school are good, though less formal at departmental level than in larger schools. Regular, formal, meetings of curriculum coordinators and of staff with responsibilities for year groups take place. Teaching is observed and departments are beginning to monitor the work of pupils in addition to the regular assessment of their work at strategic points in the year. An effective whole-school assessment and marking policy has still to be put in place. Although some marking follows procedures common to several departments, this is not universally the case and there are too many variations in practice across the school. Pupils are not always made aware of the levels of the National Curriculum they are reaching, although there is increasing use of these levels in some departments. As a result, pupils have some difficulty in equating standards between subjects or knowing what standards they are achieving. Pupils also experience some difficulty in equating the standards they are achieving in one subject with those in another.
64. Development planning is much improved since the last inspection. The current school development plan has overcome the weaknesses noted by the last inspection. It has a reduced number of appropriate targets, allocates responsibilities and has success criteria. There are indications of financial requirements but these are not sufficiently extensive to enable a comprehensive picture of the financial implications of the proposals to be obtained. It fails, however, to tackle the concerns raised by Her Majesty's Inspectors on a recent visit to the school in respect of the low number of pupils gaining level 5 of the National Curriculum in public tests in English, mathematics and science at the age of 11. At departmental level, development planning is also much improved and is aided by annual curriculum reviews which provide a sound basis for future planning. Too often, however, department development plans fail to reflect school development priorities, to include costings of the proposals or the need to continue to seek ways to maintain and raise the attainment of pupils in all subjects.
65. Monitoring of the work of the school and of teachers in the classroom is good and a full record is kept of all monitoring activities, including the observation of lessons, by the headteacher, though the methodical appraisal of teachers is under review and current practice is more informal. Less successful is the monitoring of the work of pupils because the school does not yet make use of a whole school marking and assessment policy that is followed by all departments. As a result, although marking and assessment of the work of pupils takes place and a full record is kept of the standards achieved by pupils throughout their time in the school, there are too many variations between departments.
66. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very well managed and led with clear strategies for improvement, which impact positively on learning and achievement. There is a detailed handbook of good quality that sets clear directions for this area of the work of the school. Expectation is high. The organisation of pupils in groups according to their levels of attainment and the careful consideration of class size is appropriate. It contributes well to raising attainment and self-esteem. There is a clear development plan for special educational needs and targets are well focused and monitored. There are excellent procedures for the identification of special educational needs and there are developing strategies to ensure that pupils are removed from the register of special educational needs when acceptable progress has been achieved.

67. An appropriate number of adequately qualified staff are employed by the school to teach the curriculum offered to pupils and to allow smaller class sizes to be a feature of the school, especially in English, mathematics and science. In many cases, teachers are appropriately deployed though occasionally there is a mismatch between teachers' experience and expertise and the subjects they are required to teach. This reduces the quality of learning and the attainment of pupils. The need to provide staff training for the programmes of literacy and numeracy and to provide temporary teaching staff to cover for illness or vacancies has reduced the amount of training and support that is available to compensate for these shortcomings. Administratively the school is well supplied with non-teaching staff and pupils with special educational needs benefit from sufficient learning support assistants to help them make progress. There is some concern, however, that technician support for science is combined with a role as a support assistant. The work of teachers in the classroom benefits from the administrative support they receive for their work. Currently the school does not have, and has not needed recently, an induction programme for all new staff and although supply teachers are provided with sufficient information to undertake their duties, there is no published information to help them with their work.
68. Routine financial management is good. There is an appropriate division of responsibility and secure procedures for the ordering, receiving and payment for goods and services purchased by the school. Regular information is provided for the headteacher, governors and cost centres, allowing expenditure to be monitored and budgets prepared. The school seeks value for money before all purchases are authorised. Funding for designated purposes such as staff development or special educational needs is used appropriately. Much of the large amount of money carried forward each year is designated for specific purchases such as new computer equipment. There has been no audit of the school since the date of the last inspection report, which indicated that the shortcomings then identified by the audit, had been acted upon.
69. Expenditure in the current financial year on learning resources accounted for 5.4 per cent of the total budget. This is in line with national figures and is a slight increase on the previous year. Reserves have been used to improve the pupil to computer ratio and purchase associated software in response to concerns expressed in the previous report. The provision of resources including textbooks, materials and equipment is good or better in all subject areas except music, where there are insufficient percussion instruments and keyboards to meet the requirements of information communication technology in the curriculum at Key Stage 3. Equipment used to supplement teaching in mathematics is limited and the poor sound quality of the cassette player used in modern languages makes listening difficult for pupils. Very limited access to information communication technology facilities prohibits the development of the appropriate skills for pupils in art and modern languages. The condition of resources and access to them is satisfactory or better in all subject areas. In history and geography, the quality of the material produced by the department to help pupils with project work is very good. In science some large capital items need replacing. The library houses an adequate stock of well-used fiction, non-fiction and audio material. Since the appointment of the part time librarian, pupils have had better access to the library and it is now well used. A suite of four computers provides access to the Internet and to CD-ROMs. These are used by teaching groups for research, thus encouraging pupils to learn independently. Progress towards the establishment of a database of the library stock and the

process of record of issuing is being undertaken with a view to providing more efficient control of the stock and a better match between the stock held and the requirements of pupils.

70. Overall, the accommodation is adequate to deliver the full range of the subjects of the National Curriculum. The school is situated on a large attractive site with good sports facilities. The separate blocks of buildings are well used, for the most part, to provide specialist areas for teaching. This is not always the case, however, and resources have to be moved about the building. Occasionally teaching takes place in rooms that are not entirely suited for the subject. One of the science laboratories is in a very poor condition and there are plans to refurbish this during the summer holidays. The food technology room is in an unsatisfactory condition. Many of the floor tiles are lifting and cupboards and units are old and in very poor state of repair. The old style workshops used for design and technology are now somewhat dated and there is no graphics facility in the technology block. Some of the classrooms are a little cramped during lessons, because of the number of pupils that needs to be accommodated in some of the classes as the school increases in size. Other subject areas have adequate accommodation and storage facilities, especially mathematics where the provision is good. The site agent provides a valuable contribution towards the running of the school and maintains the condition of the school well.
71. Although pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are below average and there are few pupils in the school with high levels of attainment on entry, attainment at the age of 11 now matches the national average and is at least equal to, and often better than, that achieved by pupils in similar schools. Attainment is rising in line with the national trend and pupils from the school reach above average results in national tests at age 14 when then they have moved to upper schools. The school, therefore, adds value during both key stages. The behaviour and attitudes of pupils are good, relationships are very good and the school provides many opportunities for the personal development of pupils. Leadership and management are strong and the finance provided for the work of the school is well managed. Governors and others are fully consulted about major spending decisions, resources are well used to provide a variety of experiences within the curriculum and a range of extra-curricular activities. Unit costs in relation to expenditure are broadly average for secondary schools. Mill Vale School is, therefore, an effective and improving school that provides good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

72. In order to raise standards of attainment further, particularly in lessons, and to set targets for additional improvement the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- Improve assessment and its use by:
 - i. implementing the whole school policy for assessment and marking,
 - ii. making greater use of assessment to improve short term planning.*Paragraphs 35,49,50,63,65,102,105,121,154,162*
- Establish closer links between whole-school and departmental development planning by ensuring that:
 - i. departmental development plans reflect more closely whole-school planning priorities,
 - ii. financial considerations form part of all development planning.*Paragraphs 64,116,127,147,154,162*
- Extend professional development for non-specialist teachers and classroom assistants to subjects other than literacy and numeracy.
Paragraphs 67,109,122,160
- Set homework more regularly in all subjects and ensure that when set homework presents greater challenge to pupils.
Paragraphs 14,36,57,95,101,106,114,146,159

