

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **THE GILBERD SCHOOL**

Colchester, Essex

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115357

Headteacher: Mrs V Cresswell

Lead inspector: Brian Blake HMI

Dates of inspection: 8<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> March 2004

Inspection number: 264052

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 – 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll:	1215
School address:	Brinkley Lane Colchester Essex
Postcode:	CO4 9PU
Telephone number:	01206 842211
Fax number:	01206 854756
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J Andrews
Date of previous inspection:	28 <sup>th</sup> September 1998

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The Gilberd School is a larger than average mixed gender, 11 to 16, foundation comprehensive. There are 1215 pupils on roll, with almost an equal number of boys and girls. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The percentage of pupils with English as an additional language is slightly higher than the national average. The percentage of pupils receiving free school meals is below that found nationally.

The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is average. The number of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is also around the national average, with the percentage of pupils having a statement of special educational needs below average. The range of difficulties that some pupils face has broadened since the previous inspection and now includes some complex needs that require additional specialist support.

Since its previous inspection, the school has attained specialist mathematics and computing status. It is also a designated Beacon school and Microsoft Academy. The school has been awarded 'Investors in People' and has achieved a number of curricular-related awards.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
2585	Brian Blake HMI	Lead inspector	
9545	Kevin Greatorex AI	Lay inspector	
33722	Steve Abbott HMI	Team inspector	Mathematics
2501	Raye Allison-Smith AI	Team inspector	Art
11190	Winifred Burke AI	Team inspector	Design and technology, and information communication technology (ICT)
2480	Christine Gilder AI	Team inspector	Special educational needs (SEN)
33720	Sean Harford HMI	Team inspector	Science
15337	Ian Hartland HMI	Team inspector	Religious education (RE)
18740	Marcia Headon HMI	Team inspector	History
12475	Stuart Johnson AI	Team inspector	Music
19455	Garry Jones HMI	Team inspector	Geography
18950	Carmen Rodney AI	Team inspector	English and English as an additional language (EAL)
20312	Mary Ryan HMI	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
14446	Barry Simmons AI	Team inspector	Physical education (PE)
33721	Tom Winskill HMI	Team inspector	Citizenship, personal, social and health education (PSHE)

Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) were joined on this inspection by Additional Inspectors (AI) appointed by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools.

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## **REPORT CONTENTS**

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS</b>	
<b>STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS</b>	<b>8</b>
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
<b>QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>11</b>
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
<b>LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4</b>	
<b>PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS</b>	<b>35</b>

## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**The Gilbert School is a good school.** The leadership of the head teacher is good. She is well supported by an effective senior leadership team, by faculty and subject heads of departments and heads of year. Pupils achieve well and standards are above average. The very good relationships throughout the school help to create a good ethos and a good learning environment. The school provides good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- the high expectations set by the effective headteacher;
- the strong contribution made by many managers at all levels throughout the school;
- the governing body's secure understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses;
- teaching which is good and enables most pupils to achieve well;
- staff that are very committed and have high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour;
- the very good range of extra-curricular activities that enriches pupils' learning;
- marking that does not always enable pupils to know their strengths and weaknesses or what they need to do to improve;
- provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory overall, but records of progress are insufficient with IEP targets too imprecise; and,
- the school does not meet statutory requirements for religious education, citizenship and daily collective worship.

**Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.** National test and examination results have improved significantly and nearly all key issues raised in the previous inspection report have been tackled successfully.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

**Standards overall are very good,** particularly GCSE results which are much better than those found nationally or in similar schools. Standards in music are not high enough. The results of national tests in the three core subjects at the end of Year 9 are above average.

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

*Key: A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average  
Similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

Standards are above average in almost all subjects and well above in some. **The overall achievement of pupils is good.** Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make satisfactory progress. More able pupils achieve well. Competence in literacy, numeracy and ICT is good.

**Pupils' personal development is good,** with strengths in high teacher expectations, including behaviour, and good pupils' attitudes. Attendance is good and punctuality satisfactory. **The overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.**

### QUALITY OF EDUCATION

**The quality of education is good. Teaching and learning are good.** Lessons are well planned and teachers challenge pupils to achieve well. Good relationships and effective management of pupils create a supportive learning environment. Marking does not always let pupils know their

strengths and weaknesses or what they need to do to improve. The school provides a wide range of courses and options to meet the needs of most pupils. The school does not yet have a sufficiently well planned programme to support the needs of the increasing number of younger pupils with special educational needs.

The provision of extra-curricular activities is very good. Accommodation is good overall with excellent provision for the performing arts and very good provision for ICT and physical education. The school is well-resourced. The school's procedures to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are good. There are very good arrangements for pupils transferring from primary schools. Pupils are monitored effectively and receive good support, advice and guidance throughout their time in school.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership is good and management satisfactory.** The leadership of the headteacher is good. She provides a clear vision for the school and sets high expectations for teachers and pupils. Senior and middle managers also provide good leadership. Although the school development plan is monitored and evaluated, there is insufficient evaluation of its overall effectiveness on provision for the increasing needs of the youngest pupils. The governing body supports the school well and understands its strengths and weaknesses. However, it has not ensured that all statutory requirements in citizenship, religious education and daily collective worship are met fully. There is good support for newly qualified teachers.

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

Parents are very pleased with the work of the school. They are well informed and very supportive. Individuals and external organisations make a good contribution to the education of pupils. The school has very good links with primary and secondary schools. Pupils speak highly of the school.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- ensure marking provides pupils with information about their strengths and weaknesses and what they need to do to improve;
- improve further the provision for pupils with special educational needs, for whom traditional academic courses are not appropriate;
- improve the provision for music; and
- meet statutory requirements by providing fully for religious education, citizenship and daily collective worship.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

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

Pupils' standards and achievement are good or better. The Key Stage 3 results from national tests in 2003 show that levels of attainment are above national averages in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. At the end of Key Stage 3 and 4, standards are above or well above national averages with the exception of music, which is average.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well and make good progress throughout the school.
- National test results for Year 9 in 2003 were above the national and similar schools' averages in English, mathematics and science.

#### Commentary

1. Since the previous inspection in 1998, high standards have been maintained in national tests and examinations. Results for five or more A\* - C grades at GCSE have improved by 15 percentage points since the previous inspection, which has meant that the school has been consistently above the national average. The percentage of pupils achieving five or more A\* - G grades has decreased marginally since 1998, but is still above the national average. The percentage of pupils achieving one or more A\* - G grades has remained consistent since the previous inspection, at around two per cent higher than that found nationally. The majority of pupils with special educational needs achieve well by the time they leave school. The small numbers of pupils who have significant sensory or physical impairments achieve as well as their peers.
2. The school's average point score is above the national average and has remained so since 1998. Although girls perform marginally better than boys, both achieve better than their respective national averages. The performance of pupils from different minority ethnic groups is generally in line with the standards found in the school.
3. The school is achieving well against its stated targets. The value added to pupils' performance between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is well above that found in other schools nationally.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining five or more A* - C grades	68 (65)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining five or more A* - G grades	94 (95)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining one or more A* - G grades	98 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupils (best eight subjects)	39.8 (39.7)	34.7 (34.8)

*There were 214 in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. The figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

4. The standards achieved by Year 9 pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 are above those found nationally in all three core subjects. The improvement trend over the last three years is similar to that found nationally in English and science, but has slowed down marginally in mathematics over the last two years. Boys continue to marginally outperform girls in mathematics, but achieve slightly less well in English. In science, performance levels are



similar. The performance of pupils from different minority ethnic groups is not significantly different from the school average.

- There is effective extra support with reading, spelling and comprehension for some lower performing pupils in Years 7 to 9. Many of these pupils need less extra support as they close the performance gap with their peers. Almost all achieved graded GCSE passes in English in 2003, representing good progress against their attainment on entry.

**Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 - average point score in 2003**

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	35.2 (n/a)	33.2 (33.3)
Mathematics	36.8 (36.8)	35.4 (34.7)
Science	35.1 (34.7)	33.6 (33.3)

*There were 232 in the year group. The figures in brackets are for the previous year. The n/a for English in 2003 is due to lost scripts by the receiving examination board.*

- The school's average point score for the three core subjects is above the national average and in line with the national trend since 1998. The table below shows that, against schools with a similar number of free school meals attainment is above in mathematics and science and well above in English. It is generally in line when compared to schools with similar prior attainment.

