

INSPECTION REPORT

CHESTERTON COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

Newcastle-under-Lyme

LEA area: Staffordshire

Unique reference number: 124411

Headteacher: Mr Colin Elstone

Reporting inspector: Mr Thomas Comer
15109

Dates of inspection: 20 – 23 January 2003

Inspection number: 249240

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 – 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr M Dolman

Date of previous inspection: 7 November 2000

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32113	Mrs J Byrom	Team inspector	Mathematics	How well the pupils are taught
30941	Mr K Brammer	Team inspector	English, English as an additional language	
22985	Mrs J Sparkes	Team inspector	Science	
32329	Mr A Stafford	Team inspector	Art & Design	
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10340	Mr J Lockett	Team inspector	Design & Technology	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This is a small secondary school with 471 boys and girls on roll – about half the national average. The school serves a former mining village situated close to Newcastle-under-Lyme. The district, designated by the Government as a regeneration area, suffers from significant social and economic hardship and the proportion known to be entitled to a free school meal is above the national average. Very few pupils come from ethnic minority backgrounds and only a few pupils have English as other than their first languages, and all are fluent in English. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is above average and the proportion with formal statements is nearly three times the national average. The great majority of the 97 pupils on the register of special educational needs have learning difficulties; a few have emotional or behavioural difficulties, and a very small number have other disabilities. The attainment of the annual intakes of pupils to Year 7 was very low in the past but has risen considerably over the past two years. The school has an achievement award for improving standards. It also has the Sportsmark Award and operates as a satellite club of the Stoke-on-Trent Gymnastics Centre of Excellence.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Chesterton Community High School is an increasingly effective and successful school which serves its community well. It provides a good education which meets the needs of all of its pupils well, regardless of background or ability. It cares well for its pupils and has a good partnership with parents, who have positive views of the school. The teaching is good and enables pupils to make good overall progress and to achieve well, both academically and in their personal development. The school is very well led and effectively managed. It is attractive, well equipped and well cared for. It is efficient and gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Very effective leadership
- Outstanding GCSE results in expressive arts and physical education
- Teaching is good and pupils achieve well
- Pupils are well cared for
- Pupils' good attitudes to school, their behaviour and personal development
- Partnership with parents and relationships with the community
- Outstanding range of extra-curricular activities

What could be improved

- Basic skills of literacy
- Standards in science in Years 10 and 11
- Attendance
- The marking of pupils' work and the setting of homework

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has been transformed since the previous inspection in November, 2000. Pupils now make good progress. Standards have risen and examination results have improved very well. Teaching and pupils' attitudes to school are much better. Pupils' ability to use information and communications technology has substantially improved. Pupils' attendance has also improved but still needs to be raised further. The teaching staff are now much more accountable for their work and self review and evaluation have become part of the school's culture.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	All schools			Similar schools	
	2000	2001	2002	2002	
GCSE examinations	E	E	E	B	Well above average A Above average B average C Below average D Well below average E

Standards achieved by Year 9 pupils

Many of the pupils begin Year 7 with weaknesses in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. The pupils make good progress throughout Years 7, 8 and 9 and achieve well in relation to their attainment when they began Year 7. Pupils with special educational needs also make good overall progress. By Year 9, overall standards of the pupils' work are below average but improving although weaknesses in literacy still persist. Standards are below average in English, mathematics and science. The results of the national tests of the previous Year 9 pupils (2002) in these subjects were below average in English and science, and well below in mathematics, but have risen faster than nationally over the past five years. The school adds considerable value and the 2002 Year 9 pupils' test results were significantly higher than in most similar schools.

Standards achieved by Year 11 pupils

The overall standards of work of the present Year 11 pupils are below average but represent a good achievement for these pupils in relation to their starting points in Year 10. Standards are below average in English and mathematics and well below average in science. The school's GCSE results are lower than the standards that the pupils actually achieve because the weaknesses in their writing skills put them at a disadvantage in the examinations. In lessons, pupils talk about their work and can explain what they know better than they can in writing. The overall GCSE results were well below the national average in 2002 but are improving much faster than the national trend and exceeded the challenging targets set by the school's governors. The proportion of Year 11 pupils achieving five or more GCSE higher passes (in the range A* – C) was well below the national average but greater than would be expected. The proportion achieving five passes at grade G or higher was in line with the national average for all schools. Pupils with special educational needs succeed in their GCSE examinations. The most successful subjects at GCSE are physical education and expressive arts subjects. In 2002, the results in information and communications technology GCSE were also very good. The results in English and mathematics are much better than would be predicted for these pupils, but they are lower than they should be in science. Higher attaining pupils take GCSE examinations in English and mathematics a year early and enjoy considerable success.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils feel valued and respected and respond well to the school's high expectations of them. They are keen to learn and to do their best.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good overall. Although a few pupils do occasionally misbehave in lessons, the school is calm and orderly. No pupils have been permanently excluded over the past year.
Personal development and relationships	Good overall. Pupils are interested in lessons and eager to take part in out-of-school activities. Pupils show respect to their teachers and consideration towards other pupils. Relationships between pupils and staff are very good.
Attendance	It is below average but has improved. There is very little truancy but too much absence is authorised by parents.

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.

Teaching is good throughout the school. The teaching meets the needs of all pupils and enables them to learn effectively. Pupils with special educational needs are well taught and make good progress. The school's gifted and talented pupils are identified early and they also make good progress. The main strengths of the teaching are the teachers' good lesson planning and their very effective management of the pupils. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are taught well in English and mathematics and are improving, but teachers of most other subjects need to concentrate more urgently on literacy, particularly extended written work. The marking of pupils' work and the setting of homework are also points for further improvement.

Pupils respond positively in lessons and take part enthusiastically in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. They try hard, concentrate and work at a good pace. The main weakness in their learning lies in their basic literacy skills,

especially the ability to write at length. This holds many of the pupils back and is the main reason why the GCSE results are not higher than they are. The most successful teaching is in English, mathematics, physical education, religious education and the expressive arts. Although the teaching of science is satisfactory in the GCSE course, it is not yet as effective as in English and mathematics.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good overall. The impressive range of extra-curricular activities enables many pupils to excel and helps to raise the pupils' self-esteem and improve their attitudes to learning.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good overall. Teachers and learning support assistants know their pupils well, understand their needs and ensure that they learn effectively. Pupil support workers ensure that pupils with behaviour difficulties make good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very small number of pupils with English as an additional language are fluent in English and make the same progress as others.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. Spiritual development good, especially in the expressive arts subjects and religious education. The provision for pupils' moral development is good and includes clear expectations of conduct. Social development is very good. Pupils learn how to work well together in many ways. They learn to take responsibility and to exercise leadership. The provision for cultural development is very good, especially in art, music, dance and drama.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. The monitoring of pupils' personal development, their behaviour, and attendance is good. Assessment of pupils' attainment should be more accurate and frequent in some subjects. The school has a good partnership with parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership provided by the headteacher and the senior team is inspirational, purposeful and very effective. The priorities for the school's improvement, the establishment of a good learning ethos and high expectations, improved attitudes and behaviour, and good working relationships have been achieved by the staff as a whole. The school is very well managed at senior level and the management of subjects is generally good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. All statutory requirements are met except for the provision of daily worship. The governors are very supportive of the school and have a good understanding of its strengths and matters for improvement.
The school's evaluation of its performance	In order to ensure that it is competitive, the school compares its performance with other schools, using local and national data and analyses provided by the local education authority. The senior staff monitor the work of the school thoroughly. The teachers all have personal performance targets and their work is regularly checked by senior staff.
The strategic use of resources	The school is well funded. It spends its money effectively in pursuit of its aims and objectives.

Staffing is generally adequate for the school's needs. The resources for learning are good in most respects, especially computers and other new technology; however, the library is poorly equipped and is inadequate for the school's needs.

The school applies the principles of best value effectively when comparing its own performance with other schools, when consulting pupils and parents about its effectiveness. It sets itself challenging targets and strives to equal the performance of competing schools.

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 expected to work hard • The school is well managed • Their children are helped to become mature and responsible • Their children make good progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A minority of parents would like more detailed information about their children's progress • More homework for younger, lower attaining pupils • A very small number of parents said that the school should be more vigilant concerning bullying

The great majority of the parents have good opinions of the school. The inspectors agree with what pleases the parents most. The inspectors also agree that homework is not set consistently and lower attaining pupils tend to have less homework than others, particularly in Years 7 – 9. The inspectors do not agree with parents about information about their children's progress. End-of-year reports are informative and parents can meet form tutors at progress meetings. Parents do not meet the subject teachers at these meetings but were consulted by the school and the majority of parents prefer the system as it is. The inspectors investigated bullying. The pupils and staff said that there are very few incidences of it and that they were in any case resolved swiftly and effectively.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

Attainment on Entry to the School

1. The overall attainment of the present Year 11 pupils when they first joined the school (*their prior attainment*) was very low and was similar to that of the previous Year 11 who sat for their GCSE examinations in 2002. This has been a characteristic of the school for some years. However, the prior attainment of the school's annual intakes to Year 7 is rising, although it is still below average. Amongst the pupils presently in Years 7 and 8 there are now many more potentially high attainers than in previous years and there are some very able pupils.

Pupils' Basic Skills

2. Pupils' basic literacy skills are well below average when they join the school. Although they improve, these essential skills, especially of extended writing, are not high enough by Year 11 and are the principal reason why the overall examination results are not higher than they are. Pupils need more opportunities to develop these skills, especially writing, in all subjects. Reading is also underdeveloped and the learning resource centre's library is ill-equipped to encourage wider reading amongst the pupils.

3. Pupils' numeracy skills are below average but enable pupils to learn other subjects well enough, particularly mathematics, science, geography and design and technology.

4. Pupils' IT (information technology) capability is rapidly improving. Although it is still below average in Year 9 it is above average by Year 11. This is a substantial and important improvement since the previous inspection.

Years 7, 8 and 9

5. Pupils make good progress over their time in Years 7, 8 and 9. Although overall standards are below average by Year 9, they nevertheless represent a good achievement for these pupils, bearing in mind their low starting points at the outset of Year 7. The overall results of national tests of Year 9 pupils were below average in 2002. They were below average in English and science and well below average in mathematics. The results are improving strongly – faster than the national trend. The 2002 results were well above the average of other similar schools on the basis of prior attainment.

6. The evidence of the inspection confirms the indications of the test results, that Year 9 pupils' standards of work in English, mathematics and science are rising, but are below average. In other subjects, standards are above average in physical education, average in citizenship and religious education, and below average in art and design, design and technology, geography, history, information and communications technology, French and music. Standards are rising in most subjects, particularly in information and communications technology, French and music. In French, pupils are building a much firmer foundation for future work in the GCSE course than was the case in recent years. Overall standards are below average in Year 9 in French but pupils achieve well, overall, in relation to their prior attainment.

Years 10 and 11

7. Although the GCSE results are well below the national average they are improving well – much faster than the national trend. In 2002, the overall results were well below the national average but they were well above the average for similar schools on the basis of their prior attainment (as measured at the end of Year 9). The results exceeded the governors' targets, which were challenging.

8. The proportion of Year 11 pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades A*-C was well below the national average in 2002 but was broadly average for similar schools on the basis of prior attainment. The proportion of Year 11 pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades A*-G has risen sharply and, in 2002, was in line with the national average for all schools and well above average for similar schools on the basis of the pupils' prior attainment.

9. Overall standards of the present Year 11 pupils' work are below average. The GCSE results indicate that standards are lower than this but this is not the case. This is because the weaknesses in the pupils' written work do not allow the pupils to show to best advantage what they know in the examinations. In lessons, pupils' ability to talk about their work and explain it is better than their written work and is a better indicator of these pupils' subject knowledge.

10. Standards are below average in English and mathematics in the present Year 11 and well below average in science. These results are reflected in the GCSE results in each subject. The results in English and mathematics are much better than would be predicted on the basis of the pupils' prior attainment but are lower than they should be in science. Nearly all pupils achieve at least a grade G in science. This deserves high praise but too few of the pupils achieve A*-C grades in science.

