

INSPECTION REPORT

ARNOLD MIDDLE SCHOOL

Barton-le-Clay, Bedford

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109656

Headteacher: Ann Payne

Lead inspector: David Bain

3258

Dates of inspection: 26th - 29th January 2004

Inspection number: 258551

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:	Community
Age range of pupils:	9 to 13 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	562
School address:	Hexton Road Barton-le-Clay Bedford Bedfordshire
Postcode:	MK45 4JZ
Telephone number:	01582 616400
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Lesley McEwan
Date of previous inspection:	22 nd June 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Arnold is an above-average-sized middle school for pupils aged 9 - 13 in a rural area of Bedfordshire. The school has substantially grown in size since the last inspection. There are currently 562 pupils on roll and the number is due to rise to 600. The majority of pupils come from white British backgrounds, with around six per cent coming from other backgrounds. The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is very low. About half the pupils come from Barton-le-Clay, a large and growing village, south of Bedford. Most of the rest come from surrounding smaller villages. Most pupils come from advantaged areas, where socio-economic circumstances are well above average. The proportion claiming free school meals is well below the national average. The proportions of pupils identified as having special educational needs and having statements of need are both broadly average. These include six pupils in the Chiltern class, which is a specialist provision for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder. Others have a range of needs, although comparatively few are identified as having moderate learning difficulties. Pupils' attainment on entry is well above average. The school is now involved in the Primary National Strategy, 'Excellence and Enjoyment'. A new head joined the school in September.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
3258	David Bain	<i>Lead inspector</i>	English as an additional language.
19366	William Walker	<i>Lay inspector</i>	
10782	Henry Moreton	<i>Team inspector</i>	English; Special Educational Needs.
3543	Derek Jones	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics; Information and Communication Technology.
27585	Ken Hounslow	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science.
31705	John Mason	<i>Team inspector</i>	French; Music.
30114	Ann Kenward	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography; History; Personal, Social and Health Education; Citizenship.
27226	Richard Cribb	<i>Team inspector</i>	Religious education; Physical education.
31685	Valerie Girling	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art and design.
20966	John Catton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology.
29452	Christine Emerson	<i>Team inspector</i>	SEN – Autistic Unit.

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Arnold is an underachieving middle school. It provides an unsatisfactory education for its pupils, who underachieve because the quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory in English, mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT). It is a caring school. Pupils have very good attitudes and are keen to learn. Relationships are very good and behaviour is good, having improved in recent months. The new head is leading the school very well and has set about addressing underachievement. The school gives unsatisfactory value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Pupils' attitudes are very good. They are enthusiastic about their work and are keen to take responsibility for daily routines.
- The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory in the core subjects of English, mathematics and ICT, resulting in unsatisfactory achievement.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good in music and physical education, good in science, design and technology and French, resulting in good achievement in these subjects.
- Teaching and support in the Chiltern Class, which is a specialist provision for pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), is very good. These pupils make very good progress.
- The new head provides very good leadership and is ably supported by the leadership group.
- The school's programme of enrichment outside the school day is very good.
- Curricular organisation is over-complex; the grouping of pupils in Years 7 and 8 on the basis of their general attainment is leading to inequality of access and opportunity for some.
- Some good assessment data is not used effectively and consistently across the school to track the progress of individuals and groups of pupils, or to inform them how to improve.
- The information given to parents about their children's standards and progress is unsatisfactory.

The school has made unsatisfactory progress since the last inspection, because standards in English and mathematics have deteriorated and the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has increased. Progress on the key issues identified in the last inspection is varied. Marking has improved but still varies in quality. Whole-school planning is now sound. Assessment data is used well to establish targets, but is not used fully and effectively to track pupils' progress across the curriculum. The improvement in art has been considerable. Spiritual development is now sound.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
English	B	C	B	E
mathematics	C	C	D	E*
science	A	A	B	D

Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average

Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 2.

Pupils' achievement is not high enough. It is unsatisfactory in all years. They enter the school with standards which are well above average. When they leave in Year 8, standards in science are still well above average, but in English and mathematics they are only above average. Standards in national tests at age 11 are above average in English and science, but below average in mathematics. When compared to similar schools, based upon prior attainment, performance in 2003 was below average in science, well below in English and very low in mathematics. (E* in the table above places the school in the bottom five per cent of similar schools.) Across the whole school, standards are generally above average, and well above in science and, in Years 7 and 8, music and

design and technology. Whilst achievement is good in science, art, design and technology, French, music and physical education, it is unsatisfactory in English, mathematics, ICT and geography. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is satisfactory, whilst those in the Chiltern class achieve very well. There is little difference between the achievement of boys and girls, except in English where girls are ahead, as is the case nationally.

Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Pupils show much pride in their school. Their attitudes are very good, as is reflected in their good attendance and desire to learn. The vast majority behave well and are keen to be involved in whatever the school has to offer. A few pupils are disruptive. Oppressive behaviour, including bullying, has been a concern, and the school is working hard to discourage it. Recent initiatives, such as the provision of older pupils as 'active listeners', have been effective in curbing such incidents and contributing to the good, personal development of all the pupils.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory, as is the quality of learning, because it is unsatisfactory in the core subjects of English, mathematics and ICT, as well as geography. In contrast, it is good or better in over half of lessons. It is very good in music and physical education, and good in science, design and technology and French. Overall, teachers' expectations of pupils are too low. The quality of marking and assessment is inconsistent.

Curricular provision is satisfactory. It meets broad statutory requirements, but there are weaknesses in its organisation. Provision for enrichment is very good, especially participation in sport and music. Provision for pupils with SEN is good, with very good provision in the Chiltern class. The match of teachers and support staff to the curriculum is good. Accommodation is inadequate for the number of pupils on roll. Arnold is a caring school, but does not provide pupils with sufficient academic advice and guidance. In recent months, the school has involved pupils well in its development. Links with parents are satisfactory. There are good links with the community and other schools.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new head provides very good leadership and is ably supported by the leadership group. Leadership of other key staff is satisfactory. Management is sound, with monitoring of teaching at an early stage of development and currently lacking rigour. Financial management is good and focused upon appropriate educational priorities. The involvement of pupils is a strength of the new consultative style of management. Governance of the school is good.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Most parents are satisfied with the school. However, about a third do not feel that their views are sought and they are dissatisfied with the information given to them about their children's progress. A significant minority also indicate concerns about homework and about pupils' behaviour, including bullying. Many of the concerns raised have been long-standing issues. However, many commented that the situation has improved significantly over recent months. Most pupils are happy in the school, but share many of the same concerns. They are positive about recent changes.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- raise achievement, by improving the quality of teaching and learning in English, mathematics and ICT;
- review curricular organisation in order to improve equality of access and opportunity;
- involve all teachers in using assessment data to track the progress of pupils and to inform them consistently how to improve;
- improve the quality of information provided to parents about their children's standards and progress;

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- provide a daily act of collective worship.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Overall, pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory. Standards are well above average on entry to the school. In 2003, results in national tests at the end of Year 6 were only average. They were above average in English and science, but below average in mathematics. Whilst standards are generally above average in Years 7 and 8, achievement in these years is unsatisfactory, particularly in English, mathematics and ICT. The achievement of pupils with SEN is satisfactory, whilst those in the Chiltern class achieve very well.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- In 2003, standards in national tests at the end of Year 6 in mathematics were below average, compared to all schools nationally.
- Standards are well above average in science, music and, in Years 7 and 8, in design and technology.
- Pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory in English, mathematics, ICT and geography.
- Pupils' achievement is good in science, art, design and technology, French, music and physical education.
- Achievement is unsatisfactory in nearly a quarter of lessons.
- Pupils in Chiltern class make very good progress.

Commentary

1. Overall, pupils' achievement at the end of Year 6 is unsatisfactory. Their attainment on entry is well above average, based both upon results in national tests at the end of Year 2 and results in Bedfordshire schools in tests at the end of Year 4. When compared to all schools, results in national tests at the end of Year 6, have declined. Whilst results, based upon pupils' average point score across all three core subjects of English, mathematics and science, were well above average in 2000, they were only average in 2003. This decline is mainly due to pupils' lower attainment in mathematics, which was above average in 2000, but below average compared to all schools in 2003. In contrast, attainment in science has been consistently well above average, except in 2003 when it was above average. Attainment in English has been consistently above average, although it was only average in 2002.

2. In both 2002 and 2003, results overall indicated that pupils' achievement was poor when compared to similar schools, based upon prior attainment in Year 2 tests. Results were well below their expected level in English in both years and in mathematics in 2002. Results in mathematics in 2003 were very low, in the bottom five per cent of similar schools nationally. Whilst results in science were at expected levels in 2002, they were below the level for similar schools in 2003. Analyses of results, in 2003, show that the greatest underachievement was by abler pupils in mathematics and science and average and above-average pupils in English. Results over the last few years do not suggest major differences between the performances of boys and girls. As is the case nationally, girls achieve better than boys in English, but similarly in mathematics and science.

3. The school has a wealth of assessment data produced both nationally and by the local education authority (LEA). It is making good use of this data to analyse its performance and departments are now aware of their progress compared to other schools. National data on Year 6 tests is based upon prior attainment at the end of Year 2. Pupils at Arnold Middle School were educated in their lower schools until the end of Year 4. Based upon Year 4 tests, the LEA provides analyses for reading, writing and mathematics of progress from Years 2 to 4 and Years 4 to 6. In all three, the progress of Arnold pupils in their lower schools was well above the LEA average, whilst their progress at Arnold was well below the LEA average.

4. The school failed to meet the targets it had set for performance in tests in 2003, except in science where it exceeded its target for the proportion attaining Level 4 or better. It has set challenging, but realistic, targets for 2004 and 2005. Based upon monitoring of pupils' current performance in the core subjects, senior managers are optimistic that these targets will be met. Inspection evidence suggests that achievement is currently not as poor as results in tests in 2003 indicate.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 6 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	27.7 (27.2)	26.8 (27.0)
mathematics	26.2 (27.2)	26.8 (26.7)
science	29.4 (30.4)	28.6 (28.3)

There were 133 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

5. Overall, pupils' achievement by the end of Year 8 is also unsatisfactory. Pupils sit tests at the end of Year 8, but these can only be compared with other LEA schools. Results of Arnold Middle School pupils in Year 9 tests, when at Harlington Upper School, show the proportion attaining Level 5 or better in 2003 to be above average in English and mathematics. This represents underachievement, given pupils' attainment when they arrived at Arnold in Year 5. In contrast, the proportion attaining Level 5 or better in science was well above average. In mathematics, the proportion of boys achieving Level 5 or better is well above average. In English, although girls outperform boys, the gap is narrower than nationally.

6. When compared to other schools in the county, pupils' continuing underachievement in English and mathematics is clear from LEA analyses of Year 9 results. Progress in English from Year 7 to 9 is well below the county trend line, especially for girls who enter Year 7 well above the county average and end Year 9 well below. Results in mathematics are below the county trend line, but not by so much as in English. However, results in science are above the trend and suggest good achievement, especially for boys.

