

INSPECTION REPORT

CHARLTON SCHOOL

Telford

LEA area: Telford and Wrekin

Unique reference number: 123597

Headteacher: Mrs K Cheshire

Reporting inspector: Michael Buckley
OIN: 30517

Dates of inspection: 4 to 8 December 2000

Inspection number: 223767

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
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Date of previous inspection:	31 October 1994

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			How well is the school led and managed?
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			How well does the school care for its pupils?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Charlton is a mixed comprehensive school with Foundation status. Although it has no sixth form, there are 1,035 pupils on roll, which makes it large for its type. Numbers have been rising steadily with the growth in local housing and the school's accommodation is overcrowded. The socio-economic makeup of the catchment area is mixed and 112 pupils (11 per cent) are eligible for free school meals. This is just within the average band nationally. Over 90 per cent of the pupils are from a white British background. However, the proportion from minority ethnic groups is growing and it is high compared with the figures usually found in shire counties. Fifty-eight pupils are learning English as an additional language, almost all of them are supported through the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant scheme. These figures, too, are high compared with the numbers normally found in shire counties. The attainment of pupils when they enter the school in Year 7 is well balanced across all ability levels. Overall, 168 pupils (16 per cent) are on the school's register of special educational needs and 28 pupils have statements specifying the additional external support they require. These figures are broadly in line with national statistics. A small number of pupils have physical disabilities.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This a very effective school that provides very good value for money. Standards are consistently above the national averages at the ends of Year 9 and Year 11, teaching is consistently good and often very good and the quality of leadership and management is very high.

What the school does well

- High and improving standards of attainment are supported by a responsive and innovative curriculum, very good arrangements for monitoring and assessment and the very good development and use of information and communication technology.
- Pupils have a very good understanding of what they need to do to improve so that they all make good progress, including those with special educational needs.
- Teaching is consistently good and often very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Pupils' attitudes to school and the quality of relationships at all levels are very good.
- There is a very high standard of support for pupils and for their personal development, and systems of monitoring and assessment are very good.

What could be improved

- Standards of accommodation are unsatisfactory and sometimes poor.
- The school does not teach all of the required curriculum for music at Key Stage 3.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has achieved very good improvements since the last inspection in October 1994. All the key issues identified then have been fully addressed, except for the provision of daily collective worship, and the overcrowded accommodation makes this very difficult to do. There have been good or very good developments in almost all aspects of the school's performance, teaching has improved significantly, as have the quality of leadership and management, the standards of pastoral care and the provision for and use of information and communication technology. The school is very effective, providing very good value for money, and it is very well placed to improve still further.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

The table shows that, for the last three years, the overall standards reached in the GCSE examinations have been well above the national averages and, in 2000, they were also well above those achieved by schools with a similar percentage of free school meals. The improvement in performance over the past five years has been above the national trend. The results in 2000 were very good in English literature, mathematics, drama, history, information and communication technology and business studies. They were weakest in art, design and technology, geography, travel and tourism and German. The school's results at the end of Year 9 have been above or well above the national average for the past four years and, apart from a dip in 1999, show improvement over time. In 2000, the overall average point score was well above the national average and well above the average for similar schools. Standards at Key Stage 3 are highest in mathematics, information and communication technology and science and weakest in art and music. Inspection evidence reflects this performance at both key stages. By all measures, pupils make good progress, generally obtaining better grades than might be anticipated from their previous results. The school sets challenging but realistic targets and pupils are well on their way to meeting them.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils like school, enjoy their lessons and are actively and positively involved. They have a very good understanding of the impact of their behaviour on others and show respect for others' opinions, feelings and beliefs.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good in class and around the school. Pupils are generally courteous to one another and to adults.
Personal development and relationships	Very good personal development is actively encouraged and pupils show a high degree of initiative in and out of class. The school creates a relaxed, friendly but respectful atmosphere.
Attendance	Very good and well above the national average.

Pupils readily accept responsibilities, taking on classroom duties and acting as prefects. Their positive attitudes to and involvement in the school council and prefect council are impressive.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
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Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	N/A
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Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching is consistently good across the school and much better than at the last inspection. In the lessons seen, 97 per cent of teaching was satisfactory or better and 74 per cent was good or better. Teaching was very good or excellent in 19 per cent of lessons. There was very little difference between the quality of teaching in different age groups. The highest proportions of very good teaching were seen in English and science, where about 40 per cent of lessons were very good or better. High standards were also seen in mathematics, design and technology, music, physical education and religious education, where about 20 per cent of lessons were very good. The few instances of unsatisfactory teaching were seen in English, science, music and personal and social education. Strengths of teaching include teachers' good knowledge and understanding of their subjects, their very clear learning objectives, high levels of expectation and challenge and very good procedures for assessment. As a result, pupils of all needs and abilities learn well and have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress and show a strong interest in their work. Pupils learning English as an additional language generally make very good progress. A minor weakness in teaching is that, occasionally, teachers do not plan well enough for the long double periods, the pace of lessons slackens and some pupils lose interest and motivation.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Lessons are well planned to meet the needs identified and interesting and appropriate options are provided in Years 10 and 11. Pupils are well supported and often achieve much higher results than might normally be expected.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	These pupils are well supported and make very good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school makes very good provision for pupils' social development. Provision for spiritual, moral and cultural development is good. Moral themes are introduced in assemblies and there are many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and show initiative. Extra-curricular music is particularly strong.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. Pupils are very well known to pastoral staff and very well informed about their academic and personal development. The school takes pride in their achievements. Very good monitoring of all aspects of pupils' performance, including behaviour and attendance, by heads of house and tutors.

The school has very good procedures for promoting discipline and good behaviour that are consistently applied. Health and safety procedures are comprehensive.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The leadership of the headteacher and senior staff is innovative, energetic and determined. It is very effective. Improving learning and raising standards are given the highest priority.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. The governors are very well informed and play a strong part in shaping the school's development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. There are very effective systems for monitoring and developing the quality of teaching, identifying the key priorities and evaluating the school's effectiveness and efficiency.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are well deployed and used to the best effect.

Responsibilities are delegated very effectively and all staff in the school share a very strong commitment to the school's values and to ensuring the success of its pupils. The school's management keeps a very close watch on the budget and the principles of 'best value' are rigorously observed.

The number, qualifications and experience of the staff match the school's needs well and the level of resources is satisfactory. The school is well equipped with computers and other aspects of new technology and uses these resources well. Accommodation is unsatisfactory and, in some places, poor. The school is overcrowded, the fabric of some of the buildings is in need of repair and the provision for science, physical education and drama is particularly poor.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour in the school is good. • The teaching is good. • The school expects their children to work hard and achieve his or her best. • The school helps their children to become mature and responsible. • Parents would feel comfortable approaching the school when they have questions or problems. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children are not given the right amount of work to do at home. • They are not well informed about how their children are getting on. • The school does not always work closely enough with parents.

Inspection findings confirm parents' positive views. The school works hard to develop a productive partnership with parents. Parents strongly support the school and appreciate what it provides for their children. Inspectors think that the homework set is appropriate for the work done in class and that the school readily involves parents and does work closely with them. However, they do agree that the information on progress given in pupils' annual reports is not always clear or easy to follow.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Evidence from the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 and the school's own assessments indicates that, in 2000, the attainment of the majority of pupils on entry was at the national average. However, over the past four years, this has fluctuated between below the national average to average. A comparatively small proportion of pupils in Year 7 are achieving at the highest levels.

2. In the 1999 standard tests, the percentage of fourteen-year-olds reaching the nationally expected level and higher levels in English was close to the national average while the percentages reaching the expected level and higher levels in mathematics and science were above the national averages. The average point scores followed the same pattern in all three subjects. The results for 2000 show a considerable improvement, with the percentages of pupils reaching the expected levels being well above the national averages in all three subjects. Results in science were particularly high. The percentage of pupils reaching higher levels was about the national average in English, above the national average in science and well above the national average in mathematics. The average point scores were close to the national average in English, above this standard in science and well above it in mathematics. This indicates that the highest proportion of higher-level scores was in mathematics.

3. Except for a dip in English in 1999, the average point scores in each subject have been above the national average for the past five years and the trend in mathematics and science is moving upwards faster than that seen nationally. Boys and girls do better than national gender-related averages with a bigger margin of difference for boys than for girls. Since 1996, the pattern of results has been erratic in English, with an unexpected dip in 1999, which adversely affected the school's overall performance. The school's overall point score has been above or well above the national average for the past four years and shows improvement over time. When compared with 1999 results for schools having a similar proportion of free school meals, the percentages reaching nationally expected levels were above average in mathematics and science but below average in English. In 2000, the same comparison showed that the percentage results were well above average in English and science and very high in mathematics. There were fewer than average higher grades in English. The average point scores were above the average for similar schools in English and science and well above average in mathematics. The overall average point score was well above the national average and well above the average for similar schools.

4. Teachers' assessments for 2000 indicate that, at the end of Key Stage 3, standards in information and communication technology were well above the national average. Attainments in design and technology, geography, history and physical education were above the national average but those in art and music were below the national average.

5. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the percentage of pupils obtaining five or more A* to C grades was above the national average, the percentage obtaining five or more A* to G grades was well above the national average and the average point score was also well above the national average. In the 2000 examinations, the percentage obtaining five or more A* to C grades was above and the proportion obtaining five or more A* to G grades was well above the respective national averages. The average point score was also well above the national average, as it has been for the last four years. The school's average point scores show a steadily improving trend over time. Since 1994, this trend has risen at a higher rate than the

national one although, in 2000, the gap between the school's and the national figures was not quite as large as in previous years. This is mainly because the national figures have improved steeply in the past two years. Boys' and girls' results have been well above the national figures and there are indications that boys have improved more than girls over the last three years. These results are even better than they seem because the school enters all pupils for the examinations and enters a significant minority of them early, in Year 10. Pupils with special educational needs achieve good, sometimes very good, results and those learning English as an additional language do as well as the main body of pupils. Gifted or talented pupils entered early for examinations often achieve outstanding results.

6. When measured against the results of schools with a similar proportion of free school meals, the percentages of five or more A* to C and A* to G grades and the average point score were well above average for 1999. In 2000, the proportion of A* to C grades was above average and proportion of A* to G grades was very high. The overall performance was well above average. When compared with results in schools having similar scores in the 1997 Key Stage 3 tests, the proportion of five or more A* to C grades in 1999 was average, the proportion of five or more A* to G grades was well above average and the average point score was well above average. When the 2000 GCSE results are compared with schools having similar results in the 1998 Key Stage 3 tests, the proportion of five or more A* to C grades was average, the percentage of A* to G grades was well above average and the overall average point score was close to the average. The progress made by Year 11 pupils at Charlton School was much better than that made by pupils of similar prior attainment in other schools in 1999 and, in 2000, it was about average. Over the past three years, a growing proportion of leavers has opted to go on to sixth form studies.

7. The school has developed extremely detailed systems for assessing, monitoring and predicting the performance of individuals and cohorts of pupils. These demonstrate that, over the past two years, the progress made across Key Stage 3 has been very good. For example, between Years 7 and 9, over half the pupils progressed two or more National Curriculum levels in mathematics and 37 per cent made similar progress in English. At Key Stage 4, assessments based on the results of standard tests in Year 9 and on a nationally recognised system for predicting performance in the GCSE examinations show that pupils in each of four ability bands all make significantly greater progress than is found within these bands nationally. Secure statistics show that, in four out of the past six years, GCSE results have been better than the standard prediction for each cohort, based on prior attainment. This represents significant added value and shows that most pupils are making good progress. The school uses these systems to predict very demanding but realistic targets for each cohort and progress towards them is very closely monitored. There is good evidence that pupils at both key stages are well on the way to achieving the school's targets for 2001 and making good progress towards those for the following year. The school's results are far above those set for it by the local authority.

8. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, results were well above the national average in mathematics, drama, history, information and communication technology and business studies. They were above the national averages in English language and literature, science, French and physical education. Results for art, design and technology, geography, travel and tourism and German were below the national averages although the proportion obtaining grades A* to G in art was above the national figure. The school's performance in art, design and technology and geography has varied considerably over the past three years. Very few pupils have been entered for the GCSE music examinations in the past few years but those who do enter generally obtain very good or excellent results. No national comparisons are available for the performing arts examinations but the results are very good.

