

INSPECTION REPORT

Fairlands Middle School

Cheddar, Somerset

LEA area: Somerset

Unique reference number: 123888

Headteacher: Mr Barry Parkin

Reporting inspector: Mr John Collins
8163

Dates of inspection: 28th February – 3rd March 2000

Inspection number: 183772

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Middle deemed secondary

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 9-13 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Fairlands Way
Cheddar
Somerset

Postcode: BS27 3NW

Telephone number: 01934 743186

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs Heather Fuller

Date of previous inspection: October 1994

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
John D Collins	<i>Registered inspector</i>		Special educational needs; The school's results and achievements; The curricular and other opportunities; How well the school is led and managed.
Deborah Granville - Hastings	<i>Lay inspector</i>		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development; How well the school cares for its pupils; How well the school works in partnership with parents.
Pat Jackson	<i>Team inspector</i>		Key Stage 2; How well pupils are taught.
Barbara Baughan	<i>Team inspector</i>	English.	Assessment.
Ray Woodhouse	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics.	Best value.
Dr Cindi Millband	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science.	Accommodation.
Michael Miller	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art; Religious education.	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
Jan Boulton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography; Physical education.	Extra-curricular activities; Pupils' personal development.
Stephanie Matthews	<i>Team inspector</i>	History.	Equal opportunities.
David Congdon	<i>Team inspector</i>	Music.	
Graham Williams	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages.	Staffing.
Keith Walton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology; Information technology.	Resources for learning.

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Fairlands is a nine to thirteen co-educational school of above average size, providing comprehensive education for 500 pupils whose attainment on entry ranges from well below to well above average. The school is situated alongside a housing estate in Cheddar, a small town in Somerset. The catchment area is wide; the school draws its pupils from this estate, and many pupils are bussed in from villages and private estates around the town.

The school is popular with parents, and the numbers of pupils joining the school has grown steadily since the last inspection, four years ago. The standard admissions number is 120 pupils but local admissions policy allows this to be exceeded for local children. Very few pupils leave or join the school at other than the standard admission and departure times.

Only two pupils have a home language other than English. The number of pupils for each teacher is broadly average by comparison with similar schools nationally, but is higher than at the previous inspection. Class size ranges from 22 (Year 5) to 29 (Year 6) and on average is 26. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is, at 5.3 per cent, well below average for similar schools in England.

There are 96 pupils on the special ('additional') educational needs register, which as a percentage of pupils attending the school is below the national average. There are nine pupils with statements of special educational needs, which, as a proportion of those attending the school, is below the national average. All pupils with additional educational needs attend mainstream classes.

The school has, for 1999 - 2000, set clear targets for improvement in the use of performance data to help improve teaching and learning. It is specifically targeting improvement in boys' writing and raising the attainment of pupils at the borderline between National Curriculum Levels 4 and 5. It has placed high on its agenda the monitoring, evaluation, review, and development of all that it does, and has planned to work closely on the assessment of 14 year olds with its receiving secondary schools.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Fairlands Middle School is a good school with many outstanding features and few weaknesses. It provides a good quality of education for all its pupils, and is effective in enabling pupils to achieve high standards. The great majority of teaching is either good or very good, and unsatisfactory teaching is rare. The school is well led and managed in its quest for high standards by its headteacher and senior management team. They are strongly supported in this by teachers and support staff, the governing body, and the parents. The school provides good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- The quality of teaching is good, enabling most pupils to achieve a good standard of work in almost all subjects.
- Pupils with additional educational needs make good progress because of good quality provision.
- Pupils' attitudes to the school, their behaviour and personal relationships are very good.
- Provision for personal, social and health education and for extra-curricular activities is very good.
- Relationships with partner institutions are very constructive.
- Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are very good.
- Action taken to meet the school's targets is very effective.
- The commitment to improvement and the capacity to succeed are good.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve should be raised so that the proportion of pupils who attain at the highest levels in national tests is increased.
- The assessment of some subjects is insufficient to be useful to promote good teaching and learning.
- Information and communications technology is not well used in some subjects to enhance pupils' learning.
- The school does not meet statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship.
- Formal and thorough risk assessments around the school should begin as soon as possible.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in October 1994, when it was described as a strong school with many good and some outstanding features. Since then it has sustained what it did well and continued to improve in most areas of its work. It has responded well to almost all the issues identified in the last inspection. More analytical monitoring of pupil performance, improved opportunities for staff development, and more clearly identifying how teaching and learning could improve has had a good effect in most subjects. Teaching has improved, as has the effectiveness with which teachers make clear to pupils what they are expected to know, understand and be able to do by the end of each topic or lesson. As a result, pupils' achievements in most subjects have improved. Continuity of learning between Years 6 and 7 has improved in most subjects. The introduction of the literacy and numeracy strategies has played a significant part in helping teachers identify clear objectives in English and in

mathematics. Nevertheless, the implementation of the literacy strategy could be further improved by a more co-ordinated approach with even higher expectations of what pupils can achieve. Subject co-ordinators have a more clearly defined role and are taking part in annual reviews of their subject, with increased rigour and focus. They have yet to monitor the quality of teaching so as to share effective practice and provide appropriate support to correct weaknesses. Homework is mostly appropriate and set according to school policy, though the challenge provided in a minority of cases is insufficient.

Improvements have been made to the accommodation, though the difficulties referred to in the previous inspection largely remain and adversely affect pupils' progress in some subjects. The safety issues concerning buses has been addressed.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 11 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
English	B	A	B	D
mathematics	C	C	B	D
science	A	A	A	B

Key	
<i>well above average</i>	A
<i>above average</i>	B
<i>average</i>	C
<i>below average</i>	D
<i>well below average</i>	E

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school, as indicated by the local education authority (LEA) and other tests, is broadly average.

Taking the results of the 1996 to 1999 National Curriculum test results for 11 year olds together, pupils' performance in mathematics is slightly above the national average, in English it is above the national average, and in science it is well above the national average. Compared with schools having a similar proportion of free school meals, results are below average in mathematics and English, but above average in science. However, the results of standardised tests used by the local education authority for these pupils indicates that in the main their likely average of points scored in Standardised Attainment Targets would be at the national average and not, as subsequently happened, above. They exceeded the targets set by the local education authority. The pupils therefore made better than expected progress. However, inspection evidence found a lack of adequate challenge in both English and mathematics for the most able pupils. This would have adverse impact on their achievements at the highest levels and, overall, lower the average of the points scored.

The school's analysis of the 1998 results led to changes in the organisation of learning groups, teaching methods, and the content and pace of what was taught. These changes improved pupils' achievements in 1999 in mathematics but not in English. The adoption of the literacy strategy took time to implement and to adjust to the new approaches, which resulted in a dip in the school's English results. Nevertheless, over the period 1996 to 1999, the trend in the school's average results in English, mathematics and science was broadly in line with the national trend.

Inspection evidence found standards overall of 11 year olds in reading, writing, speaking, and listening to be above the national average. However, standards of spelling and punctuation are not as high as they should be, and boys' handwriting and presentation is generally less well controlled than that of girls.

In mathematics, the inspection found standards to be above average for eleven year olds, but a minority of pupils with the potential to exceed the levels expected nationally is not sufficiently challenged. In science, standards are well above the national average. In both subjects, pupils' understanding is as well developed as their knowledge and skills. This reflects the opportunities in the curriculum for pupils to experiment, discuss and learn through practical activity.

In information and communications technology, standards are above national expectations. In art, geography, and history, pupils make good progress through the school and, in all other subjects, they make sound progress.