11. In other subjects, standards are well above average in expressive arts and physical education, above average in information and communications technology, average in art and design, citizenship and religious education, and below average in design and technology, geography, history, French and music. Presentation of written work is a general weakness which lets many pupils down.

12. The most successful subjects are English and mathematics throughout the school and physical education, performing arts subjects and religious education in Years 10 and 11. These good standards are reflected in the GCSE results, which are particularly outstanding in the GCSE courses in expressive arts and in physical education.

13. Gifted pupils often attend extra classes after school. Higher attaining pupils also benefit from early entry to GCSE examinations in English and mathematics and enjoy considerable success.

Pupils with Special Educational Needs

14. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. Scrutiny of pupils' work and lesson observations provide clear evidence of that progress throughout the school in English, mathematics, science, geography and religious education. Their progress is satisfactory in other subjects. In Year 11, these pupils succeed in their GCSE examinations.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

15. Most pupils have good attitudes towards the school and their work. They generally take pride in their work and do their best. They are quick to settle to their tasks and collaborate well with others. The majority of pupils like their school. Year 11 pupils talked enthusiastically to inspectors about the way in which the school has improved. Pupils are pleased that the school has a better reputation in the community, and are proud to belong to the school. Pupils appreciate the range of lunchtime and after school clubs, which the teachers provide for them and are very keen to take part in them.

16. Pupils with special educational needs collaborate with one another and take a full part in class discussions. Those with emotional and behaviour difficulties make good progress and benefit from the work of the pupil support workers and from the school's positive ethos. As a result, their attitudes to school improve and they develop a sense of responsibility towards their work.

17. Pupils generally behave well. The numbers of exclusions have fallen dramatically as the school's ethos has improved and no pupil was excluded permanently during the past year. Around the school,

pupils' behaviour is generally impressive and they are friendly and helpful to one another and to visitors. Pupils are motivated by the school's reward system and are keen to record their stars in their planners. In lessons, pupils can sometimes become restless or noisy and, on very rare occasions, they can become disrespectful.

18. Pupils develop good interpersonal skills and respond positively to opportunities to take responsibility, for example, as prefects or as representatives to the School Council. Relationships are very good. Pupils respect their subject teachers and appreciate the help they receive from their form teachers. At breaks and lunchtimes, pupils generally mix harmoniously and are very well supervised. Pupils say that they feel safe in the school and that there are very few incidences of bullying.

19. Attendance over the 2001-2002 year was well below the national average, with the figure for nearly all year groups below 90 per cent. The attendance figures for the current year to date have improved and are around 90 per cent, which is approaching the national average. In fact, most pupils have good attendance records; however, a quarter of them have poor records with individual attendance below 80 per cent. Obviously, this is bound to have an adverse effect on their achievement. The absence is generally authorised by parents and there is very little truancy. The school efficiently investigates reasons for absence and works hard to secure parents' co-operation. Pupils are punctual to arrive at school and to their lessons. Although attendance has improved since the previous inspection, it needs to be improved further.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

20. Teaching is good throughout the school. Since the last inspection, the school has focused successfully on improving the quality of teaching and the effectiveness of pupils' learning.

21. Teaching and learning are good in English. Lessons are well planned and teachers use a variety of teaching strategies and resources to make the lessons interesting and to promote good learning. A strength of the English department is its use of marking and assessment to help pupils to make progress.

22. In mathematics, the overall quality of teaching and learning is good and has improved since the previous report. Teachers work hard to develop pupils' confidence through structured planning that builds on earlier work and have established very good relationships with pupils. As a result pupils are keen to learn and make good progress.

23. Teaching and learning are good in science in Years 7 – 9 and account for the Year 9 pupils' good achievement. Teaching is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and improving but pupils do not yet achieve as well in science at GCSE as they do in English and mathematics. However, a particular strength throughout the school in science is the good teaching of practical work and investigation, and this deserves praise. On the other hand, the teachers' expectations of the most able pupils should be higher and more pupils should be working towards the higher GCSE grades.

24. The most successful teaching is in English, mathematics, physical education, religious education and the expressive arts. In these subjects learning is good and pupils achieve better than expected GCSE results.

25. The main overall strengths which characterise lessons are the teachers' good lesson planning, their very effective management of pupils and very good relationships with them. Teachers have worked very hard to raise the aspirations of their pupils and to foster a positive learning environment and they are to be congratulated on their success. Because the pupils now feel confident that they can succeed they respond positively in lessons and learn effectively. They try hard, and work at a good pace. These strengths of teaching and learning are evident in most subjects.

26. The main overall weaknesses of the teaching lies in the inconsistency of the teaching of literacy skills in subjects other than English. The main weakness in pupils' learning also lies in their literacy skills, especially reading and the ability to write at length.

27. There is insufficient emphasis on the teaching of literacy skills in many subjects. The quality of corrections and advice in exercise books ranges from good to inadequate and opportunities to develop pupils' skills are often missed in lessons. Extended writing, in particular, is frequently neglected in many subjects. The library is poorly equipped and it is not contributing as it should to the development of literacy.

28. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory although it is not yet fully embedded in the work of other subjects. In mathematics, most lessons start with an activity designed to develop numeracy skills and this is helping to raise standards. Science, ICT and geography contribute well to the teaching of numeracy, however, and provide the opportunity for pupils to practise their mathematical skills in different contexts. For example, in science, pupils calculate magnification, use time, manipulate formulae and draw line and block graphs; in geography, pupils use co-ordinates, direction and scale; in ICT pupils make effective use of formulae and spreadsheets

29. The aims of lessons are made clear to pupils at the beginning of each lesson and are often graded to provide suitable challenge for pupils of different abilities. Good use of questioning, for example in art, enthuses pupils and improves their understanding. At the end of most lessons, pupils review what they have learnt. These good features help to consolidate and reinforce pupils' learning. However, in some lessons the reviews do not take place. Teachers generally ensure a brisk pace and lively atmosphere by using a range of strategies that involve the pupils. They use a variety of teaching styles, for example, in English and mathematics, which add interest to the lesson. However, occasionally too much time is allowed for particular tasks and pupils quickly lose concentration; as a result, they make less progress than they should.

30. The teaching of ICT is satisfactory in Years 7, 8 and 9 and is good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subject. In Years 10 and 11, a variety of strategies are used, including discussion and research and pupils learn effectively. In Years 7 to 9, pupils do not always understand what to do because teachers have not planned and structured the lesson in sufficient detail. In these lessons, learning is slow and pupils do not achieve as well as they should. Pupils apply their ICT skills in other areas of the curriculum. However, the use of computers is underdeveloped in French, and in music there are insufficient opportunities for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 to use computers for composition.

31. The setting of homework is inconsistent. It is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9, because lower attaining pupils are not set homework regularly in some subjects and, when it is set, it is frequently finishing off classwork. As a result, pupils miss opportunities to extend their learning and to develop independent study skills.

32. Routine marking is used well in lessons to give clear feedback to pupils and provide help when needed, but the quality of the marking of written work is inconsistent. Marking is used well in English, for example, giving pupils encouraging comments and showing them how to improve, but needs more attention in most other subjects.

33. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good overall. Teachers and learning support assistants plan their work well, make good use of individual education plans, and understand the needs of their pupils. They raise the self-esteem of these pupils through praise and encouragement, reinforcement of their understanding and learning, and through regular, careful and evaluative assessment. In English and mathematics, Year 7 pupils are sometimes withdrawn for additional support, using a computerised integrated learning programme. This is effective and pupils' progress is rigorously monitored.

34. The teaching of gifted and talented pupils is good overall. In English and mathematics, extra classes are provided for Years 9 and 11, which enable pupils to attain higher National Curriculum levels at the end of Year 9 and to take GCSE a year early. By the end of Year 11, these pupils have made good progress.

35. The impressive range of extra-curricular activities contributes to the very good relationships between pupils and teachers and to pupils' positive attitudes to learning. The commitment and dedication of teachers is very evident in these out of school activities which include revision lessons for Year 11 pupils, dance and drama productions, and sport.

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

36. The school's curriculum is well planned. It meets legal requirements and provides equally well for all pupils, regardless of background or ability. All pupils are valued equally and are expected to succeed, with success defined as the best an individual pupil can do. The school encourages its pupils to take responsibility and to become active citizens.

37. The curriculum provides a broad learning experience for all pupils and includes all National Curriculum subjects and religious education and health and sex education taught according to the governors' policy. The time given for teaching is above the minimum expected and the balance of time given to the various subjects of the curriculum is satisfactory.

38. The school has put in place strategies to improve pupils' basic skills of literacy and numeracy. These are working well in English and mathematics and basic skills are improving. However, there is not yet a consistent approach to the application and practice of literacy skills in most other subjects and weaknesses in literacy are holding the pupils back. On the other hand, numeracy skills are adequate for the pupils' work, for example, in science, geography and design and technology.

39. The sole modern language taught is French, which has a generous allocation of teaching time in Years 7, 8 and 9. The school has exercised its discretion to disapply the National Curriculum requirement to study a modern foreign language in respect of many of the Year 10 and Year 11 pupils, and of a much smaller number to take a design and technology subject. This is a sensible decision, which has been made in accordance with regulations and national guidance to enable the pupils concerned to concentrate on fewer GCSE subjects or to undertake a course of work-related education at college.

40. The school is anxious to expand its range of vocational courses. At present, applied GCSE courses are offered in art and in leisure and tourism. Careers education has suffered from a lack of continuity and some pupils feel that they are not informed early enough about to make choices about careers and further an higher education. Nevertheless, there has been a rapid increase in the number of Year 11 pupils going into further education and sixth-form courses.

41. The range of extra-curricular activities is very wide and many of the pupils take extra classes after school, and also participate enthusiastically in various clubs and in music, drama, dance, gymnastics, team games and sports.

42. Pupils benefit from regular 'activity days', when they all follow a course in a single subject or theme, such as science. Pupils say that these days are enjoyable and enable them to make rapid progress. The school is a community school in a very real sense and it involves its community in the curriculum as much as possible.

43. The headteacher has taken a lead with other secondary schools to set up an area network of schools. For example, partnership with a local college and with other schools enables the school to widen its provision for gifted and talented pupils. Outside agencies, such as the police and social workers, visit the

school and contribute to lessons, for example, in drugs education and citizenship. Pupils and their parents are involved with a wide range of local initiatives, for example, family learning and lifelong learning. The school has very effective links with local partner primary schools, for example, to raise attainment in science.

44. The school identifies its growing population of gifted pupils and provides well for them in many subjects. In order to meet these pupils' needs, extra classes are arranged which aim to raise the pupils' performance in national tests at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science. Higher attaining pupils are entered for GCSE examinations in English and mathematics a year earlier than usual, at the end of Year 10. In Year 11, many of these pupils also attend classes after school, and take part in taster classes at a local college to help prepare them for study at advanced level.

45. Pupils with special talents in particular subjects, especially the expressive and performing arts, are identified early and benefit from high quality coaching. Year 11 pupils benefit from effective preparation for examinations, and this is much appreciated by the pupils themselves.

46. Pupils with special educational needs have the same opportunities as all other pupils and follow the same courses to GCSE. The organisation of classes enables these pupils to be taught largely in smaller groups with effective support provided by learning support assistants in English and mathematics. In some other subjects, for example, French, design technology and music, this support would also be beneficial. Many pupils are also withdrawn from lessons to improve their literacy and numeracy skills through one-to-one tuition and derive great benefit from this. Similarly, a large number of pupils enhance their reading, spelling and mathematical skills with an interactive computer programme. The school also helps new Year 7 pupils to consolidate their literacy and numeracy skills by taking part in summer schools.

47. The school makes no special provision for its small number of pupils with English as an additional language. At present, all of these pupils are fluently bilingual and need no special help with English. However, this may not always be the situation. There is no evidence that these pupils make progress at a rate different from that of other pupils but the school does not analyse its results to be certain.

48. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. The ethos of the school has continued to improve from the time of the last report and good relationships and a strong sense of community have received priority. Attractive displays of pupils' work around the school send out positive messages and reinforce a sense of shared pride. However, very few subject departments make plans for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in their schemes of work.

49. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is good overall. The expressive arts subjects make a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual development through exploration of aspirations and emotions. Religious education lessons provide opportunities for pupils to reflect upon spiritual questions about the meaning of life. Morning assemblies often include inspiring music, drama and dance, the celebration of achievement and a time for personal reflection. The school does not provide a daily act of worship for all pupils; however, the 'thought of the week', encourages and inspires pupils and raises their spiritual awareness of events such as the holocaust.

50. The school's provision for moral development is good. There is a clear code of conduct which pupils understand and follow and pupils learn right from wrong. Moral issues are often discussed in lessons; in geography, for example, pupils consider breaking down of prejudice, environmental issues and the changing roles of women. In religious education, pupils discuss matters such as genocide, good and evil. Pupils learn a sense of fair play in their games lessons. In citizenship lessons, pupils explore issues such as bullying, racism, family values and crime.

51. Provision for social development is very good. Pupils learn how to work together in many subjects and in sporting activities. Older students develop a sense of leadership and responsibility, for example, through participation in the school council and as prefects. Year 11 pupils give support and advice to younger pupils. There are many opportunities for pupils to take part in charity work. Pupils' self-confidence is

fostered in drama and dance lessons. The pupils are involved in a wealth of local community initiatives such, as a housing project, collaboration with other schools, the local council and a theatre. These experiences help to raise pupils' awareness of environmental issues, such as pollution, transport and recycling.

52. Some older pupils have worked with the fire service and a local police crime prevention initiative. A group of pupils took part in a project, working with professional actors, in which they created a play about bullying which they performed at local primary schools. In food technology, pupils created another piece in which they explored issues of healthy eating and self-image. This was performed at the county show and was later used in a video promoting a catering contractor. Pupils are aware of issues and causes of racism and discrimination and learn to deal with them.

53. The school makes very good provision for pupils' cultural development. Geography lessons teach the pupils about cultural differences of different peoples; music, art and history lessons enable pupils to learn about the work of celebrated musicians and artists, and about their own cultural birthright. In religious education lessons, pupils learn about different world religions. Pupils often visit museums, galleries and the theatre. As part of their work in dance, pupils joined with others to take part in a workshop with the Birmingham Royal Ballet and the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. However, in French, the school could do more to raise pupils' appreciation of European culture, for example, through exchange visits or correspondence with schools in France.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

54. The school looks after its pupils well. It has good procedures to ensure pupils' welfare and child protection procedures are securely in place. Teachers understand the procedures clearly and the school maintains confidential records. The governors have a health and safety policy which is effectively implemented and risk assessment has been carried out. No major health and safety issues are outstanding.

55. The school provides a breakfast club where pupils can socialise and enjoy a hot drink and cereal or toast before school. The school nurse holds a clinic to give practical advice to pupils about health issues.

56. The school works hard to improve attendance. For example, absence is followed up on the first day by office staff with a phone call to the home of the pupil concerned. The educational welfare officer and school pupil support workers make home visits when concerns arise and good attendance is recognised and rewarded. Attendance has improved significantly, but despite the school's efforts, it is still below average.

57. The school has improved pupils' behaviour and their attitudes to school. The establishment of an effective climate for learning has been one of the headteacher's main priorities. This has been successful and pupils therefore learn effectively. The new code of conduct was drawn up in consultation with pupils as well as staff. The lunchtime clubs attract many pupils and add much to the school's calm and purposeful atmosphere. Pupils have been motivated by the reward system, which is now under review. A culture of success is now well established in the school and individual achievement is celebrated, for example, in assemblies.

58. The assessment of pupils' attainment is satisfactory. The school monitors pupils' progress, including those with special educational needs, effectively. Pupils are set personal targets in each subject.

59. Information provided by primary schools provides background information on pupils with special educational needs, helps to identify their needs and how best to meet them. All teachers, throughout the school, use the pupils' individual education plans effectively when planning lessons and recording pupils' progress against the targets set for them. Similarly, annual reviews of pupils with statements of special educational needs record progress and set future targets. Learning support assistants are well trained and

very effective. The school's pupil support unit successfully re-integrates into school pupils from this and other schools who may have become disaffected with education.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

60. Parents have positive views about the school. Parents believe that the school is well managed, develops responsible attitudes in their children and expects them to work hard. They are pleased with the progress their children make and the extensive range of clubs and activities on offer. Parents have no major concerns. Some would like more consistent homework for younger pupils, particularly the lower attainers in Years 7 – 9. A very small number mentioned concern about bullying.

61. The inspectors agree with parents' positive views. They also agree with parents that homework in Years 7 to 9 is inconsistent and that lower attaining pupils have less to do than the higher attainers. The pupils' end of year reports meet statutory requirements and also give a good picture of pupils' achievement, attitudes and effort. Tutor review days give parents opportunities to meet form tutors and to discuss their children's overall progress. This system has been arrived at after consultation with parents although a minority still miss the former system, in which they could meet subject teachers. However, parents can talk to subject teachers by individual arrangement. The inspectors investigated bullying. The pupils said that there was very little bullying and incidences were resolved swiftly and effectively.

62. The overall quality of written information, including the progress reports, prospectus and governors' report to parents is satisfactory. The pupils' planners are proving effective as an additional channel of communication between school and home and are regularly checked by form tutors. Parents like the way that the school sends them letters to celebrate their children's special achievements. The school is approachable and routine communication with the school's excellent administrative staff is helpful. Most parents feel welcome when they visit the school and say that they are confident that complaints or suggestions would be dealt with sympathetically and effectively.

63. The home-school partnership is good. The school listens to parents' views and consults them, for example, about school uniform and the tutor review days. Target-setting days are a key feature in links between school and home, in which parents, child and tutor discuss progress and plan targets. These meetings are well attended and provide a good opportunity to resolve problems. Constructive relationships are fostered through a range of family learning sessions, for example, with computers and the Internet. Most parents are supportive of the school, its discipline policy and homework, and support the school's productions and awards ceremonies. Parents generally support their children's education well; however, some parents are too ready to authorise absence from school.

64. The school holds regular meetings with parents of pupils with special educational needs, including the parents of all children in the final year of primary education, to exchange information with them on how best to meet their needs, their progress and their learning targets.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

65. The senior management team comprises the headteacher and three others with senior responsibility for oversight of the curriculum, pupils' progress and their personal development. The leadership provided by the senior staff, collectively, is very effective. It is characterised by clear vision and purposeful educational direction which aims to provide a high quality of education for all pupils, regardless of background or ability. The headteacher and senior staff aim to improve the life chances of their pupils, to raise standards, and to establish and maintain high expectations and an effective climate and environment for learning in which all pupils can thrive. The staff as a whole are dedicated to their work and operate as a team for the benefit of their pupils and the community which the school serves.

66. The school's governance is effective although the governors wish to extend further their role in the monitoring and evaluation of the school's progress and in its planning for development. The governors are very supportive of the school. They played a full and beneficial part in the inspection, which showed that they have a good understanding of the school's strengths and matters for its further improvement. They receive regular reports from the headteacher, senior and middle managers, which enable them to monitor the quality of the educational provision and to set challenging but attainable targets for achievement. The school meets all statutory requirements apart from the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. The governors have oversight of the budget and monitor spending effectively.

67. The headteacher and his senior staff work closely and very effectively as a team to provide an example for other staff to follow. Consequently, staff morale is high. Teachers and support staff are confident in the quality of their work but are not complacent and are anxious to improve further.

68. The success of the school's leadership is shown in the transformation of the school since the previous inspection. It is calm, purposeful, orderly, bright, clean and welcoming. Pupils' attitudes to school and learning have greatly improved and their self-esteem has been raised considerably. Consequently, their behaviour has improved and is now good, both in lessons and around school. Pupils are now much more confident in their capacity to achieve, and they understand that they can succeed. Displays of pupils' work, which can be seen almost everywhere in the school, are impressive. Examination results have risen considerably and continue to rise faster than nationally and show that the school adds considerable 'value' to pupils' achievement and personal development. Pupils' and parents' good opinions of the quality of education testify to the extent of the school's improvement.

69. The school is effectively managed. The headteacher and senior staff have established a culture of self-evaluation and improvement so that staff are willing to confront areas of weakness. The improving outcomes show that this process is effective. The school has also benefited from rigorous evaluation by the local education authority's inspectors and the school's progress is evaluated rigorously in relation to key issues set for improvement. The senior staff monitor pupils' written work, and also monitor the quality of teaching and learning through visits to lessons.

70. The school's middle management comprises the bursar, the co-ordinator of the learning support department, subject and faculty heads, and key pastoral staff. The management of subjects is generally good and is improving. The management of provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. Matters for further improvement in subject management include the more active participation of subject heads in the monitoring of performance.

71. The special educational needs co-ordinator manages her responsibilities efficiently, and is very well supported by a very able team of learning support assistants, who are well deployed and provide close and effective links with subject departments. Pupil support workers are also very effective. The needs of pupils with special needs are given a high priority by the school's senior management and by the governor designated for special educational needs.

72. The school's plan for development provides a strategic overview of the school's most significant areas for improvement and steers its course over the planned time-scale. The plan is fully costed and its progress is regularly evaluated. The emphasis in the school's objectives is the continued improvement in its ethos and pupils' confidence and achievement.

73. The most recent specific priorities have been to raise standards in French and mathematics, to improve the teaching of literacy and numeracy through all subjects, to improve the teachers' assessment of their pupils, and to extend further the involvement of the community. The outcomes of the inspection indicate considerable success with these objectives though more work still needs to be done with literacy.

74. The expenditure per pupil was above average in the financial year 2001-2002. The budget is in balance. The school uses its funds efficiently to support initiatives such as improving the accommodation, the school's environment and broadening extra-curricular activities.

75. The school is efficient, its finances are well managed, and it gives good value for money. Special funds, such as those for pupils with special educational needs, are spent on their intended purposes. The school applies the principles of best value effectively. Parents and pupils are consulted about the quality of education provided. Parents' opinions are regularly sampled, for example, through the daily use of pupils' planners, which provide an effective means of home-school communication. Pupils' views are canvassed regarding important matters such as the school's Activities Days. The school listens and takes note of what is said by external agencies and members of its community, such as its partner schools.

76. A good system of management of the teachers' performance sets all teachers challenging personal targets for improvement. All pupils are also set personal targets. The school compares its performance with that of other similar schools, both locally and nationally to ensure that it is competitive and continues to add value. Data provided by the local educational authority assists this process. When making major purchases or placing contracts the school always seeks best value. Self-help provided by the site management team with minor construction works and repairs enables the school to save considerable sums of money. The administration of the school is very efficient. The administrative staff are few in number but do their work very well and efficiently, making effective use of modern technology.

77. New staff are carefully selected. The school has sufficiently qualified teachers in most subjects. Staff are deployed effectively on the whole; however, this is a small school with a commensurately small staff. Management responsibilities are shared amongst fewer members of staff than would be the case in a larger school and some managers have a great deal to do. Form teachers monitor pupils' attendance, behaviour and personal development effectively. However, since they are the members of staff who deal with parents at consultation evenings, it would be an advantage if they were more involved with the oversight of pupils' academic progress.

78. Regular in-service training courses are provided for the whole staff, for example, to help teachers to meet new requirements for the teaching of national strategies for literacy, numeracy and citizenship. The system for the induction of new staff into the school is effective. The teaching staff are well supported by an adequate number of administrative, technical and educational support staff who help to ensure that the school runs smoothly.

79. The accommodation is good: it is well cared for and well maintained and has improved very considerably since the previous inspection. The learning resource centre provides a welcoming and well-equipped resource centre. The fabric of the building has been improved and many rooms have been comfortably refurbished. The lack of a drama studio is a disadvantage, particularly in a school which enjoys the success in performing arts subjects that this one does.

80. Resources for learning are generally good and a considerable amount of money was been spent on computers in 2001-2002 to good effect, and the ratio of pupils to computers is twice as favourable as the national average. However, the library's bookstock is insufficient for the school's needs: its reference and fiction books are inadequate, both in quality and quantity.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

81. In order to improve teaching and standards, the governors, headteacher and senior staff should take the following action.

