

INSPECTION REPORT

BEACON HILL COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Aspatia

LEA area: Cumbria

Unique reference number: 112375

Headteacher: Alan Clouston

Reporting inspector: David Morton
13154

Dates of inspection: 14th – 17th October 2002

Inspection number: 249165

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Market Square
Aspatia
Wigton
Cumbria

Postcode: CA7 3EZ

Telephone number: 01697 320509

Fax number: 01697 322510

Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: John Miller

Date of previous inspection: November 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
13154	D. Morton	Registered inspector	Music Citizenship Educational inclusion	Information about the school The school's results and achievements How well are pupils taught? How well the school is led and managed? What should the school do to improve further? How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
19374	W. Sheehan	Lay inspector		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?
30512	M. Bailey	Team inspector	Science	
11190	W. Burke	Team inspector	Art and design Design and technology	
14521	J. Dunning	Team inspector	Geography History	
21971	J. Glennon	Team inspector	English Provision for pupils with special educational needs	
19452	A. Pearson	Team inspector	Physical education Religious education	
17923	M. Shaw	Team inspector	information and communication technology mathematics	
17404	J. Tolley	Team inspector	modern foreign languages	

The inspection contractor was:

Power House Inspections

Grasshoppers
1 Anglesey Close
Chasetown
Burntwood
Staffordshire
WS7 8XA

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Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Beacon Hill Community School is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 16. It is much smaller than most secondary schools, having 200 pupils on roll. There is an almost equal number of boys and girls, although in Year 11 there are 26 boys to 12 girls. The school is in the centre of the town of Aspatria, which is situated in a fairly isolated part of Cumbria. Almost all pupils come from the town or surrounding villages. The social circumstances of this rural area broadly match the national picture; in the town itself there is a significant proportion of adults who are unemployed. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals, 32 per cent, is above the national average. There are no pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds or for whom English is an additional language. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs, 30 per cent, is above average, whilst that of those for whom money is provided for extra help, six per cent, is above average. The school is one of nine small schools in Cumbria seeking to join together as a technology college to be called The Rural Academy.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Beacon Hill provides a sound education and its pupils achieve well; that is, they make good progress as they move through the school. This is the result of good teaching and the positive attitudes pupils bring to their work. Whilst standards overall are below the national average, the improvement evident in pupils' performance since they began in Year 7 is a key strength of the school. The leadership of the headteacher has ensured that the wellbeing of pupils and the focus on how they need to learn are generally appropriate. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils achieve well in relation to their starting point at the beginning of Year 7.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Standards are highest in art and design and music, closely followed by citizenship and French.
- Pupils enjoy lessons, are keen to learn and behave well.
- It is a happy school; pupils' wellbeing is a secure feature and relationships are very good.
- Pupils with special educational needs are well supported and make good progress.

What could be improved

- The management of measures to raise standards further, through the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning, is insufficiently systematic and lacks rigour and processes of self-evaluation.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the previous inspection in November 1997 has been satisfactory overall. However, at that time a number of concerns were raised requiring the school to set in place more rigorous procedures for monitoring the progress made by pupils and setting them individual targets appropriate to their potential or learning needs. This has not been wholly achieved. There was also a need to improve development planning and although some of the earlier criticisms no longer apply, the development plan is still not a document that has at its centre the raising of standards through improved teaching and learning. However, despite this lack of improvement, other important steps have been taken in other areas: assessment data is now fully in place, although not used sufficiently to plan teaching and learning; provision for ICT has improved and most members of staff have undertaken training so that

pupils' skills of literacy can be better developed. Since the previous inspection standards have improved steadily and at a rate faster than that found nationally. The quality of teaching is better now than in 1997.

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			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	E	D	E	E

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

In national tests in 2002 at the age of 14 in English, mathematics and science:

- results in all three subjects were well below average when compared with all and similar schools; compared with schools where a similar percentage of pupils are entitled to free school meals, results in science were average, in English results were below average and in mathematics well below average;
- given attainment on entry to the school, these results represent satisfactory achievement;
- girls performed better than boys in all three subjects;
- results in these tests have improved at a similar rate to national improvement.

In 2001, results in GCSE examinations:

- the school's results overall in GCSE examinations in 2001 have improved at a faster rate than that found nationally; overall 2002 national results are not available at time of publication, so that comparisons are not possible;
- results in 2001 represent satisfactory achievement and progress over the two years of the GCSE course.
- results were not as good as in 2000 as measured by the average points scored by each pupil;
- governors set challenging targets for 2001 as they have for 2002 ; unvalidated results for 2002 show that the target was met using previous criteria, but not when using pupils' best eight subjects only;
- girls have consistently performed better than boys in recent years, although results overall were below the national average;
- when compared with all and similar schools, these results were well below the national average;

2002 results in subjects taken at GCSE:

- results in art in 2002 were outstanding and the small entry for physical education obtained good results. All other subjects were below the national average, but pupils achieved best in French, followed by science, mathematics and English. In subjects with small numbers entered, English literature and religious education obtained results close to the national average. The least successful subjects were design and technology and history;
- the performance of pupils over the full range of grades was better than over the higher A* to C grades; average and below average pupils are doing better, relatively, than above average pupils.

Standards seen during the inspection:

- are below average overall but this represents good achievement in relation to standards pupils were achieving on entry to the school, that is they make good progress;

- standards seen in lessons are better overall than examination results in 2001, owing to recent staff appointments and pupils responding better to direct teaching than they do under examination conditions;
- standards seen in art and music were consistently better than other subjects; the weakest subjects were mathematics and ICT throughout the school and science in Years 7-9;
- basic skills of literacy and numeracy are below average but improving in response to the new initiatives in Years 7-9;
- pupils with special educational needs make good progress in lessons;
- girls consistently perform better than boys; the school is not doing enough to raise the performance of boys.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are happy at school and enjoy their lessons.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Pupils' behaviour reflects their attitudes; they are proud of their school.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and adults working in the school are one of its strengths.
Attendance	Satisfactory. The majority of pupils come to school regularly and arrive on time.

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.

Pupils learn well and make good progress in lessons. In GCSE examinations results are improving at a faster rate than that found nationally. The good achievement and learning of pupils is the result of good teaching overall and the positive attitudes pupils bring to lessons; the best teaching makes the most of pupils' willingness to work hard. Teaching is marginally better in Years 7-9 than in 10 and 11. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good or better in two-thirds of lessons.

Generally teachers ask questions that make demands upon pupils' thinking; this is not so in all teaching as some teachers too easily accept one word or very short answers, not demanding that pupils answer more thoroughly. However, the school has introduced a literacy policy and, increasingly, teachers are following this so that speaking and writing are developing more effectively. The best practice of this is not shared amongst all teachers.

The teaching of English is good, although there is only one specialist teacher. Lessons are well planned and the needs of differing groups of pupils are met, even though overall standards are below average. The teaching of mathematics is also good despite standards being well below average. Given pupils' poor attainment on entry to the school, the teaching

helps them to improve as they move through the school. The school is responding to new initiatives in Years 7-9 and standards of numeracy are improving, although the application and development of the skills of numeracy are not used as much as they might be in some subjects. The teaching of science is good and leads to effective learning and good achievement.

Teaching is especially effective in French and art; it is frequently very good in history, music and physical education. In the best teaching a variety of approaches to learning are used, lessons move at a brisk pace and pupils enjoy active involvement in learning. Whilst broadly satisfactory, teaching is less effective in design and technology and not all teachers use ICT effectively to enhance learning in their subject. Less satisfactory teaching lacks imagination, planning does not prepare for effective learning by different groups of pupils and the expectations of teachers are not high enough.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. Pupils are grouped for most subjects so that individual needs can be tackled. There are opportunities for some pupils to follow courses related to work. Citizenship has been introduced effectively.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. These pupils are provided for well and make good progress in lessons.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. The school provides a good range of opportunities for pupils' personal development; pupils engage with moral issues very effectively, whether to do with their own lives or through a broader perspective arising from literature, history or world events.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. A strength of the school is the concern that all adults working in it have for the wellbeing of pupils.
How well does the school work in partnership with parents	Good. The school constantly tries to forge links with parents; for many this is successful, as most parents hold the school in high regard.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Satisfactory. With the support of key staff, the headteacher has created a happy school that has a growing reputation in the town. Its results are improving steadily, especially in Years 10 and 11. However, the pace of change and development is steady rather than dynamic.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors are well informed and fully involved in decision-making. However, they do not fulfil statutory duties for the provision of religious education and ICT across subjects.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Unsatisfactory. Whilst data is gathered about pupils' performance, it is not used sufficiently as an evaluative tool to improve teaching and learning.
The strategic use of	Satisfactory. Despite the difficulties of a small school, resources,

resources	especially of staffing, are used well to cover the demands of the curriculum.
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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 children are happy at school.• They feel their children make progress.• The school is approachable.• Many are pleased that their children are expected to work hard.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Some parents have worries about the amount of homework that is set.• Some feel they are not kept informed of how their children are getting on at school.• Some feel that there are too few extra-curricular activities.

Inspectors agree with the positive views of parents. Parents do not make it clear whether they feel there is too much or too little homework; inspectors think the amount is about right, but find homework is not set consistently by some teachers. Inspectors consider the reports for parents to be good and provide all necessary information. They also consider that the range of extra-curricular activities is as extensive as can be reasonably expected in a school with a small number of teachers.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

Results at the age of 14:

1. Results in national curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 have been consistently well below average over the last few years whether compared with all schools or those schools with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. Results of tests in mathematics and science were marginally better than this when compared with similar schools, but still below average. The performance of boys has been significantly weaker than that of girls. Girls' performance has been close to the national average for girls but boys have been significantly below the boys' national average.

