

INSPECTION REPORT

ST. GREGORY'S RC MIDDLE SCHOOL

Bedford

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109696

Headteacher: Mr. P. Boylan

Reporting inspector: Brian Oppenheim
2686

Dates of inspection: 30 June – 1 July 2003

Inspection number: 252465

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Middle deemed secondary
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	9 – 13 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Biddenham Turn Bedford
Postcode:	MK40 4AT
Telephone number:	01234 268649
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. Peter Commons
Date of previous inspection:	27 September 1999

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2686	Brian Oppenheim	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>The school's results and pupils' achievements</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
9865	Sue Howley	Lay inspector		<p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
23393	Brian Dower	Team inspector	English	How well are pupils taught?
13067	Alan Quinn	Team inspector	Mathematics	
6364	Geoff Strack	Team inspector	Science	
31685	Val Girling	Team inspector	Art and design	
7084	Jack Haslam	Team inspector	Design and technology	
32297	Chris Martin	Team inspector	Geography History	
19613	Sue Thomas-Pounce	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Music	
1880	Garry Bignell	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages Special educational needs	

14446	Barry Simmons	Team inspector	Physical education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
2731	Penny Holden	Team inspector	Education inclusion English as an additional language	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Gregory's Catholic Middle School has 286 pupils making it smaller than other middle schools. The school is a Roman Catholic school and takes pupils from a range of different cultural and religious heritages. The other important information about the school is that:

- the proportion of pupils entitled to free schools is above average at over 24 per cent;
- the proportion of pupils who have special learning needs is below average but the proportion with a Statement of Special Educational Need is average;
- many more pupils than average speak a language other than English at home: the main languages are Italian, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali;
- the school receives extra money to support the achievements of 71 ethnic minority pupils;
- pupils' attainment when they start at St Gregory's in Year 5 is a little below average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Gregory's RC Middle School is successfully improving and now provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. Some aspects of its work are very good. Good teaching means that most pupils achieve well and that standards of work in English, mathematics and science are above those of similar schools. However, a small number of the brightest pupils are not making as much progress as they should. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall and governors provide a high level of challenge and support. Governors and senior managers have been successful in pushing forward with improvements. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- The good teaching means that most pupils make brisk progress with their learning and achieve well.
- The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social education is good and the school successfully creates a strong, positive ethos in which all are valued.
- Information and data about pupils' achievements are used well to raise standards in English, mathematics and science.
- Good extra-curricular activities in music and physical education, and high quality drama productions, mean that pupils' learning is enriched very effectively.
- The very strong governing body has supported senior managers very effectively: together, their combined commitment has helped the school make the necessary improvements over the past four years.

What could be improved

- The achievements of boys in English, and the more able pupils, are not as high as they should be because they are not always given work that interests them or stretches their thinking enough.
- The limited range of teaching styles does not take enough account of the different ways pupils learn and this sometimes limits the progress they make in lessons.
- Standards in information and communication technology are too low and there are not enough opportunities for pupils to use computers in other subjects.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher have too many tasks: responsibilities are not shared equally and as a result there are some inconsistencies in the way tasks are handled and improvements made.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. The three key issues from the last inspection in March 2001 have all been tackled well. Attainment has risen so that standards achieved in national tests are above those in similar schools and there is an effective development plan which is bringing about improvements. This has happened because leadership and management of the senior team are focused on improvement. However, the leadership and management of others with important responsibilities are not strong enough and this means that improvements are sound rather than good.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of **Year 6** based on National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools ¹	
	2000	2001	2002	2002	
English	C	E	C	B	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
mathematics	D	E	C	B	
science	D	E	C	B	

The table above shows the standards achieved by pupils in the Year 6 national tests when they were half way through their education at St Gregory's. The evidence shows that by the time pupils leave school at the end of Year 8 most achieve well: standards are average but pupils have made good progress from their achievements in the 2001 national tests.

As you can see, the national test results improved significantly in 2002 although in English the improvement was mainly by the girls. The results of this year's tests show a continuing improvement in English and mathematics because teaching is good. The upward trend in results is similar to the national picture. The school's targets for achievements in the national tests are realistic and were achieved in 2002. An important point is that pupils did better than those in similar schools: good teaching means that the school helps pupils to learn effectively.

Inspectors look at more than just the Year 6 national test results because pupils still have two more years at the school. What they found in lessons was that by the end of Year 8 nearly all pupils achieve well in English and mathematics and that standards are broadly average. This is borne out by looking at how well pupils do in their Year 9 national tests at their high school. Here, the information shows that they make better progress than might be expected. Again, in English girls make better progress than boys, some of whom underachieve because they make basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. In mathematics improvements in the way the subject is taught are showing in better standards.

Evidence from lessons shows that by the end of Year 8 most pupils are doing well in art, design and technology and physical education: standards are above average and pupils achieve well. Achievement in music is high because of the very good teaching. In most other subjects standards are broadly average and pupils' achievements satisfactory. In science standards in Year 8 are

¹ Similar schools means schools with a similar proportion of pupils who qualify for school meals free of charge which, for St Gregory's RC Middle School, is between 20 per cent and 35 per cent of pupils. This is above the national average.

slightly below average but pupils make sound progress with their learning and standards have improved. Achievement in information and communication technology is below what might reasonably be expected and pupils have too few opportunities to use their computer skills to support their work in other subjects. The evidence also shows that some of the more able pupils do not do quite as well as they should because they are not stretched enough. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress as do most of those with English as an additional language although sometimes bilingual pupils are given work that is too difficult.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Pupils' good attitudes make a very strong contribution to their learning. They are keen and willing and work hard.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Pupils' behaviour is good in classrooms and around the school. This makes a very positive contribution to their learning.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Relationships are strong and pupils develop well personally during their time at the school.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Attendance is broadly in line with the national picture. Most pupils attend regularly and punctually but a few take term time holidays.

Pupils' attitudes to school are a significant strength because of the way this contributes to their learning. Their willingness to listen, to work together, and for many their ability to rise to challenges when set, is one of the reasons why they achieve well.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching and learning are good because:

- teachers have a good command of their subjects;
- lessons are planned effectively and with clear learning objectives;
- teachers' strong relationships with their pupils have created a positive working atmosphere in the school;
- opportunities for pupils to extend their understanding and enjoyment of the curriculum, through a wide range of extra-curricular activities are good;
- pupils learn well because of their positive attitudes to the school and their interest and concentration in lessons.

In the small proportion of lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory, and in some of the satisfactory lessons, teaching methods are not varied enough to give pupils opportunities to learn in different ways. What happens is that teaching tends to rely on telling pupils what to do and giving them information and there is too little emphasis on getting them to think for themselves. This is illustrated by the way teachers ask factual questions and rarely probe further to develop pupils' understanding. This explains why the more able pupils do not do quite as well as they should: their learning needs are not always taken account of in lesson plans. Similarly, lesson plans do not take enough account of the needs of bilingual pupils and this means that sometimes the work is too difficult.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. The school provides the full range of subjects including personal, social and health education. The quality of the music curriculum is very good and good for English and physical education but provision for information and communication technology is weak.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory. The quality of the support provided by Learning Support Assistants is good and has a strong impact on pupils' learning during lessons. In lessons teachers do not always match the work to pupils' abilities.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. Teachers take care that bilingual pupils are included but where teaching is unsatisfactory the same activity is often planned for all pupils whatever their proficiency in English.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The school provides very well for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development and this contributes very strongly to the school's strong ethos. Pupils' cultural development is good but opportunities to celebrate the diversity of cultures are not always taken.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. The school has a strong caring ethos and continues to make good provision for the well being of its pupils.

The school has effective links with parents, particularly when there are concerns, and the headteacher and deputy have a good supportive policy of making appropriate home visits. Activities outside of school hours are very good and contribute effectively to the school's strong ethos and pupils' learning. Provision for information and communication technology across the different subjects does not meet statutory requirements.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Satisfactory. The head and deputy headteacher take a clear lead in improving the school and their hard work has succeeded in raising achievement. But they have too much to do and not enough of their work is handed over to other key staff. As a result middle leadership overall is patchy and means that improvement in some subjects is slow.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. The very strong governing body has been central to the school's improvement. Governors have given an excellent steer to the school: they understand how to balance positive criticism, and unswerving support for the head and deputy, with accountability.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. There have been significant improvements in the way senior managers review and evaluate the work of the school and this is raising achievements in some subjects successfully. However, other key staff are not evaluating the school's performance as effectively.
The strategic use of resources	Satisfactory. The school makes appropriate use of available resources to promote improvement. The budget has been managed efficiently so the school is in a good position to improve further.

There are broadly enough teachers with the right experience but recruitment is a continuing difficulty. The accommodation is adequate and provides a good range of subject facilities such as

science laboratories and workshops: however, in physical education there is a shortage of specialist indoor accommodation. The school applies the principles of best value well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children enjoy school. • The school expects pupils to work hard. • It is easy to approach the school and it is very responsive. • Teaching is good. • The school is well led and managed. • There is an interesting range of activities out of school hours. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some parents felt that there was not enough homework. • Frequent changes of teacher in one subject. • Behaviour is not always as good as it could be.

Nearly 33 per cent of parents returned the pre-inspection questionnaires but only 4 parents attended the meeting with inspectors. At the meeting, parents were very positive about the school. Broadly, inspectors agree with parents and endorse their views about the school. All the evidence from the inspection shows that pupils enjoy school, that teaching is good, that there are good links with parents and that there is a very good range of extra activities. The school is led and managed well in some respects but there are still areas that could be improved and some pupils are not stretched quite as much as they might be. Inspectors also agree with parents about homework: it is not used effectively enough to extend learning. However, inspectors judge that behaviour is good. There are difficulties with recruitment and these have affected teaching in the past.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Performance in the end of Year 6 national tests improved considerably in 2002 after a period of decline. The results are similar to those predicted by the school in the targets it set itself. The 2003 targets are lower than those in 2002 but are broadly realistic given pupils' attainment when they start in Year 4. Early indications from the 2003 national tests, which have just been taken by pupils moving into Year 7, show that standards are being maintained. The overall picture for 2003 looks similar to 2002 but there are solid gains in the results for English and mathematics, particularly. A significant evaluation is that standards are above the average achieved in other schools that have a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals: this shows that the school is successful in adding some value to pupils' learning.

