

INSPECTION REPORT

Leighton Middle School

Leighton Buzzard

LEA area: Bedfordshire

Unique reference number: 109689

Headteacher: Mrs A Thompson

Lead inspector: Mr B Evans

Dates of inspection: 19 - 21 January 2004

Inspection number: 260337

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

© Crown copyright 2004

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle deemed secondary
School category: Community
Age range of pupils: 9-13
Gender of pupils: Mixed
Number on roll: 467

School address: Church Square
Leighton Buzzard
Bedfordshire
Postcode: LU7 1EX

Telephone number: 01525 374907
Fax number: 01525 854370

Appropriate authority: Governing body
Name of chair of governors: Dr Fiona Dry

Date of previous inspection: 12 October 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Leighton is a mixed middle school with 467 pupils (aged 9-13) on roll and is located in Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire. There is a good balance between boys and girls overall. The school occupies a unique site centred upon a mansion and large, landscaped gardens. It gained the Schools Achievement Award in 2002, has achieved the Sportsmark status for the second time and is involved in the Bedfordshire Schools Improvement Partnership. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and many travel to the school from outlying villages. Overall, pupils' attainment on entry to the school is average. There are very few pupils from ethnic minority groups or who have English as an additional language. The number of pupils entering or leaving the school other than at normal times is low. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average. There are an average number of pupils with special educational needs, eight of whom have a Statement of Special Educational Need. The majority of these pupils have emotional and behavioural difficulties or experience difficulties with literacy.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
1049	Brian Evans	Lead inspector	Art (sampled)
9708	Sylvia Daintrey	Lay inspector	
4351	Jeanne Strickland	Team inspector	English
32379	Bob Brewster	Team inspector	Mathematics
7871	Jean Mackie	Team inspector	Science
8052	Ken McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
20716	Reg Grogan	Team inspector	Citizenship Religious education
23324	Sylvia Greenland	Team inspector	Geography History Special educational needs
30646	Terry Creissen	Team inspector	Music
23268	Kevin Corrigan	Team inspector	Physical education
12408	Alan Frith	Team inspector	French
4126	Clive Parsons	Team inspector	Design and technology (sampled)

The inspection contractor was:

PBM Brookbridge and Bedford Ltd
13A Market Place
Uttoxeter
Staffordshire
ST14 8HY

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the inspection contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted Inspections*', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	8
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	10
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	15
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	17
SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 2 and 3	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	32

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

Leighton Middle is a good school. It is an effective school which gives good value for money. It has a number of very good features. Standards are at the national average and rising. Pupils achieve well because teaching and learning are good. The headteacher, governors, senior managers and staff provide good leadership and management. They identify clear, effective strategies for continuing to meet the academic and personal needs of all pupils. Management systems are efficient and are well designed to overcome barriers to raising standards.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The headteacher, supported well by senior staff, has a clear vision for developing the school and provides good leadership.
- There is a strong ethos for learning and pupils have good attitudes to school.
- In English, pupils do not have enough opportunities for talk and discussion.
- In mathematics, pupils attain above average standards.
- Teaching is excellent in French.
- Teaching and learning vary from satisfactory to very good in citizenship and the personal, social and health education programmes.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in October 1998. It has made good progress in responding to the few key issues identified in the last report. The school complies with the act of daily worship. The personal, social and health education programme has been extended and exemplifies a positive approach to cultural diversity and equal opportunities generally. Standards have risen and pupils achieve well in all years.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Overall, pupils' attainment on entry to the school is average; the attainment of the current Year 8 cohort on entry is lower than in Years 5, 6 and 7. In work seen, **pupils achieve well** by the end of Year 8 and standards are in line with the national average. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in all years. Standards in mathematics are above national expectations and pupils of all attainment levels achieve very well. English and science standards are broadly in line with national expectations but are rising and pupils achieve well. In all three subjects, the newly appointed heads of subject are providing good leadership and have established effective strategies for improving achievement in a relatively short time. Pupils' information and communication technology skills are above average. Assessment data is used well to monitor individual pupils' progress.

Year 6 results

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

*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.*

By the end of Year 6, standards are in line with the national expectations and pupils achieve well. National test results in English, mathematics and science have consistently remained at broadly average level over the past few years when compared with all schools nationally. English results fell slightly in 2003, which represents a reversal of the year-on-year improvements since 2000. In work seen, weaknesses in writing in Years 5 and 6 have been addressed well in English, although there are not enough opportunities in lessons to extend pupils' thinking through talk and discussion. Occasionally, science teachers' lack of in-depth knowledge of a topic hinders pupils' acquisition of scientific skills. Overall, inspection evidence shows that recent dissemination between teachers of good practice in teaching and learning, and effective implementation of a well thought out literacy strategy, have led to improved pupil achievement. Numeracy skills are average. There is no significant difference in the achievement patterns of boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Gifted and talented pupils achieve satisfactorily. The relatively few pupils from minority ethnic groups achieve well.

Pupils' personal qualities including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. There is a good, positive ethos in the school. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour in lessons and around the school are good. Attendance is in line with the national average; unauthorised absences are below average.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is good. Teaching and learning are good in all years. Teaching has improved since the last inspection because strategies in the school improvement plan for monitoring and supporting good classroom practice have been implemented well. Pupils are well motivated, which enables them to achieve well. Nearly all lesson plans emphasise the matching of tasks and activities to pupils' attainment levels. Some very good or excellent teaching occurs in nearly all subjects. In the very few unsatisfactory lessons observed, either the level of challenge in the work set was pitched inappropriately or a few disrupted the learning of others. Key skills in literacy and information and communication technology are taught well and are important factors in pupils' ability to sustain concentration and support one another in their learning. Pupils' numeracy skills are taught well in mathematics but there is limited monitoring across subjects. The curriculum, including an extensive extra-curricular programme, is good. It meets well to meet the personal and academic needs of all pupils and the school makes imaginative use of resources within its wider community. However, there is no formal programme to support tutors in teaching citizenship or personal, social and health programme. Assessment data is used effectively by a number of teachers, especially in mathematics. The school cares well for its pupils and gives them very good support and guidance. The school communicates well with parents.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The leadership of the headteacher is good. The senior management team is working well together. Management systems are good and include a strong emphasis on effective self-evaluation procedures. The school improvement plan is a good working document. The governors carry out their financial and legal responsibilities fully and contribute to the further development of the school in an informed and supportive way.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents' views are generally positive. They believe that the school is well run and that their sons and daughters make good progress. Pupils believe that the school listens to their views. Parents and pupils affirm strongly that all forms of harassment are dealt with quickly and effectively by staff.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- extend opportunities for talk and discussion in English lessons;

- include provision in the staff development programme for tutors to improve their teaching of the citizenship and personal, social and health education programmes.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects

Standards are at the national average. Pupils achieve well.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 6 and Year 8 are rising.
- The school uses assessment data well to monitor pupils' progress and to set individual pupil targets.
- There is insufficient use of talk and drama in English.
- Standards in mathematics are above national expectations.
- Pupils achieve very well in French and information and communication technology.

Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	27.1 (28.1)	26.8 (27.0)
Mathematics	27.0 (26.5)	26.8 (26.7)
Science	28.8 (28.6)	28.6 (28.3)

There were 121 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

1. Standards in English, mathematics and science are rising because the three heads of subject are giving strong leadership in their subjects since their appointment a term ago. Subsequently, the impact on pupils' achievement in mathematics is already apparent in their work in all year groups and significant improvements have also been made in English and science. A further key to the good achievement patterns in the core subjects is the effective dissemination of assessment data to teachers so that they are able to set realistic targets for individual pupils. Assessment profiles for the few ethnic minority pupils show that they make good progress in line with their peer group. Good approaches to pupils' reading and writing in literacy lessons are consolidated well as pupils move through the school. However, there is not enough emphasis on talk and drama in English. In a number of science lessons, a lack of teacher expertise is sometimes a barrier to high achievement.
2. Pupils also achieve well throughout the school because of the good teaching, pupils' positive attitudes to school and their eagerness to learn. In French and information and communication technology, standards are well above average and achievement is very good because teachers continuously evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and of pupils' learning. Good use is made of information and communication technology in some subjects, especially physical education, but the limited number of computers does not yet allow pupils to apply their information and communication technology skills across all subjects. Pupils make good progress where subjects have placed an emphasis on developing literacy and numeracy skills, for example, in history and geography. Pupils achieve well in music despite the constraints that the accommodation places on practical work and instrumental tuition.
3. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because of the quality of the support they receive in lessons which enables them to make good progress in most areas of the curriculum, but particularly in mathematics, modern languages, history and geography. The

majority of teachers ensure that the pupils have work to suit their needs and they are well supported by a dedicated team of learning support assistants. There is a well structured system for the analysis of data to provide information about the effectiveness of different interventions for pupils with special educational needs. A system for writing and reviewing individual education plans for all pupils who need them provides an effective process for monitoring their progress. Gifted and talented pupils are identified and achieve well.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well and personal development is good. Attendance is satisfactory.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good in French, geography, history, information and communication technology and music lessons.
- The school is developing a good range of strategies to improve the attitudes and behaviour of a small number of pupils in Year 8.
- Opportunities for pupils to take initiative and responsibility and to learn about different cultures have improved since the last inspection and are now good.

Commentary

4. The large majority of pupils like being at the school and are motivated to work hard, especially when the teaching is of good quality. Boys and girls of all abilities respond best when the teachers provide interesting and challenging tasks and the lesson proceeds at a brisk pace. They are then keen to listen and to contribute; they work well in pairs and small groups, and they strive to achieve as well as they can. There is no time to misbehave and any individual who briefly steps out of line is firmly dealt with. There are examples of very good attitudes in most subjects, with some excellent responses in French and geography. In Years 7 and 8, a few pupils are occasionally noisy and restless, do not listen well to their teacher, and show a lack of interest in what they have to learn. Pupils behave well in assemblies and at lunchtimes and relationships are good. This results in a harmonious atmosphere around the school.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British – Indian
Black or Black British – Caribbean

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
437	10	2
7	0	0
1	0	0
3	0	0
4	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0

Black or Black British – any other Black background	1	0	0
Chinese	2	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	9	0	0

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

- The number of exclusions is similar to that reported at the last inspection. The pupils involved in incidents last year all had identified social, emotional and behavioural difficulties and received a high level of support from the school and other agencies. The senior leadership team has rightly recognised that the attitudes and behaviour of a few pupils in Year 8 are not as good as they should be. They have worked with teachers and pupils on developing strategies such as a negotiated classroom contract which applies to all in Year 8 and report cards and mentoring for targeted individuals. These have not yet had a sufficient impact on wholly eliminating the level of chatter and inattention which occasionally disrupts learning.
- Pupils' personal development has improved since the last inspection, as the school has made good efforts to tackle the weaknesses identified. Through the development of the school council, for example, pupils in all year groups now have a better understanding of the democratic processes of election and representation. They have a greater involvement in making improvements to the school, such as deciding on equipment for the playground and strategies to reduce the incidence of bullying. The school deals effectively with bullying, racism and other forms of harassment. There is more emphasis, such as in the programme for assemblies and provision in religious education, on pupils' learning about a wider range of different faiths, traditions and cultures. In the best outcomes, pupils are confident and articulate and very keen to take responsibility. For example in a popular after-school club for cheerleaders, two Year 8 girls took over the session when the professional coach was unable to come. Pupils are sensitive to the needs of others, as was seen in the care and support provided by boys in Year 6 for a boy newly arrived from abroad. Although provision for collective worship has improved since the last inspection and now meets statutory requirements, pupils' spiritual development is not as effectively promoted as their moral, social and cultural development. This is because many staff lack the confidence and skill to allow pupils to experience the joy and creativity of learning new things, whether it be the celebration of the Chinese New Year or the ironic humour of Bill Bryson's travel writing.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.1	School data	0.1
National data	6.0	National data	0.3

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

- The school's attendance rate has been consistently in line with the national average since the last inspection, with the exception of last year. The figures for 2002/3 were affected by a very small number of pupils who found it difficult to attend school regularly because of their social, emotional and behavioural problems. Attendance last term was back in line with the national average, and a considerable number of pupils achieved certificates for full attendance. Nevertheless, a significant amount of authorised absence continues to be caused by parents taking their children away on holiday during term-time. This does have some effect on slowing down pupils' progress. The school works closely with the Education Welfare Service and the Vandyke Pyramid Support Project to deal with attendance issues and has recently improved its

monitoring system by transferring data to a computer program. Most pupils are punctual at the start of the day and arrive at lessons reasonably well on time considering the distances between buildings on the site.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is good.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good and are enabling pupils to achieve well. Assessment is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils respond positively to the high expectations set for them by the school.
- The use of assessment data by teachers and good practice exists in a number of departments.
- Teaching in French is excellent.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 68 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3 (4 %)	21 (31 %)	23 (34 %)	19 (28 %)	2 (3 %)	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.

8. The table above highlights the fact that nearly seven in every ten lessons were graded as good or better. There were no significant differences between the proportions of good teaching in Years 5 to 8. Unsatisfactory lessons were characterised by inappropriate expectations or because of a few pupils who disrupted learning. In three in every ten lessons teaching was very good or excellent and pupils made much better than expected progress and achievement was very high. Good teaching was observed in all subjects.
9. Good teaching is the result of a series of initiatives introduced by the headteacher and senior staff which build on good practice within the school. The overall strategy for improving pupils' learning is increasingly successful over time and gives teachers a clear framework within which to constantly evaluate their teaching skills. Pupils' learning is further enhanced by their willingness to respond positively to the high expectations set for them in their work. In the best practice, for example, in mathematics, assessment data is carefully used to monitor pupils' progress and to identify relative weaknesses in achievement in specific areas of their work.
10. Teachers are good role models and set high expectations for their pupils. Pupils contribute a great deal to the success of many lessons, as they arrive ready to work and concentrate very hard. They are attentive, interested and are eager learners. These qualities were very evident in a number of excellent French lessons where games and competitive activities made learning fun. In an excellent geography lesson, pupils achieved well because the learning environment was characterised by challenging tasks carried out with good humour. In music, imaginative use is made of introductory activities which capture the attention and enthusiasm of pupils.

11. English lessons are structured well but greater flexibility would allow opportunities for more discussion and support more creative thinking. In mathematics and science, literacy skills are developed well but pupils' application of their good information and communication technology skills are affected by the limited access to computers.
12. Homework is satisfactory, although its effectiveness in supporting pupils' learning is not uniformly good in a number of lessons because there are inconsistencies in its setting and follow up by teachers. There is good practice, however, where marking of pupils' work is diagnostic and helps pupils of all attainment levels know what they must do to improve. Assessment data is carefully used to monitor pupils' progress and to identify relative weaknesses in achievement among subjects.
13. Pupils with special educational needs are taught well, which leads to good learning and achievement. In many subjects their needs are provided for by specially adjusted work and learning support assistants. In one English lesson the very good atmosphere and strong work ethic meant that most pupils worked well and their work showed clear improvement from the start of the year. The policy of providing support almost entirely in class rather than in special withdrawal groups means that their subject learning is not regularly interrupted. All staff have pupils' individual education plans, and the support assistants keep detailed records of the lesson by lesson learning of the pupils in their care, so planning can be constantly tailored to individual needs.

The curriculum

The curriculum is good and there is a good range of opportunities for enrichment. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There is a good match of staff to the curriculum which benefits teaching and learning.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.
- Pupils benefit from a broad range of enrichment activities.
- Accommodation is barely satisfactory to meet teaching and learning needs.

