

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **ST BENEDICT'S ROMAN CATHOLIC MIDDLE SCHOOL**

Ashington, Northumberland

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique reference number: 122366

Headteacher: Mrs K Race

Lead inspector: Dr Kenneth C Thomas

Dates of inspection: 9 – 11 February 2004

Inspection number: 258769

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

|                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| Type of school:              | Middle deemed secondary                        |
| School category:             | Voluntary aided                                |
| Age range of pupils:         | 9 to 13 years                                  |
| Gender of pupils:            | Mixed  |
| Number on roll;              | 218  |
| School address:              | Moor House Lane<br>Ashington<br>Northumberland |
| Postcode:                    | NE63 9LR                                       |
| Telephone number:            | 01670 813658                                   |
| Fax number:                  | 01670 814840                                   |
| Appropriate authority:       | The governing body                             |
| Name of chair of governors:  | Mrs S Goldsbury                                |
| Date of previous inspection: | 12 January 1998                                |

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Benedict's Middle School is a school for boys and girls aged 9 to 13 situated south-east of Ashington town centre. With 218 pupils on the school roll it is smaller than most middle schools. Standards of attainment on entry in Year 5, although covering the full attainment range, are average overall. The proportion of pupils on the school's list of special educational needs has risen over the last four years and is now above average, as is the proportion of pupils with statements. Most pupils with the highest level of need have moderate learning difficulties. Very few pupils have other than white British backgrounds and, although some of these pupils are from homes where English is an additional language, all are fluent in English. The school's socio-economic circumstances are generally unfavourable, with many families where parents are unemployed. The school is part of an Education Action Zone. Although the pupil population is very stable, because of the small number of pupils in the school the movement of just a few can have a significant impact on the school's statistical information relating to standards.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Members of the inspection team |                    |                | Subject responsibilities   |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|--|
| 3390                           | Ken Thomas         | Lead inspector | Special educational needs<br>Physical education  |
| 9958                           | Tim Page           | Lay inspector  |  |
| 10905                          | Alan Brewerton     | Team inspector | Science  |
| 11838                          | Derek Cronin       | Team inspector | French   |
| 19414                          | Janet Flisher      | Team inspector | English as an additional language<br>Citizenship<br>English                                  |
| 10832                          | Alan Grant         | Team inspector | Art and design<br>Design and technology<br>Information and communication technology<br>Music |
| 33711                          | Michael Hird       | Team inspector | Mathematics  |
| 19152                          | Richard Merryfield | Team inspector | Geography<br>History   |

The inspection contractor was:

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a very effective school with many very good features.** The school provides a very good quality of education for all pupils. The very good leadership of the headteacher, with strong support from other key staff, ensures that pupils from all groups achieve very well. Standards are well above average at the end of Year 6. Teaching and learning are good. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher's caring leadership ensures that very good teamwork underpins the quality of education the school provides.
- Pupils achieve very well because teaching effectively challenges and extends their knowledge and understanding in most subjects.
- Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour, together with very effective partnerships with parents and the community, contribute significantly to the school's success.
- Pupils derive great benefit from the school's very good range of enrichment activities.
- Procedures for identifying and making provision for pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language are very good.
- Standards in French are not as high as they should be.
- The attendance rate is adversely affected by family holidays taken in term-time.
- Not enough curriculum time is allocated for the teaching of history in Years 7 and 8.

The school has made good improvement since the last inspection. Standards in English, mathematics and science have risen. Pupils' achievement is very good. In recognition of this the school has gained two achievement awards. There is now more good and very good teaching. The key issues relating to information and communication technology (ICT) and assessment identified in the last report have been tackled successfully. However, not enough progress has been made on the key issue related to French.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

| Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 6, compared with: | all schools |      |      | similar schools |
|---|-------------|------|------|-----------------|
|   | 2001        | 2002 | 2003 | 2003            |
| English   | A           | A    | B    | B               |
| mathematics   | A           | A    | B    | B               |
| science   | A*          | A    | B    | 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 2.*

**Achievement is very good.** The 2003 results in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science were above average. These results do not accurately reflect standards in these subjects, which are well above expectations. Achievement in all three subjects is very good in Years 5 and 6. In Years 7 and 8 achievement is very good in English and mathematics and good in science. Pupils achieve well in most other subjects and current standards are above national expectations in all years. Standards in French are below expectations because not enough attention has been given to the development of the basic communication skills in the language.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. **Pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, social and moral development, is also very good.** Cultural development is

satisfactory. Attendance is satisfactory, but adversely affected by family holidays taken during term time. Punctuality is good.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching and learning are good**, with little difference between year groups. Examples of very good teaching are seen in all years. Very good planning and teamwork underpin the quality of teaching. The quality of the curriculum is good. However, the taught week is below national recommendations and the shortage of curriculum time is having an adverse effect on standards in French and restricting full coverage of the curriculum in history in Years 7 and 8. The school makes very good provision to enrich pupils' learning outside lessons. Pupils are provided with very good care, support and guidance. Parents are very committed and closely involved in their children's education. Very good links with other schools, higher education and the community enhance provision.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management of the school are very good.** The thoughtful leadership provided by the headteacher, with highly dedicated support from the acting deputy head, is ensuring that the very good quality of education the school provides is being maintained at a time of significant staffing difficulties. The school makes effective use of evaluation information to identify strengths and tackle weaknesses. Governance of the school is good and all statutory requirements are met.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Parents are very pleased with the school. They express no major concerns and are particularly pleased with the quality of education and care the school provides. Pupils are equally positive. They are very proud of their school and greatly appreciate and enjoy all that it has to offer them.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Raise standards in French.
- Ensure that enough curriculum time is allocated to history for full coverage of the Programme of Study in Years 7 and 8.
- Continue to emphasise to parents the adverse effects on pupils' progress of absence from school for family holidays.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

#### Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement is very good. As a result, pupils progress from standards that are average on entry to well above average at the end of Year 6. They continue to achieve very well in Years 7 and 8 and standards are above expectations in most subjects by the end of Year 8.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well during their time in the school and make more rapid progress than expected based on their standards of attainment on entry.
- Standards are well above national expectations in English and mathematics and above expectations in most other subjects by the end of Year 8.
- Pupils' very good literacy skills and numeracy skills help them to achieve well.
- Pupils do not achieve as well as they should in French.

