

INSPECTION REPORT

LAKERS SCHOOL

Coleford, Gloucestershire

LEA area: Gloucestershire

Unique reference number: 115774

Headteacher: Mrs. Alison Elliott

Lead inspector: Michael Merchant

Dates of inspection: 1st – 5th December 2003

Inspection number: 258686

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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Terms used in this report

*Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are at **Key Stage 3**, having transferred in most cases from their primary schools at the end of **Key Stage 2** after Year 6. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are at **Key Stage 4** of their education. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 follow courses and Programmes of Study set out in the National Curriculum. A course of religious education is a requirement for pupils of all ages at school.*

*At the end of Year 9, pupils aged 14 take national tests in English, mathematics and science. In all subjects of the National Curriculum, teachers also make their own assessments of what the pupils know, understand and can do at age 14 years. At the end of Year 11, pupils aged 16 may take examinations in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (**GCSE**). Others may follow courses leading to the award of the General National Vocational Qualification (**GNVQ**) or the National Vocational Qualification (**NVQ**).*

*Inspectors judge the **standards** reached by pupils by comparing their attainments with national test and examination results, or by the levels of performance expected for pupils of the same age nationally. The pupils' **achievements** reflect whether they are doing well enough. These judgements take account of the educational **value added** over time. In this report, **similar schools** are defined as those with similar standards when pupils enter the school.*

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	833
School address:	Five Acres Coleford Gloucestershire
Postcode:	GL16 7QW
Telephone number:	01594 832263
Fax number:	01594 832486
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Nick Davis
Date of previous inspection:	17 th September 2001

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Lakers is an average sized comprehensive school educating 833 boys and girls aged 11 to 16 years. There are more boys than girls at the school and the school roll has grown steadily over the last five years. The school is situated just outside the village of Coleford in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, and many pupils travel long distances to it. The attainment of pupils when they enter the school varies from year to year, but is generally below average; the school does not have a completely comprehensive mixture of pupils joining it in Year 7. Those pupils aged 16 who left school in 2003 had entered the school with well below average standards. There are pockets of significant social and economic deprivation in this rural area and many pupils come from comparatively disadvantaged backgrounds, even though overall, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly average. Almost all pupils are of white British backgrounds and none speak English as an additional language. The number of pupils with special educational needs, including those with statements, is above average. Special educational needs include dyslexia, moderate learning difficulties, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and multisensory impairment.

The school attained Investors in People status in 2001.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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19338	Graham Ellis	Lay inspector	
22958	Terry Bailess	Team inspector	English
18886	Francesco Ruggiero	Team inspector	Mathematics
7428	Roy Jardine	Team inspector	Science
31779	Vivian Harrison	Team inspector	Design and technology
30973	Geoff Hancock	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
32115	John Foster	Team inspector	French English as an additional language
32122	Judith Straw	Team inspector	History
7465	Richard Brent	Team inspector	Geography Citizenship
18261	Tony Hill	Team inspector	Art and design Special educational needs
30675	Helen Rudeforth	Team inspector	Music
17233	Glyniss Yates	Team inspector	Physical education
18673	Richard Wilkins	Team inspector	Religious education

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Lakers is an **effective school** and provides a **good quality of education** for its pupils. It has transformed itself since the last inspection. The school community is an exciting place in which to learn because the inspirational leadership by the headteacher, well supported by governors and other key staff, has ensured that all pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well. Standards of work seen are average in Years 9 and 11 and the school is successful at getting the best out of boys, who achieve better than boys do nationally. Teaching and learning are good in all years with much that is excellent. The school provides **very good value for money**.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The energy, purpose and drive of teaching in the majority of lessons means that pupils achieve well and attain standards that are average overall. Teaching and learning are good throughout the school with much that is very good or excellent.
- The leadership of the headteacher is determined, inspirational and highly effective and has provided the unremitting drive to push up standards.
- The school makes good use of assessment information to both evaluate its work and set clear targets for improvement for its pupils.
- A creative and enterprising curriculum caters well for all pupils and prepares them well for life.
- Behaviour and attitudes to learning are good because staff give pupils the confidence to learn.
- The school cares for, guides and supports its pupils well and does all it can to help pupils along.
- The school has forged effective partnerships with its parents, other schools and the community, which contribute to its success.
- Standards and achievement are not high enough in religious education.
- Too few subjects make a planned contribution to the development of ICT¹ skills.

Since the last inspection in 1998, the school has made **very good improvement**. Standards have improved from below average to average and teaching and learning are consistently good. Attendance has improved from below average to average and the school makes far better use of assessment to push up achievement. The school is now well led and managed. All the key issues from the previous inspection have been fully met.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11, compared with:	all schools			similar schools
	2001	2002	2003	2003
	D	E	D	B

*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 9.*

The school does well for its pupils. **Pupils' achievement is good and standards overall are average in all Years.** This is particularly impressive because pupil attainment on entry is below average and in some years well below average. The three core subjects of English, mathematics and science, are at the forefront of this drive to push up standards, particularly in Years 10 and 11, because teaching and learning are consistently good, often with much that is very good and some excellent. The effective leadership and management of all three of these subjects have provided an inspirational drive to continuously improve pupil achievement. The national picture of boys underperforming compared with girls has been greatly minimised at Lakers. In business education,

¹ Information and communication technology

ICT and history, very good teaching leads to above average standards and very good achievement. Standards are below average and pupils' achievement unsatisfactory in religious education in Years 10 and 11 because of weaknesses in teaching.

The school has developed a good ethos for learning and pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour in classes and around the school are good because the school sets high expectations for their conduct. Pupils are interested in learning because relationships between pupils and teachers are good. In a small minority of lessons, learning is held back by the inappropriate behaviour of a few pupils.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The school provides a good quality of education for its pupils. Teaching and learning are good overall and the use of assessment is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. This is a very real reflection of the school's ethos of a relentless drive to push up standards. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan interesting, imaginative and challenging lessons so that pupils are eager to learn. The methods used succeed in retaining pupils' interests and motivation and thus moving them quickly on. Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils and have a significant and very positive impact on the progress of pupils in many lessons.

The curriculum across the school has many good and very good features, but, because requirements are not met in ICT and the school does not comply with the requirements for a daily act of collective worship, it is overall unsatisfactory. Opportunities for enrichment are very good. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. The school has good procedures for care, welfare, health and safety. Pupils receive good support, advice and guidance for their personal development. Induction is good and the involvement of pupils in the school's work and development is also good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. Under the highly effective, determined and inspirational leadership of the headteacher, an extremely clear vision for the school has been forged, with a strong focus on high quality teaching and learning, which is succeeding in pushing up standards. The school's decision to concentrate its improvement strategy on raising standards in Years 10 and 11 is entirely appropriate. Effective, cohesive teams have been built at all levels in the school. The governing body has made a strong contribution to the success of the school by fully carrying out its role as a critical friend. The school meets nearly all statutory requirements. However, not all subjects make a planned contribution to the development of pupils' ICT skills and a daily act of collective worship does not always take place. Most subject leaders are effective and have created a strong ethos for sustained improvement. There is a highly effective improvement plan, the key focus of which is to nurture high standards through effective teaching. The highly effective monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and intelligent use of assessment information have contributed greatly to the school's very good improvement.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Both parents and pupils display a good level of satisfaction with the school. On the basis of the small number attending the parents' meeting and the limited response to the parents' questionnaire, parents feel the school is accessible, that they are welcomed and that members of staff are approachable. A significant minority of parents responding to the questionnaire had concerns with homework arrangements. The inspection team's view is that homework works well. The overwhelming majority of pupils are happy at the school and feel that they are making good progress.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- improve standards and achievement in religious education,

and to meet statutory requirements;

- make sure that all subjects make a planned contribution to the development of pupils' ICT skills;
- ensure that a daily act of collective worship takes place.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards in work seen are **average** and this represents **good achievement** because most pupils enter the school with below, and in some years well below, standards of prior attainment. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Pupils with special educational needs and those identified as gifted and talented **achieve well**. Pupils' English and mathematical skills are **average**, but their ICT skills are **above average**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school does well for all its pupils. Standards are improving year on year and achievement is high by the end of Year 11.
- The core subjects of English and mathematics have improved markedly.
- The underperformance of boys compared with girls, seen nationally, has been greatly reduced at Lakers.
- The successful implementation of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy and the school's effective approach to improving literacy skills are having a very positive effect on standards.
- In all years the achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good because teachers are sensitive and responsive to their needs.

Commentary

Test and examination results

1. Standards in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were below average compared with all schools nationally and well below average compared with similar schools. These results were an improvement over 2002.
2. Although the comparison with similar schools shows underachievement, the school also has data which enables the progress in cognitive attainment to be tracked from entry to the tests taken in Year 9. This data indicates that achievement was satisfactory. Pupils who took these tests in 2003 entered the school with below average prior attainment.

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	31.8 (31.0)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	34.0 (33.5)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	32.6 (32.5)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 164 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

3. In 2003, results in the GCSE examinations were much better than the test results taken in Year 9, a result of the relentless drive by the school to raise standards in Years 10 and 11. The school did well by its pupils by the time they reached Year 9 and they achieved well in 2003. The school has made very good progress with its challenging targets, all of which they have comfortably met over the last two years. Standards by Year 11 were average overall. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C in 2003 was just below average compared with all schools, but well above average compared with similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining one or more grades A* to G was even better. It was well above average when compared with all schools and very high in comparison with similar schools.

This placed the school in the top five per cent of similar schools in the country for pupils attaining one or more GCSE grades A* to G. Boys did well; their results in 2003 were better than those of the girls. The school has pushed up standards relentlessly in Years 10 and 11 (this was the focus of their improvement plan) and they have continued to rise year on year. The achievement of pupils overall was good.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	46 (30)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	86 (81)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	31.3 (28.4)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 175 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

Standards and achievement

4. Work seen confirms the improving standards evidenced in the test and examination results. The improvements on the quality of teaching and learning, which had such a big impact on improving GCSE results in 2003, are now having an impact on pupils' standards in Years 7 to 9. In these years, standards overall are average (an improvement over the 2003 test results) and pupils' achievement is good. The three core subjects of English, mathematics and science, are at the forefront of this drive to push up standards and work seen in all three of these subjects is at the national average. This is because teaching and learning are consistently good in these subjects, often with much that is very good and some excellent. Moreover, the effective leadership and management of all three of these subjects have provided an inspirational drive to continuously improve pupil achievement. The work that has been done in English to push up the standards of boys is particularly impressive and the national picture of boys underperforming has been greatly minimised at Lakers. The school does not monitor the results of its small number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, but the evidence from work seen shows that these pupils achieve as well as others in the school.
5. These three subjects have also been very effective at introducing the National Key Stage 3 Strategy into their teaching. The focus on sharp lesson introductions and the implementation of an effective whole-school approach to developing pupils' literacy skills have all helped to push up standards and achievement. None of these subjects, however, is making enough use of ICT in their teaching and this is preventing standards from being higher. Other subjects, such as design and technology and religious education, have been slow to bring the National Key Stage 3 Strategy into their lessons and here standards are below average.
6. In Years 7 to 9, pupils, both boys and girls, are achieving very well in ICT, and history because of the overall very good teaching. Good teaching is leading to good pupil achievement in art and design, geography and French.
7. The pattern of overall average standards and good achievement is also seen in Years 10 and 11. Very good teaching is fostering exciting learning and rapid gains in knowledge in business education, ICT, art and design, history and physical education. Satisfactory achievement in design and technology and music reflect the overall satisfactory teaching and learning seen. In music, standards have been held back because of staff absences, although the current team are working hard to redress the gaps in pupils' knowledge. Standards are below average and pupils do not achieve highly enough in religious education. This is because teachers expect too little of pupils, while at the same time not matching work well enough to their needs.