9. The work seen during the inspection broadly reflects the test and examination results at both key stages. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are well above national expectations in information and communication technology and above the levels expected nationally in English, mathematics, science, history, drama and physical education. They are at the expected levels in design and technology, geography, where teachers' assessments were over-generous, French and German. Standards are below the nationally expected level in art and music at the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils continue to make good progress through Key Stage 4, where attainment in the GCSE course groups is well above the nationally expected levels in information and communication technology and generally above national expectations for English, mathematics, science and history. They are above the nationally expected levels for all groups in physical education. Standards in art and German are below the nationally expected levels at the end of Key Stage 4. Attainment is in line with national expectations in all other subjects.

10. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress at both key stages. Some make sufficiently good progress to be moved back to lower levels on the Code of Practice. This progress is largely due to skilful teaching and support and the use of appropriate resources. Special educational needs staff and class teachers are involved in drawing up and working on individual education plans. Departments are allocated extra funding to provide additional resources for these pupils. However, the details of the individual education plans and the work set do not always provide a close enough match with the pupils' individual educational needs. Those pupils learning English as an additional language make very good progress at both key stages, as do pupils who are identified as being gifted or talented.

11. Standards of literacy across the curriculum are above national expectations. Teachers in all curriculum areas ensure that pupils understand the technical terms in use for each subject and speaking and reading are given appropriate prominence. Particularly good examples of pupils' achievements were observed in physical education, art, science, history and religious education. The school is consolidating and raising standards of numeracy by timetabling extra lessons for pupils in Years 7 and 8. Standards of numeracy are also helped through good practice in other areas of the curriculum, such as science, geography, design and technology and information and communication technology. The cross-curricular use of information and communication technology is generally good in all subjects except music and physical education where access to machines is difficult. Pupils also use the provision well to support their work in art, mathematics, English, history, design and technology, modern foreign language and religious education.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

12. Pupils' attitudes to the school are very good indeed and they are actively involved in their lessons. For example, Year 8 pupils wanted to take part in a drama lesson about homelessness and enjoyed learning through lively, dramatic interaction. Pupils in a Year 10 mathematics lesson were keen to answer and pleased to help each other calculate the volumes of regular figures. Pupils take part in a very wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sporting, musical and dramatic events, as well as clubs for homework, information and communication technology and chess. Many pupils gave polished performances in a concert held during the week of the inspection. The visits and trips organised by the school receive enthusiastic support and pupils and parents appreciate the way members of staff make time to organise and run these activities. In lessons, pupils are very well motivated and concentrate well. They are keenly aware of their own progress, helped by the information on the 'Steps for Success' system, which runs throughout the school.

13. Pupils with special educational needs have positive attitudes to school and to their work. They behave well in lessons, even when the work is difficult. In classes within the

special needs area, behaviour is always good and the pupils value the care shown to them by the staff. Pupils with individual education plans relating to their behaviour respond well to the support provided through the pupil inclusion coordinator.

14. Behaviour in lessons is good, with very few exceptions. Standards of behaviour as pupils move around the school are also good, despite the difficulties caused by congestion on the narrow stairs and corridors when lessons change. The school's very good policies and the quality of relationships ensure that there is little oppressive behaviour. There was just one permanent exclusion last year and the level of fixed-term exclusions is about average for a school of this size. Most exclusions are for anti-social behaviour.

15. Relations in the school are impressively good. Within a framework of respect and discipline, the atmosphere is friendly and relaxed. Pupils of all ages get on well among themselves and with members of staff. They like the way different age groups are put together in houses and feel that this helps their personal and social development considerably. Younger pupils like being helped by older ones when they first come to the school and older pupils like the responsibility of looking after them. Pupils understand the effect their actions can have on others and, as a result, are very ready to help. This thoughtfulness and willingness to share were features of many lessons seen during the inspection. For example, in a Year 10 lesson about the use of new technology in retail outlets, pupils were anxious to help each other and share their expertise.

16. Pupils are considerate. In a Year 9 gymnastics lesson, their judgements of each other's performance were perceptive and valued. At all levels of the school, pupils are ready to accept responsibility. Prefects play an important part in helping with routine discipline at break and lunch times. The prefects' council reviews discipline for Year 11. The school council is drawn from all year groups and pupils of all ages make an effective contribution to its proceedings. It plays an active role in helping to improve school life. For example, it deals with the problem of dogs fouling the playing fields and raises funds, dividing the profits between improvements to the school and charitable causes. This sense of responsibility is also evident in the way pupils are ready to manage their own learning. Overall, pupils respond very well to the provision made for their personal development.

17. Attendance is very good. The rate of attendance for the last academic year was well above the national average of 91 per cent. Figures for authorised and unauthorised absence are significantly lower than the national average. Most pupils arrive on time at the start of the day. Pupils are sometimes late for lessons, largely because of difficulties moving around the school site. Pupils' attitudes have improved since the last inspection and the quality of relationships is now a strength of the school. The last inspection report said there were few opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and this has now changed significantly.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

18. Standards of teaching are consistently good across the school and they are much better than they were at the last inspection. In the lessons seen, 97 per cent of teaching was satisfactory or better and 74 per cent was good or better. Teaching was very good or excellent in 19 per cent of lessons. There was very little difference between the teaching in different age groups although there was proportionately more very good teaching as well as more unsatisfactory teaching at Key Stage 3. There was a higher proportion of good teaching at Key Stage 4. The highest proportions of very good teaching were seen in English and science, where about 40 per cent of lessons were very good or better. High standards were also seen in mathematics, design and technology, music, physical education and religious education, where about 20 per cent of lessons were very good. The few instances of unsatisfactory teaching were seen in English, science, music and personal and social education.

19. Teachers plan well. They identify very clear learning objectives and make sure that pupils understand what these are at the start of each lesson. They have a good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach, enabling them to provide good explanations and ask challenging questions that are well matched to the levels of pupils' progress. In mathematics and science, for example, they know the areas that are most likely to cause difficulties and are able to steer pupils through them. In more practical subjects, such as art and physical education, teachers give good individual demonstrations so that pupils understand readily how to improve their skills. Teachers generally maintain good pace in lessons although a comparative weakness in a few lessons is that they are not sufficiently geared to the extended double period of 100 minutes. In these cases, the pace drops off and some pupils lose their involvement and become restless. Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies. Pupils respond well to their often imaginative approaches, showing high levels of interest and learning well. Another feature of the teaching in many lessons is the good match of materials and methods to the pupils' abilities.

20. Teachers have high expectations and lessons frequently provide real challenges for pupils of all ages and levels of attainment. In the best lessons, teachers inspire pupils and encourage them to think at higher levels. This ensures that pupils concentrate very well, developing a thorough understanding of their work and making good progress. Teachers almost always encourage pupils to think for themselves and to carry out their own investigations. Consequently, pupils show very high levels of interest and commitment, becoming actively engaged with their learning. Pupils showed less enthusiasm in the very few cases where teachers talked at pupils for too long or were too directive. Good relationships enable pupils and teachers to interact with one another successfully and underpin the successful management of classes. Information and communication technology is put to very good use in supporting learning in all subjects except music and physical education. Homework is generally regular, relevant and well marked.

21. The arrangements for day-to-day assessment are very good. Teachers understand pupils' learning needs and have a very good knowledge of the progress and attainments of individuals and groups of pupils, including those with special educational needs. They share their understanding with pupils through oral feedback and enable pupils to assess their own progress. Marking is generally well used to monitor progress and to set targets. As a result, pupils have a very good knowledge of what they have learned and what they need to do to improve. All of these teaching skills are generally combined successfully so that pupils enjoy their lessons and work hard and productively.

22. Within the special educational needs area, teaching is always good. Detailed planning, the careful use of time and resources and high expectations create an atmosphere of trust and a confidence in success that produce high quality learning. Support staff are fully involved with the specialist teaching and learning strategies and have received appropriate training in using reading and assessment schemes. They work well, supporting pupils in class as well as in their special groups. Class teachers understand pupils' special educational needs and plan their work carefully so that good progress is made. An unusually high proportion of pupils with special educational needs are successful in the GCSE examinations. All staff working with these pupils are good role models, showing patience, good humour and perseverance. This motivates pupils to do well and to sustain their efforts, even when they find the work challenging. Pupils learning English as an additional language are very well supported and make very good progress, as do those who are gifted and talented.

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

23. The school provides a good curriculum that has a clear rationale and is well directed towards providing effective learning opportunities for all pupils. The curriculum is kept under continuous review and is responsive to the interests, aptitudes and special needs of pupils. At Key Stage 3, the overall breadth and balance of the curriculum are satisfactory. Pupils are given opportunities beyond the National Curriculum through drama and personal and social education but insufficient time is allocated for the statutory requirements in music to be met. The school offers a good curriculum at Key Stage 4, which is flexible and balanced. All pupils follow GCSE courses in English, mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, design and technology and the humanities. Each of these curriculum areas provides pupils with wide and often innovative opportunities to take a variety of courses, such as long and short GCSE courses, and also to enter some examinations early. These arrangements enable pupils to follow programmes of study that are well matched to their particular strengths and interests. Pupils take an additional GCSE course chosen from a group of arts-related subjects. They also follow courses in physical education, religious education, personal and social education and information and communication technology.

24. Provision for extra-curricular activities is very good. A spelling, reading and homework club at lunch-time is well used by pupils, especially in Years 7 and 8. Staff from different curriculum areas provide revision sessions and additional lessons in their subjects at lunch-times and after school. These give extensive extra support for pupils' learning. The school offers a very wide range of extra-curricular sport. Pupils also have very good opportunities to participate in activities involving the performing arts. For example, the quality of the evening concert held during the week of the inspection was outstanding. All curriculum areas arrange relevant educational visits, such as fieldwork in geography, theatre visits in English and, recently, a visit to art galleries in Paris.

25. Provision for personal and social education has improved since the last inspection and the programme is now good. All pupils are taught for one period a week in their tutor groups. The scheme of work is well planned and monitored and it includes aspects of health education, citizenship, personal organisation and study skills and issues surrounding the misuse of drugs. Sex and relationship education is taught effectively through this programme and in science lessons. The school makes satisfactory provision for work-related education. Careers education is taught through the personal and social education programme and other subject areas are beginning to contribute more directly to work-related learning with relevant displays, materials and visits. Vocational education is in the early stages of development. At the moment, the school offers GCSE courses in business studies and information studies and travel and tourism. The annual careers convention and the careers library help pupils

with individual career planning and close liaison with Shropshire Careers Services ensures that pupils have maximum access to careers guidance. At the end of Year 10, pupils spend time at the two local post-16 colleges, providing them with good opportunities to explore the range of courses and options that are available when they leave the school.

26. Links with the community have improved since the last inspection and they make a good contribution to pupils' learning. For example, visiting speakers from outside agencies participate in personal and social education lessons and in assemblies. There are close links with the parish church and pupils have a variety of contacts with the elderly, the disabled and the homeless. An annual party is held for senior citizens and the choir give concerts at residential homes. Good links with a number of local industries and businesses have helped to extend facilities, such as the school's radio station and the media studies room. A link with a major bank has enabled pupils to set up and run a highly successful school bank.

27. The school has good relationships with its partner institutions. It works hard to liaise as closely as possible with over 20 primary schools and it is involved in a local project to develop curricular and assessment links between primary and secondary schools. There are also constructive initiatives with individual primary schools over French and information and communication technology. Very close links with the two post-16 colleges ensure a smooth transition from school to post-16 education and training.

