

# INSPECTION REPORT

**HENLOW VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED  
MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Henlow

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109695

Headteacher: Mr R G Payne

Reporting inspector: Ms J Jones  
12460

Dates of inspection: 31<sup>st</sup> January – 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2000

Inspection number: 215554

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle  
School category: Voluntary Controlled  
Age range of pupils: 9 to 13 years  
Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Church Road  
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Bedfordshire  
Postcode: SG16 6AN

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr D Killick

Date of previous inspection: June 1995

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Ms J Jones	Registered inspector		School improvement Overall effectiveness The school's results and pupils' achievements Teaching and learning Leadership and management Community links
Mr B Eyre	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development Pupils' welfare, health and safety Partnership with parents and carers
Mr V Shuttleworth	Team inspector	English Equal opportunities	
Mrs P Hannage	Team inspector	Mathematics	Quality and range of opportunities for learning
Mr M Davis	Team inspector	Science	
Ms O Hall	Team inspector	Art Special educational needs	
Mr R Patterson	Team inspector	Information technology Design and technology	
Mr H Davies	Team inspector	Geography Religious education	
Ms P Hooton	Team inspector	History	
Ms J Tolley	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Mr T Payne	Team inspector	Music	
Mr B McCann	Team inspector	Physical education	

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Number of full-time pupils	525	(larger than average)
Pupils entitled to free school meals	4.9%	(lower than average)
Pupils on the register of special educational needs	30.5%	(above average)
Pupils with statements of special educational needs	2.7%	(average)

The school takes pupils with the full range of ability but in general, the attainment of pupils on entry to the school is below average. An unusually high number of pupils of all ages moves in and out of the school in all years because the school takes around one-fifth of its pupils from the nearby Royal Air Force base. There are very few pupils from ethnic minorities and only one recently arrived pupil who speaks English as a second language.

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

This is an effective school. Leadership and management are good. Teaching is good overall; it is of a very high standard in many lessons. Pupils' achievement in relation to their prior attainment is good overall, and is very good in literacy at Key Stage 2. Pupils' attitudes to school, their personal development and relationships at all levels are very good. The cost per pupil is close to the national average for middle schools and the school provides good value for money.

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

- There is clear educational direction for the work of the school and pupils achieve standards at least in line with what would be expected from their prior attainment. Achievement in a number of subjects, including English and science, is good.
- The national strategy to improve literacy at Key Stage 2 has been implemented exceptionally well.
- The attitudes of pupils and relationships at all levels are very good.
- There are very good opportunities for personal development, within the curriculum, in the day-to-day life of the school and through extra-curricular activities.
- Parental support and help in school are very strong.
- The quality of moral and social education is very good.
- There is exceptional teaching and learning in art.

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

- Appraisal is not taking place and monitoring of teaching is insufficient; it does not lead to identification of training needs for a number of teachers, particularly in music, where standards at Key Stage 3 are below average.
- Information and communication technology does not fully comply with National Curriculum requirements and is not used sufficiently within other subjects.
- Information from assessment is not used sufficiently to identify higher attainers in a few lessons, and to give them more challenging work, particularly in geography, information and communication technology and religious education.

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in June 1995. Improvement since then has been good. There are no Key Stage 2 test results to make a comparison with standards in 1995, but figures from 1996 show results for pupils at the age of eleven to be rising in line with the national trend. There has been good improvement in science results and in standards of literacy. Teaching has improved; the proportion of lessons in which teaching is unsatisfactory has fallen, and the proportion of lessons where teaching is good or better is significantly higher. Teaching is very good or excellent in an unusually high number of lessons; it was excellent in just over five per cent of lessons.

Response to key issues in the previous report is satisfactory. There is now a sound policy for equality of opportunity and pupils' work is well marked. The senior management team has successfully invested time and training in helping teachers to plan lessons for pupils with varying attainment; teaching now takes good account of the differing needs of pupils, though highest attaining pupils need more challenging activities in a few lessons.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11-year-olds based on average point scores in tests in Key Stage 2.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
English	C	C	C	D	well above average    A above average        B average                 C below average         D well below average    E
Mathematics	C	C	C	C	
Science	C	C	B	C	

There has been an upward trend in Key Stage 2 results in English, mathematics and science over the last four years, in line with national trends. Over this period, the performance of boys and girls has been in line with the national average, except in English, where girls' results were better than average. The school's targets for test results in 2000 and 2001 are ambitious but realistic and evidence suggests that pupils are likely to achieve them.

Work seen during the inspection at least matches test results and was often better. By the age of eleven, attainment is above average in English and science, and also in art, design and technology, history and religious education. Attainment in English in the current Year 6 is higher than in the previous year because those pupils started school with lower than average reading skills and had less benefit from the strategy to improve literacy. Attainment is average in mathematics, geography, information and communication technology (ICT), French, music and physical education.

By the age of thirteen, attainment in English and mathematics is in line with expectations, and in science is above average. Attainment is well above average in art, and above average in design and technology and history. Attainment is in line with expectations in geography, ICT, French and physical education. Standards in music are below expectation. At both key stages, attainment in religious education meets the standards required of the Bedfordshire Agreed Syllabus.

Pupils' attainment is below average when they start in Year 5 and is average when they leave. Pupils make good progress in the four years in the school, with the best progress in Key Stage 2 because of the impact of the effective literacy strategy across several curriculum areas.

### **PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils enjoy coming to school and many take part in extra-curricular activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Pupils are well behaved in lessons and in the play areas and dining room.
Personal development and relationships	Very good at all levels. Pupils develop constructive relationships with each other and with teachers, and their capacity to understand and respect differing points of view grows in maturity as they move from Year 5 to Year 8.
Attendance	Very good. Pupils attend regularly; authorised absence is low and there is virtually no unauthorised absence.

### **TEACHING AND LEARNING**

<b>Teaching of pupils:</b>	<b>aged 9-11 years</b>	<b>aged 11-13 years</b>
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 in English is very good at Key Stage 2 and good at Key Stage 3. Teaching in mathematics, including numeracy, and science is good at both key stages. There is more good and very good teaching in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 3. This is mainly because literacy is very well taught and this has a positive impact on teaching and learning in most subjects in Key Stage 2. Teaching in art is very good but there are some weaknesses in teaching and learning in music at both key stages. Pupils learn well in most lessons because they enjoy the lively activities that challenge them to do their best. Teaching is well planned to meet the needs of all pupils overall. For example, higher attainers achieve good progress in the upper mathematics sets because they are given stimulating tasks that challenge them to think quickly and build up their knowledge of patterns and ideas in mathematics. In most subjects, they are given extra work but they need more demanding activities in a few lessons. During the inspection, teaching in 36 per cent of all lessons was very good or excellent. In a further 35 per cent it was good and in 24 per cent teaching was satisfactory. Teaching was unsatisfactory in five per cent of lessons.



## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	There is a good range of opportunities to learn, and a very good choice of extra-curricular activities. The curriculum is enriched by the addition of French in Key Stage 2. However, the omission of swimming, and aspects of information and communication technology from the curriculum are breaches of statutory requirements.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good provision, well adapted to pupils with particular needs such as behavioural difficulties or dyspraxia, enabling pupils with special educational needs to make good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Provision for pupils at an early stage of acquiring English is good.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision is good and particularly effective in reinforcing pupils' moral and social development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good overall. Pupils are well cared for in a secure and supportive environment. There are satisfactory arrangements for helping pupils to know how to improve their work.

The school works very well with parents and carers and is well supported both by the parents' association and by individual parents.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership and management are good. The school's aims and values are clear and endorsed by staff, pupils and parents. Leadership gives clear educational direction for the school, and senior and middle managers share a commitment to improve.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors play an important and effective role in financial planning. Most are recent appointments but are beginning to shape policy effectively. For example, they are aware that the school needs to improve the use of computers in all subjects and have made sound strategic plans to increase the quantity and quality of equipment and provide further training for all staff.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is satisfactory overall. The school has good procedures for reviewing developments and is beginning to carry out a thorough analysis of test and assessment results. The school recognises the shortcomings in information and communication technology and the development plan addresses these. There is insufficient systematic observation of teaching, and this aspect of monitoring is unsatisfactory.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are used efficiently in most areas. The school copes well with the limitations of accommodation.

There are sufficient staff and resources to meet the needs of the curriculum. Accommodation is cramped but improvements to the design and technology areas are currently underway. The introduction of the national strategies to improve numeracy and literacy have been managed very well. The school seeks to get the best value for money in all its decisions.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school is well managed and led.</li> <li>• Teachers have high expectations of children.</li> <li>• The school communicates well with parents and they are welcome in the school.</li> <li>• Behaviour is good and children respect one another, teachers and property.</li> <li>• The school is not complacent and is committed to improvement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some parents felt they needed more information about their children's progress.</li> </ul>

Inspectors agreed with all the points that please parents. They consider that the school holds regular and well structured meetings to inform parents about how their children are doing at school, but they found that annual reports do not always provide enough detail about progress in all subjects.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

##### **Test results in English, mathematics and science**

1. Pupils' results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 show them to be in line with the national average in English and mathematics and above average in science. Overall, results are average and in the past four years, results have risen broadly in line with the trend nationally. Test results in mathematics and science have followed the national tests closely but there has been wider variation in English. Results were average in 1999 but above and sometimes well above average in the previous three years. In most years, girls do slightly better than boys in tests in all three subjects. The difference between boys and girls is similar to the difference nationally, except in English, where girls have done better than average over the last four years.
2. Pupils' attainment when they enter the school is below average; they make good progress to reach average levels by the end of Key Stage 2. Pupils' results are broadly in line with those of pupils in similar schools, although English results were below this average in 1999.

##### **Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 2**

3. Teachers' assessments of standards of work in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6 match test results closely. Assessments in science are lower than test results. The difference is because the tests do not take account of pupils' skills in solving problems through investigation.
4. The school has set itself high targets for the next two years. Pupils' achievements, particularly in English and number work in the current Years 5 and 6, show these targets to be realistic.

##### **Standards seen during the inspection**

5. The local education authority provides the school with evidence, based on tests taken across the county. This supports the inspectors' judgement that the school provides good 'added-value', particularly to levels of reading. This is especially commendable since around one-fifth of pupils come from service families who move frequently. The school has good systems for assessing pupils when they enter the school and uses records of pupils' progress well to check that pupils are achieving the levels expected.
6. The standards reached at the end of Year 6 are maintained in Key Stage 3. At the end of Year 8 when pupils leave, attainment is above average in science and is average in English and mathematics. Progress is therefore satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good overall. The more rapid progress in Key Stage 2 is due largely to the successful implementation of the numeracy and literacy strategies, and their impact on other subjects in Key Stage 2.

### **English, including literacy**

7. The work of pupils in the current Year 6 is above average and work of a high standard was seen in many English lessons in Key Stage 2. This is because of the very effective way the national strategy to raise standards of literacy has been implemented.
8. Standards in English in Key Stage 3 are in line with national expectations. Pupils communicate well in speech and writing. They use a wide vocabulary and read well. Spelling mistakes remain frequent in the writing of all but the highest attainers. This is because these pupils have had less benefit from the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy than pupils in Key Stage 2.
9. Already, pupils' greater skill and confidence with English in Key Stage 2 are enabling pupils to make good progress, not just in English, but also in other subjects such as history and religious education, which depend heavily on the written and spoken word.

