

INSPECTION REPORT

ROBERT BLOOMFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL

Shefford

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109652

Headteacher: Mr A. Rogers

Reporting inspector: John Godwood
18242

Dates of inspection: 29 April – 1 May 2003

Inspection number: 249147

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Middle
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	9 to 13
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Bloomfield Drive Shefford Bedfordshire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr R. Ford
Date of previous inspection:	June 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
18242	John Godwood	Registered inspector	Educational inclusion, including race equality	What sort of school is it? How high are standards: the school's results and pupils' achievements? How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9756	Ken Parsons	Lay inspector		How high are standards: pupils' attitudes, values and personal development? How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
2740	Betty Barratt	Team inspector	History Special Educational Needs	
23528	Andrew Bird	Team inspector	Mathematics	
13734	Harold Davies	Team inspector	Geography Religious education	
18542	Gerald Griffin	Team inspector	Design and technology Information and communication technology	
7428	Ray Jardine	Team inspector	Science	
8139	Barbara Johnstone	Team inspector	Music	
31649	Richard Marsden	Team inspector	Citizenship Modern foreign languages	
23030	Caroline Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education	
10053	Janet Simms	Team inspector	Art and design English as an additional language	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Robert Bloomfield Middle School is a community school with 719 pupils aged 9 to 13. This is much larger than most middle schools. There are slightly more girls than boys. The school is oversubscribed and has grown over the last five years. Pupils come from a wide area in and around Shefford. Four per cent are eligible for free school meals, which is below average. Most pupils come from white British backgrounds, with four per cent from minority ethnic backgrounds. Five pupils speak English as an additional language, with very few at an early stage. Sixteen per cent of pupils (116) have special educational needs, of whom 13 have a Statement, which is below average. Of 30 pupils with more significant special needs, most have learning needs or emotional and behavioural difficulties, though there are pupils with sensory impairment, physical disability or dyspraxia. A relatively high number of pupils leave or join the school at other than the usual times of year. Pupils' attainment on entry is broadly average though it is rising and was above average for the current Years 5 and 6. A new headteacher was appointed in April 2002.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Robert Bloomfield is a good school. Results in National Curriculum tests are generally above average, though until recently they did not improve as fast as other schools nationally and in 2001, results were average. Over the last year, very good leadership has raised expectations of what pupils can achieve and set a very clear direction for improvement. Standards rose in the 2002 tests and are now above average. Pupils achieve well, though the school's targets and pupils' achievement could be higher still. Teaching is good and often challenges pupils to think for themselves, contribute to discussions and learn independently. Pupils have very good opportunities for personal development, including a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. They respond very well and their very good attitudes and behaviour make a strong contribution to their learning and to the ethos of the school. The headteacher provides very good leadership and the school is well managed, though planned improvements are not all yet in place. There is a shared commitment amongst staff and good capacity for further improvement. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Very good leadership has significantly raised expectations and is leading to higher standards.
- Pupils achieve well because of good teaching which challenges them to think and enquire.
- There is very good provision for personal development and pupils contribute well to school life.
- Pupils respond to the trust they are shown and their very good attitudes contribute to learning.
- Pupils with special needs are very well supported and make very good progress.
- There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities and high rates of participation.

What could be improved

- Pupils' progress is regularly assessed but interim assessments are not collated centrally or linked to pupils' individual reviews.
- Targets for pupils' and the school's performance are not linked clearly enough to national benchmarks and could be higher.
- The role of subject leaders and other managers in monitoring and supporting teaching needs to be more clearly defined and further developed.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made satisfactory progress since its last inspection in June 1997. Between 1998 and 2002, National Curriculum results have risen in line with the national trend, though improvement was slow until 2002. There has been an improvement in teaching, with a significant increase in the proportion of very good or excellent teaching. The school has made progress on all the issues identified in the last report. There has been very good progress in ensuring that pupils cover the National Curriculum in information and communication technology (ICT) and satisfactory progress in improving reports to parents. Good progress has been made on the management issues – implementing the management review, establishing a monitoring programme and improving the school development plan – though the most significant developments have taken place over the last year. These have significantly raised teachers' and pupils' aspirations but have yet to have a full impact on standards.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 6 based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
English	C	C	C	D
Mathematics	C	D	C	D
Science	A	D	B	C

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

Results in the 2002 National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6 were above average overall, but were better in science than in English or mathematics. They were below those of schools in similar contexts but indicated satisfactory progress in relation to pupils' attainment at the end of Year 2. Over the period 1998 to 2001, the school's results did not keep pace with the national improvement, but they rose significantly in 2002 and caught up with the national trend.

The school exceeded its target for English, but not those for mathematics or science. It is on course to reach its targets for the 2003 tests. These targets have been raised, reflecting higher aspirations on the part of teachers. They are not especially challenging, however, in relation to the progress that similar pupils make nationally.

Since September 2002, many steps have been taken to raise achievement and, as a result, standards seen during the inspection are higher than in the recent tests. Standards are above average at the end of Year 6 and at the end of Year 8, and pupils achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry. Standards are well above average in science in Years 7 and 8 and in ICT in all years. Standards are average in design and technology in Years 5 and 6 and in religious education. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress. Gifted and talented pupils are suitably challenged in lessons and other activities and make very good progress.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are proud to belong to the school and participate fully in lessons. This makes a positive contribution to their learning.

Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good in most lessons and around the school. Pupils are trustworthy and look after property well.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils work very well together and show respect for each other and for their teachers. Their personal development is excellent.
Attendance	Very good. Pupils enjoy school and attendance is well above average.

Pupils' interest in school activities is excellent and a very large number take part in clubs and trips. Pupils feel valued and take on many responsibilities, including running the school council.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 5 – 6	Years 7 – 8
Quality of teaching	Good	Good

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

Teaching is good and often very good. It is good in English, mathematics and science and in most other subjects. It is very good in ICT and satisfactory in religious education. Pupils' literacy is well supported within English and in all subjects. Provision for numeracy is satisfactory – it is taught well in mathematics, but the support given to numeracy in other subjects is not co-ordinated.

Teachers have high expectations and manage pupils very well. They encourage pupils to think for themselves and value their contributions. As a result, pupils are keen to share their views and listen well to each other. Most lessons are well planned, with a variety of activities that keep pupils interested, though a minority of lessons lack pace and interest. Pupils' learning is enhanced because in most lessons, teachers make it very clear what they are expected to learn. In a few lessons taught by non-specialist teachers, however, learning is slowed by a lack of depth in their subject knowledge.

The school is successful in meeting the needs of all pupils. Those who have special educational needs are very well supported and teachers are provided with good information to help plan for them. There is considerable additional provision for gifted and talented pupils. Pupils enjoy learning and co-operate very well with their teachers. They work well in groups and in independent enquiry work.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum is broad and includes good development of enquiry skills. Pupils gain a good start in learning French from Year 5.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Teachers plan for them consistently well. Specialist teaching is very good, as is the support from teaching assistants.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. There are very few pupils at an early stage of learning English. Their needs are assessed appropriately and they receive good support and care. As a result, they make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. There is very good provision for pupils' moral and social development. Pupils have many opportunities to take responsibility and contribute very well to the life and ethos of the school. Provision for spiritual and cultural development is good.

How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Teachers know pupils well and meet their individual needs. The school is effective in helping pupils become mature and responsible.
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The school has good links with parents and parental support has a very good impact on learning. Reports on pupils' progress are good, but the format is not consistent enough between subjects. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, and a high level of participation. Very good links with the upper schools help to ensure that pupils' progress is not interrupted when they transfer.

There are good procedures for assessing pupils' attainment, but these assessments are not collected centrally to provide an overall check on each pupil's progress. Not enough use is made of national data in setting pupils' individual targets. There are very good procedures for promoting good behaviour, with clear guidelines for teachers and an imaginative use of rewards that motivates pupils.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. Very good leadership from the headteacher has given a very clear direction and led to rising standards. Subject management is good but the role of some subject leaders needs further development.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors know the school well and help to shape its direction. They have a good knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Classroom work is regularly monitored. Assessment data is analysed carefully, but reports on performance need to be more systematic and linked more closely to national data.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Finances are managed carefully, with clear links between planning and expenditure. Long-term planning needs to be improved.

The school is well staffed with teachers and support staff and there is a satisfactory match between teachers' qualifications and the subjects they teach. The accommodation is satisfactory and very well maintained. There is a good range of learning resources, though the role of the library in supporting learning is under-developed.

The headteacher is well supported by governors and senior staff in his drive to raise standards. There has been much monitoring and evaluation in the past year, leading to a new school improvement plan. This has raised aspirations, though new developments are not fully embedded and the roles of all managers in school improvement need to be defined more clearly. The school applies the principles of best value well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The school has high expectations.• Parents' concerns are dealt with well.• The school is well led and managed.• The teaching is good.• Children like school and enjoy learning.• Teachers show an interest in pupils and help them become mature and responsible.• Extra-curricular activities are very good, especially in sport.• Behaviour is good.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some parents find there is too much homework and it varies between teachers.• Some are dissatisfied with the school's links with parents.

Most parents are very pleased with the school and believe that it is improving. In investigating parents' concerns, the inspection found that homework is generally set appropriately and often challenges pupils to work independently, though there is some variation in the homework set by different teachers. The school has good links with parents and has recently worked very hard to consult parents, respond to any concerns and involve them more in children's learning. Pupils' reports contain useful information on progress but the format varies too much between different subjects.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school, as measured in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 2, is rising. The attainment on entry of pupils in Years 7 and 8 was broadly average; for pupils in Years 5 and 6 it was above average.
2. Results in the Year 6 National Curriculum tests in 2002 were above average overall. The best results were in science. English and mathematics results were average but science results were above average. The results were significantly better than those of 2001, which were average overall and below average in mathematics and science. From 1998 to 2000, the Year 6 results improved slowly but did not keep up with the national trend and in 2001 the results declined in English, mathematics and science. In 2002 this trend was reversed and the 2002 results were the best the school has yet achieved.
3. The improvement in results in 2002 is largely due to an enhanced focus on achievement and on preparing pupils to perform at their best that was introduced by the headteacher on his appointment in April 2002. Following an analysis of previous results, aspirations were raised of what pupils could achieve, booster lessons were introduced and the conditions under which pupils sat the tests made more conducive.
4. Since September 2002, many more significant steps have been taken to raise achievement. These include a clearer sense of direction, smaller classes in some subjects, more grouping by ability, a review of the behaviour policy, greater use of assessment and much monitoring of teaching. As a result, standards seen during the inspection are higher than in the recent results. In work seen, standards are above average, and whereas the 2002 results suggested that pupils had made satisfactory progress in relation to their earlier results, pupils are now achieving well.
5. Standards of work seen at the end of Year 6 are above average in most subjects and pupils are achieving well. This is because they are well taught and encouraged to think for themselves. As a result, their skills in doing independent research are developed well. In ICT, standards are well above average and pupils achieve very well because they receive very good teaching. Standards in design and technology at the end of Year 6 are average, but this represents good achievement because pupils join the school with little experience of the subject. Standards in religious education are average and pupils' achievement is satisfactory because there are no specialist teachers and, though the department is well led, teaching is satisfactory.
6. By the end of Year 8, pupils reach above average standards in most subjects. Standards are well above average in science and ICT and average in religious education. In science, pupils develop very good skills in scientific enquiry as a result of the strong emphasis that teachers place on this aspect. Pupils' achievement is good in most subjects. It continues to be very good in ICT and satisfactory in religious education. Achievement in French in Years 7 and 8 is satisfactory because, although the teaching is good, less time is allocated to French than in most schools – this is compensated for by the good foundation pupils get by starting French in Year 5.
7. Pupils' own very good attitudes to learning also make a strong contribution to their achievement. They are co-operative in lessons and in doing homework. Pupils work well in pairs and groups; they discuss sensibly and constructively and are keen to contribute to the whole class.
8. In the 2002 Year 6 tests, the school just exceeded its target in English, but did not meet its targets for mathematics or science. Pupils are on course, however, to reach the targets for 2003. These targets are slightly higher than the 2002 results, but are not especially challenging. If they are achieved, pupils will have made satisfactory progress in relation to their Year 2 results. The targets for 2004 are slightly higher again, but since attainment on entry is rising, these also expect only satisfactory progress. Raising aspirations has been one of the senior management team's key aims

this year. They have been successful in this, but the school's targets indicate that aspirations could be higher still.

9. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress in improving their reading and spelling ages, and in their confidence and self-esteem. They often exceed the targets in their individual education plans. This is because they receive very good specialist teaching in small groups for English and mathematics, and they are well supported in lessons by teachers and teaching assistants. Their needs are well known by subject teachers and they make consistently good progress in all subjects. Their learning is only occasionally slowed when lesson planning does not cater specifically for their needs and no teaching assistant is available. There are also some instances in physical education when pupils with poor co-ordination skills do not make the progress expected because tasks are not broken down into sufficiently simple steps.
10. The school has a very small number of pupils who have English as an additional language. These pupils are supported well and make good progress. There is also a relatively small proportion of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. They are socially well integrated and progress as well as other pupils. The school analyses test results according to ethnic background and the analysis shows that no particular group is underachieving.
11. Gifted and talented pupils make very good progress. The school has identified the pupils who are gifted or have specific talents and makes special provision for them. In music, talented pupils do very well through extra-curricular activities and instrumental lessons, as well as in class. Pupils do well in national challenges in mathematics.
12. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls. In mathematics, boys do better, as also happens nationally. Boys and girls do equally well in science. In English tests, girls do better than boys overall, though the difference is no greater than that found nationally. Boys' performance has recently improved in English – from 1999 to 2001 they underachieved, but the school has taken specific action and in 2002, boys' results equalled those of girls. In English in the current Year 6, however, boys are not achieving as well as girls.
13. Standards of literacy are above average. In speaking and listening, pupils participate well in whole class and small group discussions, listening respectfully to others and arguing a clear point of view. Reading standards are also above average. Most pupils enjoy reading and read independently with good understanding. They are able to find information from an encyclopaedia or non-fiction book. Writing is also above average, though in Year 6, reading is notably better than writing. Literacy skills are promoted well and consistently in the teaching of all subjects.
14. The standard of pupils' numeracy on entering the school is broadly average. Mathematics lessons provide regular practice in mental arithmetic and pupils have a daily mathematics lesson in Years 5 and 6. Numeracy is also promoted through booster classes. Standards in numeracy by the end of Year 6 are above average and performance in national tests is improving. In other subjects such as science and design and technology, pupils use decimals in their measurements and present results in graphs. The effectiveness of strategies for teaching numeracy is only satisfactory, however, because the approach taken by different subjects is not co-ordinated.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

15. The vast majority of pupils enjoy coming to school and take full advantage of what it has to offer them. They are proud to belong to the Robert Bloomfield community and have a very good attitude towards the school. The good teaching they receive means that pupils are interested in their lessons and keen to participate fully in them – this makes a very positive contribution to their learning. They are prepared to put forward their own views and to respond to questions from the teacher. For example, in a history lesson on Henry VIII, pupils were very keen to contribute their own knowledge and ideas, but also listened carefully to the views of others. Their overall interest and involvement in what the school has to offer them is excellent. A very large number of pupils take advantage of the wide range of lunchtime and after-school clubs on offer. The school fosters productive attitudes

through its strong ethos, making sure that individual pupils feel valued and able to contribute to both their own learning and to the wider school community.

16. Virtually all parents are very happy with pupils' behaviour in the school. Pupils' behaviour is in fact very good in most lessons, encouraged by the good teaching that maintains their interest, and this enables teachers to concentrate on pupils' learning rather than spend time maintaining order. Even in an unchallenging personal, social and health education (PSHE) lesson on healthy lifestyles, for example, pupils responded positively and addressed the task sensibly.
17. The school buildings can pose challenges in terms of congested corridors during lesson changeovers, but pupils cope very well, behaving sensibly and safely, with no pushing or bad temper. At breaks and lunchtimes, they behave very well. The restricted playground facilities are rather sterile, but pupils only require limited supervision by adults to ensure good order. Some Year 5 pupils at times resent the control over their movements effected by Year 8 monitors during lunchtimes, but they nevertheless respond with resigned good humour. Pupils are very polite to each other and to adults, observing common courtesies well. They look after property well and are trustworthy. For example, teachers allow them to access and use digital cameras at lunchtimes with a minimum of supervision.
18. No bullying or harassment was seen during the inspection, although some Year 5 and Year 6 pupils talked about incidents, mostly on the school buses. Both parents and pupils share a confidence that the school deals effectively with such incidents brought to its attention. In the last school year just one pupil received a fixed-term exclusion – a proportion well below what might be expected in a school of this size. The overall standards of behaviour clearly reflect both the school's high expectations and the grounding these pupils have received from their parents and in their lower schools.
19. Pupils' personal development is excellent. The school has a large number of personable and mature young people whom it is a real pleasure to meet. Many have an unforced confidence that enables them to relate well both to each other and to adults. This applies to pupils of all levels of attainment. They understand the impact of their actions on others and they work very well with each other. In a textiles lesson, for example, they shared resources well and those who had mastered how to thread a sewing machine helped others in a very sensible and natural way. In lessons they are very prepared to work on their own – in an ICT lesson, for example, pupils got on with producing a booklet about the school shop with a high level of self-motivation.
20. The school provides considerable opportunities to take initiative and pupils know that they themselves can organise things, rather than wait for teachers to do so. Examples of these include the charity events that pupils organise. The school council is well run by pupils themselves and its contribution to the school is recognised by pupils and staff alike. Pupils have put together a school magazine, again with limited adult support. There are monitors for a variety of tasks around the school, some pupils giving up a considerable amount of their time to perform them. Year 8 pupils take it in turns to run errands for the office and take such responsibilities very seriously. Most importantly, pupils were recently fully involved in deciding the values to be expressed in the school's new motto, 'Community, Opportunity, Excellence'. The school's PSHE programme contributes well to their personal development. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning in lessons and they contribute well to setting their own targets, both formal and informal. Pupils in all years are prepared to do the little jobs – sorting out textbooks, collecting in books, clearing up after a practical session – that help ensure that lessons run efficiently.
21. Relationships in the school are very good. This reflects the school's emphasis on community and the social development of pupils. Form tutors know their pupils well, assisted by the school's systems that enable other teachers to keep them informed of successes and problems. This is particularly beneficial to younger pupils used to having all their lessons with one teacher in their lower school. Pupils' relationships with other teachers are also characterised by mutual respect and a partnership in learning. The heads of year and other managers encourage good relationships and pupils value their role. Most pupils respect each other and understand the impact of their actions on others, with little friction evident. In group or paired work, they co-operate and share resources

sensibly, respecting each other's views. Low and high-attaining pupils work constructively together with no pupil excluded from the group. Boys and girls usually work together unselfconsciously. One example of this was in a lesson on street dance, where pupils worked exceptionally well together and responded well to the teacher's supportive criticisms. All those involved showed confidence in the group.

22. Pupils want to come to school, parents support the school well and, as a result, attendance is well above average. There are very few unauthorised absences and pupils arrive punctually in the morning, allowing a prompt start to the school day. Any lateness is almost always caused by problems with the school buses. Between classes, pupils move around the school purposefully and hence little time is lost at the start of lessons.
23. The very high standards of pupils' attitudes, behaviour and attendance seen at the time of the last inspection have been maintained.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

24. Teaching is good and often very good throughout the school. Almost all the teaching seen was at least satisfactory and more than four out every five lessons were good or better. Nearly two out of every five lessons were very good or, occasionally, excellent. The quality of teaching is slightly better in Years 7 and 8 than in Years 5 and 6.
25. Teaching is good in almost all subjects throughout all year groups. It is very good in ICT and, in English, it is good in Years 5 and 6 and very good in Years 7 and 8. It is satisfactory in religious education.
26. In the majority of lessons, teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well to interest pupils and give accurate explanations. In science and some geography lessons, for example, pupils are inspired by the teachers' own enthusiasm for their subjects. Teachers of French often use their own language skills to provide a good model for pupils' pronunciation. In many subjects, some teaching is done by non-specialist teachers. They are usually given good support from the subject leader, but in a minority of lessons a lack of subject knowledge affects pupils' learning. In history, non-specialist teachers need more support in order to help them extend the learning of higher-attaining pupils. There are no specialist teachers in religious education and, while teachers have good guidance, some lack depth in their knowledge of the subject. English teachers are well supported but occasionally there is a lack of knowledge of more subtle linguistic features of a text. In the new subject of citizenship, teachers' expertise needs further development.
27. Lessons are well planned. English lessons, for example, usually have a good structure, with a starter session that involves all pupils quickly and activities that are frequently stimulating and fire their imagination. In almost all lessons, teachers have clear learning objectives and explain these to pupils, who therefore know what they are aiming to learn. This supports pupils' very good co-operation with their teachers. A minority of lessons in design and technology, however, do not have such a clear purpose and, while mathematics lessons are planned well, the objectives are not always shared with pupils. Teachers often plan a good range of activities that capture pupils' interest and ensure that they learn at a good pace. The planning of most lessons includes activities that meet the needs of pupils of all abilities. In physical education, however, there are not enough activities for pupils with physical co-ordination difficulties and, in a minority of ICT lessons, the higher attainers are not challenged enough.
28. Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are high in almost all subjects, and this encourages pupils to do their best. In English, for example, pupils study challenging texts and in ICT they solve problems in realistic contexts that are relevant to their own experience. However, in religious education, some lessons are too slow and unchallenging, with pupils working through too many worksheets rather than doing extended writing. The weaker lessons in history and very occasionally in science are also undemanding.

29. A strength in much teaching is that teachers use methods which encourage pupils to think for themselves and contribute actively to the lesson. In science, for example, pupils develop particularly good enquiry skills because they are given good opportunities to make and test hypotheses, to discuss ideas and make connections. Pupils also learn to work independently and do research in art, geography and history. In religious education, however, there are only limited opportunities for independent enquiry and in mathematics, some lessons do not encourage pupils enough to think and explain their own understanding.
30. Pupils' very good attitudes contribute positively to their learning. Pupils are managed well, and in most lessons this leads to constructive relationships that aid concentration and interest. In physical education, for example, mutual respect between teachers and pupils leads to high levels of motivation and a very good work rate. Pupils concentrate well in most lessons; they work well together, contribute constructively to discussions and listen respectfully to each other. In music, they enjoy performing and persevere well. Their concentration slackens in some religious education lessons because not enough is demanded of them. In addition, art and design and technology are taught in double lessons and pupils find it difficult to maintain their concentration for this length of time.
31. In many subjects, pupils' learning benefits from constructive use of ICT. Opportunities to use computers are built into the programmes for English, mathematics and science, though in science a lack of equipment means that pupils have too few opportunities to collect data from experiments electronically. Mathematics lessons make excellent use of interactive whiteboards to aid pupils' understanding through clear, dynamic displays. ICT is used well for research and presentation in history, geography and art. Pupils use computer-aided design and manufacture in design and technology, but don't have any opportunity to control robots. The use of ICT to support pupils' learning needs further development in French, music and religious education.
32. Marking is often good, giving pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work. It is very good in English, science and French; in mathematics, pupils receive helpful comments but do not know how well they are progressing in relation to National Curriculum levels. The quality of marking varies in art and geography and, in religious education, pupils do not get enough written guidance. In history, marking is inconsistent in Years 5 and 6, but better in Years 7 and 8, where pupils also have opportunities to evaluate their own work. Pupils have good oral feedback in art and ICT. Assessment is accurate in physical education, but pupils do not have enough opportunities to evaluate their own and others' performance. Within design and technology, pupils evaluate their own work well in food and textiles, but less so in resistant materials. Assessment is not yet properly developed in citizenship.
33. Homework is set regularly and usually complements and extends the lesson well. Some parents were concerned that too much homework is set and that the amount varies between different teachers. Some also felt that holiday projects set in the humanities subjects in Years 5 and 6 were too time-consuming. The inspection found that teachers generally keep to the homework timetable, though occasionally homework is not set when it is scheduled. Homework in geography, history and art often involves independent research and prepares pupils well for the coursework they will do later in the upper school.
34. Most subjects give good support to pupils' literacy skills. Subject vocabulary is prominently displayed in classrooms and is regularly reinforced. There is also a good focus in most subjects on reading and writing non-fiction, and the use of 'writing frames' to support pupils' writing. The exceptions are in mathematics, where misspellings of mathematical vocabulary are not corrected, and in religious education, where pupils' knowledge of subject language needs further development.
35. Support for numeracy is satisfactory but is less well developed than literacy and there is no co-ordinated programme across all subjects. In mathematics, numeracy skills are developed well through short activities at the start of each lesson, with additional support for lower-attaining pupils. In design and technology, pupils regularly make measurements and use decimals and graphs. Pupils also apply their measuring skills in science, including measuring the force needed to move

shoes across surfaces and making estimates and measurements of temperature to assess the insulating properties of common materials.

36. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good. It is particularly strong in the learning support department and is consistently good in most subjects. Where it is best, as in English, supportive yet challenging teaching builds pupils' confidence and enables them to work to full capacity. In all subjects, teachers are well informed of pupils' needs and pupils are usually provided with appropriate work. In many lessons, pupils receive skilled support from teaching assistants, who work closely with teachers to ensure that pupils understand the work and are able to participate fully.