28. The school's provision overall for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Many of the positive features mentioned in the previous report have been maintained or extended. There are now more opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and a school council has been set up. The cramped accommodation and the logistic challenges associated with bringing the whole school together still prevent the conduct of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

29. The provision for pupils' spiritual development is good. In religious education, there are good opportunities for pupils to reflect on the major issues of life. For example, pupils in Year 11 discuss issues associated with euthanasia and abortion. In design and technology, religious themes and patterns are explored through textiles. In art, pupils explored the significance of the painting 'Raft of Medusa', depicting shipwrecked sailors turning to God in prayer. However, there are only limited contributions from other subjects in the curriculum, such as mathematics and science. A well-planned programme of themes guides assemblies and tutorial periods for the whole school year. The themes largely follow the Christian calendar and are of a broadly Christian nature. The whole school attends the local parish church for the carol service with the choir and school orchestra. There is a close link with the church and the youth minister takes some assemblies. Remembrance Day is celebrated with members of the British Legion. During the inspection, the theme of 'Advent' was developed in house assemblies and in most tutorial groups.

30. The provision for pupils' moral development is good. Some of the themes for school assemblies introduce moral values. For example, Year 11 pupils were asked to reflect on the contribution that they could make to society in the light of the remarks made by the father of a murdered Nigerian schoolboy in London. Pupils know the high standards that are expected of them and behaviour is good. Teachers set very good examples for the pupils. The personal and social education programme deals with moral issues and contributions from other subjects include discussions on the slave trade and on the Holocaust in history and an emphasis on fair play and sportsmanship in games. Two letters on display in the physical education department praised the 'positive sporting attitude' of pupils on the rugby field and the sensitive, caring nature of the pupils in giving help to disabled children at the ice rink.

31. The provision for pupils' social development is very good. There are very good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility as prefects, house and games captains and as members of the school council. Prefects have an important everyday role in maintaining discipline and order at break and lunch times and the prefects' council deals with Year 11 pupils who contravene the school's code of conduct. The mixed-age house system and frequent work in groups make for good relationships. Very good social skills are taught in drama. Good relationships are fostered through numerous other experiences, such as school productions, visits abroad and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award expeditions.

32. The provision for pupils' cultural development is good. Drama makes a strong contribution to the good provision for cultural development. In physical education, pupils are taught dances from different cultures and they use information and communication technology to send recipes electronically to the Czech Republic. The art department organises visits to local galleries and to galleries in London, Liverpool and Paris. Artists in residence are also sometimes introduced. The quality of extra-curricular music is outstanding. The school has links with schools in Lithuania, Magdeburg and Zimbabwe. A trip to Israel is planned for next February. Pupils learn about a wide range of world religions in religious education. Multi-cultural education is supported by a variety of activities, such as work in art and the study of anthologies of poems from Africa, India and the Caribbean in English.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

33. The school has devoted much time and effort to ensuring that pupils are looked after well. Members of staff have considered carefully how best to provide the support that their pupils need. The tutorial and support groups are organised in four houses. Pupils from Years 7 to 10 are placed together in groups but pupils in Year 11 are grouped separately. This is an unusual arrangement but it is highly effective in practice. Members of staff know pupils very well. There is a friendly, supportive atmosphere within the houses, as well as a degree of healthy competition between them. Pupils have confidence in the system and in their heads of house.

34. Class teachers and support staff take good care of the pupils with special educational needs and there is no evidence of these pupils being bullied or harassed. Their progress is carefully monitored against the targets set in their individual education plans and the formal statements of their needs. Effective support and advice are provided by the special educational needs co-ordinator. The pupils' targets are regularly reviewed to ensure that assessments are used to help plan appropriate future work. Provision for these pupils is very good and fully complies with the guidance in the Code of Practice.

35. There are good procedures to ensure pupils' welfare. Health and safety procedures are effective although defects in the accommodation are a problem. The buildings and site manager reviews these procedures frequently. There are appropriate procedures for child protection and new members of staff are due to receive relevant training and guidance. The procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are very good. Attendance is correctly recorded and very efficiently monitored by the pastoral secretary, the heads of house and the pupil manager. Good levels of attendance are promoted by competition between tutorial groups and the school maintains good contact with parents. As a result, standards are very good. The procedures to promote discipline and good behaviour are also good. Behaviour strategies are well planned and co-ordinated so that they are applied consistently across the school. The good behaviour seen in lessons and about the school shows that the procedures work. The school makes effective use of contracts to help pupils who have difficulty in managing and controlling their behaviour. These keep pupils in the school and, at

the same time, limit disruption. The contracts are carefully monitored by the heads of house and the pupil manager.

36. The central data-base created by the school since the previous inspection is comprehensive. It contains data on individual pupils, based on results of the standard tests at the end of Key Stages 2 and 3. Performance is also analysed using externally produced formulae to predict attainment according to National Curriculum or GCSE grades three times a year for each subject. This data-base allows the school to assess progress and to measure the value added by individual subjects and by the school as a whole. The system is computerised and networked throughout the school so that all staff can use it to set targets for groups and for individual pupils. Overall, the procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are very good and the school is continuously developing and refining them. Assessment data are generally used well to plan developments to the curriculum. Particularly good use is made of them in English, mathematics, religious education, design and technology and information and communication technology. The only subject where assessment is unsatisfactory is music. A notable feature emerging from discussion with pupils was the effectiveness of the 'Steps to Success' scheme. Pupils know their present National Curriculum or GCSE levels and can explain what grades they are aiming for. The school has made very good progress in developing assessment since the last inspection and the information is now playing a major part in the drive to raise standards.

37. The school provides a very high standard of educational and personal support and guidance for its pupils. It keeps very detailed records identifying academic and personal progress and also other factors affecting performance, such as behaviour and attendance. The complete range of information is available to help subject teachers, heads of house and their tutor teams in their work to raise levels of achievement. All aspects of care, support and guidance are regularly and carefully monitored through the effective use of computerised systems. Pupils benefit greatly from this well-informed support. Overall, procedures for pupils' personal and academic support have developed and improved considerably since the last inspection.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

38. Parents strongly support the school and appreciate what it provides for their children. Almost all those parents who returned the questionnaire consider that the school expects their children to work hard and that they make good progress. Parents think that behaviour in the school is good and that the school helps their children to become mature and responsible. They say they would feel comfortable approaching the school when they have questions or problems. Inspection findings confirm these positive views. Some of the parents who returned the questionnaire had concerns about homework but inspectors think that the homework set is appropriate for the work done in class. Others do not feel that the school works closely with them but inspectors consider that the school readily involves parents and does work closely with them. However, inspectors agree with parents that the information on progress given in pupils' annual reports is not always clear or easy to follow.

39. The school works hard to develop a productive and effective partnership with parents. Members of staff are quick to contact and involve parents when necessary and careful to record all such contacts. Arrangements for pastoral support ensure that parents can easily contact members of the pastoral staff. The school seeks parents' opinions on changes. For example, the structure of consultation evenings for parents of pupils in Years 7 and 8 was changed from short appointments with subject teachers to longer ones with tutors. The quality of information provided for parents of pupils with special educational needs is good and they are regularly involved in reviews of their children's progress. Individual targets are recorded in the pupils' planners which parents sign each week.

40. The school provides good information about its daily life, special events and pupils' achievements. The governors' annual report provides a comprehensive review of the year. Parents can easily discover details about the curriculum. For example, the 'Steps for Success' programme is set out in pupils' exercise books. In addition to the consultation evenings, parents are sent one full annual report a year. These reports contain essential information on how pupils are doing but the format in which they are produced often makes them difficult to follow. Parents have to refer to a glossary to interpret numerical information and the verbal comments are composed from a number of prepared statements. This stilted approach makes it difficult for parents to have a clear view of the progress their children are making as individuals.

41. The level of parents' involvement in the school and the contribution that they make to their children's learning are good. Most parents sign planners regularly. Attendance at consultation evenings is good and parents give a lot of support to concerts and productions. The 'Friends of Charlton' play an active role in supporting the school's activities as well as in raising funds. Parents readily help with special events, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Bronze Award expedition. The good links with parents reported after the last inspection have been maintained.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

42. Under the headteacher's very strong leadership, Charlton has become a school where improving the quality of learning and raising standards of teaching and achievement are given the highest priority. All the school's activities are firmly based on these objectives and the staff, pupils, parents and governors work hard together to achieve them. Exacting standards are set. The approach of the headteacher and the senior staff is innovative, energetic and determined. It successfully blends educational theory and practice with a rigorous scientific approach towards experiment. For example, they have devised extremely thorough procedures for monitoring and assessing performance and for setting new and challenging targets. These are followed up by positive and carefully measured interventions to assist the performance of individuals and groups of pupils. An analysis of the achievements of boys and girls in literacy led to monitored work with single-sex groups, which led in turn to marked improvements in the performance of boys in the targeted groups. In its efforts to offer the best possible curriculum for all at Key Stage 4, the school provides options in three ability bands. The high standards of attainment and the improvement over time in test and examination results are further evidence of the rigour and success of the management's approach. Pupils' personal development and welfare are approached in the same way and innovations, such as the mixed age tutorial groups, are very effective.

43. The senior management team is a small group in which each member's role is clearly defined and effectively carried out. Communications are very good. Responsibilities are delegated through management networks based on curriculum areas and the pastoral system. The deputy headteacher and the pupil manager meet their teams every two weeks and the curriculum leaders and heads of house meet their teams each week. Within each curriculum area, different teachers have specific additional responsibility for assessment, for information and communication technology and for supporting pupils. These systems work very well owing to the care with which teachers carry out their work.

44. The co-ordinator for work with pupils with special educational needs performs her duties effectively. Good links with neighbouring primary schools result in the early identification of the pupils' needs and in individual target-setting. A detailed and up-to-date register of the pupils is made available to all staff, individual educational plans are reviewed as required and pupils are moved on or off the special educational needs register. The co-ordinator has a clear overview of pupils learning English as an additional language and of

those who are gifted or talented. The staffing and resources provided for special educational needs are managed well and are directed at the identified needs of pupils.

45. The governing body meets at least five times a year. Its meetings are well attended and the proceedings are carefully recorded. Governors are kept very well informed by frequent detailed reports and presentations from the headteacher and senior staff and by their regular visits to the school, meeting staff and observing lessons. Relationships with the school's staff are very positive. Governors' work is delegated to a number of sub-committees, all of which are very effectively and conscientiously supported by the clerk to the governors, a volunteer who gives his services to the school on about three days a week. These arrangements ensure that the governors have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they are well placed to form clear strategic policies to guide the school's development. For example, they have successfully steered the school into and out of Grant Maintained status and into Foundation status over the past six or seven years.

46. Individual governors bring a wide range of experience and professional training to their work and they are actively involved in shaping the school development plan and monitoring progress towards the targets set. They monitor expenditure particularly closely through the work of the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The finance officer manages the day-to-day running of the school's budget efficiently and expenditure is scrutinised by the head teacher and the chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee. Specific grants are well used for their designated purposes. All statutory requirements are met except that the school does not teach the full National Curriculum for music at Key Stage 3 and it does not provide a daily act of collective worship. Steps have already been taken to rectify the former but the serious difficulties posed by the overcrowded accommodation make the latter hard to accomplish.

47. The school development plan provides a very detailed analysis of the school's needs and priorities, based on the principle of raising educational standards. It identifies appropriate targets together with costings, time deadlines and success criteria. Named persons are responsible for ensuring that targets are met and the headteacher, senior management team and governors monitor progress regularly. These processes are reviewed annually in a formal management review and curriculum and pastoral teams also conduct their own reviews, setting targets which are then evaluated by the headteacher. All these arrangements combine to ensure that the school achieves its objectives successfully and on time.

48. The award of 'Investors in People' status has confirmed the full participation of all staff in training and in a rigorous and successful programme of performance management. The arrangements for monitoring teaching and developing teachers' skills are very good. The headteacher and members of the senior management team conduct a rolling programme of observations in each curriculum area in turn, often in partnership with the curriculum leaders and, occasionally, with external advisers or consultants. Curriculum leaders also carry out their own observations. Observations are recorded, shared with the relevant teachers and used for professional development. The school makes very good provision for staff development, guided primarily by the targets in the school's development plan. Much of this is provided in-house and it has had a very positive effect in areas such as assessment and information and communication technology. The school has a good induction scheme, operated in conjunction with the local education authority and it supports trainee teachers through links with Wolverhampton University.