In addition to the above the school should address the following important issues:

- The provision of swimming for any non-swimmers in Key Stage 2.
- The incorporation of information communication technology into the work of all subjects in Years 7 and 8.
Paragraphs 38,132,154

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	116
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	33

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1.8	17.3	43.2	30.3	6.1	0.9	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	576	
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	56	

Special educational needs	Y5-Y8	
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	11	
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	176	

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	10

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	9
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	8

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	5.9
National comparative data	6.0

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	0.4

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	72	70	142

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	57	58	66
	Girls	52	45	56
	Total	109	103	122
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	77 (65)	73 (59)	86 (71)
	National	70 (65)	69 (59)	78 (69)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	43	53	55
	Girls	43	40	43
	Total	86	93	98
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	61 (58)	65 (59)	69 (47)
	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (71)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	6
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	4
Indian	9
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	540
Any other minority ethnic group	14

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	1	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	16	0
Other minority ethnic groups	5	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y5 – Y8

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	27.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y5– Y8

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	175

Deployment of teachers: Y5– Y8

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	82.3
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Average teaching group size: Y5– Y8

Key Stage 2	25.9
Key Stage 3	25.3

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	928,951
Total expenditure	986341
Expenditure per pupil	1756
Balance brought forward from previous year	67628
Balance carried forward to next year	70514

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	576
Number of questionnaires returned	131

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	45	69	0	14	3
My child is making good progress in school.	49	66	3	8	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	39	70	2	17	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	69	3	25	8
The teaching is good.	34	87	6	1	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	32	63	0	26	10
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	75	49	0	3	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	80	48	0	3	0
The school works closely with parents.	27	76	1	21	6
The school is well led and managed.	54	62	8	2	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	47	68	7	4	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	36	50	15	26	3

Other issues raised by parents

The main concerns expressed by parents in their responses include homework, that there are insufficient extra-curricular activities available to pupils, that they received insufficient information about the progress of pupils from the school and that the school does not work closely with parents. Those who attended the meeting for parents did not support these views. However, concern was expressed at the unacceptable behaviour of a number of senior boys in the school.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE

CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

73. The English department is making a very substantial contribution to the improvement of the performance of pupils throughout the school. On entry to the school, their overall prior attainment in English is below the national average and well below that of pupils in many other schools. By the end of Key Stage 2, however, standards achieved in the last three years have been broadly in line with the national average and just below that for pupils from similar schools. The boys have shown a steady improvement from 1997, when they were well below the national average, to 1999, when they were in line with it. Girls' attainment during this time has stayed broadly in line with national expectations. Standards attained in reading in 1999 were substantially improved for both boys and girls. In writing, however, the standards for all pupils declined slightly but remained close to the national average. At Key Stage 3 standards have been maintained, and the attainment of both boys and girls of all levels of prior attainment (including those with special educational needs), is in line with national expectations.
74. The standards of work at Key Stage 2 seen during the inspection were in line with those achieved by pupils nationally. The most able pupils in Years 5 and 6 speak with confidence in a variety of situations. They respond with perception and originality to their reading books and also cope well with adult texts, for example the instructions for using gas masks during the Second World War. Their spelling, grammar and paragraphing are accurate and they use a good variety of vocabulary and figurative language. Nearly all pupils speak clearly and listen with good understanding. The overall standard of reading aloud and deriving information from texts is above average. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress in both reading and writing.
75. During the first two years of key stage 3 pupils make good progress. The higher attaining pupils become articulate speakers who are able to express complex ideas. They improvise speech with alacrity in drama and have very good concentration and listening comprehension. They respond in a reflective way to their reading and are able to frame their ideas in a variety of ways, showing very good understanding of plot, character and theme and the different purposes of language. Pupils with special educational needs make their own contributions to group and class discussions, and play a full part in drama, often creating effective characterisations. They read with accuracy but limited expression, although they are good at self-correction. Written work by most pupils is thoughtful, and the meaning is usually clear even when there are inaccuracies in spelling and grammar. The overall standards of spelling, punctuation and grammatical expression are in line with national expectations. Nearly all pupils, including those with special educational needs, speak with above average confidence, although during the inspection few were heard to develop their spoken thoughts beyond initial sentences. Their responses to reading show good understanding and the ability to select suitable quotations and references to support their opinions.

76. Teaching and learning in English are good overall, and very good at Key Stage 2. Teaching is very good or better in four out of every five lessons. In only one lesson seen during the inspection was it unsatisfactory. The teachers know their subjects well. Good planning provides pupils with learning experiences that build on their growing knowledge and understanding. A purposeful start to lessons helps pupils to focus on the subject and secures their interest and commitment. Objectives are clearly stated and reviewed, enabling pupils to understand the purpose of the lesson and to measure their own progress. Good homework habits have been established; thus making the best use of pupil's time at home by reinforcing the learning begun in the classroom. Effective teaching strategies and appropriate tasks enable pupils of all abilities to succeed. Teachers have an enthusiasm for English that is conveyed to the pupils. Very good relationships with their teachers encourage pupils to take risks and develop their skills. They are challenged to explore meanings and to use new vocabulary. Very good displays of relevant and attractive work encourage, stimulate and reinforce learning. Links with other subjects, history and geography for example, are well used. For more able pupils, a good range of approaches to demanding literature such as Shakespeare's plays is used and excellent responses are achieved. For other pupils, opportunities for empathising with characters in literature are not always given; for example, a class is told to describe the feelings of a soldier at the battlefield during World War 1 rather than to write a letter home from the front. First answers are sometimes accepted without further questioning so that pupils' ideas are not fully developed.
77. In response to the high quality of teaching, the pupils are nearly always well behaved and keen to do well. Pupils have developed good homework habits – they note down what needs doing and complete it on time to a good standard. They settle quickly to work and they are very ready to answer questions and contribute ideas. There is usually a good level of involvement in discussion in groups and in class, and pupils listen well to the teacher and to each other. They work together very well in group tasks and in drama. During the inspection, only in two Year 8 classes did some disruptive and challenging behaviour slow up the progress of the lesson. There are few differences between the attitudes of boys and girls: girls produce written responses more quickly and write more neatly and in accurate sentences at Key Stage 3. Overall, the pupils' attitudes are very good at Key Stage 2 and good at Key Stage 3.
78. In most lessons, at both key stages, pupils are encouraged and given opportunities to speak and listen in class and group discussions of the work. There is a good range of literature, including poetry, plays and novels from different centuries at both key stages. Writers from outside the United Kingdom are studied. Pupils at both key stages are given a good variety of tasks in which to develop their skills in written English. There is a strong emphasis on language skills: genres, devices, figurative language and formal grammar. The scope for drama, however, is limited by the unavailability of a suitable space. Although classrooms are used as well as possible, they do not enable pupils to develop their use of space and understanding of stagecraft. There is a very comprehensive range of teaching materials and strategies for developing literacy skills at both key stages. The effect of the department's justifiable emphasis on language skills is that there are fewer and less varied written responses to literature, especially at Key Stage 3, except for the most able groups. Extra-curricular activities are strong; drama clubs meet twice weekly and are well attended. School variety shows, including Shakespearean excerpts, involve large numbers of pupils. The study of war poetry was enhanced by a Year 8 visit to the

battlefields of Flanders. Very constructive and active relationships with lower and upper schools include strategies to ensure continuity and progression between Years 8 and 9.

