

INSPECTION REPORT

BEECHWOOD SCHOOL

Slough

LEA area: Slough

Unique reference number: 110076

Headteacher: Ms Julia Shepard

Reporting inspector: Graeme Clarke
1547

Dates of inspection: 30th September – 3rd October 2002

Inspection number: 249152

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Type of school: | Modern |
| School category: | Community |
| Age range of pupils: | 11-16 |
| Gender of pupils: | Mixed |
| School address: | Long Readings Lane Slough. |
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| Appropriate authority: | The Governing Body |
| Name of chair of governors: | Mr P Rowley |
| Date of previous inspection: | 10 th December 1998 |

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|--------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|--|--|
| 1547 | Graeme Clarke | <i>Registered inspector</i> | | What sort of school is it? Equal opportunities How high are the standards? The school's results and achievements How well are the pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further? Provision in Years 10 and 11 |
| 9504 | Sheila Gurney | <i>Lay inspector</i> | | 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 |
| 31135 | Rachel Hobson | <i>Team inspector</i> | English and Drama | Literacy |
| 3643 | Derek Jones | <i>Team inspector</i> | Mathematics | Numeracy |
| 19043 | Dr David Lewis | <i>Team inspector</i> | Science | |
| 31685 | Val Girling | <i>Team inspector</i> | Art and design | |
| 18065 | Sue Dutson | <i>Team inspector</i> | Design Technology | How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils? |
| 11300 | Barry Smith | <i>Team inspector</i> | Geography | Special Educational Needs |
| 5832 | Mike Morton-Thorpe | <i>Team inspector</i> | History | Citizenship |
| 8052 | Ken McKenzie | <i>Team inspector</i> | Information and Communication Technology | |
| 17404 | Judith Tolley | <i>Team inspector</i> | French | |
| 12475 | Stuart Johnson | <i>Team inspector</i> | Music | Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development |
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Beechwood is a secondary modern school serving mainly the Britwell estate, a locality to north of Slough with a well below average proportion of higher social class households. The town has selective grammar schools that admit students attaining highly in the eleven plus examination. Accordingly, when students join Beechwood in Year 7 their attainment is very low in comparison with the national averages for 11-year-old pupils nationwide. In 2000 - 2001, a critical shortage of teachers that resulted in children being sent home, a lack of effective leadership and high levels of misbehaviour led Slough Local Education Authority (LEA) to take action to protect the education the students. All Years 10 and 11 were transferred permanently to ten other schools and East Berkshire College from September 2001. Beechwood School was re-established for Years 7 to 9 with a new permanent head teacher and a full complement of teaching and support staff. This year the school caters for 411 pupils in Years 7 to 10, 62 per cent of whom are boys. Thirty five per cent of students are entitled to free school meals. Forty per cent have special educational needs (SEN), including 6 per cent with statements. Twenty two per cent have English as an additional language (EAL), including 4 per cent at an early stage of language acquisition. These figures are all above national averages. The school is a member of the Slough Education Action Zone (EAZ).

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Beechwood is now an effective school providing a satisfactory education for its students. Over the past year the new leadership team has successfully implemented an appropriate plan to raise achievement, to tackle misbehaviour and low attendance, and to practise a philosophy of inclusion and involvement. A positive climate for learning is well established in premises that have been revitalised with students' participation. Teaching quality is now good. Behaviour is very much improved. Levels of attendance have risen markedly though are still below average. Standards in the Year 9 tests have risen, especially in English. Most students are achieving satisfactorily, and some well, in relation to their prior attainment. The governors and senior management, in a productive partnership with the LEA, keep a very close watch on progress and spending to ensure best value is obtained. Given these considerable improvements and the students' very low attainments when they join the school, the school is giving satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- The very good leadership and management by the head and other senior staff gives very clear direction and sets the tone for improvements in teaching, learning and behaviour.
- It makes very good provision for students with SEN and for those with EAL.
- Promotes very effective relationships with partner institutions. Together they are making an excellent contribution to the education of students now in Year 11.
- Fosters a very good contribution from the community to help student's learning
- It ensures students' welfare and inclusion, and elimination of oppressive behaviour.

What could be improved

- Standards of attainment, especially in mathematics and science.
- School-wide strategies for improving literacy, numeracy, and applications of information and communication technology (ICT).
- The use of assessment information to aid lesson planning
- Attendance
- Meeting National Curriculum requirements – for music and collective worship.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) last inspected the school in December 1998. Since then the school has made marked improvements after a period of great instability. Attendance has improved but is still below average. Good progress on improving the quality of teaching has raised achievement in Years 7 to 10, but attainment remains well below average. No comment can be made about Year 11 now in other schools. Rich assessment data is used well to monitor progress and set targets but is not yet used sufficiently widely in lesson planning. New facilities and a teaching programme for ICT now meet requirements. Governors are involved in monitoring and evaluating the work of the school but need to ensure statutory curriculum requirements are met.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

| Performance in: | compared with | | | | Key |
|-------------------|---------------|------|------|-----------------|--|
| | all schools | | | similar schools | |
| | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2001 | |
| GCSE examinations | E | E* | E* | E | well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E |

Attainment overall in the statutory Year 9 tests was in the lowest 5 per cent nationally in 2001 and was well below the averages of similar schools. Boys' did less well than girls in English but there were no clear differences in mathematics and science. A marked improvement in English in 2002 reversed the downward trend of recent years. Mathematics improved slightly but science results declined. In GCSE only 5.7 per cent of 16-year-old students gained five or more A*-C grades in 2001. These results were in the lowest 5 per cent nationally and continued a downward trend since 1999. However, compared with schools having a similar intake and proportion of free school meals, the results were in the lowest quarter of the range, but above the lowest 5 per cent. Boys did less well than girls overall, reflecting the national pattern. There is no information to make comparisons for the 2002 results for the students who were all transferred to other schools. The GCSE target for 2004 of 30 per cent gaining 5 or more A*-C grades is a big jump, but is reasonably based on students' prior attainments. Standards are below or close to national expectations in work seen in the majority of subjects. However, most students achieve satisfactorily, and well in design and technology and physical education where there is a high practical element in the work.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|---|
| Attitudes to the school | Good. Students are happy at school, attentive, and keen to do well. There are good inter-personal relationships characterised by co-operation, respect for the values, feelings and beliefs of others, and a willingness to be helpful |
| Behaviour, in and out of classrooms | Good. Students know what is expected and value the approach to rewards and sanctions which they see as fair when they do wrong. Exclusions are a last resort: the level has been halved since the year before last and permanent exclusions are 8 times lower. Any bullying is dealt with successfully and the multi-racial school is harmonious. |
| Personal development and relationships | Good. A well planned programme in all years which includes sex education, drugs education and citizenship is enhanced with opportunities for community service. Students value involvement in The School Council which introduces them to the democratic process. |
| Attendance | Below average at 87.5 per cent last year, but much improved on the year before. Almost 91 per cent this term. Punctuality to lessons during the day is generally satisfactory but lax in the morning. |

TEACHING AND LEARNING

| Teaching of pupils: | Years 7 – 9 | Years 10 – 11 |
|---------------------|-------------|---------------|
| 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.

Time invested in recruiting and training teachers has led to a marked improvement in teaching in all subjects. The better lessons reflect a good command of subject knowledge and an understanding of how students learn, thorough planning and positive teacher-student relationships. These, with well managed behaviour and checks on progress are making a clear contribution to students' progress and achievement. There are some weaknesses needing attention. Where lessons lack variety, or tasks are pitched at too high a level, some students easily lose concentration and learning suffers, particularly when behaviour deteriorates and is not well managed. On occasions teachers miss opportunities to consolidate learning in good plenary work at the end of lessons. There are inconsistencies to address in using the new assessment system to aid planning for differing ability groups, and using information and communication technology to support learning in lessons. The literacy strategy is being implemented but it is only recently influencing learning. Isolated examples of work in mathematics, science, design and technology for example contribute to numeracy development, but they need to be part of a school wide strategy. Most students with SEN or EAL are successfully taught almost entirely in classes alongside other students in the school. Specialist teaching for students withdrawn from lessons improves literacy and numeracy and personal development. Gifted and talented students are helped to make progress in English and physical education, but a general approach is at an early stage of development throughout the school.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

| Aspect | Comment |
|---|---|
| The quality and range of the curriculum | Overall good but the statutory curriculum is unsatisfactory because music in Years 7 to 9 does not fully meet requirements and students do not have a daily act of collective worship. Extra-curricular activities are good. |
| Provision for pupils with special educational needs | Very good. They are integrated into all aspects of school life and have access to the full curriculum through mainstream lessons or in complementary provision. Learning support staff ensure those with statements receive appropriate help. |
| Provision for pupils with English as an additional language | Very good. Teaching and support is well organised, generally in mainstream classes, or in withdrawal groups for those with greater learning needs. Care is taken to ensure they share the activities of all other students. |
| Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | Good. Spiritual development is satisfactory, helped by a weekly theme which is reinforced in assemblies, tutor periods and lessons. Moral development is good: a well-established behaviour policy encourages respect and teaches the difference between right and wrong. Good social development is encouraged through group work, collaborative projects and out-of-school visits. Cultural development is satisfactory with an expanding variety of opportunities. |
| How well the school cares for its pupils | Very good. The school is safe, well supervised, clean and well maintained. Due attention is given to health and safety. Child protection procedures are effective. The assessment process is used well in support of students' personal development and academic achievement but greater consistency of use to inform lesson planning is needed. Regular review processes for students with special needs meet requirements. |

The partnership with parents has many good aspects. Information of high quality is provided through a good range of informative booklets, readable and attractive newsletters, and a very comprehensive prospectus. Useful meetings to discuss progress that complement helpful end of year reports are well attended. The school keeps parents up-to-date about outstanding work, and also responds quickly to parents about any concerns. Parents appreciate the recent improvements in the school. However, there is little direct involvement of parents in school and the small but active parents' association would value greater participation.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

| Aspect | Comment |
|---|--|
| Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff | Very good. The head teacher's strong sense of purpose and excellent leadership is focused on promoting the school ethos and raising achievement. Key management staff are equally dedicated in carrying out their responsibilities diligently and effectively to bring order to the school and create a supportive climate for learning. |
| How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities | Governors have a high level of commitment and their part in monitoring progress, suggesting strategic direction and fostering relationships with the community is very good. However, statutory curriculum responsibilities are not met. |
| The school's evaluation of its performance | Very good. Senior staff actively monitor work in the school and make a thorough analysis of test and examination results. In a very effective partnership with the LEA, there is a rigorous programme to evaluate progress used to determine priorities for attention and development. |
| The strategic use of resources | Very good. Earmarked funds are used very well. Staff are well deployed, and exemplary training and support has greatly improved teaching. Resources for learning are well used. Accommodation has been successfully revitalised through a refurbishment programme carried out jointly between the students, LEA and community. Best value principles are very effectively applied and extend to consultations with parents and students. |

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

| What pleases parents most | What parents would like to see improved |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their child likes school. • The teaching is good. • They feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. • The school expects their child to work hard and achieve his or her best. • The school is well led and managed. • The school is helping their child become mature and responsible. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right amount of work to do at home • Information about how their child is getting on. • Working with parents. |

Inspectors found justification for parents' concern about homework. However, they found good arrangements for informing parents about progress, and that the school constantly seeks to work with parents in many ways.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. When students join the school in Year 7 their attainment is very low in comparison with the national averages for 11-year-old students nationwide. The ability of those now in Year 8 is well below the national average. Information from primary schools indicates 39 per cent of them had reached Level 4 or above in English compared to 74 per cent nationally at the end of Year 6 in 2001. The school carries out the Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT) and a reading test each autumn. Results show 76 per cent of the year group are below average and 57 per cent have a reading age which is two years or more below their actual age. The school has an above average number of students with SEN on roll, which is counted into the calculation of results. These factors bear upon comparisons of attainment with national and other school averages because they significantly lower the proportion gaining higher grades in statutory tests and examinations. This is particularly so for English, mathematics and science examinations which are taken by nearly all students.

2. Overall, the proportion of 14-year-old students attaining the national expectation of Level 5 or higher in the statutory Year 9 tests was very low in relation to the national average in 2001. Students' attainment in English and mathematics was very low, being in the lowest 5 per cent nationally, and well below the averages of similar schools. Attainment was a little higher in science, though in the lowest 25 per cent nationally and below the average of similar schools. Boys' attainments in English were a little below those of girls, but there were no clear differences in mathematics and science. The 2002 results show a marked improvement in English where the downward trend of recent years has been substantially reversed. Science and mathematics attainments in 2002 are still well below the provisional national average, although since 1999 they have closely followed the upward national trend. Information to make comparisons with similar schools is not yet available for 2002.

3. In GCSE only 5.7 per cent of 16-year-old students gained five or more A*-C grades in 2001 compared to 15 per cent in 2000. Similarly, 72 per cent gained five or more A*-G grades compared to 78 per cent in 2000. The overall average points score also fell from 23 in 2000 to 19.1 in 2001. This decline continued a downward trend since the last inspection in 1998 that diverged away from the national trend of improvement over the same period. These results were very low in comparison with national averages as they lie in the lowest 5 per cent. The boys' average points score of attainment was 3.4 below the girls', which reflects the national pattern. Boys' attainment overall improved in line with the national trend since 1999, but the girls' fluctuated noticeably and declined in 2001 after a rise in 2000.

4. In relation to the GCSE results of schools with a similar intake and proportion of free school meals, the results were in the lowest quarter of the range, but not in the lowest 5 per cent. Although the English results at A*-C were just below the mid point of the range, the mathematics and science results lay in the bottom 5 percent. The pattern is quite different when compared to schools where students had similar prior attainments at the end of Year 9 in 1999. Although the proportion of students gaining five or more A*-C grades was well below, the proportion gaining five or more A*-G grades was above the average of these similar schools. However, their overall attainment was below average in comparison with these schools.

5. In summer 2001 all Year 10 students, who were transferred into 11 other schools and the further education college in Slough, were integrated into the second year of their new school's GCSE courses. They were entered for appropriate examinations in 2002 in their

respective school or college. Collated results show only 4 per cent of those candidates who had been at Beechwood gained five or more A*-C grades and 68 per cent gained five or more A*-G grades. However, no information is available at present to make national comparisons. Comparisons with similar schools will not be valid because these students have been taught in so many different institutions.