49. Teachers' numbers, qualifications and experience are generally well matched to the needs of the curriculum. However, there are comparative weaknesses in some subjects. For example, the limited number of technicians in science and the non-specialist teaching in

religious education are having an adverse effect in some lessons. The generous provision of support teachers has had a beneficial effect on work with special educational needs. Non-teaching staff are highly regarded and play an important part in the life of the school. Staffing has been successfully reorganised since the last inspection and it now presents a good and improving picture, with one or two minor weaknesses still to be addressed.

50. Overall, accommodation is unsatisfactory and, in some areas, it is poor. Since the school was built in 1963, the number of pupils has approximately doubled and accommodation is seriously overcrowded. This makes movement between lessons and the conduct of house or school assemblies very difficult. Despite the best efforts of staff, governors, parents and pupils, the gymnasium, hall and linked dining-room suffer particularly hard wear and tear, large sections of flat roofing need to be replaced and the temporary classroom units are inadequate for their purposes. Although a great deal has been done since the last inspection to improve the layout of teaching areas and classrooms, accommodation in some areas, such as science, physical education and drama, is still poor and adversely affects learning. The library has been refurbished but it is still cramped although the adjacent newly equipped resources centre is well used. Access for the disabled has been considerably improved in recent years with the installation of ramps and lifts. The playing fields are of a reasonable size but poorly drained and often unusable in wet weather and there are insufficient hard-surfaced areas. The ground staff and the school's gardening club have helped to make the approach to the school and courtyards attractive. The car-parking space is wholly inadequate, as is access for delivery vehicles, and this constitutes a potential health and safety hazard.

51. The supply and condition of learning resources are satisfactory overall and good action has been taken to address many of the shortcomings identified in the last inspection report. The provision of technical resources is good, with a range of well-used equipment. The school has its own radio station with high-quality equipment provided by a local business. The reprographic department is well used and the demand for desktop publishing and copying is high. The ratio of computers to pupils has improved greatly since the last inspection and is now about twice the national average. Most are in dedicated suited rooms and some are easily available in subject areas. However, the booking of specialist rooms can cause difficulties, owing to high demand. The learning resource centre, which includes a library, is well used for access to computers, for homework and for reading for pleasure. The supply of computers, compact discs and videotapes is good and extra funding for improvement has been provided since the last inspection. However, the stock of books in the library is still low for the number of pupils in the school and the library area is small. Resources are very good in geography and good in modern foreign languages and physical education. They are satisfactory in the other areas except music, where there are no facilities for the use of information and communication technology.

52. The school has made very good improvement since the last inspection. All the key issues identified then have been fully addressed except for the provision of daily collective worship and the accommodation makes this very difficult to do. There have been good or very good developments in all the curriculum areas except music, where progress has been satisfactory. Teaching has improved significantly, as have the quality of leadership and management and the standards of pastoral care. The provision for and use of information and communication technology are very much better than they were. The school is very effective, provides very good value for money and is very well placed to improve still further.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

53. In order to maintain the existing high standards and improve still further, the school's senior management and governors need to:

(1) Ensure that the complete programme of study for music at Key Stage 3 is fully covered.

(paragraphs 20, 23, 46, 52, 105, 116)

(2) Continue their efforts to improve and extend the accommodation in order to meet the demands of the curriculum and the needs of the growing number of pupils.

(paragraphs 14, 28, 46, 50, 52, 75, 82, 94, 123, 126, 130, 138)

In addition, further consideration should be given to ways of meeting the requirement for a daily act of collective worship and to resolving issues related to health and safety in science and physical education. (paragraphs 28, 46, 52, 75, 130)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	176
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	52

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	18	55	23	3	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1,035	N/A
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	112	N/A

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	28	N/A
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	168	N/A

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	58

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	27
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	24

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.3
National comparative data	8.0

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
National comparative data	1.2

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	85	108	193

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	63 (50)	73 (66)	70 (62)
	Girls	89 (59)	90 (62)	75 (56)
	Total	152 (109)	163 (128)	145 (118)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (61)	84 (72)	75 (66)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	23 (22)	56 (48)	36 (29)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	64 (62)	70 (66)	61 (69)
	Girls	101 (75)	97 (64)	75 (66)
	Total	165 (137)	167 (130)	136 (135)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	85 (77)	86 (73)	70 (76)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62(60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	36 (38)	49 (46)	26 (47)
	National	31 (31)	39(37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	87	87	174

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	49 (33)	86 (64)	87 (65)
	Girls	50 (56)	85 (87)	86 (90)
	Total	99 (89)	171 (151)	173 (155)
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	58 (58)	98 (98)	99 (100)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	44 (46)
	National	38.4 (38)

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	6
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	7
Pakistani	36
Bangladeshi	3
Chinese	2
White	941
Any other minority ethnic group	12

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	1	0
Bangladeshi	1	0
Chinese	0	0
White	29	1
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: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	56.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	4
Total aggregate hours worked per week	78

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.7
Key Stage 4	22.8

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	2,509,320
Total expenditure	2,556,391
Expenditure per pupil	2,570
Balance brought forward from previous year	85,754
Balance carried forward to next year	38,683

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,035
Number of questionnaires returned	224

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	39	52	6	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	45	49	1	1	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	41	49	4	0	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	53	15	2	2
The teaching is good.	37	54	1	0	8
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	29	40	20	6	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	45	4	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	32	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	27	50	12	7	4
The school is well led and managed.	43	45	4	2	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	42	50	4	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	41	8	1	16

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

ENGLISH

54. The results of the 2000 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were well above the national average and above the average for similar schools. They were above the standards achieved by the school in science but below the school's results in mathematics. In the GCSE examination, pupils achieved results significantly above the national averages in both language and literature. These results are particularly commendable for two reasons: first, because they exclude an 'express' group of pupils who take the examinations a year early and, secondly, because all pupils are entered for both examinations and this is not so in all schools. Girls perform better than boys but the percentage difference between them is less than the national difference. Since pupils enter the school with standards in line with the national average their results show good progress through both key stages.

55. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards are above the levels expected nationally. Pupils can write accurately and at length. They understand the rules of punctuation, paragraphing and spelling, using a wide and often vivid vocabulary. They can research successfully and use their findings to write persuasively. They write lively stories and poems and they are beginning to use the language of literary criticism to discuss poetry, plays and fiction. Pupils in Year 7 commented shrewdly on *Mrs Frisby and the Rats of Nimh*, while pupils in Year 9 could discuss the technical devices used in two challenging poems with a similar theme, by Thomas Hardy and Gillian Clarke. Moreover, these skills are not confined to pupils of high attainment. It is a strength of the department that such skills are being developed throughout the ability range. Levels of grammatical accuracy, however, do vary more significantly.

56. Pupils continue to make good progress through Key Stage 4, where attainment is generally above the national expectation. The highest attainers, having gained good grades in the GCSE examination in Year 10, are successfully tackling sophisticated writers. They learn a little about linguistics and use their knowledge to compare the techniques of such authors as Dickens, Stevenson and Graham Greene. They can compose successful parodies, thus gaining insights into a writer's style, and they continue to use language vividly. Pupils' ability to analyse is less well developed and many tend to rely too much on re-telling a story. Low attainers write well about *The Crucible* and *Macbeth*. Their spelling is often weak, although other aspects of language use, such as punctuation, paragraphing and the extent of their vocabulary, are often better than indicated by their prior attainment. In one lesson, pupils with special educational needs were observed making perceptive comments on *Kestrel for a Knave*. Their writing was narrow in range but mainly neat and accurate.

57. Standards of speaking and listening are in line with those expected nationally. In one Key Stage 3 class, pupils had devised a phone-in radio programme, in which the presenter spoke fluently and dealt gracefully with questions from the class. In another class, the teacher had made a video-recording of pupils addressing the class in order to help them understand their strengths and weaknesses. In Year 10, pupils prepared and then delivered short speeches with varying fluency. Some speeches were well made while other speakers relied too heavily on their text with a consequent lack of eye contact. In general, pupils are more articulate than is usual and respond well to opportunities for discussion in small groups. Pupils read aloud confidently. All can understand the gist of the text being studied but a phrase such as 'pomp and ceremony' puzzled some middle ability pupils in Year 8, while the irony in a passage by Hemingway eluded the 'express' group in Year 10.

58. Standards of teaching are good and often very good. All teachers plan and organise diligently, explain objectives clearly, keep up a good pace and do well what they set out to do.

They engender very good relationships with their pupils, so discipline is never a problem. They mark thoroughly, thereby doing much to improve pupils' basic skills of punctuation and spelling. Marks are well used to monitor progress and set targets. There is a great deal of individual support for pupils with special educational needs. They generally make good use of computers as an aid to reading although one group chose books on the screen that were too advanced for them. Tasks are challenging, with good variation of activity. Where weaknesses occur, they arise from teachers talking too much and depriving pupils of the opportunity to discuss among themselves and learn from each other. As a result of good teaching, pupils learn well and make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs achieve better GCSE grades than might be expected from their prior attainment. All pupils have a very good understanding of their own weaknesses and what they need to do to improve. They are given many opportunities to be creative and respond with enthusiasm. Their attitudes and behaviour are very good.

59. Management of the subject is very good. The high standards observed during the last inspection have been maintained. Teaching has improved still further so that, on this occasion, three quarters of all lessons seen were judged good or very good. Examination results have remained at the same high level, significantly above the national average. Schemes of work are being re-written in order to make the curriculum more cohesive. Assessment data is very comprehensive and used most effectively. The pace of lessons was criticised in the last report but has been improved since then. The department organises many out-of-school activities and teachers spend many hours at the end of the day giving additional help to anyone who wants it.

Literacy

60. Standards of literacy across the curriculum are above national expectations. Two years ago, all staff received training from a local authority adviser who then visited the school on several occasions to guide literacy policies in each department. The new head of the English department has continued this good work, liaising closely with curriculum leaders. The result is that all departments are now aware of what needs to be done and take appropriate action. They ensure that pupils understand the technical terms in use for each subject, often displaying important words in the classrooms. Speaking and reading are given increasing prominence. In physical education, pupils speak and listen intelligently and in art, there is much discussion in small groups. Science teachers take care to explain all technical terms commonly used and in mathematics, the key words are displayed on classroom walls. History teachers make good use of writing frames, encourage a wider use of vocabulary and teach the skills of note-taking. Teachers of religious education are particularly strong in encouraging pupils to express ideas effectively and to debate with each other.

MATHEMATICS

61. The proportions of pupils gaining the expected level and higher levels in the 2000 Key Stage 3 tests were well above national standards. The results were very high compared with those for schools with a similar percentage of free school meals. There was little difference between the attainments of boys and girls and the results were significantly better than those for the previous year. They were also higher than those in the other core subjects. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, pupils attained well above the national average for grades A* to C although the results were slightly below those of the previous year. The results were similar to those in English but higher than those in science and there was little difference between the attainments of boys and girls.

62. Standards of attainment in lessons and written work are generally in line with test and examination results. By the ends of both key stages, pupils' work is generally above and

often well above the expected national standards. By the end of Key Stage 3, many higher-attaining pupils can factorise quadratic expressions confidently while many lower-attaining pupils plot linear graphs accurately. By the end of Key Stage 4, many higher-attaining pupils can calculate areas and volumes of regular figures with confidence and some lower-attaining pupils can readily identify the mean, mode and median of discrete data. Pupils are beginning to make good use of information and communication technology in mathematics lessons at both key stages. For example, in one Key Stage 4 lesson, pupils used computers to maximise the dimensions and volume of a box. This is the result of a drive to raise the profile of information and communication technology across the whole school. Access to this technology, particularly the Internet, is a powerful motivator for pupils. Pupils use calculators appropriately and accurately in lessons and the department is now sensibly developing the use of graphical calculators. Presentation skills are good and often very good and pupils enjoy answering questions and discussing their understanding of mathematical topics.