(1) Improve the teaching of literacy in all subjects by

- setting more extended writing tasks for pupils
- encouraging pupils to undertake more reading for research and pleasure
- improving the library resources for reading

(paragraphs 2,9,26,38,73,80, and 99 – 102)

(2) Raise standards in science in Years 10 and 11

- by raising expectations for the higher attaining pupils
(paragraphs 10,23 and 115 –121)

(3) Further improve the attendance rate by

- working with parents and outside agencies to reduce the frequency of authorised absence
(paragraphs 19 and 56)

(4) Improve the marking of pupils' work and the setting of homework

- ensuring that the quality of marking is more consistent within and between subjects and helps the pupils to improve the quality of their work
- ensuring that homework is planned rather than finishing classwork
- ensuring that the lower attaining pupils in Years 7 – 9 have as much homework to do as the higher attainers

(paragraphs 31,32,60,61)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS***Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection***

Number of lessons observed

118

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

44

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	1	17	56	41	3	0	0
Percentage	1	14	47	35	3	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils**Pupils on the school's roll**

Y7 – Y11

Number of pupils on the school's roll	471
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	138

Special educational needs

Y7 – Y11

Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	35
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	97

English as an additional language

No of pupils

Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3
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Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	28
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	21

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	10.9
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.2

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage (Year 9)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	40	44	88

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	22	25	21
	Girls	25	17	20
	Total	47	42	41
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	56 (60)	50 (49)	49 (45)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	14 (23)	31 (24)	26 (18)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	28	30	28
	Girls	31	23	22
	Total	59	53	50
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	70 (53)	63 (50)	59 (42)
	National	67 (65)	70 (78)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	24 (24)	31 (23)	8 (19)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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	2002	47	60	107

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	9	37	45
	Girls	18	58	60
	Total	27	95	105
Percentage of pupils achieving The standard specified	School	25 (22)	89 (83)	98 (96)
	National	50 (48)	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	31.9 (25.5)
	National	39.8 (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	462	17	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	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	1	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	2	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	28.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.4

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	13
Total aggregate hours worked per week	330

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	22.4
Key Stage 4	19.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial year	2001-02
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	£
Total income	1787746
Total expenditure	1748375
Expenditure per pupil	3525
Balance brought forward from previous year	42330
Balance carried forward to next year	81701

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	17
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	14

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	471
Number of questionnaires returned	280

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	22	67	8	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	35	55	6	2	2
Behaviour at the school is good	22	66	9	1	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	61	9	5	3
The teaching is good.	16	72	10	1	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25	58	10	5	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	30	61	3	4	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	40	54	3	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	30	58	8	2	2
The school is well led and managed.	30	58	8	2	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	30	60	4	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	26	66	5	1	2

Other issues raised by parents

82. A few parents said that bullying was a problem whilst others said that it was handled effectively. When parents complained about homework it was that lower attaining children in Years 7, 8 and 9 had less to do than other, higher attaining pupils. Both of these points were investigated during the inspection and the results of the investigation are reported in the Summary for Parents.

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' achievement is good
- Well-planned, challenging teaching and good learning
- Effective marking and assessment
- Very good leadership and management and clear educational direction
- Very good improvement since the previous inspection

Areas for development

- Pupils' listening skills in Years 7 – 9
- Pupils' critical and analytical writing skills
- The use of the library to improve pupils' reading
- The teaching of literacy skills in other subjects

83. By the end of Year 9, results of the national tests are below the national average but well above those of schools taking pupils with similarly low prior attainment. The rate of improvement in these test results over the last three years is above the national trend and boys are closer to the average for boys than the girls are to the national average for girls. In 2002, pupils did better in the English tests than they did in mathematics and science. The pupils' overall standards seen during the inspection are below average but represent a good achievement for these pupils.

84. The GCSE results, both in English and in English literature were below the national average in 2002. All pupils except one were entered for the English examination - much higher than nationally - and all pupils passed the examination with at least a grade G. The school's entry and results for literature were similar. In both subjects, there has also been a steady improvement in the A*-C grades gained since 1999. Overall standards of the current Year pupils are below average but represent a good achievement for these pupils.

85. Standards of speaking and listening are below average but improving. The department has targeted the development of these skills and makes sure that pupils have frequent discussion opportunities in English lessons. This action is having a positive effect on standards, particularly speaking; however, the quality of pupils' listening is below average in Years 7 – 9. Pupils' clarity of expression is sometimes impeded by their vocabulary but, by the end of Year 9, most pupils speak confidently and speak effectively to share and develop ideas and opinions and to evaluate their work. Many younger pupils, however, especially boys, do not listen well to their teachers; consequently, instructions and explanations often have to be repeated, thus adversely affecting the pace of the learning. Because pupils in Years 10 and 11 are more mature and attentive, listening is not such a problem and they are able regularly to develop their skills through discussions, mini-debates and role-plays.

86. Standards of reading are below average. Many pupils join Year 7 with reading skills well below average and a few have reading ages five or six years below their chronological age. Although most make good progress and quickly learn to read for information, their ability to make inferences and deductions from their reading is weak. Pupils have the opportunity to read a good range of fiction and non-fiction in their lessons but, in spite of a number of innovations, such as a reading club and *Reader of the Month*, many pupils do not read regularly for pleasure. The library is poorly stocked and there is no librarian: this means that reading, whether for recreation, general interest or research, cannot be developed adequately. Reading aloud is encouraged and pupils of all ages and abilities readily volunteer to read in class.

87. Standards of writing are below average. Pupils' technical accuracy and vocabulary in Year 7 are often poor. Presentation and handwriting are often untidy and many pupils have difficulty writing at length; however, by the end of Year 9, standards have improved well. Their limited vocabulary still prevents some pupils from expressing themselves clearly, but most can write for a range of purposes and audiences and take care with the structure and neatness of their writing. The most able pupils have produced lively travel writing about Newcastle under Lyme, well-constructed arguments about overpaid footballers and amusing narratives but, for many, extended writing is still a problem. Stories are brief and ideas unsustained and, in writing, points undeveloped or not illustrated because insufficient time and thought have been given to planning.

88. By the end of Year 11, pupils are better able to structure their extended writing as a result of their teachers' emphasis on coursework skills for the GCSE examinations. Creative writing and personal responses are stronger than critical analyses of media and literature; and even the most able pupils do not have good analytical skills. Frequently, pupils offer description, paraphrase or explanation, instead of considered evaluations of the effect on the reader, or themselves, of presentational devices, such as imagery and vocabulary, used by writers. In literature essays, many also use an inappropriate narrative style or give unnecessary biographical and historical details, rather than carefully argued and well-illustrated interpretations or opinions. It is their lack of analytical skills, especially the ability to engage closely with writers' language and style, which prevents pupils from achieving higher GCSE grades.

89. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, as do the few for whom English is an additional language and those designated as gifted and talented, because teachers plan carefully with learning support staff to meet these pupils' needs, offer them individual help in lessons and, if necessary, provide additional learning resources and challenges. Progress units, a summer school and 'catch-up lessons' are in place to develop literacy skills. Additionally, because the relationships between them are good, pupils readily collaborate and assist each other, especially in group activities. All pupils are highly valued by their teachers and have the opportunity to follow both English and English literature courses leading to GCSE examinations.

90. The range of experiences which enrich pupils' learning is good. There are extra-curricular activities, such as GCSE revision classes, gifted and talented and booster classes in Year 9, theatre visits, book and reading clubs; and a workshop on speaking and listening is planned for next term. Additionally, there are close links with the drama department and all pupils in Years 7–9 have a weekly drama lesson. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and their knowledge of citizenship are not always catered for in teachers' lesson planning but all have a variety of information and communication technology (ICT) opportunities. These include the writing of newspaper articles, leaflets, letters and posters and the use of the internet for research. The regular use of the internet to forge links with other schools to share their ideas and writing have yet to be fully developed but some pupils have recently had poems and book reviews published on the Staffordshire schools' website.

91. Overall, teaching and learning are good. The strengths of the teaching are the teachers' high expectations of pupils' behaviour and achievement, effective lesson planning and clear learning objectives. Lessons are usually well resourced and learning tasks are stimulating and challenging. A good example of these strengths was seen in an enjoyable Year 8 lesson for lower-attaining pupils about the Greek myth *Theseus and the Minotaur* in which the pupils developed their vocabulary well and learned how to structure their own stories effectively through a puzzle and game.

92. Teachers employ a range of teaching strategies, such as individual, paired, group and whole class activities, and encourage pupils to make choices and their own decisions. In less successful lessons, opportunities to develop pupils' aesthetic awareness, of poetic language, for example, are missed and wrong assumptions made about their cultural knowledge, for example, that pupils all understand how fairy stories are constructed. When this happened, only the most able could complete the set tasks well. Additionally, pupils do not always appreciate, and are not always helped to understand that the fictional

characters, George and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*, or Macbeth and his wife, are not real people but characters constructed by authors and playwrights.

93. Marking and assessment are well used by all teachers to inform pupils how they are doing and to suggest how work can be improved. Pupils know their target levels or grades and have copies of the criteria against which their work is assessed to guide them. Their good learning is also helped considerably by their sensible attitudes to English and positive relationships with their teachers and each other.

94. The leadership and management of English are very good. The department is now staffed with a team of highly committed and hard-working teachers. Communication and support are good, responsibilities appropriately delegated and priorities for development are clearly identified. New schemes of work, incorporating the changes necessary to implement the National Literacy Strategy, the changes to the national tests for pupils at the end of Year 9 and a completely new syllabus for English and literature in Year 10, have all been successfully introduced since September 2002. Teaching and marking are monitored well and the English department is constantly looking for ways to improve its practice and pupils' learning. As a result, they continue to experiment: for example, by entering a number of the more able pupils for GCSE in Year 10, to give them early examination experience and confidence; and, very recently, by choosing an alternative examination board's syllabuses in English and literature which they believe will be more suitable for Chesterton's pupils.

95. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. In both national tests for pupils in Year 9 and at GCSE, standards are approaching national averages and are above those attained in schools taking their pupils from similar backgrounds. Pupils are achieving well. Pupils speak more confidently; reading is carefully monitored; the marking policy is implemented consistently; the technical accuracy of work and neat presentation are frequently targeted and strategies to improve the performance of boys are proving very successful. The department now works closely with the learning support department; new schemes of work identify a good range of teaching and learning strategies, and there are no longer any significant weaknesses in teaching. There are still weaknesses in literacy, especially in pupils' reading, listening, vocabulary, spelling and punctuation in Years 7 – 9; however, the department is taking action to eliminate these problems.

Drama

96. Because pupils in Years 7– 9 only have one drama lesson each week, overall standards are below average, though there are a few talented pupils in each year group. The subject is very well organised and is now taught by a specialist teacher. Teaching is good and pupils learn and achieve well. This represents very good improvement since the previous inspection. However, as there is only one specialist teacher and no drama studio, it is not possible for the department yet to expand and offer the subject at GCSE.

97. By the end of Year 9, most pupils can use mime, freeze frame, tableaux and thought tracking to depict characters and situations, are aware of the impact of their body language, movement, ensemble and voice on an audience and are starting to experiment with staging effects, such as sound and lighting and the use of space and levels.

98. Drama is making a significant contribution to pupils' social and team-working skills and helping to develop their trust, creativity, self-discipline and confidence. They support each other's presentations very well, always applauding and offering positive and constructive criticism to improve performances. Interesting schemes of work encourage pupils to look at a wide range of social and moral issues, including the plight of children in wars and the wisdom of taking soap opera characters as our role models. Year 7 pupils have recently participated in the *All our Identities* workshop at the Staffordshire County Showground. Writing and performing their own play, based on their concern about the destruction of rainforests, they incorporated dance, music and poetry. Later they ran workshops for other pupils and

performed in local primary schools. There is also a drama club which puts on school productions and very valuable links with the English and expressive arts departments.

Key skills across the curriculum – Literacy

99. The provision for literacy in subjects other than English is unsatisfactory and weak literacy skills are holding the pupils back. Overall standards are below average in writing and reading, but improving in speaking and listening. Spelling, vocabulary, punctuation and structure of sentences are generally weak in Year 7 and, although most pupils make good progress, inadequate literacy skills affect examination results in several subjects at the end of Year 11. Because many pupils do not read willingly, their vocabulary, expression, knowledge, understanding and critical skills are not well developed. There are also weaknesses in listening, especially in Years 7– 9.