Results at the age of 16 in GCSE examinations:

Subject	School result in 2001 compared with national results.	Trend over the last 3 years	Comments (about unvalidated 2002 results)
English	Below average	Consistently average across A* to G range, but below at A* to C higher grades	Continues below average, but girls perform better than boys.
English literature	Average	Above average at previous inspection	Small entry dipped on 2001 results
Mathematics	Well below average	Does well across full range of grades, but not at A* to C higher grades.	Well below average – at higher grades no real difference between boys and girls.
Science	Below average	Does well across full range of grades, but not at A* to C higher grades.	Below average, but two boys achieved A* grades.
Business studies	Below average	Weak at higher grades.	Below average. Boys and girls more or less same at higher grades.
Art and design	Above average	Significant improvement year by year since previous inspection	Well above average, 94 per cent of pupils achieved the higher grades.
Design and technology: • Food technology • Resistant materials • Textiles	Below average Below average Below average	A consistently under-achieving subject.	Too few entries in Food to compare. Resistant materials and Textiles remain below average.
Environmental studies	Below average	Performance is steady each year with around a third of pupils obtaining the higher grades.	No national comparison available, but below the geography national average.
French	Above average	Consistently a success story in the school. Boys and girls usually perform equally well.	Dipped a little, but remains a strong subject in the school.
History	Below average	Numbers too small to discern a valid trend	Below average, few entered.
Information and communication technology	None entered.	Not possible to identify trends	A GNVQ course.
Physical education	No pupils were entered for the GCSE	No discernible trend. Pupils are not entered for the examination year.	In 2002, over half the pupils entered gained the higher A*-C grades.

Religious education	Entries are too small to compare reliably with national results	No discernible trend because of the small numbers involved	In 2002, four of the ten pupils entered, gained the higher A*-C grades. Most pupils achieve well.
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2. Overall, the school ensures that most pupils obtain a grade in each subject they take in GCSE examinations; this represents satisfactory achievement. Results in French are the best in the school and close to the national average. The 2002 GCSE results show the good proportion of GCSE passes at grades A* to G achieved by pupils with special needs. In 2002, no pupils were entered for a GCSE examination in history or music. ICT was undertaken as a GNVQ course.

Standards of work seen during the inspection:

3. Standards of work identified through observation of lessons and analysis of samples of pupils' work indicate that standards are below average overall:

Standards	Years 7-9	Years 10 and 11
Well above average		art and design
Above average	art and design, music	
Average	citizenship, French,	citizenship, French, physical education
Below average	English, design and technology, geography, history, physical education, religious education	English, science, design and technology, environmental studies, history, religious education
Well below average	mathematics, science, ICT	mathematics, ICT,

4. Standards seen during the inspection were below and well below average in 60 per cent of lessons, average or better in 38 per cent of lessons. Given that overall standards were well below average when these pupils entered the school in Year 7, the school has effectively raised their standards of attainment, learning is effective and pupils' achievement is good.

5. The school, therefore, is doing well by its pupils in most subjects:

Achievement	Years 7-9	Years 10 and 11
Very good	art and design, citizenship, French, music	art and design, citizenship, French
Good	English, mathematics, history, physical education	English, mathematics, science, physical education
Satisfactory	design and technology, geography, ICT, science	design and technology, geography, history
Unsatisfactory	religious education	ICT, religious education

6. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in lessons. They succeed in every subject at the same rate as all other pupils. In all subjects progress is at least satisfactory; it is good in art and design, English, mathematics and religious education, and very good in French. Pupils who are withdrawn for extra help in literacy make good progress in lessons and show sound improvement overall.

7. Standards of literacy are below average. The school has introduced a policy to improve levels of literacy and teachers have been trained in the skills required to achieve this. However, not all subjects pay sufficient attention to developing the range of basic skills in reading and writing during lessons. Knowing technical words associated with subjects is important and departments mostly help pupils in this; some are less ready to give opportunities to improve the daily use of reading and writing.

8. Standards of numeracy, whilst below average, are improving. The focus teachers are giving to the use of number in a variety of ways helps pupils to gain confidence. There is a need for a more coherent approach to this across all subjects. Some subjects use ICT effectively, in others its use is minimal. The school is aware of the need for development in the use of ICT in all aspects of pupils' learning and is taking steps to improve the facilities and expertise of teachers to make this a reality.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

- Attitudes are very good and contribute very well to pupils' learning.
- Relationships between pupils and between adults and pupils are very good.
- Behaviour throughout the school is good and provides an orderly learning environment.
- There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to take responsibilities in school and for themselves to set individual targets to support their own learning.

9. Pupils are very interested and involved in all school activities. In lessons they listen very well and enjoy contributing to discussions, although this is a skill requiring further development. They work independently and sensibly when in pairs and groups. They offer each other support in their work and are keen to share their learning with peers. These very good attitudes contribute well to the good quality of learning in the majority of lessons.

In an excellent Year 10 French lesson all pupils behaved very well, they listened attentively, were totally engaged in the activities and all displayed a respect for the teacher and a willingness to do their best.

10. Relationships between pupils and in particular between adults and pupils continue to be very good and they make a significant contribution to the atmosphere observed found in many classrooms. In discussion with parents and pupils, it is apparent that they feel that one of the major strengths of this small school is the fact that everyone knows each other and this leads to very good personal support for pupils. The inspection findings strongly endorse this view.

11. Pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school continues to be good and during the inspection there was no evidence of bullying or harassment. At break-times and lunchtimes pupils are friendly and there is a calm social atmosphere. During the last school year there were a significant number of exclusions, predominantly for fixed periods. Very few are converted into permanent exclusions.

Pupils' personal development continues to be good. The buddy system for Year 7 pupils has proved worthwhile and the pupils involved are enthusiastic about their role. Through opportunities in lessons they are able to reflect on moral and social issues which develops their thinking and questioning skills. For example, in a Year 9 history lesson, pupils were engaged in a challenging debate on whether gas should be used in warfare.

12. Pupils are not given sufficient opportunities for responsibilities, which affects their personal development by not giving them the skills to support and help others within a community. In addition pupils are insufficiently involved in setting their own targets for improvement which often leads to them not taking enough responsibility for their own learning.

13. Attendance is satisfactory for the majority. However for a small minority of pupils with erratic attendance there is a serious impact on their learning. The school does everything possible to support and encourage these pupils. The overwhelming majority of pupils are punctual and this ensures a smooth efficient start to the day.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

How effectively the quality of teaching helps pupils learn and make progress in lessons.	Good overall in all year groups
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14. Teaching and learning have improved significantly since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching in most lessons was at least satisfactory, and in two-thirds of lessons was good or better. In almost a quarter of lessons seen teaching was very good and occasionally excellent. The challenge for the school is to raise the standard of teaching in a third of lessons closer to the remainder that are good or very good. There is a clear connection between the quality of teaching and how well pupils learn. Pupils' achievement since starting school reflects the qualities found in the best teaching.

15. The improvement is, in part, owing to the appointment of some key new members of staff and a general raising of expectations of what makes a good lesson. There has also been some staff movement that has led to improvement. However, what is good is not known or shared by all teachers and senior management is not rigorous enough in finding ways of sharing approaches that prove to be successful. The better teaching takes full advantage of the smaller groups in most lessons. Teachers know pupils well and meet their learning needs effectively because of this. They know when to give one-to-one support or make more demands of individual pupils. In the best lessons teachers are clear what they expect pupils to learn and plan activities to meet these goals. In less effective lessons activities are put before pupils without clear expectations of the knowledge, understanding and skills that teachers seek to develop in the lesson. In a few cases, teachers have too low expectations of pupils and are too easily satisfied with work that is below the capabilities of pupils. Not enough is made in some cases of the final five or ten minutes of a lesson so that what is learned is not discussed by pupils and fully realised.

Some excellent teaching takes place in French. In a lesson with Year 10, the teacher used a wide range of active tasks that kept pupils motivated and led to effective learning. They worked on tenses through the use of mime, responded to visual stimuli, played games that checked the accuracy of their learning. The lesson moved at a fast pace enabling pupils to build effectively on what they had learned previously. Pupils were required to practise speaking, listening and reading with each other and against a time limit. Crucially, they enjoyed their learning.

In a lesson in art and design with Year 7, the final few minutes of the lesson were well managed by the teacher so that pupils had a voice in evaluating their own learning in a lesson where they were making press prints. Excellent questioning by the teacher caused pupils to assess how effective their learning had been. The teacher encourages pupils to believe they can succeed in all aspects of art and design and frequently gets them to speak of their success, using language effectively. Expectations of teacher and learner are high.

16. Teachers manage pupils well with the result that boys and girls come to lessons with very positive attitudes and are keen to learn. The best teaching takes account of how pupils at different ages learn, lessons are interesting and capture the attention of pupils. As a result, behaviour is good and pupils learn effectively in most lessons. Teachers set purposeful homework, although some are not consistent in setting work and cause some parents concern. Homework is usually marked promptly and helpfully.

17. The quality of teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good. Teachers generally provide pupils with work that is suited to their learning needs, but in design and technology, ICT and science teachers are not aware of pupils' individual education plans. In most subjects they make special provision. For example, in French the teachers put emphasis on speaking and listening so that pupils are not held back by problems with literacy. In design and technology, however, pupils with special needs are expected to use the same approaches to writing as all other pupils. The learning support assistants provide effective help, particularly when they are briefed in advance of a lesson. However, this does not always happen. The teaching of basic literacy in small groups is good. Pupils are provided with a number of activities, which they enjoy. The pace of lessons is good, pupils

work hard in a pleasant atmosphere and progress is good. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties are well known to teachers and learning support assistants, who use appropriate strategies for dealing with them. Consequently they make progress in lessons at the same rate as other pupils.

18. Pupils who could attain well are not always sufficiently challenged. This, in part, explains the below average results in the higher grades of the GCSE examination. In the less successful teaching, teachers are slow to extend the thinking of pupils beyond the immediate and obvious; curiosity is not aroused or used as a focus for effective learning. They fail to take advantage of the small classes to get to grips with the learning needs of all pupils, making sure that all strive to fulfil their potential.