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

37. The curriculum is good, with a broad range of subjects that are in the most part well balanced. The programmes of work in most subjects are well planned to include the full National Curriculum, as well as enrichment in the form of fieldwork, practical work or scientific enquiry. Statutory requirements for the National Curriculum and religious education are met. All pupils learn French from Year 5, which gives them a good grounding for the statutory study of a foreign language from Year 7. The provision for ICT has been much improved since the last inspection and pupils now cover the full National Curriculum. The use of ICT is also much improved in other subjects such as English, science, physical education and geography. The arrangements for teaching art are not satisfactory and have not improved since the last inspection. Art is taught in rotation with design and technology, which means that pupils have art lessons for only one third of the year. In addition, the time allocation is considerably less than that recommended nationally, especially in Years 5 and 6. These factors mean that pupils' learning is disrupted and this has an impact on the level of skill they develop.
38. Classes are arranged with the aim of ensuring that pupils of all abilities are appropriately challenged. In Year 5, pupils are taught in their mixed ability forms. From Years 6 to 8, pupils are grouped for English and mathematics according to their ability in each particular subject, as they are for French in Years 7 and 8. This effectively helps teachers to match lessons to the particular needs of pupils. In science, pupils are grouped by ability in Years 6 and 8 but revert to mixed ability teaching in Year 7. This is not having a detrimental effect on standards but it would be more logical to maintain the continuity of arrangements from Year 6. Smaller classes have been created in English, mathematics, science and subjects with a practical element, and this is having a positive impact on standards.
39. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities. The rate of participation is very high, partly because of the wide range of choices available and partly because in music and sport, for example, pupils of all abilities are encouraged to take part. The readiness of staff to contribute to extra-curricular activities is a major factor in their success and this is appreciated by parents. There is considerable provision for gifted and talented pupils in mathematics, English, science, physical education, drama and music. Some pupils attend a children's university to develop their interests further. The school has a strong tradition in sport that is reflected in success in competitions. Talented pupils progress to national, regional, county and local competitions in a range of activities, particularly athletics. There are many drama productions that also include poetry, music and dance. In ICT, particular attention is given to pupils who have no access to computers at home. Many subjects organise visits to enrich the curriculum and there are several residential trips each year. However, opportunities are lacking in design and technology and there are no visits to galleries in art. A strong feature is the opportunities that older pupils have to help with younger pupils, through which they gain a sense of citizenship and responsibility. The school has been awarded the Sportsmark Gold Award with distinction and also the Healthy Schools Award.
40. The school's links with the community make a good contribution to learning. There are very good links with sporting clubs, which make use of the new floodlit multi-games facility and in return offer coaching and equipment. Links with the local church community are strong and the annual carol service draws many together. There are residential visits to carry out field studies, and foreign trips

to France. Pupils' French speaking skills are also promoted by the voluntary help of a local French speaker. Their art work is displayed in local establishments. PSHE lessons are enhanced by visiting speakers such as the police. The school recognises that there are areas where it could make still greater use of the community, especially in fostering pupils' awareness of multi-cultural aspects.

41. There are very good links with partner schools, particularly the upper schools. Regular meetings are held with upper school staff at both senior management and subject level to enhance pupils' continuity of learning when they change school. There are good arrangements for transferring pupils' records and in some subjects, such as French, there are innovative bridging projects. Teachers observe lessons in each other's schools and in music there is good support from an upper school advanced skilled teacher. The liaison with lower schools is good, but not so well developed in individual subjects. Lower school pupils have a taster day in the middle school to get to know their tutor and the school layout. However, there need to be closer links in geography to ensure that the same topics are not taught in both schools.
42. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and is guided by the school's aim that all pupils should have equal opportunities and strive for excellence. Pupils with special needs have full access to the whole curriculum, and have additional lessons to meet their particular needs. There is a strong focus on improving their reading and literacy skills as a foundation for learning other subjects. Very good use is made of ICT to motivate pupils and enhance learning. For example, the early intervention literacy programme uses a computerised learning package and is particularly effective. Teachers of all subjects receive good information from the learning support department to help them plan suitable work for pupils with learning difficulties. Outside lessons, pupils have a homework club, where they get support with work in all their subjects, and a friends club, which gives good personal support, especially for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.
43. There is good provision for pupils who have English as an additional language. They are known well by the learning support department and their needs are carefully identified. They receive appropriate support and are placed in classes that are well matched to their level of English. They are cared for well and make good progress.
44. The school's provision for pupils' literacy is good, both within English lessons and across subjects. All teachers have been trained in the National Literacy Strategy and in most subjects there is a good focus on key language, vocabulary, reading and writing. In addition, pupils' writing is developed through the use of 'writing frames'.
45. Support for numeracy is satisfactory. Mathematics lessons promote mental skills, and there are booster classes for those who need them. Mathematics challenges, lunchtime sessions for gifted and talented pupils, extra-curricular opportunities and weekend sessions for parents all contribute to raising awareness of the importance of number. Opportunities to apply and practise numeracy skills occur in many subjects. However, there is no school policy to co-ordinate these and hence the approaches are inconsistent. The school is committed to raising standards further and in-service training for the whole school is planned.
46. There is a good programme of personal, social and health education. An appropriate range of topics is covered, including health and sex education, though for pupils in Years 7 and 8, there is not enough emphasis on beginning to think about careers. Pupils value the lessons and make good progress. Many lessons are made interesting by varied activities including discussions, speakers and games. In a minority of lessons, however, the teaching is unimaginative and pupils have to do too much listening. The subject is well managed, with good support for teachers and up-to-date resources. Teachers have had training to update their expertise and to learn new teaching methods.
47. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall, with moral and social education being particularly strong. The school's ethos places considerable emphasis on personal development and this is reflected in the provision throughout the school.
48. There is good provision for spiritual development. It is promoted in several subjects, although in some the provision is implicit rather than planned. In religious education it is explicit, covering

spiritual issues in all years. Pupils consider the meaning of belief in the major world religions, the spiritual significance of sacred writings, worship and celebration, and the existence of God. In one lesson, for example, they considered the meaning of common symbols and then started to develop their own interpretation of the school's motto. A history lesson on the plains Native Americans emphasised their spiritual life and how this was influenced by their dependence on the buffalo. Art lessons encourage pupils to recognise their own talent, although the crowded syllabus leaves barely enough time for reflection. In physical education, pupils gain a sense of achievement and self-worth. Music promotes creativity and appreciation of the expressive nature of music, although more could be done to emphasise its spiritual aspects. Music is not used as much as it might be in school assemblies, where the emphasis is often on moral rather than spiritual values, with few opportunities for individual reflection. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship, but pupils have five assemblies per fortnight. There is a theme each week, which is emphasised in assemblies and on the school's web-site and discussed in some form periods.

49. Provision for moral development is very good. The school has a clear moral code, which is promoted consistently through all aspects of its work. Teachers set a good example and expect pupils to behave considerately. Pupils are made aware of the difference between right and wrong and are expected to show respect for each other and for the code of behaviour, which they themselves helped to formulate. Moral issues are considered in subjects such as history, English and religious education, as well as PSHE. Pupils' awareness of the needs of the less fortunate is developed through charitable fund-raising events.
50. The ethos and daily activities of the school provide a secure environment in which relationships are founded on mutual respect and an emphasis on community values. Provision for the development of social skills is very good. There are many opportunities for pupils to show initiative and take responsibility. These include the school council, as well as activities in forms, clubs and sport. In physical education, for example, there is a range of inter-form competitions, dance competitions, inter-school fixtures and clubs, whilst older pupils assist at team events and support younger ones. Pupils regularly contribute to assemblies. A Year 7 form, for example, held the attention of their own and other year groups with a sketch they had produced on the week's theme of 'making the most of your talents'. Pupils are given the opportunity to work collaboratively in most subjects, developing teamwork skills and learning to value the contribution of others. Friendships and social skills are covered in the PSHE programme. Social interaction is also promoted through extra-curricular activities and on residential and day visits. The school genuinely trusts pupils and gives them real responsibilities. Two examples are the way the school council has a budget to spend and the responsibility that pupils assume for the running of the school shop. Pupils throughout the school sense and appreciate this trust placed in them and the vast majority respond positively to it.
51. There is good provision to help pupils develop an understanding of their own and other cultures. They visit places of cultural interest and are involved in music and drama productions. Art displays around the school are of high quality and stimulate pupils' interest. Geography contributes to pupils' cultural awareness through the study of countries and their ways of life, and past cultures are studied in history. The school is very aware of the limited number of ethnic backgrounds represented within its community and prepares pupils satisfactorily for life in a wider multi-cultural society. They study artistic traditions and styles from around the world, including some very attractive work on masks. Different dance cultures are explored in physical education. Religious education covers the importance of worship and sacred writings in the major world faiths and all pupils visit a Sikh temple.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

52. The school provides a caring environment in which pupils feel safe and valued, allowing them to concentrate on learning. Procedures for child protection and welfare are good. The member of staff responsible has been trained and has ensured that other staff are aware of the procedures and that proper records are kept. Local guidelines are followed and she liaises with social services as required. There is good provision within the PSHE programme to help pupils take responsibility for their own safety, including work on assertiveness and protective behaviour. Health and safety procedures are in place, including departmental risk assessments. Governors monitor health and safety regularly. There are appropriate procedures to ensure safety on school trips including formal risk assessments.
53. All teachers are active in the pastoral care of their pupils and make considerable efforts to give support to individual pupils when they need it. In this they are well supported by the pastoral co-ordinator, heads of year and the senior management team. Pupils find staff approachable and believe they will do their best to give help if it is needed. The school is effective in helping pupils become mature and responsible, assisting them to face the challenges that may arise. There are opportunities in the daily form time to deal with individual issues, and the heads of year use their meetings with class teachers to address any problems that are emerging. The relatively new system of teachers using the praise or report slip to tell the form tutors about successes or problems appears to be working effectively. There is a good support for pupils who have difficulties meeting the school's expectations – pupils have a pastoral support programme, which helps them to modify their behaviour, with a reward tailored to their own interests. Circle times are used as necessary to discuss issues as a group.
54. There are good procedures to monitor and support attendance. Potential attendance problems are quickly identified from the registers. The school follows up absences quickly by contacting parents by telephone if they have not provided a reason for their child's absence. The educational welfare officer is involved as necessary.
55. The procedures to monitor and promote good behaviour are very good. The school has a clear set of rules backed up by a relatively new and comprehensive system of rewards and sanctions. Form tutors deal with most problems as they occur, and are well supported by heads of year and senior management. The emphasis is firmly on providing rewards for good performance and for contributions to the school community. The rewards that are offered are imaginative and, as a result, are valued by pupils. The privilege of sitting on a bench rather than the floor in assembly, for example, is a very desirable aspiration for pupils of this age. The issue of incidents on the school buses is a vexed one, which is very difficult for the school to address effectively and an area in which they do not have a legal responsibility. Senior staff put much effort into monitoring and improving behaviour on the buses. There is a home-to-school code of conduct and any incidents are dealt with firmly.
56. Procedures for dealing with oppressive behaviour are satisfactory. The bullying policy is based on a no-blame approach to resolving issues and is usually effective. Pupils believe the school will help them and are usually prepared to approach someone if problems occur. Pupils report that any incidents of bullying are dealt with well. However, the school does not keep central records of such incidents and their outcome.
57. The school's assessment policy, recently revised, provides a good basis on which to use assessment effectively to raise standards. A particular strength of the policy is that key staff, including subject leaders, form tutors and heads of year, are each given very clear and complementary roles in setting targets, monitoring progress and taking action. The assistant headteacher leading these developments has worked hard to create a positive climate throughout the staff for using assessment more effectively. Targets for each pupil are set on entry to the school by the subject leaders of English, mathematics and science, and all pupils are aware of them. They are soundly based on pupils' prior attainment in their lower schools and on standardised tests administered on entry into Year 5.

58. Most subjects have established good, systematic arrangements for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. Pupils gain a clear indication of their standard in relation to National Curriculum levels of attainment when their work is assessed. Teachers undertake a regular review each half-term with pupils in Years 7 and 8 and set them short-term goals for improvement. As a result, class teachers gain a clear picture of how well their pupils are progressing. This good practice should be extended to other years. While arrangements for assessing pupils have improved in the past year, there is still some way to go to ensure that the school's policy is fully implemented. Subject leaders, particularly in English and mathematics, are not yet making full use of national comparative information to ensure that pupils' targets are challenging enough or expectations of their progress sufficient. While individual pupils' progress is monitored by class teachers, not all subject leaders maintain a central record and track the progress of all pupils in the subject. In addition, assessments are not collated in the school's database at regular enough intervals to enable other staff such as senior managers, form tutors and heads of year to gain an overview of pupils' progress towards their targets and to intervene at an early stage where necessary. For example, once targets have been set in Year 5, progress towards them is not reviewed by senior managers or other key staff until the Year 6 practice tests – too late for effective remedial action. In addition, the school has not yet linked the timing of the collection of key assessments with pupils' reviews and reports.
59. Subject leaders in many subjects use assessment results effectively to guide their planning and the focus of improvements. For example, the science co-ordinator has focused attention on increasing the proportion of girls achieving above average standards and boys' achievement has been a target for improvement in English. However, regular collation of pupils' attainment in the school's central database alongside their targets would enable senior staff to analyse the progress of groups of pupils in each subject, and use this to guide school planning.
60. There are very good procedures for assessing the progress of pupils with special educational needs. Appropriate assessment methods are used to diagnose pupils' particular needs and measure their attainment. Assessment data is used very well to track pupils' progress and to set targets for improvement. The targets contained in their individual education plans are practical and are regularly reviewed. The annual reviews of pupils' Statements of Special Educational Needs fully meet statutory requirements and are well attended by pupils, parents and representatives of external agencies. The objectives for individual provision outlined in Statements are fully met in practice.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

61. Most parents are very supportive of the school and very pleased with what it provides for their children. In particular, they believe that their children like school, that the teaching is good and that their children work hard and make good progress. They think the school helps children to become mature and that behaviour is good. Virtually all feel comfortable approaching the school with a suggestion or a problem. A limited minority of parents believe that the school does not work closely enough with them or give them enough information about their child's progress and that children do not get the right amount of homework. Inspection findings support parents' positive views. There are ways in which the school could improve the reports on pupils' progress and while homework is generally set regularly, it could be made more consistent. Overall, parents believe that the school is very good and it has the confidence of the vast majority of parents from the wide geographical spread of the communities that it serves.
62. The school has good links with its parents. It is keen to promote communication between home and school. Parents are involved at an early stage if a pupil has problems conforming to the school's expectations, and this partnership is often productive in providing support. A very high proportion of parents typically attend parents' evenings; they are happy with them and feel that they get honest information about their children's strengths and weaknesses. Much of the information for parents is useful. The prospectus and the governors' report are both good documents. The annual reports on pupils' progress have been improved since the last inspection and now meet legal requirements. They provide useful information about progress and attainment, and include thoughtful personal comments and targets. However, they are not as helpful as they should be. There is a lack of consistency in the layout used by different subjects and the scales used to measure effort or

attainment are sometimes different. This makes them potentially confusing for parents. The school uses modern technology well, with a developing web-site and the facility to communicate with about 200 parents via e-mail.