### **Mathematics, including numeracy**

10. Standards in mathematics lessons match test results, and teachers' assessments are in line with national expectations at the end of Year 8. The effect of teaching numeracy is not yet being felt as strongly as the literacy strategy because it only started fully in September 1999, but pupils are already achieving above average standards of mental mathematics. Quick warm-up activities and work accurately adapted to meet the needs of individual pupils, are helping pupils find patterns in numbers and enjoy the sense of success. Pupils in higher sets achieve standards that are well above average in both key stages. Pupils are encouraged to think about their own learning and recognise their own progress.
11. They have sufficient numeracy skills to cope with simple calculations and draw graphs in other subjects such as science and geography. They can interpret numerical data, when required, for example in history.

### **Science**

12. Attainment in science is above average in all years. Pupils' knowledge of scientific facts and ideas is good; they remember what they have been taught and use models from an early age to explain, for example, why an electric bulb becomes dimmer when the resistance in a circuit is increased. Pupils have less practice carrying out investigations in which they have to decide how to verify their predictions, though they understand how to carry out fair tests. Standards in this aspect of science are average.

### **Standards in other subjects**

13. Attainment in art is high. By the end of Year 6, most pupils reach above average levels, and standards are well above average by the end of Year 8. Their progress is often exceptional in a wide range of media such as paint, textiles and ceramics.
14. Attainment is above average at the end of both key stages in design and technology and history. In both subjects, pupils' ability to write well enables them to achieve highly.

15. Attainment is above average at the end of Key Stage 2 and average at the end of Year 8 in religious education. The difference is due largely to the higher literacy skills of pupils in Key Stage 2.
16. Pupils reach levels of skills and knowledge that are in line with expectations at the end of Key Stage 2 and Year 8 in geography, information and communication technology, French and physical education. Pupils reach satisfactory standards in written French but do not make sufficient progress in speaking. Attainment is average in information and communication technology overall, with pupils reaching above average standards in communication and control. However, they do not have sufficient opportunity to carry out the measuring and modelling in other subjects of the curriculum to reach the required standard in these aspects.
17. In music, pupils reach levels in line with national expectations by the end of Year 6 but do not achieve levels expected of them in Key Stage 3 so that attainment, particularly in the practical aspects of music-making, is below average.
18. In Key Stage 2, pupils achieve at least satisfactory progress in all subjects, and progress in English is very good. In Key Stage 3, pupils make at least satisfactory progress in all but music, where there is insufficient emphasis on practical work in the curriculum for pupils to make satisfactory progress. Progress in art is very good in Key Stage 3.
19. The quality of learning in most lessons is good enough for pupils to build steadily on what they already know and over time, they achieve standards that are appropriate in relation to what they previously knew. Teachers adapt work particularly well to help lower attaining pupils and enable those with special educational needs to learn effectively.
20. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in relation to their prior learning. The school rarely has pupils for whom English is not the first language. During the inspection, good provision for one such pupil, newly arrived in the school, enabled him to settle well but it was too early to judge progress in acquiring a basic knowledge of English.
21. In a few lessons in science, geography and design and technology, higher attaining pupils are not always stretched. Teachers find them extra work if they finish before the others, but usually the tasks are no more demanding than the earlier work.

### **Standards in ICT across the curriculum**

22. Separate lessons for information and communication technology enable pupils to develop a good range of skills which they can then apply in other subjects when they have the opportunity. Pupils achieve standards that are at least as high as can be expected when using computers for word processing and publishing. They can discriminate between different ways of displaying information and they present their work well. The weakness in information and communication technology is in the absence of modelling and measurement from the curriculum, and in this respect, standards are below average. There is insufficient use of information and communication technology to increase learning in a number of other subjects. For example, pupils do not use computers in science to collect information such as changes in temperature or the speed of a moving trolley, and this restricts their

opportunities to experiment, speculate and test ideas quickly, because alternative ways of collecting this information is laborious or inaccurate.

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

23. Pupils have very good attitudes to their work. They show respect towards each other and towards all adults, including visitors. Many are fluent conversationalists; they can discuss the content of their lessons with their teachers and could converse easily with members of the inspection team. Most pupils listen well to teachers and each other, and in most of lessons observed, for example in numeracy and history, this enabled pupils to learn very effectively.
24. The behaviour of pupils is good. In lessons where teachers make the subject interesting, it is very good. Movement around the school is orderly. Playtimes are lively occasions with a great sense of fun and confidence. Unkindness or bullying are rare, and quickly dealt with. There is some silliness in a few French and physical education lessons, but this is handled effectively by the teachers. There have been no exclusions in recent years. Parents expressed satisfaction about behaviour and with the policies the school uses to make sure their children behave well.
25. The school is very effective in helping the high number of pupils who arrive partway through the year to settle quickly and begin to make progress in all subjects. All adults work in close collaboration to enable these pupils to accept the positive ethos of the school, even when they have already attended a number of schools. This happens frequently because so many pupils are from Royal Air Force families. Pupils act as monitors to support the newcomers so that they quickly develop an understanding of what is expected of them.
26. The personal development of pupils is very good. This is reflected in the confident manner in which the majority of pupils relate to adults, in their ability to enter into sensible dialogue and in their willingness to undertake responsibilities. They enjoy school and take part in activities with enthusiasm, both in lessons and at lunchtime or after school. In many lessons, pupils are able to work in pairs and groups, developing personal skills and self-confidence. They consider the needs of less fortunate members of society and raise money for their chosen charities.
27. Attendance is very high and there is virtually no unauthorised absence. Pupils are punctual to school except when buses are late. Pupils and parents understand the school's policies and recognise the importance of regular attendance.

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

28. There has been significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the previous inspection. The school has made a concerted effort to improve the way activities in lessons match the attainment and needs of all pupils, and this is generally successful. There is, however, a need to ensure that all tasks include elements that challenge highest attaining pupils. Teaching is now good overall, with many strengths, and this leads to effective learning in almost all lessons. There is very little unsatisfactory teaching, but there is a significant amount in music where about a quarter of lessons seen were unsatisfactory. In these lessons, pupils did not learn as much as they should, particularly in Key Stage 3, where they are not acquiring sufficient skill in the practical side of music, such as composing and performing.

29. Although teaching is good in both key stages, there is a higher proportion of good and very good teaching at Key Stage 2. This is mainly due to the very good teaching of numeracy and literacy in Years 5 and 6.
30. Teachers are well prepared for lessons and usually know the subject matter thoroughly even if it is outside their own specialism. They use their knowledge well to plan lessons that challenge pupils to learn through having to think for themselves. This is particularly evident in mathematics lessons where pupils have to explain the way they arrive at their answers. Pupils in the top mathematics set in Year 6 enjoy the challenge of finding questions to match the answers they are given, for example, to try to find harder and harder ways of combining prime and triangular numbers to reach a given number. This enthusiasm is possible because the teacher establishes an atmosphere in which pupils want to succeed and are not afraid to try.
31. Teachers plan lessons carefully, often with a series of short activities, so that pupils learn well because they are able to concentrate throughout. In the best lessons, teachers establish good conditions for all pupils to learn because the planning takes account of pupils' differing levels of attainment. For example, in a Year 5 art lesson on landscapes, the teacher involved pupils in an effective demonstration of mixing paint before they began their own work. The teacher then provided suitably different tasks for pupils with learning difficulties and broke the two-hour lesson into shorter activities, with a good balance of time for pupils to do their own work, listen to advice from the teacher, and walk around looking at each other's work. The lesson finished with a session to evaluate the work done, and left pupils enthusiastic and happy with the good quality and quantity of their work.
32. Teachers have clear objectives for lessons. They know what they expect pupils to learn and usually make this clear to pupils. This is particularly effective in numeracy and literacy lessons where teachers take time at the end for a 'what did we learn today?' session that encourages pupils to feel pleased with their achievements and be aware of their own progress. This clarity of purpose is also evident in lessons with older pupils. For example, a Year 7 science class carrying out an investigation into the effects of friction, knew what they expected to do and discover because the teacher checked they understood input and output variables and discussed the key scientific ideas at the start of the investigation. This was done using a mixture of whole-class and individual teaching in a way that involved all pupils, including those with special educational needs, and enabled them to learn effectively.
33. In many lessons, the pace is brisk but calm; teachers provide a series of short tasks and skilfully link them with discussion among groups or the whole class. In a Year 8 history lesson on Islam, pupils were asked to read aloud, study a map, make notes and give extended written answers. Learning in this lesson was very good; all pupils were able to keep up and complete the activities because the teacher adapted the more difficult written tasks for lower attaining pupils.
34. Learning is good in most lessons because, in addition to their other strengths, teachers manage pupils well. Good behaviour is assumed and rarely has to be imposed. When teachers do have to reprimand pupils or remind them to listen, they do it quietly, without interrupting the flow of the lesson. This good atmosphere for learning means that teachers can give pupils the chance to learn independently and make their own discoveries. For example, in a Year 8 science lesson, pupils were able to explore the effect of different components in a circuit and discover for themselves that diodes allow current to flow in one direction only.

35. Teachers assess pupils well. Marking has improved since the previous inspection and is now usually helpful, encouraging pupils while showing them how to improve. In most lessons, teachers are aware of pupils' progress and if necessary, change the course of a lesson when they find pupils need more help or could go faster. In a Year 6 literacy lesson, several pupils made a false start on an activity to analyse the construction of a passage from a textbook, and the teacher, although focusing on another group at the time, quickly spotted the problem and dealt with it effectively.
36. Homework is used well to reinforce the work in lessons or to introduce different tasks. For example, Year 5 pupils keep a 'moon diary' in which they draw the moon each night and observe the changes.
37. Basic skills of numeracy and literacy are reinforced where possible in all lessons. The use of key words, and correct terminology in all subjects, helps to extend pupils' vocabulary and encourage their interest in language. The emphasis in history on words such as 'assassin' that have been borrowed from other cultures, is a good example.
38. Teachers regularly take account of the needs of pupils with special educational needs. They refer regularly to pupils' individual education plans. These have clear targets that are realistic and help pupils to achieve appropriate skills and understanding. In art and history and in lowest sets in English and mathematics, the work is always interesting and demanding but not so difficult that pupils become discouraged.
39. Teaching in a small number of lessons is unsatisfactory and leads to unsatisfactory learning. This is sometimes caused by faults in planning, so that activities do not work well; pupils are confused and need too much help to get started. Where teaching in music is unsatisfactory, the activities do not inspire pupils, and teachers do not demand a high enough standard of performance. Consequently, the quality of learning drops; pupils are not sufficiently committed to want to do better and they achieve less than they should, particularly in Key Stage 3.
40. There are a number of minor weaknesses that happen in lessons that are otherwise satisfactory:
  - In a few activities in science, information and communication technology, music and religious education, higher attaining pupils are not given challenging enough tasks.
  - Teachers sometimes talk for too long at the start of lessons, leaving pupils with too much information to assimilate.
  - Teachers do not always tell pupils how they are doing. For example, in physical education, teachers do not always explain to pupils what they need to do to do better, or draw attention to those who are doing well and could be examples for others.
  - Sometimes teachers do not provide simpler work for lower attaining pupils. For example, in science, all pupils manage practical work well, but lower attainers do not have enough help with written work and therefore achieve less than they should when they are not supported by learning assistants.