#### Commentary

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

| Standards in: | School results | National results |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| English       | 27.9 (29.9)    | 26.8 (27.0)      |
| mathematics   | 27.8 (29.3)    | 26.8 (26.7)      |
| science       | 29.0 (29.8)    | 28.6 (28.3)      |

*There were 48 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

1. As a middle school with pupils from Years 5 to 8, the only formal test results available are those taken by pupils at the end of Year 6. Pupils enter the school with standards of attainment that are average overall. Pupils achieve very well through Years 5 and 6 and results in the National Curriculum tests taken in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 6 are improving at the same rate as results nationally. Taken together, results over the last three years are well above average and above those indicated by the 2003 test results, which were above average. At the request of the local education authority, two pupils were admitted temporarily to the school shortly before the tests were taken. As the standards of attainment of both pupils in English, mathematics and science were well below average, and because there were only 48 pupils in the year group, their inclusion on the school roll had a disproportionate effect on the test results. The school's demanding targets for Year 6 in 2003 were exceeded and equally demanding targets have been set for 2004. Analyses of performance show that the school is amongst the highest achieving schools in the county.
2. Inspection evidence shows that the achievement of pupils presently in Years 6 and 8 is very good and that standards in English and mathematics are well above expectations. Although there are slight differences in standards in science, where they are well above expectations in Year 6 and above expectations in Year 8, pupils are achieving well and these differences relate to the characteristics of the year groups. Underpinning this very good achievement is exceptionally thorough planning, with great care taken to ensure that teachers' strengths and learning resources are used most effectively to support pupils' learning. This benefits the needs of all groups of pupils who, as a result, achieve very well. Although girls attain higher standards than boys in English, the difference is less than that observed nationally. The performance of boys is not only better in English than that of boys nationally but also matches



the national performance of girls. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls in mathematics and science. The achievements of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, those with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs are comparable with those of their peers. Because the needs of the higher-attaining pupils are recognised in most lessons they achieve particularly well.

3. Very good standards of literacy enable the majority of pupils to make the most of their education. Standards of reading are very good. Regular practice across a range of subjects leads to pupils becoming competent readers, able to understand texts and to identify different layers of meaning. Pupils communicate very well and speak with confidence in groups of all sizes. Writing skills are above average and handwriting and presentation are exceptionally good. Numeracy skills are well above average. The National Numeracy Strategy is being implemented successfully and numeracy skills are applied particularly well in science, design and technology, information and communication technology (ICT) and geography. The school has responded well to the key issue related to raising standards in ICT that was identified in the last inspection report. Pupils are now achieving well so that standards in ICT are above expectations at the end of Year 8. This is directly linked to the substantial investment the school has made in ICT resources over recent years. Teachers are becoming increasingly confident in the use of ICT and, although there is more progress to be made, pupils are being provided with more opportunities to apply and develop their ICT skills in subjects across the curriculum.
4. In other subjects pupils enter the school with standards that are broadly average. Because of good teaching pupils achieve well and standards in almost all subjects are at or above national expectations by the end of Year 8. The need to raise standards in French in Years 7 and 8 was identified as an issue for action in the last inspection report. To tackle this issue the subject was introduced in Year 5, which is two years earlier than is statutorily required. However, the best use has not been made of this early start with the consequence that achievement remains unsatisfactory and standards below expectations in Years 7 and 8. The reason for this is that there has been too much emphasis on the use of ICT and the development of pupils' literacy skills, with too little emphasis on the development of the basic communication skills in French. As a result, pupils lack confidence in speaking and pronunciation is poor because they depend too much on written preparation. Further action has now been taken and there are indications that improvements are being made.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Their spiritual, moral and social development is very good; cultural development is satisfactory. Attendance is satisfactory and punctuality is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils like coming to school, enjoy taking part in the wide range of opportunities available, and behave very well during lessons.
- Pupils display very good self-knowledge and an understanding of what is right. They show care and concern for others.
- Relationships are very good; and the school manages the very few incidents of bullying or harassment very effectively.
- Some pupils lose too much time at school as a result of family holidays taken in term-time.
- Not enough is done to cultivate pupils' first-hand experiences of cultural diversity.

### **Commentary**

5. Pupils' very positive attitudes to school are reflected in their curiosity and desire to learn, the exceptionally high standards of presentation of their work and their interest in the many extra-curricular activities the school provides. This makes for a happy school where pupils are

confident, strive to do their best and achieve very well. The school has maintained the strengths in pupils' attitudes, values and personal development noted in the last inspection report.

6. Pupils display sufficient maturity to be able to take responsibility for their own learning when working in groups or researching a topic. This makes a significant contribution to the very good progress they are making. They also take responsibility when assuming monitors' roles and show concern for the environment in keeping classrooms free of litter. Older pupils respond well to the additional responsibilities they are given. They assist lunchtime supervisors, act as librarians and collect school dinner numbers. School council members often take a leading role in citizenship lessons and are currently considering the effectiveness and implications of providing a pupils' surgery where individual pupils' suggestions and concerns can be discussed. Approximately forty per cent of pupils take part in extra-curricular activities; this is a high participation rate considering that many pupils need to take buses at the end of the school day.
  
7. Spirituality is embedded in the pupils' faith, reflected in the work that they produce and applied within the community of the school. Central to the aims of the school is the all-round development of pupils within a Catholic Christian framework. This commitment influences all of the school's activities and is much in evidence in the general school ethos. Pupils are educated in an environment based upon clear values and principles. These values and principles influence every aspect of school life and pupils feel secure, valued and respected. There is clear recognition by the school that the spiritual and moral development of pupils has a vital impact on their progress, attitudes and achievement. This aspect of pupils' personal development is exceptionally well co-ordinated and there are numerous and valuable examples of opportunities for reflection and discussion of spiritual and moral issues in all curriculum areas. This is a great strength of the school and a significant contributory factor to the success that pupils achieve.

## Exclusions

### *Ethnic background of pupils*

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

| Categories used in the Annual School Census | No of pupils on roll | Number of fixed period exclusions | Number of permanent exclusions |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| White – British                             | 218                  | 8                                 | 1                              |

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

8. Pupils' positive moral development is evident from their understanding of and agreement with rules. This leads to very good behaviour that has a beneficial impact on learning. All members of staff insist on high standards of behaviour and the overwhelming majority of pupils conform to these expectations. The number of fixed period exclusions is low compared to other schools. Although there was one permanent exclusion during the year preceding the inspection, this was the first for very many years. Relationships between pupils and with adults are very good and are characterised by mutual trust, respect and consideration. Pupils report that there is very little bullying and that if any incidents do occur they are treated with great urgency and dealt with immediately. Teachers encourage pupils to report any incidents of harassment and the system is working well. During discussions with inspectors, pupils from ethnic minority groups said that they felt secure and very well looked after. Pupils develop an understanding of the traditions and values of other faiths, and an appreciation of cultural diversity is celebrated in several subjects. However, not enough is done to develop this aspect of pupils' personal development in a systematic way and in particular to enable them to gain first-hand experience of other cultures.