2. In the 2002 English tests, girls did considerably better than boys: their attainment was almost double that of boys. The girls' results were above those of girls nationally while boys' results were well below those of boys nationally. What is interesting is that the gap between boys and girls is only significant in 2002: the average for the last three years shows that boys and girls performed at the same level. However, the evidence from the inspection confirms that some boys make slow progress in English and underachieve. There are a number of weaknesses in the boys' English work that explains this underachievement. The main difficulty lies in mechanics of writing: pupils make basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar and many are not able to use complex sentences.

3. Another way of looking at the 2002 results is to compare them with pupils' earlier achievements in the national tests that they took in 1999, at the end of Year 2 in their First School. This shows a different picture: pupils make only modest progress which is not as good as might be expected. However, there are good reasons for this different picture. First, pupils start at St Gregory's in Year 5, half way through Key Stage 2, rather than at the start of Year 3. Second pupils have only been at the school for two years when they take their national tests at the end of Year 6: in this two years the school is beginning to make a difference to learning. Third, pupils' make better progress later on in their school career in Years 7 and 8 so that overall their learning is good.

4. This is why inspectors look at more than just the Year 6 national test results. The quality of work seen during the inspection shows that by the end of Year 8 nearly all pupils achieve well and that standards are broadly average in most subjects. This is borne out by looking at how well pupils do in their Year 9 national tests at their high school. Here, the data shows that they make better progress than might be expected.

5. Evidence from lessons shows that pupils are doing well in English, mathematics, art, design and technology and physical education: standards are broadly average and pupils make good progress. In mathematics improvements in the way the subject is taught are showing in better standards. Here, pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6 is satisfactory but between Year 7 and the end of Year 9, a year after leaving the school, it is good: in other words pupils made better than expected progress. Again, however, boys underachieve in English. The evidence also shows that the more able pupils do not do quite as well as they should because they are not always being stretched enough. This is also borne out by assessment data showing that the current Year 8 pupils are also making good progress. In most other subjects standards are broadly average and pupils' achievement is as expected.

6. Standards in science in Year 8 are slightly below average but pupils make sound progress with their learning. The reason why standards in lessons are slightly lower in Year 8 than in the Year 6 tests is that they are different groups of pupils. Also, the tests do not cover pupils' ability to

apply their understanding. One of the weaknesses in pupils' achievements is that they find it difficult to use their scientific understanding to explain why something is happening.

7. Achievement in information and communication technology is below what might reasonably be expected and pupils have too few opportunities to use their computer skills to support their work in other subjects. In science, for example, pupils are not encouraged to use computer skills to collect and analyse scientific data.

8. Pupils enter the school with weak literacy skills but standards overall improve by the end of Year 8. Satisfactory progress is made in raising literacy standards because of the school's commitment to an inclusive approach in teaching. Standards in numeracy are in line with national expectations and, again, pupils make satisfactory progress from the start of Year 5.

9. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress towards the targets set for them. These are kept under review and are made known to all relevant staff. Their achievement is sound in relation to their learning difficulties, many of which are related to low language and literacy skills.

10. Pupils for whom English is an additional language make satisfactory progress overall: Some achieve well considering their starting point although they are very quickly set back in their learning and standards suffer if teaching is unsatisfactory.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

11. Pupils' attitudes, values and behaviour are good and this makes a very positive contribution to their learning. Relationships are strong and pupils develop well personally during their time at the school.

12. The vast majority of bilingual pupils at St Gregory's spoke very positively about their education. They are keen to become good at English and to do well in their school work. They are keen to play a full part in the life of the school. The vast majority of pupils are very helpful and supportive to those beginning to speak English although some found the teasing over their accents upsetting.

13. Pupils are positive about school and their learning and nearly all parents who responded to the questionnaire stated that their children like school. Many pupils take good advantage of the wide range of activities provided, particularly in music and sport. They are friendly and open and happy to discuss their work and school life. Parents are very pleased that the school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best. The majority of pupils are compliant and willingly get on with their work, especially when teaching is varied and lessons are interesting. They are keen to answer questions but take limited responsibility for their own learning, usually because few opportunities are provided. However, during "Citizenship Week" when challenged with a development project, Year 8 pupils produced work which demonstrated enthusiasm and initiative.

14. A significant minority of pupils, mainly boys, do not have as positive a work ethic as girls. It is not unsatisfactory but boys do not always listen well and some find it difficult to concentrate for any length of time. This can lead to chattering and minor disruption which disturbs the learning of others. When questioned, boys talked about a preferred learning style through practical activities. In physical education, for example, pupils' enjoyment is linked closely to the practical nature of the subject.

15. Behaviour is good and this is endorsed by parents and visitors. In most lessons, pupils are calm and well behaved, especially when staff have high expectations of good behaviour. Around the school most pupils behave well. They queue sensibly in the dining room and in the playground they mix and play together harmoniously. A minority of pupils are not naturally well behaved and lack self discipline. There is a tendency to be noisy and boisterous towards the end of the lunch break resulting in some inappropriate behaviour in corridors and cloakrooms and a reluctance to settle

down to learning again. There is a little bullying and some unacceptable teasing but pupils are confident that staff deal with incidents quickly. Exclusions are few and reducing following quite a high rate last year. Improved procedures mean they are used infrequently and there have been no permanent and very few fixed term exclusions this year.

16. Personal development is good because of the strong contribution made by the school to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are clear about the Catholic nature of St Gregory's and respond well to the school's moral and social values. Parents are very satisfied that the school is helping their children become well rounded and mature. Most pupils show respect and consideration for one another and work well in pairs. Year 8 pupils, for example, demonstrate maturity and responsibility around the school. School Council members take their role seriously and would like more time to canvass views and report back to their peers. Pupils have a good understanding of the difference between right and wrong. They know about their own backgrounds: English, religious education, music and art, in particular, and the local Italian community, contribute well to pupils' awareness of their own cultural values. Broadly, pupils' cultural development is good: their awareness of the range of diversity is sound because opportunities to celebrate diversity are not always taken.

17. Relationships are good and contribute to the positive ethos and learning environment. There is good racial harmony and social mixing.

18. Attendance is satisfactory at 93.1 per cent which is broadly in line with the national median. Unauthorised absence is very low at 0.12 per cent. Most pupils attend regularly and punctually but a few take term time holidays and a small minority of pupils has unsatisfactory attendance.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

19. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. This is because:

- teachers have a good command of their subjects;
- lessons are planned effectively and with clear learning objectives;
- the strong relationships teachers have formed with their pupils have created a positive working atmosphere in the school;
- teachers have provided opportunities for pupils to extend their understanding and enjoyment of the curriculum through a wide range of extra-curricular activities;
- pupils learn well because of their positive attitudes to the school and their interest and concentration in lessons.

19. There are a few weaknesses in teaching which mean that in some lessons pupils do not learn as well as they should:

- there is quite a narrow range of teaching approaches which do not reflect the different ways in which pupils learn;
- teachers do not use questions enough to extend and develop pupils' understanding.

20. In the lessons seen, teaching was satisfactory in a third of lessons, good in half and very good or excellent in over a tenth. Three percent of lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory. There was a broadly similar pattern to the quality of teaching across the Years. As a result of the predominantly good teaching throughout the school pupils' learning is good overall. There are, however, inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and good practice is not shared as effectively as it should be.

21. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they are familiar with recent educational developments. They plan their lessons well with a clear purpose. Learning objectives are explained succinctly so that pupils know what is expected of them. Lessons frequently start with a sharply focused whole-class introduction that builds on pupils' previous knowledge and end with a review of what they have learnt, whilst setting the context of the next lesson.

22. A striking feature of many lessons is the quality of the relationships between the pupils and the teachers. Pupils learn well because of this mutual respect. This was particularly apparent in physical education where pupils engaged fully in lessons because they recognised the enthusiasm and energy of the teacher and his commitment to getting the best from them. They in turn were treated with respect and consideration. Such strong relationships create a very positive working atmosphere in which learning flourishes.

23. Less effective teaching and learning was a feature of a small minority of lessons. In each instance, teachers adopted one teaching style throughout the lesson and failed to take account of the different ways in which pupils learn. There were no opportunities for pupils to become actively involved in the learning process and instead they had simply to listen and absorb information. There are many instances of good practice where pupils are given a large measure of responsibility to learn for themselves and from each other and this was seen in music, art, design technology and physical education. Because of this greater independence, pupils make significant learning gains and what they learn stays with them. In a Year 7 music lesson, for example, pupils were composing their own theme tunes and then sharing and evaluating their compositions. The work had been structured so that all were able to produce some original music and this ranged from one girl who used her computer to compose a melody to a pupil who tapped out a simple beat on a small drum. Such teaching strategies take account of the different ways pupils learn and promote a greater independence of working. However, these strategies are not shared as widely as they should and there are inconsistencies across the school.

24. The setting of homework is variable. Some practices are good with homework set that is both challenging and designed to extend learning. In other cases, homework is either set irregularly or what is set lacks challenge and is not designed to improve learning. These instances were the exception rather than the rule but they serve to highlight the need for a consistent whole-school approach to the setting of appropriate homework.

25. In many lessons good use is made of questioning to develop pupils' understanding. The teaching challenges pupils with thought provoking questions which make them think more deeply, explain their reasoning or consider alternative solutions to problems. The teachers do not focus just on the most earnest few but engage all the pupils, insisting that they all attempt to answer. In the best lessons this leads pupils to value their own contributions and to come forward with their own ideas. This good practice is not consistently applied, however, and there were occasions when individuals or groups did not make sufficient progress because they were not challenged in their thinking and superficial and brief answers were accepted by the teacher. Strategies need developing to ensure that the best practice becomes routine in all lessons.

26. In most subjects the teaching of literacy is satisfactory although not all subject teachers are clear about their role in developing pupils' literacy skills and their contribution is not as explicit or as planned as it should be. Overall, the teaching of numeracy is also satisfactory although again, apart from in mathematics and science, it is not explicitly planned as an integral part of lessons. Teachers do use information and communication technology to support teaching and learning in their subjects but this is an area which needs further development.

27. The school is successful in meeting most pupils' needs although there is some concern about the progress of boys in English. This is recognised and is being addressed. Teachers have created an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities which extend pupils' understanding and enjoyment of the curriculum. These are well supported and they contribute to the positive learning ethos in the school as a whole.

28. The quality of the support provided by Learning Support Assistants (LSAs) is good and makes a significant impact on pupils' learning during lessons. LSAs are provided with a clear brief and ensure that their support is unobtrusive, yet complementary to the work of the subject teacher. They clarify instructions, keep pupils on task and encourage their participation in lessons. In lessons where pupils are unsupported, teachers do not always match the work to pupils' abilities.