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

41. The school's curriculum policy includes the commitment to provide a broad, balanced curriculum for pupils, reflecting local and national guidelines. The curriculum policy states that 'subjects are taught with due regard to other curriculum areas, so that where possible, links are identified between courses'. The effectiveness of this approach is shown by the way in which pupils' progress in most subjects has been improved by effective literacy and numeracy strategies.
42. The curriculum in both key stages is broad, balanced and relevant and meets most National Curriculum requirements. The main exception is the modelling and measurement aspects of information and communication technology. In addition, a number of pupils do not have their full entitlement to swimming because the school is unable to provide swimming lessons, and although most learn to swim in their lower schools, some do not.
43. Pupils have one lesson of information and communication technology a week, which gives them satisfactory competence in basic skills, but computers are not used sufficiently often in other subjects of the curriculum.
44. Drama is not taught as a separate subject but pupils have some opportunities to practise drama in English, and in history, where role-play is used well to help pupils empathise with peoples from other times. Pupils can take part in school drama productions. In dance, they practise movement and learn dramatic techniques such as 'freeze frame'.
45. There is an appropriate emphasis in Key Stage 2 on English and mathematics and the increased time allowed for these has been used successfully to extend and improve provision for literacy and numeracy. The curriculum in Key Stage 2 is enriched by French, which provides pupils with an early introduction to the subject. In Key Stage 3, all pupils continue with the study of French, with an increased time allocation. Although the time for both English and mathematics is reduced in Years 7 and 8, good curriculum planning reduces the impact of this reduction. In English, pupils sometimes study texts related to the topics current in history or geography, getting the most out of the available time. Numeracy skills are practised in other subjects, for example by adding numbers in French.
46. The effectiveness of the curriculum in a few areas is constrained by problems with accommodation. For example in French, teachers cannot always make the most suitable use of equipment or activities, because they may not be available in the classroom being used for the lesson.
47. Provision for personal and social education throughout the school is good. The programme, including health, drugs and sex education, is planned carefully and used effectively to develop a sense of citizenship. For younger pupils, 'circle time' is used effectively to help them listen to each other and solve problems that are bothering them. Outside speakers are often used to bring variety and relevance to the programme. During the week of the inspection, a speaker from the police was talking about drugs. Pupils discuss issues sensibly and are polite and courteous to visiting adults.

48. There is a clear policy and timetable for homework, starting with English and mathematics twice a week in Year 5, and progressively including more subjects as pupils move through the school. The time spent on homework helps pupils in their learning, and prepares them for work at the upper school.
49. The curriculum for pupils with special educational needs is good and meets the requirements of the Code of Practice. Pupils are well integrated in lessons. There are effective links with outside agencies, and pupils with statements of special need and those on other stages of the register of special needs have appropriate individual education plans with clear short-term targets. Plans are effectively prepared and reviewed and targets agreed at whole-staff meetings.
50. The provision for extra-curricular activities is very good and includes a wide range of activities and visits, in this country and France. Sports make a strong contribution, for example through hockey, netball and football. Around two-thirds of pupils regularly take part in sporting clubs and fixtures. There is also a good range of musical activities, including orchestra, recorder and guitar groups. Other activities include a multimedia club and a jigsaw club. Fifty pupils attended a drama club for Years 7 and 8 during the inspection week. There is a thriving art club several times a week.
51. All pupils have full access to the curriculum. Pupils with special educational needs of all kinds are well supported and the school adapts well to unusual needs, such as a child arriving from abroad with very little English. There is good provision for pupils with particular needs. For example, on Tuesday evenings there is an innovative and helpful club for pupils who are dyspraxic or have dyspraxic characteristics, and for their parents. The school enables all pupils to take part in a good range of activities by holding many at lunchtime to cater for those who come to school by special bus and cannot stay after school.

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

52. Overall provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school's aims and code of conduct provide a sound foundation for personal development.
53. Provision for spiritual development is good. Religious education makes a valuable contribution by providing opportunities for pupils to examine and acquire insights into beliefs, and there are many other opportunities for pupils to explore big ideas. For example, in history, pupils consider and discuss the loss of life associated with war and on religious practices in Ancient Greece, Egypt and Rome, and in various periods of British history.
54. Provision for pupils' moral development is very good: the school actively values responsibility, honesty, fairness and tolerance and pupils are clearly made aware of the differences between right and wrong. The personal education programme and assemblies cover a range of moral issues. Pupils discuss and reflect on a number of ethical concerns in English, geography, history and religious education. In classrooms, pupils benefit from working in an orderly atmosphere with acceptable and predictable responses, rewards and sanctions.
55. As was the case at the time of the last report, provision for pupils' social development is very good. Staff support, encourage and value pupils' achievements. The quality of life and daily activity provides a caring and secure environment in which relationships are based on respect and co-operation. There is a good range of opportunities for

pupils to show initiative and accept responsibility. These include a range of monitor duties in classes, duties as librarians and the opportunity to participate in a wide range of school events.

56. Provision to help pupils develop an understanding of their own and other cultures is good and has improved since the previous inspection. There is no evidence of teachers failing to promote positive images or not using appropriate language when describing or referring to cultures other than those of the pupils, as was stated in the last report. In fact the opposite is true and pupils study different cultures in depth in a number of subjects and through a good range of musical and drama productions. For example, pupils have half days where they dress and eat in the style of peoples from other times, such as ancient Greeks or Victorians.
57. The curriculum takes account of the cultural diversity of British society and this is particularly evident in English, music, art, history, geography and religious education.
58. Good progress has been made on issues related to the curriculum raised in the previous inspection report. There is now an effective equal opportunities policy. Work is now planned to provide a much closer match of tasks to pupils' needs than previously. The school does not have a policy for gifted and talented pupils but makes good use of the local authority's guidance when such pupils are identified. At present there are two children who are working in a year above their chronological ages and both are making good progress. The pupils' parents are happy with the arrangements.

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

59. The school has a responsible attitude towards the health, welfare, safety and care of its pupils. It is currently revising its health and safety policy and staff training has been undertaken to ensure its effective management. The child protection policy is due for a periodical review. It is managed satisfactorily by the child protection co-ordinator but insufficient information has been shared with others. The school has been reminded that all adults in the school should undergo regular training. Overall, the school is a safe and secure environment in which to learn.
60. The school is sensitive to pupils with special educational needs and their individual learning plans are effective in giving pupils clear guidelines and targets to work for. Teachers support these pupils well. This is evident in the constructive way classwork and homework is marked and in the way teachers know and take account of pupils' particular difficulties and strengths.
61. Parents approve of the school's behaviour policy and how it is applied. Rules, compiled in discussion with pupils, are displayed in every classroom. Pupils are rewarded by a well thought out reward system which they value. Discussions with pupils, together with parents' comments, confirm that the behaviour policy is effective in seeing that there is no oppressive or inappropriate behaviour in the school. The school is very successful in helping pupils with behavioural difficulties fit into the daily routine and behave acceptably in lessons.
62. Because they teach them for many lessons, class teachers in Years 5 and 6 know their pupils well. They follow their personal development well, offering support and encouragement where needed. Personal development in Years 7 and 8 is also well monitored by heads of year and subject teachers. Teachers understand the needs of pupils from the Royal Air Force base, through experience and through the good links with the base through the link governor. These pupils are well supported and fit into the school well.

## **Assessment and monitoring pupils' progress**

63. Pupils' work and progress is assessed and monitored satisfactorily. There is a good whole-school system for formally assessing pupils' work that includes all statutory National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 2.
64. There are very good systems for assessing attainment in English and mathematics in Key Stage 2 that stem from the way literacy and numeracy are taught. Teachers use information about pupils' progress to identify weaknesses in attainment in different aspects of each subject, and modify the curriculum and teaching strategies. The use of information from assessments and tests in English is a model of good practice because it enables the progress of each pupil in each aspect of the subject to be followed. All pupils now have individual targets to improve their standards. The process is less well-developed in mathematics because the strategy has only recently been introduced. Assessment in art is also very good and gives pupils clear information about their strengths and how to improve still further.
65. There are at least satisfactory systems for assessing pupils' achievements in most other subjects, and across all subjects for pupils with special educational needs. Assessment is less well-developed in food technology. All teachers keep good records of the attainment of pupils in each subject.
66. Although teachers generally assess pupils accurately and regularly, some do not use the results sufficiently to influence the way they plan their teaching, particularly for the higher attaining pupils. This was seen in some lessons in history, science, design and technology and religious education where, although teachers could identify higher attaining pupils, they did not always provide work for these pupils that was difficult enough.
67. Information about pupils' attainment and progress is used well in English and mathematics to ensure that pupils are taught in the most appropriate groups.
68. Teachers are not consistent in the ways they communicate National Curriculum levels to pupils. This was noted in the previous inspection report. The school's assessment policy makes proper provision for reporting National Curriculum levels in English, mathematics and science, and in most subjects, assessment is related to National Curriculum levels. However, in a number of subjects, some pupils know their levels and others do not.
69. Class teachers, particularly in Key Stage 2, have good knowledge of pupils' progress in most subjects, and heads of year keep meticulous records that are passed on efficiently at the end of each year. At present, class teachers get an overview of pupils' progress twice a year when reports are compiled. There is scope to extend this, particularly in Key Stage 3, where there is more teaching by subject specialists so that class teachers have more frequent opportunities to review their pupils' progress across all subjects.

70. There is good assessment of pupils with special educational needs. Their progress is reviewed annually according to statutory requirements, and records are accurate and kept carefully. The assessment is used well to see that pupils are at the most appropriate stage of the Code of Practice and that education plans are altered to reflect pupils' changing needs.
71. The school makes good use of information currently available on pupils' standards on entry to the school. This enables pupils to be grouped appropriately and ensures that the register of special educational needs is accurately compiled.

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

72. The school's links with parents are very good. Over half the questionnaires sent out to parents before the inspection were completed and a very large majority felt that the school has good links with parents. This was stressed by parents at the meeting prior to the inspection. Parents identify with the values and standards the school promotes and believe that they are effective in preparing their children for their next stage of education. The home/school agreement has been accepted as a good initiative that formalises the understanding that already existed. There is a desire to work with parents to share information, to consult when new initiatives are planned, and generally to promote an enthusiasm for learning. The very successful partnership helps pupils to learn well and enjoy school.
73. Parents are kept well informed about the work of the school and about ways in which they can be involved:
- Regular newsletters keep parents up-to-date with the latest news and events.
  - Parents are given comprehensive information at the start of every term about the curriculum pupils will be following in each subject.
  - Pupils have diaries to record reading done at home.
  - Pupils' planners are used well to show parents what homework is to be done, and parents and teachers use these to send messages between school and home.
  - The governors' annual report is a well set out and informative document.
  - Consultation evenings are held regularly and are well attended.
74. Annual reports are augmented by brief but helpful interim reports. The full reports give parents a good idea of how pupils are responding to lessons, but in some subjects, there is too little information about how much progress children are making and what they need to do to improve.
75. Parents make a very effective contribution to pupils' learning. A number of parents visit the school to help in the classrooms and in the library. There is a very active parents' association that raises large sums of money to finance projects, for example the new computing suite. Support is given to charities identified by pupils and to a range of social events.

## HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

76. The school is well led and managed. The headteacher has been in post for two years and has the confidence of staff and parents. He has a clear vision of the way the school should serve the local community, and of how it should continue to develop. This is shared by the senior management team, and through their high expectations and good example they have established clear educational direction for the school. Parents recognise and approve of the school's aims and values. The school values tradition and conformity to high standards of behaviour. This is apparent in all its work.
77. The leadership is clear about wanting the best teachers for the school, and has set up a good procedure for making appointments that includes observing applicants teach. The practice is effective and appointments made in this way are very successful.
78. The school's development plan takes full account of the key issues in the previous report and is an effective tool for evaluating the school's effectiveness because it shows clearly what should be done, and how. In the past two years, the leadership has successfully implemented its priorities of raising standards in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, and in improving accommodation. There is a good strategic plan to improve the use of computers for learning. Planning is linked closely to the school's financial situation and the school seeks to obtain the best value for money in all areas through careful investigation of alternatives before spending on any item. The leadership has taken very effective action to meet its targets through the well-focused way in which the numeracy and literacy strategies have been implemented.
79. Most subjects are managed well, and management in numeracy and literacy is very good. The very successful introduction and continued development of the literacy strategy is a strength of the school. Leadership in French is unsatisfactory because the co-ordinator needs more training to enable the department to keep up-to-date with current ideas and methods for teaching French.
80. Finances are very well managed by the office staff who make efficient use of the latest computer system and software.
81. Members of the senior management team work closely together and with subject co-ordinators and heads of year. Duties, such as managing pupils' records and putting together development plans for subjects, are delegated sensibly and efficiently.
82. The governing body influences planning and keeps a close watch on whether changes can be afforded. For example, the recent decision to increase the teaching staff in Key Stage 2 was only agreed by the governors after careful financial analysis of the school's current and likely future income. Many of the governors are recent appointments but they already have a good grasp of most of the school's strengths and needs.
83. The school monitors its work in a number of effective ways. For example:
- pupils in Years 5 and 8 are assessed using Performance Indicators in Middle Schools (PIMS) and this provides a good measure of progress, enabling the school to calculate the 'value' it is adding to pupils' education;
  - subject co-ordinators check the quality of lesson planning and see that books are marked correctly;
  - the senior management team, at the request of the governors, carried out a detailed survey of teachers to establish the effect of changes in routines such as

- the recent extension in teachers' working days;
    - the senior management team carried out a detailed survey of pupils and parents to evaluate all aspects of the school's work; information from the survey was used extensively in the school development plan.
84. There is a weakness however, in the lack of regular and systematic observation of teaching. This was raised in the previous inspection report but not as a key issue. Appraisal is in abeyance, awaiting new regulations. Although the headteacher and other senior staff frequently visit classrooms on a casual basis, there is no planned programme to observe teachers and identify their professional needs. Co-ordinators monitor marking and planning in their subjects, but they do not have enough non-contact time to observe colleagues teaching.
85. In spite of the generally high standard of teaching seen during the inspection, some teachers, particularly those who teach a number of subjects, need more training so that all their teaching reaches the standard of their best. Recent professional development has rightly focused on teaching numeracy and literacy, both in separate lessons and in other subjects, but there is now a need to give time to specialist subjects such as French, music and physical education, that have not benefited significantly from the training for numeracy and literacy.
86. Governors fulfil most of their statutory duties. Assigned governors monitor the effectiveness of provision for pupils with special educational needs, numeracy and literacy. All governors regularly spend time in the school talking to teachers and are aware that the school needs to reintroduce appraisal as soon as possible to meet legal requirements. They have an effective plan for increasing the use of information and communication technology in all subjects. There is a need for a sharper mechanism for checking that all elements of the National Curriculum, such as modelling and measurement in information and communication technology, and swimming in physical education, are fully met.

### **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

87. The match and number of staff to the demands of the curriculum in Key Stage 2 are good; pupils benefit from being taught by a range of subject specialists. In Key Stage 3, the match of staff to the demands of the curriculum is satisfactory. Some staff teach a small number of lessons outside their specialisms, and do so satisfactorily, with support from colleagues. The arrangements for the induction of new staff and newly qualified teachers are good.
88. The school is looked after well and has a pleasant and orderly atmosphere which encourages good attitudes and behaviour. Care has been taken to ensure children's safety during the current building project to extend design facilities. Pupils in Key Stage 2 benefit considerably from the provision of specialist facilities in several subjects such as science, design and technology and information technology.
89. Accommodation, although very cramped in some areas such as art, design and technology and mathematics, is used well to provide stimulating and relevant displays, and the library is used effectively for reading practice by individual pupils. However, there is no room for small group work with pupils with special educational needs and the allocation of rooms for French severely restricts the range and variety of activities provided and leads to inefficiencies in the use of resources.
90. Resources are satisfactory overall, and used efficiently in most subjects. However, some subjects are better provided for than others. In art, resources are excellent.

Resources are very good in English and satisfactory in most other subjects. There is a need for additional computers and software for specialised use in science, design and technology and music. In music, there is a need for more instruments, music and books, and the use of the music room for other subjects means the furniture in the room is not well arranged for music-making.

91. The situation is improving in information and communication technology where there is a two-room computer suite, awaiting full use as teachers receive training. However, there is a need for more computers to bring the number up to the national average and enable greater use of computers in other subjects such as science and mathematics. The school has good strategic plans, drafted with the support and advice of the governing body, to raise provision in this area to at least a satisfactory level by the year 2002.

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

**In order to improve standards further the governors and management should:**

- implement teacher appraisal and improve the monitoring of teaching so that professional development needs are identified and met, and all teaching can be raised to the standard of the best; (paragraphs 84, 86, 120, 129, 146, 154, 172, 195)
- improve the range and quality of the use of information technology in order to meet fully the requirements of the National Curriculum in all subjects; (paragraphs 16, 22, 42, 86, 91, 100, 146, 153, 155, 158, 163, 164)
- improve the use of information from assessment to identify higher attaining pupils and share this with all teachers, in order to extend the learning for these pupils in all lessons. (paragraphs 21, 66, 101, 114, 119, 127, 129, 161, 194)

In addition to the above key issues, the school should consider the following other lesser weaknesses for inclusion in its action plan:

- improve the information in annual reports to parents by including more information about pupils' progress and indicating specific areas for improvement; (paragraphs 69, 74)
- enable modern language teachers to have easier access to the resources needed for teaching; (paragraphs 46, 89)
- provide training for all staff in child protection procedures. (paragraph 59)

## **LINKS WITH THE COMMUNITY**

92. There are good links with the local community. Pupils raise money for a number of local charities, and welcome people into school, for example to a Christmas concert for senior citizens. Members of the community also take part in some lessons and activities; a local expert on World War I comes in to talk to pupils when they study this period in history. Members of the community also spend time hearing pupils read.
93. The school uses local museums and art galleries well for visits, and regularly brings a number of visitors into school to widen pupils' experience. For example, the local police liaison officer takes part in personal, social and health education lessons when subjects, such as drugs, are discussed, and the school nurse visits frequently.



94. The school has a good relationship with the Royal Air Force base at Henlow. This enables staff to understand and support pupils who have to move school frequently. The appointment to the governors of a representative from the base is a strength because it keeps the needs of these pupils firmly in focus and widens the range of experience on the governing body.
95. The school has very good links with lower and upper schools. These enable teachers to overcome the difficulty of designing a curriculum which covers only parts of both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. Links between senior managers in the school and their counterparts in upper, lower and neighbouring middle schools are very supportive, and similar links between subject co-ordinators are also effective. Staff meet regularly, either to discuss whole-school issues, or those related to specific subjects. These links are reflected in joint planning of the curriculum, and in moderation of work, for example of investigative tasks in mathematics.
96. There are also good links through a consortium of local schools that enable the school to get good value for money from its contract for maintaining the grounds.
97. As a voluntary controlled school with close ties to the local church, the school enjoys the support of governors appointed by the diocese of St Albans. Although the church is too small for the whole school at once, smaller groups visit, and the local vicar visits the school and takes some assemblies. There is scope for extending the links with the church further and increasing its influence on school life.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	102
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	32

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6	30	34	25	5	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

#### Pupils on the school's roll

	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils on the school's roll	525
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	20

#### Special educational needs

	Y5– Y8
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	11
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	136

#### English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

#### Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	43
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	17

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.8
National comparative data	6.0

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	0.4

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	80	64	144

<b>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	54	60	72
	Girls	50	43	56
	Total	104	103	128
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	72 (69)	72 (57)	89 (74)
	National	73 (65)	72 (59)	83 (69)

<b>Teachers' Assessments</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	50	53	58
	Girls	46	40	44
	Total	96	93	102
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	67 (69)	65 (57)	71 (74)
	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (72)

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

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	1
Indian	2
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	518
Any other minority ethnic group	3

### ***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	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

### ***Teachers and classes***

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	26.37
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.9

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

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

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	169.5

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

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	84.8
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y5 – Y8**

Key Stage 2	23.88
Key Stage 3	23.55
Key Stage 4	

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	955155
Total expenditure	939495
Expenditure per pupil	1834.90
Balance brought forward from previous year	21368
Balance carried forward to next year	37028

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

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out

527

Number of questionnaires returned

281

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

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	49	8	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	38	55	6	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	37	58	3	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	63	13	2	1
The teaching is good.	36	59	1	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	30	55	14	0	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	44	4	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	57	41	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	35	56	6	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	51	45	1	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	41	51	3	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	41	47	9	0	3

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

### **ENGLISH**

98. The results of National Curriculum tests taken in 1999 at the end of the key stage were in line with the national average for the proportion of pupils attaining the expected level (Level 4) and just below the average for the proportion attaining the higher levels (Level 5 and above). These results are similar to those reported at the time of the previous inspection and the school's results have kept pace with the rising national trend over the last three years. Test results in 1999 are below those of pupils in similar schools, partly because a higher than usual number of pupils in this year group had below average reading skills when they started in Year 5. Teachers' assessments are well matched to test results.
99. Current attainment in lessons in Key Stage 2 is better than that shown by previous test results and is now above average. This is largely due to the very successful implementation of the National Literacy Strategy which has raised standards in all aspects of the subject and improved the quality of teaching. Most pupils become confident and fluent speakers as they progress through the key stage; they are eager to answer questions and can talk about their work with ease in discussions. Pupils respect and listen attentively to their teachers and the opinions of others so the standard of discussion in class is good. Teachers encourage all pupils to join in oral work and all lessons give pupils many well-planned opportunities to practise their skills. The more regular experience of drama would increase these skills still further.
100. Higher attaining pupils hold conversations using standard English well. Pupils of average or below average ability generally speak in well-formed phrases because the use of single word answers is discouraged. All pupils read well by the end of the key stage and there are effective programmes of help for those pupils whose reading starts out below average. All pupils enjoy reading and teachers use demanding texts to extend pupils' vocabulary and comprehension to above average levels. Pupils' knowledge of grammar is good and all but the very lowest attainers can analyse the writing of a range of well-chosen authors using the correct terms. Writing communicates effectively and many pupils delight in extending their knowledge of words through the regular use of dictionaries and other well-planned resources. However, the mis-spelling of everyday words is common and there are faults in sentence construction in all but the higher attaining pupils' work. Where these skills are more rigorously taught, sentence and paragraph writing improve to above average levels by the end of the key stage. Pupils do not use computers enough to draft and present their work.
101. The overall attainment of pupils in Key Stage 3 is in line with expectations and is above average in speaking and reading. By the end of Year 8, pupils respond well to a good range of literature. The quality of discussions and written work about texts shows that pupils' knowledge of literature has improved since the previous inspection. Most pupils can analyse the style of authors well, and have good knowledge of correct literary terms. This is reflected in above average pieces of extended writing by higher attaining pupils. Boys' writing is generally below the standard of that of girls because teachers' expectations of the quality and style of writing are not made clear enough and boys often confine their written responses to minimum requirements. By the end of Year 8, pupils use sentence and paragraph constructions well, but higher attaining pupils need to practise a wider range of more demanding writing.