## Attendance

### Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

| Authorised absence |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| School data        | 6.1 |
| National data      | 6.0 |

| Unauthorised absence |     |
|----------------------|-----|
| School data          | 0.1 |
| National data        | 0.3 |

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

9. Most of the pupils arrive at school promptly in the morning and this, together with their punctuality at the start of lessons, helps them to make the most of their time at school. The school has effective procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance, and works well with external agencies when individual support is necessary. However, attendance, although still marginally above the national average, has dropped over the last three years. Although the school does all it can to discourage the taking of family holidays during term-time, the increase in authorised absence is a result of this. Such absences interrupt the pupils' education and those concerned miss the work undertaken by the rest of the class; this has an adverse impact on the progress of all pupils as teachers have to devote teaching time to help the absentees catch up.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching and learning are good. The quality of the curriculum is good. The taught week is below national recommendations and a shortage of curriculum time is having an adverse effect on standards in French and restricting full coverage of the Programme of Study in history. The school makes very good provision to enrich pupils' learning outside lessons. Pupils are provided with very good care, support and guidance. Parents are very committed and closely involved in their children's education. Very good links with other schools, higher education and the community enhance provision.

### Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good, with very little difference between year groups. Good use is made of assessment to support pupils' learning.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good lesson planning together with the effective use of teachers' good subject knowledge promote good learning.
- Pupils are well motivated, try hard to do well and give teachers their full attention.
- Relationships in the classroom are very good and teachers create a positive and supportive environment for learning.
- Very good use is made of teaching assistants to support the learning of pupils with special educational needs.
- Homework is used very effectively to support pupils' learning.
- Pupils lack confidence in speaking French because not enough attention has been given to the teaching of the four basic communication skills.

## Commentary

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 49 lessons

| Excellent | Very good | Good     | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|-----------|-----------|----------|--------------|----------------|------|-----------|
| 1 (2%)    | 13 (27%)  | 22 (45%) | 13 (27%)     | 0              | 0    | 0         |

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

10. The quality of teaching has improved slightly since the last inspection. There is now more good and very good teaching and less unsatisfactory teaching. Very good planning and teamwork underpin the quality of teaching. Teachers work very well together to review progress, plan lessons and share expertise and resources. The outcome of this is a high level of consistency in teaching across the different year groups. In the vast majority of lessons, learning activities are carefully structured to challenge and interest pupils at all levels of attainment. The highest-attaining pupils are given appropriately challenging work and pupils with special educational needs are given very good support. Good account is also taken of the needs of pupils with English as an additional language. As a result all groups of pupils make similarly good progress in lessons.
11. For many years pupils' learning has benefited from a very stable teaching staff. However, because of promotions and retirements, five teachers left the school at the end of the term before the inspection. This accounted for almost half of the teaching staff. At the pre-inspection meeting with parents, understandable concern was expressed at the impact that such a high turnover would have on the quality of teaching. Inspection evidence indicates that the new teachers, several of whom are newly qualified, are settling well and, because they are being provided with very good support, teaching effectively. There is no indication that the quality of teaching has been adversely affected by the change.
12. Teaching in the best lessons is characterised by good subject expertise that is used well to provide clear explanations with high expectations of work and behaviour. In almost all lessons good progress is made because pupils rise well to learning tasks that extend them. Teaching of this quality was seen in most subjects. In English, pupils make very good progress because they are encouraged to explore ideas and to use their imaginations. In mathematics, learning objectives are made explicit at the beginning of lessons so pupils know what is expected of them. Learning is then effectively consolidated through reviews carried out at the end of lessons. In science, pupils make rapid learning gains because a dedicated team of specialist teachers succeeds in capturing pupils' interest and enthusiasm for the subject. Underpinning all teaching is the extraordinary amount of attention given to the planning of lessons and schemes of work. This is a real strength of teaching and much appreciated by new teachers. Another particular strength of teaching is the very effective use of homework to consolidate and extend pupils' learning. Through homework the school has secured the active involvement of many parents in their children's learning and this is making a significant contribution to standards and achievement.

### **Example of outstanding practice**

#### **Exemplary use of reading homework in English**

The English department promotes pupils' enjoyment and skill in reading through the use of reading logs and the requirement to read regularly at home. Each pupil keeps a detailed record of their personal reading and these records are characterised by lively personal responses, far removed from the tired and hackneyed book reviews so often found in reading logs. Parents value their involvement in the scheme and because they are asked to sign the completion of homework each week they know what their children are reading and can check the quality and presentation of the work. This scheme has been at the heart of the development of pupils' very good reading skills and promotes an enjoyment and interest in books. It is noticeable that pupils always have a book with them and will often pull it out to read if they have a few minutes to fill, either in form time or at the start of lessons. As a consequence, the range of books read is very wide and a good number cope with very challenging texts.

13. In the best ICT lessons pupils approach problem solving enthusiastically and show very good levels of perseverance. They discuss their work with each other and exchange ideas in a mature manner. Lessons in history are lively and very good classroom relationships encourage pupils to try their hardest. There is some variation in the quality of citizenship teaching because some tutors are more comfortable than others with the course content and the teaching methods needed. In the best lessons, pupils are encouraged to reflect and to think about the complexities of contemporary issues. Excellent relationships and a secure and

trusting learning environment support the discussion of sensitive topics. Teaching and learning in French have improved and are now satisfactory. Expectations have been raised and there is now more use of French in lessons. Some lessons are, however, taught by non-specialists and in these lessons, the lack of subject expertise restricts pupils' progress in speaking and writing.

14. Teaching is good for pupils who have special educational needs. Teaching assistants are well deployed and very good use is made of their knowledge of pupils to ensure that support is most effective. Individual education plans (IEPs) are well constructed and provide clear information of pupils' needs, provision, strategies and targets. Pupils' progress is carefully monitored and reviews of IEPs and statements are conducted according to requirements. The learning needs of gifted and talented pupils are catered for within the planning for higher-attaining pupils. In most subjects this is good with appropriate extension work and other activities.
15. Inconsistency in the application of the school assessment policy was identified as a weakness in the last inspection report. The school has responded well to this issue and assessment is now used well in most subjects. Work is generally marked regularly and pupils are provided with clear information on how well they are doing and what they must do to improve. Marking of this quality is seen in English and mathematics, and progress is being made in this direction in citizenship. There are, however, inconsistencies in science, ICT and French where there is a need to give pupils more precise feedback on how well they are doing and to set targets for improvement.

## **The curriculum**

The school provides a good curriculum, which is considerably enriched by a very good programme of extra-curricular activities. The school is well staffed and has a good level of learning resources. The accommodation is satisfactory.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The range of subjects provides well for pupils' aspirations and abilities. All statutory requirements are met.
- The school evaluates its strengths and weaknesses effectively to refine its provision.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- There is very good curriculum enrichment through a range of extra-curricular activities and visits.
- Good provision for citizenship education contributes significantly to pupils' personal development.
- The taught week falls well short of national recommendations in Years 7 and 8. This has particular implications for the breadth of coverage in history.
- Several teaching rooms, and in particular those used for music and art, are too small for the numbers of pupils in teaching groups.
- Although the library has been improved since the last inspection it is too small and inadequate to support teaching and learning.