29. Overall, provision for bilingual pupils is sound. In the good and better lessons, bilingual pupils at all stages of learning English are taught well. This is because teachers explain the purpose of lessons well and make instructions very clear. The well trained learning support assistants work effectively supporting pupils who are in the earlier stages of learning English. The bilingual pupils understand their own learning needs very clearly and they learn best where teachers are patient and explain the work in different ways. Sometimes bilingual pupils do not get enough help with the structure and grammar of English and they struggle with their writing as a result. Where this happens it is because lesson planning does not focus specifically on the needs of bilingual pupils: this means that sometimes the work needs additional explanation or is too difficult for bilingual pupils.

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

30. For Years 5 and 6 and for Years 7 and 8, the school offers a satisfactory curriculum. It is appropriately broad and balanced and includes courses in information and communication technology and personal, social and health education (PSHE). The quality of the curriculum for music is very good and good for English and physical education. However, information and communication technology does not fully meet statutory requirements because it is not used in most subjects to support and enhance pupils' learning.

31. Pupils in all years are taught the full range of National Curriculum subjects and religious education. As indicated in the previous inspection report the curriculum meets statutory requirements and has a satisfactory balance of time. All pupils follow a broad core that includes English, mathematics, science, information and communication technology, art, design and technology, geography, history, French, physical education and PSHE. Access to French lessons and specialist accommodation and teachers provides the Year 5 and 6 pupils with much better opportunities than is normally available to pupils of their ages. The school has brief policies for sex and drugs education and these are taught in science and PSHE lessons.

32. The provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is satisfactory. The programme for any year largely addresses appropriate issues for the development of those pupils. However, there is no clear overview of progression from Year 5 to Year 8 creating a lack of coherence to the overall programme. Provision is best in Years 5 and 6 because there is a coordinator who ensures that there is a clear progression of activities.

33. The quality of provision made for bilingual pupils especially those who are not fully proficient in English is satisfactory but needs improvement. It is only in the last three years that the school has received funding to help support these pupils. This funding is beginning to make a difference. Italian speakers were identified as under achieving and the school concentrated efforts on improving results in science. This has been successful.

34. The provision for extra-curricular activities is very good and lots of pupils take part. There is a good range of activities including arts and crafts, mathematics and science, and the provision for both music and sport is extensive. In music there are numerous vocal and instrumental ensembles and regular school productions. In addition to sports activities such as cricket and gymnastics, there are dance groups and opportunities for water sports in the South of France. Mathematics and science clubs are well attended as are classes learning how to paint on glass and silk. All pupils are encouraged to participate in the extra-curricular programme and enjoy the opportunities available to them, whether or not they are capable of achieving the highest levels of performance, but even so, twice as many girls as boys take up these opportunities. Many of these activities are funded by a special grant for out-of-hours learning. There are also booster classes in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science as part of the school's work to improve standards. This is part of the reason why standards in the core subjects have improved in the past two years.

35. Links with the community are good and contribute effectively to pupils' wider learning. The programme of out of school hours learning involves tutors from the community coming in to school to teach a wide variety of activities. These include visits to Unilver Science Laboratories and to Luton University. There are regular visiting speakers who contribute to the citizenship programme, for example, the local police, Wellingborough prison service and the sports and leisure services. Musical activities involve both groups coming in to school, such as the Indian Music Group and pupils going out, such as the chamber choir singing at the local old people's home. There is also considerable involvement of the Catholic community in the work of the school. There are good links with local First and Upper Schools that help pupils in their transition from one phase to the next.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

36. The provision for spiritual development is very good. St. Gregory's Middle school is a Catholic school which places very strong emphasis on the spiritual development of all its pupils. The beliefs and practices of the Church are central to the life of the school, through celebration of the liturgy, religious education and daily acts of prayer. Very good provision is made for prayer and reflection throughout the year. Morning assemblies focus on worship and the development of spiritual values, but also include much that relates to the promotion of social and moral values. Spiritual development is also fostered very successfully within the mainstream curriculum, where elements of most subjects, in particular music, art and English offer pupils the opportunities to explore and reflect on matters of significance to humanity. Pupils in Year 7 and 8 have the opportunity to attend retreats at Buckden Towers, and both staff and pupils comment on the quite dramatic effect that the visits have had on them. During the most recent visit the theme of rights and responsibilities was discussed and debated at length. The school, while firmly rooted in the Catholic tradition, also teaches respect and beliefs of others, including visits to local places of worship.

37. The provision for pupils' moral development is very good. Pupils know the difference between right and wrong in a school that is rich in valuing and promoting sound ethical and moral behaviour. They are encouraged to have respect for themselves and others and to have a responsibility for those less well off than themselves. Staff are good role models. They make their expectation of high standards of behaviour in all aspects of school life very clear, promoting them consistently, vigorously and sensibly. Moral issues are very effectively explored in assemblies and in the religious education course through topics such as care for the elderly. The programme of personal, social and health education is carefully planned and includes topics that develop moral sensitivity.

38. The provision for pupils' social development is very good. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities plays a significant part in helping pupils to develop positive relationships. Pupils take part in and organise charity work. They learn about the working of democracy in a practical way through the school council, and through personal, social and health education lessons. Competitive events and games in physical education gives opportunities to learn about fair play and effective team work. Drama activities and group performances in music provide opportunities for pupils to rehearse and perform together. There are many opportunities for pupils to take part in residential school journeys both at home and abroad which give pupils the opportunities to develop their social skills by living within a community outside their own homes.

39. Cultural experiences for pupils are varied and good. Curricular contributions come mainly from English, religious education and music and art. In art pupils have the opportunity to study Kenyan and Japanese influences. A highly successful visit by an African dance group was both highly entertaining and allowed pupils to experience a quite different dance form. Visits abroad help pupils appreciate the outlook of others, and broadens horizons. The local Italian community play a large and active part in the life of the school. They support the school parent teachers association and when school fairs are held give displays of Irish dancing. The opportunities for pupils to learn about, and celebrate the diversity of the range of cultures in other subjects are not routinely planned for: this is why pupils' cultural development is good rather than very good.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

40. The school has a strong caring ethos and continues to make good provision for the well being of its pupils.

41. Staff have a thorough knowledge of pupils and their needs and respond positively to concerns. The headteacher is particularly high profile around the school, knows the pupils well and when interviewed, many pupils indicated that they would go to him if they needed support.

42. Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development are good overall. The staff know the pupils very well. They use this knowledge sensitively when guiding pupils' behaviour and dealing with their personal problems. Teachers provide very good role models for pupils so that they learn to treat others with respect and listen to others' viewpoints carefully. They also learn to treat the environment and property with due respect.

43. The school successfully supports pupils' personal development. Good induction arrangements ensure that all pupils settle easily and happily in their new environment. Considerate tutoring means that pupils quickly feel they have a friend on the staff and these close relationships with tutors continue as they move through the school. Pupils and staff use the planners well to record and communicate aspects of pupils' personal development such as merits gained. The school successfully monitors pupils' behaviour and attitudes, analyses patterns and plans improvement. This good personal support helps secure pupils' and parents' strong commitment to the school. It also means that pupils become increasingly mature, confident and responsible.

44. The school has successfully introduced specific support schemes for targeted groups of pupils, for example, the "Playing for Success" scheme and group sessions for pupils experiencing relationship difficulties. The school nurse provides a very useful "drop-in" session and the development of the Chaplaincy is bringing further benefits especially the programme of "Retreats".

45. Appropriate and effective procedures are in place for child protection and health and safety issues. Supervision is generally good and pupils feel safe.

46. Good behaviour is well promoted through high expectations in most lessons and an effective reward system. Behaviour management has been modified and most staff now take appropriate responsibility for issues both in and out of lessons resulting in a more effective use of sanctions. Pupils talk understandingly of rewards and consequences. Staff make it very clear what they expect and praise pupils for meeting these expectations. They use the merit system very well to encourage good behaviour and to reward good work. This approach is successful with the vast majority of pupils. Monitoring of incidents is good and thorough and places appropriate responsibility with form tutors. However, form time is fairly limited and there are inconsistencies in the effective use of this time and the quality of support provided to pupils by form tutors.

47. Attendance monitoring is good and there is effective liaison between the administration team, year leaders and the Education Welfare Service. Registers are well kept and pupils with attendance and punctuality concerns are appropriately targeted and supported.

48. The provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is satisfactory. The programme for any year largely addresses appropriate issues for the development of those pupils. However, there is no clear overview of progression from Year 5 to Year 8 creating a lack of coherence to the overall programme. Provision is better in Key Stage 2 because there is a coordinator who ensures that there is a clear progression of activities.

Assessment

49. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good overall. They have been developed particularly strongly in the core subjects since the previous inspection but there is a need for further improvement in some foundation subjects.

50. There are now firm baselines from which to measure pupils' achievements in these core subjects, English, mathematics and science. Liaison with both feeder primary and secondary schools is good and so the required data on attainment for assessing progress are received from both. The school has comprehensive records on the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of each key stage and on the annual tests taken in Years 4, 5, 7 and 8 that are compiled by the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA). Data are analysed to track progress and identify under-performance. They are also used to establish whether different groups within the school are reaching their full potential. This is having a positive effect in the raising of standards in the core subjects. School targets are set on the basis of this information. Assessment procedures in foundation subjects are not yet consistent or accurate enough for monitoring pupils' achievement, although good examples were seen in music and art.

51. The day-to-day assessment of pupils' level of understanding still requires more secure procedures. The learning objectives planned for each lesson or series of lessons is not always linked to assessment, either formal or informal. Similarly, the role of homework is relatively limited and only sometimes linked to pupils' work in lessons. Whilst there is some good practice, marking is often superficial and does not contribute to pupils' understanding of what they have to do to improve as much as it might. The setting of short-term targets is improving in quality but sometimes they are not clear enough for pupils.

52. The assessment data on the core subjects are now being used more effectively since the previous inspection, in curriculum planning, reviewing teaching methods and in the school's development plan. Analysis of the answers in the National Curriculum tests in mathematics, for example, at the end of Year 6 has been carried out. This has provided very useful information about the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' understanding and helped to guide decisions on teaching strategies. This is contributing to the recent rise in standards. However, similar analysis of the optional tests used to check progress in other subjects is less detailed.

53. The school records the different home languages that bilingual pupils speak and their proficiency in English. Bilingual pupils' progress is checked alongside other members of their class but the school has yet to track this more formally and to use this information to check whether pupils are making sufficient improvements in their work.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

54. Parents are very positive and supportive of the school and its ethos. The school provides satisfactory information and parents contribute satisfactorily to their children's learning.