63. The contribution made by parents has a very good impact on the work of the school. The school regularly seeks parents' views. Pupils' diaries are used very well as a genuinely two-way method of communication and enable parents to keep track of homework and to exchange views and information with form tutors. Diaries are completed well by pupils and staff, and most are signed regularly by the form tutor and the parent. Many parents contribute to children's learning at home, assisting particularly with project work. Most parents have signed the home-school agreement. There is an active parents' association that organises fundraising and social events, raising significant sums of money for the benefit of the school. Parents also support the school by providing supervision on school trips.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

64. The headteacher and key staff provide good leadership and management that are leading to rising standards and a stronger focus on pupils achieving the best results of which they are capable.
65. The headteacher has been in post for a year. In that time he has provided very good leadership in establishing a clear and widely-shared direction for the school and in developing a management structure with the capacity to achieve the new vision. The school's core values have been maintained but staff have been challenged to raise their expectations of pupils' performance. The speed of change has been rapid and, while there are clear signs of improvement, some of the developments are yet to have a full impact.
66. The whole school community, including pupils, have taken part in defining the school's values of 'Community, Opportunity, Excellence'. This has helped to build a shared sense of direction, in which governors, staff and most pupils and parents are working towards the same aims. At the same time, the headteacher has been uncompromising in communicating his vision for the school and the changes that were needed for all pupils to achieve well.
67. The deputy headteacher, assistant headteacher and pastoral co-ordinator were all appointed in September 2002. The headteacher is ably supported by these staff in his drive for improvement. The school's management structure has been radically reformed in order to give a sharper focus on improving teaching and learning and develop the role of subject leaders in developing the school curriculum and monitoring the work of their teams. Some curriculum and timetabling changes have been made in response to the headteacher's initial analysis of standards. Increased staffing has been introduced to make some classes smaller and changes have been made to the way that pupils are grouped by ability for some subjects.
68. During the current school year, there has been much monitoring of teaching and of the work of subject leaders, led by the headteacher and deputy headteacher. This has been effective in identifying areas for improvement and in beginning to develop the skills of subject leaders in self-evaluation. In the autumn term, the senior leadership group observed many lessons and as a result have a very good knowledge of the quality of classroom work. The monitoring resulted in a helpful report that has informed the new school improvement plan.
69. In the spring term, subject leaders carried out monitoring within their own departments. This has been helpful in developing the monitoring skills of the subject leaders. Monitoring is done well in English, mathematics, science, art, French and physical education. In other subjects, however, monitoring needs more clearly to identify the strengths and areas for improvement and draw these together into a plan of action that includes appropriate staff development. An annual monitoring cycle has been established but this needs to be developed into a policy in which the responsibilities of all key staff in school improvement are outlined clearly and practically.
70. The assistant headteacher is responsible for assessment. This is a new post, designed to increase the use of assessment data by teachers and subject leaders to monitor pupils' progress and correct

any underachievement. Much progress has been made in this and teachers have a much greater awareness of how to use assessment to promote learning. Further developments are needed, however, particularly in linking pupils' attainment and progress more securely to national standards, rather than school and county figures.

71. At present, reports on performance to staff and governors do not make full use of nationally available data to give a systematic analysis of standards or of the progress of different groups of pupils. As a result, governors are not always accurately informed of how well pupils are doing. The school's targets for performance in National Curriculum tests are more challenging than they were, but they only require pupils to make the same progress as similar pupils nationally and could therefore be higher.
72. The quality of leadership and management is good in most subjects. It is very good in English, mathematics, science, ICT and physical education. It is good in most other subjects, but satisfactory in design and technology. During this school year, the senior leadership group have worked hard to raise the aspirations of subject leaders and develop their skills in bringing about improvement in their subjects. This has placed heavy demands on some staff. There is now a shared commitment and good capacity for further improvement, though some subject leaders need further skills in assessment and target setting and in monitoring and supporting teaching.
73. A significant development has been the review of the school's behaviour policy, with an increased emphasis on treating pupils with trust and respect and rewarding them for effort and for positive contributions to the school community. The policy also emphasises consistency in dealing with behaviour. The policy is practical and helpful and has been effective in increasing pupils' commitment to the school and to learning.
74. There is a comprehensive process for developing the new school improvement plan, which is not due to be completed until July, for implementation in September. The process includes full consultation with staff, governors, parents and pupils and incorporates the findings of the monitoring activities. The plan will incorporate subject action plans and the school budget. It includes the school's long-term objectives and has the potential to be a very helpful document, forming the basis of future improvement. At present, however, individual monitoring activities have led to separate action plans and these need to be drawn together into a single co-ordinated plan.
75. The governors fulfil their responsibilities well. They are very committed to the school and meetings are well run. Governors help to shape the direction of the school through agreeing the school's aims and approving policies. They contribute to school improvement planning through discussing aspects of the draft plan in their committees and making recommendations to the strategic planning committee. Governors set the school's targets. They provide the school with appropriate challenge, but because they are not given detailed information on how the school's performance relates to national standards, they do not have a full understanding of how challenging the targets are.
76. Governors know the school well. They receive regular reports on the school's progress from the headteacher and senior staff, subject leaders and local education authority staff. They also visit the school regularly. Each governor is linked with one area of the school's work and reports to the relevant committee after their visit. During the current school year, governors have visited the school and reported on ICT, performance management, special needs and the library. Governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and provide the headteacher with good support in his drive for higher standards.
77. There is a full set of school policies, which are regularly reviewed by staff and governors according to a set timetable. Recent policies on assessment and behaviour management are very practical and provide teachers with clear guidance on their responsibilities. However, the new policy on teaching and learning, while resulting in useful discussion between staff, is not practical enough in providing teachers with guidance on planning lessons.
78. The school aims to ensure that all pupils are included in the opportunities it provides and achieve well. There are six different policies that support equal opportunities and race equality – these could

usefully be rationalised. The school has demonstrated its commitment to inclusion by setting targets for attendance and exclusions, as well as the performance of boys and girls, pupils from minority ethnic groups and pupils with special educational needs. The school is largely successful in including all pupils. In particular, boys' attainment has improved and pupils with special educational needs are supported very well. The new behaviour policy has reduced disaffection through a more positive approach to behaviour management. Race equality is dealt with effectively and records show that racist comments are very rare. The performance of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is analysed but there is still a need to use assessment data to track the progress made by different groups of pupils.

79. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very well managed. The systems for supporting pupils are carefully thought out and there is very good liaison with teachers. Very good partnerships have been developed with parents, other schools and external agencies. The staff in the learning support department are very well led. Practice is kept under constant review and there are constructive plans for further development. The learning support centre is attractive and provides a welcoming learning environment. The resources, including computers, are of very good quality. There has been very good progress since the last inspection.
80. There are very good arrangements for the induction of newly qualified staff. Each new teacher has a mentor, with whom they meet regularly for practical advice and guidance. They are generally given very good support by their mentor and by the subject leaders of the subjects they teach. They are regularly observed teaching and receive helpful feedback. They are also provided with opportunities to observe other teachers and visit other local schools. Trainee teachers on teaching practice are also given effective support and guidance.
81. There are sound arrangements for staff development. New and improved procedures are planned to ensure that staff training is linked more closely to the school improvement plan. Funds for teachers to go on courses are short and some training is organised within the school. The assistant headteacher has given much support to subject leaders on assessment, for example, and there has been whole staff training on teaching and accelerated learning. Following the monitoring programme, some teachers have been provided with individual support to improve their skills.
82. The arrangements for performance management are satisfactory. The procedures have recently been reviewed by a governor who has expertise in this area, and the school is very clear on the improvements needed to make performance management more consistent and more effective in raising standards. Training is planned for team leaders to improve the quality of teachers' individual targets and to link them more securely to school improvement priorities. The headteacher's own targets are very appropriate in developing the school and are used as a basis of his regular progress reports to governors.
83. The school is well staffed with teachers and support staff. The match between teachers' qualifications and the subjects they teach is satisfactory. In science and French, the match is very good, as pupils are taught by specialist teachers from Year 5 onwards. It is good in mathematics, which is taught by specialist teachers in Years 7 and 8. In other subjects, some classes are taken by non-specialist teachers, though the amount of non-specialist teaching has been decreased in the current school year. Some subject leaders, such as in English and art, give non-specialist teachers particularly good support. However, in history, religious education and citizenship, the non-specialist teachers need more support or training. In some other subjects, such as mathematics and geography, the large number of teachers means it is difficult for them to meet to plan and review their teaching.
84. Teachers are effectively assisted by the support staff. The headteacher reviewed the responsibilities of the support staff soon after his appointment, and this has improved their effectiveness. Technicians provide good support in science, design and technology and ICT. Teaching assistants are very effective in helping pupils with special needs. The school is efficiently administered. Performance management has also been recently introduced for support staff, which is an effective step in building teamwork.

85. Finances are well managed. The governors have clear procedures to link budget planning to the priorities agreed by each committee. At present these do not provide a clear link between the budget and the school improvement plan, but the headteacher's process for creating the new school improvement plan will establish this in the next financial year. The draft improvement plan includes a forward projection of the school's budget over four years. The value of this in foreseeing the implications of budget decisions is very limited, however, because future income and expenditure are maintained at current levels, rather than being predicted according to the best available information. The school had a surplus at the end of the 2001/2 financial year of five per cent of its total income, but this is planned to be used by April 2004. The school compares the proportion it spends under each budget heading with other schools locally, but not with information that is available nationally.
86. Day-to-day management of finances is very efficient. Governors and senior staff receive clear financial reports and carefully monitor the school's expenditure. All the recommendations contained in the most recent auditor's report have been implemented. The school has taken steps this year to make subject leaders more accountable for their expenditure in terms of the impact it has on pupils' achievement. For example, their budgets are based on bids linked to their development plans. In some respects, however, subject leaders are not fully accountable. While their expenditure is monitored, they do not have to budget for their photocopying costs and have not been asked to account for the quality of their expenditure.
87. The school makes good use of the principles of best value. Since the appointment of the new headteacher, the school's procedures and standards of attainment have been thoroughly challenged. The school compares its performance with other schools, though this has been done largely against other Bedfordshire middle schools and there is not a clear enough comparison with schools nationally. Parents, staff and leaving pupils have been consulted on their views of the school and its future. Competitive tenders are always sought for large items of expenditure. The school's income is about average and, in the light of the standards it achieves, it gives good value for money.
88. The accommodation is satisfactory. The governors' site management committee is active in seeking improvements, and developments since the last inspection include two new very good science laboratories, a new teaching block, a floodlit games area and a new ICT room complete with equipment. Toilets, corridors and windows have been refurbished or replaced. There is disabled access to all parts of the school. A high standard of maintenance and very good displays create a very pleasant learning environment. This is aided by good systems for managing the movement of pupils. Working space for pupils to move out of lessons such as music is at a premium but noise levels are not intrusive. Further improvements are planned to the playground environment and the drama and food technology areas.
89. The resources to support teaching and learning are good. The school has invested considerably, particularly in computers. The school now has more computers than is typical for a school of this size. However, some departments such as music and French still have too few computers to support pupils' learning. Pupils have no opportunity to collect experimental data electronically in science or control robots in design and technology. In mathematics, there is a good range of geometric models, graphic calculators and very good use is made of two computerised, interactive whiteboards. The physical education department is well supplied with equipment, especially for indoor athletics. The area for development is the library. It has recently been refurbished through the efforts of the parents' association but the current number and range of books are not sufficient to support teaching and independent reading. The library assistant has been appointed very recently and has some good ideas to increase pupils' use of the library.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

90. There have been significant developments over the past year that have raised expectations and are leading to higher standards. In order to raise standards further the governors and senior management should:

- (1) Ensure that each pupil's progress is checked regularly and accurately by:
 - recording key assessments in each subject centrally;
 - using this record to inform pupils' reviews with their tutors;
 - clarifying the responsibility of subject leaders to check on progress within each subject.
(Paragraph 58)

- (2) Raise aspirations further by:
 - using national benchmarks in setting targets for pupils and the school;
 - monitoring the progress made by groups of pupils to identify any underachievement;
 - ensuring reports to governors and staff make full use of data on the progress made by pupils nationally.
(Paragraphs 8, 59, 70, 71, 75, 78)

- (3) Ensure that subject leaders contribute fully to school improvement by:
 - defining responsibilities within an annual cycle for monitoring classroom work;
 - ensuring that subject teachers who are not specialists are given sufficient support;
 - providing subject leaders with adequate skills in using national assessment data and monitoring teaching.
(Paragraphs 26, 69, 72, 83)

In addition to the above issues for action, the school should consider:

- reviewing the timetable arrangements for art so that pupils have art lessons throughout the year;
(Paragraphs 37, 114, 115)