100. The special educational needs department supports literacy across the curriculum very well through teaching literacy progress units in Year 7, offering general and targeted help in Year 8 and running the reading club for years 7 – 9 three times weekly.

101. Although all subject staff have had training in how to plan and teach literacy and there is an agreed literacy policy, practice varies both within and between departments. The quality of teachers' corrections and comments in pupils' written work ranges from good to inadequate and opportunities to develop pupils' skills are missed in many subject lessons. Extended writing in particular is frequently neglected. This is especially the case in science, art and design technology where there is over-reliance on worksheets which require single word responses. In geography, there is sometimes too much emphasis on copied, rather than personal, notes. However, in religious education and drama, there is a strong emphasis on literacy in all lessons. Discussion, reading and vocabulary development, as well as aids to structuring written responses, are well planned. In most subjects, pupils speak effectively to extend and evaluate their ideas; however, in history and mathematics, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to discuss and explain their thinking.

102. The recently appointed literacy co-ordinator has been responsible for staff training and has given good advice on planning the development of frames to help pupils structure their writing, and the use of form time to promote spelling and reading in Years 7–9. The implementation of the National Literacy Strategy is in place well managed, but the co-ordinator also has considerable responsibilities as head of English. At the moment, not all subject heads regularly monitor the consistency and effectiveness of what their staff are doing. Some teaching rooms do not have dictionaries and thesauruses readily available. There is no librarian and, because it is poorly stocked, the library is not contributing as it should to the development of literacy.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Very good improvement since the previous inspection
- Good teaching
- Pupils' good progress and achievement
- Very good relationships
- Very good leadership and management of the subject

Areas for improvement

- Algebra and using and applying mathematics, particularly with higher attaining pupils.
- Consistency in the quality of marking and presentation of pupils' work
- Opportunities for pupils to discuss and explain their reasoning

103. The standards of work of the current Year 9 pupils, including their numerical skills, are below average. However, in relation to their attainment on entry to the school, the pupils are achieving well. Results in the 2002 national tests in mathematics at the end of Year 9 were well below average compared with all schools nationally, but were above average compared with similar schools. Results over the past four years show a very good improvement. In 2002, the boys outperformed girls.

104. Standards in algebra are lower than in other aspects of the subject; standards in geometry are higher and are broadly average. The majority of pupils can apply their knowledge to problems involving money, including decimal fractions. Higher attaining pupils have a sound knowledge of approximation and estimation and, for example, use rounding techniques to find maximum and minimum values and express very large or very small numbers in standard index form. Most pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of basic geometry and can calculate areas, for example, of circles, triangles and rectangles. Average and higher attaining pupils can calculate volumes and surface area of solids. The higher attainers can solve problems involving right-angled triangles, using the results of the Theorem of Pythagoras. These pupils can also apply their skills to problems involving cylinders and prisms.

105. Current standards of work in Year 11 are also below average but pupils are making good progress and are achieving well. In 2002, the GCSE results were below average when compared with all schools nationally but above average when compared with those of similar schools. Over a third of all pupils achieved higher grades and this proportion was greater than that expected based on attainment on entry to the school. Almost all pupils achieved a GCSE grade, which is above the national average and represents very good achievement. There was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. Over the past four years, results have improved at a greater rate than the national trend.

106. By Year 11, most pupils have a sound understanding of perimeter and area, and can apply their knowledge, for example, to composite shapes involving rectangles and triangles. Middle attaining pupils know enough of trigonometry to find angles and sides of right-angle triangles, and higher attaining pupils use sine and cosine rules effectively to solve simple problems. In statistics, most pupils can construct frequency tables, bar graphs and pie charts and calculate simple statistical averages; they can draw scatter diagrams and understand the idea of correlation. In algebra, standards are well below average. Although higher attaining pupils can manipulate simple formulae and some can factorise quadratic expressions, little algebra has been attempted by the middle and lower attaining pupils.

107. There is no significant difference in the standards of work of boys and girls. Pupils' progress is good in the majority of lessons because teachers plan and structure the work carefully to match the needs of the pupils and to build their confidence. These lessons start promptly, with a quick 'warm-up' task related to the main activity, with clear objectives and high expectations. Progress is slower in some lessons when the work is not challenging enough and the pace is too slow. Currently, the progress of some classes is adversely affected by staff absence. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is consistent with that of other pupils, overall. The teachers make good provision for gifted and talented pupils, who make good progress. They attend extra lessons in Year 9 and are entered for intermediate level GCSE a year early, in Year 10.

108. Overall, pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. In most lessons the pupils are polite, attentive and eager to succeed. Their relationships with their teachers are usually very good.

109. Teaching and learning are good overall and some teaching is very good. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen during the inspection. The strengths of the teaching are the quality of the relationships between

pupils and teachers, pupils' willingness to work hard, and the good progress they make. Lessons are usually well planned, build on a sound foundation of earlier work, and proceed at a brisk pace. Teachers use a variety of methods and resources to make learning fun. For example, in a well-organised Year 10 lesson, when pupils correctly deduced that a quadratic equation generally has two distinct solutions, the teacher made effective use of a card game to match solutions to equations.

110. The department has implemented the national numeracy strategy and many lessons start with arithmetic linked appropriately to the main part lesson. Teachers use computers well to enhance pupils' learning of some topics, for example the solution of linear equations with Year 7, and to develop numeracy skills with lower attaining pupils. Teachers make the lesson targets clear to their pupils and review progress at the end of the lesson. Teachers' expectations of pupils' achievement are high. There is a satisfactory balance of number, geometry and statistics, but insufficient algebra, particularly for higher attaining pupils. There is also insufficient investigational work and application of mathematics.

111. Homework is set weekly, in accordance with school policy. Most teachers use questioning effectively to develop pupils' understanding, but do not give enough opportunities for pupils to discuss and explain their reasoning. Teachers assess pupils' work well in lessons to give immediate feedback and help where needed. The marking of work is inconsistent: some teachers make clear, written comments to help pupils improve and to set high standards for presentation, insisting on accuracy in graph work and constructions; however, this is not uniformly good in all classes.

112. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Since the last inspection, standards have risen and pupils make better progress. All issues from the last report have been resolved. Overall, improvement is very good. The monitoring of teaching and learning is carried out thoroughly through rigorous departmental review, which includes regular lesson observation. In addition, pupils' classwork and homework are monitored weekly by the head of department. Planning for improvement is good and reflects the school's major priorities. Assessment procedures are also good. All pupils have individual target grades displayed in their books and attainment levels are given at the end of each term. The use of information technology is a good feature and the department is well resourced.

Key skills: Numeracy

113. The overall standards of numeracy are below average. The mathematics department is working hard to improve numeracy skills and standards are rising. Pupils use formulae and spreadsheets in ICT lessons, and their knowledge of measurement and proportion in art. In science, pupils calculate magnification, use time, manipulate formulae and draw line and block graphs; in geography pupils make use of their knowledge of co-ordinates, directions and scale. Although the application and development of pupils' mathematical skills in other subjects lacks consistency, these skills are adequate and are better than literacy.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- The variety of investigative and practical work
- Good accommodation and resources
- Good relationships between pupils and teachers

Areas for improvement

- The proportion achieving grades A*-C at GCSE
- Pupils' literacy skills
- Too much use of worksheets and not enough extended writing
- Monitoring of teaching, particularly with regard to the marking of pupils' work

114. The national test results at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were below the national average, but were an improvement on the results for the previous year. The results were above those of other, similar schools. The boys' results were better than those of the girls. There has been an improvement in the results each year since 1998, and this improvement has been much greater than that seen nationally.

115. GCSE results in 2002 were well below average overall. Although the proportion of pupils passing the examination with at least a grade G was in line with the national average, the proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C was well below average and much lower than in English and mathematics. A small number of pupils are not entered for GCSE in science, taking another examination instead.

116. Standards of pupils' work seen during the inspection are below average overall in Year 9 and well below average in Year 11. The difference is to be expected because the prior attainment of the Year 9 pupils is higher than that of the Year 11 pupils. The achievement of all pupils is judged to be satisfactory overall in relation to their prior attainment. Recently introduced initiatives, such as single-sex teaching groups for more able Year 9 pupils, revision classes, and booster classes for the gifted and talented pupils are already showing positive effects, particularly in Year 9. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because of the support which they receive in lessons. Satisfactory progress is made by gifted and talented pupils who benefit from extra classes out of school time. Similar progress in lessons is made by boys and girls. However, literacy is a weakness which impedes pupils' ability to write about their practical work and to achieve the higher GCSE grades.

117. Higher attaining pupils in Year 9 are able to plan and investigate factors affecting speed and perform the relevant calculations. These higher attaining pupils understand the quantitative relationships between force, area and pressure. Average and below average pupils in this year group use ICT to access information about the solar system but have difficulty in interpreting the data. Higher attaining pupils in Year 11, revising for a modular test, can describe the processes of photosynthesis and transpiration, and their written work shows that they have a clear understanding of the causes of variation in living organisms and can define relevant genetic terminology. Lower attaining pupils have difficulty with this and their written work shows less clarity and depth of thought. Writing skills are below average throughout the school but pupils express themselves better in speech than writing. Their numeracy skills are also below average although they are better than literacy skills. Their folders indicate that they can draw and label line graphs and block graphs with a reasonable degree of accuracy. The majority of pupils show competence in their practical work and work well together, showing respect for each others' ideas and sharing tasks sensibly. They handle apparatus confidently and pay attention to safety precautions when necessary.

118. The attitude and behaviour of pupils in lessons are generally good. They listen attentively and are keen to answer questions and to participate in class discussions. They concentrate well and usually remain on task during written work.

119. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Lessons are well planned and organised and teachers have sound knowledge of the subject so that they are able to give clear explanations of scientific ideas.

The management of pupils is generally good, discipline is firm and working relationships are good. The aims of the lesson are displayed clearly at the beginning so that pupils know exactly what they are to learn. However, lesson reviews to help consolidate learning do not always take place. In most lessons, work is carefully matched to pupils' needs and extension work is usually provided for the higher attaining pupils. Sometimes the teachers' expectations of pupils are not high enough so that they are insufficiently challenged and there is a heavy reliance on printed worksheets requiring no more than short answers, which does little to improve writing. Pupils experience a good variety of practical work which reinforces theory and helps to maintain their interest. Pupils' numeracy skills are applied satisfactorily through the use of simple formulae and drawing of graphs. Teachers make good use of ICT.

120. Pupils' social development benefits from working and sharing with others during practical lessons, and moral issues, such as genetic engineering and the environment, are explored in lessons. Assessment and target setting are satisfactory with regular end of unit tests throughout the school and each pupil knows his or her own progress. There is no homework timetable but the teachers set it weekly for each class, although it often consists only of finishing work started in lessons. The marking of pupils' work is not always satisfactory and teachers should do more to help pupils to improve their work in their written comments.

121. The management of the department is satisfactory, although the monitoring of teachers' marking could be improved. There is a good team ethos among the teachers who are all committed to improving examination results. Departmental meetings take place regularly and teachers' expertise is shared. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory overall and good in Years 7, 8 and 9. The new initiatives introduced are already showing positive effects, but achievement needs to be raised further, especially at GCSE. The newly refurbished accommodation is very good and provides an atmosphere conducive to learning. Resources are good, which enables pupils to experience valuable investigative work, however, larger physics apparatus and textbooks for Years 10 and 11 are becoming outdated and need to be replaced. The department benefits from good technical support.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Good teaching in Years 10 and 11
- Rising standards
- Pupils' independent learning

Areas for improvement

- Drawing from direct observation
- Monitoring of teaching

122. The attainment of most of the annual intakes of pupils to Year 7 is well below average. In particular, their drawing is below average when they begin. Pupils make good progress in Years 7, 8 and 9 from their very weak beginning. The teachers' assessments of pupils' work at the end of Year 9 in 2002 indicated that pupils' attainment was below average for their age and these assessments are consistent with the findings of the inspection. Pupils' good progress can be seen, for example, in Year 7 pupils' constructions of fantasy cities, which involve complex pieces built in cardboard, from cubes and cylinders, are lively and interesting. Good examples of Year 9 pupils' work were seen in their portraits in connection with heroic images, in which they compared and contrasted Michelangelo's *David* with fashion photographs of David Beckham. In this work, pupils used computers effectively to capture and alter the images to illustrate their ideas. Although the Year 9 pupils' standard of work is below average, it represents a good achievement for these pupils.