55. Although very few parents came to the meeting with inspectors, there was a good response to the questionnaire and to the survey conducted by the school earlier in the year. They feel well informed, find it easy to approach the school and think staff work closely with them.

56. The school has effective links with parents, particularly when there are concerns, and the headteacher and deputy have a good supportive policy of making appropriate home visits. Bilingual pupils and their families have good relationships with the school. There has for example been an Italian community linked to the school for many years.

57. Written information including the pack for new parents and the weekly newsletter is useful and most parents support the use of the homework diary and reading record book. Clearer information about homework expectations would enable parents to provide better support for their children's learning. Additional information about what is being studied, such as that provided by the

mathematics department, gives parents a very useful guide. In addition parents are sent brief details of the areas to be studied in all the other subjects.

58. Annual reports provide considerable information but much is more relevant to teachers than parents. Better, clearer details about progress and how to improve would make reports more accessible to parents and pupils. Many parents attend the autumn term meetings to meet with form tutors but subject consultations are less well attended and there are plans to review these arrangements.

59. A parent association organises social and fundraising events and supports school activities. Attendance at concerts and productions is particularly good but no parents currently come into school to support the curriculum although the school is keen to involve them.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

60. Taking everything together, the leadership and management of the school is satisfactory. However, this overall judgement hides the contribution made by the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and governors to improving the quality of education for pupils. All take a clear lead in improving the school and their hard work has succeeded in raising pupils' achievements. However, the head and deputy have too much to do because the part played by some other key staff is too limited. As a result leadership overall is patchy and in some subjects improvements and developments are slow.

61. Both the headteacher and the deputy headteacher make a strong contribution to the school's progress and to improvements over the past few years. The headteacher is particularly effective in establishing good relationships and has worked diligently and loyally for the school during a difficult period. That the work to improve standards has succeeded is a testament to his commitment to the school, to parents and to pupils. There is little doubt that the deputy headteacher has also contributed very significantly to improvements in the school and the rise in pupils' achievements. Attention to detail, a clear understanding of systems and careful monitoring of teaching and learning have all played a central part in these improvements.

62. Governors fulfil their responsibilities very successfully. The governing body is very strong and over the last four years has played a central role in helping the school to improve. Governors are highly committed to the school and many are parents. Their enthusiasm for the school, and their belief in what it stands for, has helped to give the school a sense of purpose and direction. Governors have an excellent understanding of their role: they balance positive criticism, and unswerving support for the school, with accountability. This is a remarkable governing body in many ways and governors have given tremendous support to the headteacher during a difficult time. They have worked hand in hand with the school to overcome the weaknesses identified in past inspections but at the same time have set up clear procedures for organising their work. This is the key to governors' success: clear systems ensure that the governing body works efficiently while governors maintain the personal and human side of their role, building on the strengths of teachers. Also important is governors continuing commitment to improvement. In spite of successes in moving the school forward, governors are not complacent and take their role in improvement very seriously.

63. Another strength of the leadership and management is the way data is used to raise pupils' attainment in English, mathematics and science. Here, the school is now using performance data about individual pupils, and about groups of pupils, to predict outcomes, track progress and evaluate whether standards are high enough. Senior managers now use this data well, using the evaluations to work with staff to identify areas for improvements. Information about performance ensures that the school knows how well it is doing and whether standards are high enough. The information is also used well to evaluate the achievements of different groups of pupils: in this way the school is getting better at ensuring that all its pupils reach their potential.

64. The school's approach to monitoring teaching and learning also plays an important part in raising pupils' achievements. Lesson observations, looking at pupils' work in books and checking assessment records are all used to give senior managers a view of quality and whether, and where, improvements are needed. In mathematics, for example, monitoring has been significant in helping to raise standards and achievements. Similarly, senior managers have had the necessary information to make important decisions about direction and strategy.

65. What all this means is that the school has identified the right priorities for development. This is illustrated by the school development plan. This provides a coherent view of the school's strategic direction and sets priorities against timescales, who is responsible, success criteria, who monitors and evaluates and costs. Significantly, the plan emphasises achievement and leadership and management as well the learning of different groups of pupils but limits the number of targets. Overall, therefore, it is manageable and provides a good tool for improvement.

66. However, despite these clear strengths there are still weaknesses in some aspects of the way the school is led and managed. One area is that the part played by some key staff is not strong enough. The headteacher and deputy head have taken the lead on many of the initiatives that have helped to improve standards: for example the deputy head has taken the role of special educational needs coordinator temporarily as well as leading on the use of data. The reluctance of some staff to take responsibility has resulted in some inconsistencies in the responsibility structure. There is a Key Stage 2 coordinator but separate Year 7 and Year 8 coordinators. This makes it more difficult to delegate substantial responsibilities and to achieve consistency.

67. A related weakness is in the leadership and management of subjects. Here, despite clear strengths in mathematics and English, where positive leadership has helped to improve standards, there are some subjects where the leadership and management are less ready to take responsibility for improvement. What this means is that there are some inconsistencies in the way agreed policies and procedures are implemented. In some subjects, for example, assessment is used well to support teaching plans and to review teaching methods. However, this sort of analysis and evaluation is not used consistently in all subjects: this explains why the rate of improvement in some areas of the school is slow. In a similar way, performance data is not always used to evaluate strengths and weaknesses and identify areas for improvement. Of course, for subjects other than English, mathematics and science there is not as much data but, nevertheless, the use of self-evaluation to try to understand what is happening is a little limited in some subjects.

68. Accommodation is satisfactory overall and the range of resources is broadly adequate. Outside space is good and provides extensive opportunities for physical education but there is a shortage of specialist indoor accommodation for the subject. The spacious music room contributes well to the high standards achieved by pupils. Specialist accommodation for science and design and technology has recently been improved and up-graded and provide good facilities. In science, however, about a quarter of the lessons are not in the laboratory and this limits pupils' learning. Library provision is satisfactory. There is a reasonable range of books and access is adequate. In most cases the resources available to support pupils' learning, such as books, materials and equipment, are adequate. There are sufficient computers but they are not used well in subjects. Music is an exception: here the use of information is developing well and, for example, pupils use the computer to support their music composition. The range and experience of staff are sound and the school has been successful in keeping teachers: many are long-serving and this contributes well to the school's overall sense of stability and continuity.

69. Financial management is secure and the school has reliable records of its spending. The budget is managed efficiently and governors have good regular information with which to make judgements about spending. This ensures that the school can use its resources to support and promote improvement. The ability of the school to keep staff and the use of more classroom assistants are both examples of how the school is using its budget strategically. Another effect of the well managed budget is that the school is in a good position to improve further: finances are secure and although tight, there is sufficient scope to target money to areas of need. The principles of best value are applied well. A particularly good example is the way governors consult parents: for

example, they have shared fully the school's plans to tackle the weaknesses identified in previous inspection reports.

70. There are broadly enough teachers with the right experience but recruitment is a continuing difficulty. The accommodation is adequate and provides a good range of subject facilities such as science laboratories and workshops: however, in physical education there is a shortage of specialist indoor accommodation. The school applies the principles of best value well.

71. The staff directly involved with English as an additional language support is very small. The deputy headteacher manages the programme with the help of 4 learning support assistants. Individual teachers have yet to take on their responsibility for planning and supporting bilingual pupils. The school's recent history has developed teachers' expertise in teaching and learning so that most bilingual pupils do well. The focus has not been on developing even better strategies for increasing these pupils' progress in all lessons.

72. The deputy headteacher has very recently assumed responsibility for co-ordinating SEN throughout the school. Although not trained for this role, she has quickly familiarised herself with requirements and procedures and has led the annual reviews of several pupils. IEPs are well written, but do not currently include details of pupils' date of birth or gender. The deployment of LSAs is in line with the needs of pupils and supports their learning well.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

73. In order to maintain and improve standards further, the school should:

(1) Improve the achievements of boys in English, and the more able pupils, by:

- setting work that interests boys;
- ensuring that there are tasks stretch the thinking of the more able pupils (paragraphs: 2, 5, 74 – 86, 130, 95)

(2) Raise standards in information and communication technology by giving more opportunities for pupils to use computers in the subjects of the curriculum. (paragraphs: 7, 30, 104, 125, 131, 138, 141 – 145)

(3) Broaden the range of teaching styles to better reflect the different ways pupils learn by:

- ensuring consistency in the use of questions to develop pupils understanding;
- giving pupils more opportunities to become involved actively in their learning;
- sharing the good practice that already exists. (paragraphs: 19 – 29, 80, 111, 123, 131, 132)

(4) Share leadership and management tasks more equally amongst key staff by:

- reviewing and revising the current management structure;
- develop the capacity of middle leadership so that more key staff are able to take significant responsibilities;
- develop the use the school's evaluation procedures so that they apply to all subjects. (paragraphs: 60 -72)

OTHER ISSUES WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BY THE SCHOOL

Share the successes and ideas that have helped improve the provision for English, mathematics and science so that pace of development in other subjects is equally good.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

69

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

26

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	2	5	40	20	2	0	0
Percentage	3	7	58	29	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. Care should be taken when interpreting these percentages as each lesson represents more than one percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

Y5 – Y8

Number of pupils on the school's roll	283
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	71

Special educational needs

Y5 – Y8

Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	6
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	57

English as an additional language

No of pupils

Number of pupils with English as an additional language	89
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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	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	15

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.3
National comparative data	6.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	0.3

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	37	25	62

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	18	28	32
	Girls	22	18	24
	Total	40	46	56
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	65 (70)	74 (58)	90 (81)
	National	75 (75)	73 (71)	86 (87)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 4 and above	Boys	17	28	30
	Girls	21	20	24
	Total	38	48	54
Percentage of pupils at NC level 4 or above	School	61 (73)	77 (65)	87 (84)
	National	73 (72)	74 (74)	82 (82)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
120	4	1
3	0	0
31	0	0
18	2	0
	0	0
2	0	0
3	0	0
17	1	0
10	0	0
11	1	0
3	1	0
15	2	0
4	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
44	2	0
0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y5 – Y8

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	15.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.8

Education support staff: Y5 – Y8

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	103.5

Deployment of teachers: Y5 – Y8

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.7
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Average teaching group size: Y5 – Y8

Key Stage 2	24.8
Key Stage 3	23.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2002/03
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	£
Total income	914161
Total expenditure	882860
Expenditure per pupil	3086
Balance brought forward from previous year	4288
Balance carried forward to next year	31301

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	3.6

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.6
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	283
Number of questionnaires returned	93

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	55	43	2	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	44	49	5	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	34	53	9	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	33	46	13	5	2
The teaching is good.	48	44	3	1	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	44	45	5	2	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	62	30	3	0	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	32	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	41	49	4	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	51	42	1	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	42	5	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	48	44	3	1	3

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Pupils make good progress and achieve well by the end of Year 8;
- Girls attain standards in the national tests at the end of Year 6 which are better than those of girls in similar schools;
- Pupils learn well because of the consistently good teaching;
- The leadership and management of the subject are raising standards through improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Areas for improvement

- A number of boys are underachieving and are failing to attain appropriate standards in the national tests at the end of Year 6.