79. The department contributes well to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Reflection is encouraged, particularly at Key Stage 3, through the discussion of poetry and speeches such as ‘I Have a Dream’ by Dr Martin Luther King. Pupils explore concepts of good and evil in their study of ‘Macbeth’. There are frequent opportunities to explore moral issues and develop a personal standpoint and framework of values through discussion and role-play as well as writing about the moral issues raised in their reading of stories, poetry and plays. There are many good opportunities to develop interpersonal skills through drama, pair and group discussion. Social issues are discussed in depth and include the struggle for black equality in the USA and the prospects for children born at the beginning of the 21st century. Good understanding of our social history is encouraged through reading about the Victorian workhouses in ‘Street Child’. As well as drawing upon a broad spectrum of English literature from Beowulf to the present day, the department uses stories from different cultures, such as that of China and Mexico in Year 5, and the settings of Key Stage 3 reading books include Hong Kong and Eastern Europe.
80. Procedures for monitoring pupils’ attainment and progress are very good. Detailed records are kept on all pupils from entry to exit, and they are carefully monitored and regrouped when necessary. The contents of individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs are well known by staff. Work is regularly marked and comments are generally encouraging and helpful. The department is working towards target setting for all pupils. The department regularly reviews strengths and weaknesses in pupil performance and makes appropriate curricular adjustments. It has been particularly effective in addressing the needs of boys through teaching strategies, pupil grouping, the choice of materials and running booster classes. As a result, boys’ attainment is now in line with that of the girls.
81. The English department is very well led and managed. Expectations of teachers and pupils are explicit. The annual department review takes a candid look at successes and shortcomings, and shows that the leadership of the head of department is both visionary and practical. She gives very clear educational direction. Resources are adequate and well used although pupils cannot always take their books home. The 16 computers, although new, are barely adequate for full classes of older pupils. Accommodation is spacious and well furnished, although the lack of a drama studio is a limitation.
82. Improvement since the last inspection in 1997 has been very good. The significant under-attainment of boys compared to girls has been eliminated and overall attainment is now in line with that of pupils in similar schools. There have also been significant improvements in the use of assessment and the provision for pupils’ spiritual development.

MATHEMATICS

83. The attainment of pupils entering the school is below national averages but by the end of Key Stage 2 it is in line with national averages indicating that progress in the key stage is good. The attainment of boys has improved significantly since the last inspection and the attainment of girls has been maintained so that both are now comparable. Similarly, by the end of Year 8, the attainment of boys has improved so that overall attainment in mathematics is now in line with national averages and achievement at both key stages is good. Attainment is also in line with that in similar schools but during the inspection standards achieved were judged to be above those suggested by national statistics and to have risen above the national position. This represents a good improvement since the last inspection report. Attainment in mathematics is similar to that in English but below that in science
84. Pupils enjoy mathematics, are committed in lessons and, in general, respond well to teaching which is good particularly at Key Stage 2, There is a small minority of challenging pupils at Key Stage 3 who require good class management for learning to take place. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress over both key stages. These pupils are effectively supported in class and all teachers are aware of the contents and targets in their individual educational plans.
85. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils respond quickly and accurately to mental number tests on tables and square numbers at the start of lessons. They answer verbally with confidence or in writing. Higher attaining pupils work accurately in dealing with fractions, decimals and percentages. Simple algebraic equations are solved and scatter and conversion graphs are drawn carefully. All pupils have access to the same programme of study but the work of average and lower attaining pupils is less secure and that of some lower attaining pupils lacks organisation in presentation. Nevertheless, some of the work by lower attaining pupils approaches national averages. Pupils are encouraged to make choices for themselves in solving problems. They construct tables with symbols of their own choice to represent the characteristics of different imaginary birds. Some pupils work out very quickly the number of different ways the characteristics can be combined.
86. By the end of Year 8, pupils of all levels of attainment undertake investigations of different kinds. Higher-attaining pupils find the relationships between numbers arranged in patterns of different sizes. Other pupils organise orders from catalogues and plan an outing to Brighton using costings and railway timetables. Information communications technology is used to give a spreadsheet of school tuck shop costs. Year 8 pupils assist in the school bank in a responsible way. Algebraic and number skills are combined very successfully in applying Pythagoras' theorem to find the length of sides of right-angled triangles. Evidence from the work of pupils indicates good attainment by higher attaining pupils in number work, solving equations, using coordinates in graphical work and angle properties of basic shapes. Average attaining pupils attempt a smaller range of graphical examples and lower attaining pupils focus on strengthening number skills. The grades eventually achieved by pupils in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate good progress across this key stage and well organised continuity of curriculum provision between schools.

87. In mathematics lessons pupils' listening and speaking skills are good. Pupils speak with confidence and they listen to their teachers and the answers of other pupils. Reading skills enable the great majority of pupils to take part fully in lessons and thus improve their attainment in mathematics. Writing skills vary from good extended writing in projects in Key Stage 3 by higher attaining pupils to single sentence descriptive answers in many situations and single word answers by some pupils.
88. Teachers are enthusiastic for mathematics, have high expectations of pupils and are keen that pupils succeed. Additional booster classes for both girls and boys take place after school to increase pupils' confidence. Teaching is at least satisfactory in all observed lessons and good or very good in approximately two thirds. Teachers know their subject well, though this is not always the case with visiting teachers despite good support. The national numeracy strategy is used successfully at Key Stage 2 and is being introduced in Years 7 and 8 with appropriate number tests at the start of lessons. Teachers' planning is generally good. Occasionally insecure time management does not allow time for the re-enforcement of topics at the end of lessons and during the inspection an investigation involving two concepts did not allow sufficient time for these to be securely learnt. Homework is set on a regular basis and is marked. Homework was relevant to class work but did not offer sufficient challenge to pupils. Pupils acquire basic skills well and apply them in investigations that are integrated into teaching.
89. The requirements of the National Curriculum are met. Schemes of work have been revised. Pupils are arranged by groups according to attainment in mathematics at Key Stage 2 and according to attainment in English and mathematics at Key Stage 3. Some of the teaching groups have a wider attainment range at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 2, but there is satisfactory provision in these groups of alternative material and extra teaching support for pupils with special educational needs. While some topics are successfully supported by information communication technology there is insufficient development of this aspect of study at Key Stage 3. This is recognised in the department's development programme for the present school year.
90. Mathematics has good, enthusiastic leadership and is well managed. Teachers are sensibly deployed and good resources in both buildings support teaching in rooms in different areas of the school. Teaching in the music room is isolated from the rest of mathematics and lacks a board section with a graphical grid. Lesson observation and a scrutiny of the work of pupils effectively monitor the work of the department. Regular reviews of the progress of pupils are carried out to enable the composition of the groups in which pupils are taught to be reviewed. The marking of the work of pupils lacks sharply defined comments indicating how pupils can make further progress and there are no clear links between marking and the targets set for pupils. Mathematics has made good progress since the last inspection due to good teaching and it has the capacity for further improvement.