123. The GCSE results were below average in 2002 and this has been a consistent pattern for a number of years. There are few higher attaining pupils and this is reflected in the GCSE grades but the proportion passing the examination with at least a grade G was in line with the national average in 2002 although pupils tended to do slightly less well in art than other subjects. The subject is more popular at GCSE with girls than with boys.

124. The standard of work produced by Year 11 pupils taking the GCSE course is broadly average and represents a good achievement in relation to the pupils' prior attainment at the start of the course. Examples of sound work were seen in a Year 10 lesson, when pupils investigated printmaking methods with an interactive computer programme. This work shows that the pupils can use the results of their investigations effectively to make a print from their own drawings. They plan colourways effectively, as seen in their work influenced by Andy Warhol. This artist has a strong influence on the development of pupils' ideas which helps them to raise the standard of their work. Similarly good standards were seen in a Year 11 lesson in which pupils were preparing for the GCSE examination and their final compositions included strong images based on their preparatory drawings. A particularly good feature was the effective way in which pupils talked about the ideas that they were communicating visually. This ability to speak confidently about their work enables them to advise, and share opinions with their fellow pupils, which makes a positive contribution to the development of their literacy skills.

125. Pupils behave well in lessons and respond positively. Good relationships have been established based on mutual respect and pupils take pride in their work.

126. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Lesson planning is a strength and well-structured lessons broken down into easily understood elements are a feature of the best teaching. However, pupils would benefit from more practice of drawing from direct observation. Teachers' use of questioning captures pupils' enthusiasm and encourages them to experiment with ideas, shape and materials, for example, when building shapes from cardboard. Teachers plan lessons so that pupils with special educational needs can make the same progress as other pupils. A strength of pupils' learning lies in their capacity to work independently and this enhances their progress. The use of computers has a positive impact on learning for most, but not all pupils, and could be further improved by making a plan to ensure that all pupils benefit.

127. The new subject head is doing a good job and is working hard and successfully to improve the department's effectiveness. He has a good understanding of what needs to be done in both the long and short term to raise standards. However, the monitoring of teaching of the subject and of the pupils' learning needs to be more frequent and more tightly linked to the subject's development plan.

128. Spacious accommodation with good natural lighting is a particularly positive feature of the classrooms. Display is used very well to show examples of professional artists' work, pupils' achievements and how-to-do-it techniques. This establishes a lively, visual atmosphere that motivates pupils to achieve their potential. Teaching staff give generously of their time to provide out of school activities.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- The planning for the introduction of the new subject
- Active citizenship is a strength
- Pupils' participation in the running of the school

Areas for improvement

- Arrangements for assessing pupils
- Opportunities for extended writing

129. This is a new subject in the National Curriculum, compulsory in secondary schools from September, 2002. The school's planning and preparation for its introduction have been very thorough. The co-ordinator has produced a good scheme of work which covers the three expected elements of the National Curriculum for the subject, enhanced by notes for pupils and by detailed teachers' notes and lesson plans. Citizenship is linked to the school's personal social and health education programme, and also with other subjects. Active citizenship, as opposed to the new National Curriculum subject, is vigorously promoted through contact with the community and is a particular strength.

130. During the week of the inspection, it was only possible to see five lessons, mainly in Years 7 – 9. From the lessons seen, standards of work appear to be broadly average. This represents a good achievement for Years 8 and 9 pupils, and satisfactory achievement for Year 10. However, in one Year 9 lesson, the pupils, particularly boys, were badly behaved and were making unsatisfactory progress. It is not possible to reach a more accurate and detailed judgement about pupils' work because the course is based on an oral approach with very few written tasks, usually the completion of worksheets, and there are, therefore, no examples of extended writing or of teacher assessment. This approach will make assessment of pupils' attainment very difficult for teachers, although the school plans to assess pupils more formally in the future.

131. The teaching of citizenship is undertaken by form tutors, all of whom have received training. In the lessons observed, the teaching was good in years 8 and 9, with the exception of the one unsatisfactory lesson, and satisfactory in Year 10. Year 10 pupils discussed moral standards as they affect their own lives, and drew on examples from friends and celebrities, but without reaching a clear definition of morality. Years 8 and 9 pupils discussed, in a mature way, the issues of animal rights, vivisection, and of racial prejudice and discrimination. In the Year 8 lesson, pupils engaged in good, analytical evaluation of each others' role-play of prejudice and discrimination. Aspects of citizenship arose during religious education lessons during the inspection, for example, when pupils discussed the legal aspects of euthanasia in the light of a topical, high profile example of a man seeking assisted suicide abroad.

132. Overall, the introduction of the teaching of citizenship has made a satisfactory beginning. A particular strength of pupils' personal development which contributes to the subject is their participation in the daily running of the school, for example, in the School Council and acting as prefects. Pupils take part in a Young Enterprise scheme, in local environmental projects and charity work. Older pupils help to organise and run mini-Olympics in local primary schools and they play a significant part in the school's anti-bullying measures, and help younger pupils.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching
- The pupils' ability to make and realise their designs
- Good relationships with the pupils
- Conscientious and hardworking pupils

Areas for improvement

- Literacy and numeracy skills
- Pupils' presentation of their work
- Design, drawing and sketching
- Planning for homework
- Routine marking of work
- Assessment

133. The work of the department has been adversely affected by the absence of key teachers because of illness or maternity leave. Much of the work is presently taught by supply teachers, and the head of the art and design department has temporary oversight of the work in design and technology. These teachers are all doing a good job in difficult circumstances.

134. The attainment of most of the annual intakes of pupils to Year 7 is well below average. In particular, their drawing and handwriting are below average when they begin. The standards of the present Year 9 pupils' work are still below average but are higher than those of previous years and are improving. Bearing in mind their low attainment on entry to the school, pupils in Years 7 – 9 achieve well. They make good progress in textiles, pneumatics and electronics and make good use of computers, for example, with computer-aided design and manufacture. Pupils' skills at making objects are generally good but there are weaknesses in their design skills. Pupils do not present their work well and their drawings often lack enough detail. Sketching, especially in three dimensions, is also a weakness.

135. The school provides GCSE courses in resistant materials, food studies and graphics but not in pneumatics or electronics. There is also a successful course in home economics (child development). The standards of the present Year 11 pupils' work are average and represent a satisfactory achievement. The GCSE results were slightly above the national average, overall, in 2002. In 2002, the results of the pupils taking GCSE in resistant materials were above average. The work of pupils currently taking GCSE in home economics (child development) is above average. As in Years 7 – 9, skills of making are generally good although they lack metal-working skills because they are not taught them earlier, in Years 7 – 9. This omission adversely affects the pupils' ability to design and make in a full range of resistant materials. Also as in Years 7 – 9, there are weaknesses in design work, drawing and presentation.

136. Overall, teaching is good and pupils learn effectively. The strengths of teaching lie in good lesson planning and organisation and in the pleasant but firm management of the pupils. Pupils have good attitudes to lessons and are keen to do well; they behave well in lessons, listen carefully to the teacher, and persevere with their work. They are kept on task and work at a good pace. However, they tend to depend too much on the teacher for information and rarely show initiative or originality. Homework needs to be planned and integrated more fully into the design and making process. Routine marking of pupils' written work is unsatisfactory and, in a number of exercise books and folders, instructions to finish work are not complied with.

137. Although the subject planning mentions literacy and numeracy, in practice these skills are not being developed sufficiently; in particular, extended writing. Opportunities are missed to challenge the more able pupils and all pupils, regardless of their attainment level, follow the same booklets in Years 7 – 9. There were no learning support assistants available to help pupils with special educational needs during the week of the inspection.

138. Assessment is a weakness. The teachers' records shows that assessment is not sufficiently linked to National Curriculum or GCSE criteria and this presents difficulties for target setting, recognising trends, predicting outcomes and evaluating success and pupils do not know what levels of the National Curriculum or GCSE grades they are working to.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Pupils' good achievement
- Good teaching
- The successful new vocational GCSE in leisure and tourism
- Effective subject management

Areas for improvement

- Literacy and the quality of pupils' written work
- The marking and assessment of pupils' work
- The consistency of challenge for higher attaining pupils

139. When pupils join the school their attainment is well below average. Although they achieve well in lessons, it is not enough for them to catch up, and standards are still below average in Years 9 and 11. Results in the GCSE examination are below average and match the standards seen in the present Year 11. In 2002, all pupils achieved a grade, which represents good progress for lower attaining pupils. Girls' attainment has often been close to the national average for grades A* – C, but dropped to match that of the boys in 2002.

140. Pupils' numeracy skills are satisfactory and pupils practise them in lessons. Examples of this are Year 9 pupils' useful construction of graphs to show the characteristics of a country's population, and the higher attaining pupils' effective interpretation of the effect of changes in birth and death rates on the population growth of rich and poor countries. Literacy skills are weak, however, and few pupils write extended and accurate accounts of what they have learned. Much of their written work consists of copied notes and short answers, which provide few opportunities to develop either the pupils' geographical skills or the quality of their extended writing. Although higher attaining Year 11 pupils write clear accounts, for example, of global warming, weaknesses in literacy continue to limit progress in the GCSE course. Lower attaining pupils have difficulty in retaining and applying the necessary body of knowledge, which adversely affects their success in examinations.

141. Overall, pupils achieve well throughout the school, taking into account their well below average attainment on entry. Good teaching, good relationships between teachers and pupils, and generally good behaviour in lessons contribute well to good progress. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because the work is well matched to their needs. In Year 7, such pupils benefit from close individual attention in a smaller group. When it is available, support from learning support assistants is effective in helping pupils to keep up with the work. Higher attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 make good progress and are challenged by opportunities to research topics independently. The progress of higher attaining pupils in Years 7– 9 is more variable, and opportunities to move some pupils on to more demanding tasks are occasionally missed. The sporadic attendance of a minority of pupils impedes their progress and their learning consequently lacks continuity.

142. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers are well-qualified subject specialists with good knowledge of the subject. Clear explanations and instructions give lower attaining pupils confidence to tackle new work. Relationships in the classroom are very good. Teachers are approachable and

generous with the time they give to help individuals. Discipline is firm, but with a light touch so that lesson time is well used for learning. Pupils know what is expected of them and most show interest and make efforts with their work. Most lessons are well-planned, with a variety of activities to hold pupils' attention, but pupils quickly become restless and lose concentration if tasks go on too long. On the vocational GCSE leisure and tourism course, pupils' learning is enhanced by a well planned programme of visits. However, the department needs to make more consistent use of strategies to improve the quality of pupils' extended written work, including the use of discussion, and to reduce the amounts of copied notes. A consistent weakness is the marking of pupils' work. Although teachers' written comment encourage good efforts and presentation, they are less helpful in showing pupils, especially higher attaining pupils, how to improve their work.

143. The subject is well managed. Monitoring of teaching and self-review have provided clear priorities for improvement. Progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory and standards are improving. The department has successfully implemented a vocational course in leisure and tourism in Year 10 to broaden the school's curriculum.

HISTORY

Overall the quality of provision in history is **satisfactory**

Strengths

- Well constructed schemes of work
- Good relationships between pupils and teachers
- Guidance for the non-specialist teaching team to ensure the cover of the curriculum
- Sound teaching with some good features

Areas for improvement

- Pupils' independent learning skills
- The development of pupils' speaking skills
- Pupils' confidence to explore a wider range of resource materials
- The use of ICT
- The accuracy of the assessment of the pupils' progress

144. The results of the teachers' assessment of Year 9 pupils in 2002 were below average and lower than those in 2001, but were in keeping with the attainment of these pupils on entry to the school. The current Year 9 pupils' standards of work are below average but the pupils are achieving satisfactorily in relation to their attainment at the start of Year 7. Pupils with special educational needs are making the same satisfactory progress as others. Pupils find it difficult to use information effectively. Although most pupils can select and use evidence from a variety of resources to describe historical events, they find more difficulty explaining the causal reasons for them. For example, a Year 9 lesson about the Battle of the Somme included a range of interesting resources - newspapers, books and artefacts - but many pupils could not make the expected clear connections between the different reports and accounts. In general, lower attaining pupils find it difficult to write at length to explain historical events and their writing tends to be restricted to a few sentences. By contrast, the higher attaining pupils write freely. They present clear summaries; they have learned basic historical enquiry techniques and they are beginning to use them to evaluate the source material.