75. The proportion of pupils attaining at level 4 or above in the 2002 national tests at the end of Year 6 is in line with national averages. This represents a significant improvement on the results attained at the time of the previous inspection when standards were well below average. The 2002 results are similar to those attained in 1999 and 2000. They are above average when compared to those of similar schools. The girls did particularly well, their levels of achievement were good and they outperformed their national counterparts by a significant margin. They did considerably better than they did in the years 2000 and 2001 and at level 5 their attainment was double that of the boys. The latter did badly and their results were well below those of boys nationally. There has been a decline in their standards since 2000. Pupils with special educational needs made good progress and attained well in the national tests and there was no significant variation in the results of the pupils from different ethnic heritages.

76. The quality of the work seen during the course of the inspection reflects the standards attained in the national tests. Standards overall by the end of Years 6 and 8 are average and the progress pupils are making and their levels of achievement are good. The exception is the poor progress of a significant number of boys which results in their underachievement. All pupils are able to write in a range of styles for different purposes and the more competent produce extended prose which is well organised, accurate and carefully presented. Computers are used to draft writing and to present it imaginatively in various forms. This was seen in the work undertaken by Year 6 pupils whose poetry writing was well written and sensitively displayed. There are weaknesses, however, which account for the underachievement already noted and it is in the mechanics of writing where the difficulties arise. Pupils are making basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar and many are not able to use complex sentences. These weaknesses persist across the Years, particularly in the boys' work.

77. Reading standards overall are average although, as with writing, there are many boys whose reading skills are underdeveloped. Most pupils have made good progress in understanding a range of demanding texts and are able to read aloud fluently and with expression. Their levels of achievement in this skill are good. Standards of speaking and listening are also at expected levels, for the boys as well as the girls. They are confident when speaking and understand that they must adapt their speech to take account of their audience. There are some boys and girls who find this difficult when Standard English is required in formal situations. There are many who have yet to master the techniques of debate in whole class situations but in small groups discussion skills are well developed. Pupils are attentive in lessons and show respect for what other pupils have to say. Their willingness to listen to each other and heed what the teacher has to say reflect their positive attitudes to the subject. Overall, the levels of achievement in speaking and listening are good.

78. Pupils progress well because of the quality of the teaching which is consistently good. Teachers know their subject thoroughly and plan well to ensure that what they teach is both demanding and interesting. This was seen in the work of a Year 5 class of very low competence who were reading 'No Gun for Asmir' by Christobel Mattingley, a work which depicts the suffering of the people in the Balkans. Not only were these pupils gaining an insight into the lives of people very different from themselves, they were also understanding a range of language which was new and challenging. They responded well to the teacher's high expectations and worked with enthusiasm.

79. Appropriate use is made of the learning support assistants who contribute significantly to the learning of pupils with special educational needs and pupils whose home language is not English. They are closely involved in the development of lessons and are well deployed. Teachers have created a very positive climate for learning in classrooms by building strong relationships with the pupils and encouraging an ethos of respect and consideration for others. Visually arresting display material and teaching prompts are used as learning aids and to enliven classrooms. Marking is regular and supportive and pupils are told how to improve the quality of their work through the setting of targets. Appropriate systems are used for the monitoring and assessment of pupils' work and progress, and pupils understand how well they are doing from the feedback they receive over key pieces of work. Progress is being made in developing pupils' self-assessment skills but this is at an early stage as yet.

80. Teachers are aware of the challenge facing them with regard to raising the attainment of boys and are trying a range of teaching strategies to address the problem. These have yet to make an impact. There is some inconsistency in teaching approaches. There were lessons seen where the teacher failed to question to monitor pupils' understanding. There were times when superficial answers were too readily accepted and pupils were not challenged to answer at length. Opportunities were missed to engage pupils in evaluating each other's work and so they failed to learn from each other. In some lessons there was not that active engagement, that lively interchange between pupils, and between pupils and teacher which make a lesson memorable and the learning stick. Attention to these points will make the teaching of English in the school very good.

81. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The newly appointed subject co-ordinator has a clear grasp of the issues to be addressed if standards are to rise and the achievement of boys is to match that of boys nationally. The improvement of teaching and learning is at the heart of development planning and this is seen in the provision for a Year 5 writing intervention programme, Year 6 booster classes and the earlier introduction of progress units. There are formal lesson observations in place to monitor the quality of teaching but the most effective sharing of good practice takes place through daily conversations and regular discussions at departmental meetings. In addition to the monitoring and assessment systems already noted, the subject co-ordinator undertakes regular work scrutiny to see how well pupils are performing. Staff new to the department are well supported. There has been significant improvement since the previous inspection when pupils' written standards were well below average. Teaching was then judged to be satisfactory overall whereas now it is consistently good. There is the capacity to improve the quality of provision further because of the commitment of the staff to the welfare and academic progress of the pupils.

82. Literacy

83. Pupils enter the school with weak literacy skills but standards overall improve by the end of Year 8. Satisfactory progress is made in raising literacy standards because of the school's commitment to an inclusive approach in teaching. The proportion of pupils whose mother tongue is believed not to be English is high but the number of pupils with special educational needs is below the national average. Teachers are sensitive to the needs of these groups and adapt their teaching to ensure that such pupils are able to benefit fully from the school's curriculum. There are many instances of such practice being used effectively.

84. Much is done in English to improve standards of literacy by using frameworks to help pupils to write well, by encouraging group discussion and by developing the range of pupils' vocabulary. In a Year 7 lesson pupils of very low competence made good use of such frames to develop a written argument and because of this structure all were able to complete the task successfully. Year 5 pupils looked at texts from different cultures and developed their understanding of foreign and borrowed words. Attention is given to speaking and listening skills in physical education when pupils have to use technical language correctly and explain what they are doing and why. The teaching of that subject is particularly effective in giving language support to pupils whose mother tongue is not English.

85. Not all subjects, however, accord priority in their teaching to the raising of literacy standards and often it is not planned for in a systematic way. In a subject area where the understanding of technical vocabulary is essential if pupils are to make good progress, no reference was made to the key words which were on display around the room and few opportunities were offered to use such words. In another subject pupils had to read silently. There was no monitoring of how well they were doing this and a learning opportunity was missed for them to read aloud and so improve their confidence.

86. The school is developing a co-ordinated approach to the teaching of literacy across the curriculum and is targeting resources at improving the proficiency of all pupils in all subject areas. The services of the Education Authority's literacy co-ordinator have been used to raise the profile of literacy teaching but the school recognises there is more to be done.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Leadership and management in the subject;
- The dramatic improvements in standards since 2001;
- The collection, analysis and use made of assessment data.

Areas for improvement

- The challenging of higher-attaining pupils;
- Some aspects of the teaching;
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT).

88. Standards of attainment are in line with national averages for Years 6 and 8. In the 2002 National Curriculum tests for Year 6 pupils, attainment was in line with the national average, but the proportion achieving the higher levels was below the national average. Nonetheless the overall result is a dramatic improvement on the results of 2001, which were well below the average. There has been no significant difference between the performances of boys and girls over the last two years. In comparison with similar schools the attainment in 2002 was above average.

89. Pupils' achievement by the end of Year 6 is satisfactory. This means they made the expected progress between Year 5 and Year 6. Pupils' achievement between Year 7 and the end of Year 9, a year after leaving the school, is good. This means they made better than expected progress. Recent assessment data from internal, standardised tests show that the current Year 8 pupils are also making good progress.

90. Those pupils with special educational needs and those with English as a second language are making satisfactory progress across key stages.

91. In Year 5 the emphasis is on number work, but aspects of shape, measuring and handling data are also covered. Skills in basic number work are sound. Pupils also show that they can handle simple fractions and the decimal equivalents successfully and can relate them to

percentages. They can read and write numbers to 10 000, and the majority know place values and can round up or down to the nearest 10 or 100. Most pupils are confident with times-tables up to 10. They understand the concept of a negative number on a number line. Some can go beyond the rote learning and apply their understanding to solving real-life problems.

92. In Year 6 there continues to be a concentration on number work but work on other aspects is extended. There is a better sense of place values and relative size of numbers. Most can multiply by 10, 100 and 1000 and move the decimal point and can now handle problems involving improper fractions. They use square numbers and square roots. There is a better balance between aspects of the curriculum than in Year 5 and pupils show they can measure and draw angles, calculate simple areas, analyse and represent data in a number of ways and plot line graphs. Some pupils are able to calculate areas of irregular figures.

93. By Year 8 the pupils' work is showing clear progress in basic operations and their applications. It also shows that many pupils are using algebra confidently. These pupils can solve problems by substitution of values and use brackets and can draw linear graphs from an equation. They can derive a formula to describe a simple sequence of numbers. Some have moved on to simultaneous equations and can also apply Pythagoras' theorem. Lower-attaining pupils can draw a line graph from given co-ordinates. Skills in data-handling have been developed further, including the use of scattergrams. Work on spatial concepts is also improving at all levels.

94. Overall standards in basic numeracy are in line with expectations. These would be enhanced through a more structured approach to developing mental arithmetic skills. More lessons should begin with such activities. The versatility and usefulness of mathematics would be more apparent to pupils if they were to practise basic number operations less through repetitive exercises and more through use of applications to solving real life problems and investigations. This would also bring a better balance between the four strands in the syllabus, particularly in Years 5 and 6.

95. The quality of teaching is good overall but of the lessons seen it was best in Years 7 and 8. The quality ranged from very good to satisfactory but there are some aspects that need to be considered. The good teaching involved careful planning, good pace and timing, the sharing of clear intentions with the class and matching tasks to pupils' ability and previous knowledge. Teaching to the whole class is more commonly observed and individual pupil's needs are not always met. There is a clear match in planning for pupils' needs in the very thorough schemes of work but it was not sufficiently evident in lessons within each set. Higher attainers need to be more challenged. There is recent evidence that this is improving in Year 8. The best lessons observed are made up of a brisk opening to test the class' mental arithmetic, followed by well-structured strategies for teaching the key objectives and concluding with a summary that allows pupils and teacher to measure the progress made towards these. To this end assessment procedures need to be better defined. The use of homework should play a more structured part in this along with more diagnostic marking and feedback to pupils so that they have a more immediate awareness of their progress. Short-term targets need to be more precise, achievable and monitored.