## **Commentary**

16. Throughout Years 5 to 8, the school provides the full range of National Curriculum courses. Provision in French has recently been extended to Year 5. This indicates the school's commitment to rectifying a weakness reported at the previous inspection. A particular strength is the quality of provision in the timetabled lessons in numeracy, literacy and citizenship for all pupils in Years 5 to 8. The progress pupils make in these lessons supports their work in other subjects effectively. The extension of French and the provision of citizenship are the result of ongoing review, demonstrating the school's values in providing equal opportunities. Similarly, gifted or talented pupils are identified in each subject and extension activities are planned for them. In English, mathematics and science, the three-part lesson is well implemented, so that

the Key Stage 3 National Strategy is improving standards, and pupils' knowledge of their progress. The adoption of a secondary style of provision in Years 5 and 6 means that the school makes the most of its specialist teaching. Well above average standards indicate the success of the management of the curriculum despite the restraints imposed by the low level of staffing in a small school. A positive feature of curriculum planning is the collaboration with the first schools and the high school to ensure that pupils continue to make good progress when they transfer between schools.

17. The regular acts of collective worship and assemblies support the school's ethos very well. However, the time for assemblies at the end of Mondays and Fridays reduces taught time, so that some lessons last only 40 minutes instead of an hour. This has a negative impact on progress in French in both Years 5 and 6, and affects the depth and breadth of topic coverage in history in Years 7 and 8. Some citizenship lessons are also adversely affected by a time shortage. The school is reviewing this situation.
18. There is equality of access and opportunity for all pupils, including the few with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs. Provision for pupils with special educational needs generally is based on the need to raise standards of literacy and numeracy as soon as possible, and curriculum arrangements are effective and reflect this priority.
19. One of the strengths of the school is its provision of extra-curricular activities and out-of-school learning. This provision is well organised and provides a very good range of activities outside the normal school day. Many of these activities are well suited to the needs of gifted and talented pupils. There are drama, music, sports, ICT and art clubs, and visits to the theatre and other local places of interest. Parents and pupils are very appreciative of the enrichment opportunities that the school provides.
20. The match of teachers to the needs of the curriculum is satisfactory. Because of the small size of the school there is inevitably some non-specialist teaching and this has had an adverse impact on standards in French. Non-teaching staff make a significant contribution to the effective functioning of the school, particularly in art, design and technology, and ICT. Teaching assistants have a good knowledge of the pupils they support and make a positive contribution to pupils' learning.
21. The school accommodation is satisfactory overall. There are strengths in many areas. The new computer room provides a very good teaching area and is well equipped with up-to-date computers. The refurbished accommodation for food technology is also very good. However, the science laboratory and technology rooms are out of date and in need of refurbishment, and the mobile classroom, which accommodates music, is damp and too far away from the school building. The art room is too small for the size of the teaching groups and this restricts the circulation of pupils and ready access to materials. The library is too small to accommodate class groups and the book stock is inadequate to support independent research. There are interactive whiteboards in many classrooms and these are well used, for example to highlight and summarise key learning points in lessons.

### **Care, guidance and support**

The school makes very good provision for pupils' care, welfare, health and safety. Pupils receive very good support, advice and guidance based on monitoring. Procedures for involving pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views are very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school looks after its pupils very well; health and safety and child protection procedures are comprehensive and very effective.
- Well-planned and thoughtful induction procedures help new pupils to settle quickly.

- The school actively seeks pupils' views and tries to accommodate their suggestions and preferences.

#### **Commentary**

22. Pupils are very well looked after during the school day. They feel safe at school because they are well known to their teachers. Pupils establish very secure and trusting relationships with adults who work in the school. Child protection and health and safety procedures are well understood by the relevant members of staff. The school liaises well with a range of external agencies, including social services, educational psychology and health, in order to provide effective support for pupils who are experiencing difficulties. The school has a very good tracking system for monitoring concerns before they become issues, and keeps staff updated and aware of their responsibilities.
23. Very good liaison and transfer arrangements with the first schools and high school ensure a smooth transition when pupils enter the school in Year 5 and when they leave the school at the end of Year 8. Pupils speak warmly of the support they receive and this makes a positive contribution to their progress in the early years. Topic work is often planned with the first schools and the high school in order to provide effective curriculum continuity. Rewards for good achievement are celebrated in assemblies and these motivate pupils well.
24. The careful monitoring and recording of pupils' personal development and achievements underpin the very good pastoral support the school provides. Academic guidance is good but there is inconsistency in the quality of marking which leads to less certainty on how improvement can be achieved in a few subjects. Pupils with special educational needs, gifted and talented pupils, and those with English as an additional language are supported very well, and make similar progress to that of their peers.
25. The school council is very well regarded both by pupils and teachers. All pupils can stand for election to the school council and recommendations from the council have brought about several improvements. These include additional extra-curricular activities, pupils' discos and charitable activities.

#### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

Links with parents, the community, and other schools and colleges are very good.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents are provided with extensive curriculum information and support their children's learning very well.
- Very good links with the community enrich the quality of pupils' education.
- Strong working partnerships with other schools ensure that pupils are well prepared for transfer to high school.
- Links with parents of pupils with special educational needs are strong.

#### **Commentary**

26. Parents' pre-inspection questionnaires reveal very favourable views of the school. These positive opinions are confirmed by the inspection. Approximately one in ten respondents disagreed with the statements that there was no bullying or harassment, that they were kept well informed about their children's progress, or that the school sought their views. These issues were investigated thoroughly but could not be substantiated. Pupils' views are also highly positive and similar to those of their parents.
27. Amongst the most striking features of the school's communications with parents are the clear and extensive curriculum information provided and the good quality of pupils' reports. Pupils'



planners are used very effectively as a means of communication between parents and teachers and parents speak well of the school's responsiveness to their views and concerns.

28. Parents' involvement in their children's education is promoted through termly teacher meetings and the provision of curriculum workshops, which cover topics requested by parents. These activities help parents to support and consolidate the school's positive ethos at home. As a result pupils are surrounded by a clear and consistent set of values and goals. This leaves them in no doubt as to what is expected of them and makes a significant contribution to standards and achievement. Parents of children with special educational needs are fully involved in the reviews of their statements and IEPs.
29. Very good benefits arise from the school's community links, including parish links with Ashington and Morpeth. Pupils have visited the offices of 'The Evening Chronicle' as a literacy enrichment activity. Visits are made to local heritage museums and to field study centres. Local businesses support the curriculum and pupils involve themselves in community events. Sports clubs provide coaching and this has helped several pupils to gain county honours. A local football team uses the school grounds and provides an out of school activity, which involves pupils from the school. Parents assist in the running of clubs and with out of school visits. There is an active parent and teacher association, which raises about £3,000 annually for additional resources.
30. Links with other schools and colleges are very good. There are strong links with the main first schools. Transfer arrangements to the high school are enhanced by very good relationships, joint transitional curriculum planning, and procedures to ensure continuity of pupils' pastoral support. Work experience places are offered to high school pupils and placements are provided for student teachers from Northumbria University.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

Leadership and management are very good. The headteacher provides very good leadership and is very well supported by senior colleagues. Leadership elsewhere in the school is good. Management is very good. Very good planning, underpinned by effective monitoring, is helping to take the school forward. Governance of the school is good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher inspires staff and ensures that pupils are educated in an environment based upon clear values and principles.
- The high commitment of the headteacher, with excellent support from the literacy co-ordinator, who is now acting as deputy head, is ensuring that the quality of education is being maintained at a time of significant staffing difficulties.
- Governors are very supportive and fulfil their statutory responsibilities very well.
- Very good planning and financial management help the school to achieve its educational priorities.
- Subject co-ordinators provide good support for other staff and pupils.