7. Inspection evidence, from observation of lessons and scrutiny of work, shows that overall standards in all years are generally above average. Given that pupils arrive well above average in core subjects, this represents unsatisfactory achievement. However, there are significant variations between subjects and in some cases between year groups. As pupils arrive with well-above-average competences in basic skills and the vast majority have very good attitudes, variations in achievement reflect variations in the quality of teaching and learning and the effects of the curriculum offer and its organisation. Standards are highest where pupils receive specialist teaching or where the class teacher is confident in delivery of the subject. Grouping pupils by ability in English and mathematics does not appear to be supporting a rise in standards, although it appears to be doing so in science. Teachers' expectations, which are not generally high enough for average and above-average pupils, are affecting pupils' achievement, particularly in English, mathematics, geography and ICT. Achievement was unsatisfactory in nearly a quarter of lessons observed during the inspection.

8. In Years 5 and 6, the standard of work is well above average in science and above average in English, design and technology, ICT, French and music. It is average in other subjects, including mathematics. In these years, pupils' achievement is good in design and technology, French and physical education, but unsatisfactory in English and geography and poor in mathematics.

9. In Years 7 and 8, the standard of work remains well above average in science, but is also so in design and technology and music. It is above average in all other subjects, except geography and ICT where it is average. In these two years, achievement is very good in design and technology and good in science, art, French, music, physical education and personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE). However, it is unsatisfactory in English, mathematics, ICT and geography.

10. As gifted and talented pupils achieve in line with other pupils, their overall achievement is also unsatisfactory. However, pupils with SEN make satisfactory progress. The needs of individual pupils

are assessed and provision is planned to meet them. Individual education plans are used to target the needs of pupils in order to help them learn.

11. Pupils in Chiltern class, which is a specialist provision for pupils who have ASD, make very good progress. They achieve very well in their communication and interaction skills because the teacher and support staff are very skilled at addressing SEN associated with ASD. The work, which is on show in the class, and the assessments carried out by the teacher in charge indicate that achievement in the development of skills in literacy is very good. The pupils benefit from good opportunities for inclusion in mainstream classes where the standard of their work is in line with that of the other pupils.

Pupils’ attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils show much pride in their school. Attendance is good, with the great majority attending regularly and on time. Pupils’ attitudes are very good. The vast majority behave well in the classroom and about the school and are keen to learn and to be involved in whatever the school has to offer. A few pupils are disruptive in some lessons. Oppressive behaviour, including bullying, has been a concern of pupils and parents. The school is working hard to discourage this behaviour and recent initiatives, such as the provision of older pupils as ‘active listeners’, have been effective in curbing incidents and contributing to the good, personal development of all the pupils. Provision for pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The rate of attendance is above the national average.
- Pupils’ attitudes are very good. They are enthusiastic about their work and are keen to take responsibility for daily routines.
- The school sets high expectation for pupils’ conduct and this is reflected in the good and often very good behaviour in lessons. However, a small number of pupils are sometimes disruptive in class and over-boisterous outside lessons.
- The school has effectively addressed the incidence of oppressive behaviour, including bullying, through the use of older pupils as ‘active listeners’.
- The personal development of pupils is good.

Commentary

12. Arnold Middle School is a secure and orderly place. Most pupils are happy at the school and in the main they attend regularly and on time. They settle quickly and teachers are able to make a prompt start to the day. Whilst the rate of attendance compares well with other schools, it has declined since the previous inspection. One reason for this is that more parents are taking holidays in term time. The head is very conscious of the detrimental effect this practice can have on the attainment and progress of pupils and is seeking parental support to improve the situation.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	5.5
National data	6.0

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.1
National data	0.3

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

13. At all levels, pupils speak well of their school and are keen to take advantage of the many opportunities available for them to take an active part in school life. As monitors, members of the school council, librarians or ‘active listeners’, pupils wear their identifying badges with pride and take their responsibilities seriously. All pupils are aware that the school has high expectations of their behaviour and the great majority respond well. The calm and quiet environment that is found in most classrooms enables pupils to concentrate on their work. At all levels in the school, pupils show that they respect their teachers, listen well and are eager to learn. There are, however, occasions when a

few of them act in a silly way and seek to distract their colleagues, but these are not typical. Most pupils enjoy their schooling and accommodate the misbehaviour of the minority in a mature and tolerant way. In lessons, little time is wasted and pupils are generally well focused on their work.

14. About the school, attitudes are more robust. The movement of large numbers of pupils through relatively narrow doorways and corridors inevitably results in some pushing and pulling. Similarly, during break periods, the exuberance of pupils playing games in a recreation area of modest proportions, results in physical contact, which can be intimidating. Most pupils cope well with the crowded conditions and the opportunities so provided for aggressive and sometime oppressive behaviour. Nevertheless, the concerns, which have been expressed by a significant number of pupils and parents about bad behaviour, particularly by a few older pupils, are still valid. The school is sensitive to these concerns, including the incidence of bullying and of poor behaviour on the school buses. The latter is not directly the school's responsibility. Following a recent review of its policies, the school has initiated a series of measures, most notably the peer support group known as 'active listeners', which have been warmly welcomed within the school community. The evidence indicates that good progress is being made. The governors are aware that the number of exclusions has been high for a middle school and successfully challenged the length of one of the exclusions last year.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	526	22	0
White – Irish	2	0	0
White – any other White background	6	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	8	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	1	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	6	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	4	0	0

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

15. Pupils with SEN have positive attitudes to learning and behave well. Pupils in the Chiltern Class respond very well to their specialist curriculum. They settle to tasks willingly and take care in the presentation of their work. Although they find it difficult, they try hard to join in with other pupils in mainstream classes. The one pupil who is at an early stage of English language acquisition is positive about school.

16. The personal development of pupils is good and has improved since the time of the previous inspection. There are now many more opportunities for pupils to exercise responsibility in the daily routines of school life. A thorough review has been conducted into the provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in each area of the curriculum. This has led to some very good practice, notably in art where pupils have an opportunity to learn of the beliefs and culture of their own and other civilisations over time and across the globe, and in dance where there has been an exploration of multi-cultural practice. In some areas, schemes of work are still being adapted to reflect best practice but the school is showing considerable commitment to this central aspect to

pupils' development. Pupils are gaining self-knowledge and an understanding of the feelings, values and beliefs of others. A weakness that remains is that the school does not meet its statutory obligation to provide a daily act of collective worship, with a period of reflection only being experienced by some pupils at the start of the day.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching, learning and assessment are unsatisfactory overall. The breadth of the curriculum is satisfactory, although there are weaknesses in its organisation. Provision for enrichment is very good. Arrangements to ensure the pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are satisfactory. Monitoring of pupils' progress across the curriculum is inadequate. The school's links with parents are satisfactory, whilst those with the community and other schools are good.

Teaching and learning

Overall, the quality of teaching and learning experienced by pupils in all years is unsatisfactory. This is because the quality of teaching and learning in three of the core subjects, English, mathematics and ICT, is unsatisfactory. Especially in these subjects, teachers' expectations of pupils are too low. Pupils are not challenged appropriately and the pace of work is too slow. Consequently, pupils underachieve. In contrast, there is some outstanding teaching. Teaching and learning was good or better in over half the lessons observed. The quality of marking and assessment is unsatisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory in English, mathematics, ICT and geography.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils are too low, particularly for average and higher-attaining pupils. Pupils receive insufficient challenge in some subjects.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good in music and physical education, and good in science, design and technology and French. There is some outstanding practice in these subjects.
- Teaching and support for the pupils in the Chiltern class is very good.
- The quality of marking and assessment is inconsistent. Some good assessment data is not used effectively across the school to track the progress of individuals and groups of pupils, or to inform pupils consistently how to improve.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
2 (2%)	17 (18%)	34 (37%)	30 (32%)	10 (11%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

17. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. This is because, despite there being much good and very good teaching, the quality of teaching and learning in three of the core subjects, English, mathematics and ICT is unsatisfactory. It is also unsatisfactory in geography. Teaching was unsatisfactory in 11 per cent of lessons seen, learning in 14 per cent. In these lessons, and in a substantial proportion of those where teaching and learning was just satisfactory, expectations are not high enough, pupils are not challenged appropriately and time is not used effectively. Whilst the proportion of good, very good and excellent teaching is about the same as at the time of the last inspection, the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has increased from four per cent.

18. However, some excellent practice was seen in design and technology and French. Some very good teaching was also seen in music, physical education, religious education, English, geography and PSHCE. Overall, teaching and learning are very good in music and physical education, and good in science, design and technology and French. They are also good in history, in Years 5 and 6, and art, in Years 7 and 8. In ICT and geography, teaching is satisfactory in Years 5 and 6, but unsatisfactory in Years 7 and 8.

19. There are some major differences in reasons as to why the teaching in English and mathematics is unsatisfactory. In English, teaching is good or very good in about half of lessons, but it is unsatisfactory in over a fifth. Where teaching is less effective, time is not used well. Teaching is not planned sufficiently well to meet the differing needs of the wide range of abilities within classes. Teachers often dominate lessons, not enabling pupils to offer their contributions. Questioning is not well used and teachers are not always aware of how pupils are responding. There is, however, some very good teaching in English, for example, in a Year 6 class, where pupils worked well in groups. They were developing stories based on monsters from myths and were keen to evaluate each other's work.

20. In contrast to English, teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in mathematics because, whilst the majority of the teaching is just satisfactory, the learning in these lessons is not sufficient to result in satisfactory achievement. Again, the use of time is unsatisfactory, as much of the developmental work does not result in meaningful new learning. For the significant number of high-attaining pupils, in particular, the course itself lacks of challenge. Some of the opening suggestions for teacher's lessons are too easy. Where teaching is good, questions are focused on the learning needs of the pupils, and teachers deliver clear, accurate information.

21. There are signs of improvements in teaching in both English and mathematics in recent months. The appointment of a co-ordinator for English in Years 5 and 6 and the provision of advisory support in mathematics are beginning to have an impact on the quality of pupils' learning. Involvement in the 'Excellence and Enjoyment' initiative, under the National Primary Strategy, should benefit the quality of work in both departments. Some very good practice within other subjects could also inform teachers' practice in English and mathematics.

22. In science, teaching and learning are almost always good, whether taught by non-specialists, as in most Year 5 and 6 classes, or by specialists. Teachers generally have high expectations and provide work to meet the needs of pupils of differing abilities. By skilful questioning, teachers are able to challenge all pupils. Teachers are enthusiastic and encourage some of the less confident pupils to participate fully. They make good use of a wide range of methods and resources, including the support assistants.