- planning how numeracy is to be supported within the teaching of all subjects*;
(Paragraphs 14, 35, 45)

- developing the use of the library in supporting learning;
(Paragraph 89)

- improving long-term financial projections to take better account of likely changes in income and expenditure.
(Paragraph 85)

**This issue is already included in the school's planning.*

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	106
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	42

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	3	37	48	17	1	0	0
Percentage	3	35	45	16	1	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils on the school's roll	719
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	30

Special educational needs

	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	13
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	116

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	5

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	52

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	4.6
National comparative data	6.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	0.3

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 6)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2002	96	87

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	82	76	90
	Girls	75	65	79
	Total	157	141	169
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	86 (80)	77 (64)	92 (90)
	National	75 (75)	73 (71)	86 (87)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	79	79	89
	Girls	73	64	77
	Total	152	143	166
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	83 (74)	78 (66)	91 (86)
	National	73 (72)	74 (74)	82 (82)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese

No of pupils on roll
685
0
8
8
2
5
2
2
0
1
0
0
1
1
0

Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1	

Any other ethnic group	
No ethnic group recorded	

2
2

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y5 – Y8

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	33.35
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.6

Education support staff: Y5 – Y8

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	331

Deployment of teachers: Y5 – Y8

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	83.5
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Average teaching group size: Y5 – Y8

Key Stage 2	25.6
Key Stage 3	26.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2
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	£
Total income	1,576,409
Total expenditure	1,583,143
Expenditure per pupil	2239
Balance brought forward from previous year	86,193
Balance carried forward to next year	79,459

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	16
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	14.7

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	719
Number of questionnaires returned	516

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	54	4	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	44	53	3	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	31	62	3	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	60	15	2	2
The teaching is good.	40	57	1	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	35	54	9	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	54	42	3	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	38	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	33	51	13	0	3
The school is well led and managed.	47	48	1	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43	53	3	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	40	51	4	0	4

Other issues raised by parents

Parents were very positive about the school, the standards achieved and the support given by teachers. They reported some poor behaviour on the buses, but felt the school did all it could to control this. Some parents felt that there was too much project work set for homework, especially in Years 5 and 6. Others felt that the amount of homework set was inconsistent and depended on individual teachers. Several parents felt that the school had improved and that children were enjoying learning more.

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

ENGLISH

Overall, the quality of provision in English is **very good**.

Strengths

- Pupils' attainment is above average in all years.
- Good teaching leads to effective learning in all years, particularly in Years 7 and 8.
- Very good assessment and guidance ensure all pupils understand how to improve.
- There is very good curriculum enrichment and support for literacy beyond lessons.
- The leadership and management of a large number of specialist and non-specialist teachers are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in writing in Year 6 could be improved.
- Non-specialist teachers need support in ensuring that their expectations of pupils with special needs are realistic.

91. Attainment by Year 6 pupils in the 2002 National Curriculum tests was average overall, though the proportion gaining Level 4, the expected level, was above average. In comparison with similar schools, higher-attaining pupils did less well than expected. Boys and girls did equally well. Although there was a decline in results in 2001, overall an improving trend has been maintained. Attainment in lessons is above average in all years. However in the current Year 6, pupils' attainment in writing is not as high as in reading. The achievement of all pupils is good but in Year 6, girls are achieving better than boys. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is very good.
92. Attainment in speaking and listening is above average. Year 6 pupils participate well in whole class and small group discussions, listening respectfully to others and arguing a clear point of view. Lower-attaining pupils can sustain a lively dialogue in role, for example as a police investigator or the victim of a crime committed by Macavity the Mystery Cat, based on their understanding of T.S. Eliot's poem. Year 7 and Year 8 pupils can present their impressions of a poem or play to the rest of the class confidently and articulately, giving good reasons for their opinions.
93. Standards of reading are above average. Year 6 pupils of all abilities read independently and with a good level of comprehension. They are able to find information using an index, glossary and sub-headings. They read regularly, but a number express less enjoyment of reading than pupils in other years. By Year 8, pupils demonstrate good understanding of characters through writing diaries in role. They can also recognise and imitate features of a writer's style, for example through writing an additional chapter to the novel 'Holes' by Louis Sachar. In their book reviews all pupils show a developing appreciation of more challenging texts, supporting their judgements clearly through detailed references. Lower-attaining pupils show a good understanding of the main characters and events in Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'.
94. Standards of writing are above average in Years 5, 7 and 8, but only average in Year 6. In Year 5, higher and average-attaining pupils use language imaginatively and employ adventurous vocabulary. In a retelling of the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, one girl wrote: "It was dark like a fresh ink stain. Every corner was another adventure, the first look was as scary as the first few seconds of a power cut. This was no friendly place." Although lower-attaining pupils in Year 5 write less accurately and use simpler sentences, their writing is still lively and they are able to engage the reader's interest. There is less consistent achievement in Year 6. Although higher-attaining pupils write fluently, some rely more on an informal style, while the attainment of others is limited by weaknesses in spelling and grammar. Boys in Year 6 occasionally show potential through precise vocabulary and lively content but at other times their writing is not developed at length or is untidily

presented. The writing of pupils of all abilities in Years 7 and 8 is far more assured and accurate. Pupils are able to employ a variety of differing styles appropriate to purpose and audience.

95. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 5 and 6, and very good in Years 7 and 8. The most effective lessons are very well planned, structured and paced. Nearly all lessons begin with a short starter activity that ensures that all pupils are quickly involved in tasks that reinforce spelling, vocabulary and grammar or remind them of previous reading. Teachers generally make good use of whole-class shared reading or writing. All pupils are included in brisk questioning that brings out the main linguistic features of a text and are then encouraged to use those features in their own writing. For example, after questioning Year 7 pupils on their initial impressions of a poem, the teacher demonstrated how to begin writing an appreciation of it, which the pupils were then able to continue with confidence. Pupils also benefit from the provision of helpful 'writing frames' and structures. For example, lower-attaining pupils were helped to sequence events in *Macbeth* by placing prepared sentences in order. Teachers' choice of activities is frequently stimulating and appeals to their pupils' imagination while also reinforcing understanding. For example, Year 5 pupils responded very well to the challenge of writing diary entries showing how a character in the novel 'Grandpa Chatterji' felt before and after a visit to his family.
96. On occasions where learning is less effective, teachers sometimes have insufficient knowledge and understanding of the linguistic features of a text to extend pupils' attainment. Sometimes there are not enough copies of books for all pupils in the class, or the overhead transparency is not visible to every child, and a few pupils are unable to follow. Although there are good examples of pupils being given opportunities to plan, draft, edit and share their writing with another pupil, sometimes insufficient time is spent developing a piece of writing until all pupils are successful. Evidence from pupils' work indicates that in Year 6, teachers move too quickly to another writing task before consolidating.
97. Curricular opportunities are very good. The National Strategies for Literacy and Key Stage 3 have both been adopted successfully. Schemes of work are very well planned and lessons are all based around challenging texts and themes. All Year 5 and 6 pupils are taught discrete drama lessons, while drama techniques are incorporated into English lessons in Years 7 and 8. There is good support for pupils with literacy difficulties both within lessons and in reading and handwriting clubs at lunchtimes. Other subjects also emphasise literacy skills well. Opportunities for all pupils to use ICT every half term are built in to the schemes of work. There are also very good examples of enrichment of the curriculum through visiting actors, drama workshops, drama and poetry clubs and the Reading Passport scheme organised in liaison with the local newspaper.
98. The assessment of pupils' work is very good. Marking is generally detailed, helpful and positive. Pupils' progress is effectively monitored. All pupils are set literacy targets and they have a clear idea of how to improve. The only exception to this is where occasionally a non-specialist teacher needs more guidance on marking and setting realistic targets for pupils with specific learning difficulties.
99. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is a large number of English teachers, both specialists and non-specialists. Communication and guidance are very good and non-specialists receive considerable support from the subject leader and her deputy, ensuring a common purpose and common standards. There is a clear and appropriate development plan for the subject and there has already been obvious improvement, for example in raising levels of attainment and improving boys' achievement in most years. Concerns raised in the previous inspection about reading resources, the use of ICT and monitoring pupil progress have all been addressed. Overall, improvement since the last inspection is good.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **good**.

Strengths

- The specialist mathematics teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject.
- Lessons are planned well and homework is issued regularly.
- Excellent use is made of the latest technology.
- Working relationships between teachers and pupils are good and the progress made by the higher-attaining pupils is very good.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils need more opportunities to think for themselves.
- Marking does not inform pupils how well they are doing in relation to their targets.
- Pupils' performance in mathematics is not compared sufficiently with national figures.
- Learning objectives are not always made clear to pupils at the start of lessons.

100. In 2002, results in the Year 6 National Curriculum tests were average overall, though an above average proportion gained the higher Level 5. Boys performed better than girls. Standards were similar to those in English but not as good as in science. Overall, pupils made satisfactory progress in relation to their attainment on entry to the school, though the trend of performance over recent years is an improving one.

101. In work seen, standards by the end of Year 6 are above average. This is higher than recent test results because of improvements in the quality of teaching. Pupils' work is carefully presented and they are encouraged to use a variety of ways of conveying mathematical information neatly and accurately. For example, higher-attaining pupils calculated the VAT and selling price of household articles, demonstrating a sound understanding of percentages, decimals and place value and setting their work out logically. Higher-attaining pupils have very good skills in calculating mentally or on paper. Average-attaining pupils can use negative numbers to plot coordinates on graphs and describe the reflections of two-dimensional shapes. When doing calculations that involve several operations, lower-attaining pupils understand how to use brackets and the need to do calculations in the correct order. They demonstrate their understanding by making up questions of their own. Average and lower-attaining pupils' basic numeracy skills are satisfactory, except for the very lowest-attaining pupils, who receive extra support. Standards of numeracy are improving through the regular use of quick practice sessions at the start of all lessons and through booster classes. Pupils achieve well, including those with special educational needs, whose learning improves when supported by a teaching assistant.

102. Standards by the end of Year 8 are above average, with higher-attaining pupils attaining well above average standards. Pupils' work continues to demonstrate a care for presentation and accuracy. Higher-attaining pupils can interpret a complex mathematical calculation and arrive at a reliable estimate of the answer. They create and solve simultaneous equations. Average-attaining pupils understand how to calculate the interior and exterior angles of two-dimensional shapes. Lower-attaining pupils explore and describe number patterns and reliably calculate areas. Pupils achieve well, including those with special educational needs and those who have English as an additional language.

103. Pupils' numeracy skills are developed through oral and mental work at the start of all mathematics lessons, with additional support for those who need it. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 have a daily mathematics lesson. Other subjects, including design and technology, physical education and science, also contribute to numeracy. However, this support is not as effective as it should be because the approaches taken by different subjects are not co-ordinated across the school. There is a planned programme of ICT included in the mathematics scheme of work.

104. Teaching is good and sometimes very good. The teachers who are subject specialists have a very good knowledge of the subject and use this to ensure that pupils have a good understanding of the concept they are learning. Some lessons are taken by non-specialist teachers, who are supported well, but occasionally do not achieve the same depth of understanding. Lessons are carefully planned, and are well matched to the full ability range in each class. Teachers have high expectations and lessons are conducted at a brisk pace. Very good use is made of resources, including computers. Use of the new interactive whiteboards is particularly effective. In a Year 6 lesson on estimating and measuring angles, for example, the teacher used the interactive whiteboard to display angles very clearly and remind pupils how to measure them. As a result, pupils gained in confidence and skill. Relationships between pupils and teachers are very good and pupils have a very good attitude to the subject, contributing well to lessons and concentrating throughout the lesson. However, the learning objectives are not always communicated to pupils to help them reflect on their own learning and teaching methods do not always encourage pupils to think for themselves or explain their understanding to others. Homework of an appropriate standard is issued regularly. Work is marked regularly with helpful comments. However, pupils do not have enough information to know how well they are doing in relation to their targets and what they need to improve. Good use is made of teaching assistants, who enable pupils with special educational needs to make as much progress as other pupils.

105. The subject is very well led and managed. All the issues raised in the last inspection report have been addressed. The subject leader has a good knowledge of the department's strengths and areas for improvement and provides a clear educational direction. Pupils' attainment is assessed regularly and accurately. Targets for pupils' future performance are realistic and achievable but need to be linked more reliably to the progress made by similar pupils nationally. Teachers are supported by an excellent handbook and schemes of work and the department works well together, despite being large and dispersed. Teachers provide much out-of-hours support for pupils, including booster lessons, activities for gifted and talented pupils and popular extra-curricular activities. Many classrooms are stimulating environments, with images portraying the beauty of the subject and much pupils' work on display to celebrate achievement. There are not enough library books to support reading about mathematics for pleasure.

SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is **very good**.

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well in all aspects of science, but especially in their scientific enquiry skills.
- Teaching is good and some is very good. Lessons are interesting, challenging and well planned around clear learning objectives.
- Pupils are encouraged to speculate, reason and explain, using appropriate technical vocabulary and terms.
- The subject is led and managed very well by an enthusiastic and committed subject leader.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils' progress towards their targets are not brought together and reviewed frequently enough.
- There are too few opportunities for pupils to use sensors and data-loggers in their investigations because the number available is inadequate.

106. Results in the 2002 National Curriculum tests for Year 6 pupils were above average but in line with similar schools. A good proportion of pupils achieved above the expected level for pupils of their age and the results were an improvement over the previous year.