SCIENCE

91. At the end of Key Stage 2 attainment in science is good. The number of pupils reaching level 4 and level 5 in public tests at the end of the key stage is slightly above the national average. The attainment of pupils in this school is in line with that of pupils in similar schools. The results have shown a significant improvement over the last three years. The attainment of boys slightly exceeds that of girls. Assessments by teachers, based on the levels of the National Curriculum are below national expectation at level 4, but in line at level 5 suggesting that investigative skills

are less well developed than theoretical knowledge. Attainment in science is better than that in both English and mathematics. Evidence from lessons and the work of pupils indicates that the oldest pupils in the school are set to achieve standards in line with the national expectation at the end of the Key Stage 3. This is in part due to the introduction of the Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education programme (CASE) through which pupils can effectively plan and obtain valid results from their own experiments, for example, to find the factors affecting solubility. This approach is particularly successful in providing challenge for high attaining pupils

92. The quality of learning overall is satisfactory and is better in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 3. Prior attainment on entry to the school in science is in line with national averages, but by the end of Key Stage 2 pupils have made good progress to achieve attainment that is above that achieved nationally. In Key Stage 2 pupils develop knowledge of a broad range of science topics, understand simple scientific principles and can use keys to identify plants and animals. They are able to apply their ideas to new situations and at the end of Year 5 can confidently explain how animals are adapted to their environment. By the end of Year 6 they have a good understanding of the processes involved in human reproduction. The majority of pupils have gained a satisfactory understanding of the topics covered in science by the time they leave school at the end of Year 8 and some high attaining pupils can explain changes in state using the particle theory. A significant number of pupils, however, show poor retention of their Key Stage 2 knowledge and weak understanding of basic concepts. A significant number of pupils at the end of Year 8 have difficulty in identifying the position in the body of major organs and their function. In both key stages, pupils use scientific vocabulary accurately and can present the results of their experiments clearly. There are better opportunities to develop number skills in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 2. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in Key Stage 2 due to the individual attention from both teachers and classroom assistants. In Key Stage 3, however, where classes are arranged according to the prior attainment of pupils in English and mathematics, and where there is less classroom support, progress for these pupils is slower.
93. The majority of pupils in both key stages show interest in their work and take pride in its presentation. They are keen to answer questions and speak fluently about their ideas. In the laboratories, the majority works safely and sensibly and collaborates effectively in group work. A significant number of older boys require skill and patience on the part of the teacher to ensure that they concentrate on the task in hand.
94. Overall teaching in science is satisfactory in over three-quarters of lessons and good or better in at least half. It is good in Years 5 and 6, but is unsatisfactory in a significant number of lessons in Years 7 and 8. The quality of teaching is better in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 3. All teachers have a good grasp of the topics taught and in Key Stage 2 teachers plan lessons carefully to meet the needs of the pupils. They have clear objectives, which are often shared with the class. A variety of strategies are used to help pupils learn including some useful practical work. Pupils in Year 5 were particularly keen to discuss the variety of habitats found in their recent pond dipping expedition. There is a lack of logical progression in some topics, with some complex ideas being introduced too soon. Pupils with special educational needs are given work to match their attainment and some high attaining pupils are given extra tasks, but these do not always involve extra challenge. In Years 7 and 8 teaching is organised in groups according to the attainment of pupils in mathematics and English. To some extent this enables a better match between the work set and

the needs of pupils but does not always encourage the provision of work that specifically matches the requirements of pupils of lower attainment. There are improved opportunities for pupils to be involved in their learning in Years 7 and 8 through the use of the Cognitive Acceleration through Science Education (CASE) scheme and the investigative practical work which form part of the portfolio each pupil takes to the upper school. There are good reviews of work before new work is introduced and the best lessons proceed at a brisk pace with all pupils concentrating throughout. Where teaching is poor, there is insufficient revision of previous work and no clear learning outcomes. As a result, pupils are unable to cope with the demands of the lesson and lack a clear view of what is expected. They lose interest and some poor behaviour results. In groups composed of pupils of lower attainment, some pupils have a poor record of the work covered and therefore find it difficult to revise. Homework is not regularly used to extend learning in either key stage and marking lacks detail so that pupils do not understand how to improve their standard.

95. Assessment depends on end-of-topic tests and this information is used when curriculum issues are reviewed. This assessment does not impact on day to day lesson planning and there is insufficient monitoring of pupils' notebooks. There has been some monitoring of teaching by the headteacher and the previous science co-ordinator, but this is in abeyance until a new co-ordinator is appointed.
96. Teachers in the science department have a range of experience and expertise and are ably supported by a technician who also acts as a classroom assistant in science classes. Resources are adequate although some large items of equipment need replacing. Resources for teaching information communication technology skills are limited, but good use is made of those that are available. Accommodation is adequate and will be much improved when the refurbishment of the second laboratory is completed later this year.
97. Since the last inspection there has been a significant improvement in standards achieved in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 and by the end of Year 8. Both girls and boys are now making better progress and are achieving equally. Pupils in Key Stage 2 are now able to explain their ideas confidently and in Years 7 and 8 pupils have been introduced to the use of scientific models to explain their ideas. The introduction of the CASE programme has had a positive impact on developing investigative skills.

ART

98. The attainment of pupils at the end Key Stage 2 and by the end of Year 8 is mainly in line with that expected nationally and maintains the position reported at the last inspection. Although the school does not use assessment at the end of Key Stage 2, pupils' work is moderated alongside work from similar schools to ensure that it meets the required standard. Overall attainment is sound in both key stages and all pupils make satisfactory progress in investigating and making (attainment target 1). Work undertaken towards the second attainment target, the knowledge and understanding of the work of artists, is less satisfactory and pupils are unable to make sufficient progress in using the vocabulary of art or in relating their work to that of named artists.
99. In Key Stage 2, pupils record experiences from observation and from imagination by cutting and sticking and by using pencil, pastels and paint. Painting is well developed

and pupils are able to mix and colour match. They enjoy talking about their work and there is some verbal evaluation by the teacher of work achieved. In Years 7 and 8, pupils develop their skills at drawing from observation and work in a wider range of media, though not scale, which tends to be limiting. In a good lesson in Year 8, multi-cultural artefacts were used as a stimulus for drawing. The introduction of three-dimensional work in Year 7 enabled one group to produce sensitive interpretations of peppers in clay. Such work supports personal development but is not consistently found in all classes. Across the curriculum, individual initiative is not sufficiently encouraged as pupils are rarely given homework or required to carry out research.