### **Commentary**

31. The headteacher provides the school with a clear educational direction and has successfully established a devolved style of leadership that actively promotes the potential of all staff. As a result, the school's management structures are based on co-operation with staff joining together to share ideas and make decisions. This sharing of leadership roles and responsibilities is very much part of the distinctive ethos of the school and consistent with the Christian principles that permeate all daily activities and guide all planning. Central to the aims of the school is the all-round development of pupils within a Catholic Christian framework. This commitment influences all of the school's activities and is much in evidence in the general school ethos. Because clear values and principles influence every aspect of school life pupils feel secure, valued and respected. There is open recognition by the school that the spiritual

and moral development of pupils has a vital impact on their progress, attitudes and achievement. This aspect of pupils' personal development is very well co-ordinated and there are numerous and valuable examples of opportunities for reflection and discussion of spiritual and moral issues in all curriculum areas. This is a great strength of the school and a significant contributory factor to the success that pupils achieve.

32. In pursuing the aims of the school, the headteacher receives very good support from senior colleagues and other staff. Because of the recent promotion of the deputy headteacher and the absence, through extended compassionate leave, of the acting deputy head, the senior leadership team was significantly reduced at the time of the inspection and consisted only of the headteacher and the literacy co-ordinator. A very good indication of the high commitment of staff and the very good quality of teamwork is seen in the support being provided to these two senior members of staff as they cope with the multiple additional responsibilities they have taken on as a result of the temporary reduction in the senior leadership team. Almost all staff have subject responsibilities, and many staff have several areas of responsibility. They work hard to be effective in their roles. Very good collaboration between staff is ensuring that teachers who have co-ordinating responsibilities, some of whom are newly qualified, receive good support and carry out their roles effectively. This is seen, for example, in French and music where both co-ordinators are newly qualified, and in the very effective co-ordination of special educational needs by a part-time teacher.
  
33. Performance management is well established within the school and senior staff are enthusiastic about its effectiveness in bringing about improvement. Continuing professional development of staff is carefully devised in relation to the priorities of the school and the individual teacher. The school makes a good contribution to initial teacher training in spite of its small size. The strong teamwork evident in the school also includes the site management and cleaning staff. The school premises are maintained to an exceptionally clean standard and this makes a significant contribution to the school ethos.
  
34. The governors support the work of the school well. The chair visits the school regularly and other governors take part in occasional visits to gather information on an aspect of the work of the school. Through these visits and regular reports from the headteacher governors have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and areas in which improvement is needed. However, because visits by governors are not linked to the systematic evaluation of the progress being made with the school development plan, governors are not able to contribute in a fully informed manner to the shaping of the direction of the school. Policy development is carried out well by the various sub-committees of the governing body and governors carry out all of their statutory responsibilities.
  
35. The school uses its resources well, to the benefit of pupils. It is careful to seek to ensure that it obtains the best value for money from all its financial decisions. The headteacher oversees subject spending to ensure that resources are spent to best effect. This is seen, for example, in the raising of standards in ICT as a result of targeted spending to improve computer resources. The school is awaiting several invoices for minor works. When these are paid the budget surplus will be about the same as the amount deemed to be prudent.

## Financial information

### *Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003*

| Income and expenditure (£) |         |
|----------------------------|---------|
| Total income               | 631,669 |
| Total expenditure          | 609,430 |
| Expenditure per pupil      | 2,673   |

| Balances (£)                        |        |
|-------------------------------------|--------|
| Balance from previous year          | 51,562 |
| Balance carried forward to the next | 78,801 |



# **PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS**

## **SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 2 AND 3**

### **ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

#### **English**

Provision in English is **very good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are well above average and have improved significantly since the last inspection.
- Leadership and management are very good. The very effective teamwork and rigorous monitoring of the department's work have a very positive impact on the quality of provision.
- Teaching and learning are very good and result in very good achievement.
- Pupils' very positive attitudes and behaviour make a significant contribution to their progress.

#### **Commentary**

36. Results in the National Curriculum tests in 2003 for pupils at the end of Year 6 were above average and better than those gained by pupils in similar schools. However, taking the last three years together, results for both boys and girls have been well above average and this is a more accurate reflection of the standards observed during the inspection in lessons, in pupils' work and in discussions with pupils. As attainment on entry to the school is average the test results represent very good achievement for all pupils and this continues through Years 7 and 8.
37. Speaking and listening skills are very good. The vast majority of pupils are able to sustain responses, to put forward their point of view, consider and discuss alternative views and frame questions as well as answer them. Reading skills are also very good. Pupils read widely for pleasure and can use skimming and scanning skills to find information from non-fiction texts. They have a very good understanding of the features of different styles of writing and they are able to use this knowledge in their own writing.
38. Pupils make this very good progress because of very good teaching and their own desire to learn and succeed. Very thorough planning underpins teaching that meets the needs of all pupils so ensuring that pupils of all levels of prior attainment achieve very well. The highest attaining pupils are given appropriately difficult work, and lower-attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs are given very good support. The excellent relationships between teachers and pupils together with the level of challenge in lessons provide a secure environment in which pupils feel able to explore ideas and hypothesise in the knowledge that their efforts will be valued by teachers and pupils alike. Lessons have good pace and pupils are encouraged to work both collaboratively and independently. Homework is used very effectively to extend and consolidate class work. The use of the reading log is particularly praised by parents for having a very positive effect on the range of pupils' reading for pleasure. Teachers ensure that pupils are given a rich diet in English and this is enhanced in Year 6 by the visit to 'The Evening Chronicle' newsroom where they have hands-on experience of the production of a newspaper. Apart from this, however, ICT is not used effectively enough as an aid to drafting and editing work.
39. A very good range of extra-curricular activities including theatre visits and opportunities to participate in dramatic productions, both large and small scale, enriches pupils' experience. Over half of the school's population takes part in the very popular annual production, written by the subject co-ordinator and always sold out.