107. Pupils' standards seen during the inspection are above average by the end of Year 6. By the time they leave school in Year 8, standards are well above average. Pupils achieve well throughout the school, including those with special educational needs and the higher-attaining. There are particular strengths in their acquisition of scientific enquiry skills as a result of the strong emphasis that

teachers place on this aspect throughout their teaching. There is no significant difference between the achievements of boys and girls.

108. By the end of Year 6, pupils acquire a secure understanding of key scientific facts and principles in all the main elements of science and about half reach standards above those expected. For example, almost all pupils can describe the type and direction of forces acting on moving objects such as toy cars, parachutes and magnetic materials, and many describe what happens when forces are in balance and when not. This good grasp of principles comes about because teachers provide very good opportunities for pupils to explore and investigate at first hand, and they are expected to hypothesise, reason and discuss what is happening with others and with their teachers. Expectations and the level of challenge in most lessons are high. As a result pupils progress well. Teaching assistants provide very effective support for pupils with special educational needs, for example by helping them to structure and sequence practical tasks and record their findings. Pupils build on their understanding in later years to reach well above average standards. By Year 8, most pupils understand features of acids and alkalis – for example, they predict and explain how pH changes when one is added to the other. Many describe solids, liquids and gases in terms of their particles and they understand some features of chemical change, and record them in the form of word equations. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 8 use ICT imaginatively and effectively to create animations showing how rocks weather over time.
109. Scientific enquiry and investigation feature strongly in the curriculum and pupils enjoy practical work. They learn to draw on their knowledge of science to hypothesise, predict and explain their reasoning. Occasionally, however, such opportunities are missed in Year 5, where they could, for example, predict and explain the effect of adding extra batteries or bulbs to a circuit. By Year 6, virtually all pupils are able to plan and carry out a fair test and about half demonstrate higher skills such as considering how to obtain accurate results, repeating measures and suggesting improvements to their methods. Experiments in fully equipped laboratories help pupils to develop their practical and investigative skills from Year 5 onwards. They are guided well by teachers in these skills and given plenty of opportunity throughout every year to practise them in stimulating and demanding situations. For example, Year 7 pupils devised their own methods for comparing anti-acid tablets to see which were the best. Through very good discussion within groups and some repeated experiments, they devised strategies for fair comparisons; the higher attainers also identified some weaknesses in their strategies. However, the use of a trial run experiment as part of the planning process would enable many pupils to refine their working methods more quickly. By Year 8, the majority of pupils are confident in devising appropriate strategies for investigation, they consider likely errors and use appropriate scientific language when drawing and explaining their conclusions.
110. Pupils' literacy skills are developed well. Teachers highlight key technical terms at the start of lessons and strongly encourage pupils to apply and assimilate them into their language. Pupils write at length in a variety of styles and for different purposes. Although they apply their numeracy skills to estimate, measure and calculate when opportunities arise, strategies for promoting numeracy are not as developed as those for literacy. Good use is made of ICT, for example to simulate and help visualise particle theory. Pupils use the Internet to research information about the solar system and features of the Periodic Table. They also use spreadsheets to analyse and present data, such as when comparing the solubility of sugar at different temperatures. However, they do not use sensors and data-loggers enough to gather and process information from their investigations because there are too few available, and this weakness narrows the scope of their practical work.
111. Teaching and learning are mainly good and sometimes very good or excellent. There is very little teaching that is unsatisfactory. Lessons are well-planned around clear objectives and expectations are high. Introductions often feature stimulating starter activities that create discussion and debate. Group activities are well chosen and encourage pupils to think and explain. In a Year 5 lesson, for example, pupils discussed and compared the merits of some statements in a cartoon about where plants get their materials to grow, before setting up experiments of their own to explore how nutrients are transported within them. Such tasks help pupils to develop their thinking skills, articulate their ideas using appropriate vocabulary and make connections between related aspects of science. Teachers are enthusiastic and have very good knowledge of their subject. This is shown

in clear and interesting explanations of, for example, the stages in the growth of a baby. Pupils are managed well, relationships and attitudes are very positive and as a result, behaviour is very good. Homework is set regularly and extends the learning from lessons appropriately. Marking is very good, with careful correction and useful targets for improvement. Where teaching is very occasionally unsatisfactory, the activities are not demanding enough, pupils become restless and the pace of work is too slow.

112. The subject is led and managed very well, with very clear direction and vision. The co-ordinator is very committed and enthusiastic and has organised additional activities, events and visits that have benefited gifted and talented pupils in particular. While progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory overall, it has been boosted by her appointment two years ago. Teaching is monitored and supported well and there are rigorous systems for assessing pupils' attainment as part of the very good assessment policy, though it is not yet fully implemented. All pupils have targets set for their achievement. While class teachers monitor their progress, key assessments are not used systematically enough to review pupils' progress towards their targets, take early action where necessary, and link outcomes to the school's reporting cycle.

113. The science technician is hard working and provides excellent support, including managing the department's contribution to the school's web-site. While two laboratories are very good, another is cramped and some distance from the rather small preparation room. Resources are mainly satisfactory except for the number of data-loggers and resources for teaching about light.

ART AND DESIGN

Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- The quality of teaching is good and often very good.
- During the periods in which they study art, pupils' progress is very good
- Pupils use a good range of two and three-dimensional media.
- Pupils do good quality research.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils study art for only one third of the year and this prevents them achieving as well as they could, particularly in painting and drawing.
- Marking is not consistently as helpful as it should be.
- Pupils find it difficult to maintain their concentration throughout the double lessons.

114. Standards are above average by the end of Year 6 and by the end of Year 8. Pupils work in a wide range of two and three-dimensional media and their final pieces form attractive displays around the school and effectively celebrate their achievements. Pupils achieve well in all years and above average standards have been maintained since the last inspection. This is despite unsatisfactory timetabling arrangements which mean that pupils learn art in modules for only one third of each year, in rotation with design and technology. The result is that their achievement is uneven across time.

115. The good quality of pupils' work is attributable to good teaching and a well-constructed curriculum within the department. Pupils achieve very well in art while they are studying it but there are lengthy periods when they make no progress at all. A Year 5 class, for example, had no art lessons until late April – eight months since they did art in their lower schools. This pattern of learning impedes pupils' learning of skills such as drawing and painting, which require constant practice. As a result, standards in painting and drawing are average. When these skills are the focus of a module, for instance in the landscape project or in preparatory drawings for sculptures based on Henry Moore's work, progress in painting and drawing are satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs sometimes attain highly in the practical aspects of art, and their self-esteem is raised by being

encouraged to help others. Pupils of all abilities do independent research as part of their art projects. The quality of their research is above average and much improved since the last inspection.

116. Teaching is good overall and often very good. Lessons taught by the specialist art teachers are very good, leading to very good progress and highly positive attitudes. Some lessons are taken by non-specialist teachers, who receive good support and some training. There are some single and some double lessons. The single lessons are very effective, with resources used imaginatively and an interesting variety of activities, so that pupils work at a brisk, efficient speed. The double lessons, however, are too long to maintain a good pace of learning, especially for younger pupils.

117. Classes are relatively small and pupils receive good individual feedback. Pupils' work is accurately assessed using National Curriculum levels – this is led by the subject leader, with other teachers included in discussing standards. However, teachers' marking of sketchbooks is inconsistent and does not provide all pupils with enough comments on how to improve their work. Literacy is supported well through regular emphasis of relevant vocabulary. Year 5 pupils, for example, have become more familiar with words related to water. Support for numeracy is satisfactory, though it is not systematically planned. Aspects of space and shape, for example, are reinforced through learning about perspective and proportion. Pupils use ICT effectively when they do research, often for homework, and older pupils compile a record of their research, such as in their study of masks in Year 8.

118. The department has responded well to most of the issues in the last inspection, though the unsatisfactory timetabling arrangements have not been improved and limit pupils' achievement. Pupils are capable of attaining standards which are well above average, but their fragmented experience, combined with very low curriculum time, particularly in Years 5 and 6, prevents this. The timetable also means that non-specialist teachers and non-specialist accommodation are used in all years, which further disadvantages some classes.

CITIZENSHIP

Overall, the quality of provision in citizenship is **good**.

Strengths

- The introduction of citizenship has been well planned.
- Teaching has been improved by training in subject content and teaching methods.
- Teachers are supported by clear schemes of work that are regularly reviewed.
- There are many opportunities for pupils to take part in responsible action.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils' attainment is not assessed systematically.
- Opportunities to promote citizenship in other subjects are not always used.
- Timetabling arrangements prevent the subject leader from monitoring the work of other teachers.

119. Citizenship has been introduced as a distinct National Curriculum subject in Years 7 and 8 from September 2002. It is taught within PSHE lessons and through relevant topics in other subjects. Pupils also have opportunities to contribute to the school and the wider community.

120. Standards by the end of Year 8 are above average and pupils achieve well. They are articulate and forthcoming in discussions and take advantage of the many opportunities they are given to engage in responsible action. They have a good understanding of concepts such as power and responsibility and sensibly discuss their views on social issues such as discrimination and racism. Pupils know where to find information and, as they move up the school, they show increased knowledge and understanding and shoulder greater responsibility.

121. The teaching of citizenship lessons is good overall. Most lessons are well planned and have a clear focus. Key vocabulary is highlighted and this makes a good contribution to pupils' literacy. The best lessons are characterised by a range of activities and by probing questioning, which makes pupils

think for themselves and face up to their own ideas and possible misconceptions. Pupils' interest is often engaged through active participation. In one Year 7 lesson on power and responsibility, for example, the teacher unjustifiably gave prizes to certain pupils but not others, and then asked the class to discuss how they felt about this injustice. In lessons which are not so effective, the pace is sometimes pedestrian, with pupils spending too much time listening and not having enough time to think things through for themselves. Lessons are enlivened by good use of a wide range of resources, and by visitors such as police officers or a theatre group. Boys and girls progress equally well. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into lessons and make good progress.

122. Opportunities for pupils to engage in responsible action are many and varied. Through the school council, pupils make a genuine contribution to the running of the school. Their views are listened to and acted upon. They recently requested – and received – extra seating in the playground. Pupils take the initiative in helping visitors find their way around the school and in organising fund-raising events for charity. Older pupils work as monitors and develop responsibility by taking turns at the school reception desk. Teachers are careful to ensure that all pupils avail themselves of these opportunities, although no formal monitoring takes place.

123. Leadership and management are good. The subject leader has a clear idea of the contribution the subject can make and how it can be integrated into pupils' learning. Areas of weakness have been identified and training has begun to address these. However, the subject leader has few opportunities to monitor the quality of teaching because all PSHE lessons are taught at the same time. Assessment is under-developed – pupils assess their own work, but otherwise their progress is not measured or tracked in detail. A detailed audit of other subjects has been done to identify additional opportunities for promoting citizenship, though these are not always exploited in practice. In a mathematics lesson on percentages, for example, the teacher referred to VAT without checking that pupils knew what this was or what it was used for.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is **good**.

Strengths

- Pupils attain above average standards in Years 7 and 8.
- All pupils achieve well.
- Teaching is good because of good planning and high expectations.
- Pupils enjoy design and technology and take real pride in their work.

Areas for improvement

- Not enough emphasis is given to the industrial relevance of design and technology.
- Pupils' concentration is not always sustained to the end of double lessons.
- Best practice is not shared sufficiently between teachers.

124. Standards by the end of Year 6 are average. Because pupils enter the school with little experience of design and technology, this is good achievement. Pupils continue to achieve well in Years 7 and 8 and by the time they leave school in Year 8, standards are above average. Boys and girls do equally well. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve well because of the good additional help they receive from teaching assistants and the technology technician.

125. By the end of Year 6, pupils cover a good range of work in food, textiles and resistant materials. Their design skills are satisfactory. All pupils can undertake some simple research and most can select information that will be useful in their designs. However, the use of simple surveys to aid planning is underdeveloped. All pupils can produce several design ideas before choosing one to make. Most pupils annotate these ideas well and make informed decisions about which design to use. Higher-attaining pupils include clear measurements on their design plans. Pupils regularly evaluate their finished articles in food and textiles work and higher-attaining pupils clearly identify the strengths and weaknesses of their work. However, evaluations are not always completed in resistant

materials. All pupils work safely with tools. They measure, cut and join materials with a good degree of accuracy. Higher-attaining pupils often assemble articles of a high standard. The standard of practical work is similar in all areas of design and technology. All pupils gain a satisfactory understanding of the qualities of different materials and how structures can be strengthened. Pupils' experience in computer-aided manufacture is well developed through using a computerised sewing machine. However they are unable to control model buggies because the school lacks some items of computer hardware.