8. In all years the achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good because teachers are sensitive and responsive to their needs. These pupils are frequently provided with effective support in lessons, which ensures that their progress is good. It is also good overall, when support is not available, as teaching staff are aware of pupils' needs and work extremely hard to ensure that appropriate strategies and resources are utilised. Although the school does not identify explicitly their gifted and talented pupils, they achieve as well as others in the school. This is because teachers are aware of the varied needs of these pupils and plan thought-provoking lessons, which allows them to realise their potential.
9. The pupils who have a Statement of Special Educational Needs also make good progress. An appropriate mixture of support in lessons and individually from teaching assistants plus a good appreciation of their problems from most teaching staff are critical factors in their progress.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The school promotes the pupils' behaviour and attitudes to work **well**. They display good levels of confidence and self-esteem, and attendance rates are **average**. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' behaviour in lessons, in and around the school is good because the school sets high expectations for their conduct.
- In a small minority of lessons, learning is held back by the inappropriate behaviour of a few pupils.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to their work and are interested in their activities because relationships between pupils and teachers are good.
- Pupils are confident, with good self-esteem.

Commentary

10. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their work have significantly improved since the previous inspection and are now major factors in sustaining the good achievement seen in the school. With the introduction of a more comprehensive and consistent approach, the school sets high standards for conduct, which are conscientiously and consistently reinforced by the staff. This has resulted in the creation and maintenance of a positive learning environment. Behaviour by the overwhelming majority of pupils is good and frequently very good in lessons. It is also generally good in and around the school. In a small minority of lessons, learning is held back by the inappropriate behaviour of a few pupils. The school, through the newly appointed teaching and learning coach, is working hard to help teachers develop strategies to cope with these sometimes challenging pupils. The relatively large number of temporary exclusions is the product of the school's vigorous approach of no longer tolerating disruptive and antisocial behaviour. There is a degree of disorderly pushing in corridors, although this is not of an aggressive nature. No bullying or aggressive behaviour was observed, a testament to the highly effective 'buddy system'², which is run by one of the governors. The school has effective procedures to deal with bullying incidents when they arise, although pupils state these have considerably reduced, largely as a result of the positive initiatives. There is some less satisfactory behaviour by a very small minority of pupils, mainly girls, but this is handled well by staff.

² A scheme by which Year 11 pupils are trained to give confidential advice to younger pupils who are experiencing bullying or other problems at home or in school.

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	803	100	6

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

11. Pupils enjoy school and speak of it with enthusiasm. They appreciate and support the drive for improvement. The staff's clear expectations and the enthusiastic teaching successfully motivate pupils and encourage learning very well. The school has worked hard to promote a stronger ethos of community by pupils and whilst this is still developing, there is now a sense of commitment and belonging with consequentially positive impacts on learning.
12. In lessons, pupils are focused on their work, pay attention to their teachers and enthusiastically join in activities and discussions. The school successfully promotes their self-esteem and sense of achievement with the celebration of personal as well as academic performance. As a result, they are keen to talk about their work and achievements, are self-aware and express themselves openly and confidently. They are engaged in their learning and maintain good levels of concentration, working well in groups and assisting each other.
13. The good relationships are a major strength and form a strong and positive underpinning to pupils' learning. Pupils are encouraged to explore their own and others' feelings and concerns in an atmosphere within which staff appreciate their opinions. Pupils feel valued by teachers and other adults and they reciprocate accordingly. Pupils work well together. The majority are polite and mature, listening with patience and sensitivity to each other, for example, in assemblies.
14. The promotion of pupils' personal development permeates all the school's activities and this is very well developed during their school life. The school's ethos is inclusive and caring. Members of staff are good role models and their reinforcement of moral standards is reflected in pupils' good understanding and respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others, for example, the open and sensitive discussion of pupils' personal situations in relation to lesson topics. The school celebrates different ethnic and cultural backgrounds so that pupils appreciate the positive benefits from this diversity with a total lack of tension. There is good promotion of pupils' spiritual and cultural development. This is particularly so in the expressive arts, for example, the exploration of aboriginal art and blues music.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	9.1	School data	0.6
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

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

15. Since the previous inspection, the school has successfully undertaken a number of initiatives aimed at improving attendance. Unauthorised absence is now half of the national rate. This more focused approach, involving good liaison with the education welfare service, has resulted in an improved attendance level, which is currently around the national average. Most pupils attend regularly and arrive on time.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Overall, the quality of education is **good**. Teaching and learning are **good**, as is the school's use of assessment to drive up standards. The curriculum, although very good in many of its features, is rendered **unsatisfactory** overall because the school does not meet statutory requirements for all subjects to make a contribution to pupils' ICT skills. The school cares for and guides its pupils well.

Teaching and learning

Teaching, learning and assessment are **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The strength of teaching and learning is a very real reflection of the school's ethos of a relentless move to push up standards.
- Teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan interesting, imaginative and challenging lessons.
- The methods used by most teachers are diverse and succeed in retaining pupils' interests and motivation and thus helping them learn quickly.
- Teachers make good use of the time and resources available to them, breaking down learning into small, manageable assignments.
- Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils and have a significant and very positive impact on the progress of pupils in many lessons.
- The whole-school assessment policy is a model of good practice.

Commentary

16. The school has significantly improved the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. There are examples of outstanding practice; the overwhelming majority are very good or good and only in a small number of lessons is teaching and learning unsatisfactory. The consistent strength of teaching and learning is a very real reflection of the school's ethos of a relentless move to push up standards. Most lessons are characterised by a real focus on well-structured planning, pace, challenge and innovation. Pupils are made to think and learning is exciting. Teaching, which is fast and energetic, and which encourages all to work at full pace is the norm. In this way, learning is extended and standards driven up significantly.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 112 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4 (3.6%)	25 (22.3%)	51 (45.5%)	28 (25%)	4 (3.6%)	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. In Years 7 to 9, the best teaching and learning are in ICT, history and physical education where it is very good overall. It is the imaginative and dynamic teaching seen in these subjects that excites pupils to learn. This is complemented by a picture of universally good teaching in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, often with much that is very good. This is the real driving force behind the school's success at improving standards and achievement. The least effective teaching is in design and technology, music and religious education. In these subjects, teaching and learning are only satisfactory because some teachers give insufficient attention to the needs of the different groups of pupils in their classes.
18. The picture is stronger in Years 10 and 11. Again, teaching and learning are good in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, but also very good in art and design, business education, history, ICT and physical education. This consistent pattern of effective teaching and

learning is down to the inspirational and determined leadership and management of the headteacher, her senior team and heads of subjects. Great care has been taken to put in place and nurture proficient teams of imaginative and energetic teachers who are completely immersed in Lakers' ethos of improving achievement. In only one subject, religious education, is teaching or learning less than satisfactory. Here achievement, as in Years 7 to 9, is held back because teachers pay too little attention to the learning needs of all pupils in their classes.

19. In English, teachers inspire their pupils to learn by using stimulating and lively activities, visual and oral work. In mathematics, pupils respond very positively and work very well together, as whole classes and particularly in pair work. In both of these subjects, however, an absence of regular lessons in the computer suite denies pupils the opportunity to practise and reinforce their ICT skills.
20. In nearly all lessons, teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan interesting, imaginative and challenging lessons. Beginning with a strong focus on what pupils are expected to learn, lessons have crisp introductions that set the scene for the learning to come. Pupils are fired up with enthusiasm as a result of teachers' quick-fire, probing questions and pertinent use of current, topical material, which brings the lesson to life. The National Key Stage 3 Strategy has been put into effect with great success in English, mathematics and science and has done much to structure and refine very effective practice. This is one big reason why standards in these three subjects are forging ahead.
21. The methods used by teachers are imaginative and diverse and succeed in retaining pupils' interests and motivation and thus moving them quickly on. In many lessons, pupils easily and readily move into short brainstorming sessions in which individuals share their ideas and then present these to the class. Teachers of history and of business education are particularly adept at using methods like these to move learning on at a very quick pace. Pupils are at ease and confident when working in pairs, and co-operate and collaborate when working in small groups. Independent learning is being effectively fostered by these methods and, as a result, progresses at a good rate. Pupils who are gifted and talented respond well to this high level of challenge and are often motivated to work flat out and thus achieve well. One example of outstanding practice in teaching and learning was seen in a Year 8 mathematics lesson.

Example of outstanding practice

The teacher's use of meticulous and detailed planning, structure, organisation and teaching methods for the Year 8 special group is highly effective. This results in work and challenge that is very well matched to pupils' special educational needs. For example, different approaches are briskly used until one girl's confidence is secure in recognising a simple fraction of a drawn shape. Another group of pupils rapidly consolidate their skills in multiplying by ten and 100, and as a result of very skilful questioning by the teacher, they focus on why they know their division calculations are correct, and very confidently and quickly extend their competencies to include finding answers involving decimals. The National Numeracy Strategy has been impressively adapted to provide for the four groups established within the class and facilitates the well-planned and highly focused support of the assistants assigned to each group. Under the teacher's highly competent direction, these innovative arrangements result in pupils' high levels of concentration and engagement. This raises achievement well beyond expectation, and represents a model for others in the team, particularly on the planned and effective use of groupings and support assistants. One of the impressive outcomes of this highly effective teaching is the very high achievement of a boy, who is now working at Level 4 of the National Curriculum, having previously been exempt from following the standard curriculum.

22. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well across the school because the school takes great care to ensure that provision for these pupils is good. One reason why these pupils achieve so well is the effective work of the large team of learning support assistants and learning support teachers. Small groups of pupils with low literacy and numeracy levels are withdrawn from lessons and taught well by these learning assistants and the special education needs co-ordinator. They use a good range of specialist resources, including computer programs, to raise pupils' standard of attainment and hence their self-esteem and confidence.