Commentary

14. The curriculum provides a broad range of worthwhile curricular opportunities for pupils. It is regularly reviewed and developed to reflect current government guidelines. The curriculum is organised using a mixture of traditional primary and secondary practice. Subjects are arranged in departments, with teachers taking classes for a number of subjects, particularly for younger pupils. This gives good support for the younger pupils while preparing the older pupils for their transfer to upper schools. That preparation is carried out well through good links with the upper schools. Provision of personal, social and health education, including citizenship for Years 7 and 8, taught in an identified lesson by form teachers, is satisfactory.
15. Equality of access is good. Good use is made of a detailed database to monitor pupils' progress and take appropriate action. For example, identified pupils in mathematics made good progress because they were given additional support.
16. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good across all year groups. A policy of predominantly in-class support ensures full access to the curriculum. A strong team of support assistants works effectively with designated pupils. Support from outside agencies is good and once a week a dyslexia specialist works with the appropriate pupils. Literacy and numeracy intervention groups are provided for pupils of borderline attainment who are not on the special educational needs list and pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need are provided for as individually appropriate.

17. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory overall. There are a number of individual initiatives which meet their needs well as, for example, the master classes in mathematics. There is, as yet, no formal co-ordination of the range of initiatives to meet the needs of gifted and talented pupils although this is a priority in the current school development plan.
18. Opportunities for enrichment are good. Within lessons, the imaginative use of visitors generates interest, for example the Sealed Knot Society in history. The school council works well. Clubs and societies outside the classroom, from 'Wargames' to computers, cater for a wide range of interests. Participation in the arts, particularly music, is good as it is in sport where the school gained a 'Sportsmark' award. This wide range of activities is supported by a comparatively small staff. There is a good match of staff to the curriculum. Pupils in Years 5 and 6 benefit from the specialist teaching in French and information and communication technology.
19. Well-managed funding ensures that resources are good. Accommodation is just satisfactory with teaching areas of minimum size. The hall and gymnasium are pressed into use for music and drama. Information and communication technology provision utilises the library to support the single information and communication technology suite, where pupils are required to share computers which at times hinders their achievement. This has an inevitable effect on the library where space for books is reduced. The school recognises these difficulties and is actively pursuing plans to improve the situation.

Care, guidance and support

Arrangements to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are good. The school provides effective support, advice and guidance for pupils. It involves them well in its work and development.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Systems to secure pupils' well-being are thorough and effective.
- The school makes good use of other agencies and staff expertise to develop worthwhile programmes of support and guidance for individuals and groups.
- Pupils' views are taken seriously and acted upon.

Commentary

20. The school has successfully maintained its effective procedures for taking care of pupils during a period of considerable staff turnover, particularly among the senior leadership and site management teams. The relatively new designated teacher for child protection has been well trained in the role and has made sure that all staff are aware of their responsibilities. First aid continues to be properly administered by an experienced team of mainly non-teaching staff and all treatment and accidents are carefully recorded, with parents being informed when necessary. The headteacher and office manager deal successfully with health and safety issues, ensuring that any hazards arising from the age and listed status of the buildings are swiftly attended to. No concerns were identified during the inspection, unlike the previous two inspections. The result is a safe and secure environment for learning.
21. The school works in close partnership with a wide range of educational, social and health agencies to support pupils who experience barriers to learning. For example, the Traveller Education Service provides good support for the traveller pupil and has just made available some resources which can be used to share the Traveller culture with other pupils. The school makes good use of the Vandyke Pyramid Support Project to provide counselling and courses for specific pupils and families, especially to help them deal with managing behaviour and coping with difficult situations. A very small number of pupils in Year 8 who are not achieving academically as well as they should are being mentored individually and very effectively by an experienced teacher with a particular skill in raising pupils' self-esteem. Another experienced teacher has undertaken research in best practice for supporting gifted

and talented pupils, but this has not yet been disseminated to the school. Pupils with special educational needs are well known to all staff which ensures that they are well cared for.

22. Since the last inspection, a school council has been set up which is effective in giving pupils a voice and an active role in the school. The senior leadership team are working closely with the school council to give a group of Year 7 pupils the opportunity to be trained as peer mediators. Pupils are also increasingly involved in assessing their own learning and taking responsibility for monitoring their own progress towards their targets. There is excellent practice in geography, where pupils have a personal assessment sheet in their folders with targets that they have agreed individually with their teachers.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents and the community are good. Its links with other schools are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school provides some very good information for parents and is consulting them very well in order to make further improvements to the partnership.
- The strong links between the lower, middle and upper schools in the area result in a smooth transition for pupils from phase to phase.

Commentary

23. On her appointment, the headteacher identified the need to improve communication with parents as one of her priorities. This is being successfully achieved through a range of developments. These include a restructuring of the school calendar to ensure that there are at least three distinct communication points during the school year. A half termly newsletter provides a wide range of helpful information about what is going on in the school. In addition, the school web-site is kept up to date with useful information on, for example, how parents can help their children in mathematics and science. Very good information is provided for parents of pupils with special educational needs. Nevertheless, over a quarter of parents responding to the inspection questionnaire said that they are not happy with the information they receive on their child's progress. The inspection team found that the annual reports are of satisfactory quality and that appropriate use is made of homework diaries, although practice is inconsistent. The school surveyed parents twice last year, first about the reporting system and then about their overall views of the school, and it has taken swift action in response to parents' concerns. For example, it is changing the format of the science report to make it more consistent with other subjects and it is making available more guidance on subjects so that parents are better equipped to help their children at home.
24. The small number of parents who serve on the School Association and on the governing body as parent governors make a very important contribution to school life. The latest governors' annual report provides very detailed information for parents about what the school achieved in 2002/3 with some exemplary reporting, for example, on the extent to which the school has met its targets and how it plans to improve the accessibility of the buildings to pupils with disabilities. Parents support the school very well in extra-curricular activities for sport and music.
25. The school's good links with agencies and organisations in the local community enable it to enrich the curriculum and widen opportunities for pupils' personal development in areas such as history, geography, religious education, music, science and personal, social and health education and citizenship. A notable link is with a Romanian charity which raises pupils' awareness of life in a very different community from their own.
26. Leighton Middle School plays a very active part in the local pyramid of schools which works effectively to make sure that pupils transfer from Year 4 to 5 and from Year 8 to 9 without losing ground. There is some very good practice in mathematics and French, for example, to help pupils become accustomed to the work expected in the upper schools. Extra support is provided for socially vulnerable pupils in Year 8 preparing for transfer through the 'Not the Summer School' programme. There is an increasing emphasis on working with lower schools to help Year 5 teachers see what pupils have done in mathematics and, to a lesser extent, English. The school works closely with other schools, and often takes a lead, on initiatives such as the town-wide anti-bullying campaign run by the Vandyke Pyramid Support Project, and the joint purchase of contracts such as for grounds maintenance.

27. Parents and carers of pupils with special educational needs are kept well informed of their progress and are sent copies of individual education plans. They are also provided with specially prepared information sheets about any particular condition that may affect their child's progress.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good overall. The headteacher has a clear vision for the school and is ably supported by the senior leadership team. Procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school are effective. The governance of the school is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher is providing strong leadership and building an effective team of committed teachers.
- The recently appointed heads of department for the core subjects are providing some innovative curricular leadership.
- The governors know the school well and have a good understanding of its strengths and areas for development.