40. The English department benefits from very good leadership and management. The subject co-ordinator provides an excellent role model through her commitment and high standards and gives very good support to new and temporary teachers. There is clarity of vision and strong teamwork, which results in all pupils receiving a similar experience in lessons. The ethos and aims of the school are clearly reflected in the work of the English department where rigour and challenge are balanced by a caring approach. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. Standards have risen significantly and pupils are now more aware of the standards they are working at and how they can improve their work. This is a vibrant and hard-working department well placed to effect further improvement.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

41. Pupils' very good literacy skills enable them to have full access to the whole curriculum. Knowledge and understanding of language is at the heart of English teaching and teachers across the school reinforce this through their emphasis on correct spelling and use of technical and subject-specific language. This consistent approach across the curriculum enhances pupils' achievement. Pupils' very good reading skills enable them to extract and understand information from a range of sources. They write fluently and use appropriate subject language with confidence; they learn to make notes and to use drafting and editing to improve their work. The presentation of their work is very good across all subjects.
42. There is a small group of pupils who speak English as an additional language. Although none is at an early stage of language development the school continues to provide weekly one-to-one support for them. This promotes their very good achievement and progress.

### **French**

Provision in French is **unsatisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards are below expectations in Year 8, for all pupils, in all skills.
- Marking and assessment fail to provide pupils with information on their progress and how to improve.
- Pupils have very good attitudes. They want to learn.
- The low time allocation for French in Years 5 and 6 prevents pupils from starting Year 7 with the intended advantage.
- The recently-appointed subject co-ordinator is beginning to understand the weaknesses in provision and to develop strategies to rectify them.

### **Commentary**

43. Although there are no national standards for French in Years 5 and 6, pupils are not benefiting as well as they should from the early opportunity to learn the language in Year 5. Work seen in Years 5 and 6 is almost entirely at single word level. By the end of Year 8, standards for all groups of pupils are below expectations for their age. Too much concentration on the use of ICT and literacy skills has meant that progress in basic communication skills in French has been slow. Pupils lack confidence in speaking and pronounce poorly because they depend too much on written preparation. Writing consists largely of notes and sentence work, with little evidence of extension into creative tasks involving continuous writing. Consequently, achievement throughout Years 5 to 8 is unsatisfactory.
44. Current teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teaching by non-specialists focuses well on comprehension skills, but a lack of subject expertise hinders pupils' progress in speaking and writing. Teaching by specialists features increasing use of spoken French and higher expectations. Evidence in planning shows clear intentions to provide more opportunities for

pupils to use French for themselves. Pupils have splendid attitudes. They collaborate well, present work neatly, and contribute significantly to the very good relationships that pervade classwork. They are unaware of their slow progress because marking is unhelpful and weak timing in lessons prevents teachers from relating achievement to objectives.

45. The subject co-ordinator, a newly qualified teacher and the only specialist, has been in post for five weeks. She is quickly coming to terms with the factors that have held back the progress of willing learners. Plans are already in place to improve assessment procedures and to monitor work more efficiently. She supports non-specialists well. Evidence suggests satisfactory, and potentially good, leadership and management. The extension of provision into Year 5 is a positive move, but one lesson per week of 40 minutes in Years 5 and 6 does not effectively support continuity in learning. The intention to enable pupils to start Year 7 at a more advanced stage than is typical in secondary schools is not realised. In all years, there has been insufficient planning to ensure progression in skills, so that improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory. The combination of more focused leadership and willing learners indicates good capacity for improvement.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is very good with well-structured and appropriately paced lessons, high expectations and very positive relationships between pupils and teachers.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good.
- The quality and thoroughness of assessment are good.
- Teaching and learning are enhanced by the effective application of the National Numeracy Strategy.
- There is not enough emphasis on the use of ICT in developing mathematical concepts.
- There are too few opportunities for developing investigative skills and independent learning.

### **Commentary**

46. Pupils enter the school with average standards. The 2003 National Curriculum test results for pupils at the end of Year 6 were above average when compared with schools nationally and with similar schools. Standards have risen over the past four years in line with national trends and are now well above average. Standards at the end of Year 8 are well above expectations for this stage of the course. This represents good improvement since the last inspection. When standards on entry are taken into account, achievement is very good, particularly in Years 5 and 6.
47. Pupils with special educational needs are placed in lower sets, which have smaller numbers, and in which the pace of learning is appropriate so that they achieve well. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 5, for example, can identify lines of symmetry of a variety of polygons. High-attaining pupils in Year 8 are confident with probability theory and practice. Year 6 pupils have a very good knowledge of acute, obtuse and reflex angles and use protractors accurately. However, in one otherwise satisfactory lesson progress was impeded because the lesson lacked pace and not enough challenge was given to high-attaining pupils. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop investigative skills and learn independently.
48. Teaching is very good and pupils learn well. Effective use is made of the National Numeracy Strategy. This is seen in very well planned lessons that often include opportunities for practising mental calculations. Learning objectives are clearly specified to pupils at the beginning of lessons and are often discussed with them so that they know the purpose of the lesson. This provides a focus, which maintains interest and motivation. Pupils work hard and

produce good quantities of work. Teachers use appropriate technical language and encourage pupils to do the same. Support staff, where available, contribute positively to pupils' learning by explaining mathematical processes clearly. Teacher expectations are consistently high and pupils invariably respond positively to the challenges set. Pupils' attainment is assessed regularly and progress carefully monitored. Exercise books are thoroughly marked and teachers' comments give good guidance about how pupils can make progress. Teachers keep detailed records of tests and assessment results. Targets are set and pupils know what they must do to improve. Pupils' attitudes are very positive. Behaviour and co-operation are very good. Teachers are very aware of those pupils with special educational needs and provide materials appropriate to their ability. Development of the provision for gifted and talented pupils is in its early stages. Homework is set regularly and used effectively to consolidate and extend learning.

49. The co-ordinator has been in post for only a few weeks and is beginning to make an impact. He has a clear vision about how to further improve existing high standards. He continues to promote a collegiate approach to planning. He understands the necessity to develop strategies to formally monitor the quality of teaching and learning and sees the potential of increased use of ICT to impact positively on attainment. He provides a very good example for colleagues in his own classroom practice and supports those with limited specialist skills and knowledge.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

50. The National Numeracy Strategy has been implemented in terms of the three-part lesson in mathematics and works well in most lessons. A number of other departments plan for the use of numeracy in their subjects. There are opportunities in science to use graphs to interpret data in Years 7 and 8 and examples of tally graphs in modern foreign languages. Pupils were making accurate measurements in resistant materials, and using proportions in food technology, time lines in history and bar graphs in geography.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards at the end of Year 6 are well above average and have improved since the last inspection.
- Pupils achieve well because teaching is good and often very good.
- Attitudes and behaviour of pupils are very good.
- Assessment is used well to guide teaching and curriculum planning, but marking does not always provide sufficient guidance on how to improve.