102. Reading is above average. Pupils read aloud with good expression, often from texts containing difficult language, and pupils usually understand what they read. Teachers encourage all pupils to read frequently and the skills of 'skimming' and extracting important information are well taught. Standards of speaking and listening are above average. Pupils speak in interesting and varied ways about their work and can discuss a range of topics well. Speech is generally fluent, confident and articulate. The development of a new scheme of work for Key Stage 3 has enabled teachers to build on the good practice of the literacy teaching in Key Stage 2. There is a greater concentration on using the study of literature for a more systematic approach to basic skills so standards are rising. However, pupils' experience of performance drama is limited.
103. The quality of learning in most English lessons is very good in Key Stage 2 and good in Key Stage 3. This is due in part to pupils' positive attitudes towards the subject. These have been maintained and strengthened since the previous inspection. Pupils in both key stages show interest in their work and this is encouraged by good relationships with their teachers. Lessons are well planned to involve all pupils in a collaborative approach to learning and all pupils' achievements are celebrated and rewarded. Pupils' work is regularly marked and assessed so that they know how well they are progressing.
104. Pupils enter the school with below average attainment in English and have made very good progress by the end of Key Stage 2 because teachers and pupils work enthusiastically together to learn the correct skills. This was well illustrated by a lesson about the poem 'The Lady of Shalott' in a Year 5 class. The lesson was well planned and the pupils were taught to concentrate on the use of rhyme so that their knowledge and use of vocabulary improved significantly by the end of the lesson. Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to present pupils with interesting and demanding tasks which encourage sustained concentration.
105. The standard of teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Teaching is never less than satisfactory, is good in half the lessons seen and very good in a third of lessons. Excellent teaching was also observed. Teachers maintain high standards of discipline and pupils are always sure of what they have to do; this helps ensure that the quality of learning is good. A good variety of resources is used to challenge pupils at all levels. Work is suitably planned to enable all pupils to learn well in each lesson and concentrated help is given to small groups within each class in Key Stage 2. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in both key stages because appropriate work is planned for them and they are well supported by the teacher or classroom assistant.
106. The very effective use of the literacy hour means that there is more good and very good teaching in Key Stage 2 than in Key Stage 3. Pupils make satisfactory gains in their learning in Key Stage 3. In Years 7 and 8, pupils develop good working habits and teachers encourage them to think hard about how written English can be used to persuade and convey emotion. A lesson based on the poem 'A Martian Sends a Postcard Home' and another concentrating on the opening of a short story, made demands on reading skills so that pupils at all levels of attainment were fully engaged in interpreting the authors' intentions. However, teachers do not always make their expectations of the quality and style of written responses sufficiently clear.
107. The English department is exceptionally well led and managed. The implementation of the national strategy to improve literacy has had a profound impact on standards and the expert manner of its introduction into the curriculum of the school is exemplary. All teachers, especially the large number of non-specialists in Key Stage 2, feel well

supported and part of a successful team. Curriculum planning, procedures for assessment and the management of a wide range of resources are very good.

### **Literacy across the curriculum**

108. Other subjects make a significant contribution to pupils' developing literacy, Pupils are taught to use the correct terminology and spelling. They are expected to carry out research, use technical terms correctly, and redraft their work, for example when describing their plans and evaluations in design and technology. They are encouraged to read aloud in many lessons and are learning how to extract information from a variety of sources in, for example, history. In geography, there is some use of key words, and plans to increase this further. In mathematics, they develop their ability to express ideas in words because they have to explain clearly how they arrived at their answers. They are taught to write accurately in science. For example, a Year 8 group reviewed their earlier learning and reinforced their communication skills by designing a worksheet for younger pupils.

### **MATHEMATICS**

109. The standards reached by pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 are in line with national averages, with some pupils reaching well above average standards. Results in the Key Stage 2 tests have improved over the last four years, and in 1999, the assessments of pupils of this age by teachers were in line with test results.

110. By the end of Year 6, pupils know the names and properties of two-dimensional shapes. Pupils can rotate these through a given angle; higher attaining pupils using a centre of rotation outside the shape, lower attainers using the origin. Pupils can draw graphs to represent data; higher attainers work with more difficult examples. Pupils can use their multiplication tables; higher attainers working quickly, lower attainers are more confident and accurate with smaller numbers.

111. The standards reached at the end of Year 8 are in line with national expectations, with some pupils again consistently producing work that is well above average.

112. There is some use of information technology in mathematics, for example writing formulae to generate information in spreadsheets was used to develop algebraic skills in a Year 8 class. However, opportunities to use information technology are limited.

113. By the end of Year 8, higher attaining pupils can identify a pattern in a sequence of numbers and find an algebraic formula to describe it. Average attaining pupils can simplify fractions and recognise equivalent fractions. Lower attaining pupils can use directed numbers to answer simple questions, such as finding changes in temperature. All can collect information and represent it on a graph; higher attainers calculate angles for pie charts, lower attainers find information from a given pie chart.

114. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, learn well enough in lessons to make at least satisfactory progress during their time in the school. All pupils in the top sets in each year make good progress, in response to good or very good teaching. The quality of learning of some pupils in the other sets is more variable; tasks provided do not always match sufficiently the needs of higher attaining pupils in these classes to help them achieve higher levels, but the remainder, including those in lowest sets, learn well.

115. Teachers in both key stages took part in numeracy training. The impact of this training, and the well thought out related planning, particularly the planning for Key



Stage 2, is raising standards, especially in mental mathematics and in oral communication skills. For example, higher attaining pupils in Year 7 use mental arithmetic for calculations such as 38 squared, and can explain the way they reach the answer. Lower attaining pupils in Year 7 use simple directed numbers in addition questions; most reach the answer without the use of diagrams to help. Overall, pupils achieve at least the standards expected of them, and the majority make good progress in Key Stage 2 through the well-implemented strategy to raise numeracy in Years 5 and 6.

116. The improvement in progress and standards has not yet had time to raise the school's test results at the end of Key Stage 2.
117. Most pupils enjoy their mathematics lessons. Their very good behaviour, and hard work and concentration, contribute to the good quality of learning. They come to lessons well prepared, for example with completed homework, and with the necessary resources. They settle down quickly and move sensibly around sometimes cramped classrooms. All these factors contribute to a classroom atmosphere in which they can learn and practise their skills. As well as getting on well with their teachers, pupils work co-operatively, discussing problems and ways of solving them. Their exercise books are usually carefully looked after, again showing their positive attitude to mathematics.
118. The quality of teaching is good and this too enables pupils to learn well in all their lessons. During the inspection week, teaching was very good in around four out of ten lessons, good in about three out of ten and satisfactory in the rest. Teachers explain work clearly and create a classroom atmosphere in which pupils are confident enough to discuss their answers in front of the class, even if they are not sure they are correct. Teachers quickly establish a hard working environment; this is a strong contributory factor to pupils' achievement. When teaching is very good, ideas are presented with pace and enthusiasm, which generates commitment from the pupils. For example, in the first part of a Year 6 lesson on shape and space, pupils used cardboard strips to demonstrate different angle properties such as obtuse or reflex, improving their speed and accuracy each time they repeated the process.
119. In many lessons, teachers use questions effectively to get pupils to think carefully about what they are doing, and to prompt them in describing and justifying their methods. This effective questioning visibly spurs pupils into thinking further and deeper about topics. In middle ability sets, when teaching is satisfactory, but not better, the higher attaining pupils are not given appropriate tasks quickly enough. For example, they have to work through all the easier questions first before reaching the more challenging ones. All teachers provide good individual support for those who are finding particular aspects difficult, encouraging them to have confidence in their ability to learn.
120. The co-ordination of mathematics in the school is good. The grouping of pupils in sets has a positive effect on their progress; pupils in the top sets are given very challenging work and those in the lowest sets learn well through tasks that interest them and help them to build up confidence. The positive impact of training for the National Numeracy Strategy is clear, and is visible in both key stages. Although the co-ordinator is able to work through sampling exercise books, she does not have sufficient time to monitor teaching, a key factor in improving teaching to the standard of the best in the department. The detailed analysis of information from assessment has begun and is providing useful information about the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' achievements. Teachers use National Curriculum levels when assessing pupils' work, but do not always share this information with pupils.

121. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory. Standards have improved, as has teaching. Lower attaining pupils are taught in a way that gives them confidence.

### **Numeracy across the curriculum**

122. Skills in numeracy in other subjects are good, reflecting the time and good teaching given to develop them. Pupils have a good grasp of number bonds and basic arithmetical calculations. Through constant practice, they are able to carry these out quickly and accurately, only using calculators when appropriate. In geography in both key stages, they make sense of tables and charts and represent data graphically. In science, they carry out simple calculations and use bar charts and line graphs to display their results. Older pupils interpret their line graphs and understand why the slope of a line is steep or shallow. In history lessons, pupils understand the significance of percentages, and use time lines and interpret diagrams; they can interpret numerical information in, for example, census figures. In French, pupils not only count in French, but also carry out simple calculations such as addition in the foreign language.

### **SCIENCE**

123. Results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 2 were above the national average in 1999. The proportion of pupils reaching Level 4 was above average and the proportion reaching Level 5 close to average - an improvement over results in previous years. Test results are close to those of pupils in similar schools. Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 2 are accurate, although they are below test results. This is because pupils do not reach such high levels in their scientific investigations.

124. At the end of Year 8, attainment assessed by the department, using tests in common with other local middle schools, is above average. This is confirmed by the standards of pupils' work seen in Year 8 during the inspection. Attainment by boys and girls is similar. Attainment in lessons and in most pupils' books is above average at the end of Key Stage 2. In Year 6, most pupils know the difference between series and parallel circuits, can describe simple food chains and use basic food tests to identify food types such as starch. Many use the terms 'carbohydrate' and 'protein' correctly. They plan a simple investigation into, for example, the conditions for plant growth, making predictions and recording observations to a satisfactory standard.

125. In Year 8, most gain good knowledge and understanding of electrical circuits. They set up circuits to test the purpose of different electrical components and can describe an electric current as a flow of negative charge. They carry out experiments safely, as when preparing solutions with different values on the pH scale to test for acidity or alkalinity. The standards of pupils' written work is usually good and their numerical skills are enhanced by frequent opportunities to measure, tabulate data, present data graphically and carry out calculations.

126. The standards of teaching and learning are good. Teaching has improved in Key Stage 2 since the previous inspection. The newly enlarged laboratories are places of orderly learning in which well-behaved, well-motivated pupils enjoy learning science. Teachers set good examples to promote pupils' personal development as well as teaching the knowledge and skills of science. They employ a good range of teaching methods in lessons that are usually well planned. In a Year 5 lesson on the digestive system, the teacher used good questioning to encourage a keen well-managed class to share and consolidate its understanding of different food types and their importance in the human body. In this and other lessons, teachers place emphasis on pupils'

correct use of scientific words. In practical work, learning is reinforced by pupils' high standards of behaviour and self-control. Year 5 pupils, exploring the sounds produced by different musical instruments, were able to share instruments, compare ideas and discuss their findings. However, the marking of pupils' work is not consistent in providing pupils with clear guidance on how to improve their work.