**Comparison with benchmarks for schools in similar context in 2003**

	Level 5 or above		Level 6 or above	
	2003	2002	2003	2002
English	A	n/a	B	n/a
Mathematics	B	C	C	B
Science	B	C	C	D

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

- The value added to pupils' performance between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 is well above that found nationally for all schools and against schools with similar characteristics. The school remains well set to achieve all its 2004 targets.
- Standards in Years 7 to 9 are above average in modern foreign languages, information and communication technology, history and geography. Standards are average in religious education, design and technology, music, art and design and physical education.
- Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average in modern foreign languages, information and communication technology, design and technology, religious education, physical education, art and design, geography and history.

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

Pupils' personal development is good, with good behaviour and good attitudes. Attendance is good and punctuality satisfactory. The overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. The provision for daily collective worship is unsatisfactory.

**Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A high proportion of pupils have positive attitudes to school and their work, although some Year 10 and Year 11 pupils are less enthusiastic.
- Behaviour in lessons and around the school is generally good but is adversely affected at times when pupils struggle to navigate the cramped corridors.

- The moral, social and cultural dimensions of pupils' development are promoted well, but spiritual development remains unplanned and is actively promoted in only a minority of subjects.
- The school does not comply fully with the statutory requirement for collective worship.

## Commentary

10. Pupils' attitudes and values are good. When pupils start at the school in Year 7 they learn the routines quickly and readily accept the high expectations from teachers. The vast majority of pupils are happy in school and are eager and ready to learn. They are prepared to work hard and participate fully in school activities. They show good levels of independence and persevere well with their work. This enthusiasm, demonstrated for example by pupils performing in school productions, continues as they grow older and become more articulate, confident and mature. However, the school has a small number of pupils who demonstrate indifferent attitudes to the school and their work. The responses of a few older pupils are unsatisfactory, especially when teaching is unsatisfactory.

### Attendance in the latest complete reporting year 2002/03

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	7.2%	School data	0.2%
National data	7.2%	National data	1.1%

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

### Ethnic background of pupils (2002/03)

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group

### Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1087	87	2
12	2	1
2	1	
1	5	
8	1	
8	5	

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

11. Attendance is good and has been consistently above the national average since the previous inspection. Punctuality is satisfactory. Virtually all pupils arrive at school on time, enabling a prompt and efficient start to the day.
12. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is generally good. The school sets clear expectations and has a wide range of effective strategies to support pupils who experience difficulties in learning. Behaviour in lessons is good when positive relationships and management skills are combined with teaching, which effectively matches the learning needs of different pupils. Outside of lessons, the school is generally calm and orderly but problems continue to occur in the narrow and often overcrowded corridors when pupils move from lesson to lesson and have to wait outside classrooms for a teacher to arrive. The number of fixed-term exclusions is high, but sustained efforts are made to keep pupils in school for as long as possible. Effective strategies are in place to support excluded pupils when they return to school. The joint working between the learning support team and the local education authority (LEA) behaviour support service has achieved some excellent results, including the successful re-integration of pupils from the pupil referral service.

13. Pupils whose behaviour needs are complex and/or challenging and some who also have special educational needs are directed from lessons to the learning support department, where staff work to help them regain their composure. Although this often proves effective in helping those pupils return to productive work, it can disrupt the withdrawal sessions planned for others. Some pupils feel that a number of those exhibiting the most challenging behaviour, especially some boys in Years 10 and 11, are allowed to continue being disruptive for too long. The school has effectively dealt with the few racial incidents that have occurred.
14. Some assemblies provide good contributions to pupils' spiritual development where, for example, they have opportunities to reflect on career and lifestyle choices. Opportunities to promote spiritual development across the curriculum are, however, limited. Most pupils respond well to the strong moral code promoted by staff and develop a clear sense of right and wrong. The performing arts make a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. Music makes a particular contribution to pupils' cultural development, with opportunities to learn about music from different cultures, including African and Caribbean, as well as classical and popular western music. The school is, however, failing to comply fully with the statutory requirement for daily collective worship, a problem identified at the time of the previous inspection.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The quality of education is good. The curriculum is satisfactory. The support and guidance for pupils, links with other schools and the partnership with parents are very good. Links with the community are good.

### **Teaching and learning**

Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and teachers challenge pupils to achieve high standards. Assessment is satisfactory overall.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Good subject knowledge supports effective planning.
- Teacher expectations are high and challenge pupils to learn effectively.
- A wide range of challenging tasks support a range of learning styles.
- Good relationships and effective behaviour management from the majority of teachers create a supportive learning environment.
- Small amounts of unsatisfactory teaching are often linked to inexperienced or unqualified staff.
- Marking and other assessment methods are used insufficiently to support pupils' learning.

### **Commentary**

15. Teachers, generally, have high expectations of pupils, constantly urging them to improve their work. Subject knowledge is used well to plan carefully structured and challenging lessons. Tasks are targeted appropriately to match the ability of pupils and to provide an appropriate level of challenge which stimulates thinking and learning. Classroom organisation is effective and creates a supportive environment in which pupils can learn confidently. Behaviour management is generally good, although there is a small minority of pupils whose behaviour is disrupting their own and others' learning. Relationships between staff and pupils are well developed. Classrooms are attractive, well resourced and contain good quality displays to reinforce learning.
16. A range of approaches is used to develop pupils' ability to learn collaboratively and independently. In science, pupils are given opportunities to work in groups and pairs on a

varied and stimulating range of activities. In mathematics, teachers set challenging problems and expect pupils to explain and justify their solutions. Teachers in geography and history develop independent and collaborative learning by encouraging pupils to research topics and ask relevant questions. In design and technology, pupils working independently are challenged to extend their learning by well-timed prompts from their teacher.

17. Teachers use questioning to effectively assess pupils and develop their understanding; this was particularly evident in English, geography, science, design and technology and religious education. Good use of ICT is supporting learning in English, science, modern foreign languages and geography.
18. The learning support department provides good group teaching and individual support for pupils. Members of the department are experienced and show very good knowledge and understanding of pupils' needs. In the most effective lessons, teachers are good at encouraging and coaxing even the most reluctant learners. The effectiveness of this work is greatest where there is consistent support for a group in all their lessons. Very good links between class teachers and learning support assistants promote an enthusiastic and sound approach to class work. Pupils with literacy, social and behavioural problems are carefully selected and withdrawn from lessons for their teaching. Overall this strategy works well.
19. Some unsatisfactory teaching occurs when inexperienced or unqualified staff lack the relevant expertise to develop pupils' knowledge in the subject. In these lessons, the degree of challenge is too often insufficient, with missed opportunities to engage and challenge pupils. The management of behaviour is also an occasional weakness, as is the slow pace of learning.
20. There is a well-developed system to analyse assessment data and external test and examination results. Data are used to assess progress and to set target grades and levels for pupils in each subject. However, assessment to support learning is underdeveloped. Pupils are not always sufficiently aware of their target grades or indeed of their current level of performance. Marking varies in the regularity with which it is completed and its quality. In the most effective lessons teachers provide clear oral guidance and helpful written comments on work completed.
21. Individual target-setting, review processes and recording work carried out by the learning support team are unsatisfactory. Targets are too imprecise; for example, 'improve reading age by six months' guide neither class teachers, pupils or their parents and carers towards the stated targets. Some individual education plan targets are inappropriate and remain unchanged for too long. Evidence of progress in key subjects is not gathered systematically for every review and there is no routine recording to show what work members of the learning support department have done with individuals, or what effect its strategies have had. Opportunities for observation and recording of each pupil's progress are missed. The team relies too much on informal exchange of information about their work and its impact on pupils' learning and development.

***Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in lessons***

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4%	19%	39%	32%	6%	0%	0%

**The curriculum**

Curricular provision is satisfactory overall. It is good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Extra-curricular provision is very good. Resources, accommodation and staffing are good. Provision for a daily act of collective worship and the curriculum for religious education and citizenship are unsatisfactory.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school provides a wide range of courses and options to meet the needs of most pupils.
- Accommodation is good overall, with some excellent provision in the performing arts and very good provision for ICT and physical education.
- The school is well-resourced.
- There have been significant improvements to the quality of the library provision since the previous inspection.
- The curriculum plan does not yet fully meet the needs of pupils for whom traditional academic courses are not appropriate.
- The school does not meet statutory requirements for citizenship, Key Stage 4 religious education and for a daily act of collective worship.