96. Attitudes to learning are generally good but there are exceptions, for example when a class is left too long on an activity without the teacher intervening to keep up the pace and productivity. Those who are not succeeding soon become inattentive. In those lessons where the teaching engages the pupils' interest and challenges them appropriately they behave well, co-operate with the teacher and with each other and work productively.

97. The subject is very well led and managed throughout the school by the co-ordinator. The school has made satisfactory progress since the previous inspection and standards have risen. The teachers are working as a team and show a commitment to raising standards. They are well supported through monitoring and training. Since the previous inspection the collection, analysis and use of assessment material has improved greatly. It is now an effective tool in planning and setting targets over the longer term. The curriculum is well balanced and supported by extra-curricular activities. The use of information and communication technology to assist learning needs to be more fully integrated into the schemes of work.

Numeracy

98. The standards in numeracy are in line with national expectations. Policy and procedures are now in place to address the application of numeracy skills across the curriculum. As yet there has not been any formal monitoring of the effectiveness of the programme. The schemes of work for each subject must be reviewed to ensure that the use of numeracy is clearly defined. This has been done in some subjects. There has also been useful co-operation between science and mathematics over when to teach certain skills.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Teachers' knowledge and understanding of science.
- The way in which pupils are treated and managed.
- Pupils interest and enthusiasm for science.
- The science laboratory is well organised and is a good place to learn.

Areas for improvement

- Use of information and communication technology.
- Ensure that pupils understand the key scientific terms and have more opportunities to read.
- More opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematical ability.
- The quality and frequency of homeworks.
- Clearer understanding by pupils of how they are progressing.

100. Results in National Curriculum tests in Year 6 in 2002 were in line with the national average and well above those in similar schools. Results have steadily got better since 2000. Standards in science compare well with those of English and mathematics and many more pupils are now attaining the higher levels. Evidence from the LEA shows that Year 8 pupils who had transferred to Upper Schools in 2001, attained average standards in their Year 9 tests in 2002. The low standards in science, which were a concern in the previous inspection, have now been improved.

101. The evidence from lessons, and work in books, shows that by the end of Year 8 standards are a little below average but that pupils make sound progress. There are two reasons why the standards in lessons are slightly lower now than in the Year 6 tests in 2002. First, the 2002 tests were taken by a different group of pupils and performance often differs slightly from year to year. Second, the tests do not cover pupils' ability to apply their understanding and this is one of the weaknesses in pupils' achievements: pupils do not always use their scientific understanding to explain why something is happening. In a Year 5 lesson pupils were able to use the Internet to determine where different animals could be found in a pond and construct a food chain for those animals. They were less familiar with the terminology required which includes predator, prey and consumer. Year 6 pupils in a lesson on variation in humans were able to identify features including height, arm span, eye colour and shoe size. The data for the class was recorded and graphs were drawn but an opportunity to make predictions was missed. In a Year 7 lesson pupils confidently carried out a practical investigation on chromatography: however, they did not explain what happened or why and this limited their understanding a little. Similarly, a challenging investigation in a Year 8 lesson involved pupils applying a wide range of practical skills in order to compare different shampoos: however, many could not recall what the test was for. What this means is that higher attaining pupils do not do as well as they might because they are not being stretched enough.

102. Teaching and learning is good overall in both key stages and has a positive impact on overall attainment. Lessons are well planned, well structured and the pace generally keeps pupils learning effectively. Good teaching is characterised by well organised lessons, good teacher knowledge and questions that challenge even the youngest pupils to think for themselves. On

occasions, the teaching is insufficiently demanding focusing on descriptions of what happened, rather than providing an explanation using the correct scientific words. Good support is provided in class for special needs and for pupils for whom English is an additional language but there is insufficient emphasis on ensuring that all pupils are secure in their understanding of the key scientific terms such as solute, solvent and dissolved. Not enough use is made of homework to consolidate what pupils have learnt and to extend more able pupils.

103. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good in Years 5, Year 7 and Year 8. They are satisfactory in Year 6: the larger classes in Year 6 make the organisation and management of practical work more difficult. Pupils enjoy their work in science and apply themselves well.

104. Regular end of unit assessments are made and there is a good record of these marks which are used to determine the National Curriculum Levels at which pupils are working. Planning routines and the implementation of policies are well established: objectives for lessons are stated and work is regularly marked and recorded. The science programme meets National Curriculum requirements, including some use of information and communications technology. However, pupils are given too few opportunities to apply their scientific knowledge and are not encouraged to use computer skills, for example, to collect and analyse scientific data. Reports to parents do not give sufficient information on what pupils can do and what specifically they need to do to improve.

105. Leadership of the department is satisfactory, with monitoring of teaching and a departmental meeting only once a term. The policy for science and the improvement plan are good and this is one of the reasons why standards in the national tests are rising. There is a new laboratory that is spacious and its appearance is enhanced by effective displays of key-words and pupils' work. About a quarter of all science lessons do not take place in the science laboratory. This is unsatisfactory since it restricts the type of activities that can take place. The amount of money made available for science each year is rather low and the resources available are only just adequate. A computer linked to the Internet and datalogging equipment are sited in the science laboratory but are not often used. A science technician provides good support in preparing equipment and in helping with class practical work.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Good subject knowledge of specialist art teacher;
- Good planning of work for the individual needs of pupils;
- Good procedures for informing pupils how to improve their work;
- Good attitudes of pupils contributes to good learning.

Areas for improvement

- Formalise monitoring of teaching of non-specialist teachers and identify training needs where necessary;
- Establish the sole use of National Curriculum levels for recording progress;
- Use homework to support and extend learning in Years 7 and 8;
- Improve the quality of sensitive handling of paint.

107. Standards of work by the end of Year 6 are below the level of expectation. By the end of Year 8 standards are in line with expectation therefore progress is good over time. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 are taught by teachers who are not art specialists resulting in slower progress being made than by pupils in Years 7 and 8 who are taught by an art specialist. Those with special educational needs make similar progress to their classmates in all years.

108. Slow improvement can be seen in Key Stage 2 becoming much more pronounced in Key Stage 3. Pupils in all years draw competently, with, for example, every pupil in Year 8 able to draw

a shoe which is accurate in proportion and detail, with higher attaining pupils using tone very well to describe the shoe's three-dimensional qualities. Bold colour is used well in striking designs for African wrap-kangas and stamp designs depicting endangered animals. However, there is a lack of high quality, sensitive painting, for example in the watercolour washes and other details used as backgrounds to surrealist compositions in Year 8. Information and communication technology is used effectively, for example in making repeating patterns of fish by Year 7 pupils but not all projects planned can be completed or developed sufficiently due to difficulties with access to equipment. The proportion of time allocated for art is adequate, but would be greatly enhanced and extended through systematic incorporation of a homework programme into Years 7 and 8.

109. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. One unsatisfactory lesson was seen with a non-specialist teacher. Teaching is more effective:

- when the teacher plans work to suit the needs of every pupil enabling those with special needs and abilities at both ends of the spectrum to learn equally well. For example, by providing focus targets to improve specific areas of weakness in lower attaining pupils and extension targets to challenge the higher attaining pupils;
- when lesson aims are made clear to pupils, are revisited at the end of the lesson to check on learning gains;
- when high expectations of behaviour and work are made clearly and consistently

111. Teaching is ineffective when:

- planning is inadequate to ensure all pupils, whatever their needs, are able to engage in the activity and thus learn well;
- class management lacks the structure to keep pupils focussed and on task all lesson.

112. Most pupils enjoy art and want to do well, however, the quality of behaviour corresponds to the quality of teaching. Relationships are generally good and there is a pleasant atmosphere in art lessons.

113. The quality of leadership and management is good. Long term planning sets appropriate priorities and short term planning is comprehensive to support well the needs of the non-specialist teachers who teach art. Frequent meetings and monitoring of work in Years 5 and 6 have sought to raise the quality of learning, but the lack of formal monitoring of teaching has meant that training needs have not been identified and some teaching of Year 5 being unsatisfactory. Art makes a valuable contribution to the spiritual and cultural development of all pupils at St Gregory's. Artists and craftspeople visit the school to teach glass painting, silk painting and clay work. Pupils also learn about artists work in Europe, Africa and Ancient Egypt. Themes could be developed further to reflect the variety of cultures attending the school and celebrate their arts and crafts. Lots of colourful artwork on display around the school raises pupils' self esteem and enhances the environment. Assessment procedures are good and make sure that pupils know how to improve their standard of work. Information on previous learning is used well to set targets and plan lessons, but fine tuning in the regular recording of progress by only using levels in the National Curriculum will enable pupils to appreciate their standard of work and relate it more easily to other subjects they take across the curriculum. Progress since the last inspection is satisfactory.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- Citizenship week provides good opportunities for pupils to develop a good range of skills and understanding.

Areas for improvement

- Citizenship lacks a coordinator which means that some aspects are not covered as well as others.

115. The provision for citizenship is in its infancy and has yet to be incorporated fully in to the curriculum. However, the range of work provided and the way it is organised means that it is broadly satisfactory overall. A coordinator has yet to be appointed but a senior teacher has oversight on a temporary basis.

116. Most topics have so far been covered through the personal, social and health education programme. For example, the programme in Years 7 and 8 includes topics about making the right decision and looking at how democracy works. In addition, the school organises a citizenship week where the focus is on activities to extend pupils' understanding of citizenship and deals with issues not covered in the personal, social and health education programme.

117. Pupils' achievements are broadly sound. In Year 7 pupils looked at "Police in the Community" in greater depth, producing some safety rules for around school and some posters raising awareness of crime in the community in the style of a graffiti wall. Similarly, Year 8 studied leisure provision in Bedford and designed some new facilities.

118. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Pupils learn a wide variety of skills to research their designs, including using the Internet, working out questionnaires and presenting data and taking digital photographs of prospective sites. A variety of graphical techniques were used to show the new proposals including drawings, diagrams and use of computer software. Activities successfully encouraged the development of working collaboratively, high quality discussion and increasing confidence as they make a formal presentation of their ideas to others.

119. The weakness in citizenship is that a coordinator has yet to be appointed. Senior managers do their best to hold the subject together and their success is exemplified by the satisfactory achievements of pupils. However, the lack of a coordinator makes it difficult for the school to develop its approach to citizenship and build on what it has already achieved. Senior managers are aware of this.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Pupils have a good attitude towards the subject.
- Pupils achieve well.
- Teaching and the management of pupils is good.