100. In both key stages, girls and boys work equally well. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress but gifted and talented pupils are not specifically targeted or challenged. The attitudes of pupils to learning at both key stages are mainly good. Although a few pupils have difficulty settling to work, most are well motivated and able to sustain a good level of concentration. Pupils with special educational needs respond well and work with interest. Relationships are good, pupils respect each other's work and are able to work well together. Several come and work in the department during the lunchtime club. Relationships are positive, behaviour is generally good and most classes are well managed and orderly.
101. Overall, teaching is sound though the quality of teaching ranges from good to unsatisfactory. In lessons that are less satisfactory, pupils concentrate but work largely at their own level and are not challenged. Little information is drawn from them and they are not given opportunities to learn more about art or to verbally evaluate each other's work. There is an assessment scheme in place and marks are held centrally but marking is not consistent and is not used sufficiently to inform teaching. Sketchbooks are rarely marked and there are no formative comments so most pupils do not know how well they are doing or what they should do to improve their work.
102. The department is well led and managed. Schemes of work have been revised, the art rooms are well organised and regular department meetings are held. There are strong links with upper schools and some cross moderation of work with these schools takes place. Resources are satisfactory and the creative use of materials acquired by the co-ordinator enriches the curriculum. There has been little staff development in art and insufficient time provided for the monitoring of teaching to ensure consistency of expectation and provision. Displays in the art rooms and around the school are well presented and standards have been maintained since the last inspection.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

103. Standards of work in design and technology are below average. This is due to the lack of progression in basic skills as pupils move through the school, even though standards at the end of Key Stage 2 are as expected and similar to those seen in many schools. In textiles, for example, although pupils' knowledge of more complex stitching increases from hand tacking to machine quilting, progression in joining materials in different ways is weak because projects are all of a similar two-dimensional nature. Wood joinery does not progress from the simple bookends made in Year 5. In food technology, pupils evaluate existing products, such as beefburgers, for consumer preference, but tend to follow recipes during their practicals and do not evaluate the product systematically, only the process. Standards in graphics are below average. Pupils do not carry out enough research

in any area of design and technology. Pupils in Year 8 show below average skills in all aspects of technology, though they are familiar with the routines of workshop, food room and textiles as a result of following a balanced curriculum in design and technology from Year 5. They use tools safely, generally choosing the most appropriate for tasks in all three subjects.

104. The quality of teaching is good at Key Stage 2 and satisfactory at Key Stage 3. In the four lessons seen in Key Stage 2, three were good; all four lessons at Key Stage 3 were satisfactory. Teaching methods concentrate on practical work with a good emphasis on safety. Practical lessons are popular with pupils, who work hard under time constraints, particularly when they are cooking. Pupils generally display a mature attitude in all design and technology subjects and their behaviour is usually good, though some Year 8 boys are disruptive when teachers do not appropriately challenge them in their tasks, for example when they were trying to make a pneumatic grabber with unsuitable materials.
105. Teachers' subject knowledge is satisfactory overall, but knowledge of the design process and evaluation are both less certain in Key Stage 3, which results in lower standards. Basic skills are taught adequately at Key Stage 2; pupils learn to make articles from wood and photo frames in textiles. They make good progress in food studies because they are taught in a dedicated food room. The teaching of graphic skills is satisfactory in Key Stage 2 but weaker in Key Stage 3; teachers have only limited knowledge and do not teach skills such as three-dimensional drawing, shading and rendering adequately.
106. Departmental planning is satisfactory but the progressive use of skills from one key stage to the next is not always apparent. Strict attention is not paid to literacy and teachers do not always correct mistakes in written work; pupils' folders are sparse and not well produced. Inaccurate measuring, especially in woodwork, does not enhance numeracy. Information communication technology skills in control technology are advanced satisfactorily; but not all teachers have the ability to teach this aspect of the curriculum. Teachers' expectations are satisfactory overall, though too low in resistant materials in Key Stage 3 where finishing skills are below average: they allow pupils to apply paint to insufficiently smooth surfaces, and to glue wooden components carelessly.
107. Time allocated to this subject is only just adequate to cover the programmes of study, and although pupils in Key Stage 3 take worksheets home to complete, for example one on safety, homework does not enhance learning enough. Assessment is carried out satisfactorily by teachers and pupils themselves who all have a grading sheet attached inside their folders. National Curriculum levels are assigned in teachers' mark books in Key Stage 3, but the work in exercise books does not always substantiate these levels. No evidence was seen of moderation to ensure that the levels of the National Curriculum are interpreted in the same way in all design and technology subjects.
108. The full range of the curriculum is taught in both key stages, including simple control work using older computers with control boxes. Pupils with special educational needs are not particularly well supported by their individual education plans in class, but teachers know their problems and some provide suitable, work at different levels for these pupils. Many show good practical ability.
109. Management of the subject is satisfactory. Since her appointment, the qualified co-ordinator has begun to rationalise assessment and monitor the teaching.

Development planning is weak: all plans are in review year by year under the wide heading of 'development of the scheme of work'. Good attention is paid to health and safety in lessons. Resources are good for Key Stage 2 and satisfactory for Key Stage 3 but the accommodation is in need of refurbishment. The workshops are very old and dedicated to woodwork, making it difficult to teach graphics and electronics adequately. The food room floor needs urgent attention to prevent it becoming a health hazard. There is insufficient evidence to indicate improvement since the last inspection.

GEOGRAPHY

110. The department has maintained the overall satisfactory levels of attainment reported at the last inspection although at both key stages attainment in lessons varies from good to unsatisfactory. Attainment is good when pupils are encouraged by teachers to become fully involved in learning through practical tasks and exercises that motivate pupils and create interest in the work being undertaken. In lessons on the pollution of rivers and finding routes from Dunstable to Newcastle-upon-Tyne, pupils were often fully engaged throughout the lesson and successfully reached accurate conclusions in the time allocated. Attainment in written work for both key stages is often good and particularly so in extended writing by Key Stage 3 pupils on the effect of earthquakes in Japan and Mexico, in project work on Kenya and fieldwork in the local area. Pupils develop good mapwork skills, particularly in using maps, compass directions and grid references. They are able, from Year 5 onwards, to make deductions from evidence available to them and these skills are systematically developed as they move through the school. They have good skills of geographical enquiry and are able to recall work from previous lessons and build on it. Information communication technology, including word processing and graphical presentations, is used well to present more extended pieces of investigative work. Attainment is better in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 3. Attainment in individual lessons is a reflection of the quality of teaching, and is lower when the teacher plays too great a part in the lesson and the interest of pupils wanes towards the end of the hour-long session.
111. The quality of pupils' learning is closely linked to the quality of teaching that takes place. Learning is best when the pace is brisk and pupils have a clear idea of what is required of them. In Key Stage 3 learning varies between classes. During the inspection learning was unsatisfactory in a significant proportion of lessons in this key stage. This was because, even when pupils were studying the same topic, not all teachers presented the topic equally effectively, for example in the lessons on Newcastle-upon-Tyne and the introduction to the geography of Italy. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported in lessons by learning support assistants and make progress at the same rate as other pupils in the class, especially when materials or tasks more suited to their levels of attainment are provided.
112. Although the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall there are variations between lessons. In some teaching is good, but a significant number of lessons fail to reach a satisfactory standard. This is largely because the levels of expertise and experience of teachers also varies. The majority of lessons have good features. They are well planned and a variety of tasks and materials are provided to keep pupils motivated. Class control is generally good and many lessons use practical approaches that fully involve pupils in learning. There has been an improvement since the last inspection in the emphasis that is placed on geographical principles in teaching and the use of

geographical vocabulary as part of the learning process. Current staffing problems adversely affect the quality of teaching in that teachers with less experience of teaching geography or with less subject expertise have lower expectations of their pupils and rely too much on more traditional, teacher directed approaches.