By Year 8, pupils have sustained the good standards achieved in English and mathematics and very good standards in science. Their achievements are above those expected for their age. In design and technology and physical education, pupils have made sound progress. In all other subjects, good progress has been made and pupils are well on target to meet or exceed national expectations at their next school by the end of Year 9.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good and reflect their high level of motivation.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good. Pupils are open, friendly, confident and polite.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils' personal development is very good.
Attendance	Attendance at the school is good. The attendance rate is consistently above the national average and unauthorised absence is extremely rare.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 9-13 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
118 lessons	Good	Not applicable	Not applicable

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

The quality of teaching in English and mathematics is good, and it is very good in science. The introduction of the literacy and numeracy strategy has had a positive impact on lessons. Teachers have a good grasp of the subjects they teach and are clear about what they want pupils to learn. English and mathematics are supported well through links with most other subjects, such as through writing and discussion, particularly in history, geography and religious education, and through data handling in science and geography, and measurement and calculation in design and technology.

Teaching meets well the needs of all pupils, including those with additional educational needs.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 98 per cent of lessons, good or better in 74 per cent and very good or excellent in 27 per cent. However, teaching overall in Year 5 is not as good as in other years. This is because expectations are lower than they could be, and it is not always made clear to pupils what they are expected to know, understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson. Less use is made of probing questioning.

A feature of the highest quality of teaching lies in the skilful use of questioning to extend pupils thinking, sometimes in novel ways. This was particularly evident in science. In most classes, there is a good balance between developing pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and religious education for all pupils.
Provision for pupils with additional educational needs	Provision for pupils with additional educational needs is good.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' spiritual development is sound. Arrangements for pupils' personal, moral and cultural development are good. Social development is very good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Procedures for child protection, care and welfare are satisfactory and those for promoting good behaviour are very good. Assessment of pupils' attainment and progress is informative and developing in most subjects, including English and mathematics, and science. Pupils' academic progress and personal development are monitored well.

The school and parents have developed a good partnership that strongly promotes pupils' learning from the time they start in Year 5.

Many pupils are involved in the very good range and quality of extra-curricular opportunities. Some activities are supported by parents and other members of the local community.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, ably supported by his deputy and other members of the senior management team, provides clear and good leadership to the school. Subject leaders are developing their role but have yet to monitor standards of teaching and pupils' progress closely.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is very effective. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the school and take an active role in shaping its direction. They fulfil their statutory requirements well, except for ensuring that all staff are appraised and that there is a daily collective act of worship
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school continuously evaluates its performance well against national and local criteria for success and takes appropriate action to improve.
The strategic use of resources	Teachers plan for and use resources very well to promote learning.

The school has a strong team of well-qualified teachers supported by classroom assistants who know what is expected of them. Together, they meet the requirements of all the subjects taught and of all pupils, including those with additional needs. The school has done all it can to reduce the effect of recent staff absences on pupils.

The accommodation has benefited from refurbishment since the last inspection, and this has had a positive affect on provision for modern foreign languages and information technology. However, the limited accommodation for science, design and technology, drama, geography and physical education adversely affects pupils' attainments in those subjects.

Overall, resources for learning are adequate to meet the needs of the National Curriculum. The grounds are extensive and used well. Although the library is too small for the number of pupils wishing to use it, high standards in reading are helped by the good range of fiction books. However, there are insufficient non-fiction books available centrally as most of these are held in classrooms.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children's progress is good. • Teaching is good. • Parents feel encouraged to play an active part in the life of the school. • They find it easy to approach staff with a question or concern. • Behaviour in the school is good. • The school's attitudes and values have a good effect on its pupils. • The school helps children through work they do at home. • Children like coming to school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher's expectations for brighter pupils. • First aid provision. • Supervision during breaktimes. • Some staff do not approve of boys playing hockey.

The inspection fully endorses parents' positive views of the school. Inspection evidence confirms that in some lessons there is insufficient challenge for more able pupils. However, the school is conscious of this and has begun taking appropriate action. Whilst it is accepted that there have been occasions when first aid provision has not been good, there has been a rigorous review of procedures and the inspection team are satisfied that these are now good. Supervision during breaktimes has recently been reviewed by the headteacher and during the inspection supervision was good. All regular staff are fully supportive of boys playing hockey and proud of the school's achievements in this sport.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. When pupils enter the school in Year 5, their achievement overall is broadly average for their age. During Year 5, they make sound progress and in Year 6 they make good progress.
2. Taking the results of the 1996 to 1999 National Curriculum test results for 11 year olds together, pupils' performance in English and mathematics is above the national average. In science, it is well above the national average. Pupils' progress in these subjects is, overall, about one and half terms ahead of pupils nationally. However, by comparison with schools having a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, pupils do not fare so well, being below average in English and mathematics, though still above average for science.
3. The national test data for the 1999 Year 6 pupils, when they were age seven years, was unavailable for this inspection. However, a reading test set by the local education authority prior to their entry to Fairlands indicated that the overall attainment of these pupils was average. Their results in the 1999 national tests were above average, indicating that they had made better than expected progress. Inspection evidence found a lack of adequate challenge in English, mathematics and science for the most able pupils. Consequently, although there are individual exceptions, pupils are likely to do less well at the highest levels in national tests in these subjects. This would, overall, lower the average of the points scored and explains why pupils' achievements are less than they should be by comparison with pupils in schools with pupils from similar backgrounds.
4. Overall there is no significant difference between the attainments of boys and girls in these subjects, though the performance of boys is higher in relation to that of girls than is found nationally. The exception to this is in writing, where boys' attainment is well below that of girls and below the national average. The school has taken swift and appropriate action to improve their writing, and inspection evidence indicates this is having a positive effect. An example of this is the creation of a 'booster' group of pupils judged to be on the 'borderline of two levels, who would benefit from focused group work. The ability to read and a love of reading emerge as a strong feature of the school. In mathematics and German, there has been a significant improvement in standards in relation to those at the time of the last inspection.
5. Overall, pupils achieve well throughout the school in relation to their prior attainment. By the time they leave in Year 8, they have made very good progress in science, and good progress in English, mathematics, art, history, geography, music and religious education. In no subjects do pupils, or specific groups of pupils, fail to make at least sound progress. As a result, they are well placed to achieve at least the standard expected of their age by the end of Year 9 in the national tests and teacher assessed tasks. Records of past pupils show they achieve well in the national tests at the upper school.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

6. Overall, the attitudes, values and behaviour of pupils are very good and a clear strength of the school.

7. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. They show interest in their work, sustain concentration and willingly apply themselves to the tasks set. They come to lessons with positive attitudes and a willingness to learn. They ask and answer questions readily, join in discussions and contribute well during lessons. Most pupils are confident, good-humoured and relaxed. They are generally enthusiastic about most lessons, and particularly so in science, where they come up against imaginative and exciting challenges. Year 6 pupils thoroughly enjoyed the range of experiments during their sound topic and Year 7 pupils tackled the difficult topic of theoretical photosynthesis with excitement and gusto. In design and technology, Year 7 pupils devoted much care and attention to creating component parts for their pen project. Pupils in a Year 8 German lesson were totally focused on the tasks set, and showed determination to improve their language skills. There are good opportunities for collaborative work through group discussion in many subjects, particularly personal and social education. In history, Year 5 pupils studying Egypt researched independently and then discussed the importance of what they found with others. Such examples of pupils' very good attitudes to learning are to be found frequently in the various subjects throughout the school, and illustrate the potential for extending the thinking of pupils even further.

8. Behaviour of pupils around the school and in lessons is very good. Pupils understand the code of conduct and are supportive of one another in lessons. They socialise well outside the classroom, and the atmosphere is good-humoured and calm even when busy. Anti bullying is given a high priority throughout the school in tutorial time, assemblies and personal and social education lessons. Pupils report there is very little bullying and, if it arises, it is generally dealt with quickly and sensitively. None was seen during the inspection. Pupils have a strong sense of loyalty towards the school, and there is very little litter, graffiti or vandalism.