63. Attainment on entry is round the national average but with a lower proportion of the highest attainers in most cohorts. Consequently, the examination results indicate good and often very good progress at both key stages. Work seen and lessons observed confirm this good progress. Particularly good progress was seen in a Year 9 class where pupils learned how to calculate compound probability, making effective use of tree diagrams. In a Year 11 class, pupils made good progress in calculating the areas and volumes of regular figures. This was the direct result of the teacher's careful explanations and effective questioning, followed by structured practice on examples. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. This was seen in a Year 9 group where pupils developed their understanding of number bonds and multiplication tables through challenging mental arithmetic games. Talented Year 10 pupils were seen successfully tackling A level standard simultaneous quadratic equations in a voluntary mathematics club session.

64. Standards of teaching are invariably good at both key stages, and they were very good in about one lesson in every five. This is an improvement from the previous inspection. Teachers' knowledge of the subject is good and most teachers know the usual problem areas that cause difficulties. They plan well and try to vary activities to maintain interest and enthusiasm. Lessons are usually well paced and relationships are generally good and often very good. Pupils respond to good teaching. They are well motivated and invariably polite to each other and to visitors. They answer questions willingly. Many of them enjoy learning and using mathematics. This is seen in the interesting displays of investigative work on classroom walls. Particularly good displays of data were seen in a Year 7 investigation where pupils successfully used their presentational skills to display their survey results. They particularly enjoy using real-life data, such as favourite music or animals or football teams. They enjoy the mental arithmetic games played in some lessons to warm up. These activities effectively boost standards in numeracy. Pupils also learn well when working co-operatively in pairs in some classes.

65. One comparative weakness in teaching is that some lessons lack excitement. Work in mathematics is not always appropriately linked to work in other subjects. Teachers use homework regularly to supplement the learning that takes place in class. The department's on-line data-base for assessment is an excellent development and day-to-day assessment is used very well to plan future learning. There are several positive initiatives within the department which also contribute to good learning. These include the lunchtime sessions for Year 10 pupils aspiring to go onto A level, the 'Pythagoreans' for lower attaining Year 7 pupils, the mathematics club for Year 8 pupils and the various revision sessions run for Years 9 and 11. The quality of the teaching and the resultant good learning are strengths of the department. They reflect the teachers' strong desire for pupils to do their best at all times.

66. The department is led very capably by an inspiring teacher. He leads very much by example and has created tremendous interest and enthusiasm for teaching and learning mathematics within his team. He has developed innovative approaches to many areas. For example, he has encouraged motivated lower and middle-attaining pupils to enter examinations early. This has helped a significant number of pupils raise their general aspirations. His positive leadership has contributed significantly to the rise in standards in mathematics over the past three years. The management structure in the department is exciting and motivating, with individual teachers given total responsibility for areas such as special educational needs and assessment. This system is working successfully.

67. Since the last inspection, teaching has improved, good practice is shared, behaviour is almost universally good in the classroom, a very good on-line assessment data-base has been established, the use of information and communication technology has developed, numeracy standards have improved and test and examination results have improved significantly. Overall, the department has made very good progress since the last inspection.

Numeracy

68. Standards of numeracy on entry to the school are improving as the National Numeracy Strategy takes effect in the contributing primary schools. The school is consolidating and raising these standards by timetabling extra numeracy lessons for pupils in Years 7 and 8. These are clearly making a positive contribution to the general rise in standards seen in tests and examinations in mathematics. Standards of numeracy are also helped effectively through practice in other areas of the curriculum. In science, pupils calculate formulae and plot linear and non-linear graphs, in geography, pupils present climatological data, in design and technology, pupils measure and weigh accurately, in art, pupils enlarge accurately and in information and communication technology, pupils accurately analyse data in spreadsheets. Overall the school's strategies for raising standards of numeracy are effective.

SCIENCE

69. Over the past few years, pupils have started their science course in Year 7 having attained broadly average levels in the tests at the end of Key Stage 2. In 2000, the proportion of 14 year-olds reaching the expected or higher levels in the standard tests was well above the national average and well above the average for schools with a similar percentage of free school meals. Similar high standards have been maintained over the past five years, indicating just how much progress pupils make during Key Stage 3. Pupils attain standards in science that are similar to those for mathematics and better than those for English.

70. Most pupils do well in the GCSE examination. The majority of pupils study double-award science and attain standards that are always above the national averages. The results in 2000 showed a drop in the proportion gaining passes at grades A* to C but, from the coursework produced by the current Year 11 and the work seen in lessons, this position should improve in 2001. For the higher-attaining pupils who study separate physics, chemistry and biology, standards are above the national averages. A minority of pupils study single-award science and, whilst all obtain a grade at GCSE, none attains the highest grades. The suitability of this examination is currently under review. Over the past two years, pupils have failed to gain the highest A* grade in GCSE examinations in physics, biology and chemistry.

71. In work seen during the inspection, pupils aged 14 attain standards that are above those expected nationally. Their investigative skills are particularly well developed. For example, a group studying the effect of temperature on the activity of the milk-clotting enzyme, rennin, were working at a well above average standard. Pupils are developing a

good understanding of particles and use this well to explain processes such as evaporation and melting and the formation of solutions. The standards reached by pupils in Year 11 are also above those expected nationally. They are attaining well above average standards for investigations carried out as coursework and their knowledge of physics, chemistry and biology is well developed. For example, most pupils write balanced symbolic equations as a matter of course and successfully use high-level mathematical skills to undertake detailed calculations of the energy transferred when substances interact.

72. Pupils' attitudes to science are good. They are usually well behaved and interested and they enjoy their science lessons. Relationships between teachers and pupils are mostly very good and pupils work very effectively together in groups. In most lessons, pupils are very keen and skilful at taking responsibility for organising their own work. They use literacy skills well. For example, one group wrote well about the effects of intensive farming on the environment. They access computers confidently and make particularly good use of CD-ROMs to find information. The increased use of information and communication technology is an improvement since the last inspection.

73. Teaching is a strength of the science department. The quality is good overall and teaching was very good or outstanding in over a third of lessons seen. In the best lessons, teachers inspire pupils and challenge them to think at high levels. Teachers are well qualified and make very good use of their knowledge of the subject to give simple explanations that help pupils understand difficult ideas. They enjoy good relationships with pupils and these motivate pupils to take an interest in lessons and to participate fully. Teachers work hard, make suitable use of a range of ways of teaching and are particularly good at organising practical work. An excellent team of laboratory technicians, who work under very difficult conditions, supports this work very well. Most teachers establish a good pace in lessons and this ensures that pupils make good progress. However, in some double periods, pupils lose their motivation after 90 minutes. As a result, the pace drops and learning is affected. Teachers give effective support to pupils in lessons but, in their marking, many give insufficient comments to help pupils understand what needs to be done to improve.

74. Pupils' learning in science is good. They quickly develop the skills of retrieving, handling and assembling apparatus and usually work very effectively together in groups to carry out experiments sensibly and safely. This contributes strongly to the high standards in investigative science. Pupils of all ages make good progress and standards are high by the end of Key Stage 4. In particular, pupils at Key Stage 3 make very good progress in planning and carrying out fair tests. This is a direct result of the 'Cognitive Acceleration in Science Education' lessons taught in Years 7 and 8. At Key Stage 4, pupils make good progress in analysing and evaluating the results of their investigations. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because the resources and support provided are well matched to their needs. An outstanding feature of pupils' learning is their awareness of the progress they make. This is the result of an excellent assessment procedure where pupils and teachers together monitor steps in learning and negotiate strategies for progression.

75. The head of department provides very good leadership and teachers share his vision for improving the quality of learning. The day-to-day management is efficient and the science team works very effectively. There are clear aims and principles that guide learning and the head of science is aware of the need to monitor teaching further to ensure that the curriculum continues to offer these ideals in practice. There are well thought out strategies for raising standards even higher. There has been no improvement in the quality of accommodation since the last inspection. Science continues to be taught in small rooms that produce hazardous conditions for large classes. Smaller rooms have replaced the preparation rooms and stores praised in the last inspection, affecting the efficiency of the laboratory technicians. Accommodation for science is spread over four different areas of the campus and movement

of equipment between them and the preparation room is difficult and potentially dangerous. There is no fume cupboard for use when teaching, limiting what can be taught. The fume cupboard provided in the preparation room does not operate to the required standard and this constitutes a potential hazard for the laboratory technicians.

ART

76. Teachers' assessments for 2000 indicate that standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are slightly below the national average. At the end of Key Stage 4, the percentage of candidates who obtained grades A* to C in the 2000 GCSE examination was below the national average. However, all pupils achieved A* to G grades and this is above the national average. There is no clear trend in GCSE results over time and they vary from above average to below average in different years.

77. In the work seen in the school, standards are below the nationally expected level at the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils can use a variety of materials to produce work in two and three dimensions and they use their knowledge of the work of well-known artists to add variety to their own work. The school has provided resources to improve this aspect of the curriculum since the last inspection and, as a result, evidence of increased research and experimentation can be seen in sketchbooks. Art and craft from western and non-western traditions are studied, including the work of the Cubists and the Impressionists, as well as African masks and Japanese paintings and prints. Pupils work with interest and application and they are able to modify their work using information and communication technology. For example, they produced some interesting pieces based on kitchen utensils, showing a carefully considered use of muted and harmonious colours. However, their drawing skills are weak, they show poor skills in painting, and they lack confidence in their ability to use the materials in creative ways.

78. Standards remain below the nationally expected levels at the end of Key Stage 4. Pupils can use chalk pastel to produce attractive effects, especially when working on a larger scale, and some portraits show a good use of colour and a competence in blending techniques. Pupils also use information and communication technology effectively to further their research into artists and art movements. However, they have limited ability or confidence in using paint and they lack an appreciation of the expressive possibilities of the medium.

79. Achievement and progress at Key Stage 3 are satisfactory. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Pupils make gains in their ability to use a range of materials and processes, including printing and ceramics. For example, some clay models, informed by the work of Henry Moore, explored the idea of interior spaces. Pupils show growing competence in modelling and the ability to explore form and shape. Pupils also learn to use colour and tone well and some of their interesting figure compositions effectively use a limited palette. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. This is because of the teachers' good level of awareness, the special attention they give and their very encouraging manner. Gifted and talented pupils achieve at a very good level and have the opportunity to take examinations much earlier than is usual and to study A level courses, if appropriate. At Key Stage 4, achievement is satisfactory and pupils learn to use a wider range of materials. For example, some good three-dimensional work showed well-developed skills in construction techniques using wire and plaster. These pieces, based on the study of seedpods and natural forms, were imaginative and interesting. Pupils also learn to research the work of well-known artists. The sketchbooks of some higher-attaining pupils show good levels of application and a willingness to use photographs, drawing and writing to produce lively results.

80. Teaching and learning are good at both key stages and they were never less than satisfactory in the lessons seen. This is an improvement since the last inspection. At Key Stage 3, teachers use imaginative approaches that increase pupils' interest and promote good attitudes and good learning. For example, in one lesson on composition, groups of pupils had enacted scenes from the painting 'The Raft of the Medusa' by Gericault. They then photographed the activity and used the photographs to make drawings and paintings. As a result, their interest and engagement with the subject matter were high and good results were obtained. Another feature of the teaching in the best lessons is the good match of materials and methods to the ability and interest levels of the pupils. In a lesson on clay modelling, pupils with limited skills were enabled to achieve success because the clay was easy to work with and the teacher provided a good, step-by-step demonstration of modelling techniques. This attracted a high level of interest and pupils made good gains in learning as a result. However, teaching is weaker when too much of the work is produced on a small scale, limiting the acquisition of broader handling skills.

81. In the best lessons, teachers give good individual demonstrations which make it clear to pupils what they need to do to improve their work. For example, in a lesson on 'modern inventions', the teacher gave a good demonstration of how to use acrylic paint to achieve the textural qualities of stonework by blending close-toned colours. As a result, pupils made successful use of the materials. Information and communication technology is also used well to encourage the development of good research skills and pupils are taught to access appropriate websites to extract information about well-known artists and their work. There are some weaknesses when teachers try to cover too much ground and too many topics are touched on without enough explanation. This means that pupils have insufficient depth of knowledge to promote higher levels of learning and achievement. At other times, lessons are conducted at a pedestrian pace, limiting learning to a satisfactory level. Teachers do not focus sufficiently on improving pupils' painting techniques and work set is too often on a small scale, limiting the acquisition of broader handling skills.