6. GCSE attainments in 2001 by both boys and girls in English, mathematics and science were significantly below the national averages. In English and in science a higher proportion of girls than boys gained A*-C grades. There was little difference at this level in mathematics but more boys than girls obtained lower grades. Students' results in English literature were above average, and in drama they were noticeably well above average. Results were below national averages in GCSE business studies, design technology, French, geography and history, and in the vocational travel and tourism course.

7. The school takes part in an initiative led by the Fischer Trust to share information from an analysis of Year 9 test and GCSE results. Useful predictions are available which the school uses thoroughly to help set targets for future performance. The target for Year 9 performance in English is well within grasp after the improvement this year. However, meeting the targets for mathematics and science in Year 9 represents a significant step. Similarly, reaching the target of 30 per cent achieving 5 or more grade A*-C in GCSE in 2004 requires a major jump from the 2001 figure, even though the basis is students' prior attainments.

Standards of work seen during the inspection

8. Students make at least satisfactory progress in English during the first three years, and nearly half make good progress by the end of Year 9 as a result of teaching which is good overall. Standards in Year 10 are close to levels predicted by the school on the basis of the students' prior attainment. In higher attaining sets standards are close to national expectations for GCSE. Higher attaining students write accurately, adapting their style for different purposes, and imaginatively in work on short stories. Lower attaining students' written work tends to lack detail and technical accuracy. Apart from those beginning to learn English, others are confident when talking about their ideas informally, but generally they use only a limited range of language and are over-dependent on colloquial terms. Reading skills are satisfactory. Lower attaining students tend to read without expression and hesitate over unfamiliar or complex words. Higher attaining students are reading fluently, with good expression, for example in a Year 10 class working on *An Inspector Calls* their rhythm and intonation showed a good attempt at portraying the characters. Standards in drama are a little above the national average in Years 7 to 9. Students acquire a good understanding of terms and techniques through very skilful teaching.

9. Standards in mathematics in Years 7 to 9 are continuing to rise. Most students are achieving satisfactorily in relation to their prior attainment, and some are achieving well. Although standards are well below average, students are making satisfactory progress as a result of the teaching by a more stable specialist staff. By Year 9 even the higher attaining students have difficulty relating fractions and decimals but their basic number skills are being successfully reinforced through mental and written work. Year 10 students have a better understanding of fractions but still make mistakes. Nevertheless, they are achieving well and are on target to attain GCSE grades in line with expectations.

10. Students in Years 7 to 9 are doing better in science lessons than their very low results at the end of Year 6 indicate. Most are forming a good grasp of basic concepts relating to diverse topics including secondary sexual characteristics, energy values in food, transmission of sound and basic astronomy. However, poor retention of information and

underdeveloped writing skills inhibit their progress. A good beginning in Year 10 leaves students well placed to show an improvement over the next two years. Generally good teaching is beginning to bear fruit. For example students, including those with SEN, are developing a sound grasp of aspects of digestion and are learning well from practical experimental work. Where their learning and progress is unsatisfactory it is as a result of inappropriate abstract subject matter that students cannot understand, leading to lack of involvement and poor behaviour.

11. The school has recently introduced National Literacy Strategy techniques to help develop literacy across the curriculum because standards of students' language development, in reading, writing and speaking formally, are well below those that would be expected nationally. However, their impact is only beginning to be reflected in students' work.

12. Numeracy standards lie below expectations because at present the lack of a school-wide strategy to guide numeracy development is limiting improvement to standards. There are some uncoordinated approaches to developing numeracy, however. Data collection and graphing are well developed in science but students are not helped to develop and use formulae in except in mathematics. Spatial development is promoted in design and technology, understanding coordinates is helped in geography, and students use numerical skills well in ICT.

13. Standards of work in information and communication technology had been below average but better use of time, a well-planned curriculum and greater challenge have led to improvements in Years 7 to 9. By the age of 14 standards are now in line with the national expectations. Clear guidance in teaching enables all students to succeed in developing some advanced skills, for example formatting documents and making electronic presentations in Year 9. Standards in Year 10 are below national expectations but students are making good progress in developing capability in ICT and business studies lessons. However, progress is hindered by insufficient opportunity to use ICT in other subjects.

14. Students' standards of work are below average in most other subjects, but they are making satisfactory, and sometimes good achievement over time. In art for example, higher attaining students draw skilfully and translate ideas from other cultures into colourful designs. Students quickly develop basic mapping skills in geography, and an understanding of relationships between geographic processes and work patterns. In history they learn to investigate and make judgements through analysing evidence using a variety of sources including documents, photographs and pictures. A large proportion of students enter the school with poor language skills, but they make progress in learning French and by Year 10 they increase their range of vocabulary and use language structures satisfactorily. The lack of continuity in music teaching leads to students working at a lower level than they should be. However, short periods of intensive provision, such as the drum workshop, lead them to be doing as well as could be expected and achieving satisfactorily. Most students gain some knowledge and a basic understanding of the important features of at least two major world religions by Year 9, and in Year 10 they show understanding of moral issues in relation to religious standpoints.

15. Students make satisfactory and frequently good progress in practical work. In design and technology they reach standards that are in line with or above expectations in Years 7 to 10. Year 9 students work accurately with a range of materials, taking care with the quality of their product, and in Year 10 their design and making skills are good. Most students come into Year 7 with little experience of rugby, gymnastics and health related fitness, and with low standards in swimming. They make good progress and by Year 9 the majority reach standards that are in line or above with the national average, especially in swimming. Achievement in Year 10 GCSE work is satisfactory.

16. The school makes very good inclusive provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) and those for whom English is an additional language (EAL). Care is taken to ensure that each student's learning needs are attended to in lesson planning through their individual education plans (IEPs). Most students with SEN are well supported in lessons and they make good progress in lessons and over time. Effective arrangements in the LINK (Years 7 to 9) and CONNECT (Year 10) areas ensure a good rate of progress for those students for whom withdrawal from lessons for intensive support is appropriate. Students with severe learning difficulties make good progress in the learning support area to improve their levels of literacy and numeracy.

17. The very positive and caring attitude of the department can be seen in the information given to teachers, on the problems faced by EAL students and recommendations on how to surmount them. Students with EAL are taught well and make good progress as a result of good information and advice given to support teaching in mainstream lessons. Students at an early stage of learning English have IEPs that include targets in listening, reading, writing and speaking and a timescale for achievement. Although attainment levels are low in English, students are well catered for and their learning is helped by close attention. For example, a Year 9 student receiving support is making great strides in reading and commented that EAL students are well supported by the school.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

18. Most students have good, positive attitudes to their learning and the vast majority are now happy at school. In lessons, especially where the teaching is good, they are attentive, eager to learn and keen to do well. They co-operate well and show respect for their teachers and for each other. For example, very good teaching in a Year 10 technology lesson produced excellent attitudes and behaviour from students of all abilities. Similarly, outstanding teaching in a Year 9 science lesson resulted in very good response and learning from a group of students with special educational needs. Where teaching is less interesting and challenging some students find it hard to maintain concentration throughout the lesson. In a small minority of lessons this sometimes leads to a few students exhibiting immature behaviour which inhibits learning. Outside lessons, attitudes and behaviour are good. The school has a calm, welcoming atmosphere and students move around in a relaxed yet orderly manner. Students are polite and co-operative and readily chat to visitors and offer them help.

19. Behaviour is now generally good. Students themselves perceive it to be good and they are very appreciative of the enormous improvements that have taken place over the past year. Instances of disruptive behaviour do occur but students know when they do wrong and feel the sanctions imposed are fair. Exclusions are regarded as a last resort. Last year there were only three permanent exclusions compared with twenty-four in 2000 - 2001, and the number of fixed term exclusions was almost halved over the same period. Occasional bullying is swiftly dealt with. There is no sign of harassment or racism; on the contrary the school is an excellent example of multi-racial harmony. Students' relationships with the teachers are very good and inter student relationships are also good. Students responded very well to the theme for the week *helping hands*, and examples of their respect for the values, feelings and beliefs of their peers were evident in assemblies, lessons and in communal areas.

20. Students appreciate the range of extra-curricular activities available and are proud of others' success, for example winning the Slough schools *Poetry Slam* competition. Students are mature and sensible when they accept responsibilities, for example as librarians, serving on the school council or, in Year 10, as peer mentors. They are proud of

their own achievements, both personal and academic, and readily applaud the successes of others.

21. There has been a huge improvement in attendance during 2001 - 2002 compared with the previous year and since the last inspection. The rate rose from 82.7 per cent in 2000 - 2001 to 87.5 per cent last year which is still below average. Attendance is almost 91 per cent this term. As the attendance rate for the last full year was still well below the national average for secondary schools, work should continue to sustain the current improvement. There is also rather a lax attitude to punctuality, especially by Year 10 students, in the morning. Punctuality to lessons during the day is generally satisfactory but there is room for improvement.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

22. The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 10 is now good overall and results in learning that is also good overall. The school has made a great investment in time and effort to address difficulties in recruiting and training subject specialist teachers over the past year and the benefit shows in a marked improvement in teaching since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching was good or better in two thirds of lessons seen throughout the school, and at least satisfactory in almost all. Overall almost a fifth of lessons were very good or excellent with a marginally higher proportion seen in Year 10 than in Years 7 to 9. Only a very small proportion was unsatisfactory or poor, compared to a quarter at the last inspection. An emphasis on both managing students' behaviour to create the right conditions for learning and on matching the work to students' abilities is making a clear contribution to their progress and achievement.

23. Most teachers have a good command of subject knowledge which is often coupled with a secure understanding of how students learn. In the better lessons they use their knowledge to plan thoroughly, including clear objectives and activities that are carefully sequenced to engage students' interest and maintain their involvement. For example in Year 10 work on sound, the science teacher used demonstrations of different aspects to ensure there was no misunderstanding. Visual aids and demonstrations are also used effectively in French and art where they enhance all students' learning, however, there is not sufficient use made of ICT to support learning in lessons.

24. Where teachers are clear about how they expect students to behave and what they are expected to learn, this in turn leads to a purposeful atmosphere in the classroom that is conducive to learning. Such lessons are often taught with good timing and an enthusiastic approach that leads to good pace and momentum. Students are well aware of what is expected of them and they are well motivated by enthusiastic presentation. For example, in a Year 10 lesson on *Romeo and Juliet* expectations of how students should behave were very clear, and reinforced effectively. All students are given work which challenges them, for example they respond well to the demands made of them in well-planned ICT lessons.

25. The good teaching reflects the importance given to fostering productive working relationships with students. Students who experience difficulties are dealt with sensitively and appropriately, and this helps them maintain interest and concentration. For example, in religious education lessons they are encouraged to express opinions knowing they will be valued.

26. However well lessons are generally planned, there are weaknesses, particularly a lack of variety or inappropriate activities, in some. Unsatisfactory aspects of teaching are characterised by ineffective management of students when they misbehave and do little work. The one-hour lesson is a long time for some students because many have short

concentration spans and are easily distracted. They easily lose the thread of their work and chatter to their friends. Where, for example, they spend too long on a single task, as in a mathematics lesson, boredom sets in, they lose concentration and learning suffers. In a poor science lesson for example, the content of the lesson about atomic structure was pitched at too high a level for the students' very limited understanding. In turn their behaviour deteriorated, it was not managed effectively and learning was poor.

27. Teachers check learning by using good, probing questioning, such as in oral work in French, and by competent day-to-day marking of work done in lessons and at home. Students' learning is consolidated where there are good plenary sessions at the end of lessons, for example in geography, but more often plenary work is inconsistent and often does not relate back to the purpose of the lesson objectives so making a review of progress insecure. Students have a good knowledge of how they are progressing and they are given worthwhile targets which helps to reinforce their learning. However, the new comprehensive assessment system, which has recently been developed, is not yet used consistently to plan for differing ability groups in lessons although some good practice has begun, for example in mathematics.

28. Strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy skills throughout the curriculum are underdeveloped. Tactics such as the display of specialist key words, and using writing frames to help to structure writing, are used effectively to promote writing skills. Care is taken by some teachers to choose texts that match the reading ages of the students in the class. However, these practices are not consistent throughout, and teachers have differing levels of expertise. Few subjects contribute to the development of numeracy aside from students' improved skills developed through mental work and data handling in mathematics. Examples such as gathering data and using graphs in science, measuring and cutting in design technology, and map work and interpretation of tables in geography, are all important but they are not part of a coordinated approach that is clearly needed.

29. Students with special educational needs are successfully taught almost entirely in classes alongside other students in the school. In the better lessons, teachers make good use of their individual education plans to help structure lessons. For example, an excellent science lesson took place where the teacher ensured the involvement by a Year 9 class, many of whom have special educational needs, by use of varied and relevant activities about the solar system, and a lively style. However, IEPs could be used more productively and good practice in departments such as English, mathematics and science deserves to be shared. Effective arrangements for setting students based upon assessments of their ability allows lower attaining students who are taught in *Diamond* groups to have fewer teachers and more help from Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). These students make good progress in most subjects and excellent progress in science.

30. Some students are withdrawn from some lessons where they work diligently and improve their levels of literacy and numeracy. Teaching in the LINK and CONNECT facilities is also effective in helping students who have emotional and behavioural difficulties improve their personal development and, with support, their ability to cope with mainstream lessons.

31. Students with EAL are taught well and make good progress as a result of effective support in mainstream lessons or in withdrawal groups for those with greater learning needs.

32. The most able gifted and talented students make appropriate progress in subjects such as English and physical education where they are identified and set suitably challenging activities. However, a school-wide approach to identifying and providing for students' various gifts and talents is only at a very early stage of development.