9. Relationships between staff and pupils, and amongst pupils themselves, are of very high quality and create a supportive and caring atmosphere in which pupils feel secure and comfortable. Pupils are valued both as individuals and for their contribution to the daily life of school. They respect each other's feelings and are supportive of each other in lessons. Pupils are very polite, friendly, and welcome visitors into their school.

10. During the last academic year, there were three fixed term exclusions involving two pupils. So far this year, there has been none. This is low by national standards and by comparison with other schools in Somerset. Exclusion is the final stage in the school's clear, well structured approach to dealing with unacceptable behaviour, and not a sanction that is used lightly. All exclusions are fully documented, and parents are involved at all stages.

11. Pupils' personal development is fostered through the personal and social education programme in which pupils are encouraged to think about their own attitudes and about wider social issues. Staff have high expectations of pupils, and pupils respond to the independence and freedom given to them sensibly and maturely. During lunchtimes, pupils were observed working or socialising unsupervised in classrooms and around the school, and their behaviour at all times was very good.

12. Many pupils take part in drama and musical productions. There is a large number of lunchtime and after-school clubs and activities, all of which are very well supported. Pupils have the opportunity to go on residential trips each year to Isle of Wight, Liverpool or France. This helps build their confidence and self-esteem whilst providing useful experience of living and working closely with others. Year 8 pupils apply for, and are interviewed for, one of the variety of 'jobs' around school. They may be librarians, help at reception answering the telephone and queries, work in the information technology room and help with resources, or help younger pupils with their reading. Year 6 and 7 pupils help clear the dining room after lunch, and pupils have been involved in decorating and brightening up areas around school. Such experiences provide good additional opportunities for character building, and help pupils to develop a sense of shared responsibility for the smooth running of the school.

13. Each tutor group has two representatives on the School Council. Pupils are proud of their Council and feel they have a genuine input to and effect on school life. The school supports a number of international, national, and local charities and fund-raising activities, and is quick to respond to the needs of others. During the inspection week, Year 5 pupils were organising a bring and buy sale to raise money for the flood victims in Mozambique after seeing the dreadful pictures on the news. As part of the personal and social education programme, pupils work with the NSPCC and look at ways they can help different community groups, such as the elderly. Through this, pupils develop an awareness of the misfortunes and problems of others. The home-link book is used by all pupils to record their homework and is helping them to become more organised and responsible for their own learning. The variety of regular visitors to the school provide good role models for pupils, and pupils treat everyone with friendliness and interest.

14. Attendance at the school is good. The attendance rate is consistently around 94 per cent, which is above the national average, and unauthorised absence is extremely rare. In no year group does the attendance rate fall below 93 per cent. These high levels ensure uninterrupted learning for most pupils, which contributes to their high achievement. Pupils register with their tutors in the morning and afternoon, and registration time is used briskly and efficiently, creating a purposeful start to the day. Registers are marked accurately, and there are clear guidelines to ensure staff record absences correctly. Punctuality is good. Pupils arrive on time and lessons begin promptly.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

15. Good teaching is a strength of the school. Out of 118 lessons seen, three-quarters were good or better, and a third of these were very good or excellent. Only two unsatisfactory lessons were seen throughout the week. This shows that teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection and is a result of improved planning and raising of teachers' awareness of how to improve through regular performance reviews.

16. Overall, the quality of teaching in Years 6, 7 and 8 is very good. In Year 5, though still good, it is not so high as the rest of the school, with just over half of lessons observed being good or better. There was also a considerably less very good teaching. In a number of Year 5 lessons, for example in mathematics, pupils' were insufficiently challenged by the work; consequently the standard achieved was less than it could have been.

17. In most subjects, teachers have a good depth of knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. They are confident, articulate and prepared to engage in productive dialogue and discussions with their pupils, whose own knowledge and understanding is then developed and extended. This was most frequently seen in science lessons. For example, at the end of a Year 6 lesson on sound, the teacher very skilfully asked increasingly difficult questions to elicit pupils' understanding and ability to explain accurately how humans hear.

18. Teachers are aware of the importance of basic literacy and numeracy skills in their subjects, and many consciously put the appropriate emphasis on these skills in their lessons. The development of 'key words' is a feature in several subjects, including mathematics, music and design technology. In a Year 6 music lesson, for example, pupils were expected to understand and use such terms as dynamics, variation and tempo. The use of graphs is an important feature in many science lessons. In Year 6, high attaining pupils were expected to plot and interpret 'sound' graphs showing time and intensity in decibels. However, this emphasis on literacy and numeracy is not yet consistent throughout the school. For example, there was no reference in a Year 8 dance lesson to the vocabulary of movement. Teachers in Years 5 and 6 have good knowledge and understanding of the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies.

19. Lessons are generally well planned, and some exceptionally well. In the best lessons, teachers make clear to pupils at the outset what they are expected to know, understand and be able to do. This ensures that pupils are clear about what they are expected to achieve. Most teachers plan for and carry out a short session at the end of their lessons in which they evaluate with the class what has been learned. Such sessions are particularly good in art and some English and science lessons. In a few lessons, for example in a Year 5 mathematics lesson, learning objectives were vague, which made it very difficult to assess the quality of pupils' learning. In the main, teachers' planning builds clearly on earlier lessons, providing good continuity and progression of learning for the pupils. The majority, but not all, lesson planning matches the tasks set to the needs of pupils with different abilities. A good example of this was seen in a Year 8 physical education lesson on football. Groups were formed by ability, enabling those with less co-ordination to spend more time practising passing a ball, whilst better players were able to concentrate on improving speed and develop tackling and other strategies in a more competitive situation. All pupils were vigorously involved in learning and enjoying challenge at an appropriate level.

20. Teachers mostly have high expectations of their pupils, and pupils work hard and behave

very well. There are, however, some areas where there is insufficient challenge. This was apparent in several Year 5 lessons. For example, in a mathematics lesson for lower attaining pupils to reinforce work about perimeters, pupils were only required to do simple addition to 20. In both this and another Year 5 mathematics lesson, pupils of average attainment said the work was very easy and their achievements confirmed this. In other years, the highest attaining pupils are not consistently challenged. Exceptions to this were found in geography, science and art lessons, where pupils were mostly very well challenged. In some mathematics lessons, extension work for the high attainers is limited to more of the same work but with larger numbers. In other lessons, for example English, insufficient account is taken of the range of attainment and capability within the class. Such lessons do not meet the school's aim of enabling pupils to reach their full potential because they underestimate what pupils are capable of achieving.

21. Lessons are nevertheless generally well structured with a good balance of whole class, individual and group teaching. Teachers mostly use good, interactive questioning techniques that stimulate pupils to engage in productive discussions, both in large and small groups and on an individual basis with their teacher or a fellow pupils. Discussion is very well used in religious education lessons, stimulating pupils to apply their own intellectual and creative thinking. Some teachers, however, do tend to talk for too long, which restricts the opportunities for pupils to apply their learning.

22. A good range of practical activities is used in all subjects, with particularly good investigative tasks both in science and in the food and textile aspect of design technology. The explanation of tasks is particularly good, so pupils clearly understand what they are doing. In many lessons, they share their ideas with the class confidently and competently. Most pupils are very confident and prepared to discuss their reasons fairly and accurately. However, opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning are insufficiently developed in some subjects, for example in history and mathematics.

23. The management of pupils is very good throughout the school, resulting in very high standards of behaviour. All teachers are able to create a purposeful working atmosphere by establishing firm and fair relationships with the pupils. In almost all the lessons seen, the start was brisk and immediately captured pupils' attention. The majority of teachers make good use of their voices to enhance what they are saying, thus creating lively, interesting lessons. Pupils respond with equal enthusiasm. Some very good examples of this enthusiasm were seen in French, German and music lessons. Hard work and concentration are always expected of the pupils, and usually specific targets are set for them to achieve. In a very good Year 6 English lesson, the teacher explained clearly what she expected the pupils to have completed by the end of the lesson in their writing about 'A day in the life of...'. However, pupils are not as frequently involved in the setting of their own targets as they could be.