23. Although the provision for special education needs is effectively established, subject areas vary in their use of these resources and expertise provided by the school. ICT, for instance, makes very good use of the individual education plans provided for pupils with special educational needs and adapts teaching methods and learning resources to enable them to benefit fully from the programmes of study. The science team also supports these pupils in Years 10 and 11 by adapting the curriculum to meet their needs and ensuring that they effectively overcome barriers to their learning. In contrast, design and technology has recognised weaknesses in this area of their work, but is planning to develop adaptive tools and resources to fully support those experiencing learning difficulties in the team. Individual education plans give good information on individual pupils and suggest helpful strategies for managing their needs in the classroom, but many targets are not sufficiently specific to enable the pupil or teacher to track progress against them.
24. Assessment is used well to help pupils improve their work and raise standards, especially in Years 10 and 11. Good quality standardised and internal assessments provide teachers and senior managers with a wealth of information that is used effectively to monitor pupils' progress and to set new targets in regular reviews with them. Pupils know their targets and those in Years 10 and 11 in particular, reflect on the quality of their work and are well aware of what they need to do to improve. Pupils are set or banded appropriately within subjects on the basis of standardised assessments and most of the work set is matched well to their needs and abilities.
25. However, in a minority of weaker lessons, activities are not so well matched and pupils do not achieve as well. The school's central database of pupils' targets and assessments of current performance is potentially a very effective tool for identifying those underachieving or doing particularly well, and the school is implementing a well thought out 'traffic light' coding system to highlight them. Good strategies are being employed to intervene quickly with targeted underachieving pupils. However, the system is only now being fully implemented in Years 9 and 11 because of technical problems in its development and its full impact is yet to be seen as it is implemented throughout the school year.
26. Most teachers' day-to-day marking is diagnostic and helpful; they give pupils useful verbal and written guidance on how to improve and are particularly effective in ICT, history and geography. However, marking does vary in quality in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science where the best is very good, but some provides less guidance on how to improve.

The curriculum

The curriculum across the school has many good and very good features but, because requirements are not met in ICT and the school does not comply with the requirements for a daily act of collective worship, it is overall **unsatisfactory**. Opportunities for enrichment are **very good**. Accommodation and resources are **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The organisation of pupils into teaching groups based on learning styles is innovative and offers the potential to further improve standards of learning.
- Opportunities for enrichment contribute very well to pupils' attitudes to learning.
- There is good provision for pupils with special educational needs and for citizenship.
- Too few subjects plan to teach ICT skills.

Commentary

27. There has been an effective review of the organisation of the school curriculum to ensure that it provides appropriate learning opportunities for all pupils. This has resulted in pupils being grouped for teaching according to their learning style. As a result, teachers find it easier to plan

lessons and the quality of learning is good. This has had a big impact on helping to raise achievement.

28. The allocation of time for the school day is similar to most schools in the country. The taught day of five hourly lessons is appropriate for most subjects, but the allocation for English is limited. There are 20 minutes of tutorial time each afternoon, but the support for learning during this time is variable and too much time is wasted. There are well-planned house assemblies each week. These encourage pupils to reflect on the school community, their own lives and the role of others, and the skills they need to gain success. The assemblies also make a strong contribution to the overall pastoral provision and are one reason why behaviour and attitudes to learning are good.
29. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is broad, balanced and relevant to the needs of the pupils at Lakers. All subjects of the National Curriculum are included; there is good provision for drama and ICT lessons. The curriculum for citizenship has been planned most effectively. Curriculum links with primary schools are sufficient to enable teachers to plan for continuity in learning in the core subjects, but they have insufficient opportunities to work with their primary colleagues.
30. In Years 10 and 11, pupils take a broad range of courses that contribute to the subjects of the core National Curriculum; this is enhanced by the addition of applied GCSEs in ICT and business and the Certificate of Achievement. Curriculum organisation provides all pupils with a choice of one of three routes. All follow a core curriculum, but additional subject choices direct pupils to an academic, practical or vocational course of study. All pupils in Year 11 enjoy a well-organised work experience programme. This has led to more mature attitudes to learning, better relationships between pupils and teachers and thus better standards of learning, and has played an important part in doubling the school's A* to C record.
31. Religious education is taught according to the agreed syllabus and there is a carefully planned citizenship and PSHE³ course. Provision for PHSE is good. The range of topics included supports pupils' personal development well and offers effective guidance on issues such as sex education, drug misuse and healthy living. Teachers are well prepared and so lessons deal sensitively with these subjects. Teaching and learning take place in tutorial times as well as in discrete lessons. The school is soon to be involved with the Healthy Schools Programme, which will support and extend the personal development programme.
32. In spite of the restrictions imposed by the need for many pupils to catch buses home, there are very good enrichment opportunities after school in most subjects, and particularly in music, drama and sport. These play a very big role in fostering good pupil-teacher relationships, broadens pupils' outlook and so foster better learning. The level of participation is very good, especially in music. Pupils are keen to participate in school concerts and drama productions. There have been many interesting educational visits to theatres and places farther afield. There are a good number of after-hours sporting activities and the school has produced many athletes, cross-country runners, rugby, football, netball, hockey and other teams, which compete locally. The school makes good use of its limited budget to run a wide range of activities during the summer holidays, which benefit pupils, school and local community alike.
33. The school provides good access to all curriculum areas for pupils who use wheelchairs. The physical education team has introduced the competitive game of boccio to develop and utilise the ball skills of physically disabled pupils. There are insufficient specialist resources such as rising sinks and adjustable tables to ensure that wheelchair pupils are fully comfortable in all working areas.
34. The inclusion centre, managed by an experienced senior learning support assistant (LSA) is successful in supporting pupils who are losing interest in school and are at risk of permanent exclusion, or who are finding it difficult to adjust to secondary school.

³ Personal, social and health education

35. Gifted and talented pupils are identified from information in Year 6 test scores and that passed on during visits of support staff to primary feeder schools. The co-ordinator for gifted and talented work is developing a rapidly improving provision that can celebrate success in many areas. Work with a local media group on this year's 'summer challenge', has enabled a film to be made, which has been shown at the Gloucester Festival, and which has been put forward for a national award. The local rugby club is generous in its support for talented pupils, who are coached by this very successful team on the club's 'excellence day'. Productive links with the local MP and MEP have been made following a visit of gifted pupils to the Houses of Parliament. An artist in residence is currently teaching three-dimensional studies to a small group of talented pupils and local musicians support groups of talented pupils in forming rock and steel band groups. Such activities are extending the skills and abilities of the identified groups.
36. The school has satisfactory accommodation and resources. The main buildings are well appointed, decorated and maintained and this helps to foster good learning. There are pleasant quiet areas that are well used by the pupils. The new expressive arts and English teaching spaces support effective learning and have led to higher standards. The information resource centre is well equipped and offers a wide range of research facilities. The school has good access for wheelchair pupils and there is little damage or graffiti to be seen. Displays in some areas are of a high standard.
37. The remaining temporary buildings do little to encourage effective learning and need to be replaced. The physical education facilities are unsatisfactory. There are too few ICT specialist areas and the support team work in cramped conditions, which limits the effectiveness of the service they provide.
38. The recent purchase of interactive white boards is a positive feature in extending learning opportunities. A local charitable organisation is very supportive of the school in purchasing equipment each year. There is a problem of access to ICT resources and the pupil to computer ratio is still below the national average. Most subject areas have satisfactory resources, but there is a shortage of ICT resources in science and in design and technology.

Care, guidance and support

The school has **good** procedures for care, welfare, health and safety. Pupils receive **good** support, advice and guidance for their personal development. Induction is **good** and the involvement of pupils in the school's work and development is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school has a strong and effective commitment to care and welfare.
- Arrangements for seeking, valuing and acting on pupils' views are good.
- Information and guidance on careers and further study are good.
- The new house system provides a good basis for monitoring pupils' progress and personal development.

Commentary

39. There are effective procedures relating to health and welfare, first aid and child protection. There is good co-ordination with outside agencies so that further support can be provided in appropriate cases. The school receives regular professional support on health and safety from the local authority. The supervision of pupils is generally good. These positive arrangements reflect the school's strong commitment to care and welfare.
40. Pupils are happy in school. They feel part of a caring community, in which they are confident, trust the staff and are aware of how they can obtain help. Teachers and other staff know them

well. The school has recently moved to a system of pastoral care based on a house system with pupils. These arrangements are still developing and in the process of review; they provide a good basis for monitoring pupils' progress and personal development. Staff can quickly recognise pupils' needs and thereby provide good standards of pastoral support and care. Staff act quickly to assist any pupil who is concerned or in need of support. The inclusion centre provides good support for potentially disaffected pupils.

41. The school's overall arrangements for involving pupils in its work and development are good. There is an open ethos in which pupils' views are valued and they are encouraged to contribute to the running of the school. They are encouraged to fully express themselves in lessons and are involved in the setting of targets. The school has sought pupils' views through questionnaires on issues and acted on the results; for example, designing the rewards system.
42. The new house system provides for a representative from each of the tutor groups, house councils and the full school council. Members gain valuable experience at the frequent meetings in organisation and representation while regular feedback involves all pupils through the tutor group sessions. The school acts on pupils' suggestions, for example, the provision of lockers. School council members have certain responsibilities, for example, conducting parents and visitors around the school. Year 11 pupils also undertake valuable responsibilities as prefects. A number of them provide a responsible support to younger pupils as 'buddies'. They have received appropriate and significant training for this role, which is valued by younger pupils and develops their leadership in the life of the school.
43. The close working relationships with feeder primary schools ensure comprehensive induction arrangements, which involve current Years 5 and 6 pupils. As a result, pupils settle in quickly to their new school. Older pupils are provided with good programmes of information and guidance on careers and further study co-ordinated by a designated Connexions personal adviser. These arrangements are comprehensive and inclusive with good support to all pupils irrespective of their abilities or aspirations.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Parents are **well informed** and the school maintains **good and effective** relationships with them and the community.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are well informed about the school's activities and are appreciative of its achievements.
- The good relationships between parents and the school ensure strong parental support.
- The school has good links with the community, other schools and colleges.