126. By the end of Year 8, pupils experience a satisfactory range of design and technology work. Pupils' design work is good overall and very good in food and textiles. All pupils undertake research into products that they are planning, although first-hand surveys are under-represented in their work. Higher-attaining pupils make clear links between their research and their design ideas. All pupils generate a good range of ideas, which are clearly annotated, before selecting one to make. The work of most pupils includes accurate measurements to guide making. Most pupils keep the needs of the user clearly in mind when designing. Pupils' evaluations of their own work are good in food and textiles, but are not always complete in resistant materials. All pupils select the correct tools to cut, join and finish materials. They all work safely. Practical work is of a good standard in all areas of design and technology. Pupils make good use of computer-aided design and manufacture in their work. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Pupils gain good experience of batch production in food, but in general designing and making are not often enough linked to industrial practices.
127. Teaching and learning are good and, in textiles, often very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and give clear explanations, which ensure that pupils learn accurate facts and skills. In a very good Year 8 textiles lesson, for example, the teacher gave a clear demonstration of how to use a scanner to enter a design into a computerised sewing machine and this enabled pupils to learn to use this tool quickly and confidently. In a good Year 5 resistant materials lesson, the teacher clearly explained how to research different types of puppet from a video and, as a result, pupils selected and recorded information correctly. Teachers' expectations are high and this encourages pupils to produce high quality work. Many lessons are interesting because they include a variety of activities. In a very good Year 6 lesson, for example, pupils undertook 16 different research activities before designing an insulated cooking glove. As a result, they made well-informed decisions about the type of fabric, its thickness, patterns and styles of decoration. In the best lessons pupils are thoroughly engaged by the teachers' enthusiasm for the work and this accelerates learning. In a minority of lessons, however, pupils' imagination is not sufficiently stimulated because the work is not given a clear purpose. Teachers manage their classes well and this ensures that behaviour is good. Homework is regularly set and complements classwork well. However, in a minority of lessons, homework is not recorded in the pupils' diaries. Pupils enjoy design and technology and take real pride in their work. Their concentration is normally very good, but many pupils find the double lesson too long and have trouble sustaining their concentration to the end.
128. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Standards have been maintained since the last inspection. The department is committed to further improvement, but plans to share good practice between teachers have not yet been fully implemented. Assessment of pupils' skills is well organised but the assessments are not linked to pupils' attainment when they enter the school and this makes following progress difficult. A part-time technician gives teachers good support. The school has successfully addressed this staffing matter mentioned in the last inspection report. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good with a range of appropriate activities
- The subject is well led and managed.
- Pupils develop good skills in independent research.
- Through good assessment, pupils know how well they are doing.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to their work.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching should be monitored more regularly to assist teachers' professional development and identify departmental areas for improvement.
- Assessment data is not used enough to monitor pupils' progress and develop the curriculum.

129. Standards by the end of Year 6 are above average and pupils achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry. They develop a good knowledge of geographical facts. Most pupils are beginning to ask geographical questions and draw conclusions. In their work on the local area, for example, many pupils were able to work independently and apply the knowledge and skills they had gained in lessons. They develop good independent research skills. Good opportunities are provided for them to study the local area before extending their focus to Great Britain and the wider world. Pupils' skills in using and drawing maps are average on entry but develop well across the two years. In Year 6, for example, pupils used atlases well in work that linked their historical study of the Aztecs to world geography. Pupils draw graphs to compare the climate of St. Lucia with that of their home area. They use computers well to do research and present their work.

130. Pupils continue to achieve well in Years 7 and 8 and standards by the end of Year 8 are above average. Higher-attaining pupils reach well above average standards, particularly in their research skills. Some pupils have completed high quality reports on their research into the impact of traffic on the local environment; others have researched the earthquakes at Kobe and Mount St. Helens. Many pupils have good field study skills, which they demonstrated in their study of erosion and coastal management on the Isle of Wight. However, lower-attaining pupils do not always relate the facts they have discovered to the main theme of the enquiry. Pupils extend their knowledge of the wider world and of the relationship between physical and human factors. In their study of Peru, for example, pupils understood the reasons that living standards vary in different parts of Peru. Pupils with special educational needs receive good support and progress as well as other pupils.

131. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes very good. Many teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and communicate their enthusiasm to the pupils. Lessons are well planned and use methods that make them interesting to pupils. Work is planned to match the full ability range in the class and pupils with special educational needs receive good support from teachers and teaching assistants. Teachers have high expectations – they challenge pupils to think for themselves and provide many opportunities for discussion and independent learning. Pupils respond positively and have very good attitudes to work. They are prepared well for the coursework they will do at upper school. Marking is good overall, though there is some inconsistency in its depth. Pupils know how well they are doing in relation to national levels. They use ICT effectively in lessons and homework to do research and present their work.

132. The subject is well led and managed. Good progress has been made in tackling the small number of issues raised in the last report. Lesson planning has improved and ICT is used more effectively to support learning. There is some monitoring of teaching but this needs to be extended to identify teachers' training needs and departmental areas for improvement. Teachers do not have enough formal meetings to discuss teaching methods and plan improvements to the curriculum. Pupils undertake field study in Years 7 and 8, but not enough is done in Years 5 and 6. Displays of work are good and the subject is well resourced. There are good arrangements to assess pupils' attainment. However, assessment data is not recorded in a database, which would facilitate its use

in monitoring pupils' progress and evaluating teaching. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development.

HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards are above average at the end of Year 6 and at the end of Year 8.
- Pupils achieve well.
- Teaching is good and often very good.
- Assessment procedures are good in Years 7 and 8.
- Classroom relationships and support for pupils' personal development are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment in Years 5 and 6 is not linked well enough to National Curriculum levels.
- Assessment results are not used enough to track pupils' progress and set targets.
- Teaching is not monitored systematically enough.
- The non-specialist teachers need more support.

133. Standards are above average at the end of Year 6 and at the end of Year 8. Above average standards have been sustained since the last inspection. Pupils achieve well throughout the school. Those with special educational needs, and the gifted and talented, make very good progress. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls.

134. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the topics studied is good, and in the case of higher-attaining pupils it is often very good. Year 6 pupils, for instance, demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of world events between 1492 and 1543 in their discussion of the Aztec empire. Rapid gains in Years 7 and 8 result in higher-attaining pupils especially having a very good grasp of issues. This was shown particularly well by Year 8 pupils in their discussion of the quality of life in the 16th century, during which they readily interpreted and cross referenced information from different historical sources. The understanding of below average pupils is usually more superficial but most achieve well.

135. Pupils learn to place events in chronological order and develop empathy for historical personalities. They develop good skills in doing research and using historical evidence in an investigation. They select appropriate information, compare information from different sources and draw conclusions. Their projects are well organised and ICT is often used well to enhance the presentation. While presentation is good overall, its quality is more varied in the work of average and lower-attaining pupils. Pupils are articulate in expressing their views orally, and write well-structured accounts. They use their numeracy skills confidently in calculation and the presentation of investigation findings.

136. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes very good. Lessons are well planned, with a good match of the work to pupils' abilities. Most lessons are conducted at a good pace, with purposeful introductions, clear explanations and a variety of activities. Teachers have high expectations and pupils respond very well, with good concentration. Teachers promote group work and pupils work together well. Their very good attitudes contribute strongly to their learning. In the best lessons, teaching is highly interactive. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, pupils were excited by the challenging activities in which they investigated the causes of the Black Death, and made rapid progress. There is a strong emphasis on developing literacy. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported by teachers and teaching assistants.

137. Most marking is thorough but there is some inconsistency in the quality of guidance, especially in Years 5 and 6. Pupils' evaluation of their own work is a particular strength in enabling them to know how well they are doing. Pupils' attainment is assessed regularly, but assessment in Years 5 and 6 is not linked securely enough to National Curriculum levels, and assessment results are not used systematically enough to track pupils' progress and set targets for improvement.

138. The curriculum is well planned and is appropriate for the full ability range. Pupils' learning is enhanced by visits to places of historical significance, and their personal development is very well supported. Learning and research skills are well supported by homework tasks. Long-term projects are very well planned and guided.

139. History is taught by a large number of teachers, most of whom are non-specialists. Teachers' subject knowledge is good overall but there are instances where it is no more than adequate and not sufficient to enable pupils to extend their thinking and make links between different parts of the subject. Limited subject knowledge also sometimes results in insecure assessment, and activities that do not challenge or involve pupils enough.

140. Leadership and management are good. There has been good improvement in most of the issues identified in the last inspection, but not enough in the monitoring and support of teaching. Teachers receive informal advice and detailed written guidance, but the support is not systematic enough. There is some formal monitoring of teaching, but it is not frequent enough or systematically linked to teachers' professional development. There are not enough opportunities for teachers to meet to share good practice and achieve greater consistency in teaching.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

Strengths

- Pupils attain high standards throughout the school.
- All pupils achieve very well.
- Teaching is very good because expectations and challenge are very high.
- Pupils concentrate and persevere very well.

Areas for improvement

- Lessons do not always stretch higher-attaining pupils.
- Assessment of progress is not linked to pupils' attainment on entry to the school.

141. Standards at the end of Year 6 are well above average, which represents very good achievement in relation to pupils' attainment on entry. When pupils leave school at the end of Year 8, standards are also well above average. This too represents very good achievement, since the attainment of these pupils in Year 7 was only average. Boys and girls attain similar standards. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve very well because of the very good additional help they receive from teaching assistants and the ICT technician.

142. By the end of Year 6 all pupils can successfully log on to the computer and access the software they need. All pupils can save and retrieve their work. The majority use the keyboard and mouse well. All pupils can change text fonts and size, although half of them do not select an appropriate font to suit the purpose of the document. All pupils can make a slide presentation with links between the slides. The quality of most slide presentations is very good and they often contain relevant, high quality animation. Pupils' work with databases is very good – all can design a simple form to collect information and most can organise this information in a database. Pupils recognise that there are different types of data and most can identify each type. Most pupils can sort or search data in a simple way and half can successfully sort on two different characteristics. They also have very good spreadsheet skills – most pupils can enter simple formulae and copy these into different parts of the spreadsheet. They understand how a spreadsheet can be used to model what happens when some information is changed. All pupils can present numerical data in graphs and most select the appropriate form of graph. Pupils have a very good grasp of how to control a screen turtle. They all clearly understand the dangers of giving away personal information on the Internet, but their understanding of other ways that computers impact on our lives is less well developed.

143. By the end of Year 8 pupils use computers to present information very well. All can create a PowerPoint presentation of at least three slides and most select suitable fonts and type size to make their presentation effective. Most pupils can add graphics to their slides and half of them select graphics that add real impact to their work. Higher-attaining pupils can add animation and a time sequence that has been tested for easy reading. All can use desktop publishing software to merge text and graphics and most design and write work of very high quality. Pupils can produce a three-page web-site and most can enter links between pages without help. Most pupils produce web-sites of very high quality, many with high quality animation. However high-attaining pupils are not given the opportunity to fine-tune their work because they are not taught the appropriate programming language. Spreadsheet work is very good. Most pupils can model different scenarios by changing data. Spreadsheets are usually formatted very well to make them easy to read. However, higher-attaining pupils' use of demanding skills such as the 'if' function and conditional cell formatting is very limited. Pupils' understanding of the impact of computers on society is underdeveloped.
144. Pupils' ICT skills are reinforced well in many other subjects. In English, for example, good use is made of computers to draft and redraft essays. In mathematics, spreadsheets are used well to develop pupils' understanding of number. In art and geography, pupils successfully use the Internet to research information. The use of ICT is under-developed, however, in music, French and religious education.
145. Teaching and learning are consistently very good. Teachers have a good knowledge of computers and software and as a result pupils learn accurate facts and skills. Pupils are made very clear about the objectives of the lesson. Before a Year 8 class started designing a personal web-site to take to their upper school, for example, the teacher carefully explained the key points they needed to include and this ensured that they focused very well on the task. Pupils make very good progress because teachers have very high expectations and always set the work in a very interesting and challenging context. For example, Year 6 pupils learned to use a spreadsheet by modelling the expenses of a school trip. Each pupil was given a maximum budget and they had to use their spreadsheet to get best value. Lessons are well planned and pupils learn well from a good range of well-organised activities. In a minority of lessons, however, the work is not sufficiently demanding for the higher-attaining pupils. Pupils are managed very well and behaviour is always excellent. Pupils receive very good help during their practical work. In a very good Year 6 lesson on a slide presentation, for example, the teacher gathered together a group of pupils who were all having difficulty making links between slides. He revised the procedure and thus enabled the pupils to complete the task successfully. Later a group of higher-attaining pupils was brought together to discuss the use of matching colours for best effect. This accelerated their progress and ensured their work was of a very high standard. All pupils work very well in ICT. They concentrate and persevere very well and produce work of a high standard.
146. Leadership and management are very good and there has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen considerably and the school is committed to further improvement. Pupils learn the full National Curriculum, which was not the case at the time of the last inspection. Assessment of pupils' skills is much improved and is now well organised. However the assessments are not linked to pupils' attainment when they enter the school, which means their progress is not accurately evaluated. The school has a good number of computers and peripherals. Pupils use the computers very well in lessons, as well as before school and in lunch-time clubs.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is **good**.

Strengths

- Pupils learn French from Year 5 and this provides a strong foundation for later study.
- Teachers have high expectations and conduct lessons at a brisk pace using a wide variety of methods.
- Teachers are specialists and have very good command of their subject.
- Assessment records are used well in teachers' planning.

Areas for improvement

- Reading and writing in French are not given enough emphasis in Years 7 and 8.
- The range of learning activities is restricted because some accommodation is cramped.
- ICT is not used enough to support learning.
- There are not enough resources for pupils to read independently.

147. Pupils start learning French in Year 5 – two years before learning a modern foreign language becomes statutory. By the end of Year 6, pupils can copy phrases correctly and most can give short, simple responses to what they hear or read. Higher-attaining pupils can understand short passages made up of familiar language spoken at near normal speed. They write phrases from memory with accurate spelling. Pupils achieve well through Years 5 and 6. Boys and girls do equally well and pupils with special educational needs make good progress, especially in speaking and listening.