145. Pupils have a growing enthusiasm for the subject. In Year 7 classes dealing with the Black Death, pupils showed considerable interest in the effects of the plague and the lack of health measures to prevent the spread of the disease. Boys and girls make equally good progress in exploring source materials and developing responses to different historical events. Higher attaining pupils develop their extended writing

skills well, but such skills are more limited in the work of the lower attaining pupils. There are some very good displays of pupils' work in the history department which cover a number of historical periods.

146. The GCSE examination results in 2002 were well below average and pupils tended to achieve lower grades in history than in their other subjects. Although most pupils passed the examination, very few achieved a grade C or higher. These results were lower than those in the subject in the past, when it was usual for a third of the candidates to achieve grades A*- C in this subject. The girls' results were a little better than those of the boys but were still below average. The standards of work of the current Year 11 pupils are below average but boys' and girls' achievement is satisfactory and they make satisfactory progress in using appropriate historical skills. Pupils have a limited knowledge and understanding of important issues, such as the reasons for the causes of the collapse of peace in the 1930s. However, they can use the evidence to justify different interpretations of historical events. The higher attaining pupils' work shows a reasonable grasp of the subject, as shown, for example, in their effective analysis of the policies of the Liberal government and the poverty cycle, which makes good use of research techniques and resources. The higher attaining pupils' written work is detailed and indicates that they have undertaken research using a variety of sources. However, pupils' oral skills are not developed well enough in lessons; for example, pupils' spoken responses tend to consist only of short sentences in answer to questions.

147. Pupils' attitudes are satisfactory and their behaviour is good. They co-operate with their teachers and listen to and help each other when working in pairs. They respond well to different methods but would benefit from more opportunities to contribute to the lesson.

148. Teaching is satisfactory throughout the school, with a number of good features. Teachers follow very clear guidelines and detailed schemes of work which identify learning outcomes, content and approaches. These schemes are important since three of the five teachers who contribute to history teaching in Years 7 to 9 are not specialists. Teaching at this level is well prepared, uses suitable resources and materials and is delivered in a manner that engages pupils' interest. Learning is satisfactory. Pupils make satisfactory progress, both in considering evidence and using historical terms and concepts. This is shown in the detailed and neat presentations in coursework files. Pupils read aloud in lessons but have few opportunities to take part in extended discussion, and little guidance has been given on how to make full use of relevant Internet websites. Homework is set and the marking of written work provides pupils with a clear grade and useful and encouraging comments about how to improve. In Years 10 and 11, a variety of interesting approaches and methods are used including computer presentations.

149. The leadership and management of the department are both satisfactory although the examination results have not improved recently. The head of history is responsible for helping and managing a team of teachers who are nearly all non-specialist historians. This is successfully achieved because of the efforts which the subject head makes to prepare the necessary documents and schemes of work. Development plans are clearly outlined and the department has responded well to inspections. The monitoring and evaluation of the department is satisfactory. In Year 10 and 11, lessons are taught in a well-equipped specialist classroom and the department has appropriate resources. The department needs to develop its assessment procedures to provide more accurate data on the pupils' progress. The head of history is also a senior member of staff with major responsibility for the wider management of the school. However, the school has taken steps to make an appointment to reduce the burden on this key member of staff.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall the quality of provision in ICT is **good**

Strengths

- Very good GCSE results in 2002
- Good teaching, learning and achievement in Years 10 and 11
- Better courses since the last inspection

- Good equipment and accommodation which are helping to raise standards

Areas for improvement

- The structure of lessons to include effective introductions and summaries
- The systems for planning, monitoring, and assessing ICT in other subjects

150. In 2002, results in the information technology GCSE option were well above the national average. ICT was one of the best performing subjects in the school although with a relatively small option group. Results were not so high in 2001.

151. The attainment in ICT on entry to the school is very low. All pupils now have ICT lessons and this, together with the use of ICT in other subjects, means that pupils' achievement is satisfactory, in view of their low starting point, although standards are still below average by Year 9. Gifted and talented pupils make good progress and study for the GCSE examination in Year 9. Girls and boys achieve equally well. Most pupils are confident and increasing in competence in using computers. Pupils can combine different forms of information from a variety of sources and present the results in a suitable form for an intended audience using desktop publishing and spreadsheets. Other ICT skills, such as modelling and simulation, are below average. During Years 10 and 11, pupils show good evidence of mastering research skills and make significant gains in knowledge, understanding and competence in using ICT. Standards by Year 11 are above average and this represents good achievement for these pupils.

152. SEN pupils make satisfactory progress because most tasks can be completed at their own rate and these pupils receive extra help from teachers. An interactive computer programme is used well with SEN pupils to successfully improve pupils' skills in reading, spelling and mathematics.

153. Pupils enjoy ICT lessons and appreciate the good provision and accessibility of equipment. They work well together and show interest in their work. Behaviour is good but some of the younger pupils have poor listening skills and need individual instruction before they can do the tasks set for them. They do not apply themselves with sufficient perseverance and begin to waste time unless the teacher continues to keep them on task.

154. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. They are satisfactory in Years 7 – 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of their subject and the technology which goes with it. They have good relationships with their pupils and provide very good individual help when pupils are working at computers. In some Years 7 – 9 lessons, teachers do not outline clearly what is to be done and why and do not reinforce what the pupils have learned. In Years 10 – 11, the teaching is better and pupils learn effectively at a good pace. Teachers have high expectations and use a good variety of approaches including, for example, group discussion involving the use of ICT in the organisation of a meeting for a business project and later in the same lesson researching the Internet for information on data protection. Pupils respond well to the teachers' expectations: they are interested, concentrate on their work and work independently. Clear exposition and questioning are a feature of lessons which are well organised to meet the demands of the GNVQ. The teachers are working effectively to develop numeracy and literacy.

155. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The subject is well organised and runs smoothly and has made a very good improvement since the time of the last inspection. All pupils now have ICT lessons, appropriate courses have been devised, the National Strategy for ICT has been introduced successfully and standards have risen substantially.

Key skills – IT across the curriculum

156. Most subject departments now have easy access to ICT facilities and use them effectively to enhance subject learning and pupils' capability, for example, in art, to learn about printmaking using an interactive program from the Museum of Modern Art. In mathematics, younger pupils have found the solutions to linear equations by trial and error, using a computer spreadsheet. However, the school lacks

a system for determining and monitoring the use of ICT in subject departments . Assessment of pupils' learning is also not used sufficiently to effectively plan work for pupils in other subjects. The provision of computers, accommodation and technical support is good and is a major factor in the improvement of pupils' learning. Pupils have opportunities to use computers every day at lunchtime and after school and this, together with the work with five local primary schools, is much appreciated by the pupils involved and is helping to raise standards.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is **satisfactory**

Strengths

- Rising standards
- Good subject leadership
- Good scheme of work and lesson planning

Areas for improvement

- Uptake in Year 10
- Use of information and communications technology to support learning
- Pupils' difficulty with writing
- Contact with France and French culture

French

157. French is now the National Curriculum language of the school, having replaced German over three years ago. This means that recent GCSE results and the outcomes of the teachers' assessments of Year 9 pupils reflect the work of pupils who have learned French for less time than usual because they had taken German earlier in their school career. The present Year 9 is the first year group to go through the school doing French.

158. GCSE results in 2002 were well below the national average, but they were nevertheless better than the school had had for several previous years. All candidates obtained at least a grade F, and one in five achieved a grade C, the highest grade reached. Pupils did slightly less well in French than in their other subjects, in about the same proportion as candidates did nationally. Girls did better than boys, as they do nationally.

159. The teachers' assessments of Year 9 pupils in 2002 indicated a well below average proportion of pupils reaching nationally expected standards but most pupils came close to the levels expected.

160. Standards seen on inspection have improved both in Year 9 and in Year 11. In Year 11, 54 higher attaining candidates are taking French. Standards of those seen are below average rather than well below, but there are some whose attendance is unsatisfactory, which could affect eventual percentages. In Year 10 there are only 12 pupils taking French, the school having properly disappplied the National Curriculum in the case of the others. The standards of those taking the course are average. In Year 9, where the school has made an effort to group pupils so as to match tasks to their prior learning, overall standards are still below average, though pupils are now more appropriately challenged. Pupils are now expected to learn how to talk about what they have been doing, so as to develop an understanding of tenses. Both in the first three years and in the GCSE years their achievement in relation to prior learning is satisfactory. Their overall literacy skills are developed satisfactorily. Listening and speaking are their strengths; reading is satisfactory but writing is hampered by the difficulty some pupils have with the physical process of writing. They use numbers, for example, when dealing with time, and with prices in

Euros. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory, and they learn as well as others, as do the few pupils whose first language is not English.

161. Pupils' attitudes to their work are for the most part satisfactory and behaviour is good. Most pupils enjoy their learning and co-operate well with the teacher and with each other. However there are some negative attitudes to learning a foreign language, and a few pupils, mainly boys, behaved badly during the inspection. The school has effective systems in place to handle occasional misbehaviour in lessons.

162. Teaching is satisfactory and enables pupils to learn and to make progress at a satisfactory rate. A strength of the teaching is good lesson planning, which ensures pupils know what is expected of them. Teachers' good use of lesson time ensures that pupils know what they have learned and prepares them for the next lesson. Pupils have insufficient opportunity to use ICT to further their learning. The progress of higher attaining pupils is satisfactory but they will need to be further challenged in Years 10 –11 as standards rise in the earlier years. The school has no contact with French schools nor French culture, through correspondence, visits or the Internet, all of which could raise pupils' motivation and increase their interest in the subject.

163. The previous inspection in 2000 found that progress in modern languages was unsatisfactory. It is now satisfactory, and examination results improved satisfactorily in 2002. In other ways, improvement has been good. Good leadership and management have succeeded in laying a secure foundation for further raising of standards and raising the popularity of the subject. There is now clear educational direction, which relates directly to the school development plan. The use of assessment to raise standards is satisfactory and a strength is that the National Curriculum definitions of levels reached have been re-written in language more accessible to pupils. Planning is not yet so far developed as to cope formally with recent national initiatives, such as citizenship. The use of ICT to support learning also remains to be developed.

MUSIC

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

Strengths:

- Good teaching
- Pupils' good progress and rising standards
- Good extra-curricular work and more pupils taking instrumental lessons
- Individual target setting
- The popularity of expressive arts as an option in Years 10 and 11

Areas for improvement:

- GCSE results in music
- Aural skills, in Years 7 to 9
- Use of computers

164. Pupils' progress throughout Years 7 – 9 is good, overall, and standards are rising. Teachers' assessments made at the end of Year 9 in 2002 indicate that pupils' standards of work are below average in relation to those expected nationally. There is no significant difference in the results of boys and girls. The evidence of the inspection is consistent with these assessments but pupils achieve well in relation to their well below average starting point at the beginning of Year 7. The standards of Year 9 pupils' are lower in listening skills than in performing. Instrumental resources, such as African drums, are used well. Year 9 pupils use electronic keyboards effectively for performance and composition. In a Year 9 instrumental lesson a pupil performed Faure's *Sicilienne* on the flute with a secure sense of intonation.