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

33. The curriculum provides a satisfactory quality and range of learning opportunities that are extended by a wide range of quality extra-curricular and sporting activities. Enhanced opportunities for personal and social education make for good provision in Year 10. However, the school does not meet its National Curriculum obligations on two counts. A shortage of a music specialist teacher has led to the school arranging a very good enrichment programme of activities taught by outside agencies, but it does not cover the full range of music experiences. Secondly, collective worship does not take place on a daily basis for everyone. Otherwise, the school effectively meets its statutory requirements for the National Curriculum subjects in Years 7 to 10. Students follow a common core in Years 7 to 9 with additional lessons in drama, information and communication technology, and personal and social education. The pattern for year 10 students is enhanced with optional subjects that include GCSE single or dual award science and leisure and tourism for the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ).

34. The school makes good provision for students' personal and social education, including sex education, in Years 7 to 9. It is enhanced for Year 10 with religious education, citizenship, health and fitness, home management, and careers education. The modular programme, which leads to the ASDAN life skills certification, is well suited to students' aptitudes. The programme is being enhanced through links with outside agencies. For example, Year 10 students have taken the first steps leading towards opportunities for community service by meeting with the manager of the local Family Centre. Similarly, a programme of special events, for example safety issues in Year 7, *it's a crime* in Year 8, and political literacy in Year 9 with the support of a local MP, all make an important contribution.

35. The curricular provision for students who have special educational needs is very good. There is a whole school commitment towards providing an inclusive education. Teachers work hard and successfully to ensure that the school's principles of equality of access and opportunity for all are fully in place. Careful setting arrangements in each year enable the creation of smaller *diamond* classes in which students receive intensive support. In Year 7 the diamond class has a reduced number of teachers, each teaching several subjects, which has helped the students become established in the school. Elsewhere most students with SEN have lessons in mainstream classes with appropriate support.

36. The LINK is a support arrangement for Years 7 to 9. Curricular and social opportunities are offered to enable students who are experiencing behavioural difficulties to work in a different learning environment for a fixed period of time before reintegrating back into their classes. A similar arrangement, called CONNECT, allows students to operate on a modified timetable for 3 weeks before they reintegrate in their classes. Both arrangements take a constructive approach to promote students' engagement in their learning and are viewed positively by those involved. Withdrawal out-of-lessons, and during morning registration and after school, to the learning support area helps those with mainly literacy needs.

37. New approaches to including literacy throughout the curriculum are yet to make an impact on students' standards, and a coordinated approach to incorporating numeracy has not begun. The school is now well equipped to support information and communication technology, and students' skills have greatly improved since the previous inspection. However, there are insufficient opportunities in other subject areas for students to use and apply ICT skills to support their learning.

38. A good range of field trips, sporting activities, visits and subject-based activities, enriches the curriculum. For example, visits to Docklands, a coalmine, and the Imperial War

Museum supports the work in geography and history. Theatre visits are a regular feature of the school calendar and enhance English and cultural development. The range and quality of extra-curricular activities provided by the school are good. Enthusiastic groups of students support frequent lunchtime and evening activities that include the use of the library for homework and revision study.

39. Strong and positive links with the community are excellent. The school works in very close partnership with local secondary schools to support specific arrangements, for example for music provision, and for monitoring the education of students in Year 11. The school has strong links with partner primary schools. Year 6 students have several informal and enjoyable opportunities to visit the school before they begin as students, backed by a detailed and effective monitoring system documenting their attainment on entry that enables their progress to be tracked.

40. Work-related education is good. Effective and informative activities for careers education, both within the school and the local community, are planned into the curriculum from Year 7 onwards. The careers team has grown since September and is effective, for example in offering a *Careers Quality Award*. The profile of the work related curriculum has once again taken on a greater significance with the reintroduction of Year 10 in the school, with plans made for the programme of work experience. There are appropriate links with a range of relevant agencies, colleges and employers. The careers library is regularly updated and contains several computers with relevant software. Not all software is available on the school network but the broadband access to the Internet increases the range of resources available to students in all years.

41. The community makes a very good contribution to the students' learning. Local firms take students on for work experience and in addition there is a variety of projects making an effective contribution. For instance *Writing for Industry* was a shared project, with the EAZ and various companies, which aimed to develop students writing skills. Improvement to the internal décor has revitalised the school through a most effective collaboration with local firms. The involvement of students with business personnel in designing and decorating classrooms has resulted in a better working environment and led to significant improvement in attitudes to the school.

42. Overall, the provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The school policy document sets out very clear aims and identifies effective ways in which the school can contribute to the students' development in these areas. All departments are making at least a satisfactory contribution and the great majority are making a good contribution. However at present there are no departmental policies in place and this could be an area for further development. The improvement reported at the previous inspection has been maintained.

43. The provision for the students' spiritual development is satisfactory. Although the school does not provide a daily act of corporate worship for students the assemblies are very well planned and coordinated. They are effectively linked to a weekly theme, which is reinforced in the form tutor periods and often in lessons as well. Students are encouraged to participate; for example a group of Year 9 students presented a dramatic enactment of a story, which illustrated the theme for the week. The contribution from subject departments is less strong. Religious education, English, drama and history all make a good contribution but those from science and art are unsatisfactory. A good example is found in Year 8 history where students study the values and religious beliefs of the North American native peoples and compare them with European attitudes.

44. The students' moral development is good. The school has a well-established behaviour policy, which is effectively implemented by all departments. Students are taught the difference between right and wrong and to help and respect each other. Most subjects make an effective contribution in this way. Some subjects also deal with moral issues as they arise in the curriculum. For example, slavery and the holocaust in history, moral issues raised by various uses for the Internet in information and communication technology, and moral decisions that characters had to make in drama. The personal and social education programme makes a strong contribution with units of work dealing with a wide range of issues, including such matters as drugs and bullying. On the other hand, in science lessons insufficient attention is paid to the moral issues which arise.

45. Provision for social development is good. In lessons the students are encouraged to work in pairs and groups. In drama, for example, there are a lot of opportunities for students to work together in small groups to prepare a piece of improvisation. Links with the community are explored to give the students experience of collaborating with adults. A good example of this was the redecoration project in which the students worked with teams from local companies to redecorate parts of the school. Extra-curricular activities such as sports, drama and music have an input in helping the students to develop positive relationships. Good social development takes place during the many out of school visits that are arranged such as to museums, exhibitions, Hampton Court and Windsor Castle. The School Council provides a practical and effective way of introducing students to the democratic process and is valued by the students.

46. The school's contribution to the students' cultural development is good and makes a clear contribution to preparing students for living in a culturally diverse society. For example, in English the students study literature both from their own and from other cultures. Similarly, in food technology, examples are taken from a variety of cultures. In geography, students study other societies as well as their own. In art the students study pictures by great artists, such as Van Gogh as well as the art of non-western cultures such as aboriginal work. In religious education the students are taught to identify similarities and differences between the main religions and to appreciate the rituals and customs of other cultures. Cultural aspects are an integral part of the curriculum in French and the display work in the department celebrates them. The creative arts subjects provide opportunities for students to see professional performances, both in and out of school. They participate in arts workshops, a good example being the visit of the Royal Northern College of Music Opera Workshop.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

47. The school makes very good provision for the personal support and welfare of its students. The ethos of the school is warm and caring yet orderly and disciplined. Parents are pleased with the welcoming atmosphere and the huge improvements that they perceive have taken place over the last year.

48. Policies relating to behaviour and anti-bullying are particularly effective. Points are given for good or improved work or behaviour which can be aggregated by students to earn worthwhile gifts. They offer an imaginative and effective incentive to do well. Behaviour is very well managed and this has been vital in re-establishing the school as an orderly community. The establishment of the Link and Connect facilities, and the advice of an outside behaviour consultant give valuable extra support to control behaviour. They provide vital help to students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, some of whom might otherwise be in danger of exclusion.

49. Attendance is scrupulously monitored and, although rates are well below the national average, last year saw a big improvement. There are good strategies to curtail internal

truancy and the school has good support from its education welfare officer. Punctuality, however, is less well monitored and form tutors are not consistent as to exactly when students arriving during registration are deemed to be late.

50. Health and safety issues are given high priority. Precautions in place exceed statutory requirements. First aid provision is very good. There is a designated medical room where students can have private consultations with the school nurse.

51. The induction programme for Year 7 students is very good. They start the autumn term one day early, which helps them to settle in quickly and easily. Form tutors and year co-ordinators know their students well and are sensitive to their personal circumstances and difficulties. Much time is given to pastoral matters. This is time well spent and necessary to advance students' progress. Form tutors carefully monitor personal development. Importance is placed on raising students' self-esteem through praise of achievements both in and out of school. Certificates and awards are recorded and help to make up the records of achievement, which students take with them when they leave. Overall the inclusive care and concern given to each individual student at Beechwood is very good.

52. Since the last inspection the school has made clear progress in developing and implementing good procedures for assessing and monitoring students' progress. The school has a clear and comprehensive arrangement designed to enable teachers to track students' progress on a regular basis that is appropriately based on formal assessment once a term. Attainment is measured against a points system, effectively linked closely to National Curriculum levels, which lead to short term, achievable goals. However, assessment data is not yet used to good effect across the curriculum. The valuable information is not, as yet, used consistently to plan for progress in lessons on a day-to-day basis but good practice takes place in mathematics, information and communication technology, history and geography. In the majority of subjects teachers refer to National Curriculum levels in their marking, and students are aware of what they mean. However, in art and in religious education teachers are unsure of the levels themselves so that they are not being used effectively to improve standards.

53. Students discuss their progress with subject teachers and form tutors and are required to set themselves realistic targets for improvement. Data is used effectively to identify underachievement and to follow up any cause for concern. Form tutors or subject coordinators provide mentoring for students whose progress has slowed or who are not achieving as well as they should be. Results are comprehensively reported to students and parents.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

54. The effectiveness of links with parents is satisfactory. Parents interviewed were happy with educational provision in the school and are very enthusiastic about the welcoming atmosphere and all the recent improvements. Very few parents attended the pre-inspection meeting but 31 per cent of parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and these were broadly supportive. Overall parents have good views about the school. Three main concerns were raised by a minority: whether teachers give the right amount of homework; whether parents are kept well informed about how their children are getting on; and whether the school works closely with the parents. Inspectors found some parents, particularly those with students in Year 10, have some justification for their concern about homework. However, inspectors found no justification for the other two concerns. Parents are very well informed about students' progress. Parents' consultation evenings are well supported. Form tutors are well briefed by subject teachers and individual appointments last twenty minutes. Information in student planners, interim and full reports is of very good quality, giving details

about what students know, understand and can do together with clear guidance about how to improve. Teachers spend much time telephoning and meeting parents. They respond to parents' concerns and quickly make contact if they are worried about a child and also when a child has performed particularly well.

55. The quality of information provided for parents is good. Helpful booklets are published for each year and these include information about the curriculum to be studied. The monthly newsletters are very readable with an attractive format. The prospectus provides a wealth of information, but its loose pages easily become detached and it would be more readable if it were somewhat condensed. Students' planners are well used, regularly checked and provide a very useful communication channel.

56. A very small, committed group, which would like to involve more parents, runs the Parent Teacher Association. They help at school events but find most parents are only supportive of events directly related to their child. There is little actual fund raising for the school as most events just balance their costs. Overall parents now have positive views about the school but are reluctant to become further involved.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

57. The head teacher is giving the school excellent leadership. Her commitment, conscientiousness and strong sense of purpose have been significant factors in making vital improvements to the school. Key managers in the school have clearly described roles and responsibilities, which they carry out diligently and effectively. The head and senior management teachers, who have only been in their posts for a year, have fostered a strong team spirit amongst the staff. They have worked hard and successfully together to bring order to the school and create a supportive climate for learning. Together they provide very good leadership and management. These are developments that are strongly valued by parents and the local business community.

58. The governors are keen to promote the development and interests of the school. Experienced governors are actively involved in the work of the governing body. Although the governing body is not complete because there are vacancies for parent governors, other governors take an effective role in strategic management and decision-making in both meetings of the full body and through the work of sub-committees. These aspects of governors' work are carried out very well and show a significant improvement upon the situation at the time of the previous inspection.

59. There is a good accord between the head teacher and chair of governors. Governors place a high degree of reliance upon the LEA and senior staff for information and this trust is not misplaced. Governors are well aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, particularly through receiving reports in the case discussions held with senior LEA personnel each term, from the head teacher and senior staff on aspects of their work, as well as from less formal contacts. They have a very good understanding of how a thorough analysis of attainment, attendance and financial information is related to aspects of the *Success Plan* (school development plan). However, governors have only a limited first hand knowledge of the evidence for improvement. In particular there is a need for governors to see more of the work of the school for themselves, and to link this through a structured approach in their meetings that will enhance judgements of the evidence for progress. In this way the governing body should usefully extend its knowledge of the quality and standards of work and increase confidence in its opinions.

60. The chair of governors shares his vision and determination for improvement with the other governors. The governors have shown a high level of commitment which has been

important in helping create a stable foundation on which to raise the school from its critical situation two years ago to its present level of effectiveness with a capacity for further improvement. Nevertheless, they are not meeting all their statutory obligations with regard to the National Curriculum at present. In particular, arrangements should be put in place for music, and for the daily act of collective worship.

61. The school management and staff make good use of information and communication technology to record and analyse a range of information. Optical mark readers are used to record attendance data, which is then analysed quickly to enable staff to monitor day-to-day attendance and plot trends. ICT resources for both curriculum and management use have increased significantly in recent years. The school has a broadband link to the Internet for fast data transfer. Almost half the teachers have completed their *New Opportunities Fund* training to use ICT and plans are in place for the others. Teachers are using ICT more as a tool for management and analysis, for example sharing assessment data, but the full impact has yet to be felt on the cross curricular use of ICT to promote students' learning.

62. There is a good match of staff to suit the demands of the curriculum except for the shortage of expertise in music. Support teachers are well deployed across a variety of areas including the library, special educational needs and in science and design technology. The induction programme is very good and supports the high number of teachers in training and those new to the school very well. Very good monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching are made possible through a rigorous strategy of teacher appraisal. This is already fully in place for staff with new arrangements now in place for the head teacher. Strategies are very good for continuing the professional development of staff, and ensure training needs are met wherever possible. The emphasis upon raising the quality of teaching and learning has led to clear improvement since the previous inspection.