In a lesson about earthquakes, pupils were unclear what was to be learned about earthquakes, despite looking at a vivid example of one. They could not properly discuss what they had seen as they had no criteria or information to give their work a focus. This had not been made clear at the start of the lesson. As a result their learning was superficial, depending largely on their imagination and response to what they had seen. Good ideas were not seized upon and put into a rigorous geographical context.

19. Some teachers miss opportunities for pupils to put their ideas into spoken language. The best teaching manages interaction between pupils and the teacher in discussions and debates effectively and these key skills are well developed. However, this is not always the case and other teachers too readily accept sloppy and incorrect use of spoken language, rather than challenging it and seeking correct use. Skilful teaching achieves this within the fast pace of a purposeful lesson.

20. In some lessons teachers keep careful track of how effectively pupils learn; this helps them in their future planning. In music, for example, pupils' compositions are recorded and the teacher and the class together agree an evaluation of whether learning objectives have been achieved and to what level of success. Other teachers make such learning clear and how work might be improved through thorough, helpful marking. However, it is rare to find teachers and pupils have agreed personal targets designed to extend and improve the standards pupils might achieve. Higher-attaining pupils do not always do as well as they could because demanding goals are not clearly set for them.

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

- There is a good range of worthwhile curricular opportunities to cater for the interests, aptitudes and particular needs of pupils.
- Teachers provide an appropriate range of out-of-school opportunities for pupils.
- The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

21. The curriculum provides all pupils with a broad and balanced education. There are few extras – the school does not offer a planned programme of drama, for example – and some subjects have insufficient time to provide depth and detail to learning; this is especially true of religious education. On the other hand the school has been innovative: it has quickly put a course in citizenship in place, has a clear policy for literacy and an imaginative course in association with a local college for those pupils who are easily disaffected by school. The vocational programme undertaken by this group is popular and successful; it also leads these pupils to bring positive attitudes to other aspects of their curriculum in school. Given the problems of staffing an extensive curriculum in a very small secondary school, the provision at Beacon Hill is commendable.

22. Pupils with special educational needs enjoy effective help and support. They are fully included in all parts of school life and follow the same curriculum as all other pupils. The only exception is a small number of younger pupils who are withdrawn for “catch up” lessons in literacy. Their timetable is arranged so that they do not miss lessons in the same subject each week.

23. There has been some improvement in the provision of ICT since the previous inspection through the acquisition of more hardware. However, overall improvement is unsatisfactory since lesson planning through schemes of work is still not in place and no steps have been taken to assess how well pupils are achieving in their knowledge and use of ICT. However, a new member of staff started in September and has made a good start in tackling some of these outstanding issues. The use of ICT across the curriculum at present fails to meet the requirements of the national curriculum.

Provision for pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

- There has been improvement since the previous inspection and now there are good opportunities for pupils’ personal development.
- Very good provision for pupils’ moral development ensures pupils’ attitudes and behaviour are very positive.
- Pupils have insufficient knowledge and understanding of the diversity of cultures that exist in Britain today.

24. Pupils are given opportunities to consider difficult thoughts and feelings about themselves and their relationships with others and what they see in the world. Acts of collective worship now meet statutory requirements and offer satisfactory opportunities for reflection. In lessons there are often good moments in which pupils’ spiritual awareness is encouraged.

In mathematics, pupils were fascinated when examining the effects that transposing coordinates might have for a bomber pilot. In art and design, the use of fictional readings provided a spiritual focus. In English there are planned explorations of values and human feelings through literature.

25. The school is effective in teaching pupils right from wrong. Consistently high expectations of behaviour from staff promote a calm friendly atmosphere. In science, discussions on genetic engineering and energy conservation promote very good opportunities for pupils to reflect on moral issues.

In a Year 7 citizenship lesson pupils were learning and developing an understanding of the rules and rewards system that apply in the school. The imaginative devising of a game linked to these rules ensured all pupils enjoyed participating and developed a better understanding of the rules that govern the school

26. All members of staff foster good relationships between pupils and between pupils and themselves. There is a good sense of social belonging in the school. In lessons teachers provide opportunities for pupils to work cooperatively and collaboratively. The school is keen that pupils know about their own background. Pupils visit local places of interest in their work such as Hadrian’s Wall and the theatre. Most subjects promote cultural development well. However, as reported at the time of the previous inspection, there are still insufficient opportunities for pupils to increase their awareness of the rich cultural diversity within present-day Britain. The use of school trips, for example the very popular trip to France, further promotes pupils’ social and cultural development. Pupils who have attended this trip discuss it with enthusiasm.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

- Very good pastoral support based on staff knowledge of pupils ensures all pupils have someone they can talk to about any worries or concerns.
- Good behaviour and anti-bullying policies underpin the efforts of the school to ensure good behaviour in pupils.
- Good health and safety and child protection procedures ensure a safe environment.
- Good procedures for first-day contact of pupils absent from school promotes a caring supportive environment.

27. The school has sustained a good level of overall care as reported at the time of the previous inspection. The school has succeeded well in creating a “caring community in which individual pupils are valued and supported” as identified in the school’s aims.

Pastoral support is very strong and there are many opportunities for pupils to talk confidentially to staff or counsellors. All pupils are well known to staff and this creates a friendly family atmosphere.

28. Procedures for ensuring pupils welfare have remained good as reported at the time of the previous inspection. The school’s policy for health and safety is detailed and the governing body is actively involved in monitoring procedures. Day-to-day safety is generally good although during the inspection the school was alerted to a potential health and safety hazard in the design and technology department. The school has yet to develop a policy on restraint of pupils as required in law. Pupils develop safety awareness through the drugs and health aspects of the citizenship curriculum.

29. The school has good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour. The school’s behaviour policy has very clear aims and expectations, is based on positive rewards and is applied consistently throughout the school. The policy is usefully included in the school prospectus and pupil planners to ensure parents and pupils are fully aware of the procedures being used. There are good procedures in place to monitor any poor behaviour or bullying and all incidences are fully recorded and carefully handled. These procedures result in the good behaviour observed during the inspection.

30. Attendance monitoring is good. Pupils with poor attendance records are carefully monitored and a lot of support is put in place to encourage better attendance. Registers are carefully monitored and appropriate actions taken to follow up absences. This contributes to the majority of pupils having a good attendance record.

The school librarian is very efficient in her role of following up any unexplained absences on the first day of occurrence.

Assessment

31. The use of computer software has improved the school’s ability to analyse and share assessment data in a form that is meaningful to those responsible for leading the development of improvement in subjects. There is raised awareness at senior management level of the importance of using assessment data effectively to raise standards. The school receives more test results and formal teacher assessments from feeder primary schools than it did a year ago and is therefore in a better position to determine standards on entry. Whilst records for those pupils who enter the school at the age of eleven are shared promptly with staff, those for pupils who enter at other times are not always shared early enough. Not all staff have a secure understanding of the importance of assessment data and too little emphasis has been placed on training staff so they can track achievement and set targets for improvement, either at a subject or individual pupil level. Target-setting is a very strong feature in French but practice is less strong elsewhere; it is weak in design and technology.

32. A strength of the teaching in art and design is the way in which the teacher encourages pupils to learn from their own and other peoples' mistakes. In French pupils know the steps needed for best learning to take place and what the national curriculum levels mean for them. In both cases self-esteem is raised because pupils feel they have control and can improve their own performance.

Apart from art and design, French and music pupils are insufficiently involved in the assessment process. This is a missed opportunity for encouraging more active involvement in learning.

The majority of teachers use questioning effectively to help pupils to recall information and many share learning objectives with pupils. Few however, take the further step of encouraging pupils to predict how much they will know when they have succeeded. At the end of lessons, the summary of the lesson is often rushed with little time allowed for reflection or for pupils to share what they think they have learned during the lesson.

33. The school's assessment, recording and marking policies are satisfactory but too little monitoring has taken place to ensure consistency of practice across subjects. As a result systems vary from very good in music and French to unsatisfactory in ICT and design and technology in Years 7-11 and religious education in Years 7-9. Currently departments are insufficiently accountable for results at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Weaker subject areas have insufficient opportunity to learn from best practice. One subject leader has rightly sought specialist advice from colleagues outside the school. Marking is variable with high expectations and helpful written comments in the best practice and little rigour and too generous marking in the least successful.

Assessment procedures for pupils with special educational needs are satisfactory. Annual reviews for pupils with statements of special educational need are carried out correctly and punctually. All the requirements on the statements are fully met. All pupils with special educational needs have individual education plans in accordance with the Code of Practice. The targets on these are mostly of good quality although in a few cases they are too vague to allow progress to be properly measured. The school does not yet involve parents and pupils enough in drawing up the individual education plans as recommended in the new Code of Practice. The school does not analyse its data on special needs pupils and consequently does not know how successful its policy is.

34. Weaknesses lie in sharing information with subject areas and ensuring that all subjects frame their own action plans in order to help pupils meet their targets.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

- Most parents are supportive of the school.
- Pupils' annual reports are detailed, well written and well supported by meetings with parents.
- The school prospectus is informative and a useful document for parents.
- The school does not sufficiently involve parents in the drawing up of individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs.

35. The school has continued to maintain the good relationships with parents reported at the previous inspection. Parents have very positive views about the school and the majority of parents feel their children like school. There was a good response to the questionnaire reflecting parental interest in their child's education.

36. The Beacon Hill School Association supports the school and provides a number of opportunities to financially help the school. The homework planners are developing into a

useful three-way communication system. They provide a suitable method for form tutors and parents to monitor pupils' learning and achievement.