Commentary

28. The headteacher, who is comparatively new to the school, has a clear sense of purpose and is fully focused on maximising achievement for all pupils. She has established herself well and provides a strong presence around the school, which has a large number of buildings situated in an extensive and sprawling site. There has been a considerable turnover of teachers recently, largely through promotion to more senior posts or staff retiring, which has included key members of the senior team. Within a short space of time the headteacher has re-established a new senior team and a staff who are all working consistently towards a shared vision. This is reflected in the whole school commitment to inclusion, for example, with staff striving to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met.
29. There is an appropriate range of policies which underpin the work of the school. The consistent implementation of these policies contributes to the smooth running of the school on a day to day basis. There are thorough procedures for analysing performance data and monitoring the work of the staff through lesson observations and the scrutiny of pupils' work. As a result, the senior team have a good grasp of the strengths and key areas for development, which are well articulated in the school improvement plan. The actions taken to secure improvement have been carefully prioritised and are being carried out skilfully.
30. One of the identified areas for this year is to develop the leadership and management skills of the new heads of department for English, mathematics and science who joined the school in September 2003. All three of these middle managers are already making changes such as the introduction of a wider range of teaching and learning styles, for example. These innovations, while enthusiastically adopted by teachers, will take some time to embed and have yet to impact on standards and achievement in English and science. The senior team have provided good support and guidance for these new staff who have the potential to make a real difference in the school. The additional targeted work in mathematics has already reaped benefits and resulted in improvements in standards. Leadership and management within a number of the foundation subjects are very good, with exemplary practice within the modern foreign languages department. The teachers are reflective and continually seek ways to improve. The pupils achieve well as a result. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is also well led and managed. There is a clear, systematic approach to the identification of need and the development of individual education plans. Good guidance is provided for both teachers and the support staff who are working with pupils with special educational needs. Performance management procedures are well established.

31. The enthusiastic governing body provides very effective challenge and support to the school. The governors take an active role in determining the future of the school and have a detailed knowledge and understanding of its current strengths and areas for development. They make a good contribution to the shaping of the school improvement plan. The experience of the governors is put to good use within the committee structures. The personnel experience of the chair of staffing, for example, has been invaluable in informing recent appointment procedures, not least of which was that of the headteacher. The chair of governors has regular contact with the headteacher and there is an open and transparent approach to discussions about the work of the school. For example, Governors played a key role in encouraging the school to strengthen its links with parents. Finances are well managed on a day to day basis and there are very good links between the planned expenditure and the school priorities, which are based firmly on the principles of best value. All statutory requirements are met. The race equality policy is a well thought through document, but a formal report on its effectiveness has not been presented to the governing body or committee.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	1,197,092	Balance from previous year	63,839
Total expenditure	1,202,563	Balance carried forward to the next	58,367
Expenditure per pupil	2,575		

32. Parents and pupils are very positive about the leadership and management within the school. They commented particularly favourably about the new approaches being adopted within mathematics and science. The strong leadership of the headteacher and the shared commitment of the staff and governors put the school in a good position to secure further improvements in the future.
33. The management of the special needs department is very good, with a clear vision for the future and strong efforts to include the whole school, and parents, in the provision. Reviews are properly carried out for pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need. All pupils on the list are regularly tested, and their individual progress is monitored. However, at present the outcomes of these tests are not analysed to give a rounded overall picture of the progress the department makes. Funding of the department is generous. The only shortcoming is the lack of a central base; the present 'scattered' accommodation contributes nothing to smooth working practices, though this is not allowed to reduce the quality of provision.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 2 and 3

ENGLISH AND FRENCH

English

Provision for English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Staff teaching English have understood the National Literacy Strategy and planned work to match its requirements.
- There is some over-use of worksheets and handouts in lessons.
- There is insufficient use of talk and drama in English and very little extra-curricular activity.
- Data for assessing pupils' achievement and needs is well used.
- The use of information and communication technology in English is being well developed.

Commentary

34. Standards attained in the Key Stage 2 national tests over the past four years have remained at or above the national average. The slight dip in attainment last year, as in 2001, does not seriously affect this good record, and pupils sustain the levels of attainment with which most of them entered the school. Work seen during the inspection reflects these standards. Achievement and progress are satisfactory and pupils with special educational needs are often doing particularly well. Results recorded in the upper schools to which most pupils move at the end of Year 8 show that pupils from the school achieve well in the Key Stage 3 tests at the end of Year 9.
35. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with some very good features. Teachers are conscientious about following the requirements of the literacy strategy or using the units of work provided. These work best when teachers interpret them creatively, using their own experience and subject expertise to ensure that pupils enjoy their learning. In many lessons this shared enjoyment was evident. In others, pupils were compliant but not always fully engaged or stimulated. Relationships in general are very good, though some pupils in Years 7 and 8 were occasionally less responsive and in one lesson unco-operative.
36. The school has identified weakness in writing as its main target for improvement and detailed schemes of work are used to encourage more and better writing by pupils. This has been largely successful. Good outcomes were evident in much of the work seen, although a number of pupils continue to make the same mistakes in spelling, punctuation and structure. Here the target setting is not always sufficiently specific or progress adequately monitored to ensure that the problems are overcome. The range of writing tasks is good, and includes material chosen to stimulate lively narrative, descriptive and discursive writing as well as poems and scripts. Some Year 5 pupils were able to make sophisticated comparisons between two versions of a myth and to write some interesting modern versions of a good familiar story. Approaches to writing through planning, drafting, and checking are established in the literacy lessons in Years 5 and 6 and consolidated in the English lessons in Years 7 and 8.
37. In some lessons the use of a structure for writing is being used rather too rigorously, and not leaving enough scope for divergence and experiment. Although the materials are very carefully prepared and well presented, overuse of handouts, lists of ingredients for stories and check lists is sometimes too prescriptive, and inhibits freer imaginative response. For example, a

pupil was told not to put an exciting event at the start of her story as this was not in the structure. This restriction would have been more meaningful if the choice had been discussed in terms of pros and cons, with perhaps some reference to stories which do or do not begin with a dramatic opening event. The work being done on adjectives is unlikely to improve pupils' writing if they learn that adjectives should be added or changed 'to make their writing more interesting'. One pupil was encouraged to change her perfectly appropriate use of the word *small* to *tiny* or *minute* for no good reason and without consideration of any change in meaning this might produce.

38. There is not enough time in the lessons for the good talk and good reading which are spurs to creative thinking and better writing. Teachers are keen to encourage reading, and books for class sharing are well chosen. The use of reading journals and records is effective in encouraging pupils to reflect on their choices and preferences and to assess how their individual reading has developed over time. They develop an understanding of genre and some awareness of contrasts in style and register. In a good lesson on first paragraphs of novels, much interest was shown by pupils in a Year 7 lower set when they were asked to look at the openings of a number of books and choose good examples to read to the class. Other particularly successful lessons stimulated interest because good material was well presented. Three different versions of the Red Riding Hood story intrigued a Year 5 class. A Year 7 class, writing an estate agent's advertisement, were interested to see the advertisement for their own school building when it was sold as a private house in 1904.
39. Other lessons, though well planned and satisfactory, would have been improved by this extension of range. Working on the pros and cons of the exploitation of Antarctica, Year 6 pupils were not given a feeling, through pictures or poems or journals, of the powerful appeal of the region. Another Year 6 lesson on argument, looking at the pros and cons of banning dogs from parks or banning children's T.V programmes, lacked illustrative material, such as extracts from letters to newspapers, to get pupils going. Writing and answering questions occupied much of the lessons but pupils did not have enough opportunity to exchange or challenge views. In these, as in most lessons, they answered teacher's questions, sometimes talked usefully in twos, but seldom took part in the cut and thrust of whole class argument. Discussion and drama methods are not being given quite enough emphasis in the planning and teaching of lessons.
40. The English department makes increasing use of information and communication technology. PowerPoint presentations are efficiently used in some lessons and pupils' work includes examples of word processed material, graphics and research. They are encouraged to use the internet relevantly and with discrimination. In a very good Year 8 lesson, pupils worked on presentational features for a non-narrative text and were helped to design, illustrate and explore possibilities, under the guidance of a confident and knowledgeable teacher. In the previous year, multi-media work of high quality was produced by a Year 8 pupil and the programme is used by the department in lessons on *Macbeth*.
41. Leadership and management are good. The new head of department has been in post for one term and is reviewing and modifying the departmental handbook, development plan and schemes of work. Two new teachers have also joined the team. Teachers have access to the data they need for assessing and monitoring the progress and needs of pupils in each of their classes and they use it. Marking is usually regular and conscientious and, at its best, sets up a dialogue which enables pupils to judge the quality of their work and to see how they can improve it.
42. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, with information and communication technology a particular strength. The contribution made by English to the school's extra-curricular programme, was not mentioned then, and is now very limited. There are currently no English clubs and few excursions or theatre trips have taken place recently.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