82. Leadership and management of the subject are good. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. The monitoring and development of teaching and learning are good and their quality has improved significantly since the last inspection. There is a good sense of teamwork and a shared commitment to improvement. Procedures for assessment procedures are very thorough and, as a result, pupils' knowledge of their own learning is very good. Good use is made of information and communication technology for researching and developing ideas and for manipulating and changing images. Work in the subject also makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual development. For example, some pupils are conducting personal research into the idea of 'spiritual journeys', informed by the work of Gauguin and Orozco. However, the accommodation is unsatisfactory and facilities for storage and display of work are limited. There is insufficient space available for pupils to develop broader approaches to their work and this is helping to limit achievement. In addition, the time allocated to the subject at Key Stage 3 is below the national average, limiting what can be achieved still further.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

83. By the end of Year 9, the standards achieved are above the levels expected nationally. Teachers' assessments show that eight out of ten pupils reach or exceed the expected level while the national average is just over six out of ten. Standards of work seen broadly matched the teachers' assessments. Pupils have experience of, and work competently with, a good range of materials, such as wood, metal, plastics, textiles and food. They have a good grasp of the design process and recognise the need to seek a range of solutions to a problem before making a final decision. They recognise the need to consider modification if and when problems arise in the making process. A Year 8 textiles group containing a number of pupils with special educational needs made good progress producing accurately

cut stencils for their door tidy project. Through work with resistant materials, they learn the benefit of using jigs as an essential part of production methods. Most pupils follow safe and hygienic practice when working with food. The development of basic skills equips them appropriately to work with confidence at Key Stage 4.

84. At Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in the 2000 GCSE examinations was below the national average. The performance of girls was better than that of boys. Girls' results were equal to the national average for all design and technology subjects but the lower performance of boys placed the combined figure below the national statistic. However, the school adopts a policy of entering every pupil for the public examination, not simply those who are likely to do well. Significantly, the percentage gaining A* to G grades was above the national average and the average point score was in line with the national figure. The 2000 results were below those for 1999. Work seen during the inspection indicates pupils are generally working at levels expected for their age nationally. They have developed their skills to a level that enables them to produce high-quality items. Whilst few pupils achieve the very top grades, an average number perform in the higher band. They understand the need to present their ideas with precision and make some use of information and communication technology. Examination results had been steadily improving until 2000. Current work done by pupils in Year 11 suggests that results should match the national average in 2001.

85. Teaching in the subject is always satisfactory and mainly good or very good. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and, even where the aspect being taught is not their first specialism, they operate competently and with confidence. Good relationships are established with pupils, including those with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language. Teachers make good use of oral assessment, informing pupils how well they are achieving and helping to identify future targets. They manage pupils effectively, even when a minority are not as highly motivated as they might be. Comparative weaknesses in teaching are over-direction by the teacher and insufficient opportunity for pupils to determine outcomes by their own efforts. On occasions, at both key stages, teachers do not enforce the school's rules about protective clothing and safe practice.

86. At both key stages, pupils' interest is such that they acquire practical skills, knowledge and understanding at a good pace. At Key Stage 3, the higher-attaining pupils exploit the opportunities presented to develop their design ideas, showing a satisfactory degree of initiative. In the majority of lessons, the concentration levels are high because pupils are keen to meet the assessment requirements identified by their teachers. Pupils with special educational needs and those whose first language is not English make good progress. At Key Stage 3, pupils are eager to get on with the practical work but also recognise the need to complete the written work with the same degree of commitment. They take the design process seriously, completing a range of draft designs before deciding on a final solution, displaying pride in their work and readily discussing the outcomes.

87. Pupils with special educational needs are equally committed to success in the subject. They recognise the need for safe practice, for example when working with soldering equipment. During this project, all pupils co-operated well to complete circuits for an animal's face. Pupils show positive attitudes to their teachers and to the tasks set in most lessons. At Key Stage 4, behaviour is almost always good. An exception was a lesson disrupted by a leaking roof, as pupils chose to be less attentive in the initial session than they should have been. However, attitudes changed and levels of commitment increased when the practical work began. The relationships between pupils and between pupils and teachers are good.

88. The curriculum at both key stages provides a full range of subjects including graphical products, food technology, textiles, electronics and resistant materials. However, the nature of the arrangements, particularly the reduced allocation of time in Year 7, results in limited emphasis on skills development in that year. The provision in Years 8 and 9 is better and allows longer and more complex projects to be attempted, thereby providing more opportunities for the development of practical skills. At Key Stage 4, pupils can pursue the area of their choice for the GCSE examinations within the limitations of staffing and the available facilities. Curriculum provision is good for all groups of pupils. The department has a well-developed approach to monitoring academic progress and procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. Pupils are assessed through a series of projects, with their full knowledge and participation. Project booklets are used to identify assessment criteria and to provide opportunities for pupils to contribute as partners in the assessment of their work. Target-setting is effective and contributes well to academic improvement.

89. The design and technology area is led by an enthusiastic and capable teacher who has managed the area effectively through a period of uncertainty in staffing and the introduction of a new curriculum. Staff understand clearly where developments, such as the introduction of computer-assisted design and manufacturing, are required. Teaching is monitored formally and informally. The department fully embraces the overall philosophy of the school and that is reflected in its day-to-day operation. The department makes full use of the available technology although coverage of the programmes of study is restricted by the lack of appropriate facilities for computer-assisted design and manufacture. Staffing difficulties have affected the quality of provision in certain aspects of the subject but the department appears to be moving into a period of greater stability. Accommodation is adequate and resources are generally good.

90. Since the last inspection, standards at Key Stage 3 have improved but they have remained much the same as before at Key Stage 4. The higher-attaining pupils are now more fully extended than they were previously and skills development remains good. All pupils are articulate and make good use of technical language. There is challenge within the bounds of the structured projects at Key Stage 3. However, the use of information and communication technology could be improved further, especially in the areas of design and manufacturing. Good, well-planned and rigorous teaching is still seen in the majority of lessons. The gender-based stereotyping mentioned in the last report is less evident.

DRAMA

91. Drama is taught within the faculty of performing arts. Year 7 pupils receive 50 minutes a week, whereas those in Years 8 and 9 receive only three half-terms of drama in each year. At Key Stage 4, drama is part of the expressive arts course.

92. Results in the GCSE examinations are very high and well above the national averages. Standards observed in lessons were above nationally expected levels at Key Stage 3 and in line with them at Key Stage 4. Pupils responded well to an exercise requiring them to interpret meaning from the way a nonsense word is spoken and, in a different exercise, they showed considerable empathy with the situation of people who are homeless. At both key stages, they are confident in the way they move and speak.

93. The teaching seen was very good. Its strengths include the teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject and their skills of presentation. Teachers have friendly and productive relationships with pupils. As a result, even those who might initially be uninterested quickly become motivated. Particular skill was observed in a Year 10 lesson where the teacher devised exercises to help the group understand and recognise acting that was artificial, where actors went through a conventional range of motions and expression,

and acting that was true, in that it approached the behaviour of real people in real situations. Assessment is thorough. Pupils are taught to analyse the skills which differentiate one level of attainment from the one above and use their understanding to improve.

94. What can be achieved is limited by poor accommodation. Drama lessons take place in a flimsy hut which leaks in wet weather. Lighting is a fluorescent strip and storage no more than a small cupboard. The curtains can be drawn to exclude the light but do so only partially.

GEOGRAPHY

95. There has been a steady trend upwards in results of the GCSE examinations. However, from being slightly above the national average in 1999, the 2000 results were not significantly different from the national average. In 1999, results in geography were as good as those in most other subjects in the school. Boys' grades have shown a steady improvement each year since 1997 and are in line with the national average. Girls' A* to C grades are below the national average but represent a great improvement over results in the last four years. Unusually, the boys' grades are better than those of the girls. These results indicate the good progress boys have made, given their attainment on entry.

96. In 2000, teachers' assessments showed that the percentage of pupils reaching the nationally expected level or higher at the end of Key Stage 3 was above the national average. However, evidence from the inspection indicates that standards in the present cohort were in line with those expected nationally. Basic geographical skills are taught in Year 7 and pupils understand and can use map symbols, scales and co-ordinates. Pupils develop spatial awareness through local studies and the use of atlases. They can construct and interpret graphs of various types. For example, pupils in Year 8 used line and column graphs to illustrate the climate in Moscow. Written skills develop and pupils build up a large volume of useful work, including good notes and extended and imaginative writing. They have written letters concerning the location of businesses and lower-attaining pupils conducted enquiries on earthquakes in Japan and Turkey. Reading aloud is encouraged and pupils read with fluency and good understanding. At the same time, they are improving their technical vocabulary. One result is that pupils learn to make presentations with confidence. Pupils with special educational needs improve their writing skills by using writing frames and computers. Weaknesses in spelling and grammar are being tackled by the department. The department offers short courses, beginning in the summer term of Year 9. Pupils have been sufficiently motivated to complete the coursework element in the summer holidays and results have been good.

97. Based on work seen, attainment at Key Stage 4 is at the nationally expected levels. Pupils continue to develop written skills and are able to produce good coursework, showing the ability to hypothesise, gather and analyse data and reach conclusions. They also make good use of skills in information and communication technology in studies such as 'Should the last remaining natural area in Telford be developed for the use of housing?' Pupils willingly take responsibility for choosing sources and making decisions and judgements, as demonstrated in a Year 11 debate on nuclear energy. Key Stage 4 pupils also show a growing understanding of more complex concepts, such as geographical modelling and a knowledge of geographical patterns and processes.

98. Teaching is always satisfactory or better and, in the great majority of lessons seen, it was good or very good. Lessons are well informed, well planned and enthusiastically conducted. As a result, pupils are interested and work at a good pace. They also gain confidence because lessons have clearly explained aims and teachers constantly reinforce learning through good question and answer sessions. Teachers make every effort to include

all pupils in the lessons and employ a variety of strategies to help maintain their concentration. These include work appropriate to all levels of attainment and good use of audio-visual aids. For example, one teacher made good use of music in a lesson on farming with a lower set in Year 7. The very good homework notebooks are used regularly. Teachers generally have high expectations and pupils rise to the challenges offered. Teaching is greatly strengthened by the very good use of long-term assessment, especially at Key Stage 3, where the use of National Curriculum levels allows pupils and teachers to know clearly what progress is being made and to set useful targets for all. The effectiveness of the teaching is reflected in the generally good progress made by pupils at all levels.

99. The great majority of pupils are well behaved and demonstrate high levels of motivation in lessons. They are friendly and willing to discuss their work. They work co-operatively in groups and build good relationships with each other and with their teachers, whose knowledge and judgements they trust. They feel able to ask for and take advice and they respond enthusiastically and with maturity in competitive situations. Since the last inspection, there have been many improvements. The use of differentiated materials and information and communication technology has increased and there is more independent learning and improved enquiry work. Teaching has improved. The shortcomings noted at the last inspection have been effectively remedied by the good and improving management of the subject and by a united, hard-working team.

HISTORY

100. Over the last four years, the percentages of pupils obtaining grades A* to C in the GCSE history examination have been consistently well above national averages. Results at grades A* to G have also been above national averages, with all pupils usually obtaining a grade. Teachers' assessments in Year 9 are above the nationally expected level. This is reflected in the work seen during the inspection. Most pupils have a good understanding of the major events and changes in the periods they have been studying. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 have a good knowledge of public health issues in nineteenth century Britain and a thoughtful appreciation of contemporary attitudes and values. Pupils of all attainment levels work successfully with sources, both from books and from material drawn from Internet searches. Pupils research and organise information well and can present their findings in a variety of ways. Year 7 pupils, for example, were able to speak confidently and fluently about life in a medieval village. Pupils' attainment in Year 11 is consistently above the national average and many of their coursework assignments reach a very high standard. They master the content of the GCSE course well. For example, they have a good grasp of the development of medicine through time and are able to describe, explain and make comparisons between developments and changes.

101. Pupils evaluate sources of information critically. They take account of their historical context and use the sources appropriately to support conclusions. Pupils achieve well in history at both key stages. They make good progress and many of them, especially at Key Stage 4, make very good progress. Pupils' attitudes are positive and standards of behaviour are good.