23. Overall, teachers' command of their subjects is sound. It is good in Years 7 and 8, where there is more specialist teaching. In physical education, science and music, teachers have very good subject knowledge. However, in art, for example, teachers of Year 5 vary a great deal in experience and knowledge, although they are supported well by the subject leader. Pupils make rapid improvement in Years 7 and 8, when taught by the subject specialist. In contrast, in ICT in Years 5 and 6, the teacher's good subject expertise and clear demonstrations are the source of pupils' satisfactory learning. In French, standards of pupils' spoken French and the quality of their listening comprehension are much higher where teachers use French almost exclusively.

24. Teachers' planning and use of resources are satisfactory. In music, the planning of lessons is excellent, using very well selected materials. Teaching in French is characterised by very good planning and use of resources, developing and consolidating learning at one and the same time. In design and technology, technical language is introduced carefully. But in art, weaknesses in planning results in insufficient challenge and some underachievement for abler pupils. In a very good lesson in religious education, based on the Islamic Five Pillars of Faith, the use of computers made the lesson interesting and vibrant. Use of homework is too often unsatisfactory in Years 7 and 8; it is not set consistently and is sometimes inappropriate.

25. Teachers' encouragement and engagement of pupils is generally good in Years 5 and 6, but more varied in Years 7 and 8. Overall, the effectiveness of teaching methods used is satisfactory, but

again varies greatly. In French, teaching is always lively and challenging. In history, a variety of teaching methods and strategies are used to make learning interesting for pupils. For example, they use evidence sources well to explain how effectively paintings of Elizabeth I were used as propaganda. They enjoy making deductions and searching for clues. In music, the way lessons inter-relate is very skilled, helping pupils to make very strong connections between different activities, such as listening, composing and performing. Overall, the use of time is ineffective. Pace is too often slower than is appropriate for an able cohort of pupils. Even in design and technology, where pace is generally good, some lessons are too slow; pupils would do even better if every lesson included a greater sense of urgency for learning and progress.

26. Overall, teachers' expectations of pupils are unsatisfactory, particularly for average and higher-attaining pupils. In religious education, in Years 5 and 6, the level of challenge is often much too low. In art, classroom activities and homework sometimes lack the necessary rigour to encourage sufficient originality and independence. In contrast, in music, pupils achieve very well because teaching is very methodical, offering a high level of challenge to all pupils. In physical education, pupils respond very positively and learn very well because the challenge is high.

27. In general, teachers insist on high standards of behaviour. Class management is good in French, for example, because lessons are usually well delivered. However, in ICT in Years 7 and 8, there is a lack of firm direction to pupils who do not listen well enough to be clear about to what they have to do. Teachers generally make good use of teaching assistants and other support staff. Within individual lessons, teachers ensure that all pupils have the opportunity to succeed.

28. As pupils progress through the school, they acquire skills, knowledge and understanding with growing confidence in many subjects, but as is shown in their underachievement, this is unsatisfactory in English, mathematics, ICT and geography. In ICT, as in English, questioning is not used effectively to stimulate extended oral contributions from pupils. In geography, in Years 7 and 8, there is too much reliance on commercial worksheets and whilst activities are often enjoyable, they lack depth for more able pupils. In history, pupils learn to empathise with people living in other times and can appreciate the issues they had to face.

29. Pupils have the capacity to work independently and collaboratively, but, as in history, are not always given the opportunity to do so, because most learning is through whole class teaching. In contrast, in design and technology, good practice includes encouragement of independent learning and, in music, pupils work enthusiastically in pairs and in groups. Some are independent-minded enough to relate work accurately to music they have heard outside lessons. In dance, within physical education, pupils work very well collaboratively to ensure their routines meet the high standards required. They are encouraged to experiment with their use of sequences, using canon and unison. In religious education, many in Years 7 and 8 do good research, when the opportunity is given, and they develop good knowledge of major religious beliefs. In French, pupils are expected to perform well and, therefore, develop very good attitudes to language learning.

30. Teachers have good information on pupils' special educational needs. Good provision is made for them in science, art, French, music and physical education, for example. Additional support for spelling and handwriting is provided each week to small groups of pupils in each year. Some provision is made for those with SEN through setting arrangements in some subjects. However, some teachers rely too much on the setting arrangements as pupils with SEN are found throughout the ability range within this school.

31. Teaching and support for the pupils in the Chiltern Class is very good. Staff have had specialist training and they are very experienced in working with pupils with ASD. Consequently, pupils feel secure and happy, and learn very well. The staff work as a seamless team and the very good relationships, which exist between the staff and the pupils, are a strength of the provision.

32. The thoroughness and constructiveness of assessment is varied. Overall, it is unsatisfactory, but there are examples of good assessment in many departments. Assessment is used more effectively to respond to individual needs in Years 5 and 6. Pupils' understanding of how they can improve is sound; it would be good if they received more consistent assessments and their progress was monitored across the curriculum, not just in some subjects.

33. Most work is marked, but the quality and use to which it is put varies widely. For example, in science, teachers mark pupils' work regularly and indicate to them how to improve their work. Pupils have a good knowledge of their current level of working. Teachers make good use of test data to provide pupils with specific targets for improvement. In French, marking and feedback, given in French to extend learning, is of a high quality and assessment is being increasingly used to inform the quality of teaching and learning. In contrast, in religious education, the marking and assessment of work does not give pupils a clear enough picture of how they can improve their attainment. A lot of work is not thoroughly marked and too much of it is not completed. Unusually, in history and geography, all work is done on paper. Once marked, it is stored in files, which parents commented they never saw and, therefore, they had no idea how successful a piece of homework had been. Good examples of self- and peer-evaluation were seen in English and design and technology. For example, a food lesson began with pupils working in groups to compare and summarise the individual written comments, which the teacher had made on their homework. They spent only a few minutes on the activity but it resulted in each knowing how to improve their next piece of work and all being sharply focussed, ready to engage with their lesson.

34. Good progress has been made since the last inspection in using assessment data to establish benchmarks and set individual targets. An assistant head collates information, which is being used with improving effectiveness in some departments. Targets, which had been imposed upon the school with little ownership, are now being prepared within the school, based upon quality data. Challenging but realistic targets are now being set, but currently neither form tutors nor heads of year play a role in tracking pupils' progress across the curriculum. Good assessment data is not been used consistently to inform pupils how to improve. Pupils indicated that no-one, except the new head in some cases, had ever looked at their work across all subjects before this inspection.

The Curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. It meets the broad statutory requirements, except that it does not include provision for an act of collective worship. There are weaknesses in curricular organisation. Provision for enrichment is very good. The match of teachers and support staff to the curriculum is good. The provision of resources is good. Whilst accommodation is satisfactory overall, with some excellent specialist facilities, it is currently inadequate for the number of pupils on roll.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Support for learning outside the school day is very good, with particularly good provision for sport and music.
- Curricular organisation is over-complex; grouping pupils in Years 7 and 8 on the basis of their general attainment leads to inequality of access and opportunity for some.
- Provision for pupils with SEN is good. Pupils in the Chiltern Class have access to a specialist curriculum.
- Provision for drama and for ICT within science, music and design and technology is inadequate.
- A coherent, whole-school programme for PSHCE has yet to be developed fully.
- The school fails to make provision for a communal, daily act of collective worship.
- The playground is inadequate for the school's increasing roll, and some accommodation is cramped.

Commentary

35. The curriculum for pupils in all years includes the full range of core and foundation subjects. In addition, pupils, in Years 5 and 6, get one period of week of French, which provides a firm foundation for further study in Years 7 and 8 when the time allocation is increased. Provision for drama is inadequate in all years. In physical education, boys now have the opportunity to study dance in all years, addressing a weakness identified in the last inspection. Provision in physical education is good. For example, a martial arts course is also on offer.

36. Opportunities to meet all areas of the National Curriculum are limited in science, music, design and technology, and geography. In science, there are insufficient computers so pupils have no opportunities to carry out data logging. Similarly, there are only limited opportunities to use ICT in music. Pupils are unable to experience computer-aided design in design and technology because of a lack of resources. In geography, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to carry out fieldwork.

37. Curricular organisation is too complex. In Years 5 and 6, in the core subjects, pupils are grouped by ability. This system does not continue into Years 7 and 8, where a broader grouping based on pupils' general attainment is used for most subjects. In some practical subjects, classes are combined and subdivided to provide smaller teaching groups. The school has recognised the problems arising from these arrangements and will be reviewing them before next year. Current arrangements do not provide for equality of access and opportunity for all pupils and lead to disaffection for some. For example, some pupils in the highest set in one core subject in Year 6 find themselves in the second stream in Year 7 because of their performance in other core subjects. Others, who would benefit from mixing with abler pupils in some subjects, are denied the opportunity to do so, except in some practical subjects. The school's review will take into account other issues, such as the imbalance in class sizes, time allocation to subjects and the current practice of teaching mainly core subjects in the morning in Years 5 and 6. Most subjects are currently taught in hour-long periods, although there are some half-hour periods to accommodate the current time allocation to subjects. Less skilful teachers find an hour too long with some groups of pupils, whilst half an hour is too short a time, given movement between rooms, for drama, for example.

38. A coherent whole school programme for PSHCE has yet to be developed. The programme for Years 5 and 6 supports pupils as they settle into the school, before broadening into a study of topics relating to the needs of these year groups, such as an awareness of dangerous situations and their relationships with friends. Pupils in Year 7 complete thorough research into aspects of addiction and obsession, including drugs education. Pupils in Year 8 have also been trained to counsel younger pupils. In liaison with the science department a scheme of work has been prepared, which meets the statutory requirements for the teaching of sex education. Work on citizenship focuses on participation in school- and community-based activities. Arrangements are in hand to ensure that statutory requirements in relation to the teaching of the citizenship curriculum will be met.

39. Provision for pupils with SEN is good. They are given support where this is needed, including through additional 'booster' classes. Pupils in the Chiltern Class have access to a specialist curriculum, which incorporates a variety of well-regarded strategies to help pupils with ASD to learn well. The classroom is very well planned and organised to provide a learning environment which keeps distractions to a minimum. The very structured day with individual timetables and schedules helps the pupils to change activities and minimises their anxiety. The impact of the curriculum is evident in the very good achievements of the pupils and their settled behaviour.

40. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory. An audit has been made across the school and pupils are identified for the register during Year 5, as a rule. The grouping of pupils in classes by ability can work to the advantage of these pupils, but leads to complacency in some departments where teachers fail to provide additional challenges for pupils on the gifted and talented register. As well as the high quality extra-curricular work in music and physical education, talented musicians and athletes can strive to join county ensembles or teams. The school participates in

inter-school challenges in mathematics and design and technology. In French, poetry competitions and summer school attendance challenge gifted linguists. In most classes tasks are tailored to some extent to challenge the more able. There is appropriate liaison with the upper school to supply continuity for these pupils from Year 9.