### **Commentary**

51. Test results in 2003 at the end of Year 6 were above average. All boys, and nearly all girls, achieved Level 4, but more girls than boys gained the higher Level 5. Science results were better than those for mathematics and English. When measured against prior attainment, achievement is very good at the end of Year 6 and good in Year 8. Standards are currently well above average at the end of Year 6 and above average at the end of Year 8. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.
52. Inspection evidence indicates that most pupils are making good gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding in science. For example, higher-attaining pupils in Year 8 can explain that gases expand, on heating, more than liquids because gas particles move more quickly when heated and are more spread out than those in a liquid. Lower-attaining pupils,

however, whilst recognising that gases expand more than liquids, have more difficulty in explaining why. The standards of literacy and numeracy of higher-attaining pupils are above average, and those of lower-attaining pupils are average.

53. Teaching is good and often very good. The principal features of the best teaching are the use of very good subject knowledge, high expectations, well-focused planning and an effective range of teaching methods that maintain interest and engender learning. Pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour make a significant contribution to the positive learning atmosphere in lessons. Homework consolidates or extends classwork and often requires pupils to carry out research or extended reading, which they do willingly. This makes a positive contribution to standards.
54. Good use is made of assessment to monitor the progress of pupils, to identify underachievers, adjust teaching and guide curriculum planning. Although day-to-day marking is satisfactory, advice on how to improve is not consistently provided. The identification of appropriate learning objectives enables pupils throughout the school, including those with special educational needs, to make good progress in improving their knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts.
55. During the inspection there was a temporary arrangement for the leadership and management of the subject in the absence of the subject co-ordinator on compassionate leave. These arrangements are working very well. Well above average standards and good achievement indicate that the usual leadership and management of the subject are very effective. The subject is taught by well-qualified and experienced specialist teachers, and this underpins standards and achievement. Resources are good and ICT is used effectively to support teaching and learning. The single, small laboratory is in urgent need of refurbishment. Good progress has been made since the last inspection and the capacity for improvement is very good.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good achievement is underpinned by very good teaching.
- Pupils' pride in their work and high levels of interest coupled with very good behaviour results in very good learning.
- The new computer suite is very well equipped and allows pupils to experiment and explore the wide range of resources available.
- Although the assessment of pupils' work is very thorough, it is not used to keep them well enough informed of their progress or to set targets for improvement.

### **Commentary**

56. Standards are average in Year 6 and above average at the end of Year 8. This demonstrates a significant improvement since the last inspection when standards were well below those expected of pupils of similar age. Much improved resources together with very good teaching has brought about the improvement. Pupils are achieving well because their confidence in the use of ICT has been increased as a result of the regular and well-planned use of the ICT suite.
57. Pupils in Year 6 become very competent users of computers. They quickly grasp the need to frame questions carefully when, for example, they are using a search engine to collect information for presentations. Pupils consolidate and use existing skills, knowledge and understanding while acquiring new presentational techniques. By Year 7, pupils display very



good word processing skills and are competent in the use of presentational software. They understand how to communicate information through the careful selection of fonts, colour and images to enhance the imaginative ideas they are communicating. Pupils are very keen to learn. They approach problem solving enthusiastically and show very good levels of perseverance. Pupils discuss their work with each other supportively and exchange ideas in a mature manner. This support provides them with a great deal of confidence and leads to good achievement.

58. The strength of teaching in ICT lessons is very good planning coupled with very good subject knowledge that enables the teachers to be confident and enthusiastic in their work. Teachers plan lessons that match the learning needs of all pupils. The use of modified units from the national schemes and strategies provides a good foundation for teaching. Effective use is made of ICT skills booklets to record pupils' competence in the use of a variety of software. This approach encourages pupils to use software packages independently and supports their learning very well. Pupils respond to teachers' high expectations and strive to achieve high standards. They show high levels of pride in the work they produce. Very good use is made of the skills of more competent pupils in collaborative learning activities. Assessment is used very well to ensure that work is well matched to pupils' attainment levels. Higher-attaining pupils, for example, are given numerous opportunities to extend their skills and knowledge by using more complex software or engaging in more demanding tasks. However, the marking of pupils' work does not provide enough information of the standard of their work in terms of National Curriculum levels or enough guidance on how they can improve.
59. The recently appointed acting co-ordinator provides good leadership and management of the subject. Statutory requirements are being met. High levels of self-evaluation and analysis to improve standards reflect effective and efficient management. Good use has been made of in-service training provided by the Education Action Zone (EAZ) to develop teachers' ICT skills. Technical support has also been made available to the school through the EAZ and this is contributing to the improvement seen in the subject. A wide range of software is available to support learning, but needs to be organised on the server to ensure ease of access.

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

60. The use of ICT across the curriculum is satisfactory. All teachers have access to laptop computers and have been provided with training in the use of this equipment to support teaching and learning in their subjects. Because of this the use of ICT across the curriculum has improved considerably since the last inspection. Interactive whiteboards are available in most classrooms and are beginning to be used well in several subjects, for example in mathematics. Data logging is also used well in science. However, there is a need to improve the co-ordination of the timing and use of ICT in each subject to ensure that pupils' skills are used more effectively to support learning.

### **HUMANITIES**

61. **Geography** was sampled. Two lessons were seen in Years 7 and 8 and pupils' work was scrutinised, although owing to the timing of the inspection, there was too little evidence to make a judgement about standards in Year 6. Standards in Years 7 and 8 are above average. Pupils make good progress in acquiring and using a range of geographical skills and vocabulary. A notable feature is the very well presented and accurately labelled diagrams to illustrate and explain, for example, the differences between relief, convectional and frontal rainfall. All pupils can use symbols and four-figure grid references in mapwork, and higher-attaining pupils are confident in their use of six-figure ones. Standards of literacy are above average, but there is less evidence of pupils' skills in graphic work than is usually the case. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are very carefully planned with due regard to pupils' abilities. Positive attitudes and an enthusiasm for learning enable all pupils, including those with special educational needs, to achieve well. Learning objectives are often

explicitly shared with pupils at the start of lessons, and sometimes beneficially revisited at the ends of them. Schemes of work suggest that fieldwork plays an important part in the geography curriculum.

## History

Provision In history is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is good so pupils learn well.
- Very good relationships lead to good achievement.
- Good leadership and management effectively support non-specialist teachers.
- Coverage of National Curriculum programmes of study is restricted because of a lack of curriculum time.
- Pupils' source analysis and evaluation skills require further development.