43. Training for the staff in literacy across the curriculum began with whole school sessions on the Key Stage 2 National Literacy Strategy for 9 to 11-year-olds. Later training for Key Stage 3 was designed to build on and reinforce these earlier sessions. The co-ordination was initially shared by the heads of English and humanities, who led the training sessions, with a contribution from the librarian. A literacy consultant has also run whole school training and given advice and assistance with the audit. The assistant headteacher has now taken on the co-ordinating responsibility.
44. A 'catch-up' programme for pupils who did not reach Level 4 in English by the end of Year 6 was set up in 2002 but did not continue in 2003 as its usefulness was in doubt. The English department has devised its own intervention system in Year 7 and this is working well.
45. It is clear that departments have recognised the responsibility all share for developing pupils' skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Much good work has been done. English and humanities took the lead in demonstrating ways in which all subjects could contribute to and benefit from improving pupils' literacy. Specialist vocabulary is used well and pupils are taught to write in the variety of different forms appropriate for the subject. For example, in religious education there are good examples of extended writing. In mathematics and science attainment in reading and writing is satisfactory and in speaking and listening it is good. Very good writing standards were noted in geography, history and French and in these subjects reading, speaking and listening were also above average. Physical education also has examples of good development of literacy. There is no evidence that progress in subjects across the curriculum is being seriously hindered by weaknesses in pupils' language skills.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and pupils achieve very well.
- Teaching is excellent.
- Leadership is excellent.
- The department is self-critical, continuously evaluating its effectiveness.
- There are currently no links with France through either visits or the use of information and communication technology.

Commentary

46. Standards are well above national expectations. Most pupils reach Level 5 and many reach Level 6 by the end of Year 8. The school has data from their next school which show that they continue to excel in French. In Years 5 and 6, pupils reach at least Level 3 and this provides a very good basis for the next stage of their learning. Standards seen in lessons are similar, with listening skills and knowledge about linguistic structures a particular strength. Pupils achieve very well throughout the school. They take pride in their work and respond to their teachers' high expectations, learning verb tenses, acquiring good sentence structure and making rapid progress. They feel a sense of achievement because the work makes demands of them intellectually.
47. Teaching and learning are excellent overall in all years. Teachers employ a variety of different learning activities and colourful, well designed materials. Games and competitive activities mean that lessons are fun. Pupils' learning is excellent because they know the work is worthwhile and because it is demanding. Teachers relate activities in class to National Curriculum levels and keep pupils informed of their attainment through regular assessment procedures in order that they can improve. Pupils do not use information and communication

technology enough to support their learning or to become more independent. The school expects to establish a new link with a school in France, but does not currently offer pupils an opportunity to use French in an authentic situation, for example through a visit or an email link.

48. Leadership is excellent and management is very good. Team work is outstanding, with teachers planning together, developing resources and generating ideas. This leads to consistent expectations. There is a constant, well-informed, sharply focused desire to improve performance and a creative, innovative approach to developing the curriculum. Assessment procedures are good. The department is very well aware of its own strengths and weaknesses and has constructed an action plan, focused on the continuous improvement of learning. The monitoring of attainment levels of different groups, including those from minority ethnic backgrounds, boys and girls and those with high ability or special educational needs, is good. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards have risen and the quality of teaching has continued to improve. Pupils' ability to speak French is better and they answer confidently when addressed individually. The only areas where the school has made limited progress are links with France and the use of information and communication technology.

MATHEMATICS

Provision for mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching, well supported by special educational needs staff, is raising standards.
- Very good use is made of assessment to inform future action.
- Very good use of questioning is developing mathematical understanding and literacy skills.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning is underdeveloped, limiting the opportunities to raise teaching standards further.
- Improved standards in class have yet to be fully reflected in National Curriculum test results.

Commentary

49. In work seen across the school, standards are above national expectations. This continues the gradual improvement in attainment in the school's National Curriculum test results in Year 6 since 1999 to just above average in 2003. There has also been an improvement compared with similar schools. Data in school indicates that progress in Years 7 and 8 is good. The performance of girls compared with that of boys has fluctuated, but the average figures for the past three years suggest that gender is not an issue in mathematics.
50. Teaching across the school is good with some very good teaching seen. A detailed, up-to-date database, including individual education plans, ensures that teachers have a thorough knowledge of the pupils' needs. Assessment is well used to guide future action. Good planning, together with effective co-operation with support staff, ensures that all pupils are fully included in lessons. Pupils involved in an intervention programme during 2003/4 are making very good progress. Those with special educational needs make progress along with their peers.
51. Day-to-day assessment is very good. Books are marked conscientiously, with much advice about how to improve and many encouraging comments. As a result, books contain good quantities of work which is well presented overall by both boys and girls.
52. Teachers' expectations are high, reflected in a good level of challenge seen in all lessons. Lessons proceed at an appropriately brisk pace. Very good use is made of plenary sessions, helped by clearly stated learning objectives, both to review learning and to link with the next lesson. Humour is well used. Children enjoy their lessons. Good use of questioning ensures

that pupils develop their understanding of the topics covered. Homework is well used to develop pupils' application of mathematical skills through open-ended investigation activities.

53. Pupils' attitudes are good. They are interested and willing to work hard. Good class control and good classroom relations encourage the pupils to tackle successfully topics at levels higher than expected resulting in learning being good across the school. Achievement is good. The development of literacy skills is good since teachers insist on the correct use and spelling of the proper vocabulary. Opportunities are provided for pupils to explain answers to their peers, something they were confident to do. Speaking skills are in line with national expectations. While there is good use of graphical calculators, overall the use of information and communication technology as an aid to teaching and learning is unsatisfactory. There is an issue over access to computers which the school is taking appropriate steps to rectify.
54. Leadership of the department is very good. The new head of department, with his enthusiastic, thoughtful approach, together with his high expectations of the pupils is a good role model for a strong team of teachers. There is a clear vision of how the department should develop, a vision expressed in a well thought through development plan.
55. Management of the department is good. New staff fit in well, supported by the school's well organised induction scheme. The monitoring of teaching and learning is underdeveloped, preventing identification and subsequent sharing of good practice, so important if the department's plans to raise standards further are to be realised.
56. The system of allocating funding is well managed and ensures day to day resources are good. Accommodation is barely satisfactory, however, with the rooms barely large enough. However, members of staff make the best use of what is available and rooms are bright with displays of pupils' work to encourage learning.
57. Progress since the previous inspection has been good. Standards have improved at least in line with the national trend; the level of support for pupils with special educational needs, particularly in Years 7 and 8, has improved.

Mathematics across the curriculum

58. In French and information and communication technology, teachers take up opportunities well to promote mathematical skills. In other areas of the curriculum, mathematical skills are used in the normal course of the subject. For example, bar and line graphs are used in science and statistics interpreted in geography. Overall, however, formal promotion of these skills has yet to be developed.
59. Work to raise staff awareness of the issue was carried out in 2002/3, together with an audit of mathematics used. A mathematics evening for parents has involved them in the issue. This year the mathematics department has begun to identify standard approaches to computation. Teachers in different curriculum areas do not always make full use of the mathematical skills possessed by the pupils and to help those pupils develop them further.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The recently appointed head of department is providing clear vision and direction.
- There is a good range of activities in lessons which capture the interest of pupils.
- The setting of learning targets for pupils is motivating them to achieve.

- A lack of confidence in subject expertise means that in some instances the learning objectives for lessons lack a clear focus and teachers have difficulty in drawing out the key learning points for the pupils.