37. The quality of documentation provided for parents is good overall. Annual reports to parents are detailed and provide a clear reflection of pupils' strengths and areas for improvement. Pupils' own targets included in these reports are often too vague to usefully help pupils improve. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are not sufficiently involved in the setting of their child's targets. This leads to parents not being adequately aware of how their child is progressing and what they might do to help their child make progress. The prospectus is well written and informative, but the governors' annual report to parents is brief, does not meet statutory requirements and provides very little information about the activities of the governing body.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

- The headteacher and key staff provide satisfactory leadership and management of the school.
- Members of the governing body maintain vigilance in checking on the effectiveness of the school.
- The school management does not sufficiently review how well the school is doing or take sufficient steps to share the expertise and good practice that would make learning and teaching even more effective.
- The school manages resources well. The curriculum is well managed even though some teachers have several responsibilities. The school's finances are managed prudently.

38. **Beacon Hill is a happy school.** In recent years, its reputation in the town and surrounding district has risen. The credit for this rests with the headteacher, senior staff and governing body. All have worked hard to raise the profile of the school and to let members of its community know of its strengths and the opportunities a small school offers to children.

39. **It is an improving school.** Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 lead to results in GCSE examinations, whilst below average overall, showing improvement at a faster rate than that found nationally. In the work seen during the inspection, matching as it does many of the examination results, it is clear that pupils achieve well in relation to the standards they had when they started in the school. This, too, is due to the leadership and management of the headteacher and senior management. It is also a result of some very good teaching from a nucleus of staff.

40. However, ***the school could be better***. For example over a third of teaching is less than good, just under a third being satisfactory and a small minority of teaching is unsatisfactory. It is clear that there is scope for improved teaching and learning and higher attainment by those pupils who could have higher expectations of their own achievement. The school has carefully logged data about the standards achieved by each pupil from Year 7 and through the school; however, ***teachers do not use this data to help their own planning or for setting individual targets for all pupils***. Successful approaches to teaching these pupils are not identified and shared across the staff – so that others try out proven methods when they are appropriate.

41. ***The quality of teaching and learning is not central to the school's development and planning for improvement. The school is not sufficiently evaluating its performance.*** If success in learning and in GCSE examinations can be achieved by pupils with special educational needs in subjects as diverse and demanding as art and design and French, why do the same pupils fail to do as well in other subjects? The school is aware that key reasons are the outstanding teaching and relationships in these subjects between staff

and pupils. Too often, some teachers underestimate the pupils, talk of them as being different and Aspatia being isolated as though these are reasons for some underachievement. The school's commitment to the proposals for a Rural Academy are aimed to tackle this issue, and so they do. The school usefully seeks solutions where there is expertise beyond the school. However, not enough steps are taken within the school itself to seek significant improvement. The key to this rests in ensuring a higher occurrence of excellent teaching, more good teaching becoming more regularly very good, and more satisfactory teaching being more usually good. **In French and art and design, 91 per cent of teaching is very good or excellent. History, music and physical education are also consistently taught well.** The headteacher does not use his knowledge of this very good teaching in the school as much as he might to persuade all staff that in the best schools, that the *excellence of the teaching is a key characteristic*. No formal plans are in place to make this understanding a reality; management at senior and heads of subject level does not place sufficient emphasis on striving to make all teaching as good as the best in the school.

42. **Governors have a part to play in school improvement.** Several governors are involved in major aspects of school policy. The Chair has a clear knowledge of the school's main strengths and weaknesses. Some governors get involved in the daily life of the school and can, therefore, talk of issues with some direct experience. However, they do not make sufficient demands on management to raise standards further still, despite setting challenging targets for pupils.

43. This underlying concern was similar at the time of the previous inspection. Areas for improvements indicated at that time have not been fully met. The school was urged to 'be clear exactly what will be done to effect the required change... in order to further improve standards'. There has been little significant improvement in this central concern; it remains the key issue arising from the present inspection.

44. The management of provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. The new Code of Practice is firmly established but parents and pupils are not involved enough in drawing up individual education plans. Communications with subject departments are too informal. As a consequence there are some teachers who are not aware of pupils' individual needs. The three learning support assistants are deployed sensibly although not all teachers involve them in planning before lessons. Although individual records are kept, data is not analysed to measure the overall success of the special needs policy. Although there is a link governor, relationships between the governing body and the learning support department are not close enough.

Staffing

45. Teachers attend courses as well as those run within the school for particular and relevant purposes. A greater focus on approaches to teaching and learning would be a positive development.

Accommodation

46. The quality of accommodation is good. The school building and grounds are well maintained and cared for and pupils treat their learning environment with respect. There is no evidence of vandalism and very little evidence of litter. Subjects generally have sufficient good teaching spaces although the science and design and technology areas require refurbishment. There is no access to suitable small rooms for group work in music. In some classrooms and corridors there are good displays which enhance the learning environment.

Learning resources

47. Overall, the school has adequate resources to teach the curriculum and some subject areas are well provided for. Notable strengths include art and design, where the quality of printing equipment is very good, and history which makes good use of ICT for teaching. The newly created citizenship curriculum area has a good range of source material, music is well provided for with keyboards, and in physical education adapted resources make learning easier for pupils who have special educational needs. Tools are poor in quality in design and technology and pupils are unable to use ICT to support their learning in this subject.

Finance

48. Financial management is good and the school gives satisfactory value for money. The school recognises that teachers are its best resource and manages its finances to maintain small groups and a staff that meets the demands of the curriculum.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

49. In order to improve the school further, the governors should focus on:

- (1) the management of measures to raise standards further, through the sharing of good practice in teaching and learning through systematic, and rigorous processes of self-evaluation by:
 - the headteacher and senior staff being single-minded in their approach to school self-evaluation and improvement, and developing a clear vision of what they want the school to achieve;
 - headteacher and senior staff becoming more involved actively in implementation, support, monitoring and evaluation of teaching, learning and key initiatives through:
 - monitoring and supporting the planned curriculum through scrutiny of teachers' medium-term and short-term planning;
 - monitoring and supporting the quality of teaching and therefore the performance of individual teachers through classroom observation;
 - keeping a check on standards and achievement through the analysis of test and GCSE results and taking steps to set targets as a result; checking these through discussions with staff and pupils and looking at work;
 - monitoring the achievement and progress of all pupils with good awareness of differences of boys and girls and the learning needs of different pupils;
 - leading staff meetings focussed on teaching and learning/curricular planning
 - leading school-based in-service training;
 - working with leaders of subjects to analyse test and exam data and decide on necessary steps to lead to further improvement;
 - working with members of staff to give them confidence to adhere to the guidance and policies that they had all contributed to and agreed belief in;
 - keeping professional knowledge up to date;
 - planning for development over a longer period of time than one year;
 - realising the richness and potential in all staff;
 - developing clear and high expectations – of what should be taught and how, through a detailed learning and teaching policy followed by all staff.
- (Paragraphs: 15, 17-20, 40-44, 55, 63, 68, 81, 88, 93, 106, 112)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	73
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	57

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	6	12	31	20	5	0	0
Percentage	8	16	42	27	7	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	200
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	64

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	61

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	17
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	11

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.5

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3

National comparative data	8.0
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National comparative data	1.2
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Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	28	12	40

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	7	12	12
	Girls	8	7	7
	Total	15	19	19
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	38 (32)	48 (59)	48 (39)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	13 (5)	20 (20)	10 (10)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	5	10	10
	Girls	7	5	7
	Total	12	15	17
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	30 (53)	38 (56)	43 (45)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	3 (18)	8 (18)	13 (13)
	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)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	20	18	38

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	18	18
	Girls	7	17	17
	Total	8	35	35
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	21 (50)	92 (92)	92 (96)
	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	27.3
	National	39.0

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

Ethnic background of pupils***Exclusions in the last school year***

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	200	26	2
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	12.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	13.6

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	5
Total aggregate hours worked per week	124

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	20.1
Key Stage 4	18.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	765 379
Total expenditure	797 601
Expenditure per pupil	4 242
Balance brought forward from previous year	41 375
Balance carried forward to next year	9 153

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	3.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	3

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)	1.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	200
Number of questionnaires returned	104

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	52	7	4	0
My child is making good progress in school.	32	53	3	2	9
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	52	8	2	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	61	9	6	4
The teaching is good.	32	53	2	2	11
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	20	48	14	5	12
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	42	3	3	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	52	45	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	22	48	11	6	13
The school is well led and managed.	31	50	6	4	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	31	48	5	4	11
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	22	35	13	9	21

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well considering their starting point is well below average.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Pupils have good attitudes and behave very well.
- Pupils with special educational needs achieve well.

Areas for improvement

- There is only one specialist English teacher.
- Teaching and learning are not monitored and supported.
- Not enough use is made of assessment data.

Standards of work seen during the inspection and GCSE results are below average. However, this means that pupils have achieved well because when they entered the school in Year 7 they had standards that were well below average. This success is the result of good teaching that ensures that pupils learn well in lessons. Pupils' good attitudes further contribute to their progress. Sound leadership of the department provides effective support to non-specialist teachers so that the quality of teaching and learning is maintained.

Commentary:

50. Teaching and learning in English are good. Lessons are well-planned, taking full account of the Key Stage 3 Strategy in Years 7-9. This was seen to very good effect in a Year 7 lesson on personal and factual writing:

- The teacher raised the interest of pupils with a quick-fire "starter" revising a spelling rule.
- The teacher involved pupils at the outset in understanding what they were intended to learn about writing techniques.
- She provided a number of activities that kept pupils fully motivated.
- She kept the pupils focused on what they were to learn.
- Homework reinforced what they had learned.

Consequently, pupils made very good progress. Much of the teaching follows this pattern but teachers do not leave enough time at the end of lessons to review with the pupils what they have learned.

51. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with standards of English that are well below average. Their positive attitudes and their very good behaviour, combined with the good teaching, result in their achieving well. By the age of fourteen most pupils find talking formally in class difficult, but the highest attainers contributed well to a debate on the values of society arising from a study of "Whose Life Is It Anyway? Many pupils read simple texts competently but stumble over less familiar words such as "disorderly".

Pupils with special educational needs achieve well. Teachers generally provide suitable guidance for support assistants to give effective help. On occasion, however, the work is too difficult and pupils' progress in the lesson is then unsatisfactory.

52. Writing skills are generally weak, even the highest attainers being only a little above the national average. In some cases written work is helped by teachers' comments that show pupils how to do better next time. However, too often comments do not help in this way.

53. Achievement continues to be good in Years 10 and 11 although standards are still below average.

In the GCSE year there are still pupils who have difficulty in reading words that are not commonly used. This affects their understanding. The highest attainers, however, show a sound appreciation of literature. In a study of 'Of Mice and Men' they understand the significance of such details as the red dress and the incident with Lennie and the mouse. They see the moral implications of the novel.

54. In their written work there are only a few pupils who produce accurate extended writing. Most make spelling and grammatical mistakes while some have difficulty even with simple sentences. As with the younger pupils, girls perform better than boys. Adequate use is made of ICT, particularly to present work in a word-processed form. The best teaching with older pupils makes demands of pupils.

In the lesson about 'Of Mice and Men' with Year 11, pupils were shown a model of writing as a challenge for their own response to the novel. They are encouraged to improve their work through working through drafting processes, not just to write more accurately but to show their insight into incidents in the story. Although questioning is not persistent, it probes the text to lead pupils to a deeper understanding. They struggle to make sense of how Steinbeck uses objects as symbols that tell readers about the inner thoughts and feelings of the characters.

55. The department is soundly managed by a head of department who also has other major responsibilities in the school. There has been a succession of non-specialist and temporary teachers to share the teaching with the head of department. Teaching and learning are not monitored, and full use is not made of the assessment data that is available. Nonetheless the department has shown good improvement since the previous inspection, particularly in its teaching.

Basic skills: The development of skills of literacy across subjects

56. Standards in literacy are below average. The school has formulated a coordinated policy to raise standards in all subjects. However in some subjects teachers have not gone much further than listing the keywords of English. Not enough attention is paid to raising standards of speaking and listening; pupils receive little chance to speak at any length although there are examples of discussion work in citizenship, English and history. In general pupils are often not comfortable when speaking in class and require more guided practice. Similarly there are not enough opportunities for extended writing other than in English. Consequently standards are not high enough. For example, in religious education extended writing is confined to higher attainers and even they struggle with the more complex forms of writing such as evaluation. Overall planning for literacy is not yet detailed enough and the system of monitoring is not rigorous enough to identify areas of weakness.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well.
- Teaching is good.
- Pupils are made to explain their work

Areas for improvement

- Computers are not used to help pupils learn.
- Teachers need to continue to make sure that the needs of every pupil in their class are well met.

Standards of work seen during the inspection and GCSE results are well below average. Nevertheless, pupils have achieved well since they started the school in Year 7 for they have taken on a more demanding range of mathematical skills. Good teaching has ensured this effective learning. Pupils' good attitudes to their work contribute to the progress they make in lessons. Leadership of the subject is satisfactory and seeks to improve standards.

Commentary:

57. In 2002 every pupil gained a GCSE grade at least as high as was expected based on what they had learnt when they started the school. Three quarters of all pupils exceeded these expectations by at least one grade. Pupils do well because they are well taught. Teachers know exactly what each pupil needs to help them learn. This is why pupils with special educational needs make progress that is no different from that made by other pupils. Boys and girls achieve equally well. In each class pupils have a very wide range of attainment so it is essential that teachers continue to make sure every pupil has work at the right level all the time.

In a Year 9 class with 13 pupils, the teacher had many different activities to help pupils use coordinates. The teacher told each pupil which exercise to do and when to move on. The learning in this lesson was very good because every pupil had work that challenged them appropriately.

58. During lessons, teachers very regularly check the work of each pupil. Skilful questioning helps any pupil who has made an error. Teachers know exactly when to help. They tell pupils how well they are doing. Work in exercise books is always marked but teachers' written comments are not as helpful as those they give in class because they do not tell a pupil what progress they are making or how to do better. Except for the best lessons, teachers do not plan activities sufficiently to meet the differing learning needs of pupils.

In a Year 8 lesson, objectives for the lesson were not clear to pupils and in the first half of the lesson some pupils struggled to understand some basic facts about triangles or know the names of different types of angles.

59. Good emphasis is given to making sure pupils have a sound basis of numerical skills. This is important because very many of them do not when they start at the school. By the end of Year 9 the higher-attaining pupils can use these skills well, for example to work out ratios, and lower-attaining pupils show an understanding of place value. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 11 use algebra with confidence. However, they have not yet started work on trigonometry.

60. Teachers regularly ask pupils to explain their answers. This helps pupils understand what they are doing. By doing this to the rest of the class, they gain confidence in talking to a group of pupils. This helps them in their mathematics and in other lessons. Pupils listen with respect to each other.

61. Pupils enjoy mathematics lessons. Their attitudes towards the subject help them learn.

A Year 7 class was really excited when told they would be using 'spotty' paper to draw rotations of an object. Even though this was the last lesson of the day, they did not want to stop working when the bell went!

62. Pupils do not use ICT in mathematics lessons. The national curriculum requires that they should.

63. The head of department has a number of other roles in the school. He is very committed to wanting every pupil to do well but does not always have sufficient time to develop mathematics in the school because of his other duties. Improvement has been good since the previous inspection.

Basic skills: the development of skills of numeracy across subjects

64. Pupils have very low numerical skill when they enter the school in Year 7. The school has adopted the Key Stage 3 Strategy. This strategy is having some effect on raising standards. Pupils say the mathematics they are now doing followed on well from what they learnt in their primary schools. Standards of numeracy are improving. In some subjects, such as history where pupils draw graphs from a past census, a good contribution is made to developing numerical skills. However, this is not the case in all subjects. Coordination of the development of numeracy across all subjects would help raise standards because pupils would have more occasions on which they practised their numerical skills.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Results in both the national tests at age 14 and in GCSE have improved over the last few years.
- Learning is good across all aspects of the subject and pupils' overall achievement is good.
- Teaching is good; lessons are clearly structured, with a variety of tasks that involve pupils in learning through taking part in practical activities.
- Good relationships and classroom management mean that pupils have a positive attitude to science and want to do well.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of work in Year 11 are below average and in Year 9 are well below average.
- Assessment information is not used effectively to promote pupils' progress.

Standards of work seen during the inspection and GCSE results are well below average in Year 9 and below average in Year 11. Pupils' overall achievement in relation to standards on entry to the school is good by Years 10 and 11. This is the result of good teaching, which, together with pupils' positive attitudes to their work, ensures good learning. Pupils make good progress as they move through the school.

Commentary:

65. Enthusiastic and stimulating teaching motivates pupils to work hard so that they learn well. Pupils enjoy science. The marking of written work usually includes constructive comments which show pupils how to improve. Classes are managed effectively and lessons are well structured and organised. At the beginning of good lessons teachers explain the aims of the lesson and, at the end, review with the pupils whether learning has been successful. Imaginative activities are used to capture pupils' attention at the start of lessons. For example, Year 11 pupils were given cards with questions and an unconnected answer. A pupil read out a question and the pupil with the correct answer then read out their question. The chain continued involving every pupil in a punchy review of their knowledge. This focused their learning for the succeeding variety of activities. This good practice needs to be shared within the department so that pupils' experience in science is more consistent.

In a Year 11 lesson, higher-attaining pupils had a good understanding of the work of different body organs involved in achieving a constant internal environment. Some lower-attaining pupils were confused over the difference between osmosis and diffusion.

66. Many opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their experimental skills. By age 14 pupils can discuss the nature of independent and dependent variables, and understand the need to make sufficient repeated observations in an investigation. By age 16, higher-attaining pupils can describe and interpret patterns in their results and evaluate their reliability. Lower-attaining pupils have difficulties in using their scientific knowledge to explain these patterns. Literacy skills are developed well with an emphasis on the correct use and spelling of scientific key words. Pupils are encouraged to talk about science and role-play is used to good effect. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 need to be given more opportunities to explain scientific concepts in their own words. Numerical skills are less well developed and pupils need more practice in manipulating formulae in physics. ICT is used effectively to enhance learning.

Pupils with special educational needs receive good support from assistants. In lessons where there are no assistants, they do not make as much progress as other pupils because of a lack of suitable resources. Higher-attaining pupils are often not challenged sufficiently in lessons where tasks are the same for all pupils.

67. Pupils have insufficient opportunities to work independently and have poor independent working skills. Time management in lessons would be helped by more detailed planning.

68. The subject is soundly managed and improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. There has been high staff turnover in the last few years and no support from a technician. The department is enthusiastic about the introduction of the new initiatives in Years 7-9, but the targets in the development plan need to be more specific. Assessment data needs to be used more effectively to monitor the progress of individual pupils so that under-achieving pupils can be given extra support. More rigorous monitoring and evaluating is needed to provide consistency across the subject.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Very good planning and teaching ensures the majority of pupils achieve well.
- GCSE results are above the national average and rising.
- Assessment strategies are used well to raise pupils' self-esteem.
- There is very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Areas for improvement

- The provision and use of ICT are inadequate.
- No measure is taken of pupils' standards in art and design when they start in the school.

Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average by the end of Year 9 and well above average by the end of Year 11. GCSE results were high in 2002. This means that the pupils have achieved very well since they started school in Year 7. This success is the result of teaching that is very good and ensures very effective learning. Pupils' very keen attitudes to their work contribute to the very good progress they make in lessons. Leadership of the subject is very effective and encourages improving standards.