24. Most lessons are very well paced. They start and finish on time and work is usually completed as planned. Only rarely in the lessons seen was the pace too leisurely, for instance in a Year 8 English lesson where lower attaining pupils worked on pronunciation, re-read a

scene from a play, and then punctuated an unpunctuated letter. By contrast, the teacher attempted to cover too much in a Year 6 design and technology lesson. In both lessons, pupils' learning was less than it should have been.

25. Very good use is made of support staff. Those who work with pupils with additional educational needs help these pupils make good gains in their knowledge, skills, and understanding. With the exception of the use of information technology, teachers use other resources very effectively to demonstrate and enhance pupils' learning. Although information technology is well used in geography, where pupils were observed researching the Amazon rainforest, it is insufficiently used to enhance pupils' learning in most other areas of the curriculum.

26. On a day-to-day basis, pupils' work is assessed well. The use of praise, in verbal and written comments, is generally very good, encouraging pupils to give of their best. Teachers move around their classes very well, talking with individuals and groups. As well as extending pupils' thinking, their skilful use of questioning plays an important part in eliciting how much the pupils have learnt, particularly in the last few minutes of many lessons. Assessment of this kind is particularly strong in Years 7 and 8, and in science and English in Year 6.

27. Homework is regularly set in most subjects, including art and design technology, and it plays a significant part in pupils' learning. There is an appropriate policy, and good working relationships have been established with parents through the use of 'Home-link' workbooks. Parents conscientiously sign to acknowledge that they are aware of the work that has been set. Homework was referred to in most lessons, though not always clearly planned for. It is generally well integrated with classwork and is marked regularly. The standard of challenge is variable, as parents described, and rarely specific to individual needs. In a small number of cases, it involves pupils in 'colouring in', a trivial exercise with little or no learning opportunities.

28. The needs of pupils with additional educational needs are generally well met and, consequently, these pupils make good progress. However, some individual education plans contain literacy targets that are not specific enough to be helpful, and there are many instances where targets that were needed for developing pupils' numeracy skills were not set. Although some individual pupils achieve at very high levels, the school has yet to develop appropriate strategies to fully meet the needs of exceptionally able and talented pupils.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?

29. Overall, the school provides a good range of interesting and worthwhile learning experiences that capture the interests and meet the aptitudes of its pupils. The curriculum for primary age pupils in Years 5 and 6 is broad, well balanced and relevant to their needs. It contains all the subjects of the National Curriculum, including French in Year 6, together with religious education and a personal development programme. Swimming does not take place in either year at present, though provision in the feeder first schools enables statutory requirements for pupils' swimming achievements to be met.

30. The curriculum for pupils in Years 7 and 8 is equally broad, well balanced and relevant. It includes both French and German for all pupils in Years 7 and 8. Appropriate time has been

allocated to most subjects, although history, geography and religious education are taught in blocks of time rather than weekly throughout the year. This restricts the provision and makes it difficult for some pupils to recall previous learning in detail and base new learning on the familiar. In Years 5 and 6 the time allocated for religious education is below that recommended for the agreed syllabus. The school is implementing the numeracy and literacy strategies satisfactorily in Years 5 and 6, though provision is less effective in Year 5, where pupils do not all receive the same programme.

31. The school's provision for extra-curricular activities is very good. An extensive range of clubs and practices is regularly attended by about one third of the school's pupils. Parents express strong support and approval for this provision. Other activities include lunchtime and after-school activities, weekend matches and fixtures, fieldwork, a Year 5 residential visit to the Isle of Wight, Year 6 visit to France, Year 7 to France or Liverpool, talks by outside speakers, music, drama productions and theatre visits. Each of these are used very effectively to enhance pupils' learning.

32. The provision for personal and social education is very good. The programme is well planned, broad and balanced and has a beneficial effect on pupils' intellectual and personal development; it meets statutory requirements. All pupils, in each year group, have a lesson taught by their form tutor once a week. Pupils record the outcomes in their notebooks. The scheme of work is comprehensive and covers social, health, safety, sex and drugs education. There is a whole school health week when the timetable is disbanded for all Year groups so that pupils can concentrate on all aspects of a healthy lifestyle. Many community workers are used to introduce topics, including a local nurse, doctor, pregnant mother and dentist. Outside agencies work with the school to provide appropriate drugs and sex education. Almost all form tutors have been on training courses to support their teaching of these units of work. The governors have also participated in training.

33. Preparations have been made to include citizenship in the curriculum from September 2000. All teaching of personal and social education is undertaken by form tutors and is monitored by discussion at year group meetings. During the inspection week, the majority of teaching in the lessons observed was good. Pupils gained much knowledge and understanding of a variety of topics according to their year group, for example healthy eating, types of families, responsibilities and beliefs.

34. Pupils have good opportunity to participate in competitive team games and teachers from subjects other than physical education of the school help with some of these fixtures. Boys and girls are involved in district and county competitions. In other clubs, higher attaining pupils are encouraged to participate in initiatives that give them the opportunity to extend their knowledge, for example the history conference at the local secondary school, and the course on the Great War. Many subjects use the local area and various places in Britain and abroad for special studies. These well planned annual activities provide good enrichment of the curriculum.

35. The school provides a sound introduction to careers education and the work-related curriculum, although at present this is not planned for and there is no written policy. There are no formal links with the careers service or an education business partnership. The personal development programme includes life skills that have relevance to the world of work, and in all subject areas pupils have the opportunity to develop relevant skills; for example in English they write formal letters and learn how to use fax and e-mail.

36. The provision for equal opportunities is good. The school has maintained the commitment to equal opportunities noted in the last inspection, and its equal opportunities policy is reviewed at regular intervals. Pupils' results are monitored by gender, and the school has developed strategies to promote the higher attainment of groups of pupils who were considered to be underachieving. However, these are not yet fully effective. Equal opportunities issues are discussed in many subjects, for example in English and history.

37. All pupils have equal access to resources and out-of-school activities and the opportunity to play a variety of competitive sports and go on a variety of visits. The school encourages everyone to give of their best and ensures that they have every opportunity to do well. In most classes teachers match classroom activities to the aptitudes of pupils. In English and mathematics, pupils are placed in sets matching their prior attainment and provided with appropriate work. Support for pupils with additional needs is good although some pupils are extracted from lesson for support in literacy, which affects their progress in some subjects. Pupils are not set for all lessons and in some pupils were attempting the same tasks and using the same resources whatever their level of potential attainment. The school identifies gifted and talented pupils and provides an extension programme for them outside the classroom. However, at present there is insufficient challenge for them in lessons in some subjects, notably in English, mathematics and science.

38. The school has good links with industry in the local area, including shoe manufacturing and tourism. Pupils are involved in mini-enterprises, and many subject areas introduce them to work related activities. They act as estate agents in selling medieval castles and produce tourist guides and advertising material. Older pupils take on important responsibilities around the school, for example, in reception and in the dining hall. They formally apply for these jobs and are interviewed prior to appointment.

39. The school is a member of the Cheddar Valley Schools Group. This is a cohesive group that works together very well to support pupils throughout their education. A good example of this is the leaving assembly for Year 11 pupils at the Kings of Wessex Community School. The staff of the first and middle schools are invited and the headteacher of the first school, to which the Year 11 pupil went, presents the leaving certificate. There are formal meetings of headteachers and subject staff to develop joint initiatives and common practice. Recently, the group has produced a leaflet for parents on the importance of good attendance. Year 4 and 5 staff have been looking at assessment of pupils' work and upper and middle schools are working on making best use of the data available on pupils' performances. There are many joint training sessions, and some very able pupils attend extra lessons at the upper school. There are good transfer arrangements for pupils arriving into Year 5, and similarly Year 8 pupils are well prepared for life in the upper school.