102. The overall quality of teaching and learning is consistently good and, in some lessons, it is very good. Teachers' enthusiasm for the subject, combined with a very good appreciation of teaching requirements, is well used to extend pupils' historical understanding and thinking. Teachers have good strategies to develop pupils' literacy skills. In one Year 9 class, the effective use of flash cards and word games helped lower-attaining pupils to extend their vocabulary when working on aspects of nineteenth century politics. Lesson planning is very thorough and a good range of teaching methods helps pupils understand new topics and encourages them to work both independently and collaboratively. For

example, a very skilful role-play enabled Year 10 pupils to appreciate more easily medieval attitudes to aspects of medical practice. Pupils are very well managed so that they are fully involved in the work of the classroom. Lessons are taken at a good pace and resources are usually well suited to the purpose of the learning. Day-to-day assessment is very good and it is used effectively to help pupils evaluate and develop their work.

103. Very good leadership and management in the subject make a significant impact on maintaining and raising standards. Very good improvement has taken place since the last inspection. The quality of teaching and learning has improved and a greater range of teaching styles is now used, which is better able to meet the needs of all pupils. Very good assessment procedures have been adopted and the information obtained is well used to raise standards. The provision of standard texts has improved and greater use is made of local history to provide sources of information. Pupils have easy access to information and communication technology in history which gives them good opportunities for researching material from the school's own data-base and from the Internet and for organising and presenting their work.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

104. On entry to Year 7, pupils' knowledge and use of information and communication technology are the result of a broad and varied range of experiences. However, by the end of Year 9, their performance is well above that expected nationally. In 2000, teachers' assessments showed that at least nine out of every ten girls and eight out of every ten boys reached or surpassed the expected levels. This compares very favourably with the national figures of approximately six out of every ten. Pupils have a good knowledge of spreadsheets, the construction and use of databases, desktop publishing and the Internet. They make extensive use of computers across a large number of subjects, including mathematics, English, science, design and technology, humanities, religious education and art. They develop their skills over successive years and the majority are developing into discerning users of the technology. Those with more highly developed skills are able to recognise not only when the use of computers is appropriate and beneficial but also when alternative methods are more suitable. Pupils with special educational needs attain as well as the majority of their classmates, as do those learning English as an additional language.

105. The attainment of those pupils at Key Stage 4 who are involved in nationally accredited courses is well above the national average. Almost three-quarters of the pupils who took the GCSE examination in 2000 achieved an A* to C grade, compared with only half nationally. Those not involved in the examination courses attain at a level that is broadly in line with standards expected nationally. Others, who take business studies, combine the course with information studies, attaining well above national averages in both subjects. The core provision for information and communication technology at Key Stage 4 provides pupils with appropriate opportunities to consider business-based problems that can be analysed using computer-based applications. The majority of pupils grasp the opportunities presented with enthusiasm, enabling them to develop their competence so that they make full and purposeful use of the technology. A good level of work is produced to support work in other subjects. For example, considerable research is carried out using this technology in history and religious education and spreadsheets are extensively used in mathematics. Examples of good use are seen across the majority of subjects except music and physical education, where the provision of resources and equipment is unsatisfactory. It is evident from the scrutiny of work and lesson observations pupils regard the technology as an important tool to use as appropriate.

106. All teaching seen was at least satisfactory and it was mainly good. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject, in terms of curricular requirements

and the use of hardware and software. The balance between practical and theoretical work is appropriate, encouraging pupils to consider when and how to use computers. Where the teaching was most effective, teachers structure their lessons with regard for the limitations of the accommodation and equipment. They introduce the objectives of the lesson with a clarity that enables pupils to move efficiently on to practical work. Teachers provide good individual support, being very aware of the progress made by all groups of pupils. They use questioning to good effect, encouraging pupils to reflect on layout when creating a web page and the features within it. Appropriate interjections are made to ensure good pace and to reinforce good practice. In the least effective lessons, teachers take insufficient account of the need to balance the variety of activities through the long double sessions. They do not assert their authority sufficiently to take full control to ensure the highest quality of learning. On occasions, the initial sections of lessons are over-long, with little interaction, which results in a certain lack of attention on the part of some pupils.

107. The pupils at Key Stage 3 are confident in their use of technology as a direct result of their good acquisition of skills and knowledge. They have the understanding to exploit many of the features of the software. For example, they used database construction to assemble a range of recipes to send electronically to a school in the Czech Republic and the preparation of Power Point presentations when considering data exchange by e-mail. Their ability to apply their learning is evident in the high levels of concentration and their great industry. This quality of learning is also seen in pupils with special educational needs. At both key stages, pupils' attitudes are good. They respect the equipment and one another. The vast majority are attentive and responsive to the teacher's requests and instructions. Those who have a greater knowledge of the application in use will quickly respond to requests for help from others. On occasions, their expertise is drawn on by staff to good effect. Situations arise where the sharing of computers is necessary but this does not present a problem as pupils readily co-operate to ensure that they all have equality of access and opportunity.

108. An appropriate time allocation allows for Years 7 and 9 to have one core lesson, supplemented, as it is in other years, by cross-curricular provision. The humanities department teaches the Year 8 programme in its entirety, again with cross-curricular supplement. At Key Stage 4, all pupils receive a core lesson and those taking business studies and information studies have additional lessons leading to possible accreditation. The well-developed cross-curricular approach at both key stages places a responsibility on teachers of all other subjects to provide the balance of the programmes of study and contribute to the assessment of attainment. The centrally held information about attainment is used effectively to monitor progress. The use of assessment as part of the overall support of pupils is highly developed and, consequently, the curriculum makes good provision for all.

109. The subject area benefits from an experienced leader who has a good understanding of the curriculum requirements. Pupils' work is well co-ordinated and monitored and their achievements are assessed and recorded in other subjects. These developments have been possible through well planned and extensive training programmes across all subjects. These have taken place in-house and have been mainly organised by the curriculum leader. The continuing training programme is ensuring that developments maintain the required momentum. Increasing numbers of staff from various subject areas are competent to teach the curriculum for information and communication technology. Resources have improved markedly since the last inspection. However, the subject is suffering from its own success for, although the school has about twice the national ratio of computers to pupils, increased demand has created extra pressure on these resources. The school has recognised this and plans are in hand to improve matters.

110. Progress since the last inspection has been very good. The ratio of computers to pupils has more than doubled and results in external examinations remain good, as does

good progress through the key stages. The quality of teaching continues to be mainly good and major improvements have been made in the cross-curricular use of this technology.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

111. In 2000, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C in the GCSE examinations in French was above the national average. This represents an improvement on the previous year's results, although fewer pupils were entered. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C in the GCSE examinations in German was below the national average and lower than the previous year. Oracy was the weakest skill for over half of the candidates.

112. In 2000, teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 showed that the proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected levels or higher was above the national average. Inspection evidence indicates that the attainment of 14 year-olds in French and German is in line with levels expected nationally. Their understanding is quite good and oral skills are being developed well in lessons. Many lessons, but not all, begin with oral revision. Year 7 pupils in the top German set speak confidently from memory with good pronunciation. In Year 8, higher-attaining pupils can ask and answer questions on holidays in German, using the perfect tense. In French, using the immediate future tense, they can talk about which presents they would buy for the family. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 9 in German made up their own sentences, using the perfect tense. Written work is good in both languages and pupils are making good progress. Pupils are well instructed in the basic rules of grammar and they are developing confidence in using past and future tenses.

113. Pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is above average in French but below average in German. In a Year 11 French class, higher-attaining pupils spoke confidently from memory about past and future holidays. In a Year 11 German class, pupils were less confident and more reliant on prompts. This group, however, is an extremely large class and the teacher copes well. In Year 10, on the other hand, higher-attaining pupils in the German class answered questions on school very confidently from memory. They also showed a good knowledge of modal verbs and of inversion. Written work in both languages is good and pupils are well prepared for their coursework. They have a good knowledge of the topic vocabulary and have been taught to use a variety of tenses. The written work of one of the pupils preparing for an early entry in the AS French examination is outstanding. Across all age groups, pupils with special educational needs make good progress. The support provided for them is good and much appreciated by staff as well as pupils.

114. The quality of teaching and learning is always satisfactory and, in over half of the lessons seen, it was good. Teachers make good use of the foreign language in the classroom. Their very high expectations set challenges to the pupils and have a positive effect on understanding. In the most successful lessons, work from previous lessons is revised in oral sessions at the outset and objectives are shared with the class. Work is then consolidated and extended with gains in vocabulary and new constructions and the lesson finishes with an evaluation of what has been learnt. In most lessons, pupils are productive. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to speak and paired work is used well. Pupils are also given the opportunity to use dictionaries for independent learning. Good use is made of resources, particularly worksheets, and of the overhead projector. Teachers know their pupils well and relationships are good. Consequently, teachers manage their classes very well and pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good and, at times, very good. They are attentive and well behaved, apply themselves well to their tasks and, in many lessons, they are well motivated and interested in what they are doing. Several pupils are beginning to use the foreign language to the teacher when help is needed. Homework is set to extend the work completed in class. Written work is well corrected. Very occasionally, too long is spent on one activity, usually writing, to the exclusion of other skills.

115. The curriculum leader provides very good leadership and effective management within the department. She is ably assisted by two good Key Stage 3 co-ordinators, one for each language. Relationships are good. The staff work hard and are committed to high achievement. There have been good improvements since the last inspection, six years ago. Information and communication technology has been developed well and the status of the second foreign language has been successfully established. One extra lesson per week has been given to dual linguists at Key Stage 3. However, the time allocation for dual linguists at Key Stage 4 is inadequate. Very good use is made of the school's assessment data. A useful link has been established with a school in Magdeburg and two German teachers have worked in the school in November for the last two years. The curriculum leader teaches one afternoon per week in a local primary school. Three pupils are studying for the new AS examination. The department has the capacity to improve still further and staff are appropriately focusing on raising attainment in German, particularly in the GCSE examination.

MUSIC

116. There is a great deal of music in the school. Very good standards of performance are seen in the many extra-curricular activities and some gifted and talented individuals achieve exceptionally high standards in instrumental and small group work. However, the school teaches only a limited range of elements of the National Curriculum for Key Stage 3. There is no provision for information and communication technology in music and the statutory requirements for this subject are not being met.

117. Standards of attainment range widely across the whole spectrum at both key stages. No baseline assessments are made on entry. In Year 7, it is clear that a few pupils are exceptionally talented but, in the majority of cases, standards are low, being generally the level expected for eleven-year-olds. In recent years, teachers' assessments made in Year 9 have been below the national averages although they were slightly above this in 2000. Observations confirm that the attainment of most pupils, especially those with special educational needs, improves across the key stage and progress is good, overall. Nevertheless, attainment remains below national expectations by the end of Year 9 owing to the lack of depth, breadth and range of skills, and the limited knowledge and understanding shown by the majority of pupils.

118. At Key Stage 4, a very small number of committed pupils take the GCSE examination in music. In 1998, six pupils were entered, almost all gaining very good grades. There were no entries in 1999 and only two in 2000, both gaining A* grades. One of these was still only in Year 9. Since 1996, an increasing number of pupils have entered for a GCSE course in expressive arts. This includes elements of musical skills, knowledge and understanding, although it is strongly focused on drama. For example, in a Year 10 class, composing, performing, listening and appraising skills were being developed and some pupils with special educational needs were making particularly good progress. Examination results for this course have been good, even very good, in the last three years. The proportions of A* to C grades have been about, or above, 80 per cent but no national comparison is available. These attainments complement the achievements of the significant proportion of pupils who take instrumental lessons and graded examinations in music. Their results are published in the governors' report in the same way that other public examination results appear and they are celebrated in assemblies.

119. Many pupils benefit from the specialist provision available, particularly keyboard organs in class and band or orchestral facilities. However, pupils in Year 9 still confuse the most basic concepts, such as movement upwards or downwards, whilst many are insecure in their knowledge of simple musical notation. The more talented and able pupils at Key

Stage 3 are only rarely given separate tasks or extending challenges. At all stages, and especially at Key Stage 3, pupils are uncertain of their own achievements and are therefore tentative in their efforts to improve them. This is because work is not sufficiently focused or matched to individual needs and abilities. Singing is not well developed and most pupils find it difficult to maintain an independent part in class, although very good four-part singing was heard in a concert.