41. One of the school's strengths is its enrichment programme, covering a wide range of activities, which are extended to pupils of all abilities. There are lunch-time clubs in mathematics, science, art and ICT. The French teachers provide some good materials to support the school trip to Normandy. The physical education department provide pupils with many opportunities to extend their learning beyond the school day. A wide range of competitions and trips are organised by these very committed teachers. In music, the uptake for instrumental lessons is very high. Orchestra and choir practices are well attended. The orchestra and choir have good links with both the local community and with the LEA. The art department offers pupils a wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as clubs, competitions and visits to art galleries. Parents and pupils are positive about the good provision for sports and the arts, but commented on the lack of provision for drama.

42. There is a good match of staff to suit the curriculum, except for the shortage of specialist expertise in religious education, geography and some art lessons in Years 5 and 6. Support teachers and assistants are well deployed across the school, although limited time is allocated to science. Expertise is particularly good in the Chiltern class.

43. The quality of accommodation is satisfactory overall, but varies widely. Newly refurbished rooms are spacious and well equipped for teaching specialist subjects. These include art, science, design and technology, music, ICT and the Chiltern class. Teachers cope extremely well with cramped rooms and inadequate facilities in other areas. This is largely due to there currently being over 550 pupils in a school originally built to accommodate 400. The Year 5 classrooms are particularly small; mathematics is taught in two huts outside the main building and rooms with no corridor access are frequently interrupted by through traffic. Physical education is well provided with external pitches and a gymnasium, although there are currently no all-weather pitches. Toilet facilities for pupils have been refurbished but facilities for staff are inadequate. The playground is not large enough to allow pupils to engage in recreational activities and the surface is unsafe. A risk assessment has been carried out on the playground. It will be upgraded as the first stage of a substantial building programme supported by the LEA, which starts next year. Whilst the proposals will substantially improve the accommodation, some areas will remain cramped.

44. Resources for learning are good in most subject areas. However, the library is cramped and does not support learning adequately. Provision of a learning centre with library and appropriate ICT facilities is planned.

Care, guidance and support

Arnold is a caring school. Arrangements to ensure the pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are satisfactory. However, the school does not provide its pupils with sufficient academic support, advice and guidance, resulting in underachievement by a significant number of pupils. In recent months, the school has involved pupils well by seeking their views on its work and development and acting upon them.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The school seeks pupils' views and acts on them so that they feel valued and able to bring about improvements to school life.
- The school does not monitor pupils' academic progress rigorously enough and so fails to address the needs of a significant number of pupils who underachieve.
- The school generally deals well with the care and welfare of pupils, having good child protection and well-organized first aid procedures.
- There is effective support to help pupils settle in when they start at the school in Year 5, and arrangements to help pupils when they progress to the upper school are well developed.
- Monitoring of pupils' behaviour is now good.
- The school has recently introduced good systems to combat bullying and address pupils' concerns, particularly through the training of some Year 8 pupils as 'active listeners'.

Commentary

45. Pupils generally feel safe at school and have an adult that they know well to whom they can turn when they need support. Key members of staff have good knowledge and training in welfare matters. There are secure procedures for first aid and child protection and sufficient numbers of staff are well trained in dealing with these areas. Monitoring of pupils' behaviour is now good and systems to share the information on individuals across the teaching team have led to improved strategies to support those pupils whose progress is affected by their behaviour. New procedures to combat bullying are beginning to have an impact. An important part of these is the training of pupils as 'active listeners'. Pupils see this as a very positive way of helping to stop bullying, but several pupils still spoke during the inspection of their concerns about instances of being bullied. The school liaises well with a range of outside agencies, such as social services, educational psychology and health. This provides good information for school staff about meeting individual pupils' needs and is particularly beneficial in the Chiltern unit. The school's formal policies and procedures for health and safety are up to date. During the inspection, some minor health and safety issues were raised with the school, such as restricting window openings in first and second floor classrooms. These are being addressed promptly.

46. Good liaison and transfer arrangements with the feeder primary schools help pupils in Year 5 to settle into the school well. When pupils in Year 8 transfer to the upper school, there are good procedures to ensure that they are well known by their new form teacher and placed in a group where they have friends. There is good exchange of academic and pastoral information between the schools.

47. Rewards for good achievement are celebrated in year assemblies. Most pupils are pleased with the support and praise they receive from their teachers. Although marking and comments from teachers in some subjects give pupils good help to improve their work, the quality of support varies considerably and assessment is unsatisfactory in several subjects. This has not been addressed, because there is a lack of rigour in monitoring pupils' overall academic progress by form tutors and heads of year. Too many pupils do not have a clear idea of how they are doing. They and their parents generally have insufficient information about their progress, particularly because reporting is unsatisfactory. Several pupils had inaccurate views of their attainment when discussing their work with inspectors. Consequently, the teachers and parents have not worked together to tackle underachievement by a significant number of pupils, particularly in English and mathematics.

48. In contrast, targets for pupils with SEN are clearly set through individual education plans. The achievements of these pupils are monitored effectively to ensure they are making adequate progress. Information about individual pupils is well shared by the teaching and support staff, particularly where pupils have behavioural or emotional difficulties. Good records are available about the progress they have made in relation to their previous levels of attainment.

49. The school is now active in seeking pupils' views and acts on them so that they feel valued. Pupils were involved well in the selection process when the new head was appointed. The school council, made up of elected representatives from each year group, involves pupils well in the school's work and development. Good projects to improve the areas around the school and to monitor the toilet areas are under way. Having presented their ideas, pupils have already been allowed to raise funds for their projects through raffles and a presentation to the 'Friends of Arnold Middle School Association'. Year 8 monitors are chosen by teachers and play an important role in helping teachers with tasks around the school. Several opportunities for pupils to monitor their own progress in some subjects are developing well.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents are satisfactory. It complies with its legal responsibilities to parents and provides a satisfactory level of information to them about its organisation and activities. However, the detail currently provided about children's standards and progress is unsatisfactory. The head has identified this as an area for improvement and has recently implemented measures to better inform parents and involve them more fully in school life. For their part, parents show much interest in the school and have been very successful in raising funds to help supplement the school's resources. There are good and developing links with other schools and the wider community, which help to broaden the curriculum to the benefit of all the pupils.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The information currently given to parents about their children's standards and progress is unsatisfactory.
- The school has begun to establish clear lines of communication with parents.
- Parents and friends of the school provide valuable support through their fundraising activities.
- The school works closely with the upper and lower schools in developing curricular links and ensuring that transfer arrangements are effective.

Commentary

50. In an unusually large response to the Ofsted questionnaire, parents expressed general satisfaction with most areas of the school's provision. However, about one in three do not feel that their views are sought and they are dissatisfied with the information given to them about their children's progress. A significant minority of parents also indicate concerns about homework and about pupils' behaviour, some of which is considered to be oppressive. The tenor of these opinions was repeated at the meeting with the inspectors. The inspection evidence, including discussions with pupils and staff, largely supports these negative views expressed by parents about the school, in recent years. However, it also concurs with the oft-repeated comment by parents, pupils and staff that the situation has improved significantly over recent months.

51. The new head recognised the shortcomings at an early stage of her incumbency. As a priority, she initiated a review of the arrangements for reporting on pupils' standards and progress, although this has yet to come to fruition. Many parents are critical of the annual reports, particularly the use of tick boxes, with generally inadequate comments on standards, progress and how to improve. Many parents were discouraged in the past from attending consultation evenings. They resented this. The new head has stopped this poor practice. She has made good use of routine and regular letters to keep parents informed on all aspects of school life, from staffing changes to plans for the building, from curriculum guidance to catering. She has consulted parents about new school strategies to counteract bullying, issued new guidelines on homework and invited interested parents to briefings on several areas of the curriculum. Not least, she has let it be known that she is accessible to parents who may have concerns or problems related to their children's education. There is still much to be done, particularly in the sharing of information about pupils' learning and behaviour, to fully develop an effective partnership with parents based on mutual trust and confidence. At the time of the inspection a very good start had been made.

52. Despite the reservations of parents outlined above, there is clear evidence that they are well disposed towards the school. The association of parents, teachers and friends has an impressive record of fundraising on behalf of the school. Substantial monies have been raised in the last year to be used to support the school's development planning by the purchase of, for example, computers and sports equipment. The association's events and activities also play a useful role in building a sense of community within the school.

53. Links with parents of pupils with SEN are good. These parents are invited to contribute to the reviews of statements of special educational needs. Parents of pupils in the Chiltern class have very close links with the staff who work with their children.

54. Effective management arrangements are now in place to make best use of the links with other schools in the area. A strong partnership with both lower and upper schools is well supported by the LEA. This helps to facilitate an effective and stress-free induction and transfer of pupils moving between the schools. Information about pupils' attainment is shared and trusted by all parties. Some areas of training are common to schools within the 'pyramid' and there is a growing level of exchange of curriculum information. For example, approaches to personal development in the lower schools is being monitored to ensure consistency as pupils move on to the next stage of their education, and the schemes of work in the science and mathematics faculties of the upper school have been adapted to reflect middle school practice. These arrangements help to enhance the learning opportunities for pupils and provide good professional development for the staff involved.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school's leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The very good leadership of the new head and her clear vision of how the school will develop are already having a positive impact on the school's ethos and views of staff, pupils and parents. Leadership of other key staff is satisfactory, as is management overall. Governance of the school is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The new head is providing very good leadership, inspiring pupils, staff and parents through her open and purposeful approach. She is ably supported by other members of the leadership group.
- Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is at an early stage of development and lacks rigour.
- Team leaders do not ensure consistently that teachers have sufficiently high aspirations of their pupils.
- The involvement of pupils as the most important group within school, whose views are listened to carefully and used to inform decisions, is a strength of the new consultative style of management.
- Financial management is good and focussed upon appropriate educational priorities.
- Governors support the school well and are committed to its development.

Commentary

55. Governance of the school is good overall. Governors are closely involved in helping to set the school's overall direction and bring expertise and professionalism to the governing body. The governors have successfully challenged a number of management decisions over recent years, such as the length of a pupils' exclusion and the proposals for making cuts to the teaching staff. However, they have not always been as fully involved as they would have wished and welcome the change of ethos within the school which will enable them to provide a great deal of support to the school and the new head. All statutory responsibilities are met, except in relation to the daily act of collective worship. A period of quiet reflection does not occur in all assemblies or tutor periods. Governors have a good understanding of most of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, particularly in relation to the accommodation, but are not always as clear about those related to the curriculum. Governors have been fully involved in discussions with the LEA over proposals for new buildings and

enhanced play areas and sports pitches. They were very clear about what they were looking for in appointing a new head teacher: someone who would move the school forward, address underachievement, and, most of all, a 'people' person, who would improve the school's ethos.

56. The school benefits from the very good leadership of the new head. She has a clear vision of how the school will develop as a caring community in which all pupils will achieve to their full individual potential. The head is inspiring pupils, staff and parents through her open and purposeful approach. Communications between these school groups have improved and all welcome the new consultative style of management. Pupils are seen as the most important group and their views are listened to carefully and used to inform decisions. The head has adopted an open door policy. This is providing greater access to pupils, staff and parents, which they welcome. In the absence of a deputy, the head is ably supported by two fairly recently-appointed assistant heads. The senior leadership group are working well together and are clearly focussed on school improvement. They model good practice within the classroom and around the school. The chair of governors meets regularly with the head and members of the leadership group and is fully involved in all discussions.