63. The quality of accommodation is good, with plenty of space available to teach specialist areas of the curriculum, although there is a significant proportion of surplus places. Much of the school has been recently refurbished. Double-glazed windows that have been installed throughout, newly furnished science laboratories, and bright and cheerful colour schemes in classrooms and toilets that were selected by students make the school very attractive. Students value and respect these improvements. However, windows in some rooms lack blinds and direct sunlight can lead to discomfort or make viewing projection or computer screens difficult.

64. Resources for learning are good in most subject areas with large selections of video and CD-Rom materials available, in addition to other equipment and books. These are supplemented by good facilities in the school library and recently installed computer networks. The ratio of machines to students is now much better than average. The quality of resources for art, however, is only satisfactory where inadequacies in the quality and quantity of visual aids are adversely affecting the learning of some students.

65. The schools priorities for development have been clearly set out in the *Success Plan* by the governing body, in consultation with the head teacher and the local education authority. The focus is on providing an improving quality of education to all students, with improved achievement and rising standards. The priorities for action are entirely appropriate and focus directly upon improving teaching and attainment, using assessment information to improve teaching, and creating an achievement culture in the school. Arrangements have been made through the LEA to ensure that funding of students who are educated at the local college does not work to the disadvantage of students who remain in the school. Expenditure is closely and effectively monitored at monthly intervals, and through a termly case discussion involving all interested parties which reviews the progress of the success plan and the costs incurred.

66. There has been no formal financial audit of the school in the recent past, but the external auditors have provided useful support and advice in the implementation of proper financial procedures, which are unobtrusive, effective and responsive to need. In turn the head teacher and financial manager have successfully implemented the advice.

67. Procedures for authorising and monitoring expenditure are carefully designed to ensure best value for money and the actual expenditure for 2001 - 2002 fell well within the anticipated sum. Specific grants are appropriately allocated and the school ensures that all spending decisions are adequately monitored and evaluated. Budgets are periodically reviewed against the relevant action plans. In relation to other principles of best value, the school has challenged itself to provide a better service to students and their parents, and has actively sought their views through questionnaires and the school council. The improvement in the ethos of the school, and in the self-esteem of its students, indicates that it has been largely successful.

68. In recognition of the particular needs of the school, the LEA has authorised significant additional expenditure from its school improvement grant in the last financial year, and has indicated a willingness to continue this arrangement in the current year, subject to clear progress against the action plan. Priorities have included the improvement of the learning environment, behaviour management, and raising standards. The clear improvement since the last inspection in each of these areas provides good evidence that spending decisions have been made wisely and that the school is giving satisfactory value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

69. The school has implemented several important initiatives in to raise achievement, particularly improving leadership and management, teaching, management of behaviour, attendance, monitoring students' progress and evaluating the work of the school. They are all beginning to take effect and attention to them should be sustained. In addition, the school should plan and act to:

1. Raise standards of attainment, especially in mathematics and science. In particular to focus upon those aspects needed for higher levels and grades in the work of students expected to reach Level 5 and above in Year 9 and grades A*-C in GCSE in all subjects.

Paragraphs 2,3,4,6,7,8,9,10,14,26,97,110,111,119,120,121,122,173,174

2. Develop and implement school-wide strategies for improving literacy, and numeracy skills by exploiting opportunities in all subjects; and improving ICT capability through increasing students' knowledge of different applications and the use of ICT to support learning.

Paragraphs 11,12,13,,23,28,37,61,108,116,117,121,163

3. Make greater use of assessment information to aid lesson planning, especially to help match levels of work to groups of students with different abilities.

Paragraphs 27,52

4. Improve attendance and punctuality further. In particular, to enlist the support of parents both to reduce students' sporadic absence and to ensure full commitment to meeting examination coursework requirements.

Paragraphs 21,49,56,88

5. Meet National Curriculum requirements: in music by the appointment of suitably qualified teaching staff; and in the daily act of collective worship by ensuring a full and consistent contribution to assembly themes in form, year and school assemblies.

Paragraphs 33,43,60,62,172

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

1 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

70. Beechwood school has a well above average proportion of students on the SEN register, including a higher than usual number with statements of special need. It is successfully putting in place a variety of structures to ensure the best support for those with specific learning needs and equally good provision for those with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The Learning Support department was established in 2000 and many strands of its provision are quite new. For example, withdrawal to the LINK and CONNECT facilities for those needing emotional and behavioural support in Years 7 to 9 and Year 10 respectively is already having a successful effect.

71. Although the school has comprehensive assessment information on all its students, data is not yet routinely extracted to provide information about the examination performance of students with special needs. The school does carefully track the progress of those attached to LINK and CONNECT and in the Diamond groups, but the complex arrangement for Years 10 and 11 in 2001-2 has delayed the introduction of a results analysis. The school makes very good inclusive provision. Evidence from work seen indicates that students with SEN show significant improvement over time at all levels. They make good progress in the majority of lessons, and very good progress in some, for example in physical education. Progress is also good in the LINK and CONNECT areas and in the small withdrawal lessons.

72. Students who are taught outside the mainstream lessons generally behave well despite the fact that many are referred for behavioural and emotional reasons. Where students are reluctant to cooperate initially teachers and support assistants demonstrate great skill and patience in winning them over by maintaining an environment in which students are expected to abide by clear rules and standards of behaviour.

73. Students show very positive attitudes much of the time, enjoying their work and thriving in a calm and non-confrontational atmosphere. Those withdrawn from lessons gain much confidence from the one-to-one teaching. Students also gain confidence and motivation from involvement in special events. For example, in the Year 7 diamond group coffee morning where they are visibly encouraged by the reactions to the progress they are making when they entertain teachers, parents and guests. In mainstream lessons students behave well and respond positively to the challenges offered them. The good and sometimes very good help given by learning support assistants is important in enabling students with SEN to play a full part in lessons and demonstrate a positive attitude.

74. Teaching in mainstream lessons is generally good, and occasionally excellent, leading to students with SEN making good progress. Specialist teaching is good, drawing upon knowledge, technique, patience and understanding. In withdrawal lessons in the learning support area students are encouraged to work diligently and improve their levels of literacy and numeracy. Those students who have emotional and behavioural difficulties receive high quality support in the LINK area for a limited time where they follow a PSE programme designed to help them cope with the requirements of the normal curriculum. The newly created CONNECT facility is now successfully supporting Year 10 students finding difficulty with the 14 – 16 curriculum. The arrangement is having a positive effect on learning and the great majority of the students involved display positive attitudes to their work.

75. Good deployment of Learning Support Assistants ensures that students with statements receive appropriate help. This effective support is excellent in science and good in most subjects. However, teaching would benefit further if more guidance could be given to

share the best practice seen on working with learning support assistants. The Learning Support department offers clear and useful individual educational plans (IEPs) which contain good information on needs, targets and strategies. However, effective practice in use, in English, maths and science for example, now should be shared more widely.

76. The school has a very clear and successful philosophy of inclusion. Students with SEN are fully integrated into all aspects of school life and have access to the full curriculum. Time spent in any of the support areas does not interfere with their learning. Links are strong between school and East Berkshire College where Year 11 students, who are now part of the college community, are effectively supported by a range of outside agencies as well as the school.

77. The school meets the statutory requirements for provision outlined in students' statements of special educational needs, which is a significant undertaking for such a large proportion of the school population. Students are carefully assessed on entry and identified accurately for support. The new Code of Practice is in place although the learning support department should ensure it is carrying the rest of the school with it, for example in the use of IEPs and differentiation. The SEN register is up to date, reviewed regularly and revised. The progress of those on the SEN register is carefully tracked and reviews of IEPs and statements are carefully planned, dated and carried out.

78. Parents of students on the SEN register are kept informed of all developments regarding support and progress. They are invited to all reviews and many attend. Parents are very supportive and full of praise for the very good provision for learning that their children are receiving. Year 11 students benefit from parents visiting the college to help with reading.

79. Subject departments liaise informally but well with the SEN department, but the quality of the already very good provision might be improved by a more formal system of meetings with departments.

80. Thoroughly detailed policy documents form an important part of the school's guidance for teachers. Two coordinators (joint SENCOs) work very well together and the division of labour is appropriate and successful in moving the school forward in its provision for special education needs. They are very ably supported by a committed and well-trained group of specialist teachers and LSAs. There is very good liaison between the department, the LEA and a range of outside agencies. The effectiveness of provision is regularly reviewed reflecting very good management and an awareness of future requirements.

81. In September 2002 there were 90 students with English as an additional language (EAL). EAL students in Years 7 to 10, come from nine linguistic backgrounds, but mostly Punjabi. About one in five of the students is at an early stage of English language acquisition. Support is well organised and thorough. Students' needs are clearly identified and priorities set for support, which is generally given in mainstream classes. There are also withdrawal groups and EAZ funded after-school classes two evenings a week, which effectively help those with greater learning needs. Students share the activities of all other students including enjoying a wide range of visits, such as to the cinema, science museum and Cutty Sark.

82. Good information on the problems faced by EAL students, and recommendations on how to surmount them, reflects a very positive and caring attitude. Early stage EAL students have Individual Action Plans that include targets in listening, reading, writing and speaking and a time period for the achievement. In turn, students are well supported in every year, depending on their needs including those in Year 11 who are provided for through an outreach programme. Teaching is good, and leads to good progress. Though attainment levels are low in English, students are well catered for and their learning is helped by good

behaviour and very positive attitudes they exhibit in their work. For example, a Year 9 student, making great strides in reading, commented that he and other EAL students are well supported by the school.

2 PROVISION IN YEAR 11

83. Shortly after the previous inspection in 1998 the leadership of the school began to breakdown, which was not successfully resolved. In turn, a high number of teachers left the school and replacements could not be recruited. During the academic year 2000 – 2001 the shortage became so acute that there was insufficient expertise for teaching the curriculum in Years 10 and 11. Children were sent home and the school was, in effect, working for only part of each week. Over the same period, order was lost and poor behaviour became out of control. The situation led to the local education authority (LEA) and governors to act to protect the education of students. They proposed a range of valid alternative arrangements and consulted fully with parents, community groups and other schools in Slough. A clear consensus to help formulate a solution emerged amongst all the schools and the college.

84. The LEA's decision, determined in conjunction with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), had two components that were implemented between April and September 2001. First, they appointed a new, permanent head teacher who, working with the existing and some new staff, set about re-establishing the school for students in Years 7 to 9 from September 2001. Second, all Year 10 and 11 students transferred to other institutions. After careful interviews with students and their parents to take aspirations into account, most went to grammar and other schools or East Berkshire College of further education, and a few to alternative provision in the referral unit. Their move took place in June 2001, to begin new or fit into GCSE courses in September 2001.

85. The LEA and Beechwood School, in partnership with the other institutions have diligently monitored the progress of these students. GCSE attainments, collated from all the schools at the end of the summer term 2002, had fallen from the previous year. Nevertheless, over 60 per cent of the Year 11 cohort chose to remain in full time post 16 education, either in their new school sixth forms or in the further education college, which is above average. Thirty percent entered employment or training schemes.

86. Interviews with head teachers, and a sample of ex-Beechwood students now in Year 11 in another school, indicates a much more settled position. Students and their new classmates embarked upon GCSE work at the same time. Each school has taken care to ensure that they are fully integrated into school life. They have targets for achievement based upon their present work and their progress is monitored and supported according to each school's procedures and practice. The collated GCSE target for 2003 is for 22 per cent to gain five or more A*-C grades which could be exceeded, based upon the Fischer Trust's analysis of prior attainment.

87. Arrangements at East Berkshire College are different from those in a conventional school setting. An early evaluation after one term indicated that more careful guidance was essential to help students cope with college life, and a better balance between academic and practical activities was needed.

88. Students now in Year 11 have been helped develop better time management skills that are helping them cope with the responsibilities and freedoms associated with the college day. Their attendance is much improved compared with that of Year 11 last year.

89. The curriculum was appropriately modified to suit, and continues in the current year. All students follow a core of English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology, supplemented by courses in drama, business studies, sociology, and extended vocational work. A rigorous tutorial and mentoring arrangement ensures that students' progress is followed and that they receive effective academic and personal guidance and support which is backed by a useful award system that recognises success at all levels. Hobby pursuits in art, ceramics and textiles followed along with other students give increased tactile experiences, and these with opportunities for sport give balance to the curriculum and help integration into the college community.

90. The ex-Beechwood students have their own base at the Windsor site where most teaching occurs. College staff undertake much of the teaching there, but it is satisfactorily supplemented part time by some teaching from the school where appropriate expertise is not immediately available, for example in science. The foundation vocational business studies course that was part of the college teaching last year in Year 10, is effectively taught in Year 11 by a Beechwood School teacher using the specialist facilities at the Langley site. Other specialist facilities for vocational courses, such as in hairdressing, motor vehicle maintenance and construction, are exploited at Langley in an extended day in which the students voluntarily take part.

91. A high proportion of students have special educational needs, particularly in literacy and behaviour, which are effectively helped by committed learning support assistants and by visiting parents. Good analysis of students needs has been used to find effective teaching styles. For example, support from the LEA's numeracy consultant has improved ways for numeracy skills to be further developed.

92. The comprehensive personal and social education programme is supplemented by a good range of extra-curricular activities which enrich the students' experience. Visits to the theatre and ballet have been complemented by outdoor activities arranged with the army. Participation in community service related to drug education is notable. For example, four students have been trained in peer-drug-counselling skills and their work has been held up as exemplary practice by the local police with the Home Office.

93. The LEA's decision to take this course of action was unavoidable. It has been supported fully through the remarkable cooperation between all the partners in secondary education in the town and their total willingness to help. The availability of places, facilities and expertise involved the college working in partnership with the school. The effectiveness of the partnership between the college and the school is such that, together with the oversight given by the LEA, the decision taken has been the best alternative. The provision being made is entirely reasonable, and the students are benefiting from the opportunities available.