## Commentary

22. In Years 7 to 9, the curriculum provision for most pupils is good and the range of courses is appropriate. The national Key Stage 3 strategy has been implemented well in English, mathematics and history, and the school has begun to use the teaching and learning strand of the strategy to support whole school developments. However, the provision within departments and the learning support department has not yet developed fully to meet the broadening range of needs of younger pupils in the school.
23. At Key Stage 4, the curriculum provision is satisfactory. With the exception of religious education, where the time allocated for the core statutory programme is insufficient, provision in GCSE courses is satisfactory. The school has recently introduced vocational GCSE courses in ICT, leisure and tourism and art and design but further consideration of mixed vocational options is required to offer pupils the chance to develop their practical skills relevant to future employment routes. The ASDAN Bronze Award option attracts pupils for a range of reasons and with varying levels of academic ability. They enjoy the activities and it provides an opportunity for those who need extra support with coursework to receive it during the accredited course. The course brings many social benefits and suits the least able pupils well. However, the level of challenge is not sufficient to fully meet the needs of the most able pupils in the group. Links with the sixth form college and the further education college are strong.
24. The school is failing to meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship in all years. In addition, provision for the teaching of citizenship and religious education is unsatisfactory as both are failing to meet statutory requirements. Although the school had identified the need to undertake a fundamental review of the curriculum in light of the changing needs of the student intake, and the increasing flexibility afforded to schools in the planning of the Key Stage 4 curriculum, further progress is still required.
25. Provision for ICT across the curriculum is good and has improved considerably since the previous inspection as a result of enhanced accommodation, improved resources and increased staff skill and confidence. Most subject areas have easy access to computer rooms or use of laptop trolleys. Interactive white boards are used well. Where there are identified problems, such as in music, design and technology and modern foreign languages, solutions are sought and resources planned for. The line manager ensures that hardware is replaced as needed. The best provision and impact on learning is in history, geography, English, mathematics, science and art and design. There is unsatisfactory ICT provision in religious education.
26. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, including good links with the local community. The school excels in its provision for drama and dance, with good provision in music, physical education, study fieldwork, international exchange visits, external competitions in modern languages and mathematics, art clubs for the talented and art

workshops and summer schools. In addition, the ICT rooms are used well before and after school, and many departments run revision clubs at lunch time or at the end of the school day.

27. There has been significant improvement in the accommodation since the previous inspection. It is now mostly good or better, but there remain a few areas of concern. The poor quality library provision, identified as a key issue in the previous report, has been addressed. Classroom accommodation is good for most subjects and very good in physical education and the performing arts. However, there are insufficient rooms for mathematics and some are too small for large groups. The SEN accommodation is cramped. There is also a shortage of space for individual and small group work. The food technology rooms are awaiting modernisation and the narrow corridors in many parts of the school result in congestion during lesson changeover times. Despite those weaknesses, the accommodation provides an attractive learning environment and is well-cared for by pupils. Throughout the school there are many examples of very good classroom and corridor display that celebrate and support pupils' learning.
28. Good investment by the school has ensured that the amount and quality of resources are good. There is a good range of textbooks and many departments are now well-provided with computer software. All classrooms have access to overhead projectors and an increasing number are being equipped with electronic whiteboards. Significant investment in the library since the previous inspection has ensured that it is now adequately resourced, although further investment in ICT resources is needed.

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

The school's procedures to ensure pupils' care, welfare, health and safety are good. Most pupils are monitored effectively and receive good support, advice and guidance. The school has satisfactory arrangements for seeking and acting upon the views of pupils.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- There are very good procedures for health, safety and child protection.
- Induction arrangements for pupils transferring from primary schools are very good.
- The school has effective systems for monitoring the progress of pupils through summary assessments.
- A variety of mentors, including staff, Year 11 pupils, governors and members of the community, are effective in supporting pupils.
- The quality of day to day assessment of pupils' learning needs is satisfactory overall, but in some lessons teachers do not find out enough about what pupils know and understand to inform their teaching.
- The provision of information and impartial guidance on further study or career opportunities is good overall, but stronger at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3.

### **Commentary**

29. There are clear procedures for child protection that are known and understood by teachers and support staff. Pupils with particular needs, such as medical, physical or emotional needs, receive good care and support. The school has very good procedures for ensuring it provides a healthy and safe environment. Risk assessments are carried out regularly and good records are maintained. Health and safety procedures are effectively communicated to pupils.
30. The school has a coherent and effective pastoral system. Pupils who need to talk about problems are encouraged to speak to their form tutors, heads and assistant heads of year and the student mentor. Pastoral staff keep a close eye on vulnerable pupils. Some very

good examples were seen during the inspection of form tutors finding time at the end of registration for a quick word with a student with a concern.

31. The school has good systems in place to support pupils' care and guidance and is working to improve them further, for example, by reviewing the role of tutors, revising student planners, enhancing the database of student incidents, and providing additional training on behaviour management. Pupils reported that the school dealt promptly and very effectively with any bullying that occurred.
32. Intervention with underachieving pupils is good. The report system is used well by key stage managers and heads of year to monitor pupils' progress against long-term targets. Most departments also monitor progress effectively by comparing subject assessments with examination targets. However, in some subjects, teachers' marking and informal assessment do not find out sufficiently what pupils know and understand, to inform their teaching; nor does it tell pupils what they need to do to improve.
33. All pupils have access to support to improve their standards. Many teachers run well-attended revision classes and coursework clubs after school and at lunch times. These make an important contribution to the standards achieved. In addition, there is a variety of mentoring schemes that support pupils. The student mentor, working closely with the educational welfare officer, provides learning support for pupils with problems such as poor attendance or low self-esteem. The school offers targeted support for underachieving and disaffected pupils through business mentors, form tutors, senior staff and outside agencies such as the 'perform and respect' projects. These interventions have been successful in re-engaging a number of pupils in education. Very few pupils are offered alternative provision such as work-based learning or college links at Key Stage 4. The learning support department team develop very good relationships and rapport with pupils to ensure the most vulnerable feel they can discuss their difficulties with staff. Joint working with the LEA behaviour support adviser is excellent and has led to several re-integrations of excluded pupils and retention of several pupils at risk of exclusion.
34. Parents and pupils are very positive about the induction arrangements when pupils start school in Year 7. This is due to the strong partnership with primary feeder schools and the student mentoring system, which gives younger pupils greater confidence and helps them to settle quickly into their new environment.
35. A planned programme of careers education takes place in Years 9, 10 and 11 within the personal, social and health education programme. At Key Stage 4, this provision is good and supported well by a mock interview day led by local business representatives and by a careers convention for pupils and parents. There is effective guidance to pupils on making option choices at the end of Key Stage 3 and a clear and well-organised programme to support post-16 transition. Pupils have good access to careers software programs and there are good links with the Connexions service.
36. Arrangements for seeking and acting upon the views of pupils are satisfactory. Plans are well advanced to re-launch the school council, including an innovative use of e-mail to increase participation. The school has also surveyed pupils' views on aspects of school life. Future surveys could be improved further by asking more questions on matters that concern pupils and parents and by providing a space for free comment.

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

The school has good links with parents and the community. It has very good links with other primary and secondary schools.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents are extremely supportive of the school and its work and are well informed.
- Links with the community are good and improving further.
- Individuals and organisations make a good contribution to the education of pupils.