57. Staff work together co-operatively and with mutual respect and the former gap, which they perceived between them and senior staff, is closing quickly. The weekly information sheet for staff and governors is a helpful tool. On a day-to-day basis the school runs smoothly. Parents, staff and pupils commented on improvements they perceived in the way the school is now run. With the exception of several members of Year 8, pupils feel valued and respected by staff and enjoy their school. The size of the staff has resulted in a structure where some teachers have a range of specific responsibilities. The current structure lacks coherence.

58. A scheme for monitoring the classroom performance of teachers has recently been initiated and is developing; it currently lacks sufficient rigour and the involvement of middle managers varies between departments. Some team leaders do not ensure that teachers have sufficiently high aspirations of their pupils. Data on pupil's performance is used to monitor and inform decisions. A wealth of data is available and is beginning to be used by subject leaders. It has yet to be translated into individual pupil targets, which are known, used and monitored by teachers, pupils and parents. The role of form tutors and heads of year in this process has yet to be developed. The lack of responsibility for academic standards by pastoral leaders is a barrier to raising standards.

59. The 2003/2004, school improvement plan is a comprehensive document which includes general aims and an outline approach to change management and consultation. It does not summarise the audit of need, which preceded the plan. The plan includes four appropriate priorities and is well used by senior staff to pursue developments. Evidence produced for the inspection, shows that self-evaluation is developing well. The new head quickly identified areas, which had to be addressed. Immediate action was taken to address concerns regarding bullying, with the involvement of pupils as 'active listeners' an exemplary model of how she wished to move the school forward. Support from the LEA has also been sought to address underachievement, particularly in mathematics.

60. A scheme of performance management for the head and all teaching and support staff is in place. Appropriate objectives are set for all, and leaders understand the benefits for staff and pupils. The provision of support and training for staff towards meeting their objectives is less secure, at present. Whilst new staff are positive about their induction in the school, the programme of meetings and professional discussion has not been regular and has varied between departments. A welcome initiative, since September, has been the full involvement of all staff, including all categories of non-teaching staff, in school developments.

61. The leadership and management of SEN is good. The co-ordinator manages effectively the resources available to her, including the teaching and clerical assistants. The teacher in charge of the Chiltern Class provides strong leadership and is highly committed to continuing improvement.

She set up the class in 1999 and has been successful in establishing high quality provision. Leadership of the gifted and talented programme is satisfactory. The teacher responsible is well informed and has initiated several good projects, but as yet these have not borne fruit consistently across all departments

62. The school ended the 2002-3 financial year with a surplus of approximately £18,000. Determined to protect staffing and the pupil teacher ratio, governors experienced difficulty in setting a balanced budget for 2003-4 despite using £40,000 of devolved capital money for revenue purposes. A licensed deficit of £16,500 was agreed. The budget is spent appropriately for the benefit of pupils. Day-to-day management of purchasing and payments is conscientiously undertaken and there are good control and monitoring systems in place for governors, the head and budget holders.

63. Best value principles are applied effectively in several areas of the school. Staff question the decisions they make to ensure that the outcomes will be of benefit to the pupils. Consultation with pupils and staff is a growing strength, although, as yet, it is less strong with parents. Accountability is also less strong. The school tries to maximise value for money, aware in the present climate of the importance and challenge of using precious funds to improve the school. However, given the level of underachievement, the school is currently providing unsatisfactory value for money.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April to March 2002 - 03

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	1,404,591.00
Total expenditure	1,436,774.00
Expenditure per pupil	2,742.00

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	49,313.00
Balance carried forward to the next	17,130.00

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 2 AND 3

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Standards are above average in comparison to national expectations.
- Given pupils' attainment on entry to the school, their achievement is unsatisfactory by the end of both Year 6 and Year 8.
- The quality of teaching is unsatisfactory overall.
- Assessment information is used effectively to set targets for individual pupils.
- The department has started to address the unsatisfactory progress made by too many pupils.

Commentary

64. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is well above average in reading. It is above average in writing. The attainment of pupils entering the school is rising. By the end of Year 6 standards in reading and writing, speaking and listening are above the national average. Standards have consistently been at this level in recent years. Where teaching is good, a strength of pupils' attainment is the quality of their different styles of writing; for example the quality of descriptive writing seen in one Year 6 class.

65. However, pupils make unsatisfactory progress in Years 5 and 6 given their attainment on entry to the school. By the end of Year 6, pupils do not achieve as well as those in schools with similar intakes. In 2003, results in national tests were well below expectations given pupils' prior attainment in tests taken in Year 2. By the end of Year 8, pupils are still underachieving given their attainment on entry. Results in national tests in Year 9, taken at their upper school, show gains made by pupils from Arnold are well below the trend of other Bedfordshire schools. This is particularly the case for girls.

66. Although there are examples of good and very good teaching, the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory overall. The proportion of good lessons is about the same as was reported in the last inspection. However, unlike then, some unsatisfactory lessons were observed in this inspection.

67. In the very good lesson observed, pupils made very good progress in developing their descriptive writing by using 'concept maps'. They were very well behaved, motivated and, when asked, keen to evaluate each other's work. Very good teaching of English was also observed with the Chiltern class, where the pupils' individual needs were addressed very effectively. Where teaching is less effective, time is not used well and some pupils do not work productively. This was so in some drama lessons. There is a wide range of abilities in some classes and teaching is not planned sufficiently well to meet pupils' differing needs. Higher-attaining pupils are not challenged, while lower-attaining pupils are not productive enough. Teachers often dominate lessons, not enabling pupils to offer their contributions. Questioning is not well used, including during the starter activities. Teachers are not always aware of how pupils are responding in lessons, particularly where they are not working as hard as they should. Marking of pupils' work is regular, but pupils do not always act on comments made and so it is often not effective. For example, the same pupils are

continually exhorted to 'use a ruler'. The marking also lacks challenge for the able pupils with 'ticks' given for simply writing the date. Homework is set but it does not always link closely enough to work done in class. Some teachers' own spelling is poor, and incorrectly spelt words are written on the board.

68. Teachers have access to a wealth of information on pupils. This is as a result of regular testing and the detailed marking of work. They use assessment information to set individual targets for pupils, though these are sometimes too general, when, for example, teachers give as a spelling target 'to make corrections'.

69. Improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory overall. The subject leader has ensured that many of the weaknesses identified have been successfully addressed. In particular, pupils are more involved in self-evaluation, and the use of ICT is now good. However, and crucially, pupils' progress is no longer satisfactory - as it was then. The quality of teaching is not as good as it was, with too many unsatisfactory lessons. Although there is some monitoring of teaching and learning, it is not regular or rigorous enough.

70. While management is satisfactory, leadership in the subject is unsatisfactory because not enough has been done to address the issue of pupils' achievement; many should be doing even better than they are. However, the appointment of a co-ordinator for provision in English in Years 5 and 6 is beginning to show dividends. This teacher has formed an effective working partnership with the subject leader. Together they have established long-term curriculum planning that gives them a clearer overview of provision from one year to the next. English teachers are committed to bringing about improvement and support the impetus for change.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

71. Pupils come in to this school with language skills well above national expectations. Their reading skills are better than their writing skills. Teachers are aware of pupils' needs and there is some good practice such as the reinforcement of key words in some subjects, including physical education and religious education. Effective provision was observed in design and technology where pupils are encouraged to contribute their views, and are clear and confident in doing so. Teachers mark pupils' work well in English and usually correct mistakes. Additional support is provided for low-attaining pupils, principally in spelling and handwriting. However, reinforcement of literacy across the curriculum is not consistently good.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Pupils' achieve above average standards, due to good, lively teaching.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to language learning.
- Assessment is very well developed, ensuring that the department acts to adapt teaching to the needs of all pupils.
- The provision of a stimulating course in French in Years 5 and 6 sets pupils off to a good start.
- Very good leadership and management of the subject ensure very good teamwork and liaison with partner schools, which provides for continuity for when pupils leave.

Commentary

72. By Year 8, standards are above average. All pupils are able to understand and use simple phrases and sentences expressing present, future and past events. Higher-attaining pupils can express opinions and intentions, reading and writing short paragraphs accurately. They speak confidently at near-normal speed and understand spoken texts with little interference or hesitation. All pupils make good progress, with boys and girls achieving equally well and pupils with SEN also achieving well.

73. Teaching is characterised by very good planning and use of resources, developing and consolidating learning at one and the same time. Teaching is always lively and challenging. Pupils are expected to perform well and develop very good attitudes to language learning. Pupil management is good. Pupils are co-operative because of the quality of most teaching. Only occasionally did concentration lapse, either when the timing of activities was drawn out or when pupils were unsure of their task when listening to taped materials. Aspects of literacy and numeracy are well integrated into lessons, as observed in one excellent Year 5 lesson.

Example of outstanding practice

In a mixed ability Year 5 lesson, simple resources were used excellently to help pupils in learning to link dates with questions and statements about birthdays.

'Number-fans' enable pupils to show any three-digit number rapidly and accurately. The teacher initiated a series of tasks based around number: first for pupils to display numbers up to forty spoken in French, followed by a series of addition tasks and subtraction tasks. The number-fans created considerable excitement and motivation as the pupils vied with one another to work out the calculations first. Excellent variation in method and pace encouraged pupils to set questions or to work in pairs to consolidate their use of number. English was also consolidated by a brief discussion of the meaning of 'cent' in both languages. In the remainder of the lesson pupils worked very well from taped materials and a worksheet, which enabled them to respond in writing in a variety of forms: by writing in figures, short phrases or whole sentences, according to their ability. The teacher used French throughout and expected the same of the pupils. To this end, all pupils were given the confidence to ask questions by referring to a phrase chart fixed permanently to all tables in the room. No pupil was reticent in using French, thanks to the potent mix of excellent resources linked to excellent method.

74. Teachers' use of French during lessons is inconsistent. Where teachers use French almost exclusively, the standards of pupils' spoken French and the quality of their listening comprehension are much higher than where teachers use English frequently. Assistants are very well deployed to support those with special needs and teachers are very supportive, too. Marking and feedback, given in French to extend learning, is of a high quality. Assessment is being increasingly used to inform the quality of teaching and learning. The provision of one lesson per week in Years 5 and 6 sets pupils off to a good start.