Commentary

60. In the 2003 national tests, the Year 6 pupils achieved results that were in line with the national average and the average for similar schools. The results were broadly similar to those of English and mathematics, with no significant difference in the achievements of boys and girls. The science results have improved in line with the national trend and the results for last year represent satisfactory progress from the pupils' previous attainment in Year 2.
61. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall with some good features. As a result, the achievement of the pupils is sound and they are reaching standards by Year 6 and Year 8 that are in line with national expectations. This reflects the picture established by the 2003 Year 6 tests.
62. The teachers plan their lessons carefully and all share the learning objectives to help the pupils know what it is they are expected to achieve. Where teaching is good, these are clear and the teachers ensure that they take the necessary steps to develop and consolidate learning systematically. Lessons often provide the pupils with a good variety of activities, such as practical work and research tasks. There are examples of effective demonstrations and teacher exposition. In a Year 8 lesson on digestion, for example, the teacher made good use of the model of a torso to demonstrate and explain the processes that food undergoes as it travels through the body. This enabled the pupils to undertake their individual tasks with confidence and consolidate effectively their understanding of digestion. There is a good focus on literacy, with teachers challenging pupils to write plays about the principles of electrical circuits, for example. This approach provides positive opportunities to consolidate both scientific knowledge and understanding and language skills. The vast majority of pupils respond well to the activities provided by teachers and engage enthusiastically with the tasks set. They work well in pairs and groups. Pupils in Year 8, however, are generally less able to concentrate on their work although they commented positively on their science lessons, saying that they are enjoying their work much more this year with the increased focus on practical activities.
63. The teachers provide an appropriate coverage of all aspects of the science curriculum so that by Year 6, for example most pupils are able to construct simple keys, know how to separate different materials and can construct electrical circuits with switches. They have been taught how use apparatus with confidence and how to construct suitable tables to record observations. Older pupils are provided appropriately with more challenging concepts so that most Year 8 pupils, for example, are able to recognise that different materials have different thermal properties. Higher-attaining pupils are the most confident in linking their observations to scientific principles.
64. The teachers use praise effectively to encourage the pupils in their work and there are examples of good feedback in the pupils' books which identify progress towards targets set and suggest useful ideas for improvement. This practice is not consistent across the department, however. Teaching assistants provide good support for pupils with special educational needs and, as a result, they progress as well as others in the class. While there are some examples of the use of information and communication technology to support learning in science, the use of computers is generally limited. This restricts opportunities for pupils to develop both their knowledge and understanding and their skills of scientific enquiry, which include mathematical skills.
65. While there are a number of good features in teaching, some teachers have yet to develop their expertise so that they can apply fully their own knowledge and understanding to identify focused learning objectives based on a secure evaluation of pupils' needs. Consequently, the

activities undertaken, while enjoyed by the pupils, are not always managed such that they secure maximum learning.

66. The newly appointed head of department must take due credit for the recent changes such as target setting and pupil self-assessment. Her enthusiasm, commitment to the subject and willingness to innovate has resulted in a very positive ethos within the department with staff very keen to learn and take on board new ideas. The technician is providing invaluable support and expertise during this time of change. The head of department has already undertaken lesson observations and analysed the test results in some detail. This has resulted in a clear view of strengths and weaknesses. The revised departmental plan is appropriately focused on need and provides a good basis from which to monitor progress. The changes made have yet to manifest themselves in improved standards and achievement but the department is well placed to secure the challenging targets set for the future. Progress overall since the last inspection is satisfactory.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching in information and communication technology lessons is very good.
- The curriculum in discrete information and communication technology lessons covers a wide range of software in depth.
- Assessment is very good, including pupil self-assessment.
- The current level of information and communication technology resources is a constraint on the use of information and communication technology in some subjects.

Commentary

67. By the end of Year 6, standards in information and communication technology are well above average because all pupils have lessons taught by information and communication technology specialists. Pupils use a wide range of software to a good depth and make very good progress. In a Year 5 class, pupils were coping very well with a number of challenging database activities which indicated a very good understanding of sorting, searching and graphing results. By the end of Year 8 standards are good overall. In a Year 7 lesson, the pupils became adept at using an 'on screen' monitoring and control program to operate a lighthouse and a set of traffic lights, in different conditions. Pupils make very good progress in information and communication technology lessons, which cover the national information and communication technology strategy well. However, they do not have sufficient opportunities to practise and develop their information and communication technology skills further in other subjects, largely because the current number of computers is not sufficient to meet the increasing demands of the curriculum.
68. Although pupils have to share computers in timetabled lessons in the main information and communication technology room, teachers manage activities very well and pupil collaboration is used to very good effect because teaching and learning in information and communication technology lessons is very good in all years. The teachers make very good use of the computers and other resources. Lessons are very well planned and are based upon a well-constructed, comprehensive scheme of work which meets National Curriculum requirements. Very good teaching resources have been produced by the department and are available on the school computer network. These have been designed to cater for the whole ability range and support for individual pupils is very good. The Internet is also used to very good effect and pupils in all years are able to search for and collect appropriate text, graphic images and animations to incorporate in their work. Pupils receive much positive encouragement which is backed up by a very effective teacher assessment and pupil self-assessment system, which

ensures that they know how well they are doing. A system of target setting helps pupils understand what they need to do to improve further.

69. The information and communication technology department is effective because the leadership and management are both very good. The curriculum is very well planned and very good use is made of the resources which are available. Hardware and software are reliable and used well. The information and communication technology department provides support, guidance and encouragement to other subject departments which make use of available resources. Plans are well advanced for the introduction of a class set of portable laptop computers which will help to overcome some of the constraints imposed by the nature of the accommodation. This provision will significantly improve access to information and communication technology resources for the information and communication technology department and all other departments. There has been a good improvement in the provision for information and communication technology since the last inspection and the school has the capacity to improve further as the level of information and communication technology resources increases.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

70. The use of information and communication technology across the curriculum is satisfactory overall but the limited number of computers is a significant constraint in some areas. Although there are single computers in some classrooms, they are not always well used. However, all teachers have completed information and communication technology training. This has stimulated interest and there is an increasing demand by both teachers and pupils for information and communication technology resources to use in the subjects of the curriculum. Within the constraints of the current level of resources, current use is very good in physical education and good in several other subjects including mathematics. The use of information and communication technology in science in relation to monitoring and measuring is limited.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Overall provision in geography is **very good**.

Strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent assessment procedures mean that pupils know how to evaluate and improve their own work.
- Very good teaching of writing skills leads to above average standards and achievement by the end of Year 8.
- Very good leadership and management ensure consistently high standards.

Commentary

71. Because of the way the timetable is planned, it was only possible to observe geography lessons in Years 7 and 8. Judgements about teaching in Years 5 and 6 are, therefore, based on extended analysis of current work.
72. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in Years 5 and 6, good in Years 7 and 8 because the department's outstanding effort in teaching literacy and thinking skills has the effect of accelerating learning as pupils move through the school. They discuss well, effectively taking the roles of city officials trying to stop Venice from sinking, or pollution control officers managing an oil spill. These activities are consolidated by extended writing which summarises the facts and expresses opinions exceptionally well. Pupils with special educational needs

achieve well because of the high standard of support they receive in class from teaching assistants and teachers, which enables them to keep up with the full curriculum. Work is planned so that all pupils are challenged according to their needs.