## Commentary

37. The school has a good partnership with parents. Parent governors use their knowledge of the school's overall provision to inform their work as governors. Parents also support the work of the school through helping with trips, visits and some reading support. Parents are extremely supportive and believe the school has many strengths. Virtually all parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with a query or a problem.
38. Good quality information is provided on induction to the school and is followed up with regular contact during the year. Information for parents on pupil's progress is provided by a short interim report and detailed full-year report with follow-up consultation meetings. These are welcomed by parents, although the full-year report is regarded by some as overcomplicated, with targets for improvement often vague and unhelpful. Those parents unable or unwilling to meet with teachers are contacted by the school. Day to day communication between the school and individual parents has been enhanced through recent improvement to the pupils' planner. Parents generally feel well informed through the school newsletter and information evenings aimed at helping parents help their children to learn.
39. The school has good and improving links with the community. It is represented on the 'health for Highwoods' group, which is an effective mechanism for establishing the role of the school within the community, and for identifying community needs in its area of specialism. Currently, ICT is the main area where community needs are met, with well attended adult education courses. This outreach provision is in response to requests from community members and illustrates the good response from the school to the needs of its community. Community outreach in mathematics is at an early stage of development. Local community sports clubs make extensive use of the school's sports facilities.
40. Individuals and organisations make a good contribution to the education of pupils. For example, the local police and St John Ambulance contribute to the personal, social and health education programme. Local businesses play a major role in supporting the school's work experience programme. The school also runs a careers' convention for pupils and parents. Youth workers from local churches greatly enhance pupils' understanding of the way religious belief influences behaviour.
41. The school has very good links with primary and secondary schools. There is a highly effective induction programme for pupils transferring from primary schools, which is well regarded by parents. The school's programme for transfer to post-16 education is also highly effective. Through its Beacon and specialist school status, the school has been able to work with a range of partner schools. For example, an advanced skills teacher (AST) in mathematics has been working with primary school mathematics co-ordinators on transition issues and developing common approaches to numeracy. Senior managers and other staff have also worked effectively with partner secondary schools. These links have involved a number of curriculum areas and have included visits by primary pupils and other teachers.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership is good. The headteacher and her senior and middle managers provide good leadership. Management is satisfactory. The governors provide clear strategic direction and are involved in the work of the school, but have not ensured that all statutory requirements are met.

## Main strengths and weaknesses



- The headteacher provides clear vision and sets high expectations for the school.
- The governing body supports the school well and understands its strengths and weaknesses, but has not ensured that all statutory requirements are met with regards to citizenship, religious education and collective worship.
- Middle managers provide good leadership.
- Although the school development plan is monitored and evaluated by a number of separate teams, there is no overall evaluation of the plan.
- The leadership of music is unsatisfactory.
- There is a comprehensive induction programme and good support for newly qualified teachers.

## Commentary

42. The leadership of the headteacher has a very positive influence on the school. She has set a clear direction and sense of purpose, which has contributed to the school being awarded mathematics and computing specialist status and Beacon school status. Her firm determination to ensure high quality teaching, through creating effective teams, means there has been a rise in standards. The headteacher shows financial astuteness and, as a result, has been successful in obtaining further funding for new buildings. The headteacher is a good role model for other staff and communicates her vision for the school clearly to staff, governors and pupils.
43. There is a very thorough system for monitoring the school development plan and senior staff are effective in managing this. Although the plan is linked to strategic priorities, it is not sufficiently detailed and there has been no evaluation of its overall impact. Senior managers analyse and use performance data effectively at a whole school level, and its use within departments is developing. The leadership team has identified the need to enhance the opportunities for pupils not following an academic route and are aware that more needs to be done. The senior management team has a very visible presence around the school and support the headteacher, staff and pupils well.
44. The leadership and management of heads of department, faculties and heads of year are good overall. Although a number of heads of department are relatively new in post they have quickly and accurately assessed strengths and weaknesses and are building effective teams to address those weaknesses. Departmental plans are linked closely with the school development plan, resulting in a strong focus on raising standards. Monitoring of teaching and learning at this level, as part of a culture of self-evaluation, is developing effectively. The leadership of music is unsatisfactory, although the school is well aware of this and is taking action to improve it.
45. The governors are actively involved in the life of the school and are very committed to ensuring its success. There is a good balance of skills and expertise among their membership, which is used wisely for the benefit of the school. They share a corporate vision and set the strategic direction for the school. They act as a critical friend, providing support and challenge where they feel it necessary. The governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Their comprehensive committee structure keeps them well informed of developments in school. However, the governors have not ensured that the school fulfils its statutory obligations in relation to the curricular provision for citizenship and religious education. Although it was identified in the previous inspection report, the governors have not ensured compliance with the requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. Therefore, despite having a very positive effect in general terms, the governance of the school is unsatisfactory.
46. The school is strongly committed to inclusion and is successfully supporting the learning of the majority of pupils with special educational needs. The school has worked hard to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act and has increased its access for pupils with

disabilities through the provision of ramps and a lift. However, the school lacks a clear vision for the development of the provision to match the changing additional needs of younger pupils. Individual education plans do not contain enough precise details to enable teachers to provide closely enough targeted support for those pupils.

47. The school is very committed to staff development and has an effective performance management system that is tackling underperformance. Although senior and middle managers monitor teaching in lessons, as part of the regular review cycle, the judgements reached are inconsistent because there has been no whole school training in lesson observation. The headteacher is very aware of the remodelling of the school workforce initiative and the number of support staff has increased steadily since the previous inspection, which has helped to support the work of teachers. A very comprehensive induction programme is well established and extends to new teachers and those who have assumed increased responsibility within school. The school is also involved in a variety of initial teacher training initiatives, which have helped in alleviating difficulties in recruiting staff.

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

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,689,123
Total expenditure	3,638,874
Expenditure per pupil	2,997

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	164,958
Balance carried forward to the next year	168,282

48. Financial management is strong. Financial controls are robust and there is an appropriate separation of financial responsibilities. The governors play an active part in setting and monitoring the budget. The school has been very successful in obtaining additional funding, which has been used to make the environment more conducive for learning and to improve the pupil: teacher ratio. Best value principles are applied effectively in decision-making, but procedures for benchmarking expenditure and for evaluating the impact of previous spending decisions are not sufficiently well developed.

# PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

### ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

#### English

Provision in English is **good**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well in the national tests and GCSE examinations because teachers emphasise textual analysis and writing.
- The quality of marking is not thorough enough and too much work is unmarked, which means that pupils are not clear about how they can improve their work.
- A good team of teachers has been created and forward planning to sustain standards is clear.
- Drama is a significant strength and enriches the overall development of pupils.

#### Commentary

49. Standards are well above average in Year 7 to Year 9. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 have improved significantly over the last two years and represent very good achievement for pupils who enter Year 7 with average attainment in English. The gap between boys and girls has narrowed since the previous inspection. Test results are above the national trend, though the number of gifted pupils reaching the highest levels was lower than that found nationally. In 2003, the GCSE results in English and English literature were well above average and represent a significant improvement since the previous inspection. The most able pupils do very well, more so girls than boys.
50. Achievement is generally good, showing consistently good emphasis on textual analysis and in preparing pupils well for national tests and GCSE examinations. However, achievement has been affected recently by staff problems, which means that in some classes higher attaining pupils are not always challenged sufficiently. The progress of a small minority of immature boys is occasionally affected when they are not focused on the work set. Pupils with special needs achieve well.
51. Pupils reach good standards in speaking and listening, confidently explaining and developing their ideas. Pupils achieve well in reading because of the emphasis teachers place on analysis of text and appreciation. In Year 11, the highest attaining pupils can talk about the ideas expressed in their reading. Most pupils use background information well, showing good understanding of a writer's intentions. By Year 9, lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, use and understand how literary terms such as extended metaphors work. Writing is often well structured and, overall, pupils reach good standards. The highest attaining pupils achieve well above average standards. They write with precision and draw on an extensive vocabulary. Year 11 pupils with special needs use the writing process very well to improve their written expression.
52. The quality of teaching and learning are good. Lessons have clear learning objectives and a range of activities to keep pupils involved. Teachers make good use of the Key Stage 3 strategy, particularly when developing pupils' understanding of implicit meanings. Pupils respond well to questioning, annotating and highlighting texts, modelling and using critical notes to understand critics' views. These approaches help pupils to focus sharply on the use of language, form and structure of text. Teachers use their knowledge of the national tests

and GCSE requirements to challenge pupils. In most lessons, expectations of work are high and behaviour good, but a small number of pupils are not always sufficiently stretched because teachers are either inexperienced or non-specialists. Learning assistants work skilfully with pupils with special needs. However, there are missed opportunities to give them a fuller role in lessons. Pupils receive helpful oral feedback in lessons but marking in Years 7 to 9 does not give sufficient information on how work can be improved.

53. Since the previous inspection, there have been a number of key changes in staffing, including a new head of faculty who has been in post for less than one term. The head of faculty has identified what needs to be done for continual improvement. The curriculum has been revised, but provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, citizenship and numeracy is not sufficiently explicit in schemes of work. The day to day management of the department is good and monitoring of teaching and learning is in place. The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to learn about other literary heritages.
54. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good, and a committed and cohesive team has been built.

## **Drama**

Example of outstanding practice:

A Year 9 drama lesson, with 50 pupils of different abilities, illustrates the quality of dynamic and energetic teaching, which is a significant factor in helping all pupils to make rapid progress.