75. The subject is very well led and managed. The subject leader is very confident about her knowledge of French and has prepared a thorough and stimulating programme. She is very well informed on initiatives for language learning and provides effective support for her staff. Good liaison with partner middle schools and the main upper school does much to promote continuity of provision for the pupils. Since the previous inspection the subject has improved significantly. High standards and achievement have been maintained despite staffing changes, and improved assessment strategies have led to the subject having greater appeal. Although the pen-friend and exchange schemes have run into difficulties, restricting opportunities for gifted linguists, the materials prepared for the annual Normandy visit are very good and gifted pupils attend summer schools and participate in poetry challenges.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Standards are above average at the end of Year 8, but this represent unsatisfactory achievement.
- Standards in Year 6 have declined over the last four years. They were low in comparison with similar schools in 2003. This represents poor achievement.
- Overall, teaching and learning are unsatisfactory.
- Inspection evidence suggests that standards are beginning to improve.

Commentary

76. Standards at the end of Year 6 in 2003 in the national tests were below the national average for all schools and were in the lowest five per cent when compared with those of similar schools. The trend in results during the last four years has been one of decline below the national trend. Performance is not as good as that in English and substantially lower than that in science. Overall, there was little difference between the performance of boys and girls.

77. Standards seen in the inspection in Year 6 are average, and rising. Overall, achievement is poor compared to the well above average levels at the start of Year 5. There is a need for an increased focus on efficient methods of calculation and more advanced work on relationships, between area and perimeter, for example. The achievement of lower-attaining pupils and those with SEN is satisfactory.

78. Standards seen in the inspection in Year 8 are above average. However, achievement is unsatisfactory compared to the well above-average levels at the start of Year 5. Pupils have begun to tackle algebra successfully, including the use of negative signs, but further algebraic work could usefully be included in their studies to replace some of the repetition of earlier learning seen in the inspection. The achievement of lower-attaining pupils and those with SEN is satisfactory.

79. Teaching and learning, overall, are unsatisfactory. There is a small element of both good and unsatisfactory teaching. However, whilst the majority of the teaching is just satisfactory, the learning in these lessons is not sufficient to result in satisfactory achievement. The overall effect of the teaching results in the underachievement seen in the inspection. Thus, teaching overall is unsatisfactory. The use of time is unsatisfactory, as much of the work in lessons does not result in meaningful new learning. The beginnings and ends of lesson are not always related to the main lesson objective. For the significant number of high-attaining pupils, in particular, there is a lack of challenge in the course itself. Some of the opening suggestions for teachers' lessons are too easy. Any strength in the teaching lies in the overall good subject knowledge of the teachers. They impart clear, accurate information to pupils. This is sufficient to produce the rise in standards seen in the inspection compared to the results of 2003, but further improvement is required to secure satisfactory achievement. In the good teaching seen, the use of questions focuses well on the learning needs of the pupils. Support from classroom assistants is good, they work well with the teachers in problem solving, for example, using resources satisfactorily to solve questions about money.

80. Leadership and management, overall, are unsatisfactory. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching have improved significantly since September and are now good. The required developmental work, with greater challenges to pupils' learning, has yet to take place. Management has not focused appropriately on assessment. It has not compared standards effectively with those of similar schools, as well as with national levels, to establish whether or not progress is on track to ensure the satisfactory achievement of pupils. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory, as standards have declined. However, improvement is well within the school's capacity.

Mathematics across the curriculum

81. The use of mathematics across the curriculum is satisfactory. Standards are average. Satisfactory use is made of four figure co-ordinates in map reading in geography. Spatial awareness develops satisfactorily in art. In science and technology, less use is made of mathematics than in similar schools. Measurement and simple calculations in these subjects are carried out accurately by the time pupils reach Year 8. The concepts of relative size and the understanding of large numbers are slow to develop in geography and science.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Standards are well above the national average for pupils' aged 11 and for those at the end of Year 8.
- Leadership and management by the subject co-ordinator are very good; she monitors the work of the department very well.
- Good teaching leads to good achievement by the end of Year 8.
- The accommodation and resources are good.
- There are insufficient computers in the department to use with the sensors for data logging to meet requirements of the National Curriculum.
- The amount of technician time is limited.

Commentary

82. Standards for pupils aged 11 for the three years up to 2002 were well above average when compared all schools. They were also above average when compared with similar schools, based upon the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals. In 2003, performance declined, particularly for those pupils obtaining Level 5 and above in national tests, but was above the national average; results were, however, below average when compared with those of schools with similar levels of prior attainment. In 2003, frequent changes of staff caused some underachievement for pupils in the middle-attaining class, who might have been expected to obtain Level 5 and above. There has been no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls over the last three years. Except for last year, pupils have consistently achieved results which are about what might be expected based on their standards when joining the school. Predicted grades for 2004 would indicate that last year's problem has been overcome.

83. Standards of attainment at the end of Year 8 are well above the national average. The percentage of pupils at Level 5 and above is well above the average expected for pupils at the end of Year 9. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 achieve above what may be expected based on their previous standards in science. Results in science have been consistently better than those in English and mathematics for pupils of all ages.

84. Teachers use the technical language of the subject well and improve the pupils' literacy skills by the use of key words. Pupils have well above-expected understanding of the principles of fair testing. Importantly, they can apply their understanding very well when planning their investigative work. Provision for the gifted and talented is mostly through putting them into the highest sets and matching the work to their needs. Pupils with SEN make very good progress because they receive very good support both from their teacher and support assistants. Pupils' standards in ICT are unsatisfactory in respect of measurement. The department has sufficient sensors but not enough computers, so that pupils' experience of data logging is limited to demonstrations by the teacher.

85. Overall, the quality of teaching is good and has improved since the last inspection. Mostly non-specialist teachers cover the work for the younger pupils. These teachers can take particular credit for the good work they do in preparing the pupils so well for national tests. Specialist teachers provide additional booster classes nearer the time of these tests. Most able Year 8 pupils learnt well about the mixing of coloured lights because the teacher had such high expectations for this very able group. Teachers do provide some work to meet the needs of pupils of different ability in the same group. However, teachers rely too much on the setting arrangements. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly and indicate to pupils how to improve their work. Pupils have a good knowledge of their current level of working. Teachers use test data well to provide pupils with specific targets for improvement.

86. Overall, pupils learn well. Lowest attaining Year 5 pupils made good progress when investigating the effect of exercise on the heart rate. The enthusiastic teacher did the exercises with the pupils, thus encouraging some of the less confident pupils to participate fully. These pupils developed their measuring skills well. They also understood the need to repeat measurements to improve reliability. When investigating diffusion, lower-attaining Year 7 pupils made good progress. The teacher made good use of a wide range of methods and resources including the support assistants. By his skilful questioning technique, he was able to fully challenge all pupils. In a lesson about floating and sinking with the highest-attaining Year 6 pupils, learning was also good. The key features of this lesson were the high pace, challenge and careful planning.

87. The behaviour of pupils is very good. They have very good relationships with their teachers and each other. These very good attitudes together with the good teaching are the reasons why achievement is good overall.

88. The newly appointed head of department provides very good leadership. She receives good support from the ex-science co-ordinator and the link governor, who is a science adviser. The head of department monitors the work of the teachers in her teams well. Very good use is made of assessment data to monitor the curriculum. The department has used the analyses of results from the upper school to address the relative weaknesses in any of the topics in Years 7 and 8. A similar analysis of results at the end of Year 6 is planned. Resources, except for computers, are good. Good use is made of the two laboratories. Non-specialist teachers can book laboratory time so that pupils in Years 5 and 6 are able to carry out experiments in ideal conditions. Non-specialist teachers all have strong subject knowledge, which is one of the reasons for the high standards seen. An experienced technician supports the work of the department well but has insufficient time. The department has no support in the afternoons.

89. Overall the department has improved significantly since the last inspection. Information and communication technology (ICT) is much more used in the teaching of science, though data logging is still not possible in experimental work. The quality of marking is no longer variable.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Teaching is unsatisfactory in Years 7 and 8, leading to underachievement in those years.
- The use of resources is very good. The effective use of computers is demonstrated well in lessons.
- Teachers' subject expertise is good, and the source of pupils' satisfactory learning in Years 5 and 6.
- Pupils are given insufficient opportunities to make oral contributions in lessons. This limits effective learning, particularly in Years 7 and 8.

Commentary

90. Standards of work seen in Year 6 are above average, an improvement on standards at the time of the last inspection. Achievement is satisfactory given pupils' above average levels at the start of Year 5. For example, pupils can input numbers and simple formulae into a spreadsheet. Observations and scrutiny of work during the inspection show that standards by Year 8 are only in line with national expectations. This represents unsatisfactory achievement, both in Years 7 and 8 and in their time in school overall. Pupils are able to use a range of software. They are confident in word-processing, but many are not developing the higher-level skills appropriate for an able cohort of pupils.

91. Teaching is unsatisfactory overall. It is satisfactory in Years 5 and 6, but unsatisfactory in Years 7 and 8. The strength of the teaching lies in good subject expertise, which is seen in the good, clear and accurate explanations given to pupils in Years 5 and 6, who are left in no doubt as to what to do. A laptop computer controlling pupils' screens is used very well in teaching pupils which buttons to press, and when. These demonstrations are the source of pupils' satisfactory learning in Years 5 and 6. Lesson planning is good, stemming from all the hard work that has gone into the scheme of work in the last two years. Teaching and learning in Years 7 and 8 are unsatisfactory. This is the result of an ineffective use of lesson time and of pupils not listening well enough in order to be clear about to what they have to do. Questioning is not used effectively to stimulate extended oral contributions from pupils to enable them show what they know. Class management is not strong enough in these two years, with some pupils regularly off task during lessons.

92. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory, because there has been unsatisfactory improvement since the last inspection, especially in Years 7 and 8. The subject leader has to provide technical support when the technician is not available, which sometimes disrupts her own teaching. This is unhelpful in the delivery of the teaching programme. Monitoring of the delivery of ICT across the curriculum is unsatisfactory. However, standards have improved in Year 6 and the computer rooms are now used well, both in lessons and informally at lunchtime. An appropriate range of policies is in place.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

93. Overall, the use of computers across the curriculum is satisfactory. A particular strength is the good use of word processing in English. The school provides an average number of computers compared to other schools. There are sufficient for much of the planned teaching, and they are used well. For individual pupils' use in lessons, the library's provision of computers, however, is inadequate. The use of computers is satisfactory in most subjects other than geography where the use is not well structured and science where there are not enough computers to permit data logging. The curriculum satisfies the demands of the National Curriculum and standards overall are average.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Achievement is variable but is unsatisfactory, overall.
- Teaching is unsatisfactory, overall.
- Leadership and management are unsatisfactory.
- Resources have improved in Years 7 and 8.
- The use of geographical vocabulary is sound throughout the school.
- Use of assessment for the provision of targets and to inform planning is inconsistent.
- The department lacks a fieldwork programme to develop pupils' data collection skills.
- There is no integrated programme of ICT activities to meet National Curriculum guidelines.

Commentary

94. Teachers' assessment of Year 8 pupils in 2003 showed the proportion that had attained Level 5 in their geographical studies was well below that attained in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Whilst standards are in line with those attained nationally, they are lower than would be expected given pupils' standards in core subjects on entry to the school. At the end of Year 6, although average, standards are also below expectations.