120. Attitudes to music vary widely. At Key Stage 4, most pupils are keen to succeed and settle well to work with increasing independence and with little behavioural disturbance. This contributes strongly to improving standards across Key Stage 4 and to the good results achieved in the GCSE examination in expressive arts. By contrast, at Key Stage 3, some classes contain pupils who seek to attract attention by discourteous and occasionally poor behaviour. Teachers generally manage such situations sensitively and positively but the occasional confrontation distracts the whole class and hinders teaching and learning.

121. The quality of teaching overall is good and teaching was good or very good in more than half the lessons seen. However, there was some unsatisfactory teaching marked by a lack of appropriate pace and challenge, unclear learning objectives, weak management of behaviour and inadequate assessment. Consequently, teachers and pupils were unable to measure how well they were doing. The good teaching seen was characterised by energy and dynamism. Teachers show a strong commitment to their pupils. This is particularly evident in the individual work at Key Stage 4 and in instrumental lessons. In whole-class lessons, teachers make the learning objectives clear to pupils and check that they are met by constantly monitoring work in progress. Such good teaching inspires positive responses from pupils, although they are sometimes hard won. For example, in a percussion ensemble, some disaffected behaviour by pupils in Year 9 had to be skilfully managed, ensuring that progress was made. Pupils respond to this good teaching by concentrating and remaining focused on their work. This, in turn, leads to good learning and progress. However, the skills of teachers at Key Stage 3 are sometimes challenged by the unsatisfactory attitudes of a minority of pupils. Consequently, teachers are often working harder than their pupils!

122. The well-qualified and experienced music staff are supported by eight visiting instrumental teachers. Lesson planning follows the school's revised curriculum which has been substantially modified since the last inspection. However, teachers do not always match work to the needs and abilities of the pupils who then lose confidence in their achievements. They do not record and report attainment in relation to the nationally established criteria, especially at the beginning and end of Key Stage 3, making it difficult to establish reliable measures of progress. Present arrangements for managing the subject are not satisfactory.

123. The range and quality of extra-curricular activities are outstanding and contribute significantly to learning and progress. The school has a well-deserved reputation for its orchestra and instrumental ensembles which achieve good standards, built upon the regular training. Groups have recently performed in local primary schools, the Royal Albert Hall and the National Indoor Arena, as well as taking music out into the community. Music is mainly taught in a temporary double-classroom unit. This is adequate for whole-class teaching but the lack of sound-proofing interferes with pupils' concentration, especially when visiting music teachers are using either of the two small practice rooms. Many resources are of good quality but some classroom instruments are not properly maintained and there is no provision for information and communication technology for music.

124. Since the last inspection in 1994, the curriculum and the time allocated to music and performing arts have been changed significantly so that direct comparison is not possible.

The schemes of work and lesson plans for Key Stage 3 have been modified but there are many shortcomings. In particular, the insufficient allocation of time for the subject and the lack of any provision for information and communication technology mean that progress has been very limited. At Key Stage 4, enough time is provided. The number of candidates for the performing arts course has been steadily rising and standards of attainment have been improving.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

125. The percentages of pupils who gained A* to C grades in the 1999 and 2000 GCSE physical education examinations were above the national average. The 2000 results were better than those for 1999 and they compare favourably with those for other subjects in the school. Standards in lessons and work seen indicate that GCSE pupils in Years 10 and 11 are attaining above the nationally expected level for their age. In basketball, their footwork and ball skills are accurate and well controlled and a few boys and girls who play for county teams have developed advanced skills. Written work is well organised with good use of technical terminology. Notebooks are a good learning resource. The girls' notebooks are especially well presented. Pupils in Year 11 have a good understanding of how to develop and monitor their own training programmes.

126. Standards in the core physical education lessons at Key Stage 4 are above the nationally expected level and the progress made across the key stage is good. The majority of pupils have good basic skills in volleyball and handball but the development of their knowledge and experience of the full game is limited by the small gymnasium and lack of indoor space. Pupils frequently take responsibility for organising their own teams and referees. Boys and girls have a good knowledge of health-related fitness and are physically challenged by the aerobics module in Year 10. Pupils in Year 11 have the opportunity to ice-skate at a local rink. This off-site activity broadens the curriculum at Key Stage 4 and takes pupils away from the poor, over-crowded facilities of the school. Over half the pupils are able to skate with confidence and many boys skate well enough to play ice hockey.

127. In 2000, teachers' assessments showed that the percentage of Year 9 pupils reaching the nationally expected level or higher was above the national average. Inspection evidence confirms that attainment in Year 9 is above national expectations and good progress is made by pupils of all abilities. Pupils enter the school with average attainment levels in games and very little experience in fitness and movement activities. By the end of the key stage, they understand the importance of preparing themselves for exercise. The fitness module in Year 7 develops this initial knowledge very effectively. Boys acquire good ball skills in rugby and most show good stamina, strength and speed. In dance and gymnastics, girls link movements together fluently and work constructively in small groups. Their body tension and skill levels are mostly very good. Year 8 girls are able to improvise, copy and repeat movements in dance with an awareness of rhythm and space. Across the school, many individuals and teams achieve very high standards in district and county competitions in cricket, football, athletics, basketball, swimming, badminton and netball. The school has national champions in gymnastics and archery.

128. Teaching is good throughout the school, with some very good features, and learning is good across the attainment range at both key stages. Objectives are shared with pupils at the start of each lesson and good summaries at the end ensure that learning is well focused. Teachers have very good expertise and knowledge of the subject and are able to give good demonstrations of techniques. This gives pupils a first-hand picture of the activity and shows them clearly how to improve their skills. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 are organised into sets for games. This means that the groups of more able pupils make good progress, as do the groups of lower-attaining pupils. Those with physical disabilities are well supported in

practical lessons by assistants who work closely with the pupil and the teacher. All lessons include a health and fitness section in the form of a warm up and stretching section and the very good lessons give pupils opportunities to acquire new skills, to select and apply these skills and to evaluate their own work and that of others. However, teachers do not always manage a good balance between all these strands of the National Curriculum. They use a good style of questioning which ensures pupils are fully involved in their own learning. The continuity provided by the well-planned units of work at Key Stage 3 supports good progress but the units at Key Stage 4 are not yet fully developed. Information and communication technology is not used sufficiently. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. This, together with the pupils' very good behaviour and enthusiasm for the subject, enables their learning to be most effective.

129. The head of department provides very good leadership. All issues from the previous inspection have been addressed. Appropriate policies are in place and health and safety and risk assessment procedures are clearly defined but, in two lessons, teachers did not carry out risk assessments fully at the start of the lesson. Teaching is regularly monitored by the head of the department and the school's senior management team, and the newly-qualified teacher has been well supported. The comprehensive departmental handbook is well presented, assessment procedures are well developed and used and GCSE theory tests and class work are marked with constructive comments. The well-attended extra-curricular programme is a strength of the school.

130. Accommodation is poor. The school has insufficient indoor facilities. The hall is used for assemblies, dining, concerts and examinations and the cleaning after such events is inadequate. Consequently, physical education often has to take place on a dirty floor. Furthermore, mud is carried in to the gymnasium because the only access is from the fields and this space, too, has to be used for assemblies and examinations. Time is wasted at the start of lessons ensuring floor surfaces are clean and safe, and movement is restricted because the facilities are small and overcrowded. There is no netting on three sides of the courts and time is wasted fetching and collecting balls from the surrounding field. The curriculum plan has to be very well organised in order to provide maximum learning opportunities while using the limited facilities available. Since the previous inspection, very good progress has been made, standards of attainment have improved and pupils are now making consistently good progress.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

131. By the end of Key Stage 3, the attainment of the substantial majority of pupils meets the standards set out in the locally agreed syllabus. By the end of Key Stage 4, the standards in the GCSE group are broadly in line with the national average. The great majority of the pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in relation to their prior attainment.

132. The pupils in Year 7 have a good understanding of the apostle Paul's teaching on the theme of justice and consider the positive effects of religion on a believer's life. Year 8 pupils referred to Jewish artefacts when considering the significance of symbolism in a religion. Year 9 pupils expressed well-thought-out opinions on attitudes towards death as part of a topic on rites of passage. Higher-attaining pupils are able to apply a secure knowledge of the Bible to everyday issues. Levels of achievement are good in relation to prior learning. Lower-attaining pupils have a satisfactory understanding of the main features of lessons but they sometimes have difficulty in expressing their opinions in spoken or written forms.

133. In the summer of 2000, 32 pupils in Year 11 were entered for the GCSE religious studies examination and the proportions obtaining grades A* to C and A* to G were broadly in

line with the national average. Sixteen of these pupils entered the religious education short course, gaining grades A or B. Twenty-seven pupils from Year 10 were also entered for the short course, of whom twenty-four obtained grades A* to C. Between 1996 and 1999, the percentage pass rate presents a steadily improving picture. Pupils at Key Stage 4 generally achieve well in lessons. Higher-attaining pupils have a good understanding of significant biblical events and the outstanding features of major religions. Pupils in Year 10 make very good progress in expressing well-thought-out opinions on such sensitive issues as race and prejudice. Year 11 pupils have a good appreciation of what people may suffer as a consequence of divorce and family breakdown.

134. The pupils have good attitudes towards religious education and some say it is their favourite subject. They enjoy lessons and show respect for each other's point of view. They are well behaved, courteous and attentive and they enthusiastically contribute to discussions on a range of religious issues. Relationships between pupils and teachers are mature and productive. The pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong. Senior pupils are committed to obtaining good examination results and the entry rate for GCSE examinations is good.

135. The quality of teaching is good and sometimes very good at both key stages. Lessons are well planned and managed with clear teaching objectives and expected learning outcomes are identified in planning and explained to pupils at the start of lessons. Teachers use questioning skilfully to ensure good continuity from one lesson to the next. The best teaching involves the use of a variety of teaching methods. Teaching is less effective when there is no time frame for aspects of a lesson. Teachers clearly explain the levels at which individual pupils are working and target-setting is very effective. In addition, pupils are given handouts to explain the levels.

136. Specialist teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject and this enables them to conduct lessons at a good pace. Worksheets, artefacts and information and communication technology effectively support pupils' learning. For example, a Year 7 class obtained information from the Internet about Mother Theresa and Christian Aid for a discussion about how people's lives can be determined by their faith. Teachers use a range of approaches to add to the interest of lessons. For example, pupils in a Year 10 class were encouraged to chair their own discussion on prejudice, with little direction from the teacher.

137. All pupils receive their religious education entitlement although the rotation arrangement with geography and history makes it difficult to cover the whole syllabus effectively. The pupils' work is accurately assessed as lessons proceed and they have a very good understanding of what they have learned and what they need to do to improve. The departmental policy for assessment reflects the aims of the school's policy. Overall, the marking of pupils' work is satisfactory, with appropriately encouraging and challenging comments. Presentation of work in notebooks is generally satisfactory. However, the quality and quantity of work in a few notebooks fall below the standards seen in geography and history.

138. Teaching rooms are welcoming but sometimes a little cramped, particularly with large teaching groups. Multi-faith wall displays are stimulating and lists of key words make an important contribution to the development of literacy. The pupils write for a range of purposes. For example, Year 7 pupils have compiled an account of the resurrection from different sources. Year 11 pupils prepared notes on overhead projector slides for a presentation on aspects of suffering. Good use is made of writing frames. The department is well resourced with a range of good quality texts, Bibles and artefacts. The relevant section of the library has a satisfactory number of texts but some are now out-of-date.

139. The department is very well managed and organised. The formal curriculum is enriched by an extensive programme of visits to local churches and religious establishments and by a number of external visitors, including a church-based youth worker. Some pupils went on a holiday to Israel. Since the last inspection, standards have improved at both key stages and independent learning has been further developed. In-class assessment has been improved and additional time has been allocated to the subject at Key Stage 4.