The lesson was linked to a unit of work on physical theatre and involved an experimental approach by two teachers who brought their drama and dance classes together. Teaching was intensive, with very high expectations. The starter activity involved the two classes working alongside each other in a circle, throwing and catching a ball as they counted or chanted a nursery rhyme. Within minutes of the lesson starting, pupils' concentration and co-ordination skills reached high levels through a series of well-planned and targeted activities. Teachers made excellent use of ICT to intermittently project key words and target pupils' work on creating a motif using different movements. In role, teachers demonstrated, guided and supervised pupils.

Assessment and evaluation of practical work were key strategies to very effective learning. Pupils' performance increased to a crescendo as they were taken through a series of motifs by talented pupils acting as teachers. Those student teachers displayed a high level of imaginative work, talking to, cajoling, demonstrating and leading by example until they were satisfied with the group's work.

High level expectations resulted, initially, in the class, teachers and PGCE pupils working together as a shuffling mass and shouting out an invented sentence in unison, followed by the class itself taking turns to perform choreographed motifs while they were recorded by two of their peers. Teachers effectively used targeted questions to increase pupils' understanding of physical theatre, making them aware of the symbolic meaning when communicating body language. Overall, standards were well above those expected.

55. Drama is taught throughout the school as part of performing arts. Most pupils arrive at the school with limited drama experience. However, they respond very well to the high quality teaching they receive and make very strong progress.

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

56. The national literacy strategy has been successfully implemented across the school. The development of a school policy has led all departments to include literacy in schemes of work and, more importantly, incorporating aspects of it in their teaching. Ideas from the strategy are used regularly in English, and most departments have responded well to developing literacy to meet the increasing number of pupils with low literacy skills.

57. The vast majority of pupils have well-developed oral skills. They show good understanding and confidence of using spoken language for different purposes. In music, pupils participate well in discussions and in citizenship they reach a high standard in debate and argument. Pupils readily participate in role play in history and in mathematics their oral skills are extended in lessons where experienced teachers use good questioning techniques. The development of reading skills extends beyond word walls and banks. In art, analytical reading is encouraged, as is retrieving information and annotating texts. Although a small number of pupils have low reading ages, they are keen to read aloud. The English department is responding well to the needs of the lower attaining pupils through using progress units and revising the curriculum to meet their specific needs. There are, however, limited opportunities for reading in citizenship.

### **Modern foreign languages**

58. The modern languages department benefits from enthusiastic and confident leadership. Language teachers work well as a team and this is reflected in the consistent policies and practice across both languages. The French and German language assistants make a valuable contribution to the work of the department. Resources are good in both languages and improved access to specialist rooms has ensured that ICT is used increasingly to enhance teaching in both French and German. The development of the modern foreign languages site on the intranet provides good support for independent learning. The learning environment in classrooms and corridors within the department is vibrant and the high quality displays are used well to support teaching and learning. The head of department monitors teaching and learning in both languages, drawing on the outcomes to stimulate discussion at departmental meetings and to inform subsequent developments.
59. There is a good range of extra-curricular activities, including entry into national languages competitions, the German exchange visit and study visits to France. These enrichment opportunities have a positive influence on pupils' attitudes and achievement.

### **French**

Provision in French is **good**.

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

- Teaching and learning have improved significantly since the previous inspection.
- Standards are high and results are improving but boys could still do better.
- Teaching is good overall and contributes strongly to pupils' good or better attitudes to learning.
- The department is led well and works effectively as a team.
- There are some missed opportunities to maximise the use of target language in the classroom by both teachers and pupils.

#### **Commentary**

60. There has been a steady rise in standards in French since the previous inspection. Results at the end of Year 11 are well above the national average, although in 2003 there were fewer very good and excellent grades than in other subjects in the school. In the last two years, girls outperformed boys at both key stages. In Years 7 to 9, achievement is good. Almost all pupils acquire new vocabulary and are confident to speak French within the context of the lesson. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils are beginning to grasp the grammar and structure of the language and are demonstrating an ability to manipulate and apply their improving standard in new contexts. In Years 10 and 11, the most able pupils achieve well. Writing is accurate and is of a high standard. Pupils read aloud confidently, with good pronunciation and

expression. However, there is sometimes insufficient demand made of some more able pupils in groups below the top sets.

61. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and managed, and there is effective use of a range of visual and text resources, including ICT, to promote oral work. Pupils know what is expected of them by the good quality feedback provided by teachers, including use of the school merit system to motivate learning. However, the use of the target language does not yet happen consistently or to greatest effect. Teachers too often use English when the class could have understood the instructions or explanations given in the foreign language. Similarly, teachers do not consistently demand enough from pupils in using the foreign language routinely during the lesson. Pupils' work is marked regularly. Although there are some good examples of marking that give pupils a clear indication on how to improve, too many targets for learning are broad and imprecise.
62. Leadership of French is good and there been substantial improvement since the previous inspection.

## German

Provision in German is **good**.

- There has been significant improvement in teaching and learning since the previous inspection.
- Standards are high and although results are improving boys underachieve at both key stages.
- Teaching is good overall and contributes strongly to pupils' good or better attitudes to learning.
- The department is led well and works effectively as a team.
- There are some missed opportunities to maximise the use of target language in the classroom by both teachers and pupils.

## Commentary

63. Pupils' standards have consistently been above the national average over the last four years. Girls do better than boys at both key stages. The levels of achievement for Years 7 to 9 are good. Pupils are confident to speak German, with the majority acquiring new vocabulary appropriate to the context of the work being taught. They read aloud well, with accurate pronunciation and expression. Pupils are able to write to a high standard and most have a secure grasp of the grammar and structure of German. Although the most able pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve well, speaking and writing confidently, there is insufficient demand made of pupils in groups below the top sets; this includes their use of the target language.
64. Teaching and learning are good overall, but marking of pupils' work could be improved further by identifying, more accurately, targets for learning. Lessons are well planned and teachers provide good quality oral feedback to pupils in lessons. Display materials in classrooms are a very useful aid to pupils' learning.
65. The leadership of German is good. Overall, there has been substantial improvement since the previous inspection.

## MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- The head of department provides very good leadership and management.
- Pupils achieve well despite problems in recruiting experienced staff.
- An effective professional development programme is beginning to address the insufficient use of informal assessment.
- Specialist status has provided very good resources for ICT in mathematics and enhanced partnership working.

## Commentary

66. Standards have remained above average during a time of considerable difficulty in recruiting experienced teachers of proven effectiveness. Recently, results in national tests at the end of Year 9 have declined slightly and GCSE results have increased in line with national trends. In 2003, boys achieved significantly better results than girls at both tests. Standards on entry have generally been above average, particularly for boys, although recently more pupils have joined with very low attainment. Pupils achieve well and make good progress. In 2003, compared to similar schools, above average proportions of pupils achieved an A\*- C grade at GCSE or Level 5+ in the Year 9 national tests.
67. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 but is good overall and results in above average rates of progress. One in seven lessons is taught by non-specialist teachers and a further one in five is taught by teachers on the graduate training programme. Teaching is very good in lessons taught by more experienced teachers and is characterised by good informal assessment, a spirit of enquiry and a focus on developing pupils' understanding. Teachers help pupils well to become independent learners. They set challenging problems and expect pupils to explain and justify their solutions. Satisfactory and good teaching typically involves careful demonstrations that enable pupils to make progress, but are less successful in developing their ability to solve new problems on related topics. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall and most respond well to good teaching.
68. Assessment is satisfactory. Regular tests allow teachers to track pupils' progress over time, but the use of assessment to support learning by non-specialists is inconsistent. The most effective teachers are alert to misconceptions, ask probing questions and adapt their teaching according to pupils' responses. Marking is satisfactory but does not consistently help pupils to know how to improve.
69. Effective planning leads to structured lessons with clear learning objectives, linked to a scheme of work. Teachers give due attention to literacy and make good use of homework. Use of resources is good. Improved ICT facilities are encouraging teachers to try new approaches, including the use of dynamic geometry, interactive worksheets and other software. Interactive whiteboards and data projectors are used to good effect. At times, however, there are not enough mathematics rooms, and some rooms are too small for the size of group.
70. Very good leadership from the head of department, well supported by other experienced teachers, is very effective in improving teaching and learning. All teachers contribute to monitoring exercises. Trainee teachers are well supported by their colleagues. Partnership links with other schools are very good.