73. Standards of work seen during the inspection, and teachers' records of the continuous assessment that takes place, indicate that pupils are in line with expectations for their age group by the end of Year 6, above expectations at the end of Year 8. There is no apparent difference between the standards of boys and girls and the few ethnic minority pupils are working at the same standard as their peers.
74. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 and 8 and good in Years 5 and 6, with one excellent lesson seen. The teachers' enthusiasm and interest in the topics are quickly communicated to the pupils. Learning is advanced and consolidated in a series of well-managed steps, assessed at each stage. The excellent assessment procedures comprise regular assessment assignments, a high standard of supportive marking and continuous assessment during the course of lessons. Pupils are clearly told which National Curriculum level is being met by their responses and, therefore, they know exactly how to improve their achievement as they go along. This is reinforced by individual target-setting discussions with their teachers. Teachers' expectations are high, but because of the outstanding relationships and the good humour that is inherent in all exchanges, pupils meet these expectations and rarely do less than their best.
75. The good curriculum is enriched by a programme of local investigations that teach the skills of data collection and processing. Use of information and communication technology is well developed, with pupils using web sites for homework research (for example, into oil spills) and viewing weather and volcanoes in action. The department is very well managed by a knowledgeable and enthusiastic co-ordinator whose very good leadership clearly communicates a spirit of high endeavour throughout the department. Improvement since the last inspection has been good because of improved assessment procedures and improvement in the standard of teaching. There is no reason why these high standards should not continue into the future.

History

Overall provision in history is **very good**.

Strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent assessment procedures mean that pupils know how to evaluate and improve their own work.
- Very good teaching of writing skills leads to above average standards by the end of Year 8.
- Good management and leadership ensure high standards.
- There are some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.
- The curriculum is enriched by a variety of events and experiences that make learning enjoyable.

Commentary

76. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in Years 5 and 6, good in Years 7 and 8 because the department's outstanding effort in teaching literacy and thinking skills has the effect of accelerating learning as pupils move through the school. From Year 5 onwards they develop a very good understanding of how to interpret historical sources and arrive at opinions about motive, cause and effect. For example, a series of short, well focused tasks led a Year 5 group to see the connection between the events of the Spanish Armada and the political causes of the attack. A Year 8 group were able to use the dates of sources to evaluate their reliability and to try to determine what might have been the true story behind the gunpowder

plot. Lesson activities comprise both discussion and writing and the pupils show above average maturity and ability in both. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because of the high standard of support they receive in class and the provision of work specially tailored to their needs.

77. Standards of work and teachers' records of formal assessments indicate that pupils' attainment is in line with expectations for their age group by the end of Year 6, above expectations at the end of Year 8. There is no apparent difference between the standards of boys and girls and the few ethnic minority pupils are working at the same standard as their peers.
78. Teaching and learning are very good overall. In most lessons very good planning coupled with knowledgeable and enthusiastic teaching resulted in a high level of pupil interest and very good learning. Where the planning was weaker because the teacher had not thought through the structure of the group tasks carefully enough, progress was slowed and this led to incomplete understanding of the topic by a proportion of the pupils. Learning is assessed exceptionally well, both through regular assessment assignments and through targeted questioning sessions in lessons. These are linked to National Curriculum levels so that pupils know how to improve their performance and can evaluate their own progress. Pupils' attitudes are very good, contributing to the very positive ethos for learning throughout the subject. Use of information and communication technology is well developed; in one lesson pupils were using a series of well-illustrated worksheets about ancient Egypt on the school intranet, linked to several other websites.
79. The good curricular provision is enlivened by a number of special events such as a Tudor Day, and visits from the Sealed Knot Society and a Native American. The department is very well managed by a knowledgeable and innovative co-ordinator whose very good leadership is obvious in the spirit of enthusiasm and the high standards that pervade the department. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, because of improvement in provision for Years 5 and 6, improvement in standards of teaching and the very good contribution to literacy. There is no reason why these high standards should not continue into the future.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is well organised, enabling non-specialists to build up their expertise with a particular year group.
- Teachers successfully use a wide variety of methods to engage pupils in learning.
- Pupils are achieving well.
- The subject is making a valuable contribution to pupils' personal development and their awareness of other cultures.
- Assessment procedures are being developed to identify pupils' levels of attainment in the subject but are not yet rigorous enough to provide reliable data for monitoring progress.

Commentary

80. The teachers of religious education are specialists in other subjects, who have developed a high degree of expertise in teaching particular year groups. Their work is well co-ordinated by efficient management of the subject that makes good use of local liaison meetings and published units of work to exemplify the locally Agreed Syllabus. As a result, the quality of teaching in religious education is good across the school. All teachers engage pupils well in starter activities, develop the main focus of the lesson effectively and utilise plenary sessions to consolidate learning. In the lessons observed, teachers employed a variety of learning

styles to good effect, ranging from making Hindu bracelets with Year 5 to Year 8 researching and presenting findings on Muslim prayer. Pupils collaborated well on the tasks, showing initiative when reporting back after all too brief a time for research. The work is challenging, such as expecting Year 7 pupils to analyse some of the arguments advanced for and against the existence of God. It stretches most pupils, but is not sufficiently tailored to the needs of lower attainers in mixed ability classes. Teachers manage their pupils well, establishing working relationships that are conducive to effective learning.

81. Pupils are achieving well in all years, reaching average standards of work by Year 6 and above average by the end of Year 8. Year 6 pupils have gained a fair knowledge of religious symbols and the stories behind major festivals but their writing offers only brief explanation of their importance for believers. By Year 8, pupils' essays on Jewish patriarchs show marked improvement over the first term, as they become more adept at pointing out the importance of historical events in forming the faith and its observances. Pupils' literacy is being developed well through religious education. Teachers pay careful attention to subject vocabulary and to extending pupils' writing. Pupils are competent in their use of information and communication technology to research topics but information tends to be downloaded without much thought as to its content. Pupils can identify similarities in the faiths they have studied and show the ability to reflect on what they have learned, in thinking through their own values and beliefs. Teachers are promoting pupils' spiritual and moral development effectively. For example, Year 7 pupils used lists of their personal treasures, to consider what matters most in life and Year 8 contemplated the significance of a mosque's design in worship. As a result of their studies, pupils are gaining a better understanding of different cultures.
82. Responsibility for the subject is combined with geography and history, which limits the time for innovative leadership. Steps have been taken to improve assessment by introducing levels of attainment common to humanities but the system lacks sufficient rigour. It is based more on teachers' general impressions of pupils' work than the results of objective testing and clear communication of the assessment criteria. The curriculum has been suitably revised since the previous inspection to extend coverage of other faiths than Christianity and include visits to places of worship. Improvement has been satisfactory, leading to a rise in standards.

CREATIVE, AESTHETIC, PRACTICAL AND PHYSICAL SUBJECTS

83. **Design and technology** was sampled during the inspection. Two lessons of design and technology were seen, one in Year 6 and one in Year 8. Younger pupils benefit from a wide range of resources and specialist teaching and accommodation. They achieve well as a result and reach standards in Year 6 that are above the level expected nationally. Standards in Year 8 are in line with the level expected nationally and achievement is satisfactory. Teaching in both lessons was good. The starts of lessons were used well, to talk through ideas and the activity ahead or to demonstrate particular skills that the pupils needed to use and develop. Pupils settled well, listened and watched and asked or answered questions. Consequently they were able to get on with their tasks quickly and effectively and learning progressed at a good pace. Pupils in both lessons maintained their focus well and worked constructively throughout the lesson. The teacher moved around groups checking progress and ideas, questioning pupils or providing individual support where necessary. The subject technician also carried out this role well in the Year 6 class. The needs of individual pupils were met well and their knowledge and skills developed well. Pupils were also very supportive of each other, discussing and sharing ideas well. Year 8 pupils made good use of a design package available on the small suite of computers next to the main teaching room to develop their ideas.

Physical education

The quality of provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Participation in extra-curricular activities is high with the department providing a wide range of clubs and teams which cater for pupils of all abilities.
- The assessment of pupils' attainment and progress is accurate and thorough but is not developed sufficiently to inform curricular and lesson planning further.
- The department is led and managed well with a clear commitment to pupil participation and in achieving pupils' full potential.
- The use of information and communication technology in the department is very good.