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 | 56 |

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

| | Excellent | Very good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|------------|-----------|-----------|------|--------------|----------------|------|-----------|
| Number | 3 | 17 | 51 | 32 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Percentage | 3 | 16 | 48 | 30 | 2 | 1 | 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* | Y7 – Y10* |
|---|-----------|
| Number of pupils on the school's roll* | 411 |
| Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals | 146 |

*Year 11 comprises 80 pupils who are currently integrated into 11 other institutions - schools, a further education college and a referral unit.

| Special educational needs | Y7 – Y10 |
|---|----------|
| Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs | 16 |
| Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register | 164 |

| English as an additional language | No of pupils |
|---|--------------|
| Number of pupils with English as an additional language | 90 |

| Pupil mobility in the last school year | No of pupils |
|--|--------------|
| Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission | 36 |
| Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving | 28 |

Attendance

Authorised absence

| | % |
|-------------|------|
| School data | 12.9 |

Unauthorised absence

| | % |
|-------------|-----|
| School data | 3.3 |

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| National comparative data | 8.1 |
|---------------------------|-----|

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| National comparative data | 1.1 |
|---------------------------|-----|

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 (Year 9)

| | | | | |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|
| Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
| | 2001 | 48 | 36 | 84 |

| National Curriculum Test/Task Results | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|--|----------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above | Boys | 6 | 15 | 19 |
| | Girls | 12 | 11 | 11 |
| | Total | 18 | 26 | 30 |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above | School | 21(18) | 31(27) | 36(30) |
| | National | 64(63) | 66(65) | 66(59) |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above | School | 5(2) | 6(6) | 0(4) |
| | National | 31(28) | 43(42) | 34(30) |

| Teachers' Assessments | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above | Boys | 17 | 18 | 20 |
| | Girls | 17 | 11 | 18 |
| | Total | 34 | 29 | 38 |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above | School | 40(38) | 35(43) | 45(54) |
| | National | 65(64) | 68(66) | 64(62) |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above | School | 13(7) | 6(3) | 5(19) |
| | National | 31(31) | 42(39) | 33(29) |

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

| | | | | |
|---|------|------|-------|-------|
| Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year* | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
| | 2001 | 55 | 51 | 106 |

| GCSE results* | | 5 or more grades A* to C | 5 or more grades A*-G | 1 or more grades A*-G |
|---|----------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified | Boys | 1 | 41 | 47 |
| | Girls | 5 | 35 | 42 |
| | Total | 6 | 76 | 89 |
| Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified | School | 6(15) | 72(78) | 84(89) |
| | National | 48(47) | 91(91) | 96(96) |

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

| GCSE results | | GCSE point score |
|-------------------------------|----------|------------------|
| Average point score per pupil | School | 19.1 (23) |
| | National | 39 (38.4) |

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

| Vocational qualifications | Number | % success rate |
|--|----------|----------------|
| Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied | School | n/a |
| | National | n/a |

*Year 11 in 2000 -1 comprised 106 pupils who were transferred into 11 other institutions - schools, a further education college and a referral unit – where they were educated and entered for GCSE examinations in 2002 by their respective school or college.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

| Categories used in the Annual School Census | No of pupils on roll | Number of fixed period exclusions | Number of permanent exclusions |
|---|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| White – British | 345 | 50 | 3 |
| White – Irish | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| White – any other White background | 15 | 7 | 0 |
| Mixed – White and Black Caribbean | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| Mixed – White and Black African | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| Mixed – White and Asian | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Mixed – any other mixed background | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Asian or Asian British - Indian | 43 | 2 | 0 |
| Asian or Asian British - Pakistani | 29 | 0 | 0 |
| Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Black or Black British – Caribbean | 18 | 2 | 0 |
| Black or Black British – African | 18 | 4 | 0 |
| Black or Black British – any other Black background | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Chinese | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Any other ethnic group | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| No ethnic group recorded | 0 | 2 | 0 |

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y10

| | |
|--|------|
| Total number of qualified teachers (FTE) | 26 |
| Number of pupils per qualified teacher | 17.5 |

Education support staff: Y7 – Y10

| | |
|---|-----|
| Total number of education support staff | 13 |
| Total aggregate hours worked per week | 358 |

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y10

| | |
|---|----|
| Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes | 71 |
|---|----|

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y10

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Key Stage 3 | 20 |
| Key Stage 4 | 16 |

| | |
|----------------|-----------|
| Financial year | 2001-2002 |
|----------------|-----------|

| | £ |
|--|---------|
| Total income | 2405716 |
| Total expenditure | 2511147 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 5012 |
| Balance brought forward from previous year | -6640 |
| Balance carried forward to next year* | 0* |

FTE means full-time equivalent.

*Excess expenditure of £105,431 over income arises from additional costs of educating pupils in Years 10 and 11 in other schools - met entirely by LEA - no balance to carry forward.

Recruitment of teachers

| | |
|--|----|
| Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years | 29 |
| Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years | 21 |

| | |
|--|---|
| Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE) | 1 |
| 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 | 408 |
| Number of questionnaires returned | 124 |

Percentage of responses in each category

| | Strongly agree | Tend to agree | Tend to disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know |
|--|----------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|------------|
| My child likes school. | 40 | 51 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| My child is making good progress in school. | 35 | 44 | 10 | 1 | 7 |
| Behaviour in the school is good. | 32 | 40 | 10 | 3 | 11 |
| My child gets the right amount of work to do at home. | 24 | 41 | 13 | 9 | 10 |
| The teaching is good. | 28 | 52 | 2 | 3 | 10 |
| I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on. | 26 | 40 | 15 | 6 | 10 |
| I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. | 49 | 35 | 6 | 2 | 6 |
| The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best. | 52 | 35 | 5 | 2 | 4 |
| The school works closely with parents. | 30 | 35 | 18 | 2 | 13 |
| The school is well led and managed. | 34 | 47 | 6 | 2 | 9 |
| The school is helping my child become mature and responsible. | 31 | 47 | 7 | 2 | 11 |
| The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. | 28 | 34 | 10 | 2 | 23 |

Other issues raised by parents

- New staff and “atmosphere” leads to pupils being happy in school
- Several new parents cannot complete the questionnaire form but are happy with what they have seen so far
- Insufficient homework
- Insufficient supervision of the path outside the school gate misses misbehaviour and bullying
- No information about activities outside of lessons

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

ENGLISH

94. The quality of provision in English is **good**

Strengths

- Staffing is now stable with teachers having very good subject knowledge.
- Schemes of work have been rewritten to incorporate the new requirements of the National Literacy Strategy.
- In the majority of lessons, teachers have high expectations of what students can do and achieve, as well as how they will behave.
- All students achieve satisfactorily and many achieve well.

Areas for development

- Ensure that all teachers have the appropriate training to implement the Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy, in order to contribute to raising standards of literacy.
- Develop the English teaching team, so that good practice is shared and that satisfactory teaching becomes good or better.
- Develop the use of computers in the learning process.
- Continue to develop assessment procedures for Years 7 to 9, so that students readily understand what they need to do in order to improve, and ensure consistency of marking.

95. In the National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds in 2001 in English, results were very low when compared with the national average and also well below those of similar schools. Results in English, mathematics and science were comparable between 1999 and 2001, with some individual variations year by year. Results in 2002 rose considerably in English, with more than twice as many students gaining the expected level or better, than in 2001. These test results have dramatically reversed a slightly declining trend since 1999.

96. When students come into the school their attainment levels in English are well below the national average. They do, therefore, make at least satisfactory progress during the first three years, and there is evidence that nearly half of students progress well. The attainment gap between boys and girls was similar to the national picture, with girls outperforming boys.

97. In the English GCSE results in 2001, the number of students achieving an A*-C grade was very low compared with the national average, but only below that of similar schools. The English literature results were better than the national picture, but a much smaller group was entered than is usual. When compared with students' prior attainment, these English results represent satisfactory achievement. It is not possible to comment on the 2002 GCSE results as students were taught in other centres.

98. Standards of work seen during the inspection confirmed the rise in standards by the end of Year 9. Higher attaining students can write accurate pieces. They use their imaginations well when writing short stories, and they can adapt their writing for different purposes. The writing of lower attaining students tends to lack detail and, quite often, technical accuracy. All students are introduced to some skills of literary analysis and most are able to make straightforward judgements about writers' intentions. The majority of

students, with the exception of those in the early stage of learning English, can express their ideas orally quite confidently in informal situations, although their language is often fairly restricted and they rely over much on colloquial terms. Students in Year 10 are usually able to read aloud fluently, but hesitate when unfamiliar with words of many syllables. The higher attaining students are able to inject expression, with rhythm and intonation to portray characters, for example in work on *An Inspector Calls*. Their oral skills include contributing to discussion using appropriate vocabulary, but have difficulty in reading blank verse, such as in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

99. Teaching and learning are good across the school, and sometimes very good. Teachers have a good command of their subject, and they use their knowledge to challenge students to think deeply and to make connections between the use of language and writers' intentions. In a Year 9 lesson seen, the teacher was using a piece of her own autobiographical writing to challenge students to analyse a piece of text, and to demonstrate how to 'hook' a reader to generate interest. As a result of her knowledgeable demonstration, the students learnt well. The management of students' behaviour is a strength of the department. Teachers clearly set out their expectations of how students should behave and what their learning objectives are for the lesson. For example, the teacher coped with inappropriate interruptions effectively in a Year 10 group which was looking at the opening to *Romeo and Juliet*. She made her expectations of how they should behave very clear, and reinforced them throughout the lesson. All these strategies contributed to a positive climate for learning and enabled the students to make good gains in knowledge and understanding during the lesson. On the whole, teachers use a fairly limited range of teaching and learning methods. Targeted questions are well used, and teachers explain key points effectively, however there is scope to extend the number of techniques that actively involve students further (such as using role play, hot-seating, visual images and artefacts). This is likely to have a further impact on students' achievement. Those with special educational needs make progress in line with the rest of the class. Students who are at an early stage of learning English have good support to help them to learn well. The most able students are appropriately stretched and generally make good progress in lessons.

100. On the whole, students like English. They show positive attitudes to the subject through their volunteering answers to questions and their participation in group and whole-class work. There tends to be a strong correlation between students' attitudes to their work and the variety and interest of the teaching. In some lessons, students have short concentration spans and are easily distracted. Whilst they still basically enjoy the subject, they easily lose the thread of their work, or they too readily chat to their friends. Teachers deal with these lapses well, but at times they have to take too much time over managing behaviour, which obviously cuts into time for learning.

101. Schemes of work have been rewritten to accommodate the demands of the National Literacy Strategy. Some units of work include students using computers, either for research purposes or to draft and present work. However, their use is not yet consistent between teachers and is a developing area for the department.

102. The department is well led and managed. The head of the department has had significant staffing difficulties to deal with, all through the last academic year, and it is only this year that they have had a stable staff, including two teachers in training. The head of department is trying to create a sense of teamwork and shared direction, and is ably helped by two senior colleagues. There is a strong focus on the main priorities: raising standards and achievement. A reflective, analytical approach to considering how well students are doing and in identifying areas for improvement, use of test and examination data to pinpoint underachievement, and individual student tracking and target setting, are developing well. Systems are in place to monitor teaching, and teachers receive appropriate developmental

feedback. This process is having a positive effect on learning and achievement over time. However, there is still some way to go in improving teachers' consistency in marking and in helping students understand what they need to do to improve. Not all teachers have taken part in appropriate training to implement the Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy, and this should be considered in order to focus on raising standards of literacy. The department has made good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen, the quality of teaching has improved and schemes of work have been written to accommodate curriculum changes. Now that staffing problems have been largely resolved, the department is well placed to develop further.

Drama

103. There is **very good** provision in drama.

Strengths

- Students achieve well and high standards are being maintained.
- Teaching is very good, with teachers having high expectations of what students can do and how they will behave.
- The department is very well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Consolidating the new 'team' of drama teachers.
- Continue to develop the assessment methods so that students clearly know what they need to do to improve.

104. The GCSE results in drama in 2001 were above national standards. This represents very good achievement, when taken into account the fact that students come to the school with very limited experiences of drama. In 2002, the percentage of students attaining a grade C or higher was in line with the previous year. This was at a time when students had been dispersed to a number of schools and to college, and this group of seven students continued to come to Beechwood for their drama lessons. One of the sessions was a twilight session, after school.

105. Standards of work by fourteen year olds seen in drama were a little above the national average. They achieve very well in their first three years in the school, and acquire a good understanding of drama terms and techniques and practical skills. Work seen during the inspection indicates that current Year 10 students are on target to attain GCSE grades that are similar to those in previous years, which represents good achievement through the course. They can employ a variety of dramatic and theatrical techniques to portray character, show emotion and tell a story. Year 10 students seen during inspection week showed that they could develop a character very effectively, using body language, movement and voice. The great majority of students have positive attitudes to the subject. They enjoy it and are keen to learn.

106. Teaching and learning in drama are very good. Teachers have a very good command of their subject. They challenge students to think deeply, to organise themselves, to work well on their own and with others, and to improve their drama skills. In a Year 8 lesson, the teacher set very clear boundaries, explaining how she expected students to listen and to behave. She used a range of strategies to introduce and reinforce the skills of creating a tableau and using 'spoken thoughts' to show plot and character. The students learnt a lot in the lesson as a result of the teacher's very good subject knowledge and management skills.

107. The head of department provides very good leadership and management of the subject. Students' work is carefully assessed and tracked. She has adapted the previous assessment system to the school's new one and has devised level descriptors which provide helpful benchmarks for assessing attainment and tracking progress. Teachers insist on high standards of behaviour from students – this is a direct reflection of the head of department's high standards and expectations. Drama has a high profile among the students; productions are popular and involvement in extra curricular activities is a real strength, and the subject contributes very well to students' personal development. They have maintained high standards since the last inspection.

Literacy

108. Students' skills in reading, writing and speaking in formal situations are well below those that would be expected nationally. The school has looked at ways to develop literacy across the curriculum, and has recommended procedures, such as the display of specialist key words in classrooms, and using writing frames to help students to structure their writing, and most subjects have introduced these. There has been a focus on developing non-fiction writing. Teachers have been introduced to National Literacy Strategy techniques and some are using a number of methods to reinforce writing skills. Whilst teachers of English are instrumental in teaching literacy, most subjects make a contribution by displaying subject specific words, highlighting correct spelling and giving students opportunities to talk both formally and informally in lessons. Some effective work was seen in geography where teachers use writing frames to encourage extended writing, and technical vocabulary was emphasised in science and in French. Students had the opportunity to improve their writing by producing drafts in ICT lessons. Practice is still variable, however, with teachers having differing degrees of confidence and expertise, and the impact is only beginning to be felt on standards.