Commentary

44. The previous inspection report indicated an unsatisfactory situation in respect of information provided to parents, unsatisfactory parental involvement in the school and unsatisfactory provision of information on children's progress. Since then, these deficiencies have been rectified. Parents provide good general and financial support. On the basis of the small number attending the parents' meeting and the limited response to the parents' questionnaire, parents feel the school is accessible, that they are welcomed and that members of staff are approachable.
45. The school communicates frequently with parents and, as a result, the majority are engaged with the school's educational direction and are better able to support their children, for example, with homework. There are frequent, well-produced, attractive and informative newsletters. The school also provides parents with a number of other informative documents, for example the Parents' Handbook, Key Stage 4 Curriculum booklet and the practical 'Handy Hints for Y7

Parents', which gives valuable advice on how parents can contribute to their children's learning. The prospectus is in an attractive and readable style while the annual governors' report is well produced and informative. Parents have been consulted on the school's improvement plan. A significant minority of parents responding to the questionnaire had concerns with homework arrangements. The inspection team's view is that homework works well and the homework diaries provide a good link between parents and the school.

46. A significant minority of parents do not feel that they are kept well informed of their children's progress. There are three formal consultation opportunities for parents throughout the year. These are now much better supported than previously by parents and reflect stronger links and improved confidence by parents in the school. Some parents are concerned about the new arrangements whereby they see their child's academic tutor rather have discussions with subject teachers. However, parents with particular concerns are still able to arrange meetings with specific staff.
47. The pupils' annual reports have significantly improved and are now of a good standard. For each subject, they provide a course synopsis with evaluations on general progress and subject skills. Comments on strengths and achievements clearly indicate children's knowledge, understanding and skills. Relevant targets are provided in each subject and there is provision for pupils' self-evaluation, and general tutor comments show good knowledge of individuals.
48. The school has established good links with the community. There are links with commercial organisations through the Education Business Partnership and a number of local companies sponsor the school's calendar. Local police officers are regular visitors to the school and take part in assemblies. The school's recent 'Family Learning Weekend' was very well supported. There are good links through the expressive arts, for example, the school's steel band has an extensive range of local engagements. There are good links and transfer arrangements for pupils with all the local colleges. There is useful joint working with other secondary schools, for example, an Internet link and correspondence with a school in Kenya. The school works closely with its feeder primary schools on joint initiatives on issues such as attendance.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The governance of the school is **good**. The headteacher's leadership is inspirational and is **highly effective**. Other key staff provide **good** leadership and together they ensure that the effectiveness of management is **very good**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Under the determined and inspirational leadership of the headteacher, an extremely clear vision for the school has been forged with a strong focus on high quality teaching and learning that is driving up standards. Effective, cohesive teams have been built at all levels in the school.
- The governing body has made a strong contribution to the success of the school by fully carrying out its role as a critical friend.
- Middle managers are effective and have created a strong ethos for sustained improvement in their subjects.
- There is a highly effective improvement plan, the key focus of which is to nurture high standards through effective teaching.
- The highly effective monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning and intelligent use of assessment information has contributed greatly to the school's very good improvement.
- The very strong linkage between the school's development plan and its financial planning enables the school to fully evaluate its spending.

Commentary

49. The high quality of leadership and management of the school is one of the main reasons why it is making such rapid improvement. The school was designated as having serious weaknesses at the last inspection. The headteacher immediately and successfully developed an extremely clear vision for the development and improvement of the school. This vision has been driven by a clear focus on the individual pupil and an appreciation of the pivotal importance of teaching and learning as the motor that drives up standards. The headteacher's decision to concentrate the school's improvement strategy on raising standards in Years 10 and 11 is entirely appropriate; the fruits of which are seen in the greatly improved results at GCSE. The headteacher's determination to drive up standards was not, at first, shared with the entire school community. Nevertheless, she has not shied away from the many difficult decisions needed to improve governance, teaching and learning and thus raise standards. She now has won the support of the overwhelming majority of staff and the total support of her very effective team of senior managers. With very good support from a well-informed, and when needs be, critical governing body, her goals for an improving school are now being realised. The school's vision is very well expressed in the school's improvement plan, which is entirely appropriate with its key focus on nurturing teaching and learning as a means of sustaining high standards.
50. Under the inspirational and highly effective leadership of the headteacher, the school has developed into an ambitious, open, yet self-critical institution. It is completely devoid of complacency and sets itself challenging targets. As a result of the headteacher's superb interpersonal and coaching skills, staff have a great belief in themselves and what they can achieve for the school. One of her great skills is the ability to build effective teams, then delegating real authority to them and so empowering them to reach their goals. The senior leadership team is one such example. Their skills complement each other's perfectly and they have proved to be influential and effective in supporting the headteachers' drive for higher standards. For instance, through their lead on monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and their exemplary use of assessment, they have played a significant part in contributing to the school's very strong improvement.
51. Middle managers are an effective group. Good leadership is now seen in all three of the core subjects. These effective subject leaders have taken their lead from the headteacher and created a very real ethos for improvement in their subjects. This is also the case in business education, art and design, ICT, history, geography and French. These teams have led the way in developing innovative approaches to teaching and learning, imaginative use of assessment data and sensitive, yet highly effective, methods of ensuring high quality in their subject areas.
52. The special educational needs co-ordinator is a very good leader of her team and is a good manager of the complex service based in the learning support centre. Regular team meetings with support staff, along with very good opportunities for their professional development, ensure that the team is always well informed and up to date in their understanding of special educational needs. Excellent relationships are promoted within the team and the very supportive governor and senior management team ensure that the profile of special education needs work is kept appropriately high in the school. The special educational needs co-ordinator ensures that all staff are well informed about the nature of pupils' special educational needs and through the in-service training of all staff ensures that they are well equipped to carry out their role. This is one big reason why pupils with special educational needs are achieving well.
53. The governing body, well informed by the senior managers, is highly supportive, but also asks the critical questions and so holds the school to account. Its committee structure works well and governors have developed very strong links with individual teams in the school and so are well aware of the school's strengths and any areas that need improvement. They are aware that the school fails to meet statutory requirements for ICT across the curriculum and for collective worship. They have appropriately ensured that the former is identified as an area for improvement. They are unable at the moment to meet the requirement for collective worship because of accommodation restraints. They have made a very strong contribution to the success of the school by playing a central role in shaping the overall strategic direction that the school has taken. For instance, they have been fully involved in the school's decision to aim to

become a specialist college and are very active at formulating and reviewing the school's improvement plan and financial planning.

54. Good financial planning helps the school achieve its educational priorities, which are clearly focused on raising standards through improving the quality of teaching and learning. The school is clear about the costs of development, and budgets systematically for all expenditure. The governing body is making a much stronger contribution to strategic planning than at the previous inspection. The principles of best value are very well applied in all areas of expenditure, at whole-school and team level. For example, the quality of services such as grounds maintenance, catering, technical support and insurance, has been significantly improved at a much-reduced cost. Financial control and administration are very effective. Grant funding is very well targeted to meet the needs of pupils, for example, through the University of the First Age, the out-of-hours learning project, and the family learning weekend.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	256,083
Total expenditure	2,462,348
Expenditure per pupil	2,956

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	10,243
Balance carried forward to the next	9,849

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Test and exam results were much improved in 2003, with very good achievement at GCSE.
- Teaching is good, with a strong focus on writing for different purposes; the best lessons engage pupils actively in developing their own learning.
- Tasks are not always well matched to the needs of pupils, particularly in average and lower attaining groups in Years 10 and 11.
- Best practice in assessment and target setting needs to be further developed.
- ICT is underused in lessons, to improve literacy skills.

Commentary

Standards are **average** by the end of Years 9 and 11 and pupils' achievement is **good**. Teaching and learning are **good** in all years and standards are being driven up by **very good** leadership and **good** management. There has been **very good** improvement since the last inspection.

Test and examination results

55. Year 9 test results in 2003 were below the national average, and well below average compared with similar schools. Pupils' achievement was satisfactory. Girls did better than boys, although the difference was in line with national trends. Results were better in mathematics and science than in English. Standards improved, however, from well below average in recent years.
56. GCSE results for English were average, and well above average compared with similar schools. They were also average in English literature, but only a third of pupils took this examination. About two-thirds will take it in 2004. These results show a major improvement over previous years. This represents very good achievement because the standards of this year group in English were well below average when they joined the school, as were their test results at the end of Year 9 in 2001. Boys did as well as girls: much better than seen nationally. At this level, results were better than in mathematics and broadly the same as in science.

Standards and achievement

57. When pupils enter the school, standards in English are below average. By Year 9, their reading and writing are average. This is a big improvement over the test results in 2003. The team of English teachers, under the direction of the new subject leader, has built upon the foundations laid by the previous team leader and has successfully embedded lively, imaginative and thought-provoking lessons that are encouraging pupils to give of their best. As a result, achievement is good throughout the school. Pupils with special educational needs make equal progress alongside their peers because support from specialist staff and teaching assistants during lessons, in Years 7 to 9 especially, is very effective.
58. The great majority of pupils are independent readers. In Years 7 to 9, timetabled library lessons encourage wider reading. Written work is set and marked regularly, with appropriate opportunities for more extended writing. Very good practice was seen in lessons in Years 8 and

9, to encourage pupils to write persuasively in the style of tourist brochures and newspaper reports.

59. Pupils make a good effort to write fully and develop essays in detail. However, boys often do not take enough care to present their written work well. For average and lower attaining pupils, errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation hold back overall standards. Speaking skills are also average. Pupils answer teachers' questions clearly and make constructive contributions to informal paired and small group discussions. With few exceptions, they listen well to teachers and their peers.
60. In Years 10 and 11, relevant skills are developed well. Extended personal and creative writing is well structured and expressive. Higher attaining pupils also write intelligently about literature studied. Essays are usually developed in sufficient depth, with good use of textual detail to substantiate arguments. GCSE coursework is well presented, but technical accuracy remains a significant problem. Access to ICT equipment is limited during lesson time, and there are inconsistencies of approach between classes.

Teaching and learning

61. Pupils achieve well because teaching and learning are consistently good. Teachers manage pupils well in most classes, and positive relationships are formed. They know their subject well and the best lessons are suitably varied, with a range of methods used to engage pupils actively in learning. Staff are also prepared to give additional personal help and guidance, where it is needed, in after-school catch-up sessions and booster classes. As a result, pupils acquire skills and knowledge well. Most try hard to improve their work. Further development of best practice in assessment, including self and peer assessment, could focus their efforts still more clearly and improve knowledge of their own learning.
62. In a minority of lessons, learning is held back because too many activities are planned, so that effort is rushed and there is not enough time to evaluate learning at the end. In average and lower attaining groups in Years 10 and 11, tasks are not always well matched to the learning needs of pupils.

Leadership and management

63. Subject leadership is very good. The curriculum team leader, appointed in September, is very experienced and shows a strong commitment to further improving standards. He provides an excellent role model in his enthusiasm for teaching, and is encouraging greater team working and the sharing of best practice. Management is good. Subject planning is kept under continuing review, and has been well supported by specialist LEA⁴ advisers since the last inspection. A planned programme of lesson observations and checking of work set is yet to be developed to ensure consistency of approach between classes, for example, in the use of homework, best practice in assessment and planning to incorporate ICT skills in lessons.
64. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Pupil achievement is good, as a result of better standards in teaching and learning. Investment in accommodation and resources has created a good learning environment.