Commentary:

69. Teaching and learning in art and design are very good. Teaching reflects a very good knowledge of the subject and lessons are generally very well planned to engage pupils' imagination and encourage them to become independent learners. From Year 7 onwards, homework is set frequently and appropriately. Work is marked with helpful written comments. This is a 'can do' culture where the teacher often stresses how the best learning occurs from making mistakes and gaining from such experience. Key words are displayed to reinforce the learning of new technical vocabulary and dictionaries are regularly referred to if neither the teacher nor the pupils are sure of a particular spelling. ICT, however, is not developed either for graphics or research purposes.

70. Achievement is often very good in Years 10-11.

In a Year 10 lesson where pupils were watching a video about Monet the teacher used questioning well in order to probe the pupils' powers of observation. As a result they looked more closely and made effective notes. The pupils watched as an amateur artist struggled to work in the style of Monet. The majority could understand his difficulties and equate with how he learned because of the focus adopted by the teacher.

71. More boys than girls are taking the subject in Year 11 for the 2003 examination. Currently they lack confidence in presenting their ideas before an audience. In group work the girls are mainly given the secretarial tasks. The teacher is having to structure current work much more tightly than would normally be necessary at this stage.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a very strong feature of the curricular provision in this subject. Pupils in different year groups have learned about Aboriginal dream art, Celtic culture, how Mondrian developed colour harmony. Year 8 pupils are currently being challenged by spiritual ideas related to the soul after reading extracts from 'The Northern Lights' by Philip Pullman.

72. The needs of all pupils are well considered. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because they are given appropriate support by the teacher and, when present, the learning support assistant. Gifted and talented pupils benefit from extra challenges. The majority of pupils react well by making the most of the opportunities offered to them.

73. There is very good vision and leadership for the subject. Departmental documentation is very well presented and of a high quality. Sketchbooks are well used in Years 7-9 but in need of further development in Years 10-11. Improvement has been very good since the previous inspection.

CITIZENSHIP

Overall, the quality of provision in citizenship is good.

Strengths

- This new course is creating good opportunities for pupils to learn about themselves and their roles as citizens, living responsibly and contributing to the life of their community.
- Lessons are well planned and pupils work well in response to well-structured sequences of tasks.
- The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' social and moral development.

Areas for improvement

- The elements of the course that were not part of the long-established course in personal, social and health education require further development.
- Teachers of all subjects do not often seek opportunities to underline citizenship issues that arise in their subjects.
- Pupils are not given enough responsibility in school; at present there is no school council.

Standards of work seen during the inspection are average throughout the school. However, achievement is good as a result of good teaching and learning and, especially, the very positive attitudes pupils bring to these active lessons. As a result they make good progress in lessons and increase their knowledge and understanding of the nature of good citizenship. The introduction of the subject has been thorough and imaginative.

Commentary:

74. The planning for lessons in citizenship draws on established materials that catch the interest of pupils. Teaching generally uses these materials interwoven with independently planned approaches, ensuring that the needs of all pupils in the group are met. Learning occurs at a quick and demanding pace, although there is also a need to judge carefully when this pace needs maintaining by timely intervention and extension of activities for those doing especially well in a task. Pupils with special needs find these lessons interesting and get a sense of satisfaction as they are involved fully in group discussions and activities. As a result these pupils make steady progress in lessons.

75. Boys often dominate group discussions and although groups are usually mixed, there is a need for a developing sense of sensitivity to principles of good communication, speaking and listening, the give and take of discussion. This is a particular teaching skill in lessons that require, for their objectives to be achieved, pupils to feel that they can speak freely and openly of their thoughts and feelings to situations that sometimes will be quite personal in nature. Pupils are starting to develop an awareness of their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society.

Year 8, in a simulation involving working out how much tax they would have to pay on their earnings, what is left for key expenditure and debating the merits of buying or renting a house, pupils begin to realise the implications of individual decisions made by members of the class. They are well supported as they work through the simulation, using skills of numeracy and debate to arrive at an understanding of the need to balance cost against income.

76. A good aspect of teaching and learning in citizenship is seen towards the end of the best lessons. The teacher draws together what pupils have learned, asking them to say what this is. It is a process when the teacher demands that pupils justify their opinions about issues raised in the lesson. These issues are frequently ones that contribute to pupils' understanding of social and moral issues, and therefore enhance their personal development in these areas. The best teaching challenges glib answers, those that are based on stereotypical views of aspects of society and those that may represent unacceptable prejudice.

Year 11 pupils worked well at inventing newspaper headlines and then distinguishing fact and opinion as they began to grasp an understanding of the power of language to shape ideas and opinion. In Year 9, pupils enjoyed an exercise where they had to rank definitions of good citizenship, realising how difficult a task putting human behaviour in a rank order can be, especially when getting people to agree together.

77. The teacher responsible for the introduction of citizenship is very experienced in teaching and planning for personal and social education. She is aware of aspects of citizenship to be added to this course in order to meet requirements. By having a separate course in citizenship, overall a significant strength, there is a risk that other teachers of other subjects feel they do not have to contribute in this area as well. However, as with all aspects of personal development, citizenship is an area to which more attention needs to be given within the context of learning in other subjects. The school does not give enough responsibility to pupils that help with the efficient day-to-day life of the school.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The planning and teaching of practical skills leading to satisfactory achievement.

Areas for improvement

- The National Curriculum orders for the subject are not fully implemented.
- GCSE standards over the last three years are below the national average for the higher grades A*-C.
- Accommodation and resources are inadequate.
- Standards of display are poor.

Standards of work seen during the inspection are below average overall, but average by the end of Year 9; this means pupils have achieved well in practical skills since they started in Year 7. However, pupils' design and written work is weak, and by Year 11 causes standards of work seen and GCSE results to be below average. The success in practical skills is a result of sound teaching and causes achievement overall to be satisfactory. Pupils work hard and invest a lot of physical effort but mental activity is less apparent. Leadership of the subject is ineffective in encouraging improving standards.

Commentary:

78. Teaching and learning in lessons seen during the inspection are satisfactory. These lessons are focused on practical activities. Pupils in Year 7 use coping saws carefully to shape an acrylic key tab and learn to refine and polish surfaces. The majority of Year 8 pupils make brave attempts to cut joints for their storage box. Year 9 pupils learn to work in mild steel, and make simple tools such as a toffee hammer. A number of Year 10 pupils learn how to join surfaces as they assemble an acrylic clock face, whilst Year 11 pupils make larger constructions such as a garden bench. Pupils' number skills are adequate for the tasks undertaken. This represents satisfactory achievement, throughout the school, in acquiring traditional craft skills.

79. From studying work in pupils' folders and from talking to pupils, however, whilst the teaching and learning of theory are satisfactory the development of design and the reinforcement of literacy and ICT skills are unsatisfactory. As a result of staff changes only resistant materials is being offered to all pupils. Food technology is offered in Year 11. There are no opportunities for pupils to study systems and control. Too little thought is given to involving pupils in the assessment process or to giving them the opportunity to develop active learning strategies.

Pupils with low literacy levels spend too long standing around listening to the teacher. They often lose concentration and guess answers rather than thinking about the question asked. Similarly higher attainers are not allowed sufficient opportunity to develop their own ideas. By contrast, when pupils are engaged in practical activities the majority of them invest high levels of energy, are very supportive of one another and behave well.

80. Pupils with special educational needs are adequately supported, in practical lessons, either by a learning support assistant or the technician. Potentially higher-attaining pupils are not given any extra challenge. The marking of pupils' work is too generous for lower attainers with minimal written comments to explain problems or suggest ways to improve. Frameworks to help with writing are well used for homework but the teacher reads worksheets to pupils rather than giving them the opportunity of reading aloud. This is a missed opportunity for developing reading skills. Standards of presentation improve considerably when lower attainers use computers to word process but examples of this practice are few. Spelling is often poor. No evidence is found of ICT being used for graphics or research purposes and no relevant web site addresses are displayed in the design area or workshop. The lack of proper equipment for developing hand-drawing skills limits progress in Years 7-9. Whilst the department has received training in using electronic software for design purposes there is no evidence to show that this training has benefited the pupils' design work in Years 10-11.

81. The leadership of the subject is unsatisfactory. The resources are poor, the documentation is unsatisfactory and display is minimal. Health and safety issues have been identified in the workshop. Improvement has been poor since the previous inspection.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Teaching shows a good level of knowledge and understanding of geography.
- The management of pupils' behaviour is good.
- GCSE results in environmental studies show some above average standards.

Areas for improvement:

- Explanations of the purpose of learning activities are not always given and the preparation of pupils for these activities lacks clarity.
- The use of ICT is inadequate.
- Target-setting and marking to support pupils' progress and raise standards are not fully used.

Standards of work seen during the inspection in Years 7, 8 and 9 are below average. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. It is limited in some lessons because pupils' levels of knowledge and understanding are not always taken into account and the purpose of activities made clear. Pupils generally have positive attitudes to their work and the good management of their behaviour supports their learning. GCSE results in Environmental Studies are usually close to or above the national average. Leadership of the subject is satisfactory.

Commentary:

82. Teaching and learning in geography are satisfactory. Teaching generally supports pupils in making progress. Good use is made of video clips to illustrate the effect of, for example, volcanoes and earthquakes and pupils are encouraged to discuss and share their ideas and understanding. They respond well to stimulating question and answer sessions. Pupils' learning is limited when they are not prepared sufficiently for activities and do not understand their purpose. Effective classroom management helps to ensure pupils remain focused on their learning.

By the end of Year 9 pupils have increased their knowledge and understanding of geography. Pupils explain physical processes such as volcanoes and earthquakes and show an understanding of the impact of physical disasters in developed and developing countries.

83. The standard of pupils' written work is below average overall and there is a significant difference between higher- and lower-attaining pupils in the quality of content, spelling and punctuation. Marking does not always provide pupils with sufficient feedback to help them improve future work.