MATHEMATICS

109. Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- The leadership of the department is good, establishing the appropriate priorities to raise standards.
- The monitoring of the subject's performance is good, focusing well on the needs of all students.
- The management of students is good and they behave well.

Areas for improvement

- Further development and evaluation of teaching.
- The use of computers in the teaching of mathematics.
- Further development of investigational work in mathematics to promote independent learning.

110. In the 2001 National Tests for 14-year-olds, results were very low in comparison to all schools and to similar schools. Boys performed better than girls. Performance was similar to that of English and science. The proportion of students reaching the expected level for their age at the end of Year 9 has been rising in the last three years and rose again in 2002. Assessment evidence indicates satisfactory achievement by these students. The 2001GCSE examination results in mathematics are very low in comparison to all schools

and to similar schools. Performance was similar to that of science but not as good as English.

111. In the work seen in the inspection in Years 7 to 9 standards are continuing to rise, but at a faster pace now that staffing difficulties of the recent past have eased. Standards are well below average. Achievement continues to be satisfactory and some students achieve well. The higher attaining students in Year 9 do not have a secure knowledge of fractions and have difficulty in expressing some fractions as decimals, three eighths for example. They are developing an appreciation of the difference between addition, subtraction, multiplication and division through appropriate use of mental work and written exercises. They recognise equivalent fractions and simplify accurately. Lower attaining students can multiply decimal numbers by ten, twenty and thirty for example and do so with understanding. Year 10 students show more confidence in the use of fractions, rapidly evaluating five eighths of seventy-two for example, but simple errors are still seen in written work. Extra classes after school are available for these students to raise standards further. No Year 11 lessons were seen in the inspection. Standards of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are below that expected even though standards generally have improved since the last inspection.

112. The attitudes of students to their work are good overall, varying from very good to unsatisfactory. Students in general are cooperative and willing to work. On the whole they behave well and have good relationships with each other and their teachers. Students are dependent on their teachers for their learning and need the further development of investigation work in mathematics if they are to develop good study habits and gain some independence in their learning.

113. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, with some examples of good teaching seen. The management of students is good overall, which is why the behaviour is good. In a minority of lessons the management of students is excellent, creating a very good learning environment. When the management of students is satisfactory overall there are times when learning opportunities are missed. This is because students spend too long on one task and lose concentration, or, in one case, to an unsatisfactory response from students. Assessment is used well in all lessons, focusing well on the needs of all students due to the targets they are given by their teachers. The provision for students with special educational needs is good, as is their support in class.

114. Teachers' subject expertise is good overall, though some opportunities to prepare students for more advanced work are missed. Lessons are generally planned well but lack variety in the range of activities in some. That said, subject expertise and the planning of lessons provide the sense of purpose in lessons and the impetus for students to learn. Teaching methods using the computer controlled board, introduced this term, are beginning to give students increased opportunities for visual learning. When the new computers are brought into use this aspect of students learning bodes well for their understanding, and standards generally.

115. Leadership is good and gives a clear sense of purpose to the work of the department. Staffing difficulties have eased this year, raising morale along with standards in the classrooms. It is too soon for the evaluation of current departmental practices. Priorities have been set correctly, seen in the good behaviour of students, the good use of assessment and the thorough preparation given to the scheme of work. The current arrangements for developing good strategies for teaching in years 7 to 9 are innovative and helpful to the teachers and a good example of external support for the work of the department. The need now is for further development and evaluation of teaching in relation to the school's priorities for raising attainment.

Numeracy

116. Standards are below that expected. In mathematics students can measure angles to the nearest degree. Mental work with number and the handling of data are improving. Standards are sufficient in geography, in the use of co-ordinates for example. In science a few students achieve really well and are helped through excellent data collection in plotting graphs. In information and communication technology students use their limited knowledge well. Standards are good in design and technology as numeracy skills are effectively supported in the teaching.

117. An overall strategy for developing numeracy skills throughout the curriculum is not yet in place. The science department has a policy in place but it is not fully implemented. There is no policy or audit in art, geography or history. Numeracy is monitored satisfactorily in design and technology and provides well for the development of spatial development. There is little evidence of formulae in use in lessons, apart from mathematics.

SCIENCE

118. Overall the quality of provision in science is **satisfactory**

Strengths

- The quality of teaching
- Provision for students identified as having special educational needs
- Specialist accommodation for science teaching

What could be improved

- The written work of students
- The curriculum in science
- The management of students in some classes
- The quality of written guidance and support within the department

119. When they come to the school at age 11 the attainment of students in science is well below average. Their progress in the first three years of secondary school is broadly as expected from this low base so that at age 14 their attainment, based on 2001 data, is still well below average. It is also well below average in comparison with students in schools in similar circumstances in terms of the number of students reaching level 5 or above. Very few students have reached level 6 in the years since the last inspection. National data for 2002 is not available but the number of students gaining level 5 at age 14 was lower than in 2001, following a year of very high staff turnover, and was comparable to the number in 2000. Over the three years to 2001 students have performed consistently slightly better in science than in mathematics or English.

120. Standards reached in GCSE in 2001 were very low in comparison with national averages. They were also significantly lower than results for other subjects. Boys attained noticeably less well than girls. The GCSE results for 2002 do not reflect directly on the school, however, the limited evidence available indicates that, as at age 14, levels of attainment are well below what is expected nationally.

121. In lessons in Years 7 to 9, students do better than is suggested by these very low results and their achievement is satisfactory. However, their progress is inhibited by their very low skills in communication, especially in writing. With a good teacher, they take part well in discussions and make reasonable progress, but despite the best efforts of their

teachers, written work remains poor. For example, students in Year 7 make simple deductions about secondary sexual characteristics and the higher attaining students can relate structure to function. In a lesson about the nutritional content of food, they understand how food values on packets can be added to form an accumulated total. Year 8 understand how sound vibrates in air as a result of practical demonstrations which clearly aid their understanding.

122. The current Year 10, who will take their GCSE examinations in 2004, have made a good start to the course and, based on current standards, are well placed to show an improvement over the next two years. In lessons, they show levels of performance which are better than is indicated by the poor national curriculum test results which they gained at the end of key stage 2, reflecting that the hard work of teachers is beginning to bear fruit. Students in Year 10 develop satisfactory practical skills but they need considerable support to understand the principles behind their investigations. Many in Year 10 have difficulty retaining information, but with appropriate triggers they show some understanding, for example about waves, atoms and space.

123. Overall the quality of teaching provided is good. Of the eight complete lessons seen during the inspection period, all but one was good or better and more than half were very good or excellent. In one lesson, the quality of teaching was poor, but with a similar group, the same teacher was able to enlist the services of a support teacher, delivering a lesson in which teaching and learning were very good. Where lessons are very good, they are characterised by the excellent understanding of the teacher of how students learn, and use of this knowledge in ensuring that misconceptions do not have time to arise. For example, in lessons on sound with Years 9 and 10, the teacher assembled a good range of demonstration experiments to make sure that no student had the opportunity to misunderstand the ideas surrounding the subject. In a Year 10 lesson involving an investigation into the action of amylase, the experiment was designed to ensure that all students were led to the desired result and very good learning took place. In the one poor lesson, the teacher had planned the lesson well, but delivered it at too high a level for the very limited understanding of his students, then behaviour deteriorated and learning was poor. Even in good or very good lessons, students often become tired towards the end of the lesson, concentration begins to lapse, and learning suffers as a result. In the one excellent lesson with a small group of Year 9 students, nearly all of whom have special educational needs, the teacher ensured the concentration by use of varied activities and a lively style, supported by excellent relationships with the class. In this lesson, students gained considerably in their understanding of the processes by which food is digested in humans, supported by a good model which illustrated the action of enzymes.

124. The leadership and management of the department are good. The head of department, who has been in post for just a year, has rightly seen the absolute priority as improving the quality and learning. He has worked hard with his colleagues to develop the curriculum, paying more and more attention to the needs of individuals, whether they have special educational needs, English as an additional language, or are especially able. The vision for the department is very good, and has inspired teachers, with the very good technician support, to work towards the highest possible standards. Although guidance documentation is in place, it is currently unsatisfactory. Schemes of work make some allowances for all abilities, but are insufficiently adapted to the needs of the most able or of those who have special educational needs. It should build upon the experience of inspiring science teaching that shows the benefits of taking real care over designing each activity to ensure the best learning for all. The department has overseen the refurbishment of two laboratories and recognises that the self-esteem of students has improved as a result of the bright and attractive working environment. Since the previous inspection, a new head of department has been appointed. However, considerable turnover in staff and a lack of

specialist teaching has led to standards in national tests and examinations fluctuating in response to this instability. Under the guidance of its new head, the department has already shown considerable capacity to succeed, and is now well placed to make further improvements.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Good subject specialist knowledge of the teacher.
- Good relationships between teachers and students.

Areas for improvement

- Implement the school marking and assessment scheme.
- Improve the quality and quantity of visual aids.
- Integrate the use of information and communication technology into the schemes of work throughout the school

126. There is no data available for 2001 on assessments teachers made of students' standards at the age of 14. In 2002 teachers assessed students' standards at the age of 14 as being in line with national expectation. However, this is not confirmed by work seen during the inspection because students at age 14 are working at below average standards, but their achievement has been satisfactory over time. In 2001 the proportion of students gaining GCSE grades A*-C was well below the national average and well below that of similar schools. It is not possible to comment on 2002 results at GCSE because students in Year 11 were taught in different schools in the area.

127. Students with special educational needs make similar satisfactory progress to their classmates. Higher attaining students draw sensitively from observation and render objects to look three-dimensional by using shading skilfully, for example in the sketches of the cooling towers viewed from the school grounds. Students in Year 10 are working at a level below the national average but make satisfactory achievement in relation to their standards of work at the end of Year 9. Higher attaining students draw skilfully, and enhance their work, such as in their detailed Celtic and Indian designs which have been developed into colourful batiks.

128. Most students are keen to do well and listen attentively to the teacher and to one another. They are being encouraged to respect one another's work and to appraise it using specialised vocabulary through the introduction of key words. Many students rise well to this challenge. Support teachers play an important role in affecting the behaviour of some students in the class.

129. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory throughout Years 7 to 10. Strengths lie in the subject knowledge of the specialist art teacher and in the quality of relationships between teacher and students. Regular support from a learning support assistant experienced in art enhances learning, especially of those with special educational needs. Effective use of visual aids and practical demonstrations helps all students understand the aims and objectives of the lesson, however, the lack of enough of these materials and the poor quality of what there is adversely affects the progress of some students. The use of a plenary at the end of the lesson was inconsistent and often did not relate back to lesson objectives making evaluating and reviewing progress inconclusive. Students are more able to take responsibility for their own learning if assessment objectives are made clear and recorded to show progress. This is vital in Year 10 where these should

relate to exam criteria for GCSE. Similarly, marking of work and the feedback of constructive comments linked to the requirements of the National Curriculum are a priority for students in Years 7 to 9.

130. The present head of department has been in post for only a few weeks after a year without a specialist teacher in post. A survey has led to an appropriate action plan and some outline schemes of work. Other guidance is yet to be put in place including the implementation of marking and assessment schemes; policies on literacy and numeracy; matching work to individual students; use of ICT and aspects of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development into the schemes of work. A start has been made since the beginning of term, but there has been too little time for any changes to make a great deal of impact.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

131. The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Students' enthusiasm for design technology
- New and effective subject leadership ensures a consistent approach within the department
- Relationship between teachers and students
- Quality of teaching, including match of teaching styles to students' learning needs
- Systematic monitoring of progress by both teachers and students.

Areas for Improvement

- Use of ICT to support the teaching of design technology
- Use of marking to target and further challenge those students for whom design technology is a strength.
- Textiles as a further design technology option

132. On entry to the school students have limited experience of the full designing, making and evaluating process. Satisfactory, and frequently good, progress and achievement in all years means that standards are average or better in Years 7 to 9 and in Year 10. There is no evidence of difference in attainment between boys and girls during the lessons seen.

Students in Year 9 are able to work in a range of materials with some accuracy, paying attention to finish and function, and they can test and evaluate their products. They are able to develop their understanding of food safety by incorporating a hygiene system into their work plan, for example in the preparation of tuna pocket sandwiches. Students are able to work from plans to discuss develop and clarify their ideas. For example, Year 7 students consider how to design a product to meet a specific purpose, they develop orthographic and isometric drawing skills to produce nets of their design, and they are able to use tools sensibly and responsibly to make acrylic containers from their plans.

133. Year 10 students' skills in designing and making are good. As part of their GCSE coursework they are able to generate ideas for decorative and fun clocks by collecting and using information that takes the views of the user into account. Almost all are able to clarify their ideas through discussion, drawing and modelling. They respond enthusiastically to the challenges set and work with a good degree of accuracy, following appropriate safety codes. These skills enabling them to choose and use tools to work with a wide range of materials. Students enjoy both the design component of the lessons and the social and collaborative opportunities that arise during them.

134. The quality of teaching is good and in almost half the lessons seen in Years 7 to 9 and Year 10 it is very good. Teaching is based on excellent relationships, a consideration of students' different learning styles and the importance of ensuring that all students, regardless of their literacy and numeric skills can access the design and technology content of the lesson. For example, a small group of Year 9 students with special educational needs worked independently and collaboratively in a range of materials to produce moneyboxes of their own design. In another Year 9 class, students responded with enthusiasm and humour to the teacher's food preparation demonstration where they had to carry out a hygiene check. Students in year 10 continued to work purposefully on their CD storage box construction whilst the teacher spent a significant amount of time with a disaffected student.

135. All teachers are enthusiastic and attach great importance to the relationships that they establish with students. They take care to ensure there is a calm, purposeful working atmosphere in lessons. Students experiencing difficulties are dealt with sensitively and appropriately. The lessons promote a realistic pace whilst encouraging and enabling students to discuss what they are doing. Teachers are very aware of the contribution that design technology can make to students' moral and social development. Teachers have an awareness of the contribution of literacy and numeracy to design technology. All teaching rooms have valuable word banks and prompts, but a coordinated approach to literacy and numeracy is currently underdeveloped.