Literacy across the curriculum

65. Since the last inspection, the literacy co-ordinator has successfully raised awareness of the importance of teaching literacy skills, with good support from the LEA literacy adviser. There have been annual training days for all staff, and subject teams are expected to incorporate literacy objectives into their schemes of work. There are particularly effective strategies in history, geography, English and ICT lessons. Monitoring of work on literacy is not systematic,

⁴ Local education authority

however, to ensure that good practice is adopted consistently. Standards are broadly average throughout the school, although much scope remains for further improvement, in particular in the technical accuracy of written work. Spelling is a problem across the ability range. All staff should be expected to mark errors consistently and require pupils to correct written work.

66. Good practice was seen in modelling of skills and the use of writing frames, to help pupils develop and structure written work effectively, in English, history and geography. Pupils also have good opportunities to produce extended and creative writing in these subjects. Key words and rules of grammar are displayed in many classrooms, including music, physical education and art and design. ICT lessons also promote good standards of technical accuracy through the use of spell and grammar checks. In speaking, pupils share ideas well in informal group discussions, but more emphasis could be given to presentation skills, for example, in pupil reports to the whole class in final plenary sessions.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well because of consistently good teaching.
- GCSE results have improved considerably because the subject is very well led.
- Pupils' oral skills are not as good as they should be.
- Assessment information is not used well enough to raise achievement in Years 7 to 9.
- ICT is not used well enough to aid learning.

Commentary

Standards are **average** by the end of Year 9 and **above average** by the end of Year 11 and this represents **good** achievement. Teaching and learning are **good** in all years. **Very good** leadership and satisfactory management have ensured that improvement since the last inspection has been **good**.

Examination results

67. In 2003, results improved considerably and were above average; in 2002, GCSE results in French were well below average, and pupils did far worse in French than in their other subjects. Boys did particularly well and pupils achieved well. Both boys and girls attained significantly higher than the average for the county. The school does not monitor the results of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, but the evidence from work seen shows that these pupils achieve as well as others in the school.

Standards and achievement

68. Pupils in all year groups are achieving well. By Year 9 pupils have reached standards that are average and can write accurately about themselves, their interests and the world around them. Higher attaining pupils write accurate, extended pieces, using a range of verb tenses. Pupils' speaking skills are weaker. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as others because teachers invariably plan carefully to meet their needs.
69. By Year 11 standards are above average and pupils continue to achieve well. Pupils can express themselves fluently in written French and use a range of structures and verb tenses competently. In Year 11, pupils' speaking skills are significantly weaker than their writing. However, in Year 10, pupils have very good oral skills. Achievement is accelerated because pupils' behaviour and attitude to learning are good, as a result of the good relationships with their teachers.

Teaching and learning

70. Teaching and learning are consistently good in all years and often very good. Pupils achieve well because teachers' planning is very good, as is their classroom control. Marking is good. Presentation of new material is lively and clear and at times enhanced by the newly installed electronic white board. In the most successful lessons, teachers use a variety of techniques and exercises, including games, to practise new material thoroughly and retain pupils' interest. Most lessons are enjoyable. Teachers are good linguists. In many lessons they use French almost exclusively and pupils respond well in the language. However, many opportunities to develop pupils' oral skills are missed; pupils are not challenged to speak creatively and do not have enough opportunities to practise their spoken French with a partner. Authentic recordings of native speakers are not used often enough to develop pupils' listening skills. ICT is rarely used to aid learning.

Leadership and management

71. The subject leader is a very good role model as a teacher, and leads an effective team of committed colleagues very well. He and his team have made significant improvements in provision over the last two years, and he has good vision for the future of the team. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching is underway, but not yet regular enough for colleagues to share good practice effectively. Assessment procedures are thorough, regular and well recorded, but assessment information is not used effectively to raise achievement in Years 7 to 9.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership has brought about good and fast improvement in GCSE results, teaching and the achievement of pupils.
- The good quality of teaching significantly contributes to the rise in standards and achievement.
- Computers are not used by pupils in lessons and this prevents deepening their understanding in several areas.
- The team embraces change, shares good practice, and regularly monitors and evaluates its work and performance well.
- There is insufficient co-ordination of the use of mathematics in other subjects.
- Curriculum and assessment development are helping to raise the achievement of pupils.

Commentary

Standards are **average** to the end of Year 9 and **below average** at the end of Year 11. This represents **good** achievement given pupils below average standards when they entered the school (last year's Year 11 had well below average standards in mathematics when they joined the school). Teaching and learning are **good** as is the subject's leadership and management. There has been **good** improvement since the last inspection.

Test and examination results

72. In 2003, National Tests results taken by Year 9 pupils were below average when compared with all schools and well below average when compared with similar schools. They were better than English and similar to science. They have improved steadily over time with only little fluctuation, and over the last few years boys' results have risen more than girls' when compared with national increases. The achievement for this year group was satisfactory.

73. The GCSE results for 2003 taken by Year 11 pupils were below average when compared with all schools nationally and average when compared to similar schools. Although pupils did better in other subjects, there was a very good improvement in higher grades, which was mainly due to the improvement of the boys' results, which reversed a downward trend over the last few years. The achievement for this year group was also satisfactory.

Standards and achievement

74. When pupils enter the school, their standards are below average. In work seen, by the end of Year 9, pupils' work in number, algebra, shape, space and measures is average. This is a big improvement over the test results of last year. This is because the successful approaches to teaching and learning and assessment adopted in Years 10 and 11 have been introduced into Years 7 to 9. Consequently, achievement is good throughout Years 7 to 11 and similar for boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as others in the subject. When support assistants are present in lessons they do a good job in helping pupils with learning needs to understand the work.
75. Almost all pupils in Years 7 to 9 can perform accurate calculations without using calculators and solve simple problems mentally. The higher attaining pupils manipulate fractions well and use algebra to solve problems and to describe and generalise number patterns. Average attaining pupils use percentages well to increase and decrease quantities, while pupils with special educational needs use games to help them understand and use facts about angles and shapes.
76. By the end of Year 11, the overall standard of work seen was below average, except in number work, where it was average. The higher attaining pupils use the method of differences well to establish cubic formulae when preparing for their coursework. Average attaining pupils can use statistical methods well and apply numeric skills, but have difficulties in rounding when estimating calculations. Pupils with special educational needs manipulate basic algebra and convert between different units of measure well.

Teaching and learning

77. Teaching and learning are consistently good with much that is very good and it is this that is driving up achievement. There are several effective features of teaching that are promoting good learning. The good level of teachers' subject knowledge enables teachers to make good use of the National Numeracy Strategy in all year groups to improve planning, structure and teaching methods. Teachers skilfully encourage pupils to learn and to maintain their engagement during lessons, which results in pupils achieving well. Learning is most effective when teachers also have high expectations, and provide challenge through pace or activities. The quality of support for pupils with special educational needs is varied, but is effective when assistants are active and sufficient planning takes place.
78. There are also weaknesses in a minority of lessons that hold back the achievement of pupils. Some teaching and activities are not well matched to pupils' needs. Some methods used to respond to bad behaviour are ineffective. The marking of pupils' work does not provide enough guidance on how to improve and expectation and pace of a few lessons make insufficient demands on pupils to engage in their work.

Leadership and management

79. This is well supported by senior leadership and the LEA. There is a good team spirit and teaching rooms are grouped together. This facilitates the good delegation of responsibilities, which is matched to teachers' strengths and interests. The regular and effective monitoring of the team's work and performance enables very good tracking of pupils' progress, particularly in Years 10 and 11. The team development plan is a useful instrument to plan, measure and sustain progress, and is closely linked to the school's aims and targets. The good improvement

since the last inspection includes: the use of the National Numeracy Strategy in Years 7 to 9; implementation of a modular GCSE course, to raise achievement; raising entry levels for the GCSE exam to almost all pupils; eliminating non-specialist mathematics teaching and using test and examination criteria to feedback to pupils when marking.

80. There are, however, still some weaknesses. Inconsistencies occur in the generally good presentation of pupils' work, in the quality of classroom displays and in the emphasis placed on using learning objectives to guide teaching. The role of the team's link teacher for special educational needs is narrow, and the mathematics-related targets of teachers' lesson plans are too general to be useful.

Mathematics across the curriculum

81. Overall, standards are average. The framework developed by the school to promote and improve numeracy across other subjects lacks the guidance and detail to be useful. There is no co-ordination of this important work and opportunities are missed for subjects to make their effective contributions. There are, nevertheless, some good examples of using mathematics in other subjects. Year 7 pupils draw pie charts in French and Year 8 pupils in geography, where a policy is in place, use eight-figure grid references, scale and bearings when working with maps. In science they work out the average speed of moving cars by both calculation and by using graphs. Year 10 pupils are effectively taught complex formulae and use algorithms in ICT when using spreadsheets while Year 11 pupils in science accurately calculate properties of waves such as wavelength and frequency. An interactive computer program is effectively used in the inclusion unit improving the numerical skills of a Year 8 boy.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards have risen substantially since the last inspection, especially at GCSE.
- Pupils achieve well throughout because teaching is good; teachers have good subject knowledge that underpins clear explanations and good questioning.
- Pupils' scientific enquiry skills are not as good in Years 7 to 9 as they are in Years 10 and 11 because less emphasis is placed on practising these skills.
- Teachers use ICT well to enliven class discussions and to demonstrate key points, but pupils do not use ICT enough because access to resources is limited.
- The team is well led and managed; teaching is monitored and pupils' standards analysed thoroughly. Assessment is used well to monitor progress.

Commentary

Standards are **average** in Years 9 and 11 and this represents **good** achievement. Teaching and learning are **good** as are leadership and management. There has been **good** improvement since the last inspection.

Test and examination results

82. In the 2003 national tests at the end of Year 9, pupils' standards were below average compared with all schools and well below those of similar schools. In relation to their standards when they entered the school, pupils generally achieved satisfactorily and higher attaining pupils well. Standards in science were higher than in English or mathematics. At GCSE, the proportion achieving grade C or above was above average compared with all schools and well above for similar schools, and showed a substantial improvement over previous years. There was little difference in the results attained by boys and girls. Pupils achieved very well. The school does

not monitor the results of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, but the evidence from work seen shows that these pupils achieve as well as others in the school.