127. Teaching methods are not always demanding enough for the highest attaining pupils. In some lessons, the teacher does not adapt the work for those with special educational needs. However, additional classroom support is often provided, and this enables them to learn well and make good progress in these lessons.
128. Teachers have high expectations of most pupils and these are usually well judged. In a well-organised Year 7 class investigating the effects of friction, all pupils were expected to and could distinguish between different variables and knew how they could be controlled. They also knew how to design a fair test and could predict the effects of weight or surface on the size of the friction force. In a few Key Stage 3 lessons, teachers give introductions and explanations that are overlong, leaving pupils with too much information to assimilate. In most lessons, teachers stimulate pupils' interest through more active participation in learning. For example, a class studying evaporation was asked to observe carefully different features of a Leibig condenser and to speculate about their purpose. The teacher skillfully built up a sense of anticipation as the demonstration progressed, leading to a gasp of surprise from pupils when clear water was seen to condense from ink. The teaching of investigation ideas and techniques is good in lessons dedicated to these skills, and throughout their lessons, pupils are invited to predict the outcome of experiments and form simple hypotheses. However, there is a need to increase pupils' opportunities to carry out investigations in which they can apply and reinforce these skills.
129. The work of the team of science teachers is well supported by the science co-ordinator. There is a clear sense of educational direction, setting priorities to raise attainment, and working to targets that are part of the school development plan. Some features of planning, however, require improvement. The current teaching schemes do not give teachers enough guidance about how to meet the learning needs of the full range of pupils. There is some extension work provided for higher attaining pupils, but no plans to give different tasks to pupils of differing levels of attainment. The provision for teaching information and communication technology within science is unsatisfactory and does not fully meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. The science co-ordinator monitors colleagues' planning and marking but does not have time to observe their lessons.

## **ART**

130. The overall attainment of pupils by the end of Key Stage 2 is above national expectations. There are examples of high standards of work in Year 6 that are well above expectation, for example, in the selection of landscape shapes to form an abstract composition and to create Aboriginal designs. Pupils show very good levels of attainment in mixing and controlling paint and in the development and expression of ideas and feelings. They use a wide range of materials and are familiar with the basic elements of art, such as line, tone, pattern, colour and texture. They know how to model, and understand that form is related to a three-dimensional shape. This is evident in the high standard of modelling and painting of ceramic shells in Year 5. Most know the primary colours and how to mix green, orange and purple. They look at artists' work and use artists' techniques to improve their own skills of drawing and painting. In all lessons observed, pupils show gains in learning and using art language. Pupils use sketchbooks to record from observation and most successfully

sustain their investigations over a period of time. Most pupils draw from observation with increasing accuracy. However, the drawing skills of a few average and low attaining pupils in Year 5 are below average and they need support and encouragement to improve.

131. By the end of Year 8, the overall attainment of pupils is well above expectation. They rapidly build on good sketchbook practice to develop skills of research, and most investigate and plan their work confidently. In Year 7, pupils learn the skills of batik and weaving, using specialist materials and tools with increasing control. Most show growing attention to detail in their drawings and paintings. For example, they compose colourful landscapes inspired by the artist Hundertwasser, and they draw fruit from direct observation and simplify their designs to create exciting jewellery in an Art Nouveau style. In Year 8, pupils work on modelling a hand to extend their knowledge of form, adapting and improving the shape through the study of Renaissance artists. Most pupils' work is of a high standard. Pupils with special educational needs and lower attaining pupils acquire and improve basic folding, joining and building skills successfully. Investigation using sketchbooks is a strength at all levels of attainment. Boys and girls show similar success in developing creative, imaginative and practical skills.
132. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. Teaching is often excellent and inspirational, particularly at Key Stage 3. Teachers give pupils time to reflect on their ideas so that they gain confidence in, for example, experimenting with mixing colours to build up areas of shadow and light in their portraits. Basic skills, including literacy, are well focused, and teachers' relationships with pupils promote an excellent ethos for learning. Planning is thorough and pupils' knowledge and understanding of artists are very well linked with investigative and making processes of art.
133. In most lessons there is a very good balance between activities directed by the teacher and freedom for pupils to experiment with a wide range of materials. This is an improvement since the last inspection. The design assistant makes a commendable impact on pupils' learning in supporting small groups for textile skills development. For example, the collaborative fabric hanging, based on Polynesian patterns, shows a high standard of development in colour application. Pupils are involved effectively in day-to-day assessment and group sessions where work is evaluated; this helps pupils focus on what they have learned. In the best lessons, teachers' expectations are high and pupils are engaged in challenging and enjoyable activities through well planned question and answer sessions that stimulate their creative effort. Very effective teaching methods are used to increase the quality and quantity of independent study in the classroom. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are excellent, due to the commitment and high expectations of teachers. This produces a reflective atmosphere in the art room that sustains pupils' interest and concentration. From Year 5, pupils are eager to try out new ideas and this ability to work independently contributes to their very high quality of learning and very good achievement overall. Pupils with special educational needs and other lower attaining pupils make very good progress. They receive very good support from teachers and classroom assistants on how to improve, and many achieve standards well above those expected for their age.
134. The department is effectively led by a committed and enthusiastic art co-ordinator, and a detailed handbook gives clear guidance to staff. The department policy includes very good procedures for assessment and an excellent focus on multicultural aspects of art. Art is enriched with a well-resourced design studio; lunchtime clubs extend the continuity of the art curriculum for many pupils and effectively complement the arrangement in which modules of art are taught in rotation with design and

technology. There are excellent displays of art work throughout the school. The department makes some use of information and communication technology and has plans to extend this when the building work in the design area is complete.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

135. The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 and Year 8 is above national expectations. This is an improvement since the previous inspection when standards were found to be average. When using resistant materials, pupils design and make model aeroplanes, using clear knowledge of their study of different materials. Work in pupils' folders contains drawing with clear annotations, showing where designs have been changed. However, high attaining pupils do not use a wide enough technical vocabulary when they evaluate the success of what they have made.
136. In food in Year 5, pupils are able to prepare simple products and show an awareness of designing to meet their own needs.
137. By the end of Year 8, many pupils show high standards of design and making that reach Level 5. When using resistant materials to design wind turbines, they accurately evaluate the performance of different sails before choosing a final design. They use a range of tools and processes to make a variety of products, showing increased knowledge of the properties of materials. Average and below average attaining pupils show good understanding of control systems. In a few lessons, higher attainers are not sufficiently stretched through more difficult tasks. In food, the standard of work in pupils' folders, such as that on tasting cookies, is below the standard found in other technology projects. The vocabulary is limited, and not related to the original specification. In lessons and in work assessed by teachers, girls' attainment matches that of boys. Pupils with special educational needs often achieve high standards, with some reaching Level 5 by the end of Year 8.
138. The standard of teaching has improved since the previous inspection, and is now good. Learning across both key stages is good as teachers provide lessons with clear objectives, usually containing well-focused discussions and demonstrations. For example, in a Year 8 lesson where pupils were designing a wind generator, the teacher's advice on testing the product against clear, quantitative criteria helped pupils to modify and improve the performance of their designs successfully. The lesson was carefully planned to provide pupils with a good balance of activities and to help them learn the skills of technical testing well. The teacher linked ideas of inefficiency to pupils' scientific knowledge of energy and friction well, so that pupils of all levels of attainment were able to discuss their work and decisions with maturity. Pupils were interested and collaborated successfully in teams.
139. Teachers' high expectations of quality in practical work, for example, when designing storage boxes, enable pupils to produce designs that take into account the size of contents and they show this clearly in carefully annotated drawings. In food lessons, teachers sometimes miss opportunities to extend the technical vocabulary because they accept inadequate evaluations from pupils.
140. Teachers manage lessons very well, and pupils work safely and hygienically. Their attitudes to design and technology are very good and they treat equipment with care. They are able to work co-operatively in pairs in activities such as testing the performance of their wind buggies. They respect the designs of other pupils and share ideas to improve their products.

141. Teachers do not assess designing and making in food lessons so as to set clear targets as pupils move through the carousel of projects; this hinders pupils from improving their own knowledge of how they are learning. Although management of lessons is good, allowing pupils successfully to cook a wide variety of food products, these skills are learned in isolation from other areas of the subject.
142. Management of the subject is satisfactory and there is effective co-operation with the information and communication technology department to enable pupils to make good use of computers to control mechanisms. One shortcoming in the management of the subject is the poor co-ordination of designing outcomes between food and resistant materials. Assessment of pupils' progress is not shared between the two areas. The quality and range of designing in food is insufficient and there is a lack of training given to non-specialist teachers in this respect.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

143. Overall attainment of pupils by the end of Key Stage 2 is in line with national expectations. Higher attaining pupils, however, achieve above the national expectation for pupils of this age. These pupils in particular, display good mapping, graphical and diagrammatic skills. They understand and use six-figure grid references with confidence. Most pupils are developing independent learning skills through topic work in which they have to gather information from various sources. Limited evidence was seen of pupils' ability to use information technology skills in lessons or in books, except in Key Stage 2, where pupils have successfully used CD-ROMs to find information. By the end of the key stage, most pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of weather and climate, the characteristics of the equatorial forest and hot desert ecosystems and the nature of life in rural India. They are beginning to understand the relationships between physical and human geography. Year 5 pupils carry out field study tasks appropriate for their age, for example, the work in Henlow and on the River Ivel.
144. By the end of Year 8, attainment in lessons and in books is in line with expectation for pupils of that age. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 show a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of weather systems and symbols and of the physical and human differences between north and south Italy. Higher attaining pupils have good knowledge of the work they have covered and speak clearly and answer geographical questions well. As in Key Stage 2, pupils on the special needs register make satisfactory progress, supported by class teachers. Most pupils can write accurately but opportunities for the development of extended writing are limited, except in topic and project work. In some classes in both key stages, worksheets are used too much and this restricts opportunities for extended writing and thinking.
145. Teaching is entirely satisfactory with some good practice. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Teachers prepare lessons carefully, ensuring that subject matter meets the needs of different pupils. In the good lessons in particular, learning is helped by the use of an effective range of learning strategies and by careful explanations of geographical processes. For example, pupils used photographs and captions to learn about life in an Indian village, and a video was used to explain the dangers and advantages of living close to volcanoes. Appropriate emphasis is placed on learning to interpret maps and atlases. There is however, little opportunity to develop skills needed for field study, except in Year 5. Teachers' knowledge is mainly satisfactory although there was some insecurity when pupils raised questions outside the main focus of the lesson and the teacher had to defer discussion of the point until later. A suitable range of resources and up-to-date information is used in lessons to interest pupils and help their learning. The aims of

lessons are shared effectively with pupils. Classroom management is friendly, yet firm and the pace of lessons suits the rate at which pupils learn. There is too little emphasis or use of key words used in geography. Marking is carried out carefully and pupils are aware of what they need to do to improve their work.

146. The department is well organised. There is limited monitoring of teaching and learning as the co-ordinator has little time to carry out this role and the specific needs of non-specialist teachers are therefore not always identified. The co-ordinator monitors sets of exercise books and there are regular meetings between teachers to discuss the units of work. The development of pupils' information technology competencies and field study skills, which are important aids to learning geography, are mainly limited to Year 5. The department makes a satisfactory contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in an implicit rather than identified and planned way.
147. Since the last inspection, progress has been made in the provision of appropriate work for lower attainers. Pupils' response to the subject has also improved and the lack of application, reported last time, is no longer apparent. The quality of teaching has improved and pupils are now given the opportunity to develop research skills. The range of teaching strategies has also widened and pupils are no longer too closely directed by the teacher. Pupils are given the opportunity to work both collaboratively and independently. The use of information technology is still limited and there are still too few opportunities for field study.