95. Achievement in Years 5 and 6 is very variable, depending on the specialist knowledge and abilities of the form tutor. In a Year 5 lesson, pupils were unable to recognise Ordnance Survey symbols or to use an atlas CD-Rom effectively, but they were able to search the Internet to find information about Scotland and to prepare material for an assembly presentation on holidays there. Overall, achievement is unsatisfactory in Years 5 and 6. In Year 8, fewer boys attain Level 5 in their assessments showing that underachievement is greater among boys. However, pupils who have SEN show good achievement both in the mixed ability classes in Years 5 and 6 and in the lower ability groups in Years 7 and 8. Pupils are taught how to use technical vocabulary accurately, but average and higher-attaining pupils are not sufficiently challenged, so do not all reach the high levels of which they are capable. Overall, achievement is unsatisfactory.

96. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall in Years 5 and 6, but limited resources and too much focus on Ordnance Survey map skills have curtailed the fun in learning about other places and physical landscape processes that geography generally develops. A very good Year 6 lesson, seen during the inspection, involved a lively demonstration of the water cycle using large cut out pictures and labels. The whole class together had to sort them into a logical sequence before making their own drawing. Pupils enjoyed this lesson, but were not so engaged by lessons on map reading which concentrated too much on obscure detail. In Years 7 and 8, much teaching lacks pace and variety and, overall, is unsatisfactory. In a Year 7 lesson, pupils were required to write a newspaper account of the human response to an earthquake, using ICT. This was a good lesson, because it engaged pupils, involved empathetic writing and related a geographical topic to current affairs. However, overall, there is too much reliance on commercial worksheets. These activities are enjoyable, but lack the challenge and depth for more able pupils. The quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory overall.

97. Both leadership and management of geography are unsatisfactory. The current head of department is not a geography specialist and has not provided the focus and vision needed to advance teaching and learning. Use of assessment for the provision of targets and to inform planning is inconsistent. The good practice already carried out by some teachers, in setting targets for their pupils and assessing their work using National Curriculum Levels, has not been adopted throughout the department. Where it occurs it provides a clear focus on standards and achievement.

98. Several other issues highlighted in the last inspection have yet to be tackled. The department now has good text resources to provide information on National Curriculum topics, such as volcanoes, rain forest destruction and river development. It still has to develop a policy in relation to the use of ICT and fieldwork; both of which are integral elements of the geography programme of the National Curriculum.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Teachers convey their interest and enthusiasm for their subject.
- There is good use of resources and ICT to enhance teaching and learning.
- The department lacks a consistent assessment policy, which sets targets for individual pupils and informs planning.

Commentary

99. In Year 6, standards in history are average. In 2003, when pupils left at the end of Year 8, over two-thirds had reached Level 5 in their final teacher assessment. This is close to the proportion who do so nationally in all schools by the end of Year 9. Standards are, therefore, above average by the end of Year 8. Lower-attaining pupils are well supported in history throughout the school and achieve well. Teachers set challenging work for these pupils. Overall, in Years 5 and 6, achievement is satisfactory, with pupils developing good research skills. However, more able pupils in these years and in the higher ability groups in Years 7 and 8 are not always extended as fully as they could be, so that overall achievement in history is only satisfactory.

100. The quality of teaching and learning is generally good in Years 5 and 6. For example, in a Year 6 lesson, pupils were required to examine portraits of Queen Elizabeth I and deduce from the paintings the impressions the artists were employed to convey. Pupils then had to explain how effective these paintings were as propaganda and how her subjects, her enemies and other states would see the Queen. They enjoyed their deduction and the search for clues. Teaching in lessons is good, because it is encouraging pupils to develop good research skills. In Years 7 and 8, the quality of teaching and learning is more variable. Consequently, it is only satisfactory overall. Where teaching is good, for example, pupils use source information about the candidates for the English crown after the death of Edward the Confessor to produce a rank order list of the contenders and to justify their decisions. Pupils use evidence sources effectively to discover what conditions were like from the time of the ancient Egyptians to those in Britain 50 years ago. They empathise with people living in those times and can appreciate the issues they had to face. However, in some lessons pupils are set appropriate tasks, but they are not made fully aware of why they are undertaking the activities. For example, pupils, in one class, were asked to list the attributes essential in a king, without being given the context in which to make their decisions.

101. Pupils' work shows the variety of teaching methods and strategies used to make learning interesting for them. The standard of presentation of pupils' work is high, although pupils work on paper, which is then collected in and kept in files. Pupils do not have regular access to these files, which are not taken home. Parents commented that they never see the marked work in history and some pupils indicated they don't always see work once it has been marked. Pupils make satisfactory progress in their study of history, which conforms to the requirements of the National Curriculum. However, pupils are given insufficient opportunities to work both independently and collaboratively. Most learning is through whole class teaching.

102. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The head of department conveys her enthusiasm and interest in history to the pupils. She is involved in links with other schools and is leading the department in terms of innovative practice. Performance management is in place.

103. The requirements of the last inspection have been met in respect of good use of evidence sources, increased use of ICT and awareness of areas in which the spiritual element of history can be developed. A key area still to be addressed, however, is the need for a department assessment policy, so that a common system of levels can be used to set targets for pupils and inform teachers' planning. Assessment is currently unsatisfactory. However, overall, there has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **satisfactory**.

- The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 and 8.
- Pupils generally respond well in lessons and enjoy their work.
- Pupils underachieve in Years 5 and 6 due to unsatisfactory monitoring of their progress.
- The management structure for the subject is unsatisfactory and assessment procedures are not presenting an accurate picture of what pupils can do.

104. Pupils enter the school with very different levels of knowledge, skills and understanding of religion and religious practices. By the age of 11, their achievement is unsatisfactory, as a significant number do not make sufficient progress in their work and the challenge of work is often set below their literacy levels. The level of challenge seen in Year 5 and 6 books is often much too low. The majority of Year 7 and 8 pupils have knowledge and understanding of religious beliefs and teachings, which are above the expectation for their age. Their achievement overall is, therefore, satisfactory.

105. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. The more successful teaching sets a good pace for pupils' learning and the challenge is appropriate to their prior knowledge and understanding. This was seen in lessons on Martin Luther King as a leader, in which pupils explored the 'I have a dream' speech and related it well to their own lives. Consequently, the pupils responded well, enjoyed the work and this ensured that they make good progress. In a very good lesson, based on the Islamic Five Pillars of Faith, the use of computers made the lesson interesting and vibrant. Many pupils in Years 7 and 8 do good research, when the opportunity is given, and they develop good knowledge of major religious beliefs. However, the marking and assessment of work does not give pupils a clear enough picture of how they can improve their attainment. A lot of work is not thoroughly marked and too much of it is not completed. There is no rigorous follow up when this happens. Consequently, many pupils in these year groups are not supported to achieve at an appropriate level.

106. The management of religious education is unsatisfactory. The lack of a trained subject specialist teacher is a particular problem. The leadership comes from outside the teaching team. The hard working teachers have not received subject-specific training, which would help them make best use of the programmes of study and challenge more able pupils more effectively. Assessment is unsatisfactory, as it does not inform pupils of their progress. Monitoring of teaching and learning is limited. Insufficient regular checks are made on homework and marking and good practice is not shared widely enough. Attitudes and behaviour are generally good. The vast majority of pupils enjoy the activities and try their best to improve their knowledge and understanding of religion. However, limited opportunity is given to explore moral issues and how different religious groups respond to them.

107. Improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory, due to the unsatisfactory achievement in Years 5 and 6 and the lack of a sound assessment scheme.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Pupils produce work of a very high standard.
- Non-specialist teachers of the subject in Year 5 receive insufficient guidance and training from their subject specialist colleagues.
- Lesson planning is good.
- Technical staff and classroom assistants make a good contribution to learning.
- Pupils enjoy their design and technology lessons.

Commentary

108. Most pupils benefit from being taught by subject specialist teachers from the beginning of Year 6. This is most advantageous and by the end of the year, the majority are working well above the national standard. Pupils do even better by the end of Year 8 when the research and design work of the most able pupils is at higher grade GCSE standard. For example, pupils who designed an ideal home for themselves and other family members had undertaken meticulous research. They synthesised and transformed this into detailed and logical designs, which were presented extremely well. Pupils make good progress because they respond well to good teaching and because they enjoy designing and making. Girls and boys achieve equally well.

109. Teaching varies from satisfactory to excellent, with most being good. This good practice includes highly effective beginnings to lessons, encouragement of independent learning, excellent relationships between teachers and pupils and the planned use of technical language. For example, Year 7 pupils began a food lesson by working in groups to compare and summarise the individual written comments, which the teacher had made on their homework. They spent only a few minutes on the activity but it resulted in each knowing how to improve their next piece of work and all being sharply focussed ready to engage with their lesson. There are good strategies in place to support pupils with SEN. Technical staff and classroom assistants generally make a very positive contribution to the learning and progress of pupils. Plans are in place to develop computer-aided design (CAD).

110. There is insufficient pace in some lessons; pupils would do even better if every lesson included a greater sense of urgency for learning and progress. Teachers' assessment is sometimes harsh, particularly of the work of the most able pupils and the subject team would benefit from further training in this respect.

Example of outstanding practice

An excellent design and technology lesson, which involved independent working, co-operation, teamwork and evaluative skills.

The group of 11, Year 6 girls began their design and technology lesson with great enthusiasm and clarity of task. This resulted from a short and lively introduction by the teacher, who summarised progress to date and shared the lesson objectives and tasks in a pleasant and confident manner.

All pupils planned their activities and worked independently to complete their mechanical toys with much enthusiasm. Their progress in the lesson relied upon a piece of practical homework, which all had completed, to form the heads of two toy characters.

Interest, pride and delight filled the room as pupils displayed their work and held a group discussion about techniques, processes and problems they had encountered. They completed written evaluation sheets based on the views of their peers. The great co-operation and teamwork ensured that each had identified strengths and weaknesses, but with no offence or embarrassment.

111. Leadership and management in design and technology models good classroom practice with collaborative working. Male and female staff work across all areas of the subject, providing excellent role models to pupils. Monitoring of teaching, although at an early stage of development, is being used effectively to improve departmental practice. Documentation and records are well maintained and safe working practices are established.

112. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. Work is no longer damaged in storage and the tables in the food room are now hygienic. Further subject guidance and training should be given to Year 5 teachers and schemes of work should be extended to include detail of the contribution made to the spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of pupils.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Art makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
- Rapid improvement in the acquisition of technical skills is evident in Years 7 and 8, where they are taught by the art specialist.
- Some of the highest attaining pupils receive insufficient challenge to enable them to achieve well.
- Computer facilities in the art room are insufficient to make a valuable contribution to learning.

Commentary

113. By the end of Year 6, pupils are working at an average standard and by the end of Year 8 they are above average. They achieve well over four years.