136. Good use is made of arrangements to monitor students' attainment. There are well thought out systems in place to provide teachers and students with information about progress within the requirements of the National Curriculum. Further use should be made of this data so that marking relates to national curriculum levels and to allow more challenging targets to be set for students for whom design technology is a strength.

137. New and effective subject leadership has ensured a cohesive and consistent approach to the strands of technology currently offered. The setting up of a textiles course would add another dimension and enhance the provision. Accommodation, equipment and technical support are good. The learning-support assistance provided in the food technology room is very effective. There have been clear improvements in design, graphical and manufacturing work since the previous inspection. The lack of opportunities to use information and communication technology is recognised and is currently being partly addressed with the installation of new equipment.

GEOGRAPHY

138. The overall quality in geography is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching at all levels
- Achievement in Years 7 to 9
- Inclusion of students with special education needs

Areas for improvement

- Access to and use of information and communication technology
- Opportunities for imaginative writing
- Introduction to investigative techniques at an earlier age

139. Standards overall at the end of Year 9 are below the national average, but in top and some middle sets they are in line with the national expectation. Teachers' assessments confirm that the proportion of students at Level 5 and above is below the national average, as it has been for the last five years. Although overall standards are low at the end of Year 9 they represent significant improvement from the level of attainment of most students on entry, which was well below the national average. Students make good progress in lessons and in all work seen they achieve well and in some cases, very well.

140. Standards in Year 10 are satisfactory and the improvements in skills, knowledge and understanding confirm the steady progress since entry to the school. Achievement is satisfactory considering the levels of recruitment from Year 9.

141. GCSE results in 2001 showed 22 per cent gaining A*-C grades. Although this figure is well below the national average it is similar to the previous year and confirms a steadily rising trend over the last four years. In three of the last four years all candidates have gained an A*-G grade.

142. In Year 7 students learn to use basic mapping and number skills and learn to measure angles and use co-ordinates in work on latitude and longitude. Students improve their writing skills from often low levels of literacy. Note taking is good and students extended writing is helped by the use of good writing frames and worksheets but this aspect of students' learning develops slowly. However, there are some good examples seen, in the Year 7 description of a visit to Rushall Manor Farm, and Year 8 accounts of a trip down Big Pit. Further opportunities for writing should be linked to an earlier introduction to investigative methods. By Year 9 students' knowledge and understanding have grown considerably. They are able to grasp the relationships between geographical processes and patterns seen in work on "the day in the life of a forest dweller" and the keeping of a weather diary. There are some individual efforts to incorporate information communication technology skills into work, but these are mainly examples of word processing. Students gain an early and clear understanding of moral issues in work on conservation and exploitation in studies of The Peak District National Park. Numeracy skills do not develop far, though students' use of data and graphing skills that are sufficient for their needs. Much greater success is seen in the way students learn and understand the vocabulary associated with geography and as a result read both silently and aloud with fluency and understanding. In Year 10 students develop the ability to ask questions and develop a hypothesis. They gather data in surveys and are able to present this graphically and sometimes generate the results in interesting and useful ways by computer. In investigations such as "What differences exist between the different residential areas of Slough?" students can explain their methodology and reach logical conclusions.

143. There is no difference in the way boys and girls learn or the progress made by different ethnic groups. Students sit and work well together. Students with special educational needs, and those for whom English is not their first language, receive good support in the way of appropriate learning materials and additional teaching support.

144. Teaching is good and has a very positive effect on the students learning. Lesson plans are thorough and include clear objectives and a wide variety of activities to interest students and stimulate their imagination. Lessons challenge students to think for themselves and develop concentration. They are well aware of what is expected of them and are well motivated by enthusiastic and knowledgeable presentation. Teachers make good use of a variety of audio-visual aids, as seen in a lesson using digital photographs of the area, to help students remain involved and make progress. Good timing means that most lessons have a good pace and momentum. Learning is constantly checked and reinforced by repetition and

good probing questioning, and the success of the lesson is monitored during good plenary sessions.

145. Lessons are generally full of interest and are helped by the very good relationships built up between students and students and teachers. The attitudes shown by a great majority of students are very positive and behaviour overall is good.

146. Assessment is a growing strength in the department. Day to day marking in Years 7 to 9 is closely linked to national curriculum levels. It is carefully adapted to the needs of these students and as a result they have good knowledge of how they are progressing. Information on attainment is being developed to provide good opportunities to track progress, pinpoint underachievement and provide worthwhile targets for students.

147. The department is ably led and the teachers are a committed and united team working very hard to build and maintain high standards in the department. Clear management aims are allied to high skill levels and a clear capacity to succeed.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Leadership by head of department, planning and revision of schemes of work.
- Very good teaching.
- Skilful management of behaviour.
- support to enable lower attaining students and those with special education needs to make progress.
- Literacy development.

Areas for improvement

- Development of numeracy coordinated with school policy
- Use of information and communication technology

149. Levels of attainment are in line with national expectations at the end of Year 9. GCSE attainment at grade A*-C level in 2001 was well below national average with a very small entry. In 2002, students took the examination in several different schools in the area. Entries for GCSE history have begun to rise this year with 21 students in the current Year 10. Numbers attaining grades A*-C and A*-G improved since 2000, and grades predicted for the present Year 10 on the basis of their prior attainment indicate this improvement should be maintained.

150. On entry to the school students' historical skills and understanding vary quite considerably but most are well below average. The standard of work seen in lessons in Years 7 to 9 is good, and by the end of Year 9 almost half are reaching average levels of attainment but only a very small minority are above. This represents good achievement. The progress made lays a sound foundation now for work in Years 10 and 11.

151. Students gain in understanding of how the past is investigated and judgements arrived at, and develop subject-specific skills by analysing evidence using a variety of sources including written, photographs and pictures and film. For example Year 7 students, including those with special educational needs, successfully investigated written sources from both Roman and modern times to formulate their own opinions as to what had happened to a man who died 1500 years ago. High-attaining students in a Year 8 class,

having analysed extracts from Tudor parish records, began to draft an account as though by the parish priest, his feelings about the changes of that period and how they had affected him. Year 9 students, in a class with six learning English and seven with a variety of special needs, evaluated successfully the different ways in which people reacted to the introduction of railways during the Industrial Revolution. Others evaluated the role of different individuals effecting changes in textile manufacture in the 18th century. Year 10 students are gaining an understanding of the issues surrounding the abdication of the German Kaiser in 1918 and the establishment of a republic.

152. Students with special educational needs are making good progress because their teachers make sure that planning sets appropriate targets for learning, ensure that activities and resources for learning are provided, and that they offer a good level of individual support by both teachers and learning support staff. Students learning English make good progress because of the very good collaboration between class and support teachers. There are no significant differences between the standard attained by girls and boys.

153. The quality of teaching of history is good. Well-qualified subject specialists establish very good and very positive relationships, using their knowledge and expertise to interest and motivate students, value their ideas, keep their attention and sustain concentration. As a result students behave well in lessons and work hard. Teachers encourage them to respect and listen to one another. Teachers' expectations of all students are consistently high, reflected in the establishment of a purposeful learning atmosphere in classrooms. The work given is well matched to students' capabilities and challenges them appropriately. Progress is effectively monitored in lessons, by marking the regularly set homework, and by formal tests each term. The results are shared with students to help set individual targets for learning.

154. History makes a useful and important contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example students in Year 7 study of ancient Rome, Year 8 learn about the values, attitudes and beliefs of native Americans, Year 9 students consider the variety of moral arguments about slavery, and Year 10 learn about the Holocaust by visiting the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum. Throughout Years 7 to 10 students are successfully encouraged to be tolerant of others and their opinions, and to work co-operatively and collaboratively.

155. History makes a good contribution to developing literacy and numeracy skills. Students are encouraged to listen, speak, read aloud and silently, to build up their knowledge of key words, and use a variety of forms of writing. They use percentages, construct and interpret graphs and charts using statistical data for example in Years 8 and 9 to show child mortality rates when studying the Industrial Revolution. However, these approaches are not coordinated within a wider school setting. The department's use of Information and Communication Technology is still only in an early stage of development.

156. Students' attitudes to learning are very good. They are interested in the subject and enjoy it. The behaviour of almost all students is good in lessons, listening attentively to the teacher and to one another and taking great care with the presentation of written work. For example a group with special educational needs in a Year 7 class responded with real enthusiasm to the imaginative teaching, maintaining involvement, and contributing their own ideas to the class discussion.

157. The trend reflected in improving standards and achievement is a direct result of very good leadership in the department characterised by clear direction for improvement in teaching and learning and high expectations of students' learning and behaviour. On-going review and revision of the schemes of work are used as a basis for planning, together with

Careful thought to targets for developing the teaching. Careful purchasing of a range of appropriate textbooks and other materials ensures that all students have equal access to learning resources. There has been good improvement in students' achievements since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

158. Provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching and learning in lessons in years 7 to 9 and in GCSE lessons in Year 10
- The monitoring and assessment of students on the GCSE course
- The provision of computers for use by students is now well ahead of the national average.

Areas for improvement

- Subject departments should take full advantage of increased resources for improving students' skills when planning their schemes of work.
- The school should ensure that all students have more opportunities, in the relevant subjects, for applying information and communication technology to measure, record, respond to, control and automate events.

159. By the age of 14 standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are below the national average but they are improving. There is no evidence to indicate any significant difference in the performance of students in terms of gender or ethnicity. The current GCSE course has not yet been examined at Beechwood School.

160. All students in Years 7 to 9 have one lesson each week. In addition, students in Year 7 have an ICT module in design and technology, which is taught by an ICT teacher. This well planned use of curriculum time enables students to develop skills and knowledge in most of the required aspects of ICT. Work seen during the inspection indicates that overall, attainment in the first half term of Year 9 is consistent with national expectations. Students in Year 9 are now being provided with greater challenge leading to the GCSE scheme of work. In one lesson, students were using GCSE resources via the broadband Internet connection; to learn more advanced skills related to formatting documents and electronic presentations. In Year 8 a significant number of students are beginning to produce work of a good standard. In one class students were constructing a database using unfamiliar software. Clear guidance notes produced by the teacher, enabled all students to succeed. This increased their confidence and gave them a good sense of achievement. In the early weeks of the ICT course in Year 7, students are already coping well with the school's recently extended computer network, which provides a ratio of computers to students that is well above the national average. Students are beginning to make good progress in developing their ICT capability, often from a low level of skills and knowledge.

161. In year 10, the majority of students are now following a GCSE course in ICT. Standards are below national expectations but learning is good and students are achieving well in relation to prior attainment. In one lesson students made very good progress in constructing a spreadsheet, including the use of appropriate formulae and formatting, to enable the proprietor of a fast food establishment to keep track of materials and finances over a period of time. All students in Year 10 have opportunities to develop their ICT capability either in the ICT GCSE course or in GCSE business studies.

162. Students make progress because good, and often very good teaching ensures that they are challenged by demanding schemes of work and well-planned lessons. Students have a positive attitude towards their work in ICT. They are keen to understand processes, learn how to use software and to complete work within the time allowed. Students on the GCSE course are aware of course requirements and most respond well. They are encouraged to support each other. This helps to promote a cooperative and productive working environment in ICT rooms. Good procedures are in place for monitoring and assessing work in the ICT department. Resources produced by the department, those available on CD ROMs and from the Internet for the GCSE course cater for the full range of abilities.

163. The use of ICT in other subjects has shown some improvement but needs to be developed much further. The significant increase in the number of computers and the improvement in students' ICT skills should be more widely exploited by subject departments to enhance teaching and learning. In particular the school should ensure that all students have more opportunities, in the relevant subjects, for using ICT equipment to apply their skills to measure, record, respond to, control and automate events. Access to computers and support outside lesson times is good, particularly in the well-equipped learning resource centre. The lack of window blinds in the centre and other rooms with computers prevents the screen being seen clearly, and needs to be remedied. Overall standards in ICT have shown a good improvement since the last inspection.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

FRENCH

164. The provision for French is **good**.

Strengths:

- Students' attitudes towards their learning are positive and they have very good relationships with their teachers.
- Students, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in relation to prior attainment.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good enabling students to make good progress.
- Procedures for assessing and monitoring students' progress are good.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.

Areas for development:

- Increase the opportunities for them to use the language themselves to gather and give information, independently of the teacher.
- Further develop the use of assessment to plan for the progress of groups of differing ability within lessons and enable students to take more responsibility for their own progress.
- Develop independent learning strategies, including information and communication technology to support and extend learning.

165. By the end of Year 9 standards of work seen in French are well below average. This represents satisfactory achievement in relation to prior attainment. Teachers' assessments for 2001 indicate that standards attained by the end of Year 9 are very low in comparison to the national average. However, standards have improved steadily in the past year. Standards attained in Year 10 are well below average. In GCSE examinations in 2001 standards attained were very low compared to national averages with a very small proportion of candidates attaining grades A*-C. Girls perform significantly better than boys in

examinations but no significant difference was seen in lessons. Students perform as well in French as they do in other subjects.

166. At the end of Year 9 standards attained are well below average. Students are able to describe events in the past and present such as leisure activities, their town and their family in speech and writing in some detail. Lower attaining students and students and those with special educational needs do so by following models closely or by filling in gaps. They respond appropriately and usually promptly to instructions and questions delivered at near normal speed in French. They participate in short dialogues to exchange information and identify the main points and specific detail from short texts and extracts of speech, however, the majority need guidance or repetition to do this. Lower attaining students and students with special educational needs copy and label accurately and they match print with meaning and identify the main points in speech and writing. In lessons students make good progress developing skills and increasing their range of vocabulary and structures. However, since a large proportion of students enter the school with poor language skills, and the majority of them have difficulty with pronunciation and in recalling previously learned language from memory, this slows their progress over time. The rate of progress overall is satisfactory.