40. Overall provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. In this, there has been some improvement since the last inspection, particularly in the contributions made by individual subject areas. The inspection identified many individual instances where good opportunities were being provided for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through both curricular and extra-curricular activities. However, these have yet to be effectively co-ordinated and the school as a whole is not sufficiently aware of the potential it has to offer.

41. Provision for the pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. At the last inspection, few opportunities were provided outside art and music, and this has improved. The governors have begun to look at possibilities for spiritual development using local authority guideline documents. This is linked to their review of the school's aims and ethos. However, planned provision remains limited outside the personal and social education and religious education programmes. Art and religious education continue to provide good opportunities for the appreciation of beauty and understanding of the feelings and values of others through consideration of how imagery and symbolism are used. There is also sound provision in history, for example, through a sense of wonder at the achievements of the Greeks and Romans. Pupils are led to reflect on the beauty of Cathedrals and to have an appreciation of the meaning of religion to people in the middle ages. In English, there is consideration of creation myths and links made with environmental issues. There are examples of good essay writing concerning attitudes towards a child with Down's Syndrome. Other positive opportunities occur in mathematics, science and geography. However, other subjects need to make more contributions to pupils' spiritual development.

42. Although there is a policy for collective worship, the school is not meeting statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. The main reason is that the school hall is not large enough for all pupils to gather together. Alternative opportunities for worship in classes have been tried but abandoned; the reason given was pressure of curriculum time. Pupils have opportunities each week to meet for assembly and collective worship as year groups. Most, but not all, of these assemblies provide appropriate opportunity for reflection. There is also a weekly achievement assembly. However, most assemblies are led by senior staff, heads of year or representatives from a local churches group. A record of assemblies is not currently maintained. There are few opportunities for pupils themselves to be actively involved or to lead worship. The religious festivals observed are almost entirely Christian in character, so that there are few opportunities for pupils to learn about the festivals of the other major world faiths as represented in contemporary British society.

43. Provision for pupils' moral development is good, which is an improvement since the last inspection. There is a direct link with the good behaviour and positive attitudes of pupils seen throughout the school. Pupils are given responsibility for their own actions, which promotes their understanding of right from wrong. The curriculum provides plenty of scope for moral development. Personal and social education deals effectively with sex and drugs education within a moral context; there are also good opportunities to discuss ethical issues in general. During the inspection, there were opportunities to consider moral responsibility in assemblies on the Mozambique floods and on Mother Theresa of Calcutta. In science,

pupils deal with issues such as force-feeding and the exploitation of 'Planet Earth.' Some Year 5 pupils sent impassioned letters to a government minister about rainforests. In geography, there was good discussion on the moral and social implications of the work of 'cowboy builders' when studying the effects of earthquakes. Further good provision was seen in religious education and history.

44. Opportunities for pupils to develop social skills are very good, which represents an improvement since the last inspection. There is a strong sense of community involving staff, pupils and governors alike. The adults at the school provide good role models for the pupils. Links with local residential homes, a hospice and disabled members of the community provide effective opportunities for social and community awareness. An elected school council was set up just under a year ago and its work is taken seriously by the pupils. There are very good opportunities for pupils to take responsibility, for example as librarians, on reception duty and in paired reading work. Social responsibility is emphasised, for example in the school's fund-raising activities for charity. In the week prior to the inspection, over £1000 was raised for a leprosy charity.

45. Opportunities for the development of pupils' cultural awareness were satisfactory at the last inspection and are now good. However, there is need for more specific planning and co-ordination of the cultural and multi-cultural opportunities it provides. The school is strong in its work to provide pupils with an understanding of their own local culture and the differences between urban and rural cultures. This is supported through, for example, trips to London and Liverpool. Pupils have regular opportunities to take part in school productions and musical events. They also visit art galleries, the cinema and the theatre. Through religious education, there are opportunities to visit places of worship of other faiths in, for example, Bristol. Humanities has an 'India Day.' There are links with a Kenyan school through an upper school exchange scheme. Opportunities to appreciate western European cultures are provided through the department of modern foreign languages visits to France, and pupils and their families have hosted Czech and Russian exchange pupils. There is good provision through history and English, with work on slavery and black cultures but insufficient provision for pupils' cultural development in mathematics and science. However, there is satisfactory coverage in design and technology with, for example textiles and bead weaving work based on Mexican and American Indian designs. During the week of the inspection, the school celebrated the diverse cultures of this country through displays, and awareness is generated through many subject areas and in religious education.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

46. Overall, the school provides a satisfactory level of care for the physical well being of its pupils. There is an effective child protection policy which follows the local education authority procedures. A senior member of staff is the designated officer and attends appropriate and regular training. Good use is made of medical support and other outside agencies, and lines of communication are clear. There are clear and helpful policies and guidelines for the organisation and participation of off-site activities and visits. The school has reviewed its arrangements for dealing with first aid and sickness in the light of recent incidents. Regular fire drills and safety checks on equipment are carried out. Some health and safety issues were raised with the school during the inspection, but generally there is an emphasis on safe practice in most lessons and activities. This is particularly good in science.

However, there is no formal approach to systematic risk assessments across the whole school and in departments. The school is considering ways to use the guidance from the county council but should implement formal and thorough risk assessments as soon as possible.

47. The school provides good support and guidance for its pupils and has created a caring and secure environment. Tutors play a central role in making this provision positive. Teachers and tutors know pupils well individually, and have a genuine concern for their progress, welfare and personal well being. Pupils find their teachers are approachable, accessible, responsive and encouraging. The quality of their relationships is the basis on which much of the personal support is built, and this contributes to pupils' confidence and ability to cope with everyday school life. The school is generally a happy place and pupils enjoy being there.

48. The school has very good systems and procedures for encouraging and maintaining good discipline and behaviour based on a climate of honesty and fairness, showing tolerance towards others and accepting responsibility. The code of conduct is well established and considered reasonable by pupils. This is supported by a system of rewards and sanctions which pupils generally respond to in a positive and mature manner. The good relationships between pupils and teachers also contribute to an orderly and calm atmosphere, in which pupils readily and naturally talk to teachers. Pupils are confident that if they have a problem, such as bullying, then it will be dealt with quickly and sensitively.

49. The procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance are satisfactory. Tutors are the first point of contact, and follow up absences with parents. Heads of Year use monthly reports to identify pupils with attendance problems and meet with the social services to refer problems on. Awards are given to individual pupils for 100 per cent attendance.

50. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment are satisfactory, and most teachers make sound use of the information in planning appropriate work for their pupils. In most subjects, the day-to-day marking and monitoring of progress is effective and is particularly good in science. Mathematics makes good use of regular assessments of pupils' work to help in the planning of lessons and to review the effectiveness of their teaching. There is good anecdotal record keeping, with regular use of National Curriculum levels in English. Work in history, geography and religious education is assessed against clearly stated targets, but does not specifically use National Curriculum levels. However, records in information technology do not take account of experience gained in other subjects. The school now needs to work on the details of its central policy in order to make best use of the available data and to put into practice a more consistent approach to assessment across all the subjects taught.

51. On a longer term basis, the systems in place to monitor and support pupils' overall academic progress and personal development are good. Senior staff use the abundance of assessment data to regularly monitor and track the academic progress of pupils over time. This identifies under-achieving pupils and extra support is given to those pupils. Staff use weekly tutorials to check the home-link book, which doubles as a homework planner. Subject staff record the occasions when homework is not completed which helps tutors and parents keep a close eye on individuals. The weekly tutorial also allows tutors and heads of year to have one-to-one discussions to support those pupils who need extra help. Booster groups and extra enrichment activities are provided for pupils, and those with additional educational needs are well supported in lessons. Tutors and heads of year monitor the behaviour of pupils.