Standards and achievement

83. Pupils' standards on entry to the school in Year 7 are below average. By Year 9 their standards are average and they achieve well, with their knowledge and understanding of key facts and principles a little better developed than their scientific enquiry skills. Standards by the end of Year 9 are better than the test results in 2003 because the team has made a determined effort to improve the quality of teaching and learning in these years. Achievement is good because teachers take great care to plan interesting and stimulating lessons that meet the needs of all pupils. By Year 9, most pupils have a good grasp of particle theory and use it appropriately to describe features of solids, liquids and gases and to explain phenomena such as the transmission of sound through materials. Higher attaining pupils are able to represent simple compounds using chemical formulae. Many pupils understand the flow of different forms of energy through a range of devices and can describe their efficiency in these terms.
84. By Year 11, pupils' standards are average and boys and girls, and pupils with special educational needs, achieve well throughout. For example, many confidently predict the chemical properties of elements from their position in the periodic table and the higher attainers relate these to their atomic structures and the bonds involved. This good achievement is sustained because teachers have good subject knowledge, which is put to good use through clear and lively explanations and probing questioning to check pupils' understanding. However, in Years 7 to 9, opportunities for pupils to practise skills of scientific enquiry such as predicting and making decisions about their working methods are sometimes missed because less emphasis is placed on this aspect of science when lessons are planned.

Teaching and learning

85. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and objectives shared with pupils, although in a minority of lessons, insufficient emphasis is placed on highlighting technical terms. Pupils consolidate their learning from previous lessons well through their response to teachers' good questioning and short tasks provided. Activities are well chosen and, where support staff are available, they are deployed and used very well so that pupils with special educational needs make the same good progress as others in the class. In one excellent Year 11 lesson about disease and medical conditions, pupils, many of whom had special educational needs, distinguished between inherited conditions, infection and those conditions arising in other ways. They explored difficult moral and ethical issues, such as those surrounding pregnancy where a condition is known or is likely, and gained much from a very skilfully and sensitively structured discussion. Pupils' behaviour is managed well so relationships are good, the pace of learning brisk and most enjoy science.
86. Good achievement is also ensured through carefully planned homework and teachers' marking of pupils' work, the best of which provides much feedback to pupils on how to improve. Teachers use ICT very effectively to enhance class discussions and to demonstrate key ideas. Achievement is held back at times because pupils are not using ICT enough as their access to appropriate resources such as data loggers is inadequate, which was also a weakness at the time of the last inspection. In the less effective lessons, tasks and activities are not adapted sufficiently to pupils' needs and abilities and discussions extend for too long so that they lose concentration and interest.

Leadership and management

87. The subject leader effectively promotes good teamwork and mutual support amongst the staff who have coped well in covering for colleagues through a very difficult period. He is supported well by a newly appointed second in team. Together they provide clear and appropriate direction for the team. As a result, good improvement has been made since the last inspection; pupils' standards have risen substantially, especially at GCSE. Leadership and management ensure that standards are being driven up because:
- teaching is monitored and supported systematically;
 - pupils' achievements in standard tests are thoroughly analysed and action taken, for example, currently to improve curriculum plans at Key Stage 3;
 - good quality assessments are used to monitor pupils and to set them targets, so that most pupils know what they are and what they need to do to improve, especially in later Years 10 and 11;
 - technical support is adequate and effective so that pupils have good access to practical equipment on demand.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well in ICT because of the very good teaching they receive.
- The monitoring and assessment of pupils' work is very thorough and is used well to help pupils improve.
- The leadership and management of the team are very good and provide a clear vision and direction for the subject.
- The school is not meeting its statutory obligation to ensure that all pupils are taught ICT in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

Standards in Year 9 are **above average** and **well above** average in Year 11. Pupils achieve **well** because teaching and learning are consistently **very good**. The subject is **very well** led and managed and so improvement since the last inspection has been **good**.

Examination results

88. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2003 were well above average for all schools and very high when compared with similar schools. Pupils achieved very well and there was little difference in the standards attained by boys and girls. This continued the rising trend in improvement seen over the last two years.

Standards and achievement

89. By the end of Year 9, pupils' standards of ICT capability are above average; this represents very good achievement given pupils' standards upon entry to the school. Pupils with special educational needs achieve equally well because teachers are sensitive to their needs and plan their lessons carefully. Pupils have total confidence in managing their files on the computer network and use a variety of software tools effectively. A good example of this is a project in Year 7, where pupils use presentation software to produce an animated presentation about themselves. The work of pupils is thoughtfully presented and thorough.
90. By the end of Year 11 standards are even better and are well above average. Pupils on the double unit GCSE course have very well-developed ICT skills across a range of applications. In

addition to the traditional skills of presentation, data manipulation and modelling, pupils make effective use of the Internet and use digital manipulation techniques. The school does not monitor the results of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, but the evidence from work seen shows that these pupils achieve as well as others in the school.

Teaching and learning

91. Very good achievement is fostered by very good teaching, which leads to very good learning. In Years 7 to 9 pupils benefit from knowledgeable and committed teachers. Lessons are always lively and well paced and have clear learning objectives. Pupils are actively engaged in lessons that capture the interest of pupils of all abilities. Teachers take great care to ensure that pupils with special educational needs learn at a rate that is similar to all other pupils. Positive learning environments are created by the very good attitude and behaviour of the pupils and their purposeful relationships with teachers.
92. Standards are driven up and pupils achieve very well because teachers use their own knowledge and experience to challenge and extend the learners. Pupils benefit from the high expectations of teachers and respond positively to the challenging activities. Assessment is used very effectively to motivate pupils and to set targets for future improvement. However, the most remarkable feature of the teaching is the capacity that pupils have developed for independent learning; as a result of consistently very good teaching, pupils can apply knowledge and understanding effectively in their own work.

Leadership and management

93. The leadership and management provided by the subject leader are very good and are reflected in the understanding, commitment and shared vision of the team. The strong team ethos and commitment to continuous improvement has enabled the subject to maintain its very high standards. As a result of the focus on teaching and learning and a commitment to high standards, good improvement has been made since the previous inspection.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

94. Overall the provision for ICT across the curriculum is unsatisfactory. The school is not meeting its statutory obligation to ensure that all pupils are taught ICT in Years 10 and 11. Since the last inspection, the school has made a significant investment in computers and related technology, which has resulted in a ratio of one computer to every 6.4 pupils, however, this is below the national average. Pupils' use of ICT is unsatisfactory in most subjects and there is no discernable impact on the standard of their work in these subjects. However, the school has recently invested heavily in new computer white boards and related technology and in some subjects, lessons are becoming more exciting and captivating for pupils because they enable the teachers to bring the Internet into the classroom. In subjects such as art and design, music and mathematics the use of these computer white boards is bringing lessons to life and in business studies, ICT is a significant strength of the team. The impact of ICT is yet to be seen in pupils' work across the whole school, but it is improving teaching as teachers use the technology to bring lessons to life and make their lessons more engaging for the pupils.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good, ensuring that standards are rising quickly.

- Pupils' overall achievement is good because of the high quality of curricular planning, assessment and teaching.
- Teaching is good so pupils learn well: teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject and an enthusiasm that transmits itself to pupils and enhances their attitudes.
- Achievement in a minority of classes is held back by occasional weaknesses, linked mainly to the choice of teaching and behaviour management strategies for certain groups of pupils.

Commentary

Standards are average to the end of Year 9 and below average by the end of Year 11. This represents good achievement and is the result of good teaching that promotes good learning. Very good leadership and management have ensured that improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

Test and examination results

95. Results at GCSE are below average, but represent good achievement as the pupils' attainment on entry was well below average. Results have improved markedly in the last three years: in Year 2000, 18 per cent of pupils gained A* to C, in 2001 the figure increased to 29 per cent and in 2003 it was just short of 50 per cent. There are no significant differences in the standards reached by boys and girls and the pupils' points score in geography compares favourably with their scores in other subjects. .

Standards and achievement

96. When pupils enter the school their skills, knowledge and understanding are now below average. However, as a result of a well-organised and taught curriculum, enhanced by very good assessment and target setting, most pupils reach the national average by the end of Year 9. This represents good achievement. There are no significant differences in achievement between boys and girls or higher and lower attainers. As a result of a curriculum that contains an effective balance between geographical enquiry, places, patterns, processes and environmental change, pupils learn well and acquire a firm foundation for GCSE study. Standards are also helped by the implementation of the literacy strategy, which contributes towards their understanding of concepts. Thus, for example, pupils acquire a sound understanding of location and the identification and development of geographical argument.
97. In Years 10 and 11 pupils pursue an appropriate examination course that is made more effective by the careful use of mathematics and literacy strategies. These are well used to help pupils produce graphs, tables and writing assignments to illustrate earthquakes, energy use and ecosystems. Currently, despite the impressive recent improvement in results, standards are just below average, but pupils' achievement is good because their standards on entry were well below average. Standards are higher in Year 9 than in Year 11 because the geographical provision for the current Year 11 in their earlier years in the school was not as good as it is now.

Teaching and learning

98. Teaching and learning are good. Standards of learning are helped by the subject knowledge, confidence and expectations of the teachers. Thus, for example, pupils understood about the characteristic landforms of Dartmoor because of the clarity of explanations that were linked to pictures of the features. Teachers expect pupils to produce work that is appropriate in quality and quantity. Assessment is used very well and teachers usually take good account of pupils' learning needs. On some occasions, however, teachers do not achieve the right balance exposition, effective questioning, independent work and checking for understanding. Pupils across the school benefit from some well-organised fieldwork opportunities that have a beneficial effect on their understanding of physical geography and coastal landforms.

Leadership and management

99. Work in the subject is both led and managed very well by a most capable head of team. There is a clear link between the overall team strategy to improve standards and the structures to support it. Thus the meticulous sequencing of topics and themes and the assessment and monitoring of pupils' progress make a significant contribution to the quality of teaching and learning. There is an excellent development plan in place to tackle the next priorities and the subject is well placed for even further improvement.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and learning result in very good achievement for all pupils.
- Assessment is used very well to help pupils improve their learning.
- Inspiring leadership and very effective management have improved results and standards for all pupils.
- There are no significant weaknesses, but provision for gifted and talented pupils could be developed more effectively.

Commentary

Standards are **average** by the end of Year 9 and **well above** average by Year 11. Pupils' achievement is **very good** in all years as is the quality of teaching and learning. Leadership and management are **very good** and there has been **good** improvement since the last inspection.

Test and examination results

100. Tests at the end of Year 9 show that pupils achieve average results. GCSE results in Year 11 in 2003 show that pupils achieved well above average, boys performing even better than girls, which is against the national trend. This represented very high achievement given the below average standards pupils have when they enter the school. Results improved on achievements of 2001 and 2002. Pupils are succeeding more highly than was predicted by their previous work. History results are among the best in the school.