An analysis of pupils' work showed that the same work was undertaken by all pupils, with little modification to meet the differing learning needs of pupils. Basic skills of literacy were weak and marking did not sufficiently indicate to pupils how they might improve.

84. In Years 10 and 11 pupils study the GCSE environmental studies course but this year there are no Year 10 pupils taking the course. Achievement is satisfactory in Year 11 and results over time show evidence of above average attainment. In Year 11 pupils are encouraged to develop their skills of independent study through a local study. Insufficient written work was available to make a judgement about its quality.

Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. They participate in group discussions and always attempt to undertake the work provided for them. Their progress is limited when they have not been prepared sufficiently for the task they have been set. They are supported effectively by the teaching assistant.

85. The leadership of the subject is satisfactory. There is a focus on developing pupils' literacy skills and this is evident in lessons. There is little use of ICT in lessons except for videos. The use of target-setting to support pupils' achievement is underdeveloped. These are key areas for improvement. Since the previous inspection, improvement has been satisfactory overall but there are still too few opportunities to use ICT.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- From Years 7-9 pupils achieve well in history.
- Lessons are well planned with a variety of teaching approaches used to stimulate pupils' interest.
- ICT is used very effectively to support pupils' learning.
- Pupils are very well managed in lessons and relationships between the teacher and pupils are good.
- There is a clear vision for history and the contribution it can make to pupils' intellectual and personal development.

Areas for improvement

- Over the last four years there has been a significant fluctuation in standards at the end of Year 9.
- Standards in Years 10 and 11 are below average.
- The quality of pupils' written work is below average in Years 7, 8 and 9 and well below average in Years 10 and 11.

Standards of work seen during the inspection in Years 7, 8 and 9 are below average. Oral work in lessons is better than the pupils' written work. By Year 9, nonetheless, pupils have achieved well since they started in Year 7 when standards were well below average. Standards of work seen and GCSE results in Years 10 and 11 remain below average, so achievement is satisfactory over the two years. Pupils make good progress in lessons as a result of very good teaching and effective learning, but many pupils have difficulty retaining what they have learned. Leadership of the subject is good and makes a significant contribution to the overall good achievement of pupils.

Commentary:

86. Teaching and learning in history are very good. In all years lessons are well planned and their purpose clearly explained to pupils. The beginnings of lessons are always stimulating and gain pupils' interest and attention. Some lessons begin with a brisk quiz to help pupils remember what they have learned previously and others start with interesting visual stimuli. A variety of learning activities is provided and very good use is made of ICT in teaching. The brisk pace of lessons, the interesting learning activities and good class management ensure that pupils are motivated, enjoy the lessons and learn effectively. As a result of this by the age of 14 pupils have improved and achieved well. In lessons pupils show that they have a sound knowledge of the historical topic they are studying and are developing an understanding of key concepts such as change, cause and consequence. Written work varies considerably in quality. Higher-attaining pupils give detailed descriptions and provide

reasons for historical events such as the Spanish Armada and English Civil War. The poor literacy skills of lower-attaining pupils make it difficult for them to express their knowledge and understanding clearly and write at length.

87. Results in GCSE examinations were below average in 2002. However, in lessons pupils are learning effectively because the teaching and class management are very good. Pupils' oral work is generally good but the quality of their written work is poor. Pupils are able to use their knowledge to answer questions but find it more difficult to give reasons for events and explain consequences.

Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because:

- the teaching motivates them and keeps them interested,
- an appropriate variety of activities is provided,
- they are supported effectively by teaching assistants,
- class management and relationships are good.

88. There is good leadership of the subject. The subject's priorities reflect those of the school; curricular planning is good. There is a strong focus on ensuring pupils learn well and that standards improve. Assessment of progress in lessons is good and is used in the planning of the next lesson. Target-setting and the tracking of individual pupil progress is not well developed. Improvement has been good since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- A specialist teacher has been appointed and is beginning to develop the subject.

Areas for improvement

- The national curriculum requirements are not fully covered.
- There are no plans of what is to be taught.
- There are no records of what has been taught or detail of what each pupil has achieved during Years 7-9.

Standards of work seen during the inspection and GCSE results are well below average. Standards were very low when pupils entered the school in Year 7 so their achievement is satisfactory by Year 9 as a result of sound teaching. Pupils' learning is satisfactory in Years 7-9 but unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11. The unsatisfactory learning and achievement arise because:

- records have not been kept of what pupils can do and so teachers cannot plan lessons to build on what has previously been achieved,
- some pupils have unsatisfactory attitudes to their work.
- Leadership of the subject is unsatisfactory.

Commentary:

89. In recent years, there have been several changes to the teaching and management of ICT. A newly qualified teacher was appointed to teach the subject from September 2002. As a result of these frequent changes and unsatisfactory management of the subject, she arrived to find no plans of what should be taught to each year. She has made a good start on producing plans but this job must be finished so that pupils learn what is expected. These plans must make sure that pupils learn how ICT can be used to measure, record and control events. The school has given good support to this new teacher.

90. Detailed records of what pupils had learnt had not been kept so she has to spend too much time in each lesson finding out what they can do. This means that work is often set at the wrong level. This can lead to pupils losing motivation. Too many older boys choose to browse the Internet or play games because they do not see the work as meeting their needs.

91. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with varied experiences from their primary schools. Some have not used computers at all before. Others have but their skills are very low – little more than basic word-processing. By Year 9, higher-attaining pupils are beginning to use a spreadsheet but they cannot yet write a formula. Lower-attaining pupils at this age still have difficulties finding their way around the keyboard. Most pupils obtain information from the Internet. Pupils with special educational needs make progress equal to other pupils because they are taught in smaller groups. Computers help these pupils learn, for example with improved spelling and the layout of their work.

92. Higher-attaining pupils can use a spreadsheet to say whether a condition has been met. They evaluate and refine their work. Lower-attaining pupils use differing fonts to design a poster but they are not yet skilled at planning and improving their work. Pupils have not formed the habit of recording how they are developing their work. It is essential that they do this for their examination. The new teacher has plans to make sure that these accounts are written. The teacher has a good knowledge of how to teach the subject. She is committed to developing pupils' independence in learning.

The teacher has already prepared a good series of tasks to help pupils develop some word-processing skills. Most pupils work maturely with these materials and some are beginning to try things for themselves, both in managing information and using the Internet for research.

93. Unsatisfactory improvement has been made since the previous inspection because improvements have not been made to the plans of what is to be taught and to the ways pupils' learning is assessed.

Basic skills: the development of skills of ICT across subjects

94. Good use is made of computers to help pupils learn in some subjects. For example, pupils can 'interview Hitler' when studying the causes of the Second World War. Too many subjects do not make enough use of ICT to help pupils learn. Teachers need more help in gaining confidence to use it towards more effective learning. A start is being made by the new member of staff, but senior management has been slow to persuade teachers of the opportunities. This is partly because of difficulties in arranging to use the computer room when it is being used for ICT classes. The school has plans to set up another room and this is important if the advantages of using ICT are to be gained. Another problem has been the unreliability of the system to access the Internet. The school did not choose this system; recently, it has been a little more reliable.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

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

Strengths

- Teachers plan and teach their lessons very well and consequently pupils achieve very well. Much of the teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is excellent.
- GCSE results are close to the national average and pupils do better in French than they do in other subjects.
- Pupils' attitudes towards their learning are very positive, they have very good relationships with their teachers and their behaviour is very good.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good and enables them to achieve very well.
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good and have resulted in a significant improvement in standards since the previous inspection.

Areas for improvement

- The use of assessment to plan more effectively for the progress of groups with differing learning needs, particularly the highest-attaining pupils, requires development.
- The evaluation and development of teaching and learning in lessons relies too much on informal arrangements.

Standards of work seen during the inspection are average; this means that pupils have achieved very well in French since they joined the school in Year 7. This success is the result of very good teaching which gives pupils confidence to succeed and ensures very effective learning. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are excellent; pupils' achievement, therefore, is also excellent. GCSE results are close to the national average. Pupils' very positive attitudes and the very good relationships they have with their teachers contribute to the very good progress they make in lessons. Leadership of the subject is very effective and encourages improving standards.

Commentary:

95. Lessons are very well planned with a very good variety of very well sequenced activities, which engage pupils' interest and enable them to make very good progress. Pupils speak confidently and their listening skills are very well developed. This is because of the very effective and extensive use of French in lessons. Pupils rapidly understand and use new language for themselves because of the very clear presentation of new language using the overhead projector or mime and gesture. They are also given frequent opportunities to practise in pairs and small groups. Pupils enjoy their learning and are keen to participate because they are confident they can succeed and activities are designed to provide them with achievable steps in learning.

Year 10 pupils rapidly increased in confidence in describing their free time in the past by taking part in a noughts and crosses game and in a game challenging them to list as many activities as possible from memory against the clock. Year 11 pupils used new language they had learned to conduct a class survey about future ambitions

96. Pupils with special educational needs are very well catered for; activities and resources are very well matched to their needs. Activities are mainly focused on speaking and listening, building on their strengths and as a result they achieve very well, the majority achieving a grade at GCSE. Teachers use a wide variety of approaches to teaching and learning; they make very good use of games and competition to encourage pupils to join in.

Pupils respond with enthusiasm and rapidly gain in confidence and competence during such activities. In contrast to the other skills standards of writing overall are below average. Most pupils write to a model, match print with meaning and use set phrases, substituting words to change meaning to produce short accounts. By the end of Year 11 higher attaining pupils write at length and in detail, applying grammar rules successfully and linking their ideas effectively.

Year 8 pupils quickly understood and used phrases to describe where they live because they were presented clearly on the overhead projector. They were then able to practise the phrases in a game of 'Pass the Parcel' and in a listening activity where they used white boards to jot down what they had heard.