Report slips and detentions are noted and records are kept in pupils' files. Staff have in-depth knowledge of all their pupils and they communicate well with each other. This plays an important part in the on-going process of monitoring the overall progress of pupils through their school year. The school has very close links with outside agencies and uses their skills and expertise well and sensitively to give pupils and parents additional support. This is particularly evident through the work of the educational psychologist and bereavement counsellor.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

52. The school has continued to maintain the good partnership with parents reported in the last inspection and is constantly looking for ways to develop the relationship further.

53. The large majority of parents are very positive about the school. They report that the school values their opinion and support, and that their concerns are generally acted upon quickly. They find that staff are approachable and helpful.

54. Parents receive good quality information about the school, its philosophy and approach. The prospectus and annual report from governors provide plenty of detail on how the school works and what parents can expect. The newsletter and letters home keep parents up-to-date with events, topical issues and news. There are booklets for each year group which give parents details of the curriculum to be studied that year and other information. An open evening in the autumn term gives pupils a chance to show their parents round their school and see some of the activities they are involved in.

55. Formal reporting to parents is through an interim report that indicates effort and achievement in all subjects. This forms the basis of the discussion between tutors, parents and pupils during the tutor evening. The full report towards the end of the year is detailed and personal, but often too general. Few subject staff clearly identify strengths and weaknesses, or give a clear indication of how pupils can improve. National curriculum levels are not given, nor whether pupils are working below, above, or in line with national expectations. However, the school sought parents' views on the reports and the feedback was positive. Eighty-five per cent of parents feel well informed about the progress of their child. Further development to improve the content of annual reports would make them even more helpful for parents. Parents have the opportunity to give their response to the reports by completing the return slip. The parents' consultation evenings are very well attended, and the school makes personal contact with the very few parents who do not attend. The informal communication between the staff and parents is very good, and the school is quick to respond to individual concerns.

56. The school encourages parents to take an active part in their child's education and are successful in doing so. Parents make a very good contribution to children's learning at home and at school. They are expected to sign and check the home-link book, and some parents use this as a means of communicating with tutors and individual subject teachers. The home-school agreement is firmly established, and indicates clearly what the school and parents can expect from each other. Parents are asked to bring the agreement to the first parents' evening in Year 5, and the tutor, parent and pupil sign it together. A copy of the agreement is included in the home-link book to remind everyone of his or her responsibilities. The school

has looked at ways of attracting more parents to such evenings, and has run presentations on literacy and numeracy during parents' consultation evenings. Parents receive information on curriculum matters through specific letters, the newsletter and subject evenings.

57. The annual review for pupils with additional educational needs is well managed and conducted in consultation with parents, pupils, and other key workers as appropriate. The additional educational needs department has organised sessions to give advice to parents on how to help their child at home which directly supports work in school. The educational psychologist has given support and advice to parents on how to handle behaviour of children at home.

58. A request for parent helpers goes out each year, and parents give very valuable help in the library, the resource centre, with reading and on trips and visits. Their help is appreciated and valued. There is a flourishing parent/teacher association that supports the school in all its activities and acts as a forum for sharing and obtaining parents' views.

59. Overall, the good partnership between the school and parents ensures very effective two-way communication and a joint commitment to high standards.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

60. The school's aims and objectives are well considered and have been recently reviewed so that they provide a secure framework within which the school can develop. The headteacher, ably supported by his deputy headteacher and the governing body, has a strong commitment to school improvement and provides clear leadership towards this development. The schools' priorities are very appropriate, much of what is intended is achieved, and there is a continuous drive to promote high standards. The school has a very good ethos, promotes equality of opportunity and seeks the very best for all its pupils.

61. The results of internal and national tests are analysed thoroughly, and discussions held with subject leaders to ensure suitable and determined strategies for improvement are happening. Teaching and curriculum development are monitored systematically, involving the school's senior managers and subject specialists from the local education authority. Support is provided where there is need for improvement. For example, in developing the work of design and technology the senior management of the school and a subject adviser from the local authority have observed lessons, examined provision, set targets and provided advice. Clear priorities and targets for improvement that are focused on pupils' needs are set, and agreed with staff where necessary. The outcomes are reviewed regularly. A good example of this is in the provision of booster classes in English for those pupils whose current attainments are just below Level 4.

62. Staff understand the role they are encouraged to play in the development and running of the school and know that their contribution to the school is appreciated. They know that they are able to influence the way policies are developed and implemented so as to enable pupils to learn more effectively and efficiently. The monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching is satisfactory but could be much improved. Teachers are encouraged to observe each other teach and to share ideas and practice. This has begun to happen, for example in the teaching of mathematics, but it is not yet sufficiently widespread to have had the desired positive impact. This should now be structured so that the quality of teaching is systematically monitored, effective practice shared and weaknesses rectified.

63. The headteacher is approachable and highly regarded by staff, pupils and parents. He is frequently to be seen around the school, ensuring it is both orderly and well administered as well as making frequent informal visits to classrooms. However, he has yet to monitor the effectiveness of some whole-school policies, for example, the assessment of pupils' work, and to engage personally in formal monitoring of the quality of teaching.

64. Development planning at both whole-school and department level is very good. Spending targets are carefully identified, with priority given to the improvement of educational provision and standards. The work of the school is subject to careful scrutiny by the governors and the school management team, and realistic targets are set for the school to achieve.

65. The governing body is knowledgeable, committed and enthusiastic in their support of the school and its staff. Their role in shaping the direction of the school is excellent and they provide very good strategic leadership. For example, they are much involved in the school's development planning and use it as one means of checking on the school's progress. They use benchmarking and other information provided by the Department for Education and Employment and the local education authority to guide them in their discussions and to make effective decisions concerning school improvements where necessary. Where possible, they supplement their discussions by visits to the school and by inviting subject leaders to talk with them about progress in their subject. One member of the governing body attended the training for the implementation of the literacy strategy and takes an active interest in the work of the additional needs department. Another governor has taken a keen interest in the implementation of the numeracy strategy and has also visited classes. These visits are reported back to the governing body to strengthen their knowledge and understanding of what the school is doing to improve, and how it provides for its pupils. The governors fulfil almost all their statutory requirements, though they do not ensure that staff are regularly appraised or that there is a daily act of collective worship.

66. The school finance policy ensures that financial planning is clearly linked to educational need and answers sought to questions concerning the subsequent impact of these decisions on pupils' standards. Checks are made twice a year to check the extent to which priorities on the school development plan are being met. Monthly budget monitoring reports are prepared for members of the finance committee, who report to the full governing body. Strategic planning is also very good, with detailed projections of costs and timescales

sensibly restricted to the immediate financial year; this enables money to be used effectively to raise standards through provision of, for example, booster classes, staffing and resources for additional educational needs, funding the recommendations of departmental reviews. There is a very good working relationship between governors and senior staff.

67. Within the annual budget, specific grants for national initiatives, staff training and additional educational needs are distributed wisely and to good effect. Resources for departments are allocated partly by formula, but also partly through bids by those departments involved in major developments. This allocates resources to those departments where the need is perceived, for example through monitoring reviews, as greatest. The school is in a financially sound position but reserve funds have reduced in the last three years because of the commitment to maintaining or improving standards.

68. Routine administration of the school budget is good. The school makes full use of new technology to produce its own monitoring statements. The finance committee makes a full evaluation of the quality of existing contracts for services such as catering, photocopying, cleaning, and information and communications technology support, before they are renewed. They apply the principles of best value in making budgetary decisions. The most recent auditor's report included items from the previous report, mainly of a minor nature, which still required attention, but the majority of the recommendations have now been implemented well. The routine administration of the school uses the new technology very effectively and ensures the school runs very smoothly. There are very efficient arrangements for the collection, recording and banking of cash. Bank charges are kept to a minimum.