## Mathematics across the curriculum

71. Pupils' mathematical competence allows them to make satisfactory progress in all subjects. They learn about mortgages in personal, social and health education, use graphs effectively in science and drama, interrogate census data in geography, and use reflection and rotation in art. Other subjects benefit from guidance on using mathematics but their teaching does not yet contribute strongly to the development of pupils' mathematical skills. For example, teachers of mathematics have helped improve pupils' use of statistics in design and

technology projects, but this work should give greater support for learning about measurement.

## SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are consistently above the national average and pupils achieve well.
- The leadership and management of the department are good.
- Teaching and learning are good but assessment is not always used effectively enough in ensuring that pupils know what they need to do to improve.

### Commentary

72. Standards are consistently above the national average. In national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003, results were above the national average. The attainment of boys was marginally higher than that of girls. In 2003, the proportion of pupils gaining A\* - C grades at GCSE in double award science was well above average. These results continued the upward trend seen over the last five years in national examinations. There was no difference in the performance of boys and girls. Pupils achieve well.
73. The quality of teaching and learning are good. There is some very good teaching in Year 9, with very effective use of the national strategy alongside excellent teacher-pupils relationships. Where teaching is good or better, there is a varied and stimulating range of tasks that reinforce pupils' previous learning and promotes very good progress. Teachers ensure that pupils maintain their involvement with the lesson content by using effective questioning that builds upon prior knowledge and extends thinking. Teachers set up good opportunities for work in small groups or pairs, which promote very good discussions. When teaching is less successful, there is too much use made of copying, with low teacher expectations leading to inadequate gains in learning.
74. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good overall. Support from teaching assistants is well-targeted and appropriate in helping pupils develop their understanding, skills and knowledge. The progress of those pupils is in line with other groups, especially at Key Stage 4.
75. Good use is made of ICT. Pupils are given good experiences that promote learning through, for example, the use of data logging equipment and presentational software. In Year 9, for example, pupils were able to work on computers to present their research on acid rain, which led to a good level of collaboration through the use of electronic mail attachments, an increased pace of learning and a high quality of presentation.
76. Assessment of pupils' work and its use in planning teaching and learning is satisfactory. The department uses end-of-module tests to assess pupils' attainment at both key stages. The data produced are used effectively to keep pupils informed of their performance, especially in Years 9 to 11. National value added data are used to formulate challenging targets for the department. Some pupils are aware of their personal targets, but too many are unaware of the levels they should attain. Marking is up to date and informs pupils adequately about their standards and effort relative to others in the school. However, the action that pupils need to take to reach the next level of their performance, as referenced to national standards, are not made clear enough. In most exercise books, comments for improvement are too often centred on the presentation of work.
77. The leadership of the department is good. The head of department is a well-respected, long-serving teacher in the school. He is a good role model and has brought together teachers to



form an effective team. Teachers in the department are well supported. The dedicated team of technicians supports the aims of the department very well and their high level of scientific knowledge is greatly valued by the department. Management of the department is good. Extensive monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is carried out. The head of department has a very clear and accurate view of this quality. He evaluates the effectiveness of teaching and provides good feedback to the team on strengths and areas for development. Improvement in the subject since the previous inspection has been good.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve well as a result of the good teaching they receive and reach above average standards at GCSE.
- Assessment information is used well to inform teachers' planning.
- Attitudes and behaviour of a minority of boys slows the pace of learning in some lessons.

### **Commentary**

78. The overall standard on entry to the school is below average. By the end of Year 9, the overall standard is above average. Most pupils reach a level that is above average in word processing, the use of spreadsheets and PowerPoint presentations. In those presentations, girls tend to be more careful in their choice of images and presentation of information, while boys prefer expressive sound and dramatic impact to engage the audience's attention. Literacy levels are above average, with pupils making maximum use of spell check facilities.
79. By the end of Year 11, standards are above average as confirmed in the most recent GCSE results. The majority of pupils follow the GCSE short course, with lower numbers taking the full and applied courses. Most pupils demonstrate, through their course work, an awareness of audience. They can confidently combine information and images. The Internet is used efficiently for research. Pupils are able to use basic spreadsheets and database functions. Higher attaining pupils use advanced features within databases, with evaluations that are rigorous.
80. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. This is largely the result of clear explanations given by teachers, the focus on previously noted errors and the identification of strategies to overcome them. Pupils grow in confidence and achieve well. Where explanations are rushed and the text on the screen is too small for all to see clearly, all but the highest attainers lack understanding of how to proceed. In those circumstances, pupils with special educational needs achieve least well because their capacity to concentrate, when things are difficult, is low. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is also good. Pupils are generally very mature in their approach to work. Those who have taken the GCSE examination early, talk enthusiastically about the benefits of applying their understanding of ICT to other courses, particularly in geography and business studies. Most pupils act quickly on the good advice offered by teachers and are able to work independently and collaboratively with others.
81. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations. Lessons are usually well planned, with tasks that challenge pupils to work hard and produce good results. Weaknesses in teaching occur when behaviour management is not strong enough to deal with a small number of boys with special educational needs and there is no learning support available. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly and give helpful oral and written feedback on strengths and areas for improvement. There are, however, too few opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own learning and to feed back their perceptions of what is preventing them from achieving their potential.

82. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The resources for ICT are excellent. Three experienced technicians, under the supervision of the line manager, keep the systems operational. Health and safety procedures are very effective. Very good links exist for providing basic and advanced courses for the community and also for primary school teachers. Innovative ideas, such as the creation of a virtual learning environment for gifted pupils, are being developed. The inclusion of talented pupils has yet to be incorporated into these plans. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. The resources have improved, the curriculum meets statutory requirements and the courses offered are relevant to the needs of pupils.

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

83. ICT across the curriculum is good, with the most effective provision in history followed by geography, English, mathematics, science and art and design. There is currently a more limited provision in religious education. Most subject areas have easy access to computer rooms or use of laptop trolleys. Interactive white boards are used well. Where there are identified problems, such as in music, design and technology and modern foreign languages solutions are sought and resources planned for. Hardware is replaced as needed.

## **HUMANITIES**

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **very good**.

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

- Very effective departmental leadership provides a clear focus on improving the quality of provision.
- Good quality teaching provides effectively for pupils' learning.
- Curriculum planning is detailed.
- There is thorough monitoring and evaluation of teaching to help raise standards.
- There is good use of ICT to enhance learning.
- Teacher assessment at Key Stage 3 requires further development.

#### **Commentary**

84. Pupils achieve well, with many average and higher attaining pupils achieving well above average standards. Pupils make good progress in developing their geographical vocabulary, understanding geographical processes, the capacity to recognise and describe patterns, and the skills of investigation. This is evident in pupils of average ability in Year 7, who were able to explain clearly the processes involved in frontal rainfall and are confident about the sequence of weather associated with a depression.
85. Teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 shows attainment to be well above the national average, with a large number of pupils achieving the highest levels. However, some teacher assessment is not accurate. Pupils demonstrate lower standards in their class and homework than in the formal assessment exercises due, in part, to the limited opportunities to show their understanding in extended writing.
86. Results in GCSE examinations show an improving trend since the previous inspection and are well above national averages, with pupils doing significantly better in geography than in their other subjects. The quality of field work produced is very good and makes effective use of ICT to support learning. Pupils of all abilities make good progress throughout the key stage and are developing good understanding of geographical processes.

87. Teaching is good. The most effective teaching reflects very good subject knowledge, high expectations and thorough planning. The use of questioning to support learning is highly developed and ICT is used well to support independent learning. Classroom management and organisation are very good, with teacher-student relationships also very good. There are generally high expectations to work hard and achieve well. In less effective teaching, insufficient opportunities are taken to challenge pupils to actively involve themselves in geographical thinking. In most lessons, teachers provide clear guidance to pupils on how to make progress. However, the use of marking to support pupils' learning is variable and requires greater consistency.
88. The head of department is enthusiastic and committed to continually improving the quality of provision. She monitors and evaluates the work of the department rigorously and develops strategies to address identified needs. She acts as a role model for a committed and enthusiastic team. Her management and development of detailed schemes of work has addressed one of the major weaknesses from the previous inspection report.

## History

Provision in history is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good subject knowledge is used effectively by teachers in most lessons.
- Frequent use of ICT enthuses pupils and aids their learning.
- There is very good leadership and management of the subject.
- The marking of pupils' work is not sufficiently detailed and does not give pupils sufficient guidance on how to improve.