## **HISTORY**

148. The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 is above national expectations. Some pupils at each end of the ability range achieve higher than expected levels. By the end of the key stage, pupils know how civilisations become strong, why they fall and the lasting impact they have on our lives today. They understand the influence of religion and technology and the responsibilities of leaders. They can express an accurate view of events in a variety of ways and are confident using dates and searching a variety of sources for evidence. For example, as an introduction to the development of transport in Victorian times, pupils in a Year 6 class used a number of resources to select information about types of vehicles in order to put them in sequence and date them. They were excited by the challenge of supporting their conclusions with evidence and most succeeded in doing so.
149. The overall attainment of pupils when they leave at the end of Year 8 is above national expectations. Pupils are well equipped for their studies in history at the upper school. By the end of Year 8, they have a coherent view of the major world civilisations and can compare the impact of wars, beliefs and technology in England from Mediaeval to modern times. They analyse the motives and methods of leaders from all levels of society and understand what it means to be a victim of change. Pupils at all levels cope well with historical terms and ordering events in time. They can structure an investigation testing a hypothesis and critically compare primary and secondary sources, answering questions like 'Why should we be careful in believing the Bayeux tapestry?' There are useful links with English in work on World War I, Tudor times and the Victorians and with religious education during studies of Islamic civilisation. For example, Year 8 pupils study familiar English and French words such as 'assassin', that have been 'borrowed' from Arabic. Pupils' numeracy is used and reinforced in history. Pupils study maps to trace and compare the spread of ancient empires with specific populations worked out in percentages. Pupils also study 1881 census data for Henlow in which they have to interpret statistics.

150. Teaching is good and at times outstanding. Pupils learn well because they are well taught and they come to lessons with positive attitudes and a commitment to do well. Lessons have a distinct sense of purpose where knowledge and skills interweave, opening out and being reinforced through a variety of tasks and types of stimulus. At all stages, the pupils are actively involved and this generates commitment and gives them confidence to share what they find out or to decide how to work through a task. For example, the teacher began a Year 8 lesson on a study of the Crusades with a brief role-play activity in which a pupil took the part of Pope Urban II expressing his concerns about the Muslim world and pilgrimages. Other pupils remembered earlier work well and used it as the basis for advice to the 'Pope'. This was followed by a written task in which higher attaining pupils searched independently for information and others were given more guidance.
151. Half-day events like a Greek festival, a Victorian school day and the visit by an expert on World War I are planned so that knowledge becomes real and lasting as pupils dress up for a role, taste food or touch the uniform of a soldier. Such experiences challenge pupils to step into the shoes of others and make moral judgements - a significant contribution to their spiritual, social and moral development. Year 8 pupils were shocked to learn of gangrenous infections resulting from coins placed under bandages by World War I soldiers desperate to avoid a return to the horrors of fighting at the Front.
152. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because it is standard practice to provide them with suitable tasks in all lessons. There is some good practice where teachers provide alternative approaches or tasks for pupils at each end of the ability range.
153. Information and communication technology is not integral to the course though many pupils use word processing. It is essential that pupils have access to such technology to develop greater independence in enquiry work and discriminate between resources of differing value.
154. The high standards of teaching and learning noted in the previous report have been maintained. There is now a need to extend opportunities for monitoring and sharing practice in order to strengthen co-ordination and support the large number of teachers of history.

## **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

155. Provision for information and communication technology has improved since the previous inspection, but there are still some areas of weakness. Pupils now have good opportunities for communicating and handling information, and are able to use computers for control, both in separate information and communication technology lessons and in design and technology. There is a weakness in measuring and modelling at both key stages. Pupils use spreadsheets to explore patterns in mathematics, but do not have sufficient opportunity for interrogating information that has been stored. At present, pupils do not have the opportunity to use sensors, for example, in science, to measure and record information such as changes in temperature. The school is aware of most of the weaknesses, and of the need to increase the use of computers across the curriculum in order to address them.
156. The attainment of pupils by the end of Key Stage 2 and Year 8 is in line with national expectations. Communicating is a strength. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils can word process with accuracy, and use graphics packages with skilful use of drawing software to draw and modify shapes, pictures and designs. In Year 5, pupils construct



detailed maps with carefully designed keys. They use 'copy' and 'paste' independently to duplicate trees and houses to illustrate their maps.

157. By the end of Year 8, pupils use word processing and presentation software with some more advanced features, combining a range of information sources, although there is some indiscriminate use of clip-art when pupils do not always choose the most appropriate pictures to import. When studying control software in design and technology, pupils write precise sequences of instructions for traffic lights and robot arms. When using logo, pupils write complex procedures, although in this work, high attainers do not achieve high enough standards because they are not given challenging enough tasks.
158. Teachers assess pupils too highly at the end of Key Stage 2; they estimate that many pupils reach Level 5 and above. This is an accurate assessment of the work studied, but two aspects, modelling and measurement, are not covered, and there is little of this work in mathematics and science, so that the National Curriculum is not fully met in these areas.
159. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. They use all the school's software packages with some skill, and write and edit procedures for controlling mechanisms, such as model traffic lights, with a computer. Some pupils in Years 5 and 6 are making good progress through the effective use of an integrated learning system that allows them to work at their own pace to improve spelling and general literacy. Henlow is a pilot school for this system, and teachers are making good use of the facility by running additional lessons for pupils during lunchtimes. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls in lessons.
160. Teaching is satisfactory and enables learning in most lessons to be at least satisfactory, and often good. There is some very good teaching with very well planned lessons, particularly in Key Stage 2. In Key Stage 3, most teaching is at least satisfactory, but one unsatisfactory lesson was seen. Classroom methods allow pupils to work independently, for example in doing their own research and creating their own designs for booklets, adding other sources of information. Pupils learn well through using documents written by the teacher as a basis for research. For example, in a project on the Taj Mahal, pupils were able to combine different forms of information well, and discriminated in their choice of text and graphics. Pupils behave very well; their attitudes to lessons are very good and they enjoy working with computers. They respect equipment, and when sharing a machine, they co-operate well. In lessons using control in design and technology, they work in pairs to write and edit programs. Teachers encourage pupils to use the Internet to obtain further images for documents.
161. Although teaching is satisfactory overall, there are some shortcomings in otherwise satisfactory lessons. These are due to:
- some teachers not having the expertise to provide enough tasks suitable for pupils with special educational needs or for higher attaining pupils;
  - too little homework being set, so that pupils do not consolidate the work done in lessons;
  - not making the best use of monitors and overhead projectors; so that pupils do not clearly follow demonstrations;
  - pupils having to wait too long for help.
162. Teachers plan and supervise well-organised extra-curricular activities such as the multi-media club, where pupils work together creating a magazine using an interactive

presentation package. Some pupils take responsibility for editing the magazine, others design cartoons and write school gossip columns.

163. At present there are insufficient opportunities at both key stages for pupils to extend their use of information and communication technology in most other subjects, such as mathematics, science, art, history, geography and religious education. Pupils need to use computers more in English for redrafting their writing. There is some effective use of control in design and technology. There are insufficient computers to meet the needs of all departments. There is a need for more new data logging equipment, software for computer-aided design and more control equipment. Pupils often have to share computers and they do not have enough opportunity to work on individual assignments.
164. The department is well led; topics are carefully planned within the limitations of the department's time and resources, and pupils' work is carefully assessed. The co-ordinator monitors colleagues' planning and results effectively and has accurately identified their training needs and those of other teachers who are not yet using information and communication technology sufficiently in their subjects.
165. In spite of the weaknesses identified above, there has been a significant and well-planned improvement in the facilities for information and communication technology since the previous inspection. This has allowed pupils to keep pace with most of the recent developments in information and communication technology, including the use of the Internet. The school has identified most of the weaknesses in a well-written development plan for increasing the provision and use of computers across the school, and further training for all staff in the use of information and communication technology is well planned to make effective use of government training funds.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

166. The attainment of most pupils at the end of Key Stage 2 in French is in line with expectations. By the end of Year 6, pupils understand routine instructions, give and understand simple opinions, name and label everyday objects and food items, talk about themselves and their family and gather the same information from others. Pupils' reading and writing skills are well developed and all can write simple sentences; lower attaining pupils with guidance and higher attainers from memory. Writing is well presented and largely accurate. Most pupils respond appropriately to familiar, well-rehearsed questions, for example, in warm-up activities at the beginning of each lesson, but many lack confidence in responding spontaneously.
167. The attainment of pupils when they leave at the end of Year 8 is in line with national expectations overall. Many pupils exceed national expectations in reading and writing, they understand and write sentences accurately in the past and present, describing events such as their holidays and home life; the majority following a model and higher attainers from memory. Most identify the main points and some detail from speech containing familiar language and they have a good understanding of the way the language works. However, many lack confidence in speaking, respond very briefly with single words and rely too heavily on written prompts. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls at either of the key stages.
168. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall in both key stages. Reading and writing skills are well developed because of well thought-out activities and materials which allow all pupils to progress at an appropriate pace and complete tasks successfully. Teachers have a good command of French and its use is usually well judged to reinforce learning and develop listening skills in lessons. They make good

use of resources to present and consolidate new language. For example, in Year 8 lessons, a basket of groceries was used to practise new language structures and reinforce learning, and leaflets from a French supermarket stimulated pupils' interest and encouraged them to find new words for themselves. Teachers make effective use of the overhead projector and flashcards to make the meaning of new language clear and focus attention. In a Year 5 class, pupils' enjoyment in games using flashcards helped them make rapid progress in speaking about food items.

169. When pupils are given the opportunity to work together in pairs and small groups, they are keen to do so and concentrate on the tasks set, but some become restless and lose interest in lessons where they have to wait for a long time to participate. Warm-up activities are used well in all classes; pupils enjoy these and take pride in their ability to use the language they have learned. Teachers use this method skilfully to steer pupils towards the lesson topic and recap key words and phrases. However, overall learning is too slow in speaking and listening because of the lack of opportunities for pupils to use the language for themselves. They are not given enough informal practice before being required to complete a task, and this leaves many pupils unsure and hesitant. Too much emphasis is attached to the skills of reading and writing in many lessons and as a result, pupils rely heavily on written notes. Teaching in many lessons fails to harness the enthusiasm of pupils in Years 5 and 6 by making language learning fun and building on lower attaining pupils' strengths in speaking and listening rather than confirming their difficulties in reading and writing. In all years, there is a need to develop pupils' independence and confidence in themselves as competent linguists. Although pupils' attitudes are positive and their behaviour very good, learning often lacks excitement, enjoyment and sparkle.
170. The range and variety of learning experiences provided for pupils are restricted because there is no language room with specialist facilities and resources to hand. As a result, teachers have to move equipment from one lesson to the next, often to the other side of the school. This is difficult to do and leaves them no time to organise or set up activities, and resources available to pupils are limited as a result. For example, in some rooms there is no overhead projector and no opportunity for display work to reinforce learning or celebrate pupils' achievement.
171. There are clear procedures for assessment using appropriate materials, and teachers know the pupils in their charge well. Reading and writing skills are well developed because activities and resources are planned effectively to meet the needs of all pupils; this good practice now needs to be extended to include speaking and listening skills.
172. Teachers work well as a team, exchanging ideas and planning together, but timetabling allows insufficient time for the effective management of the subject. Effective monitoring and evaluation of teaching do not take place. Teachers' knowledge of current methodology and expectations are not kept up-to-date since training is mainly restricted to discussions between schools in the local cluster and the co-ordinator is given insufficient support to feel confident in leading the subject effectively. Improvement since the last report is unsatisfactory; standards have remained constant but weaknesses in speaking and listening, the suitability of activities in Year 5, problems with accommodation and restrictions in the range of activities provided are issues which remain to be addressed.