Areas for improvement

- The curriculum in Years 7 and 8 does not meet the statutory requirements to provide for computer-aided design and manufacture.
- The procedures for assessment and for the use of assessment information are underdeveloped.

121. Pupils come into the school with standards that are below the national expectation. They have had a very varied range of experiences and practical skills are generally underdeveloped. During their first two years they improve their knowledge and understanding of the design process. They have the chance to work in different materials, improving their practical skills. By the end of Year 6, pupils reach a better level of competence in the subject and their achievement is in line with what is expected nationally. Progress over the two years is satisfactory for all groups of pupils. Those pupils who have special educational needs receive additional teacher guidance when required and, therefore, progress at the same rate as others. The more gifted pupils work on extension tasks, but these tasks do not always ensure that their progress is satisfactory.

122. During Years 7 and 8 pupils make good gains in their knowledge and understanding of design and technology. The increased time allocation allows pupils to work with a greater range of materials. They have a better understanding of construction methods than they did in Year 6 and become conversant with the technical language. They apply it in context, demonstrating good gains in their learning. By the end of Year 8 the standards of pupils' work match national expectations. Pupils take greater care to achieve a higher degree of accuracy in designing and presenting ideas.

123. The quality of teaching is good. In food, textiles and resistant materials, pupils have objectives clearly explained so that they know what is expected of them. Teachers manage the pupils very well, expecting high levels of commitment and industry. There is effective support for individuals because teachers know their pupils well. They provide good oral assessment during lessons, enabling pupils to make progress because they know how to improve their work. Sometimes teachers do not allow sufficient time to review what has been achieved in the lesson and test the quality of learning. They make insufficient use of pupils' experiences to illustrate problems encountered and how solutions were found. Although additional teacher support helps pupils, tasks are not always designed to fully meet the needs of all groups, particularly higher attainers.

124. Pupils are generally very responsive to the teachers and demonstrate a mature approach. Pupils are quickly on to task and usually remain focused. There is genuine support for one another; pupils willingly assist each other when required.

125. The curriculum provides a good range of experiences in most disciplines. Time allocation is adequate. The subject does not, however, meet the statutory requirements in Years 7 and 8 as a result of the lack of computer aided design and manufacture. The use of information and communication technology is underdeveloped across all years.

126. Assessment of pupils' work and monitoring of their performance are underdeveloped. Records of levels achieved are kept but are not analysed well enough to influence the planning of future lessons. Teachers mark the work regularly, providing positive encouragement but insufficient developmental comment on how pupils can achieve the higher levels. Homework is under-used as a way of raising standards.

127. The subject is well managed and has the benefit of teachers with good subject knowledge. The absence of technician support increases the pressure on the teachers who already have responsibilities in a number of other areas.

128. Since the last inspection achievement by the end of Year 6 and the end of Year 8 has improved. Better quality planning has produced more appropriate activities to meet the needs of pupils and accommodation has been refurbished. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

GEOGRAPHY

129. Overall, the quality of provision for geography is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Use of a variety of teaching resources;
- Standards in years 5 and 6.

Areas for improvement

- More pace and challenge in lessons to raise pupil expectations;
- Use of detailed assessment and feedback to enable pupils to make progress;
- Geographical skills including fieldwork and use of ICT;
- More differentiation of written work to allow all groups to achieve;
- Leadership of the curriculum area.

130. Standards overall are average but a little better at the end of both Year 5 and Year 6 than in Years 7 and 8. The inspection evidence shows that standards in lessons are average and there are few opportunities provided to achieve at higher levels as standardised worksheets and teacher directed tasks are used. There are no significant differences in the standards attained by pupils of different ethnicity but more able pupils are held back from achieving higher standards because they are not always stretched enough.

131. Learning is satisfactory except for the more able pupils as teacher expectations are often too low. Pupils show they are capable of detailed geographical enquiry and research when given the opportunity such as, a project on local pollution in Year 5. Pupils demonstrate geographical knowledge and understanding in lessons, and appreciate a wide range of physical and human geography topics such as, the geography of Kenya in Year 7. A greater variety of data sources and fieldwork would encourage more independent thinking, increase extended writing and further develop geographical skills including numeracy and map work. The use of information and communication technology is poorly developed to help pupil learning. There are few strategies to support pupils with poor command of English.

132. Teaching overall is satisfactory but frequently teacher led with little opportunity for individual pupil initiative or work. Lessons often lack pace and challenge. In less satisfactory lessons much of the work is superficial and lacks reference to geographical concepts such as, spatial patterns. There is a very limited range of teaching styles used and too much stress is put on content rather than developing specific geographical skills. This explains the lack of pupil progress in geography between Year 6 and 8. Marking is up to date but there is rarely sufficient informative feedback with clear directions on how pupils can improve.

133. Pupil attitudes and behaviour in lessons are good. Pupils listen attentively, want to work and support each other. In the majority of classes pupils are keen to learn and respond well to the demands made on them. Relationships between pupils and with staff are good except where unchallenging teaching does not engage the pupils resulting in poor behaviour.

134. The management of the geography department is not effective, largely due to long term staffing problems. Currently there is no geography co-ordinator. Assessment is not well understood or used to inform lesson planning. Pupils have little idea of their rate of progress partly because the whole school system to track the progress of pupils and set targets is not used consistently. Overall, improvements are just about satisfactory but there is room for further progress.

HISTORY

135. Overall, the quality of provision for history is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Use of a variety of learning resources;
- Standards in Year 5 and 6;
- Pupils' interest in the subject.

Areas for improvement

- More open ended tasks and opportunities for independent work;
- The provision for fieldwork and coursework;
- Use of detailed assessment and feedback to enable pupils to make progress;
- The range and variety of teaching styles.

136. Standards are average overall and pupils make steady progress in all aspects of their work. There are no significant differences in the standards attained by pupils of different ethnicity but language fluency does have an impact on standards.

137. Learning is at least satisfactory except for the more able pupils who have limited opportunities to extend the depth of their knowledge. Where learning is most effective, pupils are encouraged to think independently and develop extended writing such as, life as a poor Victorian in Year 5. Many pupils demonstrate detailed understanding of, and empathy towards, other cultures such as, the Ancient Greeks in Year 6 and African slaves in Year 8. When given the opportunity, pupils show they are capable of detailed historical enquiry, empathy and research. A range of historical sources and data is used to develop basic skills including numeracy but more fieldwork would give a wider range of learning opportunities. Most pupils are confident in oral work and contribute well when given the opportunity to discuss.

138. Teaching is satisfactory. Teaching is best where teachers communicate an enthusiasm for the subject and relate it to the pupils' everyday lives as in the case of Ancient Rome in Year 7. Weaker lessons are excessively teacher dominated with little chance for individual initiative. Such lessons lack pace, challenge and often there is no clear structure linked to the learning outcomes. Where these are present, as in a Year 5 lesson on the railway age, lessons engage pupils' interests and encourage learning. There is a very limited range of teaching styles used and there is limited use of information and communication technology. Pupils are encouraged to develop a sense of chronology and empathy with historical situations such as, living in a Victorian city. Marking is up to date but there needs to be more feedback with clear descriptions as to where pupils are in terms of standards.

139. Pupil attitudes and behaviour in lessons are good. Pupils listen attentively, want to work and support each other. In the majority of classes pupils are keen to learn and respond well to the demands made on them. Relationships between pupils and with staff are good. Behaviour and attention are poorer where lessons lack clear structure and challenge.

140. The history department is well managed and improvements since the last inspection are broadly satisfactory. The subject co-ordinator is well aware of the shortcomings in the teaching of the subject, helped by a detailed audit, and has an appropriate action plan in place. Assessment is not well developed or used to inform lesson planning and does not yet track the progress of pupils carefully enough.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

141. Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Pupils have satisfactory basic skills in word processing and appropriate skills of accessing a variety of programs.
- Pupils have good attitudes and behaviour and enjoy using computers.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment does not relate to National Curriculum levels.
- Pupils have limited view about how well they are doing in the subject.
- Insufficient opportunities for the pupils to apply what they learn in the computer suite to their work in other subjects.

142. Standards in both Year 6 and Year 8 are below those nationally expected. The main reason is that Information Communication Technology is not applied with sufficient breadth and depth across the curriculum. Pupils of all abilities use the mouse and keyboard with confidence for a range of purposes, such as changing fonts, the colour and size of text and many can import pictures into their presentations. Pupils are gaining confidence in entering data and using the information to produce charts and graphs. Pupils in Year 7 are developing an understanding of the use of computers to control events. Pupils in Year 8 use the Internet to download information to support their work. Although all pupils have regular access to information and communication technology, through timetabled use of the computer suite, all pupils need more opportunities to develop their knowledge skills and understanding. As a result they have limited understanding of how information and communication technology might be used to support their work in other subjects.

143. The quality of teaching overall is satisfactory, sometimes good. Teachers have a good level of subject knowledge and sufficient confidence for what is currently taught. Teachers effectively explain and demonstrate the tasks using the screen projector and whiteboard together with pupil input very well. Lessons are carefully planned and pupils are given clear instructions in order to achieve lesson objectives, however there was little evidence of the use of a diverse range of activities that maintained pupils' interest and actively engaged them in learning. Teachers over direct the pupils and there is little scope for pupils to experiment and explore different ways of working. Consequently there is a lack of challenge and pace for pupils of all abilities, with progress for most being slow and inconsistent. Achievement for pupils of all levels of prior attainment is less than expected because they make insufficient progress in most aspects of their work. Although the teacher makes regular checks on individual progress providing good support and guidance, the size of some groups and room arrangement mean that pupils are often waiting for teacher support.

144. The arrangements for teaching information and communication technology ensure that pupils have access to a range of experiences. An appropriate scheme of work has been established and the school has a policy to protect pupils when using email. Pupils cover a good range of skills but there is little use of information and communication technology in other subjects. Pupils of all abilities demonstrate positive attitudes to work; they enjoy working both alone or with a partner and show consideration for each other when working together. They are able to discuss their work, are motivated and are eager to use the equipment. The school is developing a system for assessment but this is not yet established and overall arrangements for assessment in information and communication technology are unsatisfactory. The coordinator is not yet systematically monitoring pupil's work and developments in information and communication technology provision have yet to impact on standards and progress. Overall pupils do not know in sufficient detail how much progress they are making or their level of attainment.