113. Behaviour in lessons and the attitudes of pupils towards their work are nearly always good and there are generally good relationships between pupils and teachers in the classroom. Pupils work conscientiously at the tasks assigned to them and willingly respond to questions from the teacher or requests to take an active part in the lesson. This was particularly the case in a lesson on Kenya when some pupils with lower reading skills quickly volunteered to read from the textbook. The working ethos of most geography classes enhances pupils' understanding of geography and their acquisition of knowledge.
114. The subject is well led and departmental documentation is generally helpful to those teaching the subject, though there is insufficient guidance on topics provided in schemes of work for less experienced teachers of the subject. The department makes a satisfactory contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development through fieldwork activities, the study of other countries and reflection on environmental issues and the role of man in contributing to them, Teaching is now monitored and there is some monitoring of pupils' exercise books. Assessment has improved since the last inspection though insufficient use is made of the levels of the National Curriculum to assess the work of pupils or to provide targets for the future. Nevertheless, teachers keep appropriate records of the progress made by pupils and are able to pass information of good quality to schools to which pupils transfer at the age of 13. Adequate resources, some of which are becoming dated, and good displays of geographical information in the rooms in which geography is taught, stimulate interest and help to raise attainment.
115. There has been a good response to the previous inspection report. The amount of practical work and the monitoring of the work of teachers and pupils have improved. Development planning has more focus but is not yet sufficiently costed or linked to school development planning. There is a growing portfolio of exemplar work, though this does not give an indication of the National Curriculum level each piece of work exemplifies. There has been, however, little in-service training directly related to the teaching of geography and insufficient attention paid to the allocation of teachers to classes.
116. The department is making progress, has the will to raise attainment further and is well prepared to meet the changes required by new National Curriculum orders.

HISTORY

117. Attainment is good at the end of Key Stage 2 and a little above average at the end of Year 8. Much learning is achieved through the exploration of sources and pupils acquire a good range of historical research skills. For example, through the exploration of a set of pictures Year 6 pupils successfully picked out the detail in evidence of how hunting and gathering contributed to the diets of the ancient Egyptians. Pupils use a good range of writing styles to present their work. As part of a study of life in the trenches during the First World War¹, for example, having sifted through a range of detailed sources, Year 8 pupils drafted letters in the personae of individual soldiers that communicated well the distress and other feelings they wished to share with their families. Individual study skills are well developed and

pupils in all years produce pieces of good quality extended writing. The individual studies of Year 8 pupils are often quite detailed, extensively illustrated, very well organised and presented, often with the aid of information communication technology. Roll play and drama are used effectively by pupils in all years to communicate knowledge and understanding and the outcomes of group work are confidently presented.

118. The quality of learning is good in all years and is improving currently, particularly at Key Stage 2. Year 5 pupils confirmed their quick assimilation of the differences between Tudor and modern theatre by rapidly and accurately sorting a substantial set of description cards. The quality and range of writing styles improves rapidly through Years 5 and 6; Year 6 pupils of lower attainment are producing informative and well-presented individual studies. By Year 7, the great majority of pupils understand and empathise with human experience in unpleasant historical events. For example, Year 7 pupils, following a study of sources offering information about the Black Death, displayed their understanding well through short dramatic sketches produced rapidly within small groups. An improving range of resources and the extensive use of teaching and learning styles that actively involve pupils, support lower attaining pupils in their work and enable them to make good progress. Pupils are very largely hard working and sustain good concentration. They work effectively in groups, listening well and showing consideration for each other.
119. The teaching in all lessons observed was good or very good. Planning is detailed and a very good range of well chosen teaching and learning styles is employed. Learning objectives are mostly clearly communicated and lessons usually end with a review of the progress made. The management of pupils is very good, motivation is effective and the pace of learning is often very good throughout lessons. Where teaching is very good all these qualities are evident. Marking is often detailed and informative, helping pupils to understand how well they are progressing.
120. The curriculum is good and enriched by very good fieldwork and high quality community contributions. Assessment is good and a substantial amount of data about progress over time is being built up. Standardisation of practice is in place. There are, however, variations in the ways by which the quality of work is measured. Management practices are good overall. Professional relationships are strong and the two key stage co-ordinators collaborate effectively. Monitoring arrangements are comprehensive and systematically used. Arrangements for the support for non-specialists are satisfactory. The development plan has relevant objectives but lacks measurable targets to secure these objectives.
121. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The quality of teaching has improved, a greater range of teaching and learning styles is employed and a richer and more diverse range of resources supports learning. Schemes of work have more explicit learning objectives and are better structured for use by non-specialist teachers. There is substantially more use of information communication technology particularly at Key Stage 2 and an adequate portfolio of exemplars now supports assessment.

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

122. Provision for information communication technology has improved since the last

inspection. All issues raised have been fully addressed except for the provision of specialist software in science, some of which is still to be acquired.

123. At the end of Key Stage 2, standards in information communication technology are satisfactory. Pupils in Year 6 are beginning to undertake sophisticated work using the Internet and CD-ROM facilities, for example to make an advertisement aimed at an imaginary audience in ancient Egypt, manipulating text and graphics well, in preparation for Key Stage 3. Pupils achieve satisfactory skills through the dedicated two-year course, and use these well in other subjects, though some weaknesses in keyboard skills are apparent. Although pupils are being taught to type properly, they do not practise enough. Pupils with special educational needs progress as well as other pupils in gaining skills in information communication technology, but there is little dedicated software in the room used for teaching pupils with special educational needs.
124. Pupils currently in Years 7 and 8 have not had the benefit of a course in information communication technology in Key Stage 2. As a result, and because not all subjects meet the school's requirements to incorporate the subject into their teaching, standards for the majority, though improving, remain below average. In Key Stage 3, attainment is often good where word processing or spreadsheets and databases are used in teaching or for the presentation of work, for example in English, geography and mathematics. In mathematics, good use is made of spreadsheets to make calculations in a tuck shop simulation exercise, numeracy is addressed well through the use of spreadsheets and pupils extend their knowledge of angles by the use of turtle graphics. Attention to literacy is satisfactory, though spell-checks are not used enough causing some display work to be marred, for example illustrated Christmas stories were badly and inaccurately annotated. In English, pupils use information communication technology well in the making programmes to advertise a production of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Standards of presentation are good but the ability to manipulate text is less so, as also indicated by work on ghost stories, where it is average. Pupils' use of databases to display information seen in a geography project on Dunstable Downs showed skills being consolidated at a basic level and good levels of presentation. However, in science, there was no evidence of the use of sensors to monitor the course of experiments, though some good research work on the body was seen. In other subjects, especially French, music, physical education and religious education, pupils do not reach satisfactory standards mainly because information communication technology is not fully, incorporated into the work.
125. The quality of teaching is always satisfactory and often good at Key Stage 2. No lessons were seen at Key Stage 3 as no provision is made for lessons in the subject on the timetable, but the standard of work seen in subject folders in Key Stage 3 shows that attainment is at least satisfactory. The co-ordinator, who does most of the teaching in Key Stage 2, has good subject knowledge, and pupils learn well. Planning by the co-ordinator ensures that pupils make progress in acquiring skills throughout Key Stage 2. In Years 7 and 8, however, the organisation of information communication technology teaching across the curriculum does not always ensure continuity nor progression in the development of skills, or that pupils receive their entitlements. The project work undertaken in some departments restricts the attainable grades, for example in geography, work is only pitched up to level 4 of the National Curriculum levels, which is below average at Key Stage 3. Teachers' expectations of skills are high in Key Stage 2, but in Key Stage 3 the subject is treated more as a tool, and although skills are consolidated by use, they do not advance very quickly. Pupils are not encouraged to work towards targets above

level-4.