165. Standards in Year 11 are also below average but pupils achieve well in relation to their starting points. In 2002, two pupils took the GCSE examination and achieved grades E and F. Standards are below average in performing and in composing. Pupils' listening skills and their ability to appraise music are well below average. The progress in aural appraisal currently being made by pupils in Years 10 and 11 is helped by the emphasis that the department now places on key words and literacy. Pupils are given a booklet of key terms and helped to understand how to develop good written and aural skills. This recent emphasis on literacy has had a positive effect on progress. Pupils' compositions display competence in work derived mainly from classroom projects and composition tends to use a restricted range of styles. Computers are used well by pupils in both Years 10 and 11 to draft scores. Performance standards are rising. Keyboard work is used effectively; for example, in a Year 10 keyboard lesson, pupils were able to use keyboards to create imaginative background music for a film. Overall, the emphasis on technical language and rising standards in performance, and to a lesser extent the development of compositional techniques, is leading to improved progress for most pupils. The small number of pupils opting to take music for GCSE is increasing. In addition, pupils have the opportunity to take GCSE Expressive Arts and this is proving a very popular and successful option in Years 10 and 11. In an Expressive Arts class on *The Tempest*, pupils clearly enjoyed a stimulating lesson and within the space of an hour were able to perform to Year 7 pupils with a high degree of competence.

166. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress but no specialist support is provided for them in music lessons. Gifted and talented' pupils do not always benefit from work especially designed for them but their overall progress is satisfactory.

167. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in music lessons are usually at least satisfactory and are good in Years 10 and 11.

168. Teaching is good overall. There are many strengths, for example the focus on literacy, the range of tasks within many lessons and the emphasis on practical work. Teaching is often well paced and communicates the aims of the lesson clearly. Teachers' knowledge and expertise are sound. Work is well matched to most pupils' abilities and teaching helps many pupils to develop their learning. Pupils have good opportunities to explore the music of their own culture and other cultures in lessons. Pupils learn well, with appropriate levels of interest and co-operation. Year 10 pupils clearly enjoy keyboard work and listen attentively to each other's contributions. The pupils' work is routinely assessed. Negotiated improvement targets for individual pupils are set through pupil self-assessment and this has a positive impact on their progress. Teachers are aware of examination performance across the components of performing, composing and appraising at GCSE. They are analysing assessment and GCSE results by component, so as to identify clearly the relative strengths and the areas that require improvement. Good teaching ensures that many pupils now make good progress. Pupils have opportunities to develop most necessary musical skills. However, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 to use computers for composition.

169. The number of pupils taking instrumental lessons with the four visiting teachers in school has increased recently. The full range of instruments is not yet available but the teachers hope to expand the stock of orchestral instruments. There is some good instrumental teaching and pupils work hard to develop their instrumental skills. The instrumental work is helping to raise standards and is fully integrated into the work of the department.

170. Leadership and management of the subject are good, within a strong expressive arts framework. The department's organisation is improving rapidly. The design of schemes of work is in progress and lessons are now planned to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum, albeit with some shortfall in work with computers. Assessment records as yet are scant but are regularly maintained. Some lack of space and resources for large classes occasionally affects learning adversely. The four computers in the department are mainly used by Years 10 and 11 and are not as yet fully playable through midi keyboards. The computers have the latest music software. Other resources are mainly satisfactory.

171. Extra-curricular activity in music is growing in popularity and increasing numbers of enthusiastic pupils take part. There are a number of opportunities for pupils to perform and also to take part in workshops and visits organised by the department. As yet there are few opportunities for parents to attend musical performances in school. The large number of pupils involved under the umbrella of expressive arts has a very positive effect on their cultural development. Opportunities for performance provided in dance, drama and music have a strong influence in enriching the social development of pupils; they also foster important links with the community. It is clear that the music department has the potential to have a strong impact on the social and cultural ethos of the school.

172. The subject has made good progress since the last inspection, chiefly in relation to the work offered to pupils, and extra-curricular music, which have had beneficial effects on rising standards.

GCSE Expressive Arts

173. Results in expressive and performing arts GCSE are well above comparable averages and pupils' progress is excellent, representing very good achievement from the end of Year 9 and excellent achievement in relation to their low starting point on entry to the school. The subject is a popular option in Years 10 and 11. Pupils have good opportunities to experience dance, drama and music in the context of combined performances. Teacher's planning across the subject is excellent. The use of assessment analysis, target setting and systems for the development of teaching are good. Leadership and management within the faculty are very good. Accommodation is adequate with a large performance space equipped with suitable lighting. The subject has a significant impact on pupils' creative, cultural and social development.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Outstanding achievement at GCSE and very high examination results
- The high quality of teaching and learning of dance
- Pupils' very good attitudes towards physical education

Areas for improvement

- Matching the work to the full range of pupils' capability
- The basic skills of literacy and extended writing
- Timetable arrangements in Years 8 and 9

174. Standards are above average overall and represent good achievement both for girls and boys. Pupils' very positive attitudes are supported by good teaching and ensure that they learn effectively as they move through the school.

175. The formal teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2002 indicated that standards were below average, whilst those of the previous year were well above average. The inspection findings are that standards do differ between these two year groups and that the teachers' assessments are accurate. The present Year 9 pupils' standards are above average, and the great majority of the pupils are reaching or exceeding expected standards, including those with special educational needs. Standards in dance are high in Year 9, and girls of all levels of attainment work very well together, composing their motifs as a group and with partners. Their skills of observation and analysis are very good and pupils evaluate and refine their work effectively. Boys take part enthusiastically in games and are developing good tactical awareness, for example, in badminton. This is not the case in basketball, however, in which standards are

below average. In other activities, standards are above average; for example, in swimming boys show good technique in a range of strokes. In gymnastics, girls show good control and body tension in their work on flight. Throughout Years 7-9, most pupils have an sound understanding of the effects of exercise on the body. They can prepare themselves effectively for their physical activities but should have more opportunities to take responsibility for this themselves.

176. The results in GCSE physical education have improved substantially since the previous inspection. For the past two years, results have been well above the national average. In 2001, all candidates successfully achieved at least a grade D, and 89 per cent achieved A*-C grades. The most recent results, in 2002, are equally remarkable and a good proportion of the pupils achieved A* and A grades. Boys' and girls' results were similar, and they tended to do significantly better in physical education than in their other GCSE subjects.

177. The standard of the present Year 11 pupils' work is above average overall and represents a good achievement. The GCSE course is, a very popular option and almost half of the pupils have chosen it. At this stage of the course standards are above average in Year 11, and average in Year 10. Work in the theoretical elements of the course is well structured and, as a result, both boys and girls have a good understanding of health and fitness, and a secure knowledge of the principles of training.

178. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress as they move through the school. They are extremely co-operative and very well behaved. Their levels of interest and enthusiasm for the subject are high and they take part fully in lessons. For some, however, poor attendance adversely affects their progress and continuity of learning. For most pupils, however, their commitment and effort are very good, and are key factors in the good progress that they make.

179. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout the school. Important strengths of the teaching are the very good relationships that teachers have with pupils, and their effective class management techniques. Expectations of behaviour and standards of work are high: teachers know their pupils well and enjoy good relationships with them. As a result, in almost every lesson, there is a co-operative atmosphere for learning. Pupils respond well to the teachers' expectations. Teachers have a secure knowledge of the activities they teach and, as a result, pupils learn correct techniques and develop their knowledge and understanding well. In Years 10 and 11, the effect of knowledgeable teaching combines with pupils' good motivation in the GCSE course to ensure that learning is effective.

180. In the most effective lessons teachers tell the pupils clearly what they are to learn, and frequently challenge them to evaluate their learning and understanding. This was illustrated well in a very successful Year 9 lesson where girls were developing a dance around the theme of 'traffic signs'. With skilful support and intervention from the teacher the girls were able to build on their secure understanding of dance principles and develop their own motifs. Their progress was very good, not only in choreographing and reviewing their work, but also in the tangible gains made in teamwork, co-operation, and self-confidence. Areas for development in the teaching are a closer match of work to the range of pupils' attainment. A wider variety of tasks and resources would help to ensure optimum progress for the wide ability range of pupils in some classes, particularly in games activities. Teachers are aware of the potential contribution of physical education to the development of pupils' basic skills. Key words and technical language are reinforced and ICT is used well for research. However, more opportunity for extended writing would strengthen the development of literacy skills for those pupils taking the GCSE course.

181. Leadership and management are good. Assessment procedures are very good and pupils' progress is monitored effectively, especially in the GCSE course. Teaching and learning are regularly monitored but could focus more on sharing of the key features of the very successful practice that is seen in some lessons. The timetabling of double lessons for Years 8 and 9 is unsatisfactory; it restricts progress and limits the range of learning opportunities, particularly in games.

182. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good, particularly in raising standards in examination work to the current high level. Facilities for physical education are very good and the shared community use is well managed. Despite the constraints of a small school and multiple teacher responsibilities, the commitment to extra-curricular opportunities has been sustained well. The good range of activities are popular and well-supported by boys and girls, and are helping to raise standards. They provide good opportunities for many pupils to achieve high standards both individually and in teams.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall the quality of provision in religious education is **good**.

Strengths

- Steadily improving short course GCSE results
- Good teaching
- Good relationships between teachers and pupils
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Areas for Improvement

- The match of tasks to the attainment of the more able pupils
- Attention to pupils' extended writing
- Grading and assessment of pupils' work
- Follow-up when pupils have missed work

183. A short course in GCSE has been offered to all pupils for the last 3 years. About half of the students in each year group choose to take this examination and are achieving well. Nearly all pupils entered in 2002 gained a pass at grades A*-G and just under half of them gained a pass at A*-C. Boys tend to achieve higher grades than girls. The results in 2002 were an improvement on those in 2001 but were not as good as the first year of entry in 2000 when all the pupils passed the examination and more than half of them achieved a grade A*-C. Students are achieving better results in religious education than in the other humanities subjects, geography and history.

184. The standards of pupils' work in Year 9 are average. Given the low level of their attainment when they join the school the pupils achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs and the few for whom English is not their birth language make good progress along with the others. Girls and boys perform equally well. Pupils follow the local agreed syllabus. By Year 9, pupils have learnt basic facts about six world religions, and looked at ways in which Christians and Muslims worship and thought about the rites of passage of several faiths. The pupils achieve well in learning about individual religions, but are less good in comparing and contrasting aspects of different faiths.

185. The Year 11 pupils' standards of work are average and the pupils are achieving well. Pupils of all levels of ability make good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the foundations of Judaism, and reflect upon Christian attitudes towards modern controversial issues. Higher attaining pupils have a good understanding of matters such as Jewish rituals; they appreciate the long history of Judaism and can use technical vocabulary well. They can explain Christian attitudes towards the family and discuss issues such as euthanasia sensitively and with understanding of the religious implications.

186. The pupils are generally well behaved in their lessons because they are well taught. A relaxed atmosphere is often created in the classrooms as pupils enjoy much of what they are doing and many want to learn. Most pupils participate well when working together in groups and listen to the teachers and each other with respect. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual development in moments of reflection. Moral issues are often discussed and the pupils develop social skills in their group

work. The study of world religions contributes well to pupils' cultural development. If pupils are disruptive they are dealt with quickly and effectively.

187. The pupils' written work in their exercise books and their homework are less good. Lower achieving pupils leave too many gaps in their work, which tends to be untidy and incomplete. Higher attaining pupils take pride in their work and their detailed and thorough answers lead to good standards.

188. The quality of teaching and pupils' learning is good overall. Pupils are encouraged to learn to think for themselves and to develop their own ideas about moral issues. Textbooks, videos, magazines and ICT research are used well to capture the interest and imagination of pupils, who respond enthusiastically. Pupils make good progress and can discuss serious matters, as was seen, for example, in a lesson in which Year 11 pupils presented the results of their research into the holocaust, which showed that they were well informed and they discussed the topic sensitively. Lessons are planned effectively to develop pupil's basic literacy skills. Pupils read aloud in lessons and take part confidently in discussion. However, much of the written work relies on glossaries of technical words and practised answers using writing frames. Pupils undertake little extended writing, and this is an area which needs to be improved. Although there is little development of numeracy skills, pupils use computers well, both for research and to present their knowledge and ideas. Their folders about Hinduism and Islam, leaflets about church and civil weddings and introductions to the six main world religions are good examples of this. Pupils' work is marked regularly but often no grades are given and more formal assessment is needed.

189. Religious education is well managed. The introduction of the new GCSE course has helped to raise standards and interest in the subject, which has made a good improvement since the previous inspection. The teachers are aware of the subject's strengths and areas for improvement.