167. Students in Year 10 develop the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening and increase their range of vocabulary and structures. In lessons, for example, they describe a third person in detail including personality traits and information about their work, responding to written and visual prompts. They identify detail from extracts of speech at near normal speed and write at length following a model. Standards attained by the majority of students are well below average because the range of vocabulary and structures they are able to use from memory is limited. They are hesitant in speaking and in responding spontaneously and pronunciation is sometimes approximate but meaning is usually clear. Students' progress in lessons is good but over time progress is hampered because of the difficulties they have in recalling previously learned language. However, students display a good understanding of basic patterns in the language, which represents satisfactory achievement in relation to prior attainment.

168. Students have positive attitudes towards their learning. They settle quickly, are well prepared for their lessons and the majority are keen to contribute in class activities. Behaviour is usually very good. Students listen attentively to their teachers and to each other. They work well individually and in small groups and pairs. They concentrate on tasks set and want to do well. They have very good relationships with their teachers but they lack opportunities to work independently or take the initiative in lessons. In both class and group activities students support and help each other. They clearly enjoy participating in games and working informally in small groups; it is during these types of activities that they make the best progress, increasing rapidly in confidence and competence in using new language for themselves, but with a limited range of vocabulary.

169. The quality of teaching and learning is good. All lessons observed were satisfactory or better and three quarters were good. Control and management of students is very good. Students understand and respect their teachers' high expectations regarding behaviour and effort and they respond very positively. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they use this effectively to sequence activities and prepare appropriate resources, enabling students to build effectively on what has gone before. The needs of students with special educational needs are addressed very effectively. There is very good liaison with the coordinator to ensure materials are accessible to these students. Teachers conduct activities effectively in French, the language used is well matched to students' experience and capabilities and this is effective in giving students good role models for speaking and in developing their listening skills. Opportunities are sometimes missed, however, to challenge higher attaining students to translate more complex or unfamiliar language for others. Questioning is used well and

enables all students to respond successfully and to identify and apply patterns, such as adjectival agreement, for themselves. Presentations are clear using visual materials or the overhead projector (OHP). For example, Year 8 students rapidly understood new vocabulary for leisure activities presented through pictures on the OHP and took part in a *Connect 4* game, committing the phrases to memory and responding promptly to the visual cues. Year 10 students were successful in describing a third person in detail because of the support provided by posters clearly illustrating key words and phrases. Games are used very effectively to encourage students to use new language and increase their confidence and competence. Although whole class activities give students the opportunity to practise new language, students are rarely given the opportunity to gather and give previously unknown information informally and pair work is often restricted to rehearsal. Teachers monitor individual progress closely and intervene sensitively to give help where necessary ensuring all students make appropriate progress and are able to complete tasks successfully. Lesson objectives are clear and shared with students and review is used to good effect at the end of each lesson to reinforce learning and to enable students to evaluate their progress towards objectives. As a result students are well motivated and informed about their progress. Homework is used well to consolidate and extend learning in lessons.

170. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The Head of Department has a clear vision of the way forward and development planning is clearly focused on raising standards and improving effective teaching and learning strategies. Teachers work very closely as a team sharing ideas and as a result there is a good degree of consistency across the department. Assessment procedures are good and students are aware of National Curriculum levels. Students' progress is monitored closely and help given if individuals do not make appropriate progress. The use of assessment data is satisfactory overall but as yet information available to the department is not used effectively to plan for the progress of groups of differing ability in lessons nor is it used to enable students to evaluate their own or others' work and identify in detail how to achieve higher standards. The accommodation for the subject is good but there are no blinds in classrooms which sometimes make presentations on the OHP difficult. The department's resources are good and used effectively, however, access to information communication technology is difficult and this limits the department's development of independent learning strategies to support and extend learning. Since the last report the department has made good progress in evaluating and developing teaching and learning strategies and standards are improving. Teachers are committed to raising standards and have a very good capacity to improve further.

MUSIC

171. Overall, the quality of provision in music is **poor**.

Strengths

- The enrichment programme for students in years 7 to 9.
- Extra- curricular activities in music.

Areas for improvement

- Provision of regularly timetabled classes to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum for students in Years 7 to 9.
- Provision of an option course for GCSE music in Years 10 and 11.

172. Despite making vigorous efforts, the school has been unable to recruit suitably qualified teachers and has been forced to remove music from the timetable. To compensate to some degree for this the school decided to set up an enrichment programme for all students in Years 7 to 9, which is complemented by extra-curricular activities in music.

These have been effective in providing some worthwhile musical experiences for students. A good example of this is the opera workshop for Year 9 students provided by staff and students from the Royal Northern College of Music.

173. Standards of attainment are well below average. In the drum workshops, Year 8 students performed basic rhythmic patterns in parts and created short phrases of their own. However, the lack of music teaching in their previous year meant that they were working at a lower level than they should have been. Taking this into account, they were doing as well as could be expected in this aspect of music.

174. Students receive only a little music teaching during a year. Overall, however, the extent of teaching is not sufficient to enable students to make enough progress over the year and in turn their achievement in all aspects of music is unsatisfactory. The limited amount of specialist teaching students do have is of good quality and this leads to good learning taking place in lessons. The visiting teachers are well co-ordinated, plan effectively and match the work well to the students' interests and ability. The management of the students is good; the visiting teacher is well supported by the school staff and this results in students remaining involved and working productively. Good opportunities are provided for the students to play instruments and work creatively. The approach is wholly practical and this is very helpful to students with special needs and those for whom English is an additional language, enabling them to participate fully in all the activities and make good progress in lessons.

175. The students have a good attitude to the subject. They are keen and work with great enjoyment. Behaviour is more varied. Overall, it is satisfactory, most students concentrate, work and behave well, but a minority of boys need constant supervision to ensure that lessons are not disrupted. Sometimes this interrupts the flow of the lesson and leads to a loss of pace. Relationships between students are good; they collaborate well in group work and listen courteously to each other's performances.

176. Despite the absence of full-time music teachers the school has been able to continue to offer students the opportunity to learn instruments and trumpet and trombone teaching is provided by visiting teachers. Extra curricular activities such as the gospel choir are effective in providing further opportunities for the students to make music.

177. At present there is no designated music room and the activities take place in the hall. When a music teacher is appointed the school will need to provide a suitably appointed room for the teaching of National Curriculum music. The resources available for music are satisfactory. There is a good range of electronic keyboards and percussion instruments but this needs to be improved by the provision of computers with appropriate music software. The enrichment and extra-curricular activities are well organised and managed by the head of performing arts in collaboration with the deputy head teacher.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Clear leadership of the department.
- Committed and hard working staff.

Areas for improvement

- Involve students in the evaluation of their work.
- Use assessment information to inform curriculum planning.
- Consider offering Year 10- and 11 4 students the opportunity to take the Junior Sports Leader Award

179. In July 2001 the number gaining the higher A*-C grades in GCSE in physical education was well below the national average. There was no significant difference in the levels of attainment between girls and boys, although there were more boys than girls taking the examination.

180. The majority of students enter the school with little or no knowledge of rugby, gymnastics and health related fitness. In swimming over half of them have not achieved the national attainment for eleven year olds to swim twenty metres. They settle into the school quickly and acquire the new skills involved and increase their knowledge of health related exercise. Good progress is made during Years 7, 8 and 9, and by the time they are fourteen years old the majority of them are achieving well or very well by reaching standards that are in line with the national average, with some of them doing even better. Very significant progress is made in swimming. By the end of Year 9 there are only a few non-swimmers in the school, and most students demonstrate good ability in a number of swimming strokes, personal survival skills and life saving skills. Students extend their knowledge through progressive units of work in each year. They demonstrate good ball skills in soccer and netball, although their rugby football skills are underdeveloped. In gymnastics body management skills are developing and most students are able to effectively plan simple movement sequences. However the performances lack poise and co-ordination.

181. The standard of work in the Year 10 GCSE classes is in line with national average. The majority of students attain well in the practical aspects of the course although the immature behaviour of a few of the boys inhibits their progress. Students' knowledge and use of technical language is limited. Written work is mostly well presented, and some students are using ICT to word process their work, but the low literacy skills of a few students hinders their overall attainment. Students in the non-examination classes attain standards that are in line with standards expected nationally. Students play badminton with skills that are at the appropriate levels and they make good use of the excellent facilities of the Montem Leisure Centre. Students have good understanding of tactics and strategies and are able to apply skills that have been practiced in full game situations.

182. Students with special educational needs are well integrated, given much support and reach levels of attainment that are commendable for them. Talented students are identified and encouraged to extend their skills level both in lessons and out-of-school clubs.

183. Many students play in inter-school matches and competitions and in spite of being a relatively small school gain much success. Some of the school's students have represented Berkshire in athletics, and one student has represented England at Tae Kwon Do.

184. The overall quality of teaching is at least satisfactory, and in the majority of lessons observed it was judged to be good or very good. All lessons begin in an orderly manner with objectives clearly stated and understood by students. Lessons are well organised, conducted at a brisk demanding pace, and offer students of all abilities a range of appropriate challenges. There is an expectation that students will work hard and behave well, and usually these expectations are met. Most students respond very positively to the enthusiastic approach of their teachers. Generally they behave well and are prepared to work hard. Their enjoyment of the subject is very evident.

185. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and has good variety and breadth. The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 has been broadened with badminton at the Montem Leisure centre and canoeing at Maidenhead. The department should now consider offering students in Years 10 and 11 the opportunity to take part in the Junior Sports Leader Award. This award is designed to provide a starting point for students who want to develop their sports leadership skills. Schemes of work have been recently re-written and reflect the demands of the National Curriculum and support what is being taught. Staff give very freely of their time to provide a good range of extra-curriculum activities which are well supported by enthusiastic students. Students also have the opportunity to attend residential outdoor pursuits trips where activities include canoeing, abseiling and climbing.

186. The recently appointed head of department gives good direction and leadership in setting high standards of expectation and sharing responsibility with the staff team. The staff who teach physical education work well together, support each other, and show a very strong commitment to the improvement of the department. Schemes of work have been revised and a new assessment system introduced, but as yet it does not inform curriculum planning and progression. The profile of the department within the school has been raised. The accommodation of the subject is of good quality, with the on-site facilities being supplemented by some of the excellent accommodation at Montem Leisure Centre. However, the netball courts are in need of re-surfacing, and the school's excellent swimming pool is in need of redecorating. During the last two years good progress has been made. Although the GCSE pass rate is still below the national average significant improvements have been made.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

187. Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**

Strengths

- Teaching and learning in Year 10 are good.
- All students in Year 10 take a certificated course.
- Attitudes and behaviour in Year 10 are good.
- The subject makes a good contribution to students' personal development.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Areas for development

- To improve students' standards of work.
- To develop assessment procedures that will inform students how well they are doing against national norms.
- Although teachers are committed and competent, the recruiting of specialist teachers would help raise standards more quickly.
- Enliven teaching by the use of visits and artefacts.

188. Students' attainment when they enter the school is well below average. All students have one lesson of religious studies each week where they are taught by committed but non-specialist teachers who ensure they do not regress. The vast majority of students like the subject and find it interesting. Teaching and learning are satisfactory over time. The recently refurbished religious studies room is an inspiring environment in which to learn. Given their attainment on entry achievement is satisfactory.

189. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards overall are well below the national average. Students with special educational needs and English as an additional language make satisfactory progress because their teachers know their difficulties and plan work accordingly. In Years 7 to 9 most students have some knowledge and understanding of the important features of at least two major world religions, but only at a very basic level. They know that Buddhism started in India and grew from the teachings of Gotama Buddha. They know how Hindu and Jewish weddings differ from Christian wedding ceremonies. They have some understanding of the importance of signs and symbols to different religions. Higher attaining students occasionally produce work of an average standard, for example, in work on religion and the environment. However, the vast majority of students fail to understand what religions have in common and how and why they differ. Given their attainment on entry, achievement over time is satisfactory. By Year 10, standards overall, whilst still well below average, have been maintained, representing satisfactory achievement. Students' understanding and knowledge of the key features and beliefs of the major world religions studied, including Christianity, are weak. They have well below average skills in researching and discussing contemporary moral issues. Few students can use the correct terminology to describe the key beliefs and teachings of the religions studied or to make connections between them. Given their attainment at the end of Year 9 achievement is satisfactory.

190. Teaching and learning in religious education over time are satisfactory. In lessons seen in Year 10, teaching is very good and students make very good learning gains, for example, in increasing their understanding of the Christian position on moral issues such as abortion. They are encouraged to think for themselves and reach their own informed conclusions about religious beliefs and values. This very good teaching has not had time yet to impact on standards of work that are still affected by the large number of supply teachers students had in earlier Years. In Years 7 to 9 teaching is satisfactory overall. Teachers plan lessons carefully so that students are always involved in tasks that help them acquire new knowledge or greater understanding. They have good relationships with students, which encourages students to express opinions knowing they will be valued. Insufficient use is made of religious artefacts to inspire students and there are few visits to places of worship, such as mosques, temples or cathedrals. There is insufficient use of ICT to support learning. In the tiny amount of unsatisfactory teaching seen, the management of students is ineffective and students misbehave, chatter among themselves and do little work. Although new assessment procedures are being developed, current arrangements are unsatisfactory and students do not know how well they are doing in relation to national expectations and what they need to do to improve.

191. Students' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Year 10. The vast majority of students come to lessons willing to learn and show interest in their work. They cooperate well when working in pairs or small groups. A minority of students in years 7 to 9, despite the best efforts of their teachers, are unable to manage their own behaviour, lack self-discipline, learn very little themselves and prevent others in the class from learning also. Year 10 students are well behaved and show a mature attitude in class. They get on well with their teachers and are keen to do well.

192. The leadership and management of the subject are good. There is good monitoring of teaching and learning in the subject and a clear focus on raising standards. Although staffing provision is unsatisfactory due to the absence of specialist teachers, very good outside consultancy help has been sought, which has had a positive impact on the way lessons are planned, ensuring that students are engaged on tasks which will result in new learning. All students in Year 10 take an appropriate and accredited course which they value. Accommodation has recently been upgraded and is an inspiring environment in which to work. The subject makes a good contribution to students' personal development, particularly their spiritual development, giving them opportunities for reflection and time to develop their own set of values and beliefs.