145. Leadership and management of the subject is a recognised priority for the school. In order to accelerate pupil progress and raise standards in the subject the school needs to make better use of information and communication technology to support pupils' work in a range of subjects, this detailed focus on improving information and communication technology including further staff training, improved resources and a higher level of monitoring will ensure that skills, knowledge and understanding are developed consistently across the school. Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been slow.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is at least satisfactory and many lessons have good features;
- The good quality resources and well organised classroom provide an effective learning environment.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils need more opportunities to speak and practise the language from good models of pronunciation;
- Classwork and homework should be more closely linked to pupils' learning needs.

147. French is taught to all pupils throughout the school in mixed ability classes. The standards achieved by the oldest pupils are broadly in line with those expected for Year 8. However, progress over time has been patchy due to the inconsistent quality of teaching and learning experienced by pupils before the start of this year. They are developing a broad vocabulary and a sound understanding of grammatical structure. Pupils can talk about themselves and their family; they can also describe places, people and objects. A particular focus of current work in Year 7 is to recognise key words in spoken French in order to get the full meaning of what is said. In this way, pupils are becoming more skilful at listening comprehension and their ability to understand unfamiliar sentences is steadily increasing. However, pupils often anglicise the pronunciation of French because they are not yet given sufficient opportunity to speak French in lessons, either through repetition or by producing their own constructions.

148. Improvement since the last inspection has been sound. The quality of teaching is now at least satisfactory and many lessons have good features. As a result, pupils are now making substantial progress. Work in pupils' books shows that this was not always the case and older pupils have not progressed as much as they might since starting French in Year 5. This is because some classes experienced several supply teachers in the past and their learning has not been consistent. Strengths of current teaching include good subject knowledge, well-planned lessons, high expectations and focused whole-class instruction. Pupils enjoy learning French and take pride in their work. They listen attentively to taped dialogues and like using computer programmes to consolidate what they learn in class.

149. Teaching would be even more effective if classroom instructions and explanations were conducted regularly in French and pupils were expected to use the language more during lessons. This would ensure that they heard more spoken French and were able to reproduce sentences and phrases using good models, thereby improving their pronunciation. The preparation for pair-work is not always sufficiently thorough to enable pupils to gain from the practice of speaking to each other. Some thought is given to matching work to pupils' abilities by providing a focus on specific teaching points, reference to pupils' home language and use of key words in classroom displays. However, more could be done to support those pupils who struggle with their language learning or to provide greater challenge to those who could extend their learning beyond the core expectations for the lesson.

150. Resources are of good quality and are well used. Pupils enjoy working from the new course book which was introduced at the beginning of the year and which has visual, aural and computer accessories. The languages classroom is bright and welcoming: key words, useful phrases and verb declensions are clearly displayed and help pupils to remember spellings and structures in common use. Occasional use is made of information and communication technology; classes who are finishing a unit of work are able to use a computer module to check their recall of vocabulary and reinforce their understanding.

151. The subject co-ordinator is relatively new to the school and is keen to improve standards in French. She has revised the documentation and renewed resources to ensure that pupils derive maximum benefit from their language learning. Although inexperienced, she has already provided all classes with a more stable teaching and learning experience and she has accepted advice from professional colleagues about ways to develop the subject further. The prospects for further improvement are good.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Standards in music are well above average and pupils' achievements are very good.
- Consistently high quality teaching.
- Pupils of all levels of ability do well.
- Opportunities for extended learning through instrumental tuition and extra-curricular activities are very good.

Areas for improvement

- There are no significant issues for improvement.

153. Standards in music are well above what would be expected for pupils' ages. By the end of Years 6 and 8 the quality of music making is high. Pupils achieve very well and make very good progress in the subject at all levels regardless of gender. Given attainment on entry is broadly average in music many achieve very well and make very good progress in the development of musical skills and knowledge. All very able pupils are provided with a challenging curriculum, set extended enrichment targets and some pupils have been provided with the opportunity to take GCSE in Year 8; one pupil gained a A* grade.

154. Pupils have very positive attitudes to music; they work well in groups performing with confidence and enthusiasm. Good use is made of recording performances and this enables pupils to develop the skills to evaluate their performances and make suggestions for improvement. Recorded examples of composition demonstrated confidence, a strong sense of pulse and rhythm and a good understanding of pitch and music from different cultures. Pupils are able to perform with accuracy and expression being able to maintain independent musical lines. Instrumentalists perform well, with attention to dynamics and expression. The quality of singing from the school choir is uplifting and music is making a very strong contribution to pupil's spiritual development. Pupils have the opportunity to make music in a variety of groupings, class music making, and whole school activities including choirs, bands and school productions.

155. In all years pupils sing confidently in tune and with enthusiasm. Pupils can play percussion instruments confidently and skilfully. They have a sound knowledge of music from other countries and can compose and perform in a variety of styles. They are developing a strong sense of rhythm and pitch exploring different rhythmic patterns as accompaniments. For example a Year 8 class were learning about the use of ground bass and Aeolian mode. By the end of the lesson the whole class gave a well-rounded performance showing full understanding of style using structured chords and improvised melodic line in chorus and verse pattern. This was recorded for analytical discussion in the next lesson. Evidence was provided that pupils in all years are contributing ideas

and controlled sounds as part of class composition, being able to create and develop musical ideas making good use of musical structures and demonstrating a sound use of musical vocabulary and notation. Pupils participate in musical activities and lessons with obvious enjoyment they are well behaved and treat each other and the instruments with respect.

156. The quality of teaching is very good and often excellent. The teacher's enthusiasm and expertise encourages all pupils to engage in a wide variety of musical experiences. Pupils respond well because they enjoy singing and playing and many are confident instrumentalists. The teacher's skills enhance the quality of pupil learning and high expectations of pupils performance inspires them to perform to the best of their ability.

157. Work is carefully planned to suit different ability groups within the class enabling all pupils to take part. Pupils in Year 8 have the freedom to improvise and show good levels of independence. Pupils in Year 6 and 8 play well together and listen intently and critically to class and group performances. Pupils are taught correct musical terms and they are then able to evaluate and appraise music with understanding and clarity of expression. Assessment is used to inform planning and all pupils have targets and the more able pupils, extended targets. All targets are regularly reviewed with pupils and progress plotted.

158. Information and communication technology is developing and used well to support learning. Evidence in pupil files confirms that pupils are using the computer to assist in composition. Pupils have the opportunity to play a variety of musical instruments with many pupils taking individual lessons on woodwind, string and brass instruments. These instrumentalists are then encouraged to play in school ensembles or give performances during assemblies and concerts for parents. The school benefits from the work of qualified musicians who teach instrumental lessons. The school also provides opportunities for pupils to perform in the community actively contributing to local festivals. Outside musicians come into the school to demonstrate a variety of musical instruments and encourage children to learn. All these make a significant contribution to the social development of pupils.

159. Music continues to have a high profile in the school; the department is extremely well led and managed. The coordinator has ensured that music is valued and the school is well served by her expertise, hard work and total commitment. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good will knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers setting high expectation in terms of behaviour and participation.
- The range of extra curricular activities is extensive and they are well supported by enthusiastic pupils.

Areas for improvement

- Involve all pupils in the planning and evaluation of their work.

161. The attainment of most pupils by the end of Year 6 is in line with national expectations. A particular strength is gymnastics where pupils demonstrate good planning, imagination, good body shapes and control. Pupils are beginning to develop their skills and understanding in a variety of practical contexts and groupings. Most pupils' mastery of the basic access skills of throwing, striking and catching is developing well, as their tactical awareness in games activities. Most pupils arrive at the school with only limited experience of swimming. Following comments in the previous report all Years 5 and 6 pupils now receive swimming lessons at the Robinson swimming pool.

They make good progress and by the end of Year 6 there are very few of them who are unable to swim 25 metres.

162. The attainment of pupils at the end of Year 8 is at least in line with national expectations with a significant minority of the pupils doing even better. In games activities, particularly in hockey, soccer and netball, pupils reach satisfactory standards in the basic skills which enable them to compete successfully. They are attaining an understanding of fitness issues and practices and understand the need for warming up effectively. They are putting this knowledge into practice with pupils able to lead effective warm-up sessions at the beginning of lessons. Some pupils are involved in the planning and evaluation of their work but in order for them to fulfil the National Curriculum requirements this aspect needs developing. Many school teams in inter-school games and competitions, and in spite of being a relatively small school gain much success. The present Year 8 mixed hockey team are the Bedford middle school champions. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated, are given much support by both teachers and fellow pupils and reach levels of attainment that are commendable for them. Talented pupils are identified and are actively encouraged to extend their skills both in school and with outside organizations.

163. The overall quality of teaching is good and is an improvement since the previous inspection. All the lessons observed were judged to be at least satisfactory with the vast majority of lessons observed being judged to be good or very good. Teachers are keen and enthusiastic and are able to pass on their own enthusiasm for their subject to the pupils. In lessons aims are clear, content is appropriate to the pupils' needs and abilities and the relevant resources are well organized. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and very productive. There is an expectation by the teachers that the pupils will work hard, behave well, and produce good quality work, and these expectations are met. Teachers show a care and concern for their pupils whilst encouraging the best in fair play. The vast majority of pupils respond very positively to their teachers. The standard of kit and participation is very high. They are well motivated, work hard and respect each other and their teachers. The pupils' enjoyment of their lessons is very evident.

164. The curriculum is broad and balanced, and with the addition of swimming lessons for Years 5 and 6 pupils is now meeting the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. A new and comprehensive system for assessing and recording pupils' attainment has recently been put in place. All pupils are now aware at which national attainment level they are working, and what they must do to reach a higher standard. A wide range of extracurricular activities are very well supported by enthusiastic groups of pupils. Pupils also have the opportunity to join water sports activities in the South of France, and to take part in outdoor pursuits activities such as canoeing, climbing and archery at the Kingswood centre in Norfolk. The department also organises trips to visit national sporting events.

165. Strong leadership and a positive ethos characterises the management of the subject. Good quality documentation covers all aspects of the subject's work, and helps the delivery of the subject. The on-site facilities are supplemented by the occasional use of the local swimming pool and the astro-turf arena at the local hockey centre. This is having a positive impact on the attainment of the pupils and their enjoyment of the subject. The teachers who teach physical education work well together, support each other, and show a very strong commitment to the pupils. Displays of sporting activities and photographs of pupils engaged in physical education do much to stimulate interest in the subject.

166. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. Following comments in that report the curriculum has been adjusted so that all pupils now receive swimming lessons which is part of their National Curriculum entitlement. A good, comprehensive system for recording the attainment of pupils is now in place and is helping to raise attainment. The changing rooms have been significantly improved by their recent refurbishment, but there is a shortage of specialist indoor accommodation for the subject.