126. Use of time and resources is satisfactory, and good in the main computer room where pupils can work individually and usually benefit from help by the technician. In the English room, however, where there are fifteen modern computers, best use cannot always be made of them because they are too close together, making it difficult for pupils in large classes to share. Assessment is good in Key Stage 2; pupils' skills are recorded and their progression noted in an up-to-date portfolio. Assessment is satisfactory in Key Stage 3, despite grades being limited in some subjects. Pupils generally have good attitudes to work and older ones attempt more advanced work on the Internet. The up-to-date library facilities also inspire many pupils to further their research work.
127. The curriculum satisfactorily provides the full range of opportunities for information communication technology, including computer control work. Information communication technology does not feature in the schemes of work for religious education and physical education, and opportunities for computer and recording work in music are severely limited by the equipment currently available.
128. The management of information communication technology is good and the co-ordinator has good plans for the development of the subject. She has put the nationally recognised Qualifications and Curriculum Authority scheme of work in place in Key Stage 2, and satisfactorily monitors its implementation. The co-ordination of work in Key Stage 3 is not yet complete because of the lack of contributions from religious education, music, and physical education.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

129. Since the last inspection, attainment has improved considerably and teaching is now confined to pupils in Year 7 and 8. In 1998, 28 per cent of pupils reached level 4 in the Schools Council Attainment Assessment tests, by this year, 2000, the proportion has risen to 65 per cent. The improvement in the performance of boys has been even more spectacular, rising from 7 per cent in 1998 to 65 per cent in 2000, matching the performance of girls.
130. Work seen during the inspection largely confirms this picture. Listening skills are very good; lessons are conducted in French spoken at normal speed and pupils understand fully. They are also able to understand, and extract information from short audio and videotape extracts on known topics, spoken by native speakers. Speaking skills are less well developed. Pupils speak willingly and confidently, even when they are not sure, and they are prepared to ask questions. With the exception of the highest attainers, pronunciation and intonation are not secure and insufficient attention is given to accuracy. Most utterances are short and higher attainers have insufficient opportunities to develop higher order speaking skills. Reading skills, particularly reading for pleasure, are underdeveloped. Pupils have a good grasp of the structures covered and write accurately in respect of spellings, endings and agreements. They also have the opportunity to write in a number of different forms, including dialogues, poems, letters and accounts. Some show originality, for example, a boy writing about a disastrous weekend.
131. For the most part, the attitudes of pupils to the subject are good. They work hard and

concentrate for the full sixty minutes of each lesson. They participate willingly and co-operate well when working in pairs. They take a pride in the presentation of their work.

132. The teaching in more than half of the lessons is good and, with one exception, is satisfactory in the remainder. The main strength of the teaching lies in the very high expectations of the co-ordinator. The teacher uses French all the time and expects not only that pupils will understand, but that they will reply in French. Any classroom requests have to be made in French. Pupils respond well and are confident and willing speakers, a much improved position from the situation reported at the last inspection. Basic skills are well taught and the teacher makes good use of audio-visual stimuli to convey meaning without recourse to English. Lessons are lively and are conducted at a brisk pace. Relations are good and there are no problems of discipline. The main weakness is that there is insufficient recognition that, even in classes that are formed on the basis of prior attainment, pupils have differing needs. For the most part the same task is set for all, with insufficient help for the lower attainers and no stimulus to enable the higher attaining pupils to raise their level of achievement. In an otherwise good lesson about clothes shopping and making complaints, pupils were asked to write a dialogue, and it was suggested that some might like to 'change or add things', without sufficient guidance as to how they might achieve this.
133. The curriculum is appropriate and well planned; literacy and numeracy skills are included. The use of information communication technology is planned and the intention is to implement these plans next year. The limited time allocation for the language is well distributed in the timetable. The curriculum is enriched by visits from a French touring group, a French club, and by the very successful visit to France and the First World War battlefields. This very well planned visit was an outstanding success, not only linguistically and culturally, but through the deep moral and spiritual impression which it made on the pupils.
134. The marking of the work of pupils is regular, positive and detailed, indicating how they might improve; it is often, but not always related to the levels of the National Curriculum, so that pupils know the standards they are achieving. Assessment procedures are very good, using National Curriculum criteria. At the moment, the results of assessment are not used to set targets for individual pupils or for curriculum planning. Record keeping is very good. The reports for parents are informative and give a clear picture of attainment and progress.
135. The curriculum co-ordinator has a clear vision of the future development for the subject and the determination and capacity to succeed. Management, organisation, planning and record keeping are all very efficient. The development plan is appropriate and is reviewed regularly. In a very short time, the teaching of French in the school has been transformed and all the issues raised at the last inspection have been successfully addressed. The department is well placed to move forward.

MUSIC

136. By the end of Key Stage 2 the attainment of pupils is in line with national expectations. In Year 5 pupils are able to perform confidently and expressively in time to a pulse, showing an awareness of other performers. In their composing they can combine repeated patterns very effectively to achieve a particular effect such as

a musical clock. As individuals they can compose successful tunes using the rhythm and structure of a counting rhyme and notate their melodies using the letter names of pitches. The more musically able can notate these using staff notation. Most pupils sing enthusiastically and with good intonation. In Year 6 when playing together in an ensemble, the majority of pupils play their parts accurately and fluently and listen carefully to each other so that they come in with their part at the right time. Individual instrumental skills, however, are less well developed because pupils have to share tuned percussion instruments. In composing, pupils can successfully layer different patterns and create pieces showing an understanding of rondo form. Listening activities show good written responses by the pupils in relation to the musical elements heard in extracts of music. However, pupils' oral and written evaluation of their own compositions and performances are underdeveloped.

137. By the end of Year 8, the attainment of pupils is broadly in line with national expectations for their age. When performing in a group, Year 7 pupils show good control of sounds and dynamics to create an intended effect. The majority of pupils copy 2-bar and 4-bar rhythms accurately. There is work in folders on staff notation but learning of this is not always reinforced in practical work. In Year 8 the majority of pupils maintains an independent part successfully when performing on an instrument in a group and fit their part in with other performers. In five-part scat singing pupils pitch their parts very successfully and achieve a good standard of performance. In composing, pupils are developing a sense of harmony and texture through composing pieces such as fanfares and are using staff notation correctly in their pieces. In their folders there is some good work on assessing group performances but there is no evaluation of their own work and none was observed in lessons during the inspection. All groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve satisfactorily in both key stages. The transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 is smooth and effective because teachers know the pupils well and there is effective recording of previous work and standards achieved.
138. The attitude of pupils to work in lessons is mostly good. They work co-operatively in pairs when sharing instruments and in groups when working on composing and performing tasks. They use instruments with care and are sensible when getting them out and putting them away. The behaviour of pupils is very good.
139. The quality of teaching is good overall, though better in Key Stage 3 than Key Stage 2. Very good management of pupils and insistence on high standards of behaviour result in pupils sustaining concentration and keeping to the task in hand. Lesson planning is good so that pupils develop skills, knowledge and understanding through varied activities. Tasks set are often challenging and enable pupils of different levels of attainment to achieve well. Ongoing assessment of pupils' work in class is used effectively to help pupils improve or extend their work. There are, however, missed opportunities to integrate listening and appraising activities with performing and composing activities to develop pupils' aural and critical thinking skills more effectively. Levels of homework are unsatisfactory. The infrequent use of questioning to check pupils' knowledge and understanding does not help to reinforce their learning.
140. There are new procedures in place in Years 7 and 8 for assessing and recording pupils' attainment and monitoring their progress, which are good. There are criteria for assessing particular performing and composing tasks in topics but these are not yet included in the schemes of work. Assessment information is used very effectively to inform lesson planning, to review topics and to notify music staff in the upper schools of the attainment of pupils. Schemes of work do not show, in sufficient detail,

the development of composing, performing (singing, keyboard and percussion) and listening skills across all four years and learning objectives are not always sufficiently music specific. In the departmental development plan, priorities identified for development lack particular focus and success criteria are often too general.