97. The management and leadership of the subject are very good. Priorities are clearly focused on raising standards and appropriate action is taken. Although both teachers work on a part time basis they take full responsibility for ensuring that they share ideas and develop consistency across the department. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

98. At present pupils do not have the opportunity to study a second language and this disadvantages able linguists who wish to continue their studies after GCSE.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Pupils enjoy music and take part in lessons with enthusiasm; they want to be successful.
- Teaching is good and enhanced by its very good and broadly-based musicianship.
- Pupils receive very good individual support during lessons.

Area for improvement

- There is no provision for music in Years 10 and 11.

Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average; this means pupils have achieved well since they started in school in Year 7, when standards generally were below average. This success is the result of teaching that is good and ensures effective learning for all pupils. Pupils' attitudes to music contribute to the progress they make in lessons. The subject is managed with a sense of purpose and vision.

Commentary:

99. Teaching and learning in music are good. Lessons are well-planned with a range of activities that maintain pupils' interest and lessons move on at a fast pace, so that pupils' energy and enthusiasm are maintained. In each part of the lesson, the teaching makes it clear what is to be learned and in partnership with the pupils sets about ensuring that success is achieved. Individuals and pairs of pupils work well together on electronic keyboards or the piano composing their own melodies and chord sequences within a form that is part of what is to be learned in the lesson. Intrinsic to this work is a management of time measurement in often complex sequences; this contributes to pupils' numeracy skills.

Year 9 showed clear progress over two lessons in how they could use chords to accompany their composed melodies. The teacher intervened well, for example getting boys on the clavino to sometimes split their chords into arpeggios for particular effects. The energy of this group was sustained over both lessons, ending with a lively rendering of a gospel song in which the dynamics of emphasis was successfully added to the singing that was snappy, with good tone and pitch. Boys and girls enjoyed this end to the lesson; its quality reflected the musicianship in the teaching.

100. Singing in Years 7-9 is enhanced for the very keen pupils by attendance at a choir practice twice a week.

101. Pupils improve in their music-making as they move through Years 7-9. As well as effective teaching, this is also the result of effective assessment of standards of work achieved at the end of a series of lessons. Work is usually recorded and played back to pupils who complete self-evaluation sheets; they take this seriously and are supportive of each other whilst being able to point out areas for improvement. The assessment procedures show that there is little difference in the performance of boys and girls; a further feature is that those pupils who have additional experiences, for example who enjoy piano lessons from a private teacher, are encouraged in lessons to extend themselves. A strength of the planning of teaching and learning is that tasks can be tackled at levels suitable to the levels being achieved by individual pupils. By the end of Year 9, for example, higher attainers are achieving level 6 of the national curriculum, yet the success is emphasised with the realisation that almost all other pupils are achieving level 5, sometimes before they reach Year 9. The good one-to-one support ensures that pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as the rest of their classmates.

Pupils in Year 8 imaginatively composed melodies that contrasted moments where the tune moved in steps and others when it moved in leaps and which provided variety, musical tension and interest to the listener. One boy imaginatively used double octave-playing to enhance this contrast.

102. Music is well managed. Lessons take place in a good music room and there is a sufficient range of equipment and instruments to meet the needs of the national curriculum. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good as the key teacher, new to the school at that time, has become familiar with the learning needs of pupils. The school needs to tackle the challenge of providing music education in Years 10 and 11.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The overall quality of teaching is good and pupils achieve well.
- Pupils who have special educational needs are helped to experience success.
- Over half the pupils who took the GCSE in 2002 gained the higher A*-C grades
- Pupils have positive attitudes towards learning in physical education.

Areas for improvement

- Planning for future development is weak, particularly for Years 10 and 11.

Standards of work seen during the inspection are close to but below average in Years 7-9 and average in Years 10 and 11. This means that pupils have achieved well considering their well below average starting points on entry to the school. This is due to good teaching and their own positive attitudes to their work in physical education, which together make for effective learning.

Commentary:

103. Teaching and learning in physical education are good. Teachers, including non-specialists, know their pupils well and plan their lessons so that pupils of different attainment levels are suitably stretched. They use interesting activities that contain a good level of physical demand as well as making pupils think about their learning. Teachers use their knowledge of the subject effectively to analyse pupils' performance in lessons thus enabling them to question the pupils constructively about their work. Pupils are then well equipped to think about ways of improving their performance either individually or by talking to each other. In the best lessons, this process is well established so that pupils naturally look for ways of helping each other to improve without necessarily waiting for the teacher's interventions. Consequently, by the age of 14 pupils have achieved well. However, their knowledge and understanding of skills and tactics in hockey and football are generally at a higher level than their actual performance in practice-drills and games. Pupils work hard and persevere well in their practices but only a few show consistent control and fluency. All pupils know that it is important to prepare carefully for strenuous physical activity. Impressively, in a Year 7 netball lesson, the girls began a sensible aerobic warm-up themselves before the arrival of the teacher.

104. Achievement continues to be good in Year 10 where pupils build on the standards already reached in their chosen activities and make good use of their well-established learning habits. Similar strengths in teaching are evident as in Years 7-9.

In Years 7-9, girls reach average standards in netball. Boys evaluate each other's efforts to use a variety of equipment to design games practices for younger pupils; they work well together to produce an interesting and challenging result.

105. Pupils who have special educational needs which relate to learning in physical education also achieve well. This is because teachers know them well and can adapt the lesson or resources to help them learn. Very good planning, for example through liaison with pupils' learning support assistants enables pupils with a physical disability to be well integrated with other pupils in the lesson.

106. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular sporting activity and has very good accommodation for physical education. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good; the quality of teaching is significantly better. Schemes of work now ensure that pupils build on their previous learning more effectively and so are suitably stretched as they move through the school. They are supported by good, newly-implemented assessment procedures. Whilst there is an evident commitment to improve standards and to continue to improve the overall quality of teaching, this is not reflected in the quality of strategic planning. In particular, the implications for all pupils have not been fully taken into account in the recent introduction of the Junior Sports Leader's Award in Year 10, which together with some aspects of the GCSE examination, are taught during the time allocated for compulsory physical education. The subject is well managed.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The overall quality of the teaching is good and most pupils make good progress in lessons.
- Pupils who are entered for the GCSE examination achieve well.
- Pupils who have special educational needs are well supported.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning in religious education.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient time is available to teach the agreed syllabus in the required breadth and depth.
- Assessment procedures in Years 7-9 are unsatisfactory.
- The quality of marking is inconsistent and, too often, does not show pupils how to improve their work.
- Pupils who wish to take the GCSE examination have to be taught within the time allocated for compulsory religious education. This arrangement is unsatisfactory.

Insufficient time is allocated for teaching religious education throughout the school and so it is not possible to teach the required syllabus fully. Consequently, pupils do not reach the standards expected by the agreed syllabus. However, the overall quality of the teaching is good and the majority of pupils have positive attitudes to learning so that they make generally good progress in lessons. Achievement overall since they entered the school in Year 7 is unsatisfactory.

Commentary:

107. Timetable constraints during the inspection week meant that only a small number of lessons could be observed. Judgements are therefore tentative and rely heavily on an analysis of the written work of a representative sample of pupils.

108. By the time that they reach Year 9, most pupils reach standards below those expected by the agreed syllabus. They have a broad but shallow level of knowledge and understanding of the key features of belief and worship in Christianity and other major world faiths. Their appreciation of what it means to be a member of a faith community is more limited because this aspect of the syllabus is not dealt with in sufficient depth, even in those areas, for example Judaism, where pupils' knowledge of belief and practice is more extensive. Many pupils, when given the opportunity, make thoughtful personal response to difficult questions, for example in considering belief in the existence of God.

109. Conversely, in Years 10 and 11, time constraints are handled in a way that sacrifices breadth of coverage in favour of depth in a few areas. Higher attainers reach average standards in their work on Christian marriage. They can write to a good length in expressing their knowledge and understanding of problems that arise within relationships and of Christian views on moral dilemmas such as divorce and abortion. Lower attainers can describe Christian, Islamic and Jewish attitudes to marriage and divorce but do not compare them sufficiently. Their writing is limited in length and spelling and grammar are weak.

110. Teachers plan lessons carefully taking into account the different levels of attainment of pupils. Learning for lower attainers and those pupils who have special educational needs is well supported by adapted resources and learning activities. Learning activities are generally

interesting and are varied so that pupils' interest and concentration can be sustained well throughout the fifty-minute lessons. Non-specialist teachers are well supported.

Learning was good in a Year 7 lesson on parables. This happened because the pupils were well prepared for new learning through an effective review of their previous lesson and they were set time limits for individual reading, group discussion and writing tasks.

111. Throughout the school, written marking of pupils' work is inconsistent and seldom helps pupils to see clearly how they might improve their work. In Years 10 and 11 marking tends to be more helpful for those pupils who are likely to be entered for the GCSE examination.

112. Since the previous inspection improvement has been unsatisfactory. The time made available for the subject has not increased and the quality of marking of pupils' work in Years 10 and 11 has not improved. Teachers do well in the limited time available to enable some pupils be entered for and achieve well in the GCSE examination. Current arrangements for assessing pupils' work in Years 7-9 are unsatisfactory because they are not sufficiently well linked to the expectations of the agreed syllabus.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

113. The school liaises with the local college in providing a small number of pupils with opportunities in vocational education in subjects such as painting and decorating, plumbing, building and hairdressing. These subjects are studied to NVQ level. A feature of this provision is the non-professional monitoring of the response of pupils to these courses by the chair of governors; this does much to ensure that pupils make the most of the opportunities offered them. It was not possible to observe these courses during the inspection but discussions with pupils indicate that they meet a particular need and, therefore, ensure that pupils who might otherwise remain disaffected with school are in fact keen to succeed in this and other aspects of school.

114. The school also offers a GCSE course in Business Studies. This is a well-supported course. Results in the GCSE examination are significantly below the national average. This course was not inspected.