## MUSIC

173. By the end of Key Stage 2, standards in classroom work are broadly in line with those expected nationally. By Year 8 in Key Stage 3, standards are below those expected nationally.
174. When pupils enter the school, there are wide differences in attainment between those who have received specialist instrumental teaching in their schools and those who have not, and in the level of parental support they have received. Most pupils arrive with average musical experience. After Years 5 and 6, pupils sing insufficiently and irregularly and not enough time is given to this aspect of the National Curriculum. Most pupils play tuned percussion or keyboards in instrumental work, but the skills needed to perform and read music are insufficiently developed. This is clear when pupils play their own compositions, especially in Key Stage 3. Pupils who play instruments can name given notes or recognise common signs; some others do so mathematically from theory work rather than naturally from using music but the majority show little understanding of notation.
175. In composing Chinese pieces, most Year 5 pupils show imagination and many show control, but by Key Stage 3, most pupils lack techniques to develop pieces or the performing skills to realise them. Group work often depends on the skills of the most musical pupils. At all levels, pupils listen most carefully to each other and to recordings. They appraise sensibly using a good vocabulary and have a satisfactory general musical knowledge, for example, of instruments and artists, but their knowledge of forms, styles, repertoire and composers is unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3.
176. At Key Stage 2, learning is variable but overall is satisfactory; some is very good. Learning at Key Stage 3 is unsatisfactory. High attaining pupils who are instrumentalists and read music, make the best progress, building on their previous learning, experience and their personal interests but they are insufficiently stretched. Work does not build well on work done in the first schools, or on pupils' own interests. Nor does the work develop instrumental, vocal and music reading skills to enable pupils to achieve the levels they are capable of in performing, composing and listening. The lack of practice rooms for group work hampers progress, especially in composing. Progress in Key Stage 3 is adversely affected by the imbalanced schemes of work which are too academic in approach and place too much emphasis on theory of music. At both key stages, pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to other pupils.
177. Overall, standards in music have not improved since the previous inspection. The strengths in music outside lessons have been maintained, but most pupils still do not have sufficient skills in understanding musical structure nor in performing beyond an elementary level.
178. Pupils have positive attitudes and their good behaviour supports achievement, particularly by the younger children. In Key Stage 2, music is a popular subject which most pupils enjoy, but attitudes become less enthusiastic in Key Stage 3, mirroring the quality of teaching. Pupils are friendly, open, responsive, and respectful towards staff and each other, use equipment sensibly, work well collaboratively and generally persevere with tasks they have been set. They show initiative and willingly enjoy taking responsibility, for example, when composing in groups. They enjoy music making, especially using instruments, but dislike written work and too much talking by teachers. Older pupils recognise that music contributes to their social, cultural and personal development.

179. In classroom work, teaching at Key Stage 2 varies from unsatisfactory to very good; most lessons are satisfactory. At Key Stage 3, teaching is unsatisfactory. Teachers are confident and explanations are clear and the best lessons show sound subject knowledge and good skills but in weaker lessons, teachers do not have sufficient practical expertise. Expectations of pupils' work and behaviour are appropriate in Key Stage 2 but not enough is demanded of pupils in Years 7 and 8. The most talented pupils are not fully stretched. Organisation is good but neither planning nor methods focus enough on the needs of the pupils or develop skills sufficiently.
180. Discipline and relationships are very good at all levels and sometimes excellent. Lessons use a range of resources but pupils do not make enough use of their own instruments in classroom work and teachers do not use visual aids enough. In the best lessons, time is used well and pupils concentrate and learn well. Assessment is encouraging and supportive and praise is used profusely, but there are no targets related to standards. Homework is not set; this is a missed opportunity to extend and reinforce learning. Leadership of the department is hardworking and enthusiastic.
181. Management is good; this is a very well organised, tidy department. Documentation is of very good quality. Assessment systems are well developed. There are good links with other schools within the area, including the upper school. Resources are adequate but there is a need for additional computers, keyboards, and classroom instruments including bass-tuned percussion, brass instruments, books and music. Technical support is absent, imposing great pressures on the overburdened staff. Music accommodation is unsatisfactory; the desks, necessary when other subjects are taught there, constrain work in music; there is a lack of sufficient practice areas for group work.
182. Six visiting teachers provide a wide range of instrumental lessons involving 28 boys and 52 girls (a well above average 15 per cent of the school's population). In school tuition, standards, pupils' attitudes, progress and the quality of teaching are good; some very good teaching was observed in string tuition. These staff and their lessons support a wide range of extra-curricular activities in which standards, teaching, pupil attitudes and progress are good. The co-ordinator does not have sufficient time to monitor these or other lessons.
183. School concerts and the Young Musician of the Year competitions involving large numbers are held regularly. Current activities include the choir, orchestra, band, guitars, recorders and keyboard club. Musical groups perform for the community, for example, at a residential home; there are good links with the Philharmonia and musical trips to Bedford and London enrich pupils' cultural and social education but performances of live music in assembly are not well developed. The activities reflect the dedication of staff, the support of parents and the enthusiasm of the musicians whose performances and successes bring credit to the school.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

184. Standards have been maintained since the last inspection and remain in line with national expectations at the end of Key Stage 2 and the end of Year 8. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils are successfully developing their basketball skills, particularly dribbling and passing. In gymnastics, most pupils are able to produce imaginative sequences using apparatus and incorporating different types of jumps. In dance, where younger pupils work particularly well, they can compose and control their movements by varying shape, direction and level. By Year 8, pupils are extending their skills in games like hockey, basketball, football and netball. The attainment of

some individual pupils is above average and school teams continue to enjoy success in several different sporting activities. In the week prior to the inspection, for example, one of the teams won the Bedfordshire Under-11 Mini-Hockey Tournament.

185. The majority of pupils are very positive in their approach to physical education. Lessons begin in an orderly way and almost all pupils work with a clear sense of interest and enjoyment. The majority are confident in what they do, they are attentive in lessons and respond very promptly to instructions. They are always correctly dressed for physical activity, they co-operate with each other extremely well and are fully aware of safety issues especially when handling equipment. A very small number of boys in Years 7 and 8 lack the maturity and self-discipline shown by their peers and occasionally they cause time to be wasted through silliness. Pupils conduct themselves in a very sporting manner during competitive elements of lessons. The school recently won two 'fair play' awards in a local indoor football competition. The majority of pupils, including those on the register of special educational needs, are learning well, particularly at Key Stage 2.
186. No lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory during the inspection. In about a third of lessons observed teaching was very good, with the enthusiasm of the teachers and well-structured nature of the lessons having a positive impact on pupils' learning. In those particular lessons, pupils were managed and organised very effectively. They were presented with demanding and challenging tasks to which they responded enthusiastically and teachers had high expectations of work and behaviour. Opportunities were provided for pupils to plan and implement their own ideas and to evaluate the performance of others. This aspect of the work was undertaken particularly well in both gymnastics and dance at Key Stage 2 where pupils commented sensibly and constructively on what they saw. In some lessons there were insufficient opportunities for pupils to answer questions or contribute ideas about what they were doing, nor was there enough emphasis on the quality of their movement. Additional thought could also be given to the grouping of pupils in some lessons, especially in Years 7 and 8, to reflect their different stages of development. This would raise achievement by enabling them all to work at levels appropriate to their abilities.
187. The departmental staff continue to offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities and school fixtures throughout the year both at lunchtimes and after school. During the inspection, activities involving dance, rugby, netball, football and gymnastics were observed. These were all well supported by groups of enthusiastic and committed pupils.
188. Through no fault of its own, the school is currently unable to offer swimming at Key Stage 2. Whilst some pupils come from lower schools where swimming is part of the curriculum in Years 3 and 4, this is not the case with all lower schools. Consequently, some pupils are unable to access swimming at present and this is a breach of the National Curriculum requirements.
189. Since the last inspection the system for assessment has been modified and improved. Planning and management in the department are satisfactory, but the co-ordinator does not have sufficient time to observe colleagues teach. Revised schemes of work have been introduced in some areas of the curriculum and the school now awards colours in Year 8 as a means of helping to sustain pupils' interest in physical education as well as recognising achievement and commitment.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

190. By the end of Key Stage 2, overall attainment is above the level of expectation of the Bedfordshire Agreed Syllabus. Pupils display good knowledge and understanding of the significance of symbolism in religion and of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. They are aware of the relevance of Jesus to modern day life. This was seen in lessons on the significance of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Higher attaining pupils' knowledge and understanding are very good and they are beginning to develop a good grasp of key ideas and issues shared by the religions they encounter. They are able to communicate this knowledge clearly orally and in writing. No significant differences were observed in the learning of boys and girls.
191. By the end of Year 8, attainment of pupils is in line with the expectations of the agreed syllabus for pupils of this age group. Most pupils have satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the reception given to Muhammad as a messenger of God and the importance of faith to a religious believer when faced with difficulties in life. Most pupils have a satisfactory understanding of the practices, beliefs and traditions of Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism. Pupils, particularly higher attainers, can undertake independent learning tasks well, as for example in a research project on their local places of worship. In both key stages, most pupils have good listening skills and present work neatly.
192. Learning overall in lessons and over time is good in Key Stage 2 and satisfactory in Years 7 and 8. Examples of very good progress were observed in some lessons in Key Stage 2, for example, pupils made very good gains in knowledge and understanding of the relevance of Jesus' teaching concerning the question 'Who is my neighbour?' and in understanding the nature of home worship in Hinduism. This was the result of careful and skilful teaching which engaged pupils' interest and provided a range of tasks to enable them to understand and extend their thinking.
193. Teaching is always satisfactory with a significant proportion of good, very good and some excellent practice. Attention is given to the development of basic literacy and information technology skills, although the opportunities to develop these are very limited. Pupils are given opportunities to write in a range of styles and to carry out independent learning tasks. The use of topic work, for example on places of worship and religious festivals, helps develop information gathering and analytical skills. Teachers use religious artefacts skilfully to enable pupils to understand aspects of worship. A very good example was observed in Year 5 when children were learning about the importance and significance of Puja in Hinduism.
194. In most lessons, carefully prepared tasks to meet the needs of lower attaining pupils are used. Too little attention, however, is currently given to the particular needs of the highest attainers. Learning is helped by the use of homework that is closely linked to work in class and gives pupils a chance to practise their writing skills. Lessons are interesting and time is used well. Pupils learn effectively because work is well prepared, and teachers have appropriate expectations and set an effective range of learning objectives. Pupils are keen and teachers manage the class well. Pupils on the special education needs register make progress with the support of class teachers and through tasks that meet their individual needs.
195. The department is enthusiastically and well managed. The teaching scheme is well written and contains clear learning objectives. The subject makes a valuable contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Co-ordination and organisation are carried out efficiently by the very hard working part-time co-ordinator. With so many non-specialists teaching the subject, this is an area where

better monitoring is needed to identify teachers' training needs. The department has made considerable progress since the last report by paying appropriate attention to the principal religions represented in Great Britain and including these in the teaching scheme. Teaching has improved since the last report. Expectations by teachers are higher and pupils are challenged appropriately, with the exception of the very highest attainers.