### Commentary

89. Standards are good and pupils achieve well. Pupils show clear knowledge and understanding of topics covered and are developing a wide range of historical skills. Pupils of all abilities in Years 7 to 9 use historical vocabulary with ease and have a well-developed sense of chronology because of good teaching. More able pupils interrogate sources with confidence and develop valid hypotheses. The least able pupils produce some good extended writing, helped by the use of writing frames. The GCSE results in 2003 were well above national averages and show a significant increase from 2002. Boys did better than girls. Pupils have secure knowledge and understanding of the content of the examination courses, can critically evaluate source material and can offer convincing explanations for different interpretations in history. They are prepared very thoroughly for public examinations.
90. Pupils with special educational needs make good gains in understanding because of the active questioning and support given by teachers, and because of the frequent use of starter activities using ICT. More able pupils achieve very well and develop their research and writing skills through the use of carefully planned and structured activities, which progressively extends their thinking.
91. Teaching is good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan lessons thoroughly. They make good use of starter activities, which reinforce learning and focus the pupils well. The pace of lessons is very good and pupils are challenged to think for themselves. For example, in a lesson on the Civil War, pupils used a map containing information about battles to establish patterns about locations and dates to draw conclusions and then consider the validity of the data. Resources to help learning are of high quality. Where learning is most effective, teachers have high expectations of pupils and work hard to ensure these are fulfilled. There are good teacher-student relationships within the department and teachers use praise freely to motivate and reward good work and behaviour. ICT is used

frequently to motivate pupils and aid research and structure writing. Marking of work is conscientious, but in Years 7 to 9 pupils are not given sufficient written guidance on how to improve and are uncertain of the meaning of the targets set for them.

92. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department is highly organised and monitors the work of teachers in a regular programme of classroom observation. These, and strategies to raise standards, are very effective. The department has continued to improve since the previous inspection.

## Religious Education

Provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Planning and provision is not based on the 2003 Essex Agreed Syllabus and so the school is not meeting statutory requirements.
- There is insufficient curriculum time in Years 10 and 11 and pupils not taking a GCSE in the subject do not achieve well enough.
- GCSE results are good.
- The department is led well.
- There are good teacher-student relationships.

### Commentary

93. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are satisfactory. Pupils studying GCSE do well and in 2003 achieved above average results. This was a marked improvement on previous years. At Key Stage 4, non-examination pupils follow a combined course of personal, social and health education/citizenship/religious education/careers. There is too little curricular time allocated and the religious education content does not comply with the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus. Pupils make gains in understanding moral issues but are more limited in furthering their religious understanding overall. These lead to lower than expected standards. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are developing a basic knowledge of aspects of Christianity, such as baptism, the Apostles creed, the teaching of Jesus and Christian prayer. They know about some distinctive features of different traditions such as Judaism, Hinduism and Islam. Pupils also understand some of the issues involved in a consideration of the existence of God and the different standpoints of the theist, atheist and agnostic.
94. The overall achievement of pupils at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs make good gains in understanding because of the active support given by teachers. More able pupils do not always achieve as much as they could because teaching does not consistently challenge them or give them enough opportunities to write at length about what they know. Pupils at Key Stage 4 achieve well in examination classes but not well enough in the non-examination groups.
95. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory. The characteristics of effective teaching include a brisk start and good pace to lessons, good questioning and support for individuals who experience difficulties in learning. Learning is enhanced by visiting youth workers from local churches who help pupils to understand the different ways in which religious belief can influence a believer's life. In less effective lessons, teachers do not always match resources to the different learning needs of pupils, especially the most able. Pupils' work is marked regularly but written comments do not always make it sufficiently clear what they need to do to improve.
96. There are generally good relationships between teachers and pupils and classes are well managed. Most pupils display a positive attitude towards religious education. They show an interest in religious and moral issues and behave very well. Most respond enthusiastically to

questions, are willing to ask questions and can sustain concentration over long periods in discussions. Pupils work very well together and respect others' views. Lessons in religious education make a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development.

97. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department has a clear vision for the department and gives good support to a large team of mainly non-specialist teachers with a comprehensive set of planning materials. The accommodation is good and there are attractive displays in specialist rooms. The department has produced a new scheme of work using the Suffolk Agreed Syllabus as the basis for its planning and teaching, mistakenly believing that it can do so. However, the school is legally required to base its work on the 2003 Essex Agreed Syllabus, now that it has foundation status. Statutory requirements are met at Key Stages 3 but not at Key Stage 4. The department has improved in many respects since the previous inspection.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

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

- Pupils achieve well and thoroughly enjoy practical work.
- Provision for supporting pupils' literacy, numeracy and design skills is good.
- Staffing problems are adversely affecting the delivery of ICT within the subject.
- The accommodation for food technology is poor.

#### **Commentary**

98. Standards on entry to the school in Year 7 are below average. By the end of Year 9, standards are average. Most pupils reach an average level in hand and machine sewing, modifying a recipe for a particular purpose, designing and making artefacts in wood or plastic or using drawing to communicate ideas. They are skilful in using computers for research and have some experience of computer-aided design and manufacture.
99. By Year 11, standards are above average. Pupils have generally higher standards in resistant materials and textiles than in food technology. Recent initiatives, such as changes to the course work format to A3 size, drafting and re-drafting work and using computers for research, analysis and presentation have ensured that standards in food are nearer those found in other technology areas. Above average standards are also seen in graphics as higher attainers produce innovative nets for boxes and apply their knowledge of mechanisms effectively when designing pop-up books for children. GCSE results have been above average for the past two years.
100. Achievement is good. Pupils enjoy the variety of tasks provided for them, which have been carefully planned to build on previous learning. Identified weaknesses in design and writing have been supported by the provision of new workbooks. Staff absence has prevented this initiative from being expanded to include the writing of extension tasks for the most able. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is not their first language achieve as well as everyone else. Numeracy skills are adequate for the tasks set, but their use is not always co-ordinated with coverage in the mathematics curriculum. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 know the standards they are aiming for because their teachers regularly refer to the examination criteria by which their work will be judged. Examples of well-researched topics are seen in graphics, textiles and resistant materials. Occasionally, a well-presented page is spoiled by an overlooked spelling error. The use of computers for design is currently

not as strong as when the department had a teacher who was licensed to use a specialised software package.

101. Teaching and learning are good. All teachers have good subject knowledge, with the best teachers covering not only the curriculum but also attending to the needs of all pupils in their care. This was particularly evident in a resistant materials lesson where pupils with low self-esteem were encouraged to overcome their problems. They all achieved well when measuring, drilling, cutting and finishing units for a woodpecker toy for a child. When teachers are late for the start of a lesson, pupils with behavioural difficulties can disrupt others and underachieve.
102. The leadership of the subject is very good. Health and safety procedures are exemplary. The technicians provide a very good level of support. Management is good. Staffing problems affecting coverage of resistant materials classes at examination level and inadequate access to ICT rooms for some Year 7 classes have led to a lowering of the quality of provision. However, pupils' learning has not been too adversely affected because relationships are very good and the head of subject has closely supervised their progress. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. National Curriculum levels are now used, ICT resources are better and literacy and design are much improved. The accommodation for food is still poor but about to be refurbished.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

### **Art and Design**

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

#### **Strengths and weaknesses**

- The very good analysis of strengths and weakness and the actions taken to tackle underperformance are making a difference to provision.
- Standards are improving, particularly in Years 7 to Year 10.
- Good teaching and learning is underpinned by teachers' very good subject knowledge and expertise, and their high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour.
- Pupils in Years 7-9 are motivated and take pride in their work, but have insufficient information about the standards they are achieving and how to improve them.
- There is effective development of literacy skills.

#### **Commentary**

103. Teacher assessments in 2003 show standards at the end of Year 9 to be above expected levels. However, the quality of pupils' work suggests these assessments were over generous. Attainment on entry in Year 7 is lower in art than in core subjects. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning, reflected in work done in lessons and completed for homework, contribute to their good achievement. Standards are currently at expected levels, with significant numbers above and a smaller number below the levels expected by the end of Year 9. Standards of literacy are above average. Annotations in sketchbooks and responses to questions demonstrate pupils' growing confidence in expressing themselves. For example, in a Year 8 lesson pupils were able to use artistic and mathematical language to explain how they were able to create the illusion of depth and distance on a flat surface. Through the recent introduction of sketchbooks, and by setting homework regularly, standards have improved. However, not enough use is made of National Curriculum levels by teachers to plan learning and communicate to pupils how well they are progressing. As a result, pupils are unclear how they can raise their achievement, and higher attainers are not always fully challenged.