69. The range of qualifications, experience and subject knowledge of the teaching staff is good and enables the requirements of the National Curriculum to be met. Non-specialists are well supported by specialist teachers where required. Suitable supply arrangements have been made to cover recent and current staff absences, and there has been no undue interruption in teaching. However, many classes arranged as sets have over 30 pupils, which makes it difficult for teachers to give the necessary level of support to individual pupils.

70. There is a high quality team of non-teaching staff who are deployed very effectively to support pupils' learning and maximise the impact of the teaching staff. The administrative and other non-teaching staff contribute fully to the efficient management of the school. The staffing levels are under continuous review by the governing body.

71. Clear job descriptions are in place for teaching and non-teaching staff. Although the headteacher and a number of senior staff have participated in appraisal training, there is currently no formal appraisal programme in place. However, the arrangements for the professional development of teachers are good and this is evident from the overall high quality of teaching.

72. Teaching and non-teaching staff have a wide range of opportunities for further professional development. Subject co-ordinators have a meeting each year with the headteacher to review their departmental development plans. There is a rolling programme of detailed subject reviews, which are assisted by the local education authority's education advisers. Other in-service training activities are available within the school's budget to meet individual and subject needs. The in-service programmes are monitored systematically by the headteacher and evaluated against school and departmental development plans. The impact of

their teaching on pupils' achievements is regularly monitored by the senior management of the school.

Accommodation

73. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. The school has attempted to make good improvements since the last inspection, but major problems remain. The school is too small for the current numbers of pupils, and this adversely affects teaching and learning in significant areas. For example, refurbished accommodation has been provided for English, with good storage facilities, but this has been at the expense of drama, which has been left without a specialist base. The library is too small for current numbers of pupils and has to be used as a classroom. Most non-fiction books have to be kept in departments, which limits possibilities for developing pupils' research skills. Rooms for science and art have been enlarged by removing corridors, but the science room remains cramped for space. Classes are large, and services are around the side causing pupils to work on experiments with their back to their teacher. To ensure health and safety requirements, provision is made for extra adult help in all practical lessons in science, and most lessons involve practical work. Although the art room has been improved with new units and sinks, it is still too small and presents difficulties in dealing with pupils who have challenging behaviour. It remains as a corridor to the room for additional educational needs, and proposed plans do not provide a satisfactory equivalent area in respect of light and easy access to storage. The removal of corridors has resulted in most movement being outside at changeover of lessons. Notable bottlenecks occur inside the school on wet days. Since the time the food technology room was refurbished the number of pupils has risen by 25 per cent so the area is congested with large classes.

74. Accommodation for geography and physical education has not improved since the last inspection. Pupils cannot take full advantage of geography display work because not all their lessons take place in geography rooms. Although changing rooms have been refurbished, they are too small, for example for a class of 38 boys in Year 7. Standards are significantly affected by the smallness of the hall, causing an imbalance in the curriculum between games and creative aspects of physical education because most activities have to take place outside. Achievement in music is restricted because of cramped conditions; there are too few spaces for group work and extremely limited storage space for large instruments. Similar constraints impinge upon the science curriculum where lack of space prevents the successful nurturing of independent investigative work. The preparation room is an exceptionally narrow corridor, organised as best as possible but inevitably highly cluttered. Storage facilities are unsatisfactory. These constraints have identifiable effects on pupils' opportunities to learn, and adversely affect the standards achieved in many cases. A strength of the school, however, is the use that teachers strive to make of the accommodation available.

75. Accommodation has improved for history since the last inspection and it is good now for modern foreign languages. Pupils are keen to use the specialised room for information communication technology during lesson time and for extra-curricular activities. Smaller classes (now setted) have adequate room in mathematics lessons and display work is very good except in a mobile room where there is limited pin-board. Display is sparse in the large English room, but celebrates the achievements in other areas of the school, for example, in geography, art and science. In addition, pupils enjoy working with the site manager and,

together, a small group have decorated two major toilet blocks to a very good and cheerful standard, one with interesting shell patterns.

Learning resources

76. Overall, the quality of learning resources is satisfactory. The purchase of resources is closely linked to departmental requirements and the school development plan. They are matched to pupils' needs to assist in promoting improved standards.

77. The resources used in departmental areas are satisfactory in terms of quality and quantity. They are generally well organised and pupils have good access to them. Those produced by teachers in various subjects are generally of good quality, and complement and extend commercially produced materials.

78. The library and media resource rooms provide valuable support for the curriculum. They are well used and well maintained by pupils at break and lunchtimes. The information and communications technology centre is also valued by pupils both within the curriculum and through extra-curricular provision. The centre provides networked machines for casual use by subject departments on a bookable basis; some departments make use of these resources but others find access difficult. The absence of computers in some classrooms and the limited capacity of existing equipment sometimes prevent the regular and natural integration of information and communications technology into classroom activities.

79. There is a regular overseeing of resources, their usage and departmental needs by the deputy head, who also regularly reviews the development plan. There are firmly established and effective procedures for purchasing resources and monitoring of costs and expenditure.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

80. In order to build on the existing strengths of the school and to improve the quality of pupils' learning and the standards they reach, the governors, head teacher and staff should:

- Improve the proportion of pupils attaining at the highest levels in English and mathematics and science by:
(*Paragraphs: 91, 103, 108, 109, 110, 123*)
 - * raising teachers' expectations of what the most able pupils can achieve;
 - * continuing to monitor the performance of such pupils;
 - * monitoring the quality of teaching;
 - * developing the assessment and recording systems in accordance with a whole school policy on assessment.

- Review and improve the use of information and communications technology to enhance pupils' learning in art, design and technology, history, mathematics, modern foreign languages, music and science;
(*Paragraphs: 105, 117, 129, 134, 155, 170, 180*)

- Continue to take all necessary steps to improve the accommodation;
(*Paragraphs: 73, 74*)

- Ensure that regular formal and thorough risk assessments are conducted around the school;
(*Paragraph: 46*)

- Take steps to meet statutory requirements in respect of a daily act of collective worship.
(*Paragrph: 42*)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	118
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	63

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	25	47	25	2	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons. (These may not add to 100 due to rounding to nearest whole number)

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y5 – Y8
Number of pupils on the school's roll	500
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	34

Special educational needs	Y5 - Y8
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	9
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	96

(NB Fairlands refers to such pupils as having additional needs not special needs)

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	11
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	9

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.86
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.02
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 2

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 2 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	75	52	127

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 4 and above	Boys	59	60	72
	Girls	43	41	46
	Total	102	101	118
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 4 or above	School	81 (80)	80 (64)	93 (91)
	National	70 (76)	69 (69)	78 (78)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 4 and above	Boys	55	56	67
	Girls	41	33	45
	Total	96	89	112
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 4 or above	School	84 (80)	70 (64)	88(83)
	National	68 (65)	69 (65)	75 (71)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	0
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	494
Any other minority ethnic group	2

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	3	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y5 – Y6

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	22.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	21.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y5– Y6

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	239

Deployment of teachers: Y5 - Y8

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.4
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Average teaching group size: Y5 – Y8

Key Stage 2	24
Key Stage 3	26

Financial information

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	962794.00
Total expenditure	960086.00
Expenditure per pupil	1920.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	40261.00
Balance carried forward to next year	42969.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	500
Number of questionnaires returned	268

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	56	5	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	40	53	6	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	57	5	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	61	13	3	0
The teaching is good.	31	62	4	1	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	29	55	12	2	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	55	40	4	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	50	47	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	29	56	11	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	46	47	2	2	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	54	6	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	33	50	10	2	5

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

81. Pupils enter the school with good standards in all aspects of English. They are confident speakers who are used to listening attentively to their teachers. Although there is a range of competence in reading and writing, with a small minority who are below the level expected for their age, most pupils have appropriate skills and are ready to benefit from the curriculum they follow in Year 5. All departments develop these skills to some extent. Most teach the vocabulary and terminology needed for reading and writing in their subjects, and some departments, notably history, geography and science, pay particular attention to note-making and clear presentation.