Commentary

84. The department has gained the Sports Mark award since the last inspection in recognition of its achievements in promoting participation in sport with a wide range of open access extra-curricular clubs and teams offered which cater for pupils of all abilities. These are much appreciated by pupils and parents. The inter-house events are providing further opportunities for all to participate and enjoy sporting activities at the school. Links with outside clubs are very strong, including gymnastics and rugby, and notably with the local ice hockey team where pupils have enthusiastically taken up cheer leading.
85. Teachers assess and record pupils' attainment and progress in each physical education activity accurately and thoroughly and this is clearly matched to the requirements of the National Curriculum. However, this is not as yet used fully to inform curricular and lesson planning and importantly to ensure that pupils know exactly what levels they are attaining and what they need to do to improve.
86. Pupils are generally attaining at the level expected nationally by the end of Year 6 and again when they leave at the end of the Year 8, with many pupils working beyond this. This is clear from the success of school teams, for example in netball and rugby, and the individual success of pupils in a range of sports including representing the district in the county Youth Games. This represents good achievement with pupils generally entering the school below the level expected nationally but making good progress over time as a result of good teaching and the opportunity to extend their sporting talents in a range of clubs and activities both in and out of school.
87. Whilst teaching is generally effective, for example, in developing basic rugby skills in Years 5 and 6 with well organised and enthusiastically taught lessons, some aspects are underdeveloped. Not all lessons make the teaching points explicit, particularly for the least able to make progress, and in the one unsatisfactory Year 8 fitness lesson, the very lively pupils required more carefully planned and delivered activities and importantly, more praise for those performing well. Effective lessons and activities include opportunities for pupils to show responsibility, for example by taking the initial warm-up, as seen in a good Year 8 dance lesson and in the cheer leading club.
88. The department is led and managed well with a clear commitment to pupil participation and in achieving their full potential. Links with outside clubs and the upper schools are very well established and liaison with the feeder schools is being developed to assist teachers with developing appropriate programmes of study for Year 5 pupils.
89. The department makes a significant contribution to cross-curricular themes in the school, particularly in developing literacy and in the use of information and communication technology, this latter also being used effectively by staff in recording and assessing the performance of pupils in dance and gymnastics. However, opportunities for the cultural development of pupils,

for example through the current very stimulating dance programme of study, are underdeveloped. There has been satisfactory progress since the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design was sampled during the inspection. Teaching and learning in the two lessons observed were good. Pupils enjoy the subject and are developing good basic skills in the subject.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' achievement is good because of the high expectations set by teachers.
- Lessons are very well planned and taught at a fast pace.
- There is insufficient use of music from different cultures to enhance the pupils' learning.
- Teachers demonstrate exemplary practice in starter activities, setting a positive ethos for learning.
- The range and quality of extra curricular music are very good.
- The poor quality of accommodation limits practical work and the space for instrumental tuition is unsatisfactory.

Commentary

90. Standards are in line with national expectations in Year 5 and above expectations by the end of Year 8. Pupils arrive with average attainment in music and achieve well, making good progress from Year 5 through to Year 8.
91. In Year 5, pupils respond well and have a good understanding of the basic elements of music. This is developed as pupils' progress through the school. For example, in Year 6, they compose using basic elements of dynamics and pitch and keep a record of their work in graphic notation. By the time they reach Year 8, pupils use conventional music notation and a wide range of musical terms. They have a good grasp of musical structure and demonstrate this in practical tasks. Pupils work independently and approach performance activities with enthusiasm. There is good support within lessons for pupils with special educational needs. There is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.

An outstanding starter activity in music

Children are engaged in music from the moment they walk into the room. They focus on a different composer every week. They are encouraged to make an initial physical response and then engage in a critical appraisal of the music. As the Year 5 pupils entered the room, they had already noticed the picture of Grieg on the door. A recording of "Peer Gynt" was playing and details were written on the board. They stood by their desks and immediately began conducting in time to the music. The teacher suggested that they start marching on the spot because this lesson was focusing on pulse and beat. As the teacher moved around the room, she gave positive feedback to those who were conducting and marching in time. She helped the others with quiet words of encouragement. When the music stopped, everyone sat down and the teacher skilfully led a question and answer session about the piece they had just heard. The open-ended questions allowed every response to be met with enthusiasm. No opportunity was missed to introduce musical terminology to develop children's literacy skills and understanding of technical words.

92. Teaching is good, resulting in good levels of achievement across all age groups. The good level of subject knowledge and very good planning facilitates very effective learning. The rapid pace of lessons keeps motivation high for most pupils. Teachers make good use of open-ended questions to develop pupils' understanding and quickly engage pupils in their learning.

Excellent use is made of starter activities to challenge pupils and set high expectations from the outset.

93. The head of music provides very good leadership. The co-ordinator organises and monitors the subject well and provides very good support for visiting instrumental teachers. The poor quality of accommodation limits practical work and the space for instrumental tuition is unsatisfactory.
94. Effective systems for tracking pupil progress help pupils know how they are doing and what they need to do to improve. There are well-organised schemes of work but there is insufficient coverage of non-western music cultures. This limits pupils' access to a broad music curriculum.
95. Pupils are able to join a wide range of extra curricular music including the school choir, orchestra and other instrumental ensembles. Instrumental specialists support these activities and participation levels are good. Well-established links with community groups and other schools enhance opportunities for pupils in the school. Pupils are further supported by the head of music in instrumental music examinations. Since the last inspection, significant improvements have been made in music.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Provision in personal, social and health education is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils respond well to the programme of study.
- Teaching varies from satisfactory to very good.

Commentary

96. Personal, social and health education has a high profile in the school. There are good links with outside organisations. The course meets statutory requirements and deals sensitively with such issues as self awareness, bodily changes, relationships, sex education, alcohol and drug awareness. Teaching is satisfactory, although it can be very good, depending on the quality of relationships between teacher and pupils. Overall, pupils respond well. Personal and social education makes a good contribution to the overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. However, monitoring and training of form tutors are necessary to ensure greater consistency in teaching the scheme of work.

Citizenship

Provision is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Citizenship education now forms a substantial part of personal and social education programmes in all years.
- The core curriculum is well led and managed.
- Assessment procedures have not been formalised.
- The school council provides an effective means for pupils to express their views and become involved in school improvements.

Commentary

97. Citizenship as a distinct National Curriculum subject for Years 7 and 8, is at an early stage of development in the school. The subject leader has a well-planned list of priorities, starting with the core curriculum. Accordingly, personal and social education programmes have been successfully revised to meet requirements, to the extent that four out of six modules in each year are now devoted to citizenship education. Effective leadership and management of the subject within the personal and social education programme are advancing pupils' understanding of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. The 2000 audit of citizenship elements in other subjects was not followed through to co-ordinate and manage the cross curricular dimension of the subject. In this area, leadership is lacking. There is not enough monitoring of the teaching of citizenship.
98. A formal process of assessment has yet to be put in place. Much of the work is based on discussion and pupils have not been required to write up their views on topical, citizenship issues. Year 8 pupils have researched animal rights issues, using information and communication technology successfully, and have made presentations in class. Interviews with the pupils showed that they have a reasonable understanding of the forms of lawful protest in a democratic society. They have a good knowledge of elections, helped by voting for their school council representatives, but have little understanding of the role of government. Similarly, Year 7 pupils have a good understanding of the causes and consequences of juvenile crime but not of the legal system. Overall, pupils' attainment in the subject is average by Year 8 and their achievement is satisfactory.
99. As with the overall personal, social and health education, tutors are involved in teaching citizenship but they have had little training to give them an overview of the three main aspects of this National Curriculum subject.
100. Beyond the taught curriculum, the school provides a number of opportunities for pupils to develop skills of participation and responsible action. They are encouraged to express their views via the school council, which is working well, support fund raising for charity and join in house activities run by pupils. Since the previous inspection, the school has raised pupils' awareness of the multicultural nature of British society and this aspect of citizenship features in a number of modules, linked to human rights.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the school	3
How inclusive the school is	3
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	3
Value for money provided by the school	3
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	3
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	2
The leadership and management of the school	3
The governance of the school	3
The leadership of the headteacher	3
The leadership of other key staff	3
The effectiveness of management	3

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3);

satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).