104. In 2003, GCSE results show the percentage of pupils gaining an A\*- C grade was higher than average, but fewer pupils gained the highest grades. Boys achieved less well than the girls, when compared to their achievement in their other subjects. Standards in current Year 10 and 11 classes are also above average. Pupils have a secure understanding of examination marking criteria. This helps them develop independent learning skills and manage their time in order to meet deadlines. The depth of their research and critical analysis has improved significantly since the previous inspection. Higher attaining pupils are able to reflect on and make connections across a range of contextual factors affecting the style and work of artists and designers.
105. Good teaching and learning are underpinned by teachers' very good subject knowledge and expertise and the high expectations of pupils' work and behaviour. Where learning is very effective, the pace of the lesson is brisk; pupils concentrate well during discussions and demonstrations and respond well to questions. The development of literacy skills, notably pupils' use of a technical and expressive vocabulary to write and talk about their own and others' work is a strength. Pupils take full advantage of the experiences offered in ceramics, printmaking and computer manipulated imagery.
106. The subject is soundly led and managed. The astute analysis of strengths and weaknesses and the actions to tackle underperformance have had a marked influence on raising standards. To ensure standards continue to rise, monitoring of pupils' progress has to be more rigorous than is currently found. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Standards fell during the period when there was severe disruption to pupils' learning and when much of the teaching was by non-specialists. Assessments were inaccurate and presented pupils and parents with misleading information. Since staffing problems have been resolved, standards have improved.

## Music

Provision in music is **unsatisfactory**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are unsatisfactory.
- Pupils are not doing as well as they should at GCSE.
- Improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory.
- There is a good range of instrumental teaching and extra-curricular opportunities, which are well supported by pupils.
- Lessons are well planned with good use of resources and a good emphasis on corporate music making.
- Assessment processes are insufficiently developed and not linked well to National Curriculum standards.

### Commentary

107. Standards are average overall, although some pupils achieve good performance standards. The GCSE results for 2003 are well below average, with the number of pupils entered for examinations statistically too small for reliable comparisons to be made. Comparison with the results achieved in other subjects taken by the same pupils indicates that they are not doing as well as they should. In Years 7 to 9, pupils sing with a good sense of pitch and feeling for rhythm and can hold independent parts successfully. When playing together, they keep well in time and there are some good individual performances from pupils taking instrumental lessons. However, pupils do not read musical notation well and their keyboard performance is weak. There is little use of fingering systems and an over reliance on letter names to identify the notes.

108. In Years 10 and 11, pupils play well together in class and in the extra-curricular groups. In their listening and analytical work, pupils show a lack of technical knowledge and understanding of musical vocabulary, although their responses are often perceptive. Their compositions are restricted both melodically and harmonically but there is some understanding of form and structure, as, for example, in the use of 'rondo' form for some compositions. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Pupils with special educational needs achieve equally well as a result of good individual attention and the practical nature of the work set.
109. Teaching and pupils' achievement are satisfactory overall. Lessons are well planned and use a variety of resources. However, some problems in management and control, though not serious, do lead to a loss of pace and time as the teacher deals with the behaviour of a small minority of pupils. There is also a loss of teaching time during transitions to practical work, which often takes too long. Teaching is inclusive and pupils with special educational needs are well integrated into all activities. Work is generally well matched to pupils' needs with the more talented encouraged to use their instruments in class and perform at a higher level.
110. There is a good emphasis on pupils performing together and good independent learning by individuals and groups as they work on different parts for class performances. Good relationships help this process and some pupils take leadership roles that are respected by their peers. The marking of pupils' work is rather cursory and is not linked well to National Curriculum standards or is informative to pupils. Homework is insufficiently used to consolidate and extend pupils' progress in Years 7 to 9. The use of ICT in Years 7 to 9 is limited by lack of computers and software, but there is good use in Years 10 and 11 where pupils use the technology to notate their compositions.
111. The leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory. Senior management has given extensive support and close monitoring, and outside agencies have been used for advice and development. However, there have been significant shortcomings that have been compounded by a high level of staff absence. For example, schemes of work have not been updated as requested; pupils' work has not been consistently marked for long periods and effective assessment processes not established. Improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory. Standards of attainment have fallen, the quality of teaching and learning and the quality of leadership have all declined since the previous inspection.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve well and results in the GCSE examination are well above average.
- The range of extra-curricular activities is well supported by pupils.
- Accommodation is very good.
- Pupils need to be more involved in the planning and evaluation of their work in all lessons.

### Commentary

112. Since the previous inspection, standards in the GCSE examination have been consistently better than average. In GCSE dance, the number of pupils gaining the higher grades was just below the national average. The majority of pupils currently preparing for the GCSE examination are performing at least as well, with several very able pupils performing at the highest level.



113. By the end of Year 9, the majority of pupils are attaining average standards. This represents good achievement by pupils who often start the school with very limited experience. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 in non-examination groups demonstrate levels of skills and understanding that are better than seen nationally. In all year groups, there is a wide range of standards, but teachers accommodate pupils well through individual support and differentiated activities and, as a consequence, pupils in all year groups achieve well.
114. Dance is taught to pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 as part of performing arts. Most pupils arrive at the school with very limited dance experience. However, they respond very quickly to the good quality teaching so that by the end of Year 9 most are able to take responsibility for developing a story line, choreographing and performing it with fluency and control. In Years 10 and 11, dance is not a compulsory subject but enthusiastic and able groups of pupils have opted to study for a GCSE award in the subject. Their attainment is in line with that seen nationally. They compose and perform accurately and expressively, and successfully communicate their intentions through dance. They work hard to develop their techniques, and readily accept opportunities to refine and consolidate their skills. Pupils with special educational needs are integrated well. They get good support and encouragement from teachers and fellow pupils, and achieve well overall.
115. Teaching is good. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. Lessons are well structured, use a variety of activities and are conducted at a brisk, demanding pace. Many pupils are taught how to evaluate and plan their work but this needs greater emphasis in all lessons. Teachers have high expectations of performance, behaviour and dress, which result in pupils behaving well, working hard and achieving well. Their enjoyment of the subject is very evident.
116. The head of physical education and the teacher in charge of dance have been in post just over two terms. In this short time, they have both made a significant impact on the work and organisation of their subjects. The high standard of accommodation has a very positive influence on attainment and attitude of pupils to their work. Overall, there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

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

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **unsatisfactory**.

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

- The many changes in the coordination of the subject have restricted the rate of development.
- Planning, using the National Curriculum programme of study is unsatisfactory.
- The school does not fulfil the reporting requirements for citizenship.
- Personal, social and health education is improving because of the efforts of the newly appointed co-ordinator.

### **Commentary**

117. Citizenship is taught through the personal, social and health education programme, but the provision is unsatisfactory as it does not fulfil the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum programme of study. The unsatisfactory strategic co-ordination of the subject means that the National Curriculum programme of study is not clearly planned in schemes of work or identifiable in pupil's work. Although the school has carried out an audit of citizenship, which identifies areas of the curriculum that can deliver the programme of study, this has not resulted in the detailed planning and co-ordination required to ensure its coherent delivery. A further consequence of the lack of strategic co-ordination is that the school is

unable to fulfil the reporting requirements for citizenship. There is neither a discrete report nor an identifiable citizenship comment in other subject reports.

118. It is not possible to make a judgement on pupils' standards due to the small amount of citizenship teaching seen. In personal, social and health education, however, standards are satisfactory. Achievement in lessons is satisfactory overall, with the range from very good to unsatisfactory. Very good teaching is characterised by high teacher expectations of behaviour, engagement in learning, challenging but supported tasks, well planned and well organised activities related to the learning needs of the pupils, and very good classroom management and interpersonal skills.
119. The development of the personal, social and health education programme has been hindered by staff turnover, but the recently appointed co-ordinator has worked hard to produce schemes of work for all year groups. The co-ordinator is taking effective action to create a team, extend staff development opportunities and build on existing good community links. The co-ordinator is also seeking to develop an assessment programme that will improve the information for parents. The overall provision for personal, social and health education has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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