Standards and achievement

101. Pupils enter the school with below, and for many, well below average standards. Progression through Years 7, 8 and 9 brings standards up to the national average and so their achievement is very good. Girls and boys, as well as pupils with special educational needs, all achieve very well, developing the skills necessary for success in history and making rapid progress. They are able to investigate topics effectively, discuss their work fluently, understand the importance of sources, and to appreciate the bias of some historical evidence. By Year 11 many are competent historians eager to research the subject and able to evaluate the evidence before them.

Teaching and learning

102. Achievement is being driven up by consistently very good teaching, which promotes very good learning. Teachers offer expert subject knowledge, but lessons are not 'teacher-led' - the pupils have ownership of what they are doing. Challenging and exciting work fires the imagination of pupils and makes them eager to succeed. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good with the result that pupils want to learn and do well. Homework is used very effectively to extend learning beyond the classroom. It is marked promptly, thoroughly and positively. Pupils thus

take great pride in their work. Achievement is further assured by assessment, which is used as a very effective tool to raise standards - all pupils know how well they are performing by the effective use of ICT in teaching history.

Leadership and management

103. The head of team provides inspiring leadership motivating pupils and staff to aim high. History is growing in popularity as a GCSE option. She has created a dynamic team and her management skills match her leadership qualities. Every aspect of the teams' work is rigorously checked and evaluated – the team is aware of strengths and areas that could be improved, such as extension work for the gifted and talented pupils. Short and long-term planning is in place to make this very good team achieve excellence.
104. Very high standards have been maintained in history, with a new team of teachers, and progress has been made.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils underachieve at age 16, because of unsatisfactory teaching; teachers expect too little of pupils.
- Leadership lacks a clear vision of how to raise standards.
- The quality of assessment is good.

Commentary

Standards are **below average** by the end of Year 9 and **well below average** by the end of Year 11. This represents **satisfactory** achievement to Year 9, but **unsatisfactory** achievement to Year 11. This is largely because teaching and learning are **satisfactory** in Years 7 to 9, but **unsatisfactory** in Years 10 and 11. **Unsatisfactory** leadership and management have failed to ensure high enough standards and so improvement since the last inspection has been **unsatisfactory**.

Test and examination results

105. In the 2003 GCSE short course examination the proportion of pupils gaining Grades A* to C passes was well below the national average for all schools. Pupils underachieved, on average performing significantly less well than in their other subjects. This was the first year in which the majority of pupils were entered for the examination.

Standards and achievement

106. When pupils enter the school, their standards are below average. In work seen, by the end of Year 9, standards remain below average. This represents satisfactory achievement. Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the origins and distinctive features of Christianity and other religions in the country. They can make a personal response to religious questions. However, they have only a limited understanding of why and how the lives of practising members of faith communities are shaped by their beliefs.
107. By the end of Year 11 standards are well below average and pupils overall are underachieving. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Christian and Jewish faiths, and of their distinctive insights into ethical issues, are superficial. Their grasp of religious language and concepts is limited, and their evaluative skills are underdeveloped. Pupils are underachieving because of unsatisfactory teaching.

Teaching and learning

108. Pupils' learning is satisfactory overall in Years 7 to 9, and unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Where pupils learn best, teachers have high expectations, and stretch them with interesting work that is well matched to their individual needs. For example, Year 10 pupils gained a good understanding of Christian teaching on divorce, because the teacher planned well to lead them step by step to grasp the key ideas, through a good variety of interesting and challenging activities. By the lesson's end, pupils could tackle writing a letter from a priest to his parishioners, explaining his church's stance on divorce.
109. Where pupils learn least well, it is because teachers expect too little of them, while at the same time not matching work well enough to their needs. Pupils lose interest, because the work is either too difficult for them, or too easy. For example, Year 8 low attaining pupils learned little about the Attributes of Allah, because the approach was too abstract, and they could not handle the language and concepts. In some Years 10 and 11 classes a minority of pupils, particularly girls, respond by behaving badly, hindering the learning of all. Teachers do not plan well enough to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and so these pupils too, underachieve.

Leadership and management

110. Leadership and day-to-day management of the subject are unsatisfactory. Although the school's provision now meets statutory requirements, and schemes of work and assessment procedures have been improved, progress since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory. Standards are too low overall, because not enough has been done to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good leadership of the team has identified clear priorities for raising standards.
- Monitoring teaching and learning and of pupil progress are beginning to raise attainment.
- Assessment procedures are good in Years 7 to 9, but some pupils are unsure of their National Curriculum Levels.
- Marking and assessment in Years 10 and 11 focuses insufficiently on the quality of work produced.
- There are inadequate computer facilities, which restrict pupils' learning.

Commentary

Standards are **below average** by the end of Years 9 and 11. Pupils' achievement is **satisfactory** as is the quality of teaching and learning. Leadership is **good** and management is **satisfactory**. The subject has made **satisfactory** improvement since the last inspection.

Examination results

111. In the 2003 GCSE examinations electronics was above average, graphics close to the national average with food technology and resistant materials well below average. Pupils' achievement was satisfactory. This is an improvement over 2002 where results in all aspects of design and technology were below the national average.

Standards and achievement

112. Current standards in Year 9 are below average. From below average attainment on entry pupils' achievement is satisfactory to Year 9. Higher attaining pupils in Years 7 and 9 attain standards that are above average. This was seen in pupils' work during an automated toy project in which they displayed good ideas for logo designs and good understanding of light and dark shading techniques in an isometric drawing exercise. Weaker work, mainly by average and lower attaining pupils, had poorer presentational skills both written and graphical, work often unfinished and ideas not explained. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.
113. Current standards in Year 11 are below average overall and pupils are achieving satisfactorily. Current work does show some improvement particularly in resistant materials and food technology, but standards in all specialisms need to be improved.
114. Higher attaining pupils can produce above average work as seen in an electronics project where good use of ICT is made in research. Here, pupils show good investigation skills, for instance, of different food products from other countries. Pupils show awareness of cultural influences in food production and good investigation of existing products. Work by average and lower attaining pupils can be untidy with an over-reliance on commercial material for research, weak evaluations and a lack of individuality in design work.
115. The development of design skills and the ability to offer creative and individual ideas is often not expressed in pupils' work and some of the practical tasks seem inappropriate both in choice and material used. Pupils need to see good quality work for their aspirations to be raised.

Teaching and learning

116. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. In the better lessons pupils achieve well because teachers have good subject knowledge, use a range of activities to keep pupil motivation and have good pupil management. This was seen in a lesson where pupils were developing and increasing their practical skills when making a fruit salad and a lesson where pupils increased their learning and understanding of technical terminology through a practical task in a structures project. Where learning is not as good, lessons have a slow pace; pupils choose to work at their own speed and inappropriate behaviour by some pupils disrupts the learning for the majority. Insistence on high standards of work and behaviour is a priority for the team. Planning of work for different attainment levels is not sufficiently developed. When present, teaching assistants provide good support and pupils with a special educational need achieve well.

Leadership and management

117. The recently appointed curriculum leader is providing clear direction for the subject. Schemes of work have been revised and assessment procedures reviewed with end of module testing a positive feature. Monitoring teaching and learning and of pupils' work is seen as a priority for improving standards and the need for more computer equipment is imperative.
118. The workshops are in need of general upgrading and the position of the circular saw is not ideal, being in a teaching room. There are broken work surfaces in the food technology room and the floor is marked. There are no safety lines on floor areas around machinery in the workshops. Resources are needed for the effective delivery of control technology. The recent computer room is a useful addition, but needs developing to include a research area to encourage independent learning.
119. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The new curriculum leader is making a positive impact by implementing systems to improve standards.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very capable and clear leadership is ensuring that the team maintains high standards and is improving its performance.
- The very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 has maintained the rising trend in GCSE examination results and resulted in standards above national averages this year.
- Pupils, especially in Years 10 and 11, display positive attitudes and very good behaviour and show a clear commitment to improve the standards of their work.
- The thorough assessment of pupils' work is encouraging pupils to strive beyond the targets set for them.
- Accommodation is adequate, but storage facilities are unsatisfactory and there is insufficient control over lighting in the rooms.

Commentary

Standards are **average** by the end of Year 9 and **above average** by the end of Year 11. This represents **good** achievement for pupils up to Year 9 and **very good** achievement to Year 11. This is because teaching and learning are **good** in Years 7 to 9 and **very good** in Years 10 and 11 and leadership and management are **very good**. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection.

Examination results

120. Results in the GCSE examination in 2003 were above average and pupils achieved well. Girls attained better results than did the boys, following the national trend. The team is aware of this from analysis of results and has targeted boys' achievement in its current improvement plan. The rising trend in results is faster than the national trend. The very good teaching and positive commitment of pupils in Years 10 and 11 are the key factors in this rising trend. Current teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate that these high standards are being maintained.

Standards and achievement

121. The attainment of pupils on entry at Year 7 in art and design is below average, although there are individual pupils who show a natural talent for art. At this early stage, girls tend to show more interest in art and demonstrate more ability in drawing and painting. The difference between boys and girls continues through the school and a higher number of girls opt for the GCSE examination. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 achieve well in lessons, where basic art skills are taught well through well-planned schemes of work that cover a good range of media, drawn from many cultures. The influence of artists they study is not always clear from pupils' sketchbooks, or from discussion with them.
122. Achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11 because pupils have a very positive commitment to their work and are very well taught. The individual approach that pupils take to their work is very well marked in their work. They explore their ideas and feelings in expressive ways through a wide range of media. This individuality tends to mask the artistic influences they have followed in their preparatory research and annotation is a general weakness in their work. Pupils with a particular talent for art and design are identified and benefit from extra-curricular opportunities such as the tutoring of an artist in residence.

Teaching and learning

123. Pupils are engaged effectively in lessons and learn well from the consistently good teaching in Years 7, 8 and 9. The very good teaching in Years 10 and 11 results in high achievement and success in the GCSE examination. Teachers have a very good command of their subject and have appropriately high expectations of both behaviour and standards of work, assessing it thoroughly and driving up standards. Classes are generally relaxed, but purposeful and pupils enjoy working to the standards expected of them.

Leadership and management

124. The subject leader brings strong, clear and positive leadership to the work of the team. She works very hard and manages the team very well, monitoring its work, analysing data and striving to raise standards. Her efforts have ensured that the team has made a very good improvement since the previous inspection. A recent move of location has created difficulties in the reduced accommodation available, but teachers effectively use the space and resources available to them. The recently appointed school display technician is proving a valued resource in raising the profile of art and design through displays around the school.