### Commentary

62. Standards of work seen are above average. In Years 5 and 6, pupils display good observation skills and select evidence well from a range of evidence. Although pupils' grasp of chronology is not always secure, overall they achieve well. Most pupils produce well-presented work in technically accurate English, although lower-attaining pupils' work is sometimes incomplete and contains errors in spelling and punctuation. Higher-attaining pupils complete some imaginative extended writing on the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb. As in higher years, literacy standards are above average.
63. In Years 7 and 8, standards are also above average and achievement is good. Pupils understand and use subject-specific terminology well and select from a range of evidence to show contrasting interpretations of life in the 1500s. At present they are insufficiently critical in their use of sources because they do not question how provenance affects reliability. Most pupils show a good understanding of cause and consequence in extended writing on the Civil War. A shortage of curriculum time means that pupils' knowledge and understanding of the Tudors, and the major changes which occurred during their reigns, is significantly less well developed than it is in most schools. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve well because teachers adapt materials and tasks for them, and where they are deployed, learning support assistants support them very effectively.
64. Pupils in all years learn well because they approach the subject with highly positive attitudes and are well taught. Humour is used very well which strengthens classroom relationships and encourages pupils to give of their best. Lesson planning is very detailed and classroom management strong, so that pupils' interest is effectively engaged and their attention well monitored. Learning activities are usually challenging, although occasionally a lack of teaching experience means that higher-attaining pupils are not always extended as fully as they might be.
65. The subject is well managed and led. The subject co-ordinator has worked hard to establish and build links with partner schools and to provide support for non-specialist colleagues. Development planning has had an appropriate focus on raising standards and improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

66. Art, design and technology, music and physical education were sampled. A few lessons in each subject were observed and pupils' work was scrutinised,
67. Because pupils follow a well-planned and structured programme, which builds effectively on their prior attainment, they achieve well and standards are above national expectations in **art**. Skill acquisition in drawing techniques is good and pupils are developing an appropriate artistic vocabulary. Very good displays of pupils' work show imagination and an understanding of how different materials can be manipulated and linked to ideas. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are very good, and make a significant contribution to learning. They are provided with further opportunities to extend their artistic knowledge and understanding through visits to exhibitions and galleries, and the art club. Pupils are very thoughtful not to disturb others in their movement around the art room. This is particularly important as the room is too small for the size of teaching groups. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Pupils are given a clear understanding of the learning objectives at the start of lessons and, because learning tasks are carefully planned, they are fully engaged and very productive. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Careful planning, close monitoring and the effective use of assessment underpin pupils' progress and achievement. Good progress has been made since the last inspection, particularly with regard to the exploration of art from other cultures.
68. In **design and technology**, standards in food technology and textiles are above average and average in other materials areas. Well-structured booklets are being used very effectively, especially in food technology and textiles, to promote an understanding of the design process. Pupils use these design booklets with enthusiasm to guide their problem solving. They then go on to make their designs, confidently modifying their ideas when needed. Because assessment is used very effectively, clear targets are set and pupils know exactly what they have to do in order to make progress. This promotes good achievement. Teaching and learning are good with some very good teaching in food technology and textiles. Teaching is characterised by careful planning, very good subject knowledge, good relationships and much enthusiasm. Pupils find this approach infectious and take a great pride in their work. Leadership by the acting co-ordinator is very good. Development of the subject has continued well despite staffing difficulties. Strong links with the high school, together with innovative methods to ensure that designing and making is relevant to pupils' experiences, promote continuity in learning. The new food technology and textile room has provided the momentum to ensure that the subject has continued to improve since the last inspection.
69. Standards are generally at nationally expected levels in **music**. Pupils enter the school with limited musical experiences. Standards rise as pupils move through the school because curriculum planning and teaching and learning are good. Teaching is based on good subject knowledge and well-structured lessons that have a satisfactory balance between performing, composing and listening to music. Good progress is being made in the development of pupils' singing and a choir is being formed in collaboration with other local middle schools. However, work is occasionally too demanding for some lower-attaining pupils. When this occurs pupils become confused and inattentive. The accommodation for the subject is poor. The mobile classroom used for the subject is damp and this is affecting the music equipment. There is no piano in the music room. The recently appointed music co-ordinator is providing good subject leadership and has a clear vision for the future improvement of the subject.
70. Pupils achieve well and standards are above national expectations in **physical education**. Pupils are enthusiastic about their lessons and this, together with the willingness to help and support each other, makes a significant contribution to the good progress made in lessons. The quality of teaching and its impact on learning is good. Teachers have high expectations of the quality and pace of lessons, standards of behaviour and the development of good sporting attitudes. They have good knowledge of the activities they teach and, in the best lessons, use demonstration effectively to highlight good performance so that pupils know what to aim for. In

dance, however, not enough emphasis is given to the quality of performance so that movement lacks expression and fluency. The pace of learning is brisk and clear learning objectives are met. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented achieve because they are challenged by appropriate tasks. Those pupils who are unable to take part in lessons are usually given tasks to involve them in what is being taught or included in question and answer sessions. The popular extra-curricular programme provides pupils with a very wide range of activities to further their interests. Pupils of all abilities are encouraged to join sports clubs in the community. Good leadership of the department has ensured that the strengths noted in the last inspection report have been maintained and further progress made in the development of pupils' planning evaluation skills.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of provision reflects the very strong and supportive Catholic ethos of the school.
- Very good leadership and management are ensuring a measured and thoughtful introduction of the subject into the curriculum.
- Pupils have very responsible attitudes and recognise the value of citizenship lessons.
- Teaching is good and lessons engage pupils actively in their learning.

#### **Commentary**

71. Although citizenship is a part of the statutory curriculum only from Year 7 onwards, the school has made a decision to teach it throughout the school. The subject is taught to all pupils through a weekly lesson but the values it seeks to develop are embedded in the whole life and work of the school. Pupils have a strong feeling of belonging to a Catholic community. The effect of this is seen in pupils' behaviour and attitudes around the school where they show that they understand right from wrong and that they respect other people and their beliefs and values. By Year 6, pupils have a good knowledge of basic human rights and they understand the need for rules in society. By Year 8 pupils are beginning to develop a good understanding of the workings of parliament and the essential features of democracies and dictatorships. Pupils learn about how they can participate in and affect community issues through the school council. They know how this works and can list the changes that it has brought about: refurbished toilets, healthier food at lunchtime, seats in the quad and a weekly prayer group meeting.
72. All pupils have a folder in which they can keep evidence of their achievements and involvement in school and community activities. This makes pupils responsible for selecting and recording what they think is important and also provides a basis for the assessment by tutors of pupils' progress towards becoming informed and active citizens.
73. The quality of teaching and learning is good although in the lessons observed during the inspection it ranged from satisfactory to very good. This is because the subject is taught by tutors and some are more comfortable than others with the content of the course and the methods needed to teach the subject. For instance, some teachers are more adept at encouraging pupils to reflect and to think divergently about the complexities of topical moral, social and cultural issues. On the other hand, because tutors know their pupils well and have excellent relationships with them, this creates a secure and trusting environment for the discussion of sensitive topics. Pupils are generally very well engaged in lessons. They enjoy the opportunity to think about important issues and to test their ideas through discussion.

Due attention is given to recording information and new learning and there is an increasing use of notebooks to reflect on what they have learned and to record how their opinions have been shaped or influenced.

74. The introduction of this new subject to the curriculum has been very well managed. The co-ordinator's very effective leadership is based soundly on her very good skills in the classroom, her high level of commitment to the subject and to the pupils' growth as responsible, active citizens. She has a clear vision for the future of the subject and has identified appropriate priorities for development. Links with other subjects are already in place and further use of the community as a valuable resource is underway.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