148. By the end of Year 8, standards are slightly above average. Pupils' achievement in Years 7 and 8 is satisfactory because, although teaching and learning are good, the time allocated to French in Years 7 and 8 is slightly lower than in most schools. However, this lack of time is compensated for by the early start made in Years 5 and 6. By the end of Year 8, most pupils can use simple memorised language and can substitute items of vocabulary to vary what they convey. They can produce short pieces of writing in simple sentences. Higher-attaining pupils refer to the past and future as well as the present. They identify and note the main points in passages made up of familiar language that is spoken at near normal speed. Boys and girls engage equally in learning, although rather more girls than boys work at the highest levels in Years 7 and 8.

149. Teaching is good. Teachers have a very good command of French and often use this to model pronunciation and intonation and to reinforce the idea that French is a natural and living means of communication. In some lessons, however, too much English is used and opportunities for pupils to use French for themselves are lost. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and feature a wide variety of activities. Teachers use whole-class questioning effectively. They use group work, pair work, reading aloud, mime, songs, raps and competitive games to maintain pupils' interest and enjoyment in learning. Teachers use visual aids, tape recorders and video to bring the language alive. Displays of pupils' work and key vocabulary help to reinforce learning. However, a lack of specialist accommodation and the cramped conditions in some classrooms reduce the range of activities which can be provided.

150. Pupils cover the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, but reading and writing are not emphasised as much the other two skills. There are not enough books in the library for pupils to read independently. Pupils' work is thoroughly and consistently marked and comments are given to show pupils what they need to do to improve. Sometimes these comments are not as helpful as they should be, however, in actually leading to improvement. Pupils with special educational needs are taught well. Teachers plan specific tasks to suit their needs. Teaching assistants give valuable support, though they are not available as often as they need to be. Higher-attaining pupils are challenged appropriately.

151. Leadership and management are good. Teachers are well supported by clear and detailed schemes of work. The subject leader monitors the work of other teachers, and teachers use assessment

information effectively in their planning and in setting targets. The use of ICT to support learning is under-developed. Pupils use the Internet, and staff have undertaken training, but a lack of easy access to computers limits the work that can be done.

152. There has been good progress since the last inspection, with improvements in the breadth of learning opportunities, the support for pupils with special educational needs and the use of assessment information. The positive atmosphere for learning has been maintained and teaching has remained good despite staff changes.

MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision in music is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards are above average at the end of Year 6 and at the end of Year 8.
- Teaching is good and has a positive impact on pupils' learning.
- There is very good provision for extra-curricular activities and instrumental lessons.

Areas for improvement

- The school is aware of the need to develop pupils' use of computers to compose music.

153. By the end of Year 6 standards are above average, as they were at the time of the last inspection. By the end of Year 8 standards are also above average, which is lower than at the time of the last inspection. Attainment on entry is average and pupils achieve well, gaining confidence as performers and developing their listening skills. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress due to the effective support they receive from teachers during group work. The more musically able pupils make very good progress in lessons, in extra-curricular activities and in instrumental lessons.

154. Pupils in Year 6 show good rhythmic skills and sing with enthusiasm. They talk well about music and show a good knowledge of different instrumental sounds. In a Year 6 lesson, for example, pupils listened to a short extract of music from a Harry Potter film. They used musical terminology to describe the effects of the music and how these might have been created, such as how the flute had been used to convey a mystical, magical feeling. Year 7 pupils listen to the different sounds of the Indonesian gamelan and understand the way that the different layers of sound are created. Year 8 pupils understand simple chord structures and play these well on keyboards. They know how to use simple musical notation. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, pupils listened to an example of rock and roll and played the chord sequence on keyboards. Many pupils located the notes easily, kept a steady pulse and played with some fluency. Pupils identify different orchestral sounds well during listening tasks. Although pupils create their own music and record their ideas, they do not have opportunities to use music technology, other than keyboards, to devise and refine their compositions. This affects the standards reached in Year 8.

155. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have secure class management skills and organise lessons well. They make effective use of their own musical skills to aid pupils' understanding. In a Year 5 lesson, for example, the teacher introduced a new song by giving an excellent performance that enabled pupils to capture the humour of the words. As a result, pupils were eager to join in the singing, to practise the opening phrase on keyboards and then to perform to each other. Pupils' literacy skills are developed well through regular opportunities to read aloud from textbooks and worksheets. Teachers ensure that pupils learn accurate musical vocabulary, which is an improvement since the last inspection. The subject makes a satisfactory contribution to pupils' numeracy skills. Homework is occasionally set to reinforce learning. Pupils' spiritual awareness is developed effectively through creative and expressive activities. Their social and cultural development is also fostered well in lessons and in extra-curricular music. Pupils have very good attitudes towards the subject, and their response is sometimes excellent. They are always well-behaved and persevere during group tasks. They enjoy performing to each other.

156. There is very good provision for extra-curricular activities and these are open to all pupils. In the last inspection too few boys were found to be involved, but boys now take part with enthusiasm. Regular rehearsal groups include a jazz choir, a jazz band and a gospel choir. Pupils take part in concerts both in and out of school. There are two school concerts a year and a carol service is held at Shefford Methodist Church. Pupils play in county and other local groups and some have performed at the East of England Show. Over 120 pupils receive instrumental lessons from peripatetic staff, who make a valuable contribution to the musical life of the school.

157. Leadership and management are good. The department is committed to providing opportunities for all pupils to take part in musical activities, whatever their ability. The subject leader has been in post for two terms. He has already identified ways of raising pupils' attainment. The subject leader and three non-specialist staff work well together as a team. There are excellent liaison arrangements with local schools and Year 8 pupils, for example, attend a music technology day at the upper school. Music resources are satisfactory, though there is only one computer in the department and this is not yet in use. The number of non-western music resources has been improved. The accommodation is adequate, though there are only three practice rooms, which restricts group work when they are being used by instrumental teachers.

158. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Schemes of work and assessment and reporting procedures are now in place and resources have been improved. However, there is still no opportunity for pupils to use computers in lessons.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **very good**.

Strengths

- Very good leadership and management generate a positive and enthusiastic approach to the subject.
- Standards are above average.
- There is an excellent extra-curricular programme in which many pupils take part and reach high standards.
- Very good assessment leads to effective target setting and analysis of teaching.

Areas for improvement

- Lessons do not include enough suitable tasks for pupils with co-ordination difficulties.
- Pupils have too few opportunities to learn through evaluating their own and others' work.

159. Standards by the end of Year 6 are above average and pupils achieve well. When they arrive in Year 5 they are average in activities such as gymnastics and field games. By Year 6 they have above average gymnastic skills, creating sequences that are fluent and refined. In athletics they have good sprinting techniques. They all know how to warm up effectively before exercise. They listen carefully to instructions and quickly improve their performance. Their skills in evaluating their own or others' work are not well developed, though they are able to use simple technical vocabulary to improve each other's performance when given the opportunity.

160. Pupils continue to achieve well in Years 7 and 8 and standards by the end of Year 8 are above average. In athletics, pupils' sprinting techniques are more refined and they are able to appreciate the most effective acceleration points over distance. In dance, they have a good understanding of how to create a dance using different levels, repetition of motif and canon. However, their moves lack the refinement needed to express the style of the dance. They are beginning to use technical vocabulary to help each other to improve their performances, though this is at an early stage of development. The girls have above average skills in extra-curricular netball. They apply advanced tactics and are accurate in their passing, especially when in defence. The boys also are skilful in football and show good team work and communication. Pupils enjoy individual and team success at national, regional, county and local levels in athletics, football and cross country; the girls are becoming increasingly successful in games such as netball and football. A few pupils have specific

difficulties with practical skills and struggle with basic co-ordination in running and gymnastics. They make slower progress than others because lessons do not include enough tasks that are designed to meet their needs. Pupils who have special educational needs in other areas of the curriculum achieve well and are often very capable in physical activities.

161. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good. This is an improvement since the last inspection. There are some excellent features in a minority of lessons, which result in rapid gains in the learning of new skills. In these lessons the pupils learn to improve their performance from the teacher's demonstrations and from observing each other. They are given the vocabulary to coach each other successfully and know what they need to do to reach the next National Curriculum level. The most notable feature in all lessons is the mutual respect that exists between pupils and teachers. This leads to high motivation and a good work rate. Pupils practise in order to refine their skills and respond well to the challenging tasks they are given, which progress logically to the final activity. Video is used effectively to give pupils instant feedback on the quality of their performance. Question and answer sessions are used to consolidate information, but do not always encourage pupils to think in depth or evaluate their performance. Those pupils who are unable to take part practically are nearly always involved in what is being taught, but could be included more in class discussions. The teachers know the pupils and their capabilities very well. Teachers and pupils agree appropriate targets, though these are not linked into the formal assessments that accurately track pupils' progress over each year. The pupils respond exceptionally well to the high level of trust and independence that is extended to them.

162. Very good leadership and management have led to very good improvement since the last inspection. Thorough monitoring of teaching has ensured that there are consistently high expectations of behaviour and work. The curriculum is carefully planned and the schemes of work have been updated to include new national initiatives. Swimming requirements are now met. Standards have risen both in lessons and in the excellent and very popular extra-curricular programme, which is well supported by many teachers and by local clubs. The recent addition of a floodlit games area has had a positive impact on standards and community involvement, contributing to the school's gaining the Sportsmark Gold Award with distinction.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- The standard of teaching is improving through good leadership and management.
- There are good procedures to assess pupils' progress in relation to national standards.
- Non-specialist teachers are well supported with good quality written guidance.
- There is good support for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning.
- Teachers need training to deepen their subject knowledge and improve assessment.
- There are not enough links with faith communities through the use of visits and visitors.
- Not enough use is made of ICT to support learning or to record pupils' progress.

163. Standards at the end of Year 6 are average. This represents satisfactory achievement in relation to pupils' attainment on entry to the school. Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of Christianity and other major world faiths. They understand the significance of symbols in life and religion. In many classes, pupils are willing to give opinions and take part in discussion. In a lesson on creation stories and symbols, for example, pupils discussed their personal experiences with confidence. They have a satisfactory knowledge of sacred writings and religious leaders. They are beginning to understand the nature of friendship and how relationships grow or founder. Their mastery of subject vocabulary, however, is often weak and needs to be reinforced more positively. While work is generally well presented, many pupils display weaknesses in spelling and in the use of capital letters.

164. Standards by the end of Year 8 are also average, and pupils' achievement is satisfactory in Years 7 and 8. By Year 8, pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of how different religions interpret God and are beginning to understand the similarities and differences between Christian, Sikh and Muslim beliefs and rituals. When challenged by their tasks they make good progress, though in some lessons this challenge is missing. Too often, tasks rely on the use of worksheets and pupils are not actively involved. As in Years 5 and 6, pupils contribute well to lessons and work well in pairs and groups. Some pupils, particularly the higher attainers, show good research skills and apply these, for example, to their study of the importance of the hajj to Muslims. While many pupils are able to understand concepts such as rites of passage, many find it difficult to relate their own experiences to a religious context. Across all years pupils with special needs are well supported and as a result they make equal progress with their peers.
165. Teaching and learning are satisfactory and sometimes good. Most lessons are carefully planned to ensure that pupils gain the knowledge and understanding that they need. Work is planned appropriately to match the full range of ability in the class. The teaching methods used are generally satisfactory in that the information is clearly conveyed and pupils are able to apply this in their tasks. However, there is a high reliance on worksheets and too few opportunities for extended writing. There are opportunities in some units of work for pupils to do their own research and to write at length, for example in their work on religious buildings and journeys, but these opportunities are limited. In the less successful lessons, pupils are expected to listen for too long and the tasks do not challenge them sufficiently; as a result the pace tends to slacken. Most pupils are attentive and keen to learn, but in some classes the concentration of a minority slackens because of weak classroom management or because they are not fully engaged. In some lessons, poor timing does not allow for any consolidation of what has been learned. Most work is marked regularly, but in a very small number of classes, tasks have not been marked and this is unacceptable. Pupils do not have enough written feedback to help them raise the standard of their work.
166. The subject is well led and managed by a newly-appointed subject leader, who is extremely hard working and enthusiastic. She has identified appropriate priorities for development and has already made significant improvements in reviewing the schemes of work in line with the locally agreed syllabus and providing good quality guidance to the many non-specialist teachers. Assessment procedures have been improved, using national levels of attainment, though many teachers find assessing levels difficult and need training. Since the last inspection, satisfactory improvement has taken place in relation to schemes of work, lesson planning, assessment and guidance.
167. The monitoring of teaching is severely limited by constraints on the subject leader's time, but is needed to ensure greater consistency and to identify teachers' training needs. There are no specialist teachers and despite teachers' hard work and enthusiasm, many lack a deep knowledge of the subject and of appropriate teaching methods. On some occasions this leads to unsatisfactory concentration on the part of a few pupils. There are some visits to Christian churches in Shefford, and a visit to a Sikh gurdwara, but pupils would benefit from more opportunities to hear from and visit Christian and other faiths. The subject provides well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Opportunities to expand on these aspects, however, are not built into the scheme of work. The use of computers as a tool in learning is also limited. The development of a database to record pupils' assessments would enable progress to be monitored more regularly and an analysis of standards to be used in planning future developments.