Drama

125. Drama was not inspected in detail and three complete lessons were seen. Drama is taught as a separate subject in Years 7 to 9. Standards are in line with national expectations. Pupils learn a range of drama skills and work well together to plan and prepare small group performances. They develop some ability to evaluate their learning and achievement. In Years 10 and 11, drama is an option at GCSE. In 2003, the proportion of pupils gaining higher grade passes was well below the national average. This was a smaller group than normal and results were, therefore, particularly affected by individual ability. Standards have generally been closer to national averages in recent years. Achievement in work seen during the inspection was good.

126. On the evidence provided, teaching is very good. Teachers manage pupils very well, and relationships are positive. Pupils enjoy and appreciate drama lessons. They take the subject seriously and join in practical work enthusiastically. In GCSE classes, pupils make good progress in developing a more structured insight to the subject, supported by teachers' good subject knowledge. In one Year 11 class observed, pupils explored the topic of asylum seekers in Britain imaginatively using a variety of techniques including still images, marking the moment and hot seating. They approached tasks thoughtfully, and were able to offer constructive comments to their peers on practical work.

127. The drama room provides good space for practical work. The team also makes a valuable contribution to school life through extra-curricular activities, including annual school productions. This year the play 'Our Day Out', involving some 60 pupils, will be performed in March. Drama evenings are also held during the year to present examination work. There is a weekly drama club at lunchtimes, and regular theatre visits are arranged to enrich pupils' experience.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Assessment is good in Years 10 and 11 and is helping to improve standards.
- Extra-curricular activities are very effective and contribute well to pupil's attitudes to learning.
- Accommodation and resources are very good.
- In 2003, standards were well below national averages and too many pupils underachieved.
- Pupils do not always know how to improve because feedback to pupils by teachers is not always well targeted.

Commentary

Standards are **average** by the end of both Years 9 and 11 and pupils' achievement overall is **satisfactory**. Teaching and learning are **satisfactory** as is leadership and management. There has been **good** improvement since the last inspection.

Examination results

128. In recent years, attainment at GCSE has been in line with the national average, but in 2003 both sets of results fell well below this. Two main factors contributed to this dip in attainment. Firstly, during the building of a new expressive arts block (opened in September 2003), lessons were taught in non-specialist accommodation where practical music-making was limited. Secondly, a key member of staff was absent for an extended period.

Standards and achievement

129. In lessons observed during the inspection standards in music are broadly average. When pupils enter the school, their standards in music are broadly average and pupils achieve satisfactorily. Most pupils with special educational needs achieve well compared with their prior attainment and ability, since in lessons they often take responsibility for their own learning. Lower attaining Year 7 pupils are able to take turns to chant the lead part in a 'work song' confidently. By Year 9, higher attaining pupils can improvise expressive responses to the 'blues'. Several Year 11 pupils can compose effective ballads with harmonised backing vocals. In the lessons observed, there were no significant differences in the attainment of boys and girls.

Teaching and learning

130. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. There is, however, not enough good or very good teaching and this is preventing pupils' achievement being higher. Planning is generally effective, although some terminology is too basic. GCSE schemes of work are now in place. Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding is generally good, and they demonstrate their own musicianship well in class. Some imaginative teaching methods are used, especially in conjunction with music technology. Where teaching is good, learning is 'musical'. Teachers respond well to the Key Stage 3 National Strategy. One lesson observed was judged to be unsatisfactory. In this case, the range of teaching strategies used was too limited.
131. Procedures for setting targets for individual pupils and for monitoring achievement have now begun to be put in place, and when used in every detail, these are very effective, particularly for pupils in Years 10 and 11. Oral feedback to pupils does not always focus enough on what pupils should have learned in the lesson.

Leadership and management

132. The leadership and management of the team are satisfactory. The subject leader is committed to raising standards in music. The team has a wide range of high quality musical instruments, including those from a different range of cultural traditions. Six computers run sample and

notation-based software, but sequencing software is now needed. Teachers have ensured that extra-curricular provision is very good. Uptake is very high, the range of lessons offered is good and high standards are attained, especially in steel pans.

133. Progress since the last inspection has been good. The head of team has taken care to address each weakness identified in the previous inspection report and, consequently, the overall quality of provision in music is now satisfactory. The team now has the foundations for continuous improvement into the future in place.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils gain very good levels of achievement because of the very good teaching they receive.
- Strong relationships between teachers and pupils encourage all to participate fully in lessons and in extra-curricular activities.
- Achievement is accelerated because there is good planning and use of ongoing assessment to track pupils' progress.
- More needs to be done to develop the core curriculum for all pupils in Years 10 and 11, to enable them to be prepared for pursuing an active lifestyle beyond school.
- The subject does not have a dedicated classroom base for GCSE work to enable pupils to experience the full range of learning opportunities it would offer.

Commentary

Standards to the end of Years 9 and 11 are **average** and this represents **very good** achievement because pupils' standards when they enter the school are well below average. Teaching and learning are **very good** and the subject is **well** led and managed. There has been **good** improvement since the last inspection.

Examination results

134. Pupils taking the GCSE course in 2003 gained standards below average compared with all schools nationally. Boys did better than girls, which went against the school's expectation. Standards were much improved on the previous year's results and achievement was good in relation to the knowledge, understanding and skills that these pupils had when they entered the school.

Standards and achievement

135. When pupils enter the school, their standards are well below average. Standards of work seen by the end of Year 9 are average and so achievement is very good. In basketball, pupils have acquired the basic skills of the game and know and understand the rules of play. They watch each other accurately and are able to suggest ways in which they can improve their own and others' performance.

136. By the end of Year 11, the majority of pupils reach average standards in core physical education. Work seen in Year 10 showed that many boys and girls could demonstrate satisfactory skills in the games they play and have a sound understanding of the rules they have been taught, resulting in average standards. Where pupils are working below average, they find difficulty in applying their learnt skills to a game situation consistently and effectively, and lack the skill of anticipation during the game.

137. Work seen during the inspection shows that standards are above average for those pupils who will be taking GCSE examinations in 2004. The boys seen working on analysis of performance were able to draw on their extensive knowledge and understanding of the skeletal system, muscle groups and other body systems to present their work competently to each other.

Teaching and learning

138. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work, kit, behaviour and contributions to lessons; this leads to pupils being well motivated, very well behaved and enjoying their work. Relationships are very good and lessons are very well managed to enable all pupils to learn effectively and safely. Good feedback and encouragement to all pupils leads to them clearly knowing what is expected of them and how they can improve their knowledge, skills and understanding in the subject.

Leadership and management

139. Leadership and management are good. The curriculum team leader has just rejoined the school after a year away. She has quickly re-established her role and is providing clear direction for the subject to improve further. Routines are well established, delegation is effective and the monitoring of teaching and achievement is in place. Progress since the last inspection has been good, with attention being given to placing more emphasis on pupils being involved in setting their own targets. Teaching has improved and pupils' achievements have also improved. The school is still to meet the issue of a classroom base for GCSE work and, although the shared practical facilities are good, there are still issues over effective use of them, which need to be met by the joint management group.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business education

140. The GCSE course in business education was sampled and three lessons were seen. This is a popular and highly effective course and pupils achieve highly because of consistently very good teaching.

141. GCSE results are amongst the best in the school and in 2003 were well above average. The work of pupils seen shows that these very high standards are being maintained because of the relentless push by the subject leader to ensure that all pupils achieve their best. Pupils are achieving very highly and have a thorough understanding of the requirements of the course. This is because teaching and learning are so highly effective. Teachers ensure that expert use is made of ICT as a tool for searching for information, processing it and presenting it to others. Planning is meticulous and takes great care to make sure that imaginative tasks in lessons build on what pupils have already learnt and move them on rapidly to make new gains in understanding. In all lessons seen, pupils were fired up to learn by teachers who know their subject intimately and plan well to make learning exciting.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The subject is very well led and managed.
- Citizenship is taught as a discrete and well-planned subject across the school and this helps to raise standards.

- Links between citizenship, other subjects and extra-curricular activities are good and this contributes to the good pupil achievement.
- Some lessons are too teacher centred and check the development of pupils' own ideas.

Commentary

Standards are **average** by the end of Years 9 and 11 and pupils' achievement is **good**. Teaching and learning are **good** and leadership and management are **very good**.

Test and examination results

142. It is too early to comment on test and examination results as the first groups have yet to sit an examination.

Standards and achievement

143. Standards of pupils' written work in both Years 9 and 11 are closely linked to their standards in literacy and, as such, are average. However, skills of participation and responsible action, particularly in community-based activities are above average. Pupils achieve well across the school with no significant differences between boys and girls and between higher and lower attainers.

144. Evidence from pupils' work shows that knowledge and skills in citizenship are enhanced by the provision offered by PSHE and other subjects. Thus, they learn to become informed citizens when they discuss arguments for and against foxhunting in English and they begin to learn to challenge injustice and prejudice when they study Hitler's Germany in history. Good work on personal safety is done by Year 9. The school has a strong pastoral, extra-curricular and enrichment dimension and this helps pupils develop skills of participation and responsible action. They have improved the school pleasure gardens and work with the local community with Young Enterprise and other activities. The newly developed house system offers opportunities for a range of opportunities to take part in assemblies and the school council.

145. In Years 10 and 11 the GCSE short course offers a well-balanced and interesting curriculum. There is a particular emphasis on the characteristics of parliamentary government and the electoral system and standards of understanding are generally good. Pupils have visited the Houses of Parliament and one remains in e-mail contact with a member of the House of Lords.

Teaching and learning

146. The overall quality of teaching and learning across the school is good. Subject specialists make a number of positive teaching contributions when they encourage pupils to develop their spiritual, moral and social awareness. Thus the school has produced a programme on bullying for local radio; it also has an enviable reputation for its charity work. As a result, pupils have a particular awareness of people worse off than themselves. The subject also benefits from the experience and expertise of a wide range of visiting speakers representing many organisations. Good examples were seen of high quality class discussions, group and pair work. In one lesson a teacher organised the class well to understand the difference between human and legal rights. In another, younger pupils enthusiastically discussed which occupations represented the caring professions. On some occasions, however, lessons are too teacher centred and opportunities are lost for pupils to develop their own ideas in their own time.

Leadership and management

147. The leadership and management of citizenship are very good. The head of team monitors and supports the subject effectively and this is important to the implementation of this newly developing subject. There is a comprehensive scheme of work and there are reliable systems

for assessing pupils' progress. As a result of the well-organised and managed curriculum structure the standards in citizenship are good and the outlook for the future is optimistic.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

Inspection judgement

Grade

The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2
Value for money provided by the school	2

Overall standards achieved	4
Pupils' achievement	3

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	3
Attendance	4
Attitudes	3
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	3
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3

The quality of education provided by the school	3
The quality of teaching	3
How well pupils learn	3
The quality of assessment	3
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	5
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities	3
Accommodation and resources	4
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety	3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents	3
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	2
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	2
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	2

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