82. The school has responded very well to the advice given in the last report to give more opportunities for pupils to write at length. There are now very good opportunities in several subjects: in mathematics pupils write up their investigations clearly; in history there are imaginative accounts of events written in the voice of someone who was there; in geography pupils write extensive reports of researched information, for instance on the recent earthquake in Turkey. However, there is still a need for teachers in all subjects to work with pupils on details of spelling, punctuation and grammar, and for a more explicit school policy on these aspects of writing.

83. In the national tests in English for 11 year olds, the school's results have been consistently above the national average for the last four years. In the most recent tests, results as a whole were above average. Eighty-one per cent of pupils achieved the national expectation (Level 4 or above) compared with seventy per cent nationally and the boys' results overall were well above national averages for boys. This was largely due to their high levels of attainment in reading, whereas in writing their attainment is below the national average. At the higher level (Level 5 and above) the schools' results were above the national average. However, in comparison with similar schools, the results for boys and girls in 1999 were below average. This is because the proportion obtaining the higher levels (Levels 5 and 6) is less than expected for schools of this type.

84. The inspection revealed that progress in English during Years 5 and 6 is good, so that pupils' attainments are above those expected for their age towards the end of Year 6. No significant differences between the achievements of boys and girls were observed except in writing, where girls' attainment is higher than that of boys.

85. There are many opportunities for the development of speaking and listening and for the acquisition of vocabulary and language structures. In the daily literacy hour, pupils join confidently in the class discussion time. As they read the class book together, they start to build up a critical approach to studying printed texts, analysing writers' use of words and thinking about the variety of approaches used for different purposes and different groups of readers. Pupils in Year 5 reading a fact-based story about penguins re-write the story in a form that would catch the interest of small children. Their comments on how the story should begin and on which words needed changing showed that they were already becoming aware of the difference between technical and narrative language. Year 6 pupils, whose class reader was an account of the Apollo moon landing, analyse presentation techniques, such as use of

pictures, captions, headings and bullet points in order to produce an information leaflet of their own. Examples provided of work earlier in the year showed that pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with additional educational needs, experience a range of reading and writing styles in these two years. This includes discursive writing on topics such as the preservation of the rain forests, exploration of feelings and situations, such as diaries and letters written in the voice of characters from novels and plays, and response to literature, such as the poems displayed by the class reading 'Journey of a Thousand Miles' by Ian Strachan.

86. Pupils at all levels of prior attainment continue to make good progress in Years 7 and 8 and, at the point when they leave the school at the end of Year 8, their standards in English are mostly above those expected for their age. However, the standard of writing for a significant minority is still below average.

87. There is good development of the skills acquired in the previous years. Oral discussion in small groups is very well managed: pupils negotiate ideas, listening to each other carefully and building on one another's points to reach group conclusions. For instance, a class of higher attainers in Year 7 worked productively in groups analysing elements of science fiction and horror in their play reading of 'Frankenstein'. In a class of lower attainers in Year 7, pupils were working in groups to create a story based on a siege; they showed very good skills in joint decision-making, as well as great sensitivity in making sure less confident peers were properly heard. Almost all pupils at this stage are experienced and discriminating readers. They all consolidate their skills and extend their enjoyment of reading by active membership of the school library. They talk fluently about their preferences and are ambitious in their choices of books.

88. Writing skills continue to develop, with good opportunities for extended work, both discursive and imaginative. However, pupils' standards of spelling and punctuation are not as high as they should be. This is often because pupils do not proof read their own work; pupils' expectations could be raised in this respect by their teachers insisting on this, especially on first drafts. Pupils make good use of information technology in all years in the school, including Year 5 who produce interesting and attractive booklets of stories and poems, as well as their own letter heads. One class, producing a front page for a newspaper, used a wide range of skills, from preparing a draft article on a subject chosen from the news, to managing the technicalities of working in columns, using headlines and a variety of fonts, and arranging text to incorporate pictures.

89. The teaching of English is strong. None of it is unsatisfactory, just under three quarters of it is good or better, and one third is very good or excellent. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and are well supported by a clear and thorough scheme of work. Lessons are tightly planned to get the best value from the sixty minutes, with a stimulating range of tasks, and maximum opportunities for active pupil involvement. In the best of them, objectives are shared with the class at the beginning of the lesson and reviewed before the pupils leave, enabling pupils to be partners in their own learning. Relationships are very good, and class management is sensitive and calm, providing a secure environment in which pupils develop ideas and skills confidently. There are high expectations of good behaviour.

90. Pupils are taught in class sets based on their current attainment in English, and the work they do is planned to suit their levels. In some classes there is a need for teachers to be more

aware of the range within the sets, particularly in terms of expectations of the highest attainers. More could be expected of these pupils but, overall, pupils are properly challenged by the work they do, and English lessons are stimulating and highly enjoyable. The English course, through the study of literature, provides many opportunities for the development of pupils' ability to reflect on their own experience as they consider that of others. There are also very good opportunities to think about moral issues and about the world outside their immediate community.

91. Pupils cover a good volume of work, orally and in their writing. They receive constant feedback on their work in class, individually and as a whole group. There was very high quality oral assessment by the teacher heard, for instance, in the booster class in Year 6 which is receiving more intensive teaching in the period before the national tests.

92. All writing starts in pupils' drafting books, and as the work progresses there is a good deal of very valuable individual consultation between teacher and pupil. More permanent written comment is full and helpful, appropriately pointing up strengths and weaknesses in the writing and often giving specific individual targets to aim for. Teachers keep full ongoing records for each pupil, describing progress and needs in all aspects of the work: for instance, pupils' choices in reading are noted and, when necessary, challenged. There is regular assessment against National Curriculum levels. As the school's use of computerised test data develops, the department will be able to think more specifically about setting long term targets for groups and individuals and to adjust the curriculum to meet overall needs.

93. Management of the department is strong. The head of department and her deputy provide valuable support for the large team, which includes staff with responsibilities in other departments. Good relationships provide opportunities for informal discussion of curriculum content and teaching strategies, but there is a need for more formal monitoring of the work in English by the head of department. This should include structured scrutiny of pupils' work and observation of classroom practice resulting in informative feedback and discussion.

94. Issues raised in the last inspection have been addressed. Pupils in all years, but particularly in Years 7 and 8, now have many opportunities to write at length. Re-drafted work is well presented and, although standards of spelling and punctuation are still not as high as they should be, the work done on spelling has very positive effects on increasing vocabulary. Co-ordination of systems of assessment across the two sections of the school has improved and is now satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

95. In the 1999 national tests at the age of 11, the proportions of pupils attaining at Level 4 or above, and Level 5 or above, showed a significant improvement on the previous year and were both above the national averages. Teacher assessments also indicated the results were above the national average, and were broadly in line with pupils' attainment in tests. These results are consistent with the standard of pupils' work seen during the inspection for the current Year 6. In comparison with schools which have a similar proportion of free school meals, the proportion obtaining at least Level 4 was broadly in line, but the proportion obtaining at least Level 5 was below average. The average points score in the national tests was also below the average for similar schools. Pupils obtained results similar to those they

achieved in English, but below those in science, especially in the higher grades. In each of the last two years, boys have performed better than girls. Overall, results are following national trends, but there was a sharp improvement in 1999 following a review of the department's teaching methods and scheme of work.

96. Pupils' progress through the school is mostly good and their attainment, judged during the inspection in lessons, in exercise books and in displays in classrooms, is above that expected for their ages. The presentation of work is particularly good throughout the school, with both boys and girls at all levels of attainment taking great care and pride in their written work, including good explanations of how they obtain their answers.

97. Pupils enjoy their lessons, particularly the challenge of mathematical investigations; they discuss their conclusions maturely. As a result of these investigations, pupils produce some very good examples of original and extended writing. A class of higher attaining pupils was absