

INSPECTION REPORT

BEDMINSTER DOWN SCHOOL

Bristol

LEA area: Bristol

Unique Reference Number: 109283

Headteacher: Mr M Frank

Reporting inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe
1025

Dates of inspection: 5th - 8th March 2001

Inspection number: 199496

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr R Bevan
Dates of previous inspection:	9 th - 13 th March 1998

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9034	Mrs J W Biltcliffe	Lay inspector		Attendance
13452	Mr H Meggitt	Lay inspector		Partnership with parents
5038	Mr H Heller	Team inspector	Special educational needs; English as an additional language	Pupils' attitudes and values; school's care for pupils; leadership and management
11479	Mr J A Paine	Team inspector	English; drama	
1262	Mr R Heath	Team inspector	Mathematics	
4607	Dr D E Ward	Team inspector	Science	
11190	Mrs W M Burke	Team inspector	Art	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
17277	Mrs S M Mansell	Team inspector	Design and technology; information and communication technology	
12470	Mr B M Greasley	Team inspector	Geography	Curriculum
8873	Ms C Evers	Team inspector	History	Efficiency / staffing, accommodation and learning resources
4829	Mr I H C Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
8645	Dr J D Ward	Team inspector	Music; special educational needs project	Assessment
13217	Mr M D Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education	
18673	Mrs H Boyle	Team inspector	Religious education	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This comprehensive school for boys and girls is broadly average in size. It currently has 1010 pupils on roll. The overall economic background of pupils is broadly average, but the educational background of the area puts it well within the lowest ten per cent nationally. Pupils' overall attainment on entry to the school is consistently well below the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is average, but that with formal statements is over double the national average. Twenty-one pupils come from families of ethnic minority heritage. Only two pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The school's sixth form ceased at the end of the last academic year. The school was last inspected in October 1998.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school has many sound features and is steadily improving most of its work. It is working hard – and with success – to do better, but has things of importance to put right. Pupils' overall standard of attainment by the age of 16 is below average in most subjects and often well below average in GCSE. Their level of achievement is, however, generally consistent with their standard on entry to the school. The vast majority of teaching is effective. The leadership of the new headteacher and the senior management team is dynamic and firmly focused on achieving high standards in all aspects of school life. The school provides satisfactory value for money. Overall, the school has more strengths than weaknesses.

What the school does well

- The quality of leadership and management is good throughout the school – especially that of the headteacher.
- Most pupils make good progress in design and technology, geography and history.
- English, mathematics, design and technology, geography and French performed best in GCSE in 2000.
- The attitudes, behaviour and personal relationships of most pupils are good and a credit to the school.
- The quality of teaching is generally high.
- Pupils' moral, social and cultural development are well promoted overall.

What could be improved

- The attendance of a significant minority of pupils is erratic or poor: this major problem holds the school back.
- The attainment and progress of pupils can be further improved.
- Pupils' GCSE science results are consistently lower than results they achieve in most of their other subjects.
- The school does monitor its teaching and pupils' progress, but needs to do it more intensively.
- Statutory requirements are not met for information and communication technology (ICT) and religious education (RE). The school is far from providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
- The school's provision for pupils' spiritual development is unsatisfactory.
- The good education of pupils with special educational needs requires a suitably qualified and experienced teacher to lead it.
- The shabby parts of the school need repainting – despite the school's considerable headway through self-help.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made satisfactory progress since 1998 on most of the key issues for action identified at the last inspection. For example:

- the school has a strategy for teaching the basic skills of spelling and arithmetic - but with more work to do;
- the provision and staff training for pupils with special educational needs are generally good;
- some improvement has been made in the school's physical environment, especially for physical education (PE), but the site remains drab and poorly decorated overall;
- most health and safety requirements are now met and followed within subject departments; and
- the governors' annual report to parents meets statutory requirements.

In contrast, National Curriculum requirements are still not met for information and communication technology (ICT) in Years 7-11 and for religious education (RE) in Years 10-11.

Pupils' overall standard of attainment in GCSE examinations is broadly similar to, but a little lower than, what it was at the last inspection. Most of the school's teaching is of a good quality. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and all-round development remain good. As noted earlier, however, the school still has some important gaps in the quality of its practice to put right. The required improvement in attendance also depends on the full cooperation of all parents. The new senior management team and governors recognise the need to raise further both community aspirations and the expectations and performance of pupils across the school. The school's strategies to do so are thorough and realistic.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	E	E	E	E
A-levels/AS-levels	D	n/a	E	

Key

Well above average A

Above average B

Average C

Below average D

Well below average E

The school's results in the national tests for 14 year olds in 2000 were well below average in all of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. A significantly smaller proportion of pupils reached the higher Level 6, compared with Level 5, than typically do nationally. These Year 9 results show a declining trend over the last five years. The 2000 results were also well below average for schools of a similar kind (as measured only by the proportions of pupils entitled to free school meals and taking no account of pupils' educational background). By the end of Year 9 standards in the school are below average in most subjects. They are average in art and PE. Pupils make satisfactory progress overall, however, in their studies from Year 7 to Year 9, because they entered the school with a low overall standard. Progress is good in history during these three years.

Results in GCSE are well below the national average for the proportion of pupils achieving at least five grades A*-C or A*-G as well as for average "points" scored. The results in 2000 were marginally the lowest of the last few years. The trend of the school's results is falling, whilst the national trend is rising. The overall standard reached in 2000 was well below the average for schools of a similar character (as determined by pupils' free school meals entitlement). The strongest subjects in GCSE over 1998-2000 were English language, design and technology, and geography. Science was the weakest subject. Pupils generally make a satisfactory rate of progress between the ends of Year 9 and Year 11. Most pupils make good progress in design and technology, geography and

music. The low “similar schools” rating of E above is mainly produced by frequently absent pupils limiting the school’s overall progress.

The school’s GCE Advanced (A)-level results were well below average in 2000. Only seven pupils took one A-level each in 1999. The school no longer provides sixth-form education.

PUPILS’ ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils show a positive interest in their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good overall in class and around the school, but a small minority are troublesome. Few graffiti, but much litter around.
Personal development and relationships	The school is generally a calm, orderly and friendly community.
Attendance	Most pupils attend well, but a significant minority attend poorly or erratically.

The poor attendance of a significant minority of pupils in Years 10-11 in particular retards the progress of the school and needs urgent attention. All the other aspects above are strengths of the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years
in the 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 was at least satisfactory in 95 per cent of lessons, good in 47 per cent and very good (or better) in 13 per cent of those seen. Five per cent of lessons had unsatisfactory (very occasionally poor) teaching. In well-taught lessons pupils make good progress through clear explanations, a brisk pace, firm control and rigorous work. Unsatisfactory teaching is characterised by low intellectual demand, a slow pace or weak class management. Teaching is satisfactory overall in English (although one third seen was good) and is good in mathematics.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Generally satisfactory breadth and balance, but too little teaching of ICT and RE. Curricular structure needs an overhaul. Good range of extracurricular activities and strong careers education.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	This has improved substantially over the last three years and is now good: specialist teaching, accommodation and resources are of good quality.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The two pupils at an early stage of learning English are well integrated and making good progress in their studies.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory overall. The greatest strengths are moral and social education: these aspects are carefully planned and effective. Spiritual education is the weakest element and poorly coordinated.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school works very hard, and successfully, at providing a high standard of care. Pupils feel secure and valued by staff.

The school recognises that it needs to review the curriculum it offers, especially in Years 10-11, because of long-standing deficiencies in ICT and RE, unhelpful restrictions on the options available and a paucity of vocational work. Teaching time is curtailed by the slightly short teaching day, overrunning assemblies and some unprofitable tutorial time. Pupils benefit from good provision in careers education, work experience, community links and extracurricular activities. There are a few hazards to health and safety on site, but the overall quality and effectiveness of care are high and much appreciated by pupils. Most parents hold the school in high regard. The school works hard to keep parents well informed: it is largely successful in its range of general information, but judgements on pupils' progress are often not specific enough.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The new headteacher has a clear vision and is pragmatic, determined and energetic. The senior management team work very closely and effectively together. Much rests on their shoulders.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are deeply committed to the school's welfare. They are vigilant and well informed, but lack a robust system of performance review.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The basic structure is sound, but the monitoring of teaching and pupils' progress is not extensive and accurate enough.
The strategic use of resources	Finance is managed very skilfully and tightly controlled.

The quality of middle management varies from very good to unsatisfactory, but is good overall and supports senior management well. The school has faced – and still faces – serious recruitment problems in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, modern foreign languages and special education. Accommodation has been improved since 1998 in PE, dining and toilet facilities, but much remains to be done. As a result of recent high spending, learning resources are largely satisfactory, but some book and equipment shortages remain. Applying the principles of “best value for money” is the basis of financial planning here.

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 emphasis on hard work and achievement.• The good quality of most teaching.• The leadership of the new headteacher.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The partnership between home and school, including more homework and more information about pupils' progress.• Pupils' behaviour in and around the school.• The range of extracurricular activities.

Inspectors' judgements support the positive views parents express. The school generally enables pupils who attend school regularly to make suitable progress. The quality of teaching is good overall. In his first year the new headteacher has made an outstanding contribution to giving the school a clear, shared sense of purpose, with an emphasis on raising standards and a close relationship with parents and the wider community. He is a great asset to the school and its community.

In contrast, inspectors agree that the school does not provide enough detailed information about the content of the curriculum or about pupils' attainments and progress. The volume of homework is occasionally high, usually reasonable, but occasionally has gaps. Most pupils behave well, but a small minority are troublesome or casual. The school's extracurricular provision is typical of what is offered in this size and kind of school.

Overall, most parents have a favourable view of the school. There are, however, significant minorities (amongst the small proportion who responded to the pre-inspection parental questionnaire) who are dissatisfied with a few aspects of the school's provision. The school has more work to do to explain how it operates, but also requires the committed interest of all parents to this partnership.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The standard of attainment of pupils in the school varies very widely. Their overall standard is, however, below that expected nationally of pupils at the end of both Key Stage 3 (Year 9) and Key Stage 4 (Year 11). Pupils' level of attainment in recent national tests and examinations ranges from above average to very low, but is well below average overall. The overall level of attainment in the Year 9 national tests and in GCSE has fallen since the last inspection of 1998, although the fall is largely consistent with pupils' lower levels of prior attainment. This fall is in contrast to a steady rise nationally in results.
2. When pupils come to the school in Year 7, few have a high level of attainment and their overall level is well below average. The limited evidence available from the national tests taken at the end of primary schooling [full sets of data are only available for the period 1998-2000] suggests that the standard of the intake is rising steadily from a low base. The school, however, receives far fewer high attainers than a typical comprehensive school. Reading and other tests administered over the last few years tell a similar story.
3. Four-fifths of the school's pupils therefore started their secondary education in 1998 with an overall standard in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science close to the basic national benchmark of Level 4. A significant minority, however, did not and only a handful (around seven per cent) started with a high level of accomplishment. By 2000 the proportion of high-attainers had more than doubled in English and science, although it increased by only half in mathematics. The proportion of these higher-attaining pupils still, however, remains small. The baseline of attainment in the school is well below average.
4. In the national tests taken at the end of Year 9, the proportion of pupils who achieved the national standard of at least Level 5 in 2000 was well below average in all the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The proportion reaching at least Level 6 was even further below average in all three subjects. On the average "points" that pupils scored over the 1997-2000 period, their attainment in all three subjects was usually well below average. The trend of the school's Key Stage 3 results is currently downwards and below the (rising) national trend: the effects of the slowly rising intake have not yet fed through to the end of Year 9.
5. Girls are consistently and substantially ahead of boys in English, and especially at the higher levels, by the end of Year 9. In mathematics and science, in contrast, sometimes boys are ahead overall and at other times girls: in 2000, for instance, boys performed better overall than girls in mathematics, but both sexes achieved a similar overall standard in science. Over the 1997-2000 period, with minor variations over the years, both boys and girls in this school have performed below what boys and girls typically do nationally - although in 1997 and 1999 girls were a little closer to their national average than boys were to theirs. Teachers' assessments of pupils have usually been close to the test results pupils achieved in science. Since 1998, however, teachers' assessments in mathematics have been lower than pupils achieved, whilst in English they have varied widely from the eventual test results.
6. When these 2000 Key Stage 3 results are compared with those in schools which have a similar background (as measured solely by the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals), pupils in this school performed much worse than the average of the group (and particularly so in English). The position was very similar overall in 1999 and in 1998, although in the latter case the reported performance in English was the best of the three subjects and not much below the group average. It is important to note, however, that the overall attainment of these Year 9 pupils was also well below the group average when they joined the school.
7. In the five other (non-core) subjects formally assessed at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000, teachers judged the overall attainment of pupils currently in Year 10 as well below average in design and technology, geography, history, information and communication technology (ICT) and in modern foreign languages. Inspectors concur with these judgements.

8. In GCSE examinations in 2000 pupils' overall achievement was well below average on all the normal range of measures - for pupils' average points scores and for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C or grades A*-G. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more of the higher (A*-C) grades over the 1994-2000 period, for example, was 22-34 per cent against a national average of 41-47 per cent. Over the period 1994-2000 there was a falling trend in the school's average points score, compared with a rising trend nationally. The 2000 results were lower than at the time of the last inspection, although slightly higher than predicted by intake data five years earlier. The reasons for this recent lower level of performance are partly the lower levels of intake to the school, but in a significant minority of cases are owing to an unsatisfactory or poor attendance record, particularly by pupils in Year 11.

9. In all three core subjects pupils' attainment in GCSE in 2000 was well below the subjects' national averages. In English and science the results were lower than those in both 1998 and 1999, whereas in mathematics they were about the same. When pupils' performances in the subjects they took in 1998-2000 are compared with one another, pupils did significantly better in all three years in English language, design and technology and in geography, but worse in double science. In 2000 pupils also did better in mathematics and French, but worse in art and history. No pupil achieved the highest A* grade in GCSE in 2000 in mathematics, art, design and technology, history, Spanish, religious education (RE) or drama.

10. Girls achieved a greater proportion of the higher A*-C grades in GCSE than boys in the last four years: the gap between the sexes in the proportions gaining five or more of these grades has ranged from three to 11 percentage points. In 2000 the gap was seven percentage points: 25 per cent of girls in Year 11 achieved at least five of the higher grades in contrast to 18 per cent of the boys. The gap in attainment between the sexes has, however, been less than the gap nationally in three out of the last four years. On the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses taken in art and design in 2000 all 18 pupils gained Part One of the award at either Foundation or Intermediate level.

11. When the school's average points scores at GCSE are compared with those in schools with a similar "free school meals" background, this school's performance was well below the group average over the whole of the 1998-2000 period since the last inspection. By the same measure, pupils' overall performance was also well below average in all of English, mathematics and science. The limited evidence available suggests that pupils' overall levels of attainment on entry to the school were also well below the average of "similar" schools.

12. The school has little statistical or other evidence to indicate the rate of progress pupils make as they move through the school from Year 7 to the end of Year 9, although it has substantially increased its collation and organisation of external data in the last year. It does not have comprehensive Year 6 data on attainment in the official national tests for the period 1995-1996 that could be compared with pupils' performance three years later. Nor does it have valid and consistent data about pupils' performance in internal tests and examinations in Years 7-9 as a basis for making reliable judgements on progress. The sets of data available, however, suggest that pupils made broadly satisfactory progress over the 1997-2000 period. Inspectors' judgements about the school's current work indicate that pupils who attend regularly make satisfactory progress during Years 7-9.

13. The school has much more evidence about pupils' progress over Years 10-11. Pupils' overall attainment has continued to be well below the national average over, for example, the last three years since the last inspection. Their commensurate overall attainment two years previously was also well below average. Nevertheless, even taking into account the same pupils' achievements in the national tests two years earlier, the raw statistical evidence suggests that pupils in this school made unsatisfactory progress overall as they moved from Year 9 in the 1996-1998 period through to the end of Year 11 in 1998-2000.

14. This decline in the rate of progress over Key Stage 4 is well illustrated by a comparison of the same cohort of pupils' overall points scores at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11. In all three periods (1996→1998, 1997→1999 and 1998→2000) the overall scores for pupils were further behind the average national level at the end of Year 11 than they had been at the end of Year 9.

15. There are several reasons for this weakness and rate of decline over Key Stage 4. The major factor in this slippage in Key Stage 4 is the poor attendance of a significant minority of pupils. Nearly a third of last academic year's Year 11 pupils, for example, had less than 80 per cent attendance and virtually all of these made

inadequate progress. Three-quarters of these pupils failed to gain even one grade in the A*-C range and a further 11 per cent gained just one. If this significant minority of pupils is excluded from statistical analyses, the remaining pupils made sound progress. Additionally, a minority of boys in the school tend to work a little less hard and to concentrate less than girls. This is also shown by boys overall being further behind girls at the end of Year 11 than they were two years earlier.

16. An improvement in the school's performance depends, in large measure, on successfully improving the attendance of pupils in Years 10-11 in particular, alongside greater intellectual rigour and pace in a minority of lessons. The school's targets for GCSE in 2001 and 2002 are higher overall than has been achieved in the last four years. They are a useful aim and have been pitched suitably higher than the overall level that pupils achieved previously at the end of Year 9.

17. Only 16 pupils took GCE Advanced (A) level in 2000: their results were well below average. Just seven pupils took one A-level each in 1999 and their average points score was also well below average. The school no longer offers sixth-form education.

18. In English the attainment of pupils varies very widely, but is overall below average throughout the school. Their overall standard of reading is close to average. This is largely because of wide reading and the emphasis put on retrieving relevant information from a wide range of literary texts. The standard of many aspects of writing is below average. Considerable importance is attached to the careful presentation and layout of work, resulting in a standard close to average. Spelling and punctuation, along with note-taking, are a little below the standard often seen in similar types of schools. Most pupils listen satisfactorily, but only a few are confident and effective in sustaining an extended line of debate.

19. In other subjects across the school pupils' standard of reading is below average overall. The vast majority of pupils read, with adequate confidence, the wide range of written material presented to them in different subjects. They generally extract the information they need from texts adequately. High-attaining pupils read with considerable fluency and expression, but many pupils of average or low attainment show some hesitancy on the infrequent occasions when they read aloud – partly because they are not given enough practice in class, especially in those lessons where teachers undertake all the reading aloud for them.

20. Pupils' overall standard of writing is a little below average overall. In most subjects written work is planned and structured in a satisfactory way. This aspect is often done well in mathematics because of the careful guidance given to pupils on handling extended investigations and pieces of work. The standard of drafting and polishing work varies widely from good in mathematics and music to below average in humanities subjects and is slightly below average overall. Notetaking is generally not done well and is insufficiently taught and practised. The layout, tidiness and general presentation of work are below average overall, but are of a good standard amongst high attainers in mathematics. Spelling and correct punctuation remain general weaknesses. Although most rooms have a suitable range of technical words on display for easy reference, many pupils are shaky on spelling quite common words. Not all teachers draw sufficient attention to spelling weaknesses, but a minority of pupils show little or no inclination to copy down accurately the words clearly displayed for them.

21. Most pupils listen satisfactorily: a minority listen intently, but a significant minority are prone to misinterpreting what has been said or asking for instructions to be repeated. Pupils are confident and very willing to talk informally: they have much to say and converse pleasantly and with good humour. The standard of formal or extended speech of many pupils is, however, more limited and is below average across the school. The raising of standards in both formal presentations and extended discussions requires more importance and time to be attached to oral work and more opportunities to be provided to practise it.

22. The standard of numeracy is close to average, and improving, in mathematics and in other subjects of the curriculum. Most pupils handle numbers competently in mathematics, science and design and technology. Reasonable capability in mental mathematics is underpinned by an effective and concerted drive on this aspect, particularly in Key Stage 3. Pupils generally record and interpret data satisfactorily and often do so well in mathematics, science and geography. The inappropriate or over-ready use of calculators, more common amongst older pupils, is actively discouraged. Calculators are generally used well, when required – as, for example, in trigonometry.

23. Attainment in science is below average throughout the school. Pupils generally undertake experimental work satisfactorily and handle equipment safely, but many are not strong at remembering key facts over an extended period of time. The overall standard of information and communication technology (ICT) is below average throughout the school, largely because of inadequate teaching time. Most pupils have, however, a good standard of keyboarding skill in Years 10-11. In mathematics the work with spreadsheets in Year 7 is often of a high standard and very good electronic music is a notable feature of Key Stage 4.

24. In most other subjects the overall attainment of pupils is below what pupils achieve nationally. Overall attainment is, however, average at the end of Key Stage 4 in design and technology and in music, and throughout the school in art and physical education (PE). A notable feature is the high quality of some furniture-making in design and technology in Key Stage 4.

25. Taking into account their prior level of attainment, pupils' achievement is generally satisfactory; for frequent absentees it is not. It is unsatisfactory overall by the end of Year 11 in science, ICT and RE: in the case of the last two subjects this is because of insufficient teaching time, whereas in science it is largely owing to insufficient challenge and pace of learning in a significant minority of lessons. The achievement of pupils is good, however, in history in Key Stage 3 and in design and technology, geography and music in Key Stage 4.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

26. Overall, pupils show positive attitudes towards school and to the provision it makes for them. Evidence from within the school and from adults who work with the school suggests that such attitudes and associated behaviour have improved over the last year, following the appointment of the new headteacher. There is, however, a small minority of pupils, who, by their reluctance to accept the school's values and codes of conduct, create challenges to the school community and occupy significant amounts of the time and energy of staff.

27. The school is, in the main, an orderly community, marked by a atmosphere of calm and cooperation. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is usually good and sometimes very good. In around six per cent of lessons, however, pupils' attitudes are unsatisfactory, usually because of persistent chatter and inattention. This problem is often associated with a small amount of teaching that does not have a clear lesson structure and does not extinguish such unwanted behaviour as it arises. The vast majority of pupils are courteous and show a natural, but respectful, curiosity about the activities of visitors to the school.

28. There are some traces of graffiti on the exterior of buildings. Litter is a significant problem (not all of it generated by the school) both around the school and on the playing fields, where discarded drink cans constitute a hazard. The incidence of bullying and other forms of harassment is low and staff are quick to act, once such behaviour is detected. Pupils generally show a well-developed understanding of the needs of others. They respect their values and material property. Apart from a small minority who are prone to act impulsively, pupils reflect well on their own actions and the effects they have on other people. They form positive and constructive relationships with one another, with teachers and with other adults. They generally work supportively in pairs or small groups.

29. Many pupils demonstrate a capacity to take responsibility and exercise initiative, even where this is not prompted by the staff of the school. They organise fund-raising and charitable projects, for example, form recreational groups and willingly support work in the library, whilst pupils in Year 11 help with the supervision of younger groups around the school. There is, however, no school council as a representative forum for pupils' views about school life.

30. The incidence of permanent exclusions is average for a school of this size: there were four such incidents in the last school year. The number of fixed-term exclusions lies in the top third of the range for schools of similar size. The school's procedures and systems for exclusions are, however, sensitive and applied with care. Staff and governors give out the clear message that they are endeavouring to balance justice for individuals with consideration for the wider needs of the school community.

31. The majority of pupils attend school well, but a significant minority do not, with the result that the overall level of attendance of pupils is unsatisfactory. In the 1999-2000 academic year, for example, the overall attendance was 86.1 per cent – well below the national average of 91.3 per cent. The level of authorised absence in the same year (10.9 per cent) and the amount of absence without good reason (3.1 per cent) were both above average. Attendance fell by almost two percentage points from its level of 87.8 per cent just before the last inspection in 1998, reached a low of 85.2 per cent in 1999, and has since begun to show signs of a slight upturn. The decline since 1998 is largely owing to an increase in the amount of unauthorised absence.

32. The overall level of attendance is unsatisfactory for several reasons. The above average amount of unauthorised absence is owing to a significant minority of pupils having low attendance, particularly in Years 10 and 11. This problem is compounded by a small minority of parents failing to inform the school about the reasons for their children's absence or to secure their attendance at school. The relatively high level of authorised absence is mainly accounted for by illness and by holidays taken in term-time. The problem of absence has been tackled positively by the school, but with insufficient success, since the amount of unauthorised absence is higher than it was at the time of the last inspection in 1998.

33. The school's documentation for parents makes suitable reference to the importance of regular attendance and punctuality. In most of its practice, too, the school puts a high degree of emphasis on these matters. Staff are appropriately vigilant in detecting patterns of absence. The school makes a rapid response to even short periods of absence by, for example, making telephone enquiries of parents. It has recently enhanced its strategy by making "first-day" contact with parents about all unexplained absences and by the appointment of three Learning Mentors who, as part of their duties, liaise with pupils and their parents on attendance matters. Attendance statistics are not, however, prominently displayed within the school.

34. Pupils' punctuality for school and for lessons is generally good. A small minority of lessons, however, start a little late (as, for example, after assemblies which frequently overrun their allotted time) or finish early. The majority of registers are accurately kept. The school has thorough and effective computerised systems for recording and analysing pupils' attendance and for pinpointing problems. It has satisfactory systems in place to combat truancy, which is a only minor problem for the school.

35. The school, its parents and its other external partners need to undertake a major drive to address the attendance problem with full effectiveness and to raise the overall level of pupils' attendance to an acceptable level. The strategy needs crucially to include the minority of parents who give the impression that the attendance of their children at school is a matter of low priority. As noted earlier in the report, poor attendance leads directly to pupils making inadequate progress and achieving low results in GCSE. As was observed during the inspection, the need for teachers to take up precious learning time to help frequent absentees to catch up also acts unfairly as a drag on the progress of good attenders and the performance of the whole school.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

36. The quality of teaching is good overall throughout the school, but is a little stronger in Years 10-11 than Years 7-9. It is satisfactory or better in 95 per cent of lessons - satisfactory in about one third of lessons and good in nearly half of them. Additionally, one in eight of the school's lessons are taught very well. Five per cent of the 214 lessons inspected had teaching that was unsatisfactory, although there were sometimes unsatisfactory features in the further third that were otherwise satisfactory.

37. The quality of teaching is fairly similar to, but lower than, what was reported at the last inspection. The amount of teaching that is at least satisfactory is now 95 per cent – almost identical to the 96 per cent reported in 1998. Whereas about 75 per cent of the teaching was said to be good (or better) in 1998, now about 60 per cent falls into that category. The greatest change, however, is in the amount of very good teaching: then it was judged to be almost one third, but was a feature of only about 13 per cent of lessons observed in this inspection.

38. Most teachers have a good grasp of their subjects. This enables them to select suitable topics and illustrations, to sequence learning tasks appropriately and to give pupils a clear overview of where their studies are going. Most teachers clearly enjoy their subjects and attempt, usually successfully, to communicate their interest

to their pupils. In particular, their depth of knowledge generally results in good planning, sound expectations of what can be achieved and attention to detail. In a small minority of lessons, however, most often taken by teachers outside their main expertise (as, for instance, in personal and social education) or in a temporary or "cover" capacity, the teaching lacked sufficient depth and sureness or missed the full significance of what was being studied.

39. In the majority of lessons teachers know and communicate their subjects well. In a design and technology lesson in Year 10, for example, the teacher's knowledge and enthusiasm inspired pupils to work with zeal and confidence and in a Year 7 lesson the teacher covered comprehensively the cutting, shaping and moulding of wood and associated safety issues. Another teacher's substantial knowledge of the locality and of the course being followed enabled him to refer pupils specifically in a Year 8 geography lesson to what they had studied the previous year and to extend their understanding by clear, well-structured illustrations. In a history lesson in Year 11 the teacher's wide knowledge of the GCSE examination helped pupils to focus clearly on the construction and interpretation of examination questions and to identify frequently asked topics.

40. Teachers pay broadly satisfactory attention to the teaching of basic skills, largely in accordance with the school's policy for promoting literacy and numeracy. Many help pupils from time to time to improve their handwriting and spelling, but only a minority do so in a systematic way. Spelling is, however, approached in a very consistent and effective way in Year 7 in English. Key technical words are displayed (and used positively) in many classrooms, thereby giving pupils ready access to correct technical terms and their spelling and, as in a Year 8 history lesson, helping pupils to speed up both their learning and accuracy of writing. Their display and use are not, however, a regular feature of science lessons. Opportunities are rarely taken in most subjects to draw the attention of the whole class to frequently misspelled words or to the importance of note-taking (though well done in GCSE work in PE), and insufficient opportunities are given to pupils to express their viewpoints orally, particularly in formal presentations.

41. Numeracy is generally promoted well. In mathematics lessons teachers usually put appropriate emphasis on the use of correct mathematical terminology – as, for example, in a Year 7 lesson on the meaning and use of *factor* and *lowest common multiple*. These pupils accurately recalled number facts as a class, had a secure knowledge of terminology and could explain the methodology of adding fractions. A similar emphasis on mathematical vocabulary and spelling in Year 9 ensured that pupils mastered words such as *trapezium*. An insufficient concentration on mental mathematics, however, resulted in many Year 10 pupils not recognising that $360 \div 36 = 10$. A design and technology lesson in Year 7, in contrast, usefully reinforced important aspects of English and mathematics.

42. Most teachers plan their lessons carefully and in suitable detail – and especially so in geography and history. In the best lessons teachers display and explain the aims of lessons to pupils, incorporate swift revision of previous work, give the right amount of time and variety to learning tasks, and round lessons off with a swift review of what has been learned. The emphasis placed on lesson planning in the recent national literacy training undertaken by staff is generally being put to good effect, particularly in English, design and technology, geography and history.

43. In well-structured lessons pupils are clear about what they have to do and why the lesson is important. In a Spanish class in Year 11, for example, the aims of the lesson were written on the board and then carefully explained. A similar clarity of scene-setting and exposition was seen in a geography lesson in Year 11 on the iron and steel industry in South Wales. In both cases pupils worked with confidence, obvious interest and appropriate speed on the tasks that followed.

44. An effective mixture of short and longer activities maintained pupils' concentration and drive in, for instance, a history lesson in Year 8. The same high level of interest and application from pupils was achieved by a variety of well-directed activities on floods and flood-prevention in a Year 8 geography lesson. An oral "warm-up" over a range of such topics as age, birthdates, home location and siblings quickly launched an effective Year 7 French lesson.

45. In a minority of lessons objectives are unclear, no targets are set and the direction of classroom tasks are vague. These lessons fail to arouse any interest in pupils and frequently lead to boredom or indiscipline. In a few

lessons too much of the same kind of activity rapidly loses pupils' attention. Very occasionally, the topics set require more background knowledge than pupils have acquired. A more frequent disruption to teachers' planning is the need to cater for significant minorities of pupils who have missed earlier lessons through absence: the unplanned revision and adjustment make extra demands on the time and energy of conscientious teachers and slow down the progress of the majority of pupils who attend regularly.

46. Most teachers set at least satisfactory levels of challenge for pupils – although generally more in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. In the best cases teachers make pupils think hard and explain their reasoning carefully. They encourage pupils to give of their best always: as one teacher put it to a design and technology class in Year 7, “whatever you do, do your best”. They expect pupils to think rigorously and work hard. In most of these instances pupils respond well to the challenge, show a high level of interest and commitment, and behave impeccably.

47. The good results of this kind of challenging teaching were seen in a geography lesson in Year 11 where pupils thoroughly understood the work in hand, after working intensively in pairs. A similar level of understanding and interest was sparked off in a Year 9 mathematics class by pupils setting up a tabular pattern of the sum of the interior angles of polygons and successfully deducing their relationship to the number of sides. Year 7 pupils in design and technology made rapid strides in developing and sketching their ideas and individual designs because of the initial, clear explanation and brisk, probing discussion organised by their teacher. In a very good history lesson in Year 10 the teacher very well organised a suitably demanding task for pupils to indicate how their “businesses” coped in the Wall Street Crash of 1929.

48. In a minority of lessons, however, too little is expected of pupils – in either the depth or pace of study – with the result that they often become restless and do not make the progress of which they are capable. Although teachers' expectations are well pitched in most subjects, and especially in Years 10-11, still more could be expected in the core subjects and particularly in the early years.

49. Teachers normally use a satisfactory range of effective teaching methods. In the most successful lessons they speedily revise previous work and set out the shape of the lesson to the whole class. They then open up topics by exploiting appropriately the benefits of paired or group work, individual study and the whole-class sharing of ideas, and round off lessons by a crisp and well-structured review of what has been learned.

50. In a Year 10 English lesson, for example, the teacher provided a clear writing framework that ensured that pupils were able to identify successfully key points about poetry of the First World War. Good brainstorming on the conventions of ghost stories and a quick question and answer session enabled pupils in a Year 11 English class to assemble quickly the key elements of such writing. Many good examples of this kind of teaching were observed in mathematics, design and technology, geography, history and modern foreign languages.

51. There is, in contrast, generally too little use of such techniques as brainstorming, note-taking and rigorous whole-class discussion to explore, record and consolidate what pupils are learning. In a significant minority of lessons teachers tell pupils too much too soon, do most of the pupils' thinking for them and rarely ask open-ended questions, with the result that pupils do not have to think much, can remain passive and learn less than they could.

52. Classes are generally well managed – very much so in mathematics and history. In the vast majority of lessons pupils show positive attitudes and are well behaved. Many teachers have a suitably firm hold over their classes, give appropriate praise or reward and use humour sensitively. In a small number of classes teachers do not effectively control excessive chatter and noise. This hubbub occasionally lasts the whole lesson, even as a distracting undercurrent when teachers are talking. This high noise level not only impedes what teachers are trying to teach and prevents conscientious pupils from learning, but also reinforces the silly or lazy attitudes that a minority of pupils readily display. Very occasionally, pupils are recalcitrant and reluctant to learn, despite the teacher's best efforts.

53. Time is, in the main, used well. Many teachers ensure that pupils keep up a reasonably brisk pace of learning. In a significant minority of lessons, however, the pace is not fast enough, with the result that pupils remain firmly within their “comfort zone” and do not have to exert themselves. This steady approach to work does

not achieve the higher rate of progress that is possible. Learning equipment is often used imaginatively – as, for example, when the overhead projector was used in a Year 7 English class to explore and list the range of media; when Internet research and video clips graphically illustrated aspects of trench warfare in the First World War; or when a closed-circuit microscope in Year 10 science showed pupils clearly the major differences between types of cells in living things.

54. Most teachers undertake the day-to-day assessment of pupils' work in a satisfactory way – and in a particularly thorough way in geography - and in some cases give very clear guidance as to how work can be improved. A notable feature of some lessons in art, design and technology, and Spanish was the very effective way in which teachers made quick, accurate assessments of pupils' work as they circulated during lessons – sometimes checking understanding, for instance, by a quick "What did I say?" or ensuring that missed accents were corrected. Although a minority of parents expressed dissatisfaction with the small amount of homework set, it was generally set appropriately during the week of the inspection to reinforce or extend what had been learnt in school. There are sometimes pressure points when coursework is undertaken in Key Stage 4 or when teachers do not keep to the published homework timetable.

55. Teaching is good overall throughout the school. It is satisfactory in art, music and PE in Key Stage 3 and in English and science throughout the school. In personal and social education (PSE) it varies from very good to unsatisfactory, but is sound overall. The teaching of ICT is unsatisfactory across the curriculum, but good overall in the specialist courses. It is very good in geography in Key Stage 4. Teaching is good in all subjects and key stages other than those mentioned above. Nearly all subjects have at least some teaching that is very good and a quarter of the teaching in Year 11 was of this high quality. Much more very good teaching (22 per cent) was observed in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3 (eight per cent). Staff work hard to motivate and encourage pupils and generally to raise their aspirations.

56. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in their studies both in lessons and over longer periods of time. In over half the classes seen pupils made good progress and occasionally very good progress. Progress and the general quality of learning are below an acceptable level in about five per cent of classes. Pupils' learning is of a slightly higher order in Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. Girls, in general, make greater progress than boys, because they tend to sustain concentration better and work a little harder.

57. Pupils make broadly satisfactory progress in their studies in most subjects, including the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. They make unsatisfactory progress in what they learn in ICT and also (in Key Stage 4) in RE because of insufficient time for study. Progress and depth of learning are good in Key Stage 4 in design and technology, geography and music, and throughout the school in history.

58. Pupils make the best progress where their studies are carefully planned, clearly explained to them and sustained in an interesting and engaging way. Their learning is most successful when developed in carefully graded steps, fully explored in group work and through rigorous, lively whole-class discussion, and brought to a firm conclusion by a carefully recorded summary of what has been covered. The quality of learning declined steeply on the few occasions when teachers' muddled and uninteresting lessons were accompanied by noisy indolence.

59. High-attaining pupils and the small minority who are gifted & talented make satisfactory progress overall in their learning. Their progress and depth of learning are not enough in English, but very good in mathematics and generally good in Years 10-11 in art, geography and music. Pupils with special educational needs and the two pupils at an early stage of learning English make good progress overall.

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

60. In Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9) the school provides a curriculum that offers a satisfactory range of learning opportunities and mostly meets the needs of all pupils. The breadth and balance of the curriculum are satisfactory overall. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught. All pupils study ICT in Years 7 and 8, and one modern foreign language and drama throughout the key stage. They have one lesson with their form tutor each fortnight and study personal, social and health education (PSHE), which includes teaching on sex

and anti-drugs education. The quality of this curricular provision is reduced by the insufficient time allocated for ICT and by the unsatisfactory humanities grouping for geography, history and RE in Year 7.

61. In Key Stage 4 (Years 10-11) the range of learning opportunities offered and the breadth and balance of the curriculum are unsatisfactory. All pupils study the core subjects of English, mathematics and science as well as PE. A suitable work-related programme is followed by a group of pupils for whom the full range of GCSE subjects is not appropriate. These pupils are sensibly disapplied from the full National Curriculum entitlement.

62. An appropriate range of ten optional subjects is offered for GCSE examination, but the choice for pupils is unhelpfully restricted. As a result, pupils are unable, for example, to study both geography and history, or both art and music. Insufficient time is allocated for ICT and RE. Few courses of a vocational nature are offered, a narrowness reported at the previous two inspections. Each fortnight all pupils study PSHE for three lessons and have one lesson with their form tutor. The criteria for this arrangement are clear, but the negative implications of this provision are insufficiently considered – the time constraints it imposes on the rest of the curriculum; the varied quality of the teaching of the tutorial course; and the other similar opportunities available across the curriculum (particularly within PSHE and the daily tutorial time). Ineffective use is made overall of the 20 minutes of time that pupils spend with form tutors at the beginning of the school day on the three occasions when they do not go to assembly.

63. The school meets statutory curricular requirements except those for ICT and RE. The time allocated for ICT in both key stages is inadequate to cover all the aspects required by the National Curriculum in sufficient depth. There is insufficient compensatory or coordinated use of ICT within other subject areas to meet national requirements. The time allocated for RE is low in Key Stage 3, but is insufficient in Key Stage 4 for teaching fully what is required by the local Agreed Syllabus for RE. The deficiency in ICT and in RE in Years 10-11 was reported at the time of the last inspection and not enough progress has been made in addressing these issues. There are effective arrangements for teaching an appropriate programme of sex education.

64. The school's total teaching time of 24 hours 35 minutes is slightly below the minimum of 25 hours recommended by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). This time is eroded by the regular over-run of assemblies and still further by the slightly early release of pupils from some lessons. Both English in Year 11 and drama in Year 8 have an additional time allocation, but there is no clear rationale for this anomaly. The apportionment of curricular time requires an overhaul, in order to resolve the weaknesses identified above.

65. The school is participating in a pilot scheme to raise standards of literacy, as part of the National Literacy Strategy. A great deal of work has successfully taken place. A thoughtful policy, with an appropriate focus on keywords, spelling and the improvement of writing skills, has been successfully implemented in some subjects - most notably in English, geography, history and modern foreign languages, and in examination work in PE. The National Numeracy Strategy has been effectively implemented in mathematics and is beginning to be introduced by other subject departments.

66. All pupils have the opportunity to study the full range of subjects offered. There is an effective system of grouping pupils by prior attainment or in mixed-attainment groups. These arrangements vary between subjects and are effective except in science, where the mixed-ability groupings in Year 7 in particular result in a lack of challenge. The school has introduced courses with forms of accreditation other than GCSE in a number of subjects to benefit pupils for whom the full GCSE course is not appropriate. These courses provide suitable work and worthwhile accreditation.

67. The school's provision for pupils with special educational needs has improved significantly since the last inspection. In most subject areas, including all the core subjects (except for English in Year 9), pupils at stages 2-5 of the Code of Practice receive effective specialist teaching across all year groups. In addition, many pupils who have specific reading difficulties are withdrawn for intensive support in small groups. Pupils at stage 5 of the Code are also supported by a team of Learning Support Assistants, who are well deployed and managed.

68. The quality of specialist teaching for these pupils is generally good. Teaching materials and methods are well matched to pupils' needs. In many lessons highly imaginative approaches are employed to pinpoint help to pupils who have difficulty with basic skills. This feature was particularly noted in the mathematics lessons with these pupils, where a clear structure, excellent relationships and rigorous, exciting teaching were observed. In a Year 9 lesson, for example, many pupils were skilfully and effectively led towards an understanding of "probability". The response of pupils was as high as the quality of this teaching. Pupils value the additional help they receive and appreciate the effort and care of the staff who teach them.

69. The accommodation and resources in the support unit for these pupils, including the ICT facilities, are of good quality. The assessment of pupils' needs, including their individual education plans (IEPs), is sound and regular reviews of progress are undertaken. Effective use is made of support and resources from outside the school.

70. There is, however, a major deficiency in the management of this good provision. The school has been unable to recruit a suitable coordinator for pupils with special educational needs (SENCO). This lack of a senior and appropriately qualified leader limits the overall effectiveness of provision. The planning and supervision of this aspect of the school's work are divided across a number of managers, with the result that pupils with special educational needs lack a single, powerful voice to represent their needs. This deficiency will become particularly marked, as the new national Code of Practice is introduced over the next year.

71. The school is undertaking a range of additional measures to improve its provision for gifted and talented pupils. These largely stem from the national *Excellence in Cities* initiative that is currently being launched in Bristol schools. These efforts are at an early stage and their impact is limited as yet. Some challenging, additional provision has already been effectively made in mathematics and modern foreign languages, whilst other subjects are in the process of identifying pupils for whom such extra support is required.

72. There are two pupils in the school at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. A small amount of effective specialist teaching is provided for them, on an individual basis, through the local authority's support team. This good provision is well enhanced in many subjects: teaching approaches are suitably modified to ensure that the two pupils benefit fully from the curriculum provided.

73. The school, with the full support of the governing body, has instituted a full-scale review of the curriculum. This is long overdue. Curricular planning is unsatisfactory at present, as statutory requirements are not fully met, the issues raised in the previous inspection report have been only partially addressed, and the curriculum contains features for which there is no clear educational rationale. The coordination and the quality of schemes of work for subjects are very good in geography and generally good elsewhere. In ICT, however, they are unsatisfactory, owing to the lack of continuity in planning and in the coordination of ICT work in other subjects.

74. A wide range of extracurricular activities enhances the curriculum. Successful out-of-school residential visits are arranged to France and activity weeks are organised in the UK. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme is well supported and pupils undertake field visits to the local area in science and geography. Well-attended musical festivals are held termly and there is a major production each year. The school participates fully in inter-school sporting activities and has successful hockey, football and cross-country running teams. Approximately one third of the pupils take part in competitive sports and there is a strong and willing commitment from 12 members of staff.

75. A worthwhile programme of study support is provided. This encompasses a homework club and a number of subject clubs. One group of very able geography pupils, for example, participated in a very successful residential study weekend in the Forest of Dean. Pupils in mathematics take part in the National Mathematics Competition and six pupils in Year 8 are involved in a mathematics masterclass.

76. Provision for careers education and guidance is very good. An effectively organised, clearly structured and well-resourced scheme of work is taught within the PSHE programme and in the progression guidance scheme in Years 10 and 11. This is supplemented with a well thought out and well-organised, two-

day Industry Challenge for pupils in Year 9, which includes working with local business people and visits to local firms. A progression evening for pupils in Year 11 also involves local colleges and employers. Very effective, impartial guidance is provided by careers staff and the careers officer that appropriately focuses on those in greatest need. Good access to such guidance is available for all pupils who require advice and support.

77. All pupils in Year 10 participate for one week in well-organised work experience. Pupils find their own placement, with the support of the careers staff, and take part in a good programme of preparation. During the placement all pupils are visited by a member of staff and complete a log book. On their return pupils participate in a useful follow-up session and complete an extended piece of written English coursework based on their experience. There is a sound careers library that is conveniently situated within the main library and accessible from the careers office. The library includes appropriate booklets and some supporting computer programs.

78. Links with the community, particularly with local industry, are satisfactory and improving. Local firms have provided financial support for a Community Learning Coordinator and for mentoring support for pupils. Liaison with contributory primary schools is satisfactory and being strengthened, but curricular continuity between Year 6 of primary education and Year 7 remains weak. There are plans to strengthen cooperation further with nearby secondary schools and colleges through the *Excellence in Cities* initiative. Links with institutions of initial teacher training are strong and the school regularly hosts the training of a group of student teachers.

79. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. The strongest aspects are moral and social education, whilst the weakest is spiritual development. There is no whole-school policy and no attempt made to map out or monitor the way in which pupils experience these aspects throughout the curriculum. As a result, opportunities are missed for developing pupils' awareness of their own spirituality as well as for encouraging their understanding of what living in a multicultural society entails.

80. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is unsatisfactory overall. Pupils and teachers do share spiritual experiences at times of bereavement or when visiting such places as art galleries. There are, however, few planned activities to heighten pupils' spirituality or to involve them deeply in spiritual reflection – as, for example, in assemblies or in classroom work. Morning assemblies are central to the life of the school and promote a strong sense of community. They are well planned and incorporate a wide range of appropriate moral, social, cultural and broadly Christian messages. Pupils behave very well and listen attentively in them. In the assemblies held during the inspection, however, there were no planned opportunities for pupils to reflect on what they heard or, for instance, to listen to music at any stage. Rarely were pupils actively involved. The school is far from providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

81. The school's provision for pupils' moral education is good. Staff involve pupils closely in understanding moral issues. Pupils know what is expected of them. Most staff give commendations wisely for good attitudes and behaviour and show considerable patience in explaining the error of their ways to pupils who have acted anti-socially or thoughtlessly. During the course of the inspection, the majority of pupils were very good ambassadors for their school community. Through the PSHE programme, taught by senior staff, pupils have time to reflect on important ethical issues and to seek acceptable solutions – as, for example, in the Year 9 unit on poverty, wealth, gambling and the issues of right and wrong. Moral issues are also discussed in other subjects – as, for example, in design and technology about the conservation of materials, in modern foreign languages on the dangers of smoking and in history about the evil of slavery.

82. Provision for pupils' social education is good overall. It is well encouraged in lessons where pupils have opportunities to work in pairs or small groups. Behaviour is generally good in the dining area, along corridors and on staircases. Where pupils are given responsibility – as, for instance, at the reception desk – they show themselves to be useful and valuable members of the school community. Those pupils (as in Year 7) who act as voluntary litter-pickers help to alleviate the constant problem of litter that the school struggles to address. Whilst considerable improvements have been made to the building since the last inspection, there are no social areas within the school. The poor state of the fabric of the building does not encourage pupils to

take a pride in their school environment. There is no formal structure, such as a school council, through which pupils can understand directly about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

83. Provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. The school's strengths lie in visits made to centres of popular culture as well as to art galleries and museums. Well-attended music and drama festivals provide useful opportunities for personal expression and group activity as well as drawing the local community into the school. The school's emphasis is largely on popular culture, but English and drama have put on some challenging high-culture events in the recent past. There is little evidence, within the current schemes of work, that the school systematically raises awareness of multicultural issues or provides pupils with knowledge and understanding of cultures other than their own.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

84. The school sets high standards of care and pupils feel secure and valued by staff. Those with responsibility for the pastoral oversight of children work hard and effectively to provide a sound base from which pupils may enjoy the curriculum offered by the school. Arrangements for child protection are good, and all staff are given clear guidance on how to approach this sensitive issue. An impressive instance of this was observed during the inspection, when the deputy headteacher with designated responsibility for this aspect of the school dealt very effectively and sensitively with two distressing incidents, whilst continuing to fulfil her teaching and administrative roles.

85. Policy and procedures for ensuring pupils' health and safety are good and generally deal effectively with hazards requiring action. Despite this generally sound picture, a small number of areas of risk were observed during the inspection: discarded metal cans on the playing fields present a hazard; there are trailing electrical leads in the music area, when keyboards are in use; and the gas cut-off lever is difficult to access in the food area of the design and technology department.

86. The school's behaviour policies are soundly framed and contribute to a generally favourable climate, encouraging good conduct. Rewards and sanctions are progressively and effectively deployed to ensure that pupils feel that the school community respects their needs, whilst discouraging anti-social behaviour. Incidents of bullying are quickly addressed by staff and are effectively managed.

87. There are two separate strands in the school's teaching of personal and social education. The programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) is relevant and well structured across the school. It is taught, in the main, by a small group of staff specialising in such work. The standard of teaching and the response of pupils vary widely from poor to very good, but are sound overall. The implementation of the programme is not, however, adequately monitored and reviewed, in order to ensure consistency in the quality of presentation. The tutorial period, which is offered to all pupils for one period each fortnight, covers related areas (for example, study skills) and is taught by the form tutor. The two programmes are not sufficiently coordinated, so as to avoid overlap and to guarantee consistent quality across both strands.

88. The school has made a sound start in developing measures to monitor and support pupils' academic progress. This is well led by year heads and their teams, and involves interviews and target-setting with each pupil. This work is now reinforced by the recently appointed Learning Mentors, who concentrate their efforts on pupils requiring additional support.

89. The school nursing service offers helpful, weekly drop-in sessions for pupils with personal concerns or difficulties. The school's counsellor offers intensive support, for one day each week, to pupils who experience stresses in their adjustment to school. This is a good provision that gives every indication of having positive effects. The school has recently developed a "support base" for other pupils who do not cope easily with what the school provides for them. Staff working in this base are imaginative and effective in helping such pupils to reflect on their own behaviour, through the development of personal and social skills. The provision made for pupils with statements of special educational need is generally well matched to the programmes specified in those statements.

90. The school's assessment policy gives satisfactory guidance on the assessment, marking, recording and reporting of pupils' work. Within subject departments the quality of day-to-day assessment of individual pupils' work is at least satisfactory overall and often good. It is unsatisfactory in ICT, because there is insufficient accuracy in establishing levels of attainment and inconsistency of practice within the department. It is very good in geography, especially in the marking of pupils' work and the recording of their attainments.

91. Overall, subject departments achieve internal consistency in assessment and relate their assessments satisfactorily to the levels indicated in the National Curriculum in Years 7-9. In Years 10-11 assessments relate firmly to the requirements of external examinations. The school has done much work in collating and collecting a good range of data about pupils' attainments and ability early in Key Stage 3. It has, however, insufficient subsequent data that is robust and valid enough to measure accurately pupils' rates of progress and the school's overall performance through Years 7-9. In Key Stage 4 it has very good systems of collation and presentation of data. These are a major help to teachers in tracking pupils' progress and predicting grades for individual pupils, as well as for monitoring the performance of subject departments.

92. Annual reports to parents give clear indications of grades and levels achieved in all subjects except ICT. These reports include pupils' own evaluations of their progress. Written comments by many teachers do not, however, tell parents clearly and precisely enough what their children have attained, how well they have progressed and what they need to do next to improve. The content and format of reports are not consistent enough. In the pre-inspection questionnaire a significant minority of the parents who responded expressed dissatisfaction with the information they receive in respect of their children's progress. Records of Achievement, which are completed in Year 11, are well presented and give a satisfactory indication of pupils' academic standards and their successes in a wide range of school-related activities. Assessment procedures and practice for pupils with special educational needs are sound.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

93. The school is generally held in high regard by parents. Parents particularly appreciate that the school expects their children to work hard to achieve their best. The proportion of questionnaires returned from the pre-inspection survey of parents and other carers was substantially lower than at the time of the last inspection. A significant minority amongst the fifth of adults who responded indicated that they had some concern about homework, information about pupils' progress, pupils' behaviour, the range of extracurricular activities provided and the closeness with which the school works with parents.

94. The school works hard to maintain and enhance its partnership with parents. It has sound systems and procedures in place to do so. The induction process for Year 7 entry starts appropriately with an open evening and visits by staff to contributory primary schools. The induction process in June includes an evening for parents when details are explained about such matters as homework, the reporting of children's progress, the use of Pupil Planners and the home-school agreement. The prospectus is clear and informative about the aims, objectives and activities of the school, but only limited information is given about what pupils will study in Years 7-9. The options booklet for Years 10-11, in contrast, is well prepared and informative.

95. A school calendar is issued to all parents and identifies, amongst other things, the two specific evenings each year set aside for parents to discuss their children's progress. These meetings are well attended, although many parents feel that the amount of time available to them is brief. Parents annually receive written reports about their children that also include pupils' appraisals of their own performance. Many subject reports do not, however, identify pupils' attainment and progress or what they can do to improve with sufficient precision. The school helpfully supplements reports, where appropriate, by sending parents letters of congratulation or concern about their children.

96. The homework timetable issued for each year group is appropriately balanced. Further explanations are sometimes sent to parents: in history and French, for example, a letter was sent to parents to suggest how they could help further with the homework set. The pupil planners and homework diaries are a good provision, but do not in many cases achieve their full potential as a means of effective dialogue between school and home. Parents are kept well informed about their children's attendance at school by a twice-yearly printout of attendance and absences.

97. Information about the school's activities, achievements and associated matters is communicated well and comprehensively to parents through the regular, lively *Link-Up* newsletter. The range of news items reflects the attractive and varied range of the extracurricular programme provided by the school. There are opportunities in most subjects to pursue an enrichment activity, in addition to an Easter school and summer school to enhance levels of literacy and numeracy and to encourage revision for GCSE.

98. On about one third of the questionnaires returned parents felt that pupils' behaviour was a weakness of the school. As noted earlier, behaviour around the school during the inspection was good overall. This parental concern is, however, justified in a small minority of lessons where pupils are insufficiently controlled. The school has recently received the funding to appoint two Learning Mentors and a Family Learning Coordinator. The early signs are that these appointments will actively and directly help the school to address the issues of pupils' personal development and attendance, especially with those parents who have low aspirations and expectations for their children. In addition, the *Time Out* room established for children who occasionally find difficulty in coping with normal lessons is beginning to show good results.

99. There is a Parents Association, but it struggles to attract wide support. Parents help with refreshments at parents' evenings and raise funds that are appreciated by the school. The school's governors have a visible presence at parents' meetings. They have issued questionnaires to parents from time to time about how improvements can be made in the school, although the level of returns has always been disappointingly low.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

100. The school has a succinct set of aims and values that serve as a sound basis for its current work and future development. The impact of these principles shows clearly in the work of the school, particularly in relation to pupils' attitudes and a growing focus on achievement. The school has strong, effective leadership and a clear view of what is needed to bring about necessary change and improvement. Leadership is firmly directed at improving the overall performance of the school and at creating an educational centre that benefits the whole of its community.

101. The headteacher has made a very significant and impressive impact in the year since his appointment. He has a strong but very approachable presence; is rightly held in high esteem by pupils, parents, staff, governors and the wider community; and has sustained morale at a time of substantial pressure from external forces. He accurately, consistently and rigorously identifies goals for improvement and employs appropriate management information systems and technology to support his vision for change. He deserves the full support of parents and the community, as he confronts the many challenges facing the school.

102. The senior management group has shown admirable tenacity, resilience and effectiveness in maintaining momentum for staff and pupils, despite the many organisational and staffing difficulties that have occurred over the past three years. Senior staff have worked hard and imaginatively to provide good continuity of education for pupils during this period and continue to do so now.

103. The quality and effectiveness of the work of subject leaders and pastoral coordinators vary from very good to unsatisfactory, but are good overall. As the number of key initiatives for school improvement mounts, there is a need for senior managers to delegate significant aspects to this group of staff, in order both to share management responsibility and to promote their further professional development. The school has a clear commitment to improve what it does, led by the purpose and enthusiasm of the headteacher. Much progress has been made in the last year, but the precision of action-planning to realise this commitment is not yet fully in place.

104. The governing body is active and deeply committed to the welfare and progress of the school. Its business is effectively conducted through four committees. These are well focused on key areas of the school's life, including positive and preventive work with pupils at risk of exclusion. The governing body has responded well to the challenges posed by recent financial and staffing difficulties and has begun to recognise some of the longer-term measures necessary for the improvement of the school. It does not, however, have a clear overall vision of the steps it needs to take to evaluate the school's progress to a high standard.

105. The overall monitoring of performance in the school is limited at the present time. All the mechanisms and information systems needed for this have not been established. There is, for example, only a small amount of formal monitoring of teaching and the necessary review of the curriculum has been deferred. The nationally required scheme for the performance management of teachers in the school has, however, been agreed. This will provide some of the crucial, baseline data for monitoring the quality of teaching.

106. The school's planning for development is in a transitional phase, as a result of the many recent changes in senior management and in policy initiatives. An appropriate development plan was put in place for the current academic year. A new and systematic cycle of longer-term planning is to be launched for September 2001; this firmly intends to incorporate the new targets and projects that the school is now launching.

107. The school's financial management and planning are good and effectively support well thought out educational priorities. The governing body is very well informed about the school's spending patterns, monitors expenditure carefully and takes a very active role in the school's financial planning.

108. Within a tight budget and an average income, the school has managed to move from a deficit of £160,000 in 1998 to a small surplus in 2001. This has been achieved by stringent financial controls and a continuation of the skilful financial management and very impressive use of local and national funding that were highlighted at the time of the last inspection. Recently notified reductions to the budget threaten to undermine the very necessary developments that the school is at present planning. There are effective and efficient financial control and administration by the headteacher and a deputy headteacher. The last external financial audit raised a number of minor accounting and recording issues. These have been satisfactorily dealt with.

109. The school has made appropriate and effective use of funds for staff training and of other specific grants and funds. It makes good use of such new technologies as e-mail and the electronic recording of pupils' attendance. Computer models are used to plan and evaluate potential future budgetary spending. The school takes best value into account when purchasing services. Management has, for example, investigated thoroughly the best provider for catering services and the merits of leasing rather than purchasing ICT equipment. By working directly with contractors, the school has managed to complete a large building programme within tight budget constraints. This approach is a strength of the school's financial planning and management.

110. The proportion of the school's budget spent on teaching staff is a little below average. Although the provision of teaching staff is generally satisfactory, there are some serious staff shortages. The school has been unable to recruit a coordinator for special educational needs; this has a detrimental effect on the coordination of work across the school. At the time of the inspection there were vacant posts in science, food and textiles, and modern foreign languages. These have largely been filled by supply teachers who are not always qualified in the subject they are required to teach. A mathematics post, soon due to become vacant, has been advertised but not filled. There has been a series of short-term appointments in science that have resulted in a lack of continuity and slower progress for many pupils. There is no permanent, full-time head of the English department. Non-specialist teaching in RE has a detrimental impact on pupils' progress. The problem of non-recruitment is having a damaging effect on pupils' progress.

111. There are sufficient experienced teachers for pupils with special educational needs. Technical support is sufficient. The number of hours worked by the administrative staff is above the average for a school of this size. The ratio of pupils to teachers is above average, but the amount of time teachers spend in the classroom is below average. The total teaching time of 24 hours 35 minutes per week is below the minimum recommended nationally: as indicated earlier, too little time is made available for ICT and RE.

112. There is a good programme of induction to the work of the school for teachers new to teaching and to the school. Opportunities for staff training are used very well and the impact of this training is carefully reviewed and evaluated. The good overall standard of teaching in the school and the strong support for trainee teachers indicate that the school is capable of being an effective provider of initial teacher training.

113. There has been some improvement in the quality of accommodation since the time of the last inspection, when accommodation and related health and safety issues were a key issue for action. There have been considerable improvements to the gymnasium and changing facilities, an unsafe wall and window opening have been dealt with satisfactorily and the cleaning of the interior has improved. A dining extension and toilet renovations have been carried out. Dust extraction equipment in the design and technology rooms was being installed during the inspection.

114. There remain, however, many unsatisfactory aspects. There is insufficient accommodation for art and for design and technology, and that for science and music is of poor quality. A building programme due to begin within the next few months promises to add extra science rooms and refurbish existing ones. The accommodation for drama, located in what was an indoor swimming pool, is unsuitable because of the poor acoustics. The use of the hall for PE is unsatisfactory. The playing fields are, as they were at the time of the last inspection, badly drained and in a poor condition. There is insufficient storage for food and textiles and for art. The interior of the school has not been fully painted for over 20 years and, despite the efforts of teachers to improve the general environment with displays, much of it is drab and tired and provides a learning environment lacking in stimulation. Access to the site for people with physical disabilities is very difficult.

115. The buildings are in a poor state of repair and there are many uneven paths and steps that are potential safety hazards. Some windows are sealed shut and others leak – as, for example, in the music room where rainwater leaks onto electrical equipment. There is a large amount of litter on the site. This is especially a problem on the playing fields, where damaged cans pose a safety hazard. For several days during the inspection the bins outside the kitchen area overflowed with bags of rubbish, some of which were open.

116. The spending on learning resources is above average. The provision of these resources is largely satisfactory. There is, however, a shortage of textbooks for pupils in both key stages in science and RE, for the lower attainers in history in Key Stage 3 and in music in Key Stage 4. There are insufficient sewing machines and equipment for computer-aided design in design and technology and insufficient keyboards in music. The last two deficiencies were also highlighted at the time of the last inspection.

117. The provision of resources for pupils with special educational needs is good. The centrally provided ICT facilities have been improved since the time of the last inspection and are now good. Although the number of computers is slightly below the average, most are up-to-date and of high quality. At the time of the inspection, however, pupils did not have access to the Internet. The provision of ICT in departments is now generally satisfactory, but there is no ICT hardware in art, geography, history and RE. The support area for pupils with special educational needs has good ICT provision.

118. The library provision is good and provides suitable facilities for pupils to work independently. The stock of books is supplemented by six computers with CD-ROMs, but no Internet access. One tabloid and two quality newspapers are taken each day, and there is a wide range of periodicals. The library is open and staffed all day, except for brief periods at break and lunchtime.

119. Overall, taking into account the satisfactory quality of education provided for pupils, the good quality of teaching and the satisfactory progress that most pupils make as they move through Years 7-11, set against the average amount of money received for its work, the school gives satisfactory value for money

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

120. To improve and build upon the satisfactory quality of education that pupils receive, the governors and senior management of the school should:

- (a) raise, in close and effective association with parents and other external partners, the level of attendance of a significant minority of pupils, because the present level of absence of these pupils restricts both their own progress and that of other pupils as well as the academic performance of the whole school (## 15 16 31-34 35 and subject sections).
- (b) improve pupils' overall level of attainment and progress by
 - removing the weaknesses in a minority of teaching, as identified in the main body of this report, by ensuring that the lesson structure, intellectual rigour, pace of learning and quality of pupils' behaviour are sound in all lessons;
 - increasing attention to pupils' literacy and the amount of rigorous discussion;
 - ensuring that higher-attaining pupils are always extended enough intellectually;
 - improving the rate of progress that pupils make in science; and
 - increasing the amount of teaching time each week to at least the 25 hours recommended nationally (## 16 21 25 27 38 40 45 48 51 52 58 59 64 66 71 98 111 and subject sections).
- (c) regularly monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching to consistent criteria across all subjects, in order to reinforce the majority that is good and improve the minority that has weaknesses (## 27 105 and subject sections).
- (d) measure accurately pupils' rate of progress and the school's overall performance in Years 7-9 by
 - collating, to one valid criterion across all subjects, information about pupils' attainments in school at least at the end of each of these years; and
 - using the information gained to assess individual pupils' progress accurately and to guide their future work coherently (## 12 91 104 105).
- (e) meet statutory educational requirements by ensuring that
 - religious education is taught to all pupils in Years 10-11 for an adequate period of time to cover the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus (## 25 57 63 and RE section);
 - all pupils in Years 7-11 receive sufficient teaching of information and communication technology to cover all the required aspects of the National Curriculum in sufficient depth (## 23 25 57 60 63 and ICT section).
[These are serious deficiencies that were identified as weaknesses in these two subjects at the last inspection in 1998 and have not been adequately remedied]; and
 - all pupils experience a daily act of collective worship (# 83).
- (f) improve the school's unsatisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual development, to match the sound standard achieved in their moral, social and cultural education (## 79-80).
- (g) secure the appointment of an appropriately qualified and experienced teacher to lead the generally good quality of education provided for pupils with special educational needs (# 70 110).
- (h) prepare a realistic plan to repaint those parts of the interior of the school that remain shabby (## 114).

In addition to the key issues above, other less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the school's future plan of action. These are indicated in paragraphs 19 20 28 41 60 62 64 73 78 85 87 90 92 93-96 98-99 104 114-115 116-117 and in subject sections.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	214
Number of formal discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	96

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	13	47	35	5	1	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons. The percentages do not total 100 because of "rounding".

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	No of pupils
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1010
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	165

Special educational needs

	Y7–Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	48
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	147

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	22
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	35

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	10.9%
National comparative data	7.7%

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	3.1%
National comparative data	1.1%

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for 1999-2000.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2000	101	96

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	15	50	37
	Girls	34	48	37
	Total	49	98	74
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	25 (35)	50 (47)	38 (33)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	3 (10)	18 (21)	9 (7)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	38	35	38
	Girls	54	39	41
	Total	92	74	79
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	47 (56)	38 (43)	40 (40)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	13 (22)	8 (12)	12 (15)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

Percentages in brackets refer to 1999.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	90	102	192

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	17	64	79
	Girls	25	87	94
	Total	42	151	173
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	22 (27)	79 (81)	90 (91)
	National	47 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to 1999.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	25.5 (27.5)
	National	38.4 (38.0)

Figures in brackets refer to 1999.

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of pupils aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	9	7	16

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	10.0	14.0	11.8	n/a	n/a	n/a
National	17.7 (17.7)	18.6 (18.1)	18.2 (17.9)	2.6 (2.7)	2.9 (2.8)	2.7 (2.8)

Figures in brackets refer to 1999.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	2
Indian	0
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	989
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	149	2
Other minority ethnic groups	7	1

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7–Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	56.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7–Y11

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	560

Deployment of teachers: Y7–Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.3
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Average teaching group size: Y7–Y11

Key Stage 3	25.2
Key Stage 4	23.7

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	2,570,537
Total expenditure	2,550,470
Expenditure per pupil	2,466
Balance brought forward from previous year	-48,589
Balance carried forward to next year	-28,522

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1010
Number of questionnaires returned	216

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	18	63	11	5	3
My child is making good progress in school.	23	65	9	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	21	44	18	13	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	51	17	6	2
The teaching is good.	19	62	12	1	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	20	51	19	9	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	39	46	9	1	5
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	40	54	3	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	15	51	21	7	6
The school is well led and managed.	26	57	5	5	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	20	55	13	3	9
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	16	45	15	7	17

Other issues raised by parents

There were additional comments from parents on 24 of the questionnaires returned.

Amongst the positive points mentioned were:

- the impressive leadership and approachability of the new headteacher; and
- the good quality of most of the teaching.

Amongst the few concerns expressed by parents were:

- the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils spoiling the learning of others;
- the inconsistency with which homework is set;
- the number of temporary teachers employed at the school; and
- insufficient information for parents about how their children are getting on at school.

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

ENGLISH

121. On entry to the school in Year 7, the proportion of pupils who reached the benchmarks of Levels 4 or 5 in the National Curriculum tests in their primary schools was well below the national average over the period 1997-2000. There was, however, a significant increase in the proportion of pupils gaining Level 4 in 2000. Results of the national tests in English at the end of Year 9 over the period 1997-2000 have varied widely, but have been well below average overall. Pupils' overall level of attainment in the Year 9 national tests in 2000 was well below average, when compared with schools of similar character. Although the attainment of girls is higher than that of boys, the overall attainment of both sexes is well below average.

122. Results in GCSE English language and English literature over the period 1997-2000 were well below the national average. In 2000 the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C, for example, was well below the national average. Over the past four years, however, pupils' overall performance in English has been better than in the other two core subjects of mathematics and science as well as in most of their other subjects. In both language and literature the girls' overall performance was better than that of boys, but still below the national average.

123. By the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9), pupils' overall standard in all aspects of language work is below average. The majority of pupils are, however, fairly fluent and confident readers. They have a satisfactory understanding of how to use a variety of approaches to reading and extract information for different writing purposes with fair competence. In a Year 7 class, for instance, pupils used an example of a research report to identify its structure and use of key words. Using Shakespeare's Sonnet 71, Year 8 pupils developed their understanding of the sonnet form well through discussion of its structure and by noting the number of syllables in each line and the rhyming pattern. In Year 9, pupils read Act 4, Scene 1 of *Macbeth* and recognised the ways in which the witches' use of such rhyming couplets as '*Eye of newt and toe of frog, Wool of bat and tongue of dog*' makes the words memorable for an audience.

124. Because teachers put considerable emphasis on ensuring that all pupils in Year 7 have a good understanding of spelling strategies, pupils extend their knowledge of phonemes and spelling patterns well – as, for instance, when they consider how word endings such as “-ing” may be added to words like “hit” and “bite”. Pupils in a Year 8 lesson drafted a holiday leaflet well, used their computer skills to add design features such as page layout and background, and then imported an illustration.

125. Pupils listen attentively. They regularly use textual references to support their interpretations of what they read. When using the “tennis ball” speech from Shakespeare's *Henry V*, for example, pupils thought about how humour is expressed through the use of puns and attempted to write a speech of their own that included puns. Pupils write in a range of styles and for different kinds of audiences. In Year 7 they develop key literacy skills through the National Literacy Project and are increasingly confident and competent in their use of grammar, punctuation and spelling.

126. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning in Years 7-9. They use group and class discussion to consider how texts are organised and how language creates effects. The regular use of “writing frames” helps pupils to think about the sequencing of their ideas. Most pupils make satisfactory use of textual evidence when planning writing activities.

127. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' overall level of attainment is below average. Higher-attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 select appropriate textual references to reinforce their points of view when writing. They identify and understand the impact of emotive language, as when reading a *Greenpeace* leaflet. A Year 11 class reading AS Byatt's *The July Ghost* and H G Wells's *The Red Room* considered satisfactorily how writers create atmosphere through the use of language. They noted examples of words that create mood, such as *trees blowing*, and consequently recognised the importance of sound. They then used these insights to write

an opening paragraph incorporating these features. Another Year 11 class read the verse short story, *Comrades*, by Robert Nichols and commented well on the significance of language and ideas – as when they reflected on the lines “*And the tears came scaldingly sweet He knew no help would come*” and discussed their importance. Pupils’ extended writing is generally of a satisfactory standard, with a small minority of more able pupils writing well-constructed and carefully argued essays.

128. By the end of Key Stage 4, many pupils effectively use a range of reading strategies on a suitable range of literary and non-literary texts. They interpret texts and use appropriate terminology, when discussing an author’s use of language and its effect on the reader. The writing of most pupils is of a satisfactory standard. A significant minority of pupils, however, have a weak grasp of the key literacy skills of spelling and grammar. The detail and accuracy of their writing is well below average.

129. Most pupils make sound progress in their work in Years 10 and 11. High-attaining pupils write in a sustained and mature style and elaborate on their interpretations of texts. The majority of pupils make sound progress in planning and organising their writing. They use sound reading strategies to skim texts, noting the key points in each paragraph. In small-group and whole-class discussion pupils effectively use brainstorming to structure their thinking. Pupils usually comment thoughtfully on the significance of language and ideas, when using literary texts.

130. Teaching is satisfactory overall in Years 7-11 and three lessons in Key Stage 4 were well taught. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and use it well to illuminate their teaching. Their planning usually includes clear objectives: in those lessons that have a strong organisational structure the objectives are well thought out and made explicit to pupils. In Key Stage 3, the implementation of the National Literacy pilot project has a positive effect on medium- and short-term planning. Objectives from the project’s *Teaching Framework* are used consistently and effectively in Year 7 and are being introduced in Year 8. This focused consistency of planning and teaching has already enhanced the progress of many pupils in Year 7.

131. English teachers work hard, enjoy their work and are concerned to help pupils to make progress. Discussions regularly feature in lessons and children are expected to answer questions orally. The tendency of some teachers, however, to both ask and answer questions themselves undermines the potential and opportunities of pupils’ oral work.

132. Pupils’ attitudes in Key Stages 3 and 4 are good. The majority of pupils enjoy the subject and listen attentively in class. In most lessons pupils concentrate on their lessons, are keen to learn and are well behaved. A minority of pupils, however, are disruptive in lessons and this problem undermines the quality of both teaching and learning.

133. Pupils’ study of literature and film makes a significant contribution to their moral and social development. For example, pupils considered thoughtfully the actions of two soldiers who tried to save Mr Gates in Robert Nichols’s verse story, *Comrades: An Episode*, and the different views of Curley’s wife in John Steinbeck’s novel, *Of Mice and Men*. The department organises some extracurricular activities, including poetry and drama workshops.

134. The subject has not had the benefit of a full-time, permanent head of department since 1998. The department is soundly managed by an acting head of department, but long-term decision-making has been limited. Administrative systems have been maintained, but there is insufficient rigour in the effective tracking and targeting of pupils from their entry to the school onwards and few opportunities for the department to standardise pupils’ attainment across Key Stage 3: teachers’ assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in particular vary widely in quality. Departmental documentation is sound in Key Stage 4. That for Key Stage 3 is being revised to incorporate the changes being made as a result of the National Literacy pilot project. The assessment of speaking and listening at the end of Key Stage 3, which is currently undertaken in both English and drama, requires coordination across the two departments.

135. Although departmental planning for the future is broadly adequate, there is an urgent need to assess the impact of the National Literacy pilot on teaching and learning. The current system of organising most classes with a full range of attainment and ability within them does not maximise the learning opportunities for

all pupils, including the gifted and talented. The department has completed an ICT audit and is keen to exploit new technology.

136. In other subjects across the school the overall standard of reading, writing, speaking and listening is below average overall. The teaching of literacy is more structured in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4 and reflects the intentions of the National Literacy Strategy well. The display of lists of key words to help to ensure correct spelling is evident in subjects such as English, history and PE. Pupils use writing frames well in English, mathematics, geography and history to plan and sequence their ideas for writing.

137. **DRAMA** is taught in both key stages and is managed within the Arts Faculty. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment is a little below average overall. Most pupils plan what they intend to do and evaluate their performance to a satisfactory level. Working collaboratively, they sequence ideas and events and subsequently incorporate them into their presentations. In a Year 7 class, for example, pupils were introduced to the concept of physical theatre, as they worked in groups to create drama sculptures. A Year 8 class, working on the theme of Rogan's Fair, in which they needed to consider the attitudes of others to travellers, made good progress in well-planned and challenging warm-up activities and then in reflecting on how to interpret characters and roles through mime.

138. Results in GCSE over the last four years have been below the national average. In 2000 the proportion of pupils entered that gained a grade in the range A*-C was significantly below the national figure. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' overall level of attainment is a little below average. In preparation for the final examination, pupils in Year 11 worked on the theme of "body image", contrasting characters who wanted to diet and those who did not. Pupils extended their interpretation of characters satisfactorily, as they considered how such motives as selfishness or thinking about a self-image could be revealed through dialogue.

139. The quality of teaching ranges from satisfactory to good in Key Stage 3 and is sound overall. In Key Stage 4 the quality of teaching is good overall. The two teachers of the subject have a very good specialist knowledge, use it profitably in class and have high expectations of pupils. Lessons include objectives that are written up and clearly displayed.

140. Pupils' attitudes are satisfactory overall in Key Stage 3. Pupils enjoy the subject, are generally enthusiastic and well behaved, and respond positively to one another. A small minority of pupils, however, are readily disruptive, undermining the quality of teaching and learning. In Key Stage 4 pupils' attitudes are good: pupils are keen to extend and improve their work in drama and collaborate very effectively with one another and their teachers.

141. The drama department has a detailed scheme of work that generally provides excellent guidance for staff. It does not, however, incorporate guidance on how to secure clear progression in the subject. Assessment is carried out effectively across both key stages. As noted earlier, a consistent assessment of speaking and listening at the end of Key Stage 3 requires a fully coordinated approach with the English department.

142. The space for teaching the subject is adequate overall, but has poor acoustics. At the time of the last inspection it was noted that the accommodation was in urgent need of redecoration and refurbishment. This has not yet been carried out.

MATHEMATICS

143. The proportion of pupils who achieved either the basic standard or higher levels expected of 14 year olds in the 2000 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 was well below average. Based upon the average points scored by all pupils, the school's results were well below the average for all schools and the average of those schools in similar economic circumstances. The results in previous years were also well below average. There is little discernible difference between the attainment of boys and girls.

144. The proportion of pupils who achieved a grade in the A*-C range in the GCSE examination in 2000 was well below the national average. A much smaller than average proportion of pupils achieved the highest (A* or A) grades and the proportion who achieved grades A*-B was low. Over recent years the proportion of A*-C grades obtained has remained constant at about half the national average and has not improved since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils who achieved a grade A*-G was below average. Based upon the average grade achieved by all pupils in the school who were entered for the examination, pupils made better progress in mathematics than in about half of their other subjects. Boys perform overall a little better than girls, contrary to the national trend.

145. By the end of Key Stage 3, the standard of work of a smaller than average proportion of pupils is at the level expected of 14 year olds. Pupils in the top sets, however, make sound progress and reach the expected standards in, for example, arithmetic, algebra, geometry and statistics. These pupils apply their knowledge competently to solving more complex problems such as finding the surface area and volume of both regular and irregular prisms.

146. Gifted and talented pupils make fast progress through the scheme of work and are frequently provided with extra, more challenging problems where, for instance, they generalise about the patterns and relationships they find in extended investigations and justify their hypotheses by rigorous analysis of their data. Pupils with special educational needs make sound progress overall, in response to the good (and often very good) teaching they receive. In one very good lesson, for example, these pupils gained confident insight into the probability of certain events happening, by their teacher's imaginative use of coloured billiard balls drawn from a bag. One pupil correctly, and enthusiastically, predicted "evens", when the bag contained balls of more than two colours.

147. Many pupils in Year 9 work at a steady, unhurried pace in lessons and, with help, make satisfactory progress on such standard aspects of mathematics as finding the mean of a given set of data. The achievement of the majority of pupils, however, is limited by poor recall of previously learned skills and techniques and by insufficient understanding of earlier work. For example, a set of lower-attaining pupils had to relearn the basic concepts and terminology of angles and how to use a protractor to measure and draw them, before they could proceed to learn the geometry specified in the scheme of work.

148. The attainment of many pupils on arrival at the school is well below average. During their first year they consolidate much of what they learned at primary school and go on to extend their skills and knowledge of arithmetic, geometry and data-handling towards the expected level. A good emphasis is placed upon numeracy and pupils' confidence in their ready recall of basic number facts and methods of mental calculation is improving. Many lessons begin with a short session of mental mathematics, sometimes providing each pupil with a small whiteboard on which to write answers to quick-fire questions and hold up for their teacher to see before cleaning it ready for the next question. This has the added advantage of providing the teacher with instant assessment of pupils' attainment.

149. In Year 8, pupils generally make steady, systematic progress and acquire an appropriate range of skills and techniques of the subject. They generally respond well to the teaching of numeracy, increase their speed of recall of basic facts and improve their methods of mental calculation. A set of average-attaining pupils, for example, used a booklet, devised by their teacher, in which to write their answers to a broad range of appropriate mental arithmetic questions. They responded keenly to the questions, put to them at a fast pace, and were eager to improve upon previous scores. They discussed alternative ways of performing mental calculations enthusiastically and with increasing confidence. A small group of gifted and talented pupils from Years 7 and 8 are well taught by a university tutor. They make very fast progress through the scheme of work and their learning is enriched by a range of challenging and interesting problems.

150. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment is below average overall. Higher-attaining pupils achieve the standards expected of 16 year olds. They gain a good working knowledge of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry and data-handling and use the skills they learn to solve problems in everyday contexts successfully. The gifted and talented pupils show flair in completing extended investigations of mathematical situations. For example, one such pupil had investigated the numbers of square tiles needed to make a given

shape of different sizes. The problem was explored systematically, patterns were identified, and general conclusions were reached and then justified by cogent, mathematical argument.

151. Only about half the pupils in the top set, however, are entered for the higher tier of the GCSE examination. The majority of pupils in the year group are entered for the intermediate tier and most of them gain a satisfactory level of competence in many appropriate skills and techniques. For example, they handle inequalities well and shade correctly on a graph the region representing, say, $y \geq 2x + 3$. They calculate successfully the relevant averages of data recorded in cumulative frequency tables.

152. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of pupils could achieve higher standards. Such pupils learn many basic skills and techniques, but lack confidence in applying them in unfamiliar situations or forget what they learned earlier - such as ready recall of the difference between 2^3 and 3^2 . They have little sense of urgency or determination to make better progress and gain a firm understanding of the subject, and many hamper their progress by frequent absences. In consequence, pupils' attainment in GCSE examinations is below what it could be. This, in part, is also due to too much teaching that helps them to learn basic skills and techniques, but fails to develop their independence and mathematical thinking sufficiently. Low-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in a limited range of topics and generally achieve an average level of competence in numeracy.

153. Progress in Year 10 is broadly satisfactory. Pupils in the top set make good progress in, for instance, understanding how to use the common trigonometrical ratios. By skilful teaching, at a very good pace, they readily learned to solve the more difficult equations that arise from certain applications of the trigonometrical ratios to right-angled triangles. They subsequently went on to find unknown lengths in more complicated diagrams. Low-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make sound progress in a broad range of numeracy (such as the construction of pie charts) by thorough and systematic teaching, despite a few pupils making hard work of such calculations as $360^0 \div 10$.

154. Pupils' response to the teaching they receive is good overall and occasionally very good. Their attitudes are generally positive and cooperative. Most pupils work steadily at the tasks set, but without much urgency. Many have pride in their work and present it neatly and logically, using mathematical symbols and terminology correctly. The presentation of written work of too large a minority, however, lacks sufficient care: many answers are sequences of unexplained calculations, lacking any mathematical precision, and fail to convey pupils' understanding, especially when the final answer is wrong. Equally, a large proportion of pupils, although willing to try, lack the confident recall of correct terminology to explain their contribution to a discussion of, for instance, mental methods of calculation.

155. Behaviour in lessons is usually good. Classrooms are generally very orderly and teachers are vigilant and effective in controlling minor disruptions. Most pupils respect their teachers and respond positively to admonition. They form constructive relationships with their teachers and peers, and frequently share humour. They are ready to help one another to clarify misunderstandings.

156. Teaching is good overall throughout the school. In about three lessons in five it is good and in one lesson in five is very good. The proportion of good teaching reported in the previous inspection has been sustained and the weaknesses of insufficient use of ICT and the need to set more challenging work for high attainers have been largely resolved.

157. Teachers are suitably qualified and have a good range of relevant experience. The contribution made by non-specialists is effective, and some of it is very good; it does not adversely affect pupils' attainment. Good subject knowledge is shared well amongst the teachers and generally ensures that lessons closely match the needs of pupils. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can do, however, are occasionally too low to ensure that pupils achieve as well as they could.

158. For example, during a review of GCSE questions from past examination papers with the top set in Year 11, the teacher told pupils how to answer the questions, doing all the thinking for them, and failed to develop the pupils' confidence and independence to tackle such questions without help. Equally, in several lessons the pace of learning was too slow, in order to accommodate the rate of learning of the lowest

attainers, with the result that others were held back. In such lessons questioning and discussion do not sufficiently challenge the majority of the class. Occasionally, a few opportunities to extend high-attaining pupils are missed, because questions do not contain that extra “twist” to extend learning yet more.

159. Methods of teaching include many clear demonstrations and explanations of mathematical skills and techniques. In the best lessons good questioning develops pupils’ understanding and confidence well. During their introduction to the concept of a vector quantity, for example, pupils in a top set in Year 8, prompted by their teacher’s skilful questioning, drew well upon their scientific knowledge of such concepts as velocity, acceleration and force to gain a secure understanding of the subject. Equally, a top set in Year 9 derived a formula for finding the sum of the angles of a polygon, when given the number of sides, through careful and systematic questioning. By demanding that pupils explain their contributions to the discussion, the teacher developed pupils’ understanding and confidence well. In a few lessons pupils make substantial progress because teachers alternate short bursts of teaching, during which well-posed questions help pupils to clarify their understanding, with tasks to be completed in a given time. This strategy is not used often enough as a means of increasing the rate of learning.

160. Skills and routines are generally practised effectively. Pupils are taught well to use them to tackle problems in everyday settings, especially in Years 10 and 11. Practical work is used effectively to help pupils to understand new ideas and to help low-attaining pupils to consolidate basic skills. For example, a set of average-attaining pupils in Year 9 enlarged geometrical figures drawn on squared paper, to help them to deduce the relationship between the areas of similar shapes and their corresponding sides. Equally, a group of pupils with special educational needs in Year 8 used a range of practical activities, designed imaginatively by their teacher, to consolidate their knowledge of metric measures.

161. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to investigate mathematical problems that require them to decide upon lines of enquiry, justify their thinking and hypotheses, and reach general conclusions from their working. Such problems are used well to challenge high-attaining pupils. Occasionally lessons begin or end with a puzzle that requires pupils to think creatively. Such strategies arouse pupils’ interest and establish a positive climate for learning, although they are not used enough.

162. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally good. Teachers work hard and patiently to manage pupils’ behaviour and to ensure a calm climate for learning. Occasionally the pace of learning is too slow, because pupils do not have targets to be achieved in a specified time. Computers are used to enhance learning: spreadsheets and LOGO are used effectively to develop pupils’ mathematical thinking. Text books are used well.

163. During lessons teachers generally make thorough, ongoing assessment of pupils’ understanding and quickly clarify many misunderstandings. Formal written assessments are made with sufficient regularity. The marking of pupils’ work is generally regular: brief, encouraging comments are frequently added, but challenging comments are rare. Pupils’ attainment and progress are not clearly and consistently conveyed to pupils. Homework is set regularly. It usually consolidates pupils’ learning and is occasionally challenging – especially that for GCSE coursework. It is underexploited as a way of intensifying learning, however, in Years 7-9. The subject is well led and managed by an experienced head of faculty. Teachers’ morale is generally good and the subject is well placed to sustain improvement.

164. Pupils’ general standard of numeracy is broadly satisfactory and supports their learning in other subjects effectively. In science and in design and technology, for example, pupils handle numbers well and use appropriate degrees of accuracy and relevant units of measurement, with correct abbreviations. In the same two subjects and in geography and history pupils draw and interpret appropriate graphs; where necessary, they recognise relationships between variables. Most pupils use calculators well, but some rely too heavily upon them to perform trivial calculations that should be done mentally: this is especially true of older pupils, because mental arithmetic has not been taught to them in a sufficiently systematic way.

SCIENCE

165. The overall level of attainment of the Year 7 intake of pupils has been well below the national average for several years. Whilst there has been a steady increase in attainment on entry to the school, the current Year 7 has only one in every six pupils with a higher grade (Level 5 or 6), compared to a national proportion of one in every three. Science attainment on entry to the school is, however, slightly higher than attainment in English and mathematics.

166. In 2000, at the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' overall attainment was well below average in the national tests: two in every five pupils gained a minimum of Level 5, compared to the national average of three in five. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher Level 6 was only one third of the national figure. The science test results have fallen over the last five years, compared to the national picture. From the limited evidence available, this decline is in line with pupils' overall standard on entry to the school, but suggests no "added value" during pupils' first three years in the school. By the end of Key Stage 3 the subject is noticeably and consistently weaker than mathematics, particularly at the higher levels. In this school there is no significant difference in the overall attainment of boys and girls.

167. The majority of pupils in Key Stage 4 follow a GCSE double award science course. Approximately one third are entered for the higher-tiered papers and the rest for the restricted foundation papers which carry a maximum of grade C. In recent years the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C has been well below the national average. In 2000, for example, only seven pupils gained a grade B or higher, with 19 per cent attaining at least a grade C. Girls' achievement was slightly less than that of boys. Pupils' success is, in the main, commensurate with their earlier level of attainment. Their overall attainment in this subject is, however, less than they achieve in the other two core subjects as well as in most of their other subjects.

168. By the end of Key Stage 3 the standard of work of a larger than average proportion of pupils is below that expected of 14 year olds. Pupils in the top sets generally make satisfactory progress, but work is seldom extended beyond a routine level and often lacks depth. Pupils of all levels of attainment work safely during practical work, handling equipment confidently and correctly. They record their results with reasonable care and the more able pupils remember their observations in some detail several days later.

169. The department has an extensive range of investigations that are also used specifically to assess pupils' progress. The lack of liaison with local primary schools, however, results in inadequate follow-through from the pupils' previous study of the subject. Some members of staff have undertaken specialised training that assists pupils to adopt a scientific approach, search out patterns during observations and accelerate their learning. Pupils generally make better progress in the practical work led by these staff. Pupils in a Year 7 class, for example, in analysing the growth patterns of tree branches, were enthralled as they used a gauge to establish patterns in the branch and twig network.

170. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' overall level of attainment is well below the national average in GCSE. Using average scores, the school is in the lower quarter of all schools and in the lowest five per cent for schools that have similar proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was below average.

171. Experimental work is broadly satisfactory. Investigations in Key Stage 4, however, often take up too much time, because the short, 45-minute lessons often do not allow pupils to collect sufficient data to evaluate their findings and draw conclusions in the same lesson. Pupils demonstrate fair competency in such aspects of numeracy as presenting results in tabular and graphical form. Older pupils appreciate size and the use of indices as a means of "shorthand" recording. This was evident, for example, in a Year 11 class on the electromagnetic spectrum where pupils linked changes in wavelength and frequency to many technological applications. An excellent feature of pupils' work in Year 11 is their use of software to present data.

172. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress throughout the school: their work is coordinated well by a science teacher who has had additional training for the needs of these pupils. This good progress was evident in a Year 10 class, for instance, where pupils described the difference between a soap and a

detergent, and in a Year 7 group where pupils correctly sequenced events in the purification of substances. Gifted and talented pupils generally make satisfactory progress.

173. Pupils' written work often shows insufficient attention to presentation, such as would be gained by the use of a ruler to underline headings. The result of poor layout is that pupils are not assisted to think in a logical manner or to display a sense of pride in their work. Extended writing is infrequent. The need for accurate spelling and for a clear understanding of scientific words is not emphasised enough. Although scientific words are sometimes displayed in laboratories, their correct usage and definitions are insufficiently stressed during lessons or when teachers mark pupils' work. Pupils are seldom required to read aloud in class. There is neither a department-wide policy nor consistent practice on the central aspects of literacy.

174. Teaching is satisfactory overall throughout the school. In a third of lessons seen teaching was good (or better) and was very good in one in every nine classes. It was satisfactory in the rest, apart from two lessons that were unsatisfactory. In good lessons teachers make a prompt start, have clearly stated aims, divide topics into short steps and revisit key aspects frequently. These lessons usually end with a thorough review that ensures that pupils leave knowing clearly what skill they have accomplished or the knowledge they have acquired.

175. In unsatisfactory lessons pupils are not given sufficient help or guidance for lengthy periods of time. The pace and challenge of lessons is too low and teachers infrequently give the supplementary information or illustrations that are necessary. In contrast, the very good lessons incorporate an appropriate variety of teaching styles and interactively and thoroughly engage pupils in what they learn. In one lesson in Year 10 on food chains, for example, a pupil gained very valuable experience and insight by becoming the teacher for a few minutes and analysing the main features for the class. In this lesson many examples were used to illustrate the importance of citizens understanding science – such as the effects of foot and mouth disease on the food chain. Homework was set in most of the lessons observed in accordance with the school's schedule.

176. Overall, the department insufficiently plans to take individual pupils' needs into account in its work. Over 70 per cent of pupils are taught in classes with either a full range or a very wide range of attainment and ability within them. In too few lessons is work sufficiently matched to the individual needs of pupils, with the result that many do not receive teaching at the level they require. Occasionally, through the use of effective, wide-ranging questions during whole-class discussions, higher-attaining pupils in particular are offered a deep insight into the subtleties and wonder of science. This kind of searching questioning resulted in some pupils becoming very excited about what they were studying - as when the effect of heat on a range of chemicals was being reviewed in a Year 8 class.

177. The marking of pupils' work is inconsistently done across the department. In some cases teachers mark books with clear aims, helpful comments and in suitable detail, but too often they employ transient ticks as the main feature. Higher-attaining pupils rarely receive additional comments to extend their insight. Incorrect spellings are not restricted to technical and scientific words and are often overlooked. The books of mid-range pupils show much incomplete and missed work and there is no departmental policy for the completion of work missed as a consequence of pupils' absence. Pupils are helpfully encouraged to acquire revision guides for both Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE.

178. The department has well-developed schemes of work and many sections of these set out objectives for pupils of different levels of attainment. These schemes of work are being reviewed to take account of recent national initiatives. The end-of-topic summary sheets for pupils provide a useful summary of what has been learned, including new skills acquired. Very appropriate end-of-unit tests effectively cover the National Curriculum programme of study. Staff have worked hard to prepare an extensive stock of support materials that cover all topics for each year group. These sheets are, however, often insecurely attached into pupils' exercise books with the result that they frequently become lost and unavailable for revision purposes.

179. The marks from unit tests are well logged and standardised, and comparisons are made with the long-term predictions of pupils' likely attainment. The results are, however, insufficiently shared with individual pupils for them to monitor their progress or as an encouragement to improve further. The department's emphasis on termly and annual checks is insufficiently matched by a similarly close review of pupils' day-to-

day progress or the involvement of individual pupils in judging their own progress. Mid-range pupils in Year 11, for instance, are often unable to say either what grade they have achieved to date or their target grade for GCSE. Top-set pupils, on the other hand, are generally aware of their potential and confident in talking about their future goals and aspirations. Parents are informed of their children's progress only once each year.

180. Attitudes to learning are generally sound. In most lessons pupils behave well and learn with interest, but a small minority are often content with minimal effort. Top sets always comprise interested and committed pupils who are willing to participate in round-class discussions and are fully motivated during practical work. They take suitable responsibility for their own learning and have a good grasp of, for example, a wide range of abstract chemical concepts. Mid-range pupils generally adopt a steady approach to learning. Pupils, in general, respond positively in lessons that require their active participation – as, for example, in a lesson on conduction, radiation and convection, where the transfer of heat was modelled by the movement of pupils around the room. There are good relationships between teachers and pupils.

181. The department is conscientiously led and is efficiently serviced by a team of dedicated technicians. A handbook clearly sets out policies and practices for much of the daily life of the department, but requires further detail on policies for literacy and numeracy and for work with high-attaining pupils. These elements also require embedding consistently in teaching routines.

182. The excellent relationships between teaching and non-teaching members of staff are part of the good team spirit that operates throughout the department. Staff who have other responsibilities in the school sometimes experience a tension between their love of the subject and their wider pastoral commitments. The ongoing problem of recruitment to one teaching post has been covered by a succession of short-term supply staff: the resultant lack of continuity has impeded the progress of some classes of pupils.

183. Since the last inspection progress has been made in assessment and some improvements made to the accommodation. Great strides had been made in the use of new technology, which has been wholeheartedly embraced by staff. Throughout the inspection, ICT always enriched the lessons in which it was used – as, for example, the appropriate use of CD-ROMs connected to PC projectors. Staff take full advantage of the school's ICT suites and the small number of departmentally based computers. In one lesson, for instance, pupils' interest was gripped by the use of interactive software that simulated electrical circuits: pupils demonstrated their understanding of parallel and series circuits, fuses and Ohm's Law. A closed-circuit TV camera was used in many lessons to enlarge the images of biological samples for display over a TV monitor.

184. The department offers revision sessions, a science club and excursions to such places as Oldbury Power Station. Opportunities are offered to Year 9 pupils to join the local authority's enrichment courses in the Easter vacation, but very few take up the offer. Some class sets of textbooks have been purchased, but more are needed in both key stages. Much of the accommodation is well worn, but some laboratories have attractive displays that improve the learning environment. The limited water supply in some laboratories restricts the type of practical work that can be carried out.

ART

185. Over the period 1998-2000 the proportion of pupils gaining grades in the range A*-C in GCSE was well below the national average; that of pupils gaining grades in the range A*-G was broadly average. Few pupils achieved the highest grades. Pupils' performance in the years 1996-1998 and 2000 was significantly below what they achieved in most of their other school subjects, whilst in 1999 it was significantly above that level.

186. By the age of 14, pupils' attainment is average overall. Pupils have better drawing, painting and craft skills than knowledge and understanding about artists and their work. Their overall standard of reading and their skill in writing and discussion are a little below average. In the graphics work connected with banknotes, those pupils who were actively involved in discussion looked closely and gained greater understanding of currency design than those who were only expected to listen and follow the teacher's instructions. The

majority of pupils draw from observation at a good, average level, refining their ideas and working successfully with a range of materials. Sketchbooks are used well for homework, but not in class. Few pupils willingly read the text that accompanies pictures in the books provided for them.

187. Pupils enter the school at the age of 11 with a very mixed range of experience in this subject. A recent baseline test carried out in the school shows that they generally draw well from observation. In Year 7 the best work is in the collage interpretations of a cup and saucer, but painting skills are less well controlled and below average. In Year 8 pupils' understanding of Egyptian culture is poor, when compared with their practical skill in modelling Egyptian artefacts. A significant proportion of pupils in this year group lack the curiosity to find out about the culture of Ancient Egypt and are simply content to copy images. This uninquisitive tendency and pupils' frequent absence limit progress. Other Year 8 pupils made good progress in constructing and decorating "good and evil" masks. In this group pupils successfully solved the practical problems they encountered.

188. By the age of 16, pupils' attainment is average overall. The highest standards occur in workbooks, where the best experimental studies show good understanding of techniques and an individuality of style in the work produced. As in Years 7-9, some of the best work is found in the printmaking, collage and observational studies of natural objects. Knowledge and understanding are deeper when pupils have the opportunity for first-hand experience – as, for example on a visit to the Tate Modern gallery in London, where pupils were excited by the sudden realisation that they had been looking at "real" works of art. Encounters of this kind are all too rare.

189. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in both key stages, because their needs are usually carefully considered and their work is based on effective teaching strategies. Gifted and talented pupils in Key Stage 3 do not have sufficient challenge and their progress is slower than might be expected. In Year 10, pupils make good progress in the "texture" project, where pupils talk enthusiastically about the artist Max Ernst and the *frottage* technique.

190. All pupils are encouraged to set targets, to try to complete their course work on time: whereas higher attainers generally plan for the possibility of working on a number of tasks, the lower-attaining pupils do not, in general, have this ability. Boys tend not to work as hard as girls, because they often take rests or gossip, when they feel they have nothing further to do, and lack motivation. Pupils' standard of literacy is below average, although pupils with special educational needs particularly benefit from the banks of statements and key words that are displayed in each art room.

191. The quality of teaching is good overall throughout the school. It is more consistently good in Years 10-11 than in Years 7-9. In Key Stage 3 teaching quality varies from unsatisfactory to very good and is satisfactory overall, whereas in Key Stage 4 it is usually good and occasionally very good.

192. In Key Stage 3, large class sizes and cramped working conditions restrict both the scale and range of work undertaken. The assumed potential for poor behaviour leads to teachers' reluctance to provide opportunities for discussion or brainstorming. Whilst key specialist words are displayed, opportunities are missed to involve pupils in reading, and on one occasion a hand-written worksheet did not help two pupils with known literacy problems. Teachers are well qualified and experienced, but do not have expertise in ceramics. They have good knowledge and understanding of the subject and about artists, and plan interesting projects for their pupils.

193. The Max Ernst project in Year 10 is a good example of a theme that is very successful with all pupils, but with boys in particular, who excel when given the opportunity to develop their work in the computer room. Plans to use computers have been limited by resources, with the result that only two year groups have any significant experience of the use of ICT within the subject. Homework is set and marked regularly and written comments on it are helpful to pupils. Teachers have only recently begun to assess pupils' work in Key Stage 3 to National Curriculum levels. The resultant analytical work has already raised their awareness of pupils' strengths and weaknesses.

194. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally good. Pupils usually support one another well within lessons. This is particularly evident in the computer room. Problems of discipline arise when the teacher tries to interrupt practical activities for evaluation exercises or tries to engage pupils in discussion – something that many do not readily recognise as relevant to practical art. In these circumstances, and occasionally in practical activities, behaviour deteriorates, noise levels rise and progress slows.

195. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory overall in providing a broad and balanced range of two- and three-dimensional activities (including ICT), but in constrained working conditions and with very limited resources. Statutory curricular requirements are met. There has been no formal monitoring of teaching and learning, with the result that parallel teaching groups sometimes receive very different learning experiences. The progress made in improving the weaknesses identified at the last inspection in accommodation and storage in particular is unsatisfactory. The department lacks audio-visual and computer facilities. Teaching plans and methods to engage pupils' intellects as well as their eyes and hands remain sketchy.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

196. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is below the national expectation for the subject. In the National Curriculum assessments of pupils' work made by teachers at the end of Year 9 in both 1999 and 2000, the proportion of pupils achieving at least Level 5 was well below the average of national results. Boys' and girls' results were similar overall. A low proportion of pupils reached the higher, Level 6; none achieved above it. The dip in girls' performance in 2000 was because of inadequate coverage of part of the syllabus as a result of staff shortages. At this key stage the school's results in design and technology were broadly similar to those in most other subjects. From the evidence of pupils' current design work and practical projects, attainment is a little below average.

197. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a broad experience of the basics of good design practice, using a variety of materials, techniques and constructional processes. They know about the working properties of materials and use tools with reasonable accuracy. They are familiar with basic circuits and their components. They understand the basic principles of nutrition to create food products and know about the risk assessment and quality control checks used in the food industry. Pupils' explanations of their designs show clear gains in subject knowledge from Year 7 onwards.

198. Pupils produce relevant information from their research, to write specifications for their product designs – such as a textile bag for a holiday, a kitchen towel holder or a bottle-opener. They have insufficient experience and a low standard, however, in computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM). The weakest work shows primitive drawing, with a heavy reliance on the use of felt-tip pens, limited explanation of ideas and poor spelling. Pupils generally make satisfactory progress in Years 7-9, because they are set clear learning objectives that are well matched to their individual needs. They know the specific criteria by which their work is assessed and what they need to do to improve.

199. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, because their needs are carefully considered in the planning of work. Pupils' individual education action plans (IEPs) are used well and regularly updated. In Key Stage 3 pupils learn soundly, partly because of worksheets that are easy to read and because clear displays of technical terms and units of measurement are used effectively in all teaching rooms to improve pupils' literacy and numeracy.

200. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' overall level of attainment is broadly average. Results in the GCSE examination in 2000 matched the national average for all schools, although results were slightly below those of 1999. Boys achieve marginally above the national average for boys, but girls achieve a little below the national average for girls. The most successful aspects of the subject in GCSE were resistant materials and graphics products. The least successful were food technology and textiles. In these latter courses pupils' progress was held back by a shortage of teaching expertise: the school has found great difficulty in recruiting suitable specialist teachers, either full-time or temporary, with the result that some classes have had five temporary (including non-specialist) teachers. Despite these difficulties, the department has successfully

maintained its overall GCSE results in line with the national average since the last inspection. GCSE data show that pupils make good progress in the subject, compared to results in most of their other subjects.

201. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' attainment in designing is mostly average. Pupils use appropriate sources of information, including ICT, for their designs, but the range of these designs is sometimes limited. Standards of graphics are at least average and higher-attaining pupils give detailed explanations to support their ideas. Pupils create more complex designs and produce models to scale in this key stage – as, for example, in graphics products when they create designs for shops. They generally select and use materials and tools skilfully to achieve good levels of accuracy and finish. High standards of creative practical work are a strong feature of the department's work. A good standard of literacy is seen in many well-written reports that are produced to a high standard by the use of appropriate applications of ICT to present data.

202. In Key Stage 4, assessment data is used to plan a very close match of materials and teaching approaches to pupils' needs. In lessons throughout the school the learning support assistant, trained in workshop skills, enables pupils to work with tools and equipment safely and confidently to achieve good standards. In June 2000, a talented 15 year old pupil won a national award for his craftsmanship in furniture design, when he made a storage unit, including a wine rack, out of mahogany.

203. Pupils enjoy their lessons. They arrive promptly, usually full of enthusiasm and well prepared. They respond well to the variety of activities presented to them. Pupils come from a large number of contributory primary schools: their experience and attainment in the subject are very varied when they arrive in Year 7 and usually well below the national average. From Year 7 onwards, pupils are encouraged to come to clubs and other after-school events to extend their interests in designing and making. They generally work hard, because the teachers expect high endeavour. The well-organised lessons have good pace and purpose. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is usually good, although a few behave badly if the teacher is not firm enough. Some pupils react negatively to temporary staff.

204. The quality of teaching is good overall throughout the school. It is always at least satisfactory, usually good and sometimes very good. Teachers are enthusiastic specialists with deep knowledge of their subjects. They plan effectively as a team. Topic booklets show well-structured theory and an appropriate emphasis on literacy. Parents say that the school helps their children to learn and make progress, owing to the enjoyable teaching and learning they receive in the subject. Teachers plan lessons skilfully to develop pupils' creative and analytical thinking for designing and manufacturing. Homework is well used. Marking is detailed and frequently done, so helping pupils to make good progress. Advice on how to improve work is generally communicated well to pupils.

205. This department is a credit to the school. It has strong leadership that provides effective coordination of the subject. The department's documents are well written and contribute to effective management. National Curriculum requirements are met in both key stages. The day-to-day working of the department is good: specialist staff work well as an integrated team. Weaknesses identified in the last report have been soundly addressed. Progress since 1998 includes a better use of assessment information to raise pupils' standards. There are, however, no vocational courses to extend pupils' study options in Key Stage 4. A notable feature of the department are the strong links established with industry and the community to enhance teaching and learning resources for pupils – as, for example, the external financial support received from a company for the purchase of five computers and a printer for the department.

206. Technical support is of good quality, but is insufficient for six staff in scattered teaching rooms. In consequence, teachers spend relatively unproductive time on routine maintenance and lesson preparation at the expense of teaching. In Key Stage 3, aspects of CAD/CAM are not sufficiently covered, especially in textiles. Ongoing difficulties associated with the new computer network restrict teaching: for example, the plotter/CAM cutter is no longer connected, so it cannot be incorporated into project work in Key Stage 4, and access to the Internet for research is difficult. The fact that teaching areas are located in different parts of the school hinders the efficient sharing of resources, especially ICT. Storage facilities are inadequate.

GEOGRAPHY

207. Pupils' overall level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9) is below that expected nationally. When teachers assessed pupils' work at the end of Year 9 in 2000, results indicated that pupils' attainment was well below the national average.

208. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' overall level of attainment is below the national norm. The GCSE results in 2000 were below the national average, with girls achieving better results than boys. Few pupils achieve the highest A* or A grades. Pupils' performance was, however, above what they achieved in most of their other subjects in the school. Results have improved steadily, including those at the highest levels, since the previous inspection. The department analyses GCSE results carefully. Clear and well thought out strategies have been implemented to raise standards still further.

209. Pupils with special educational needs complete work accurately and make steady progress, because work is carefully designed to meet their needs. Teachers regularly provide revised worksheets, simplified language, word lists and other help to underpin their work. There is regular liaison with the learning support assistants who work in classrooms. Higher-attaining pupils are assisted by activities that challenge them to draw very specific conclusions from information provided and to produce well-structured, extended pieces of work.

210. Pupils have a satisfactory basic knowledge of the subject. By the end of Year 9 they can describe what landscapes, places and environments are like, but have difficulty in explaining how features are formed and how they change. By Year 11 pupils have made good progress and use their knowledge to understand why changes take place. One group of pupils in Year 11, for example, studied the change in the location of the iron and steel industry in South Wales. They used their knowledge of the industry to list quickly its main features in 1860 and today. They then successfully used this information and a map to explain the changes that had taken place in the industry during that time and gave accurate reasons why it had moved from an inland to a coastal location.

211. Higher-attaining pupils have a good understanding of the links between people and their environment – as, for instance, how increasing use of energy affects the environment. In Years 10-11 they have a sound knowledge of examples of the geographical features they study and give a reasoned viewpoint on such geographical issues as the development of quarrying on the Hebridean Island of Harris.

212. Pupils efficiently extract information from a range of resource material, read maps and use an atlas. By the end of Year 9 and in Years 10-11 pupils have a good understanding of geographical fieldwork methods of collecting and analysing data and drawing conclusions. Overall, however, written work is below average - particularly in Years 7-9, where spelling, punctuation and the structure of extended pieces of writing are weak.

213. Teachers work hard to improve the quality of written work, and with some success. In one lesson in Year 10, for instance, pupils studied proposals for a ring road in Bristol. They worked in pairs to order their information with the help of a framework. They then worked individually to write a draft paragraph on a structured worksheet, before completing their piece of work.

214. The quality of teaching is good in Years 7-9 and very good in Years 10-11. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject. They use it effectively to illustrate their explanations and to ensure that all pupils understand topics. A group of pupils in Year 8, for instance, used correct geographical terms to explain what happens to rain. The teacher quickly asked pupils to look out of the window at the school buildings and grounds where it had been raining. He then very effectively used his knowledge and expertise to provide a clear explanation of what was happening. As a result, all pupils gained an increased and clear understanding of the topic.

215. Lessons are planned carefully and incorporate a wide variety of purposeful activities. In the best lessons clear objectives for the lesson are shared with pupils, lessons start briskly with a review of previous work and proceed with a lively explanation or an exciting resource to interest and inspire the pupils. In Years

10-11 lessons invariably challenge pupils to think and to use their knowledge in a new context, although this is not a feature of all lessons in Years 7-9.

216. In one lesson in Year 11, for example, pupils studied the relationship between those countries that are less and those that are more economically developed. The teacher swiftly outlined the purpose of the lesson and reviewed previous work with well-directed questions. Pupils then watched a very well chosen, short video of the banana trade between the West Indies and the United Kingdom, illustrating the various stages passed through from picking the fruit to selling it. The lesson continued at a rapid pace, with pupils using knowledge they learned previously to estimate the costs at each stage. The teacher and pupils then compared their estimates with the real costs and noted which type of country benefited most from the trade. The lesson was brought to an effective conclusion, linked to the lesson's objectives, to assess the progress made and provide a link forward to the next lesson.

217. Lessons are always very well prepared and organised. Teachers know the pupils well and relationships are good, with the result that (particularly in Years 10-11) there is a busy, working atmosphere. In less effective lessons in Years 7-9 teachers do not control chatter or intervene firmly to ensure that all pupils concentrate fully on their work. Exercise books are marked thoroughly. Marking follows a clear system and includes a commentary, so that pupils know how well they are doing and, if necessary, what to do to improve. Purposeful homework was set regularly during the inspection.

218. The majority of pupils settle to work quickly, work hard at a good pace and maintain concentration. They listen carefully, assimilate information from a range of resources very quickly and are willing to be involved in lessons. A minority of pupils in Years 7-9, however, are dependent on the teacher to maintain their concentration and, unless the teacher intervenes, quickly drift off their tasks. Pupils in Years 10-11 have a realistic knowledge of their attainment and speak knowledgeably, confidently and positively about their work.

219. Pupils are generally well behaved, particularly in Years 10-11. They have a positive attitude to the subject, work effectively in pairs and listen to one another's point of view. The majority of pupils make a useful contribution to lessons and show a real interest in the subject.

220. The scheme of work is of very good quality. It is well structured and fully complies with national requirements. Good programmes have been developed and implemented for fieldwork and the use of ICT in the subject. The procedures for assessment are very good: there are regular assessments of pupils' progress, using well thought out assessment tasks which are well marked. Records of all assessment scores are used effectively to support the progress of individual pupils and as a guide to curricular planning. The organisation of pupils within humanities in Year 7 is unsatisfactory, because many pupils study geography for a few weeks and then move on to another subject. The allocation of time in Years 7-9 is barely adequate. This is a contributory factor to the slower progress being achieved in Years 7-9 than in Years 10-11.

221. Leadership and management of the department are generally very good. There is a well-defined sense of direction and a clear and shared knowledge of what needs to be done to raise attainment. The department is very well organised, planning for the future is well focused, and the department has responded well to the previous inspection. There is, however, no systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of the department's teaching – a weakness also reported at the time of the last inspection.

222. Accommodation is satisfactory. This is mainly due to the efforts of staff in maintaining the two adjacent rooms and providing a very good display of pupils' work to enhance the environment and give the area a geographical identity. Resources are sufficient and of good quality. The department has a shared commitment to succeed and has the capacity to improve standards still further in the future.

HISTORY

223. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' overall level of attainment is below that expected nationally. Most pupils begin Year 7 below the national average. Teachers assessed their pupils as being well below the

national average by the end of Year 9 in 1999 and 2000, although in 1999 the girls' results were close to the girls' national average. A smaller proportion of pupils than usually seen was assessed as reaching the highest standards. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was below that usually seen nationally and only a small number of pupils reached the highest standards. Pupils with special educational needs achieve appropriate standards and make satisfactory progress. The vast majority of pupils reach a standard at the end of Year 9, however, that is at least in line with their earlier attainment.

224. Pupils in Years 7-9 see the causes of past events and successfully explain the reasons for actions taken by people in the past – as, for example, in a lesson on the aims of the major powers at the end of the First World War. They use a range of sources satisfactorily to describe the past. Pupils in Year 8, for instance, used text sources to describe effectively the life of slaves on plantations in the USA in the late eighteenth century. Only a small proportion, however, successfully evaluated the reliability of the sources.

225. Work by the highest attainers shows good understanding of the motives of people in the past and effective use and evaluation of a range of sources – as, for instance, in work on the reliability and accuracy of the film “Oliver” as a source for the study of workhouse conditions in the nineteenth century. In a lesson on trench warfare in the First World War pupils in a Year 9 class used text sources and a video interview with a survivor from the war to extend their understanding of life in the trenches. The written work of a large proportion of pupils is below average in standard, but the highest attainers write well at length.

226. Pupils taking the GCSE course in Key Stage 4 reach an overall standard that is below the national average, a standard similar to that reported at the time of the last inspection. In 1999 the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was below the national average. Results in 2000 were significantly lower than those of 1999; the proportion gaining grades A*-C was well below the national average. This decline was due in part to a number of pupils who had been regarded as high attainers through the course, but who performed badly in the examination. The proportion of pupils gaining A or A* grades has generally been well below average, although in 1999 it was just below average. A greater proportion of girls than boys gained grades in the A*-C range from 1997 to 1999, but in 2000 this situation was reversed.

227. The overall standard of work seen in Key Stage 4 was below the national average. Pupils taking GCSE have sound knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. Pupils in Year 11, for instance, understood the issues involved in the problems facing Germany in the 1930s. Most use sources satisfactorily: the highest attainers successfully identify bias and assess the reliability of sources as evidence for historians. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 10 explained well the causes of the Wall Street Crash and distinguished between its long- and short-term causes. For many pupils, however, who show sound understanding in their oral responses, a poor level of literacy restricts their progress and prevents them from completing the good written answers needed for success in GCSE.

228. The consistently effective teaching is a strength of the department. It is good overall, occasionally very good and never less than satisfactory. This is a similar standard to that reported at the last inspection. It was good in nine of the eleven lessons observed. Teachers know their subject well at all levels and communicate it effectively. As a result, pupils acquire good knowledge and understanding about the past. Lessons are well planned, taking good account of pupils' abilities, and usually proceed at a brisk pace.

229. Teachers have appropriately high expectations of pupils and set suitable work that challenges the highest-attaining pupils and allows them to work at a high standard. In a lesson on the work of the League of Nations, for example, pupils in a top set in Year 10 were asked to work in groups to try to solve the problems of an imaginary country, using strategies available to the League in the 1930s. This gave pupils a good opportunity to understand the underlying difficulties for the League. Higher attainers in Year 9 worked in groups to present perceptively the conflicting views held in 1832 on reforming Parliament and the electoral system.

230. An appropriate variety of teaching methods, including individual study, work in pairs or groups and whole-class discussion, ensures that pupils have good opportunities to learn in a range of different ways.

Lessons are often broken down into a series of short activities, interspersed with short feedback sessions, in which teachers check pupils' progress. Appropriately matched resources and activities make work accessible in most lessons to pupils of different abilities. Teachers clearly expect pupils to work hard and behave well: a firm but friendly approach results in a willingness to work from the majority of pupils. In a very small minority of lessons teachers allow pupils to talk when they should be working quietly or listening to instructions.

231. Most pupils show interest in, and commitment to, their work. Many clearly want to achieve good standards and work hard to do so. Most pupils in examination classes in Key Stage 4 rise well to the challenge of work they often find difficult. As a result, most pupils make good progress in acquiring new knowledge and understanding. Pupils listen to their teachers' instructions and most concentrate well on their work, although many have very short concentration spans.

232. The behaviour of the vast majority is good. A small minority are too ready to be distracted or to distract others, and a very small number arrive at lessons clearly intending to cause problems for teachers. When asked to work in groups, pupils do so with good cooperation and support one another well. The progress of a significant minority of pupils is limited by their frequent absences from lessons. This also slows the progress of pupils who have not been absent, as teachers spend time repeating work and instructions for the absentees.

233. The subject meets the statutory teaching requirements for Key Stage 3. The department is well led and managed. There is a strong ethos for learning throughout the department and a clear commitment to improving pupils' attainment in public examinations. The work of the department is carefully evaluated. This can be seen, in particular, in the reviewing of the development plan. The head of department is keen to move the department forward and for staff to be involved in initiatives for whole-school improvement. The department makes effective use of assessment procedures.

234. The present arrangement for Year 7 humanities, in which most pupils are taught history for six weeks followed by a lengthy gap when they are taught other humanities subjects, is not satisfactory. Although it allows for some depth of study, the system hinders continuity and progress, especially for the lowest attainers. This arrangement was identified as a weakness at the time of the last inspection.

235. The number and range of textbooks are generally good, but there are insufficient books for those pupils in Key Stage 3 who have a low reading age. The lack of any computers in the department for use by pupils is a weakness: the department cannot always use the centrally provided ICT facilities to enhance pupils' learning at times to suit the needs of the subject. The department does not make sufficient use of the local environment.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

236. The previous inspection reported that the subject failed to meet National Curriculum requirements for assessment and for cross-curricular requirements in mathematics, art and history. Other identified weaknesses were a lack of access to computer facilities and inadequate planning for ICT across all subjects. Weaknesses still exist in the availability and use of ICT in most subjects. The deficiencies in curricular planning for ICT and assessment that were identified at the last inspection have not been adequately redressed. Statutory requirements are still not fully met in both key stages, because insufficient teaching time is given to ICT to cover all the required aspects in sufficient depth.

237. Some progress has, however, been made in the subject since the last inspection. The school has improved the range of hardware and software for ICT: the current provision is of good quality, although still below average in quantity overall because of the financial constraints that the school has faced (and still faces). The school has firm plans for developing ICT across the curriculum and is working towards suitable targets over the 2001-2004 period.

238. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' overall attainment and achievement in ICT are below average. The National Curriculum assessments of pupils' work made by teachers at the end of Year 9 in 2000 indicated that the proportion of pupils achieving Levels 5 or 6 was well below the national average. Only a quarter of the pupils reached the level (5) expected for their age, well below the average national figure of about three-fifths. Results were similar in 1999. Compared to pupils' achievements in their other subjects at age 14, their results in ICT are weak. The lack of sufficient teaching within the specialist subject and too little experience of working with computers in other subjects show up in pupils' slow progress towards the higher levels of attainment in ICT by the end of Key Stage 3.

239. Pupils' level of attainment during the few specialist lessons they receive in Years 7 and 8 is close to average, but is below average over the whole of these years. Pupils develop basic skills in word processing and desktop publishing, and work individually to research and present information. In Year 7, for example, they produce a poster and in Year 8 design a menu of their choice. Pupils improve the accuracy and presentation of their work in other subjects such as modern foreign languages. In mathematics they learn simple programming and use spreadsheets to make calculations. In a lesson in Year 7, for example, pupils learned to investigate and explain the effect of formulae in a spreadsheet to halve, double and multiply data. In music pupils are familiar with computer applications in notation and composition. There is no separately timetabled provision for ICT in Year 9.

240. Over Key Stage 3, pupils lack sustained experience of working with computers to develop their knowledge and skills. They research and handle information carefully, when using the well-stocked library, but until very recently problems associated with the new network system restricted opportunities for Internet research. In many subjects the lack of adequate planning, equipment or software restricts pupils' learning. In science and geography pupils have insufficient experience of measurement using data-loggers. In design and technology pupils have too little opportunity to learn about computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM). Through good provision, pupils with statements of special educational need make good progress in improving their standard of English and mathematics by the use of specialist computer programs. Other pupils with special needs generally make satisfactory progress in the ICT lessons they receive, although the poor concentration of some limits the amount of work they cover. High attainers make satisfactory progress.

241. Over Key Stage 4 the majority of pupils continue to have a narrow experience of ICT because of the shortage of suitable teaching and resources. There is no GCSE accreditation. The teaching of ICT is not coherently mapped out across other subjects of the curriculum to give pupils their entitlement and teachers sometimes find difficulty in gaining access to the specialist rooms when they need them. The highest attainment in handling information and data (and at an average level) is on the GCSE Office Applications course followed by a small number of pupils.

242. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' overall level of attainment is below (and for many pupils well below) the national norm, although in a minority of cases it is average. Higher-attaining pupils work with suitable independence either at home or at school and improve the presentation of their work by using ICT appropriately. The absence of suitable teaching (in particular for the aspects of control and modelling) and the lack of sufficient challenge and variety in the work set in other subjects contribute substantially to pupils' low standards in ICT throughout the school.

243. Pupils enjoy their lessons in the short courses in Years 7 and 8 and quickly develop confidence through carefully structured tasks that involve research, designing and the handling of information and data. These also contribute well to pupils' competence in spoken and written language, spelling and number. Pupils generally listen carefully and learn to work independently as a result of good support in lessons, suitable whole-class demonstrations, detailed guidance materials and individual discussion of their work with teachers. Less confident pupils, especially in Key Stage 3, rely heavily on their teacher for direction.

244. In Key Stage 4, confident and knowledgeable pupils complete tasks effectively to a good standard. Pupils are usually cooperative, help one another and use equipment sensibly. In a GCSE food technology lesson in Year 11, for example, one girl showed another how to present textual and graphic material from her research in accurate, expressive charts and tables, using suitable applications of ICT to improve the standard of her work.

245. The quality of specialist teaching is always at least satisfactory and usually good in all years. During the inspection well over two-thirds of that inspected was good and one lesson was very good. Teaching on the GCSE Office Studies course is usually at least good. In lessons of high quality teachers have a thorough understanding of the subject and pupils' needs, and plan very suitable work for them. Such lessons are well structured, incorporating revision of what has been learned earlier and specific, short-term objectives that contribute to a good pace of learning.

246. Clear explanations of new work build pupils' confidence. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very positive. Detailed guidance materials enable most pupils to achieve accurate work, with correct spelling and punctuation, although a minority are very weak or careless on these aspects. The careful, frequent assessment of pupils' work is based on teachers' strong understanding of the National Curriculum requirements for ICT. It concentrates on both what pupils have achieved and what they need to do to improve.

247. Since the last inspection more teachers use ICT as part of their subject teaching. Its use was rated as productive in lessons seen during the inspection in science, modern foreign languages, music and special educational needs. It is at least satisfactory in lessons in mathematics, art, design and technology, geography and PE. It is unsatisfactory in English, history and RE, mainly because of inaccessibility to ICT resources or teachers' lack of expertise.

248. Overall there is a lack of clarity in curricular planning for ICT. The mapping of pupils' National Curriculum entitlement across subjects is incomplete and there is not enough teaching of ICT to ensure that minimum standards are met. These gaps undermine the school's policy of a cross-curricular approach. In Key Stage 3 the small time allocation of one lesson per fortnight for ICT and library skills in only Years 7 and 8 is too little to cover all the required aspects of the National Curriculum in sufficient depth. In Key Stage 4, continuity and progression in studying ICT are weak. There is insufficient clarity amongst teachers of other subjects about statutory ICT requirements and the application of ICT as a key skill.

249. The assessment of pupils' work is satisfactory in specialist lessons, but unsatisfactory across the school, because teachers are not confident in assessing pupils' progress in ICT. Reports to parents do not provide sufficient detail about pupils' progress and what they need to do to improve. The limited provision for ICT is justifiably reflected in parental concerns.

250. Management of the subject across the school is unsatisfactory overall. The network manager has a heavy volume of work associated with the installation of new IT systems and maintenance of equipment. This partly accounts for the lack of adequate coordination of the ICT curriculum and its assessment and for the insufficiency of teachers' professional training and support – matters that require addressing by senior management. The technical support for teaching is currently good.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

251. Pupils' overall level of achievement in French is below average by the end of Key Stage 3. Teachers' assessments for the end of this key stage in both 1999 and 2000 also indicated that pupils' attainment was below the national average level. The performance of girls is higher than that of boys at both Levels 5 and 6 and above.

252. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' oral skills and pronunciation are generally satisfactory. Classes of higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 participated well, for instance, in role-play with a partner, asking and answering questions about lost property, whilst pupils in a low set participated satisfactorily in a shorter role-play at a railway station. Pupils in a Year 7 class confidently answered a range of questions, mostly from memory. In another Year 7 class pupils gave the names of their parents and grandparents satisfactorily.

253. Understanding of the foreign language in the classroom is sound. Pupils in a Year 8 class of mixed abilities, for example, understood and carried out different tasks involving a variety of objects, the names of which they had just learned. Pupils' understanding is deeper in classes where teachers make consistent use of the

foreign language. Higher-attaining pupils in a Year 9 class, for instance, showed a sound understanding of factual texts dealing with past events, identifying and noting the main points clearly.

254. In their written work, higher-attaining pupils in a Year 9 lesson described past events, using the perfect tense with reasonable accuracy, although they paid insufficient attention to the use of accents. They have some knowledge of the immediate future tense, but have not yet produced short written passages involving all three tenses. Pupils in Year 8 are beginning to use the perfect tense with some confidence. A high proportion of pupils in Year 7 produce some competent pieces of extended writing about themselves, giving details of leisure activities they like. The level and quality of this writing were above what is often found at this stage of the course. Much of this work was word-processed and generally well presented.

255. In 2000 the proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A*-C in French in the full-course GCSE examination was well below the national average for all pupils. The performance of girls in the examination over the last three years has been consistently higher than that of boys. The proportion of pupils attaining grades in the A*-G range in 2000 in French was in line with the national average. Boys and girls in this school performed better in French than in many of their other subjects. In the Certificate of Achievement course most pupils in the small group attained Level 2.

256. Spanish is offered as a two-year course in Key Stage 4 as an alternative language to French. It is designed for those pupils, mainly lower-attainers, for whom it is considered that a fresh start on a new language is appropriate. No pupil on the full-course GCSE examination in 2000 gained a grade in the A*-C range: all but two pupils, however, secured a grade in the D-G range. The department has now changed to the GCSE short course in an attempt to raise results.

257. At the end of Key Stage 4 the overall standard of attainment in French and Spanish is below average. The standard attained in Spanish is consistent with the limited amount of time pupils have studied the language. Higher-attaining pupils in French in Year 11 have a good knowledge of relevant vocabulary – as, for example, when dealing with health topics about smoking, alcohol and drugs. They generally answer questions accurately, as they did in French in response to a letter written by a teenager to an “agony aunt”. Pupils in the top two sets in Year 10 in French speak well in role-play work, as when they booked into a hotel and several pupils dealt competently with unexpected questions. Lower-attaining pupils, most of them with special educational needs, showed a good knowledge of street directions to different buildings in town, using them well in both oral and written work.

258. In their written work higher-attaining pupils in Year 11 write confidently and with accuracy, using a range of different tenses and suitable expressions. Pupils in Year 10 show satisfactory knowledge of the relevant vocabulary to write about school, their daily routines and their preferences. The presentation of written work of many pupils in both key stages, however, lacks sufficient care. In addition, many pupils do not correct or redraft their work to improve its accuracy. Although there are examples of pupils making good progress, pupils (including higher-attainers and those with special educational needs) generally make satisfactory progress, when all aspects of the subjects are taken into account. The progress of a significant minority of pupils, however, is retarded by irregular patterns of attendance.

259. Pupils’ attitudes and behaviour are good overall, and often very good. Pupils apply themselves well to their tasks and work well in pairs or independently. The small group of gifted and talented pupils in Year 10 make their presentations with great enthusiasm and show obvious enjoyment in what they do. The Year 10 group of pupils with special educational needs responds very well in French to the high standards expected of them.

260. The quality of teaching and learning in both key stages is good overall. Teaching was very good in two lessons and satisfactory in one third of the lessons seen. In the best lessons teachers make extensive use of the foreign language in class, to help pupils develop their understanding. Their expectations are high, as revealed in a desire to move pupils on, to make them think hard about the tasks they complete and to help them to deepen their knowledge. In a Year 11 Spanish class, for instance, pupils worked hard at extended sentences, using the past tense, so that by the end of the double lesson they had improved their oral skills and consolidated the past tense in writing.

261. Teachers plan lessons well, incorporating an appropriate variety of activities and skills, to motivate pupils and to help them to maintain their concentration. Learning objectives for lessons are shared with the class at the outset and evaluated at the end, when every pupil, for instance, has to repeat a phrase or sentence before departing.

262. In a minority of lessons, however, there are weaknesses in teaching. Opportunities for pupils to practise their speaking are limited or overlooked. Teachers sometimes complete tasks, such as reading aloud, that could be undertaken by pupils, thereby restricting pupils' participation in class. The use of the foreign language to provide additional challenge to pupils in class is not consistent across the department: the lack of use of this was identified as a weakness also at the previous inspection.

263. All teachers make good use of resources, particularly of flash cards and of the overhead projector at the start of lessons, to revise what has previously been learned. Appropriate homework is set regularly, but the marking of pupils' work is irregular. There are few helpful comments in exercise books to show pupils how they can improve their work.

264. The department meets the statutory requirement to teach the National Curriculum programmes of study. Pupils have appropriate opportunities to use ICT in all years. The leadership and management of the department are good overall. Despite determined attempts to find a replacement, the department has been without a specialist teacher of French and Spanish since early December and, unsatisfactorily, classes have been supervised by a succession of supply teachers. This has diminished the aural and oral aspects of the subject, particularly for the two Year 9 classes and the Year 11 French and Spanish sets. The Head of Department has worked very hard to limit the amount of disruption caused by this staffing vacancy and to ensure that appropriate work has been set. The time-tabling of an able foreign language *assistante*, too, has been very effective in helping to alleviate this problem. A revised timetable has been prepared for introduction after the inspection. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, but the insufficient use of the foreign language in some lessons still remains a weakness.

MUSIC

265. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9, their overall attainment is below the national average. Pupils perform, improvise and compose, using electronic keyboards, but few pupils develop satisfactory fingering. Many know or can find the names of notes of the keyboard, although they have only vague knowledge and understanding of how scales and chords are formed. Many pupils, however, invent and perform songs which they present very well on tape or compact disc. Pupils make good use of pre-recorded tracks and autochords on keyboards and computers to enhance their performances. They also learn about the contexts in which music is produced. In one lesson, for instance, they showed a fair understanding of the popular music industry. They took the *Eastenders* theme, learned to play it, made their own version of it and designed a record cover.

266. Pupils' overall level of attainment by the end of Year 11 is in line with the national average. In the 1999 and 2000 GCSE results, taken together, 10 out of 24 pupils gained grades in the range A*-C. None achieved an A* grade. In work seen during the inspection the performances and compositions of a few pupils were above the national average. The attainment of most pupils in listening was, however, below average. Examples of work undertaken by pupils during the inspection included a challenging cello piece by Dvorák, a song with guitar accompaniment and a composition expressing feelings about midnight. There are 20 pupils following the GCSE course in the present Year 10. This encouraging increase in take-up, together with the 1999-2000 GCSE results, represents a satisfactory improvement over the situation reported at the previous inspection.

267. The quality of learning in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall. Pupils enter the school with educational attainment which is well below average and with very limited musical experience. Many pupils in this key stage do not listen carefully to teachers' instructions and in consequence, when they attempt the tasks set for them, waste time on irrelevant activity. This was especially noticeable in keyboard lessons, where the overall

high level of noise in class and pupils' easy access to control buttons make it difficult for the teacher to keep pupils on task and monitor their progress.

268. Most pupils in Years 7-9, however, are interested in their lessons. They move quickly to their practical tasks and enjoy singing. They appreciate the technical facilities of such computer-assisted tasks as arranging and editing the various voices on a "mix". Pupils particularly enjoy performing songs, especially where these are expertly accompanied and recorded.

269. In Key Stage 4 most pupils learn well and make good progress overall. In this stage the requirements of the GCSE course motivate and offer direction to pupils. In a Year 10 class, for example, pupils worked on songs under the direction of a "producer", developed ideas for a guitar trio and wrote accounts to explain how their compositions had originated. In the same class they used cards that included musical terms to help them to identify, select and categorise statements about the features of a piece - in this case Bach's *Tocatta in D minor*. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in Years 7-9 and good progress in Years 10-11.

270. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good overall throughout the school - and especially so in Key Stage 4, where an increasingly mature approach to their work can be seen. Attitudes are unsatisfactory in a minority of classes, notably amongst lower-attaining groups in Year 8. These pupils cause distractions that hinder the whole class and the pace of lessons. In the best lessons these distractions are well managed as a result of very forceful teaching and a careful design to lessons. Although attendance in the music lessons seen during the inspection was satisfactory, poor attendance over the long-term means that teachers have to repeat material and spend unnecessary time helping absentees to catch up with work.

271. Teaching is sound overall – satisfactory in Years 7-9 and good in Years 10-11. The best teaching is characterised by secure subject knowledge and expertise. In all lessons teachers use well their own personal musical skills to enhance pupils' performance and practice or to demonstrate how a piece should be played.

272. Satisfactory attention is paid to the teaching of literacy, especially to the use and understanding of the technical language of music and the music production industry. There is a fair insistence on correct spelling and grammatical construction. Good use is made of word processing to present final drafts well. Whilst teachers' expectations of hard work and good standards are broadly satisfactory, teachers are sometimes too ready to ascribe disappointing work and behaviour to pupils' circumstances. Pupils are generally managed effectively in lessons. The very skilful use of electronic production and recording of sound enhances pupils' performances and compositions. A small team of visiting instrumental teachers makes a good contribution to the musical education of the few pupils who take individual lessons.

273. The day-to-day assessment of pupils' work is satisfactory overall. The longer-term assessment of units of work is good. The department has developed a comprehensive system of recording assessments and use of data to monitor pupils' attainments and progress in both key stages. Opportunities are, however, missed in lessons to tell pupils clearly what they need to do to gain higher grades and to teach them how to use positively the criticism of performances amongst their peers.

274. Accommodation for music is poor. Keyboards do not have a designated space and workstations have to be squeezed into the main teaching room. There is no sound insulation between the teaching rooms. The whole suite is in a very poor state of maintenance and decoration. The two sources of serious danger identified at the last inspection (the leaking rooflights above electrical supply sources and equipment, and trailing power leads from recording machine and keyboards) have not been dealt with. They need urgent rectification.

275. Although there are no regular extracurricular ensembles, pupils do take part in termly productions and musical festivals. A considerable number of pupils work hard in preparation and rehearsal for these. Music makes a good contribution to the social and cultural life of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

276. Between 1997 and 1999 the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A*-C in GCSE was significantly below the national average. In 2000, however, there was a marked improvement, when over two-fifths of pupils entered for the examination gained at least a grade C. Projections for 2001 suggest that this improved level of performance will continue.

277. By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment in practical activities is generally at expected levels. In Year 7 the more able boys have great confidence and demonstrate such advanced soccer skills as chest control, back-heel and first-touch passes. In Years 7 and 8 the great majority of boys and girls have the necessary basic skills of soccer. They pass and control the ball well enough for practices and small-sided games to proceed effectively. In creative dance, boys and girls work well together and show effective timing in their routines, but require more awareness of body tension and style to raise their standards further. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated in lessons and make good progress. In one lesson, particular care was taken to accommodate a pupil for whom English is his second language.

278. By the end of Year 11, most pupils have a reasonable level of attainment in games. Boys and girls show expected standards of hand and eye coordination in a range of games. Few pupils, however, have pronounced racket skills or tactical awareness in badminton and squash. This is partly because these lessons are biased towards recreation and give too little attention to improving pupils' technique. Year 10 boys understand defensive systems in basketball and operate them effectively in games.

279. The quality of written work in Years 10-11 varies widely, but is satisfactory overall. The best, by both boys and girls, is very good, reflecting conscientious application, detailed completion of homework and projects, a clear understanding of issues and very good presentation. Amongst the examples of acute critical evaluation seen were guidance on the compilation of a sensible diet and the design of appropriate exercise schedules for different kinds of individuals. Many pupils produce word-processed homework. A minority of pupils do not, however, take sufficient care; in these cases homework is not completed to a good standard and much work is incomplete. Both pupils with special educational needs and talented pupils make satisfactory progress.

280. Teaching is satisfactory overall (though often good) in Key Stage 3, good in Key Stage 4 and good overall. In two of the lessons seen (both in Year 10) it was very good - characterised by meticulous preparation, extensive subject knowledge and enthusiastic delivery. These lessons are marked by high expectations of pupils.

281. Most teaching is well planned and games lessons are generally well structured. Teachers ensure that in game-related practices and small-sided games all boys and girls as well as pupils with a variety of special needs are fully involved. Those who teach the GCSE course prepare conscientiously and in detail. Learning resources are very well organised: they are easily accessible and make a major contribution to pupils' learning. The classroom contains clear displays of essential subject vocabulary and an up-to-date selection of books and handouts. On the rare occasions when teaching is unsatisfactory, too many pupils are uninvolved for long periods of time, because of poor organisation, and instructions are not clear. The good provision of professional training, which all teachers in the department have attended, has clearly helped to improve teaching.

282. Most work is well marked and contains detailed comments that help pupils to improve their future work. The evidence of pupils' files shows that the GCSE course is well prepared and taught. A good feature of Year 11 is a carefully structured written timetable for revision, given to every pupil.

283. Pupils' attitudes are good and often very good. Pupils are always smartly dressed for the subject. Whenever pupils are invited to collaborate in lessons, they do so easily and effectively and are sensitive to one another's needs. Pupils work together very well, showing enjoyment and concentration throughout double periods. They arrive promptly for lessons and few "sit out" without a reasonable excuse. Very good extracurricular provision for both boys and girls is well attended.

284. Some improvements have occurred since the last inspection. Girls now respond as well to the subject as boys and equal numbers elect to take the GCSE examination. Accommodation has been significantly improved. The building programme has refurbished the physical education wing, the gymnasium and changing rooms and

included a new classroom designated for teaching of the GCSE course. These improvements are a major help for teaching the subject. Two major teaching areas, the hall and the poorly drained playing fields, however, remain inadequate and cause considerable teaching difficulties.

285. The leadership and management of the department are very good. Teachers work together well as a team. Regular meetings ensure that opportunities exist for all to be involved in planning and administrative decisions. Expertise in ICT is increasingly used for both administration and the production of teaching materials. Documentation is thorough and both policies and schemes of work are being systematically upgraded. Instructional materials and other information are very well displayed around the department and the GCSE classroom has an excellent display of key words and phrases. Careful attention has been given to the assessment of pupils' performance. The details of these are clearly displayed in a way that encourages pupils to set their own performance targets.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

286. Pupils' overall level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is below average in most aspects of the subject. Inspection evidence points to a satisfactory improvement in standard in Years 7-9 since the previous inspection. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of religion are satisfactory. Pupils have a reasonable grasp, for example, of the influence of beliefs on the lifestyle of religious communities and individuals.

287. This understanding was well illustrated by pupils in Year 9 who appreciated and empathised with the impact of Jesus's crucifixion on the lives of individuals. The majority of pupils, however, and particularly lower-attaining groups and many pupils with special educational needs, have a restricted range of vocabulary to express religious ideas precisely. The standard of written work is low overall. Many pupils lack confidence in applying religious insights to their own lives and have limited skill in the analysis and interpretation of religious texts. Pupils with special educational needs generally make satisfactory progress, but high attainers often do not make the progress of which they are capable.

288. In the GCSE examination in 2000, taken by only 11 pupils, the overall standard was well below the national average in terms of the proportion of pupils achieving grades in the range A*-C or A*-G. All pupils in Years 10-11 pursue a course of PSHE that notionally incorporates elements of RE. In practice, however, this programme lacks appropriate Christian religious or spiritual content: these elements are not built into the scheme of work in sufficient depth to meet the requirements of the Bristol Agreed Syllabus. There was, for example, no religious dimension to the PSHE lessons observed during the inspection and the school was unable to provide any examples of pupils' RE work from Years 10-11 for review. The school does not currently offer any course leading to GCSE, although there are plans to provide a full course of study leading to GCSE from September 2001. The school's RE provision for Key Stage 4 therefore does not meet statutory requirements. Pupils' overall standard of attainment in the subject is below average by the end of Key Stage 4.

289. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to the subject are good. The relationship between pupils and teachers is warm and caring, creating a supportive environment for work. The majority of pupils settle quickly to work, respond with interest and enthusiasm, listen carefully and concentrate well. They have a sensible approach to learning and handle moral issues with sensitivity and understanding. Most books are maintained in satisfactory order, but a minority of pupils (particularly within lower-attaining groups) are untidy and do not complete work.

290. The quality of teaching and learning is usually good in Key Stage 3. In the best lessons teachers set clear aims and objectives and manage pupils skilfully. Expectations are high and good discipline maintained. Work is appropriately varied and challenging and conducted at a brisk pace. In these lessons pupils respond with a high level of concentration and interest. Less successful lessons are characterised by too much intervention by teachers and an over-emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge at the expense of discussion and understanding. In some lessons tasks are not sufficiently sequenced or graded to match the learning requirements of pupils with different levels of attainment and understanding. Books are marked regularly and consistently: pupils are motivated and encouraged by target-setting and the effective use of reward systems.

Teachers' high knowledge and understanding of the subject have a significant impact on the overall quality of learning within class.

291. Some good progress has been made since the previous inspection. The new head of department has clear vision and drive and has set suitable aims and objectives for raising standards of work. Recently revised schemes of work for Years 8-9 incorporate suitable goals for literacy, numeracy and ICT, and are fully in line with the local Agreed Syllabus. Assessment and monitoring procedures now include evaluation and tracking systems for pupils' work. The poor quality and quantity of resources, including textbooks, have a detrimental effect on standards and are inadequate for a thorough teaching of the Agreed Syllabus in both key stages.