141. The department is well resourced with a range of percussion instruments, keyboards and a computer with notation software. Some of the tuned percussion instruments, however, are in need of repair and there are only enough for pupils to share, resulting in underdeveloped skills on these instruments. The quality of the keyboards and the lack of sequencing software for the computer do not enable teachers to meet the National Curriculum requirements for the use of information communication technology in music.
142. Extra-curricular provision is very good and has a positive effect on developing performing skills. The school provides lessons on a wide range of instruments and the number of pupils receiving lessons has increased since the last inspection to just over 10 per cent of the school population. There is a good range of activities on offer during lunch-time and after school including a string group, jazz band, wind band and orchestra which perform to a high standard in school assemblies and concerts.
143. The department is well led by a very committed and hardworking co-ordinator. Since the last inspection pupils sing more frequently in lessons and in assemblies. Schemes of work have been reviewed and lessons now include more practical work and are therefore more in keeping with National Curriculum programmes of study. Attempts have also been made to improve the soundproofing between the hall and the music room. The response to the previous inspection has been good.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

144. Attainment in physical education is in line with national expectations both at the end of Key Stage 2 and at the end of Year 8. There is a significant number of high achieving pupils which is reflected in inter-school competitions by both boys and girls. There is little difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Year 6 pupils model stretching routines correctly in preparation for long jump practice. Most pupils clear distances of between two and a half and three and a half metres but few use their arms effectively to give added impetus to their jumps. Year 7 boys display satisfactory hand/eye co-ordination and agility within skills practices to develop cricket fielding techniques. Similarly, Year 8 girls catch and throw accurately over short distances in cricket practice and in competition they took three of the four possible catches offered. Many Year 8 pupils anticipate the movement of the pace and bounce of the ball in tennis practices well; most pupils produce satisfactory ground strokes and those with most skills can use them to sustain rallies of twenty-plus shots.
145. In half the lessons pupils make good progress in the acquisition of skills and understanding. In other lessons it is satisfactory. Good progress is exemplified by Year 6 pupils who applied themselves well in refining their run-ups and in spotting their long jump take-offs with increasing accuracy. Satisfactory progress was made by a class of Year 7 boys who, after an inattentive start, improved the technique, speed and accuracy of their fielding and throwing, stimulated by competition. Overall, pupils display good concentration and work effectively in pairs in their skills practices.

Team spirit is very good as was demonstrated by Year 8 girls playing quick cricket. All but a tiny minority of pupils, mostly boys, behave well and work hard. Pupils' understanding of how well they are performing is good and aided by sound evaluation of their work by others in the group. Careful grouping, well chosen tasks and, where necessary, modified equipment ensure that the progress of lower attaining pupils is in line with that of others.

146. Teaching is good overall. In half the lessons it is at least good and in all others it is satisfactory. Teachers display good knowledge and understanding. Lesson planning is very good and in all lessons observed skills practices are progressive and equipment is managed efficiently. Pupils are mostly managed very effectively and in a very positive manner. Where teaching is satisfactory, there are many positive features but sometimes the tasks are not well matched to the attainment of the pupils or insufficient control is exercised to ensure pupils fully understand and follow the tasks set.
147. The curriculum is good and extra curricular opportunities are very good, as are participation rates, with more than a half of pupils in the school being involved. The balance of the curriculum is adversely affected by the lack of any provision for swimming, especially for pupils who are still non-swimmers. Much learning is in mixed groups and equality of opportunity is very good. Assessment arrangements lack rigour. Records are not up to date and there are no systems in place to secure consistency in judgements across the department. Professional relationships are strong and monitoring, though informal, is largely effective. Links with the upper schools are well established. Good progress has been made in establishing similar learning opportunities and uniform assessment practice in the lower schools from which pupils are drawn. Development planning has been introduced, but targets are imprecise and action plans lack substance.
148. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection. All the strengths identified at that time remain and there have been some refinements to the curriculum and to management practices.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

149. All pupils attend religious education lessons and the department makes a significant contribution to the spiritual development of pupils. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 and in Years 7 and 8 is at least in line with what is expected by the Bedfordshire Agreed Syllabus. Pupils have good memory retention, and express themselves well orally and when asked to write down facts, thoughts or feelings. The higher-attaining pupils are given the opportunity, and successfully provide extended answers to questions. They interpret information about religious beliefs and practices and are extremely fluent when talking about moral and social issues.
150. Learning overall is good. Pupils' oral contributions are good and some perceptive comments, particularly in lessons in Years 7 and 8, show a deepening of understanding. Pupils know and use religious vocabulary in both their oral and written work. They take part in external visits to further improve their knowledge and the regular use of external speakers, particularly the youth minister, helps pupils with their understanding of matters of faith.
151. The very positive attitude of the majority of pupils shows in their eagerness to

contribute to discussions. In all lessons observed, the pupils listened to the views of others as well as stating their own opinions. Pupils concentrate well throughout the lessons and the behaviour of the majority is good. The pupils are very proud of their work and are keen to show what they can do.

152. The Bedfordshire Agreed Syllabus is now fully in place, including the assessment opportunities. Focused target sheets are given to each pupil at the start of each new unit of work, as is a topic outline. In all lessons observed the quality of teaching was good or better. A variety of different techniques and materials are used in all lessons. As a result lower attaining pupils participate fully and learn well and the thinking skills of higher attainers are challenged. In the majority of lessons the pace is brisk and in all lessons the expected learning outcomes are shared with the pupils at the start of the lesson and what they had learned checked at the end. The planning and use of varied activities in lessons helps pupils keep to the task in hand. All teachers are enthusiastic and use praise and humour to motivate the pupils. Poor behaviour is dealt with quickly and effectively. Homework, however, is not set regularly enough and there is no clear indication of the opportunities for homework in the scheme of work.
153. In-service training opportunities for those teaching religious education are created by the subject co-ordinator through department meetings but opportunities to attend external courses are limited mainly due to the absence of opportunities within the Bedfordshire Local Education Authority. Good links have been formed with the schools, which both feed into and receive pupils from Mill Vale School.
154. Resources available for both teacher and pupil use meet basic requirements and are effectively used. Currently, however, the department lacks appropriate storage space and there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to make use of information communication technology in lessons
155. This department was identified as a good department in the previous report and that statement still holds true. Particular factors in sustaining improvement include the small number of teachers teaching religious education, the organisation and leadership skills of the subject co-ordinator, the commitment of the team to the subject and the varied teaching techniques used within the lessons. The department, however, makes insufficient use of the data provided from the results of monitoring to inform planning in terms of both individual lessons and for developing units of work, and does not build financial requirements into the department development plans. The department marking scheme requires review before its effectiveness, in terms of enabling pupils to improve on their current performance, can be successfully monitored.