114. Some pupils arrive in Year 5 with below-average skills in art. Most reach the end of Year 6 with skills around average. They make satisfactory progress over the two years, experiencing teaching which, though satisfactory overall, varies in quality from good to unsatisfactory. Those who teach Year 5 are not specialist art teachers and vary a great deal in their experience and knowledge. The subject leader, who is an art specialist, leads and supports them very well through the provision of clear planning, regular training and meetings which ensure that marking and assessment procedures are being used effectively. The small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching occurs where teachers are new to the school and have not yet had the full benefit of this support. Where teachers are confident in their subject knowledge, pupils enjoy talking about pictures by famous artists and learn to use specialist language successfully. Others feel confident to teach technical skills and pupils create effective seascapes, for example, in the style of Turner, using watercolour techniques.

115. The art specialist teaches all lessons in Years 7 and 8 and there is rapid improvement, especially in the quality of technical skills, so that by the end of Year 8 most pupils are working at a level above average and most achieve well. Many pupils in the top sets, although working at an above average standard, could do better. Teaching is predominantly good in these two years, but there are weaknesses in planning which fails to provide sufficient challenge for abler pupils, resulting in some underachievement. Classroom activities and homework lack the necessary rigour to encourage sufficient originality and independence. Sketchbooks are used well to collect information and develop ideas. This results in a variety of sensitive landscapes using watercolour in Year 7 and well-researched, carefully painted compositions in Year 8, reflecting their own personality, entitled 'self-image.' Lots of pictures and good examples of pupil's work ensure that all of them understand what is expected of them. Pupils with SEN make the same good progress as their classmates due to good deployment of learning support assistants and good quality attention from the teacher.

116. The subject leader encourages teachers to work as a team and leads and manages the subject very well. The curriculum is very good, showing clear progression in the acquisition of basic skills and offering the opportunity to work in a variety of materials including clay, plaster, wire and printing. There are opportunities for pupils to reflect on their achievements and suggest improvements. Pupils work well together in groups, for example to produce Caribbean carnival-style headwear and learn about African, Aboriginal and Eastern culture and the impact Europeans have had on the people and animals of North America. Trips are organised to galleries and artists visit the school to work with pupils. Both of these activities establish a context in which pupils are happy and successful to create their own artwork. Through this work, the subject in making a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Opportunities are offered for whole classes to develop ideas using computers in the ICT suite; computer facilities in the art room are inadequate.

117. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection. Standards have risen and the quality of teaching has improved overall. There is less underachievement and assessment is used well to inform pupils of their progress and how to improve. Information and communication technology (ICT) is used more and there is now more three-dimensional work, including clay, following the refurbishment of the specialist art room and the purchase of a new kiln. Lively displays of artwork make a stimulating contribution to the whole school environment.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Very methodical, stimulating teaching ensures that standards are high and that pupils' achievement is, overall, very good.
- Very good leadership and management of the subject ensure that pupils have many opportunities to participate together in extra-curricular musical projects.
- A well-above-average proportion of pupils take instrumental lessons, promoting their individual aspirations.
- Continuity and challenge are adversely affected by irregular setting of homework and limited use of ICT.

Commentary

118. Pupils sing well in unison and in parts. They perform on a variety of instruments, developing a strong sense of rhythm and ensemble. By Year 8 many perform with expression and all listen attentively to music, with a good understanding of key concepts and vocabulary. Some are independent-minded enough to relate work accurately to music they have heard outside lessons. Although the concentration of boys is not as high as that of girls, there is no significant difference in achievement between the two groups. Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds are well integrated, and careful support for pupils with SEN ensures that their achievement is also very good, despite the absence of support assistants.

119. In their first two years pupils make good progress, reaching above average standards by the end of Year 6. Good progress is maintained in Years 7 and 8 and pupils leave the school with well above average standards. Overall, they achieve very well. This is because teaching is very methodical, offering a high level of challenge to all pupils. Planning of lessons is excellent, using very well selected materials. The way lessons inter-relate is very skilled, helping pupils to make very strong connections between different activities, such as listening, composing and performing. Pupils work collaboratively and enthusiastically in pairs and in groups. Good informal feedback during lessons complements termly formal assessments, to help pupils know how well they are doing. Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour grow out of their enjoyment and interest in the subject.

120. The subject is very well led and managed. Strong liaison with the visiting instrumental teachers promotes good team spirit in the department. Teachers run a large number of ensembles during lunch and after school, further promoting individual aspirations. Pupils perform concerts in school and in the wider community. More gifted pupils participate in the activities of the local music centre. The curriculum has a strong emphasis on classical and popular styles of music. Non-Western musical styles are covered in one term, but are supplemented by workshops for all, such as one recently on African rhythms. Music contributes very well to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.

121. Since the previous report the subject has made very good progress. Accommodation, while better, suffers from poor soundproofing and there are not enough practice rooms to cope with the burgeoning interest in the subject. Little has been done to address the shortcomings in ICT for music, limiting pupils' opportunities in developing composition. Irregular homework is an opportunity lost to strengthen continuity between lessons.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- Pupils achieve well, because very well taught challenging tasks develop their understanding and knowledge of performance.
- A very good, imaginative programme of dance for all pupils is a key factor in raising pupils' self-esteem, planning skills and interest.
- Extra-curricular sports are very good and the highly committed team of teachers provides activities that most pupils can enjoy.
- Pupils need more regular feedback on their performance standard and on what they can do to improve.

Commentary

122. On entry in Year 5, pupils' skills in sports are average and their knowledge and understanding of performance are below average. By the end of Year 6, their practical skills are generally average and their understanding and knowledge of performance is average. This represents good achievement overall. In Years 7 and 8, most pupils achieve well, developing practical and theoretical skills that are above average. Several pupils are well above average when performing in competitive games and achieve very well. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. The vast majority of pupils enjoy their activities and try their best to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills in their work. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. The pupils work very well collaboratively in teams and with partners.

123. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, high expectations and develop very good relationships with pupils. Most pupils learn very well because clear targets are set at the start of every lesson. In Year 5 and 6 dance lessons, very good pace and challenge created a vibrant learning experience; encouraging pupils to experiment with their use of sequences involving canon and unison. As a result, they achieved very well, successfully developing skilful routines. As the challenge is high, pupils respond very positively and learn very well. They work very well collaboratively to ensure their routines meet the high standards required. A very good, novel programme of martial arts and dance in Year 7 leads to imaginative responses by pupils. The Chiltern group are very well taught and make good progress as a result. The teaching of hockey, rugby and football that was observed was also of very good quality and pupils achieve well in these activities. There is, however, a need to develop the formal assessment of work in order to give all pupils better feedback on their performance.

124. Leadership is very good and strong management is already having an effect on this developing department. There is strong emphasis upon teamwork. Clear targets for development

are well identified. Nearly all pupils have the opportunity to develop their skills in an area that they can enjoy. The department makes a strong contribution to the social, cultural, spiritual and moral development of pupils. The wide range of extra-curricular sports activities provides very good opportunities for all pupils. The gifted and talented sports players have lots of opportunities to play competitive sport. The Sportsmark Award application shows the success of this work. Involvement with local sports teams is also developing well.

125. Improvement since the last inspection has been substantial. The new team are well focused upon improving further their very good practice.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Provision in PSHCE is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses:

- The PSHCE programme is delivered by a committed team of teachers.
- Lessons have a positive impact on pupils' personal development.
- Provision of citizenship across the curriculum has not been audited.
- A coherent whole school programme for PSHCE has yet to be developed.

Commentary

126. The standard of work produced in Years 5 and 6 is average and achievement is satisfactory in lessons, which are often based on the 'circle time' format, which is common in primary schools. In Years 7 and 8, pupils are learning new skills of co-operation and compromise in their lessons. Achievement here is good and standards are above average.

127. In a Year 5 lesson, pupils reviewed the reasons why some children bully others. In a Year 6 class, the lesson focused on how to behave responsibly in Internet chat rooms. Teaching and learning were satisfactory in both. They addressed sensitive subjects effectively, although the latter lesson was too teacher directed. The programme for PSHCE in Years 5 and 6 supports pupils as they settle into the school before broadening into a study of topics relating to the needs of these year groups, such as an awareness of dangerous situations and their relationships with friends.

128. Pupils in Year 7 complete thorough research into aspects of addiction and obsession to produce detailed display information on topics such as drugs, alcohol, anorexia and oniomania (addiction to shopping). During the inspection, they were planning a 30 second TV advert for an imaginary product, as an exercise to focus on the power of advertising and the problems of working together. In Year 8 a very good lesson involved pupils developing their team skills through a problem-solving task in teams of four. Pupils in Year 8 have also been trained as 'Active Listeners' and are successfully providing counselling for younger pupils on a range of topics. The quality of teaching and learning in these years is good, although over the whole school it is satisfactory.

EXAMPLE OF OUTSTANDING PRACTICE

An example of a lesson developing co-operative and problem solving skills.

A restless group of lower-attaining Year 8 pupils seemed an unsuitable cohort for a lesson on team building skills. Their individual needs and demands for attention could easily have detracted from the successful achievement of the learning outcomes of this problem-solving task; to develop skills of co-operation and compromise. But they listened attentively as the teacher told them of the task; in groups of four, they were to stand on a double page broadsheet sheet of newspaper, then devise ways of continuing to do the same thing as after each round the paper halved in size until it was A4. The approach to problem solving was outlined; 'brainstorm, choose, adapt, think of health and safety, practice; Go!'

As the paper got smaller so the groups dropped out until the winners stood triumphantly, two boys each on one foot with a partner on his back. All then settled down to the writing task; to outline their group idea for a problem solving task to set the others next week. The learning outcomes were successfully met in a lesson pupils enjoyed.

129. Currently there is no head of department. A teacher has taken on responsibility for the programme in Years 7 and 8. He has planned a course and has liaised with the science department to prepare a scheme of work, which meets the statutory requirements for the teaching of sex education. There is also a module on citizenship that focuses on participation in school and community based activities. This recognises the needs of others both locally and internationally and culminates in a charity fund raising event. Despite the lack of a head of department, leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory, although the whole school programme currently lacks coherence.

130. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Arrangements are in hand to ensure that statutory requirements in relation to the delivery of the citizenship curriculum will be met. As yet, there has been no mapping of those topics that are also being taught in other subjects or delivered through the pastoral curriculum, nor has the school developed a means of assessing pupils' personal development, such as those being tried at present through the young leaders' award.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	5
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	5
Value for money provided by the school	5
Overall standards achieved	5
Pupils' achievement	5
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	3
Attendance	3
Attitudes	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The quality of education provided by the school	5
The quality of teaching	5
How well pupils learn	5
The quality of assessment	5
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	4
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	2
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	4
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	5
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	4
The quality of the school's links with the community	3
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3
The leadership and management of the school	4
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	4
The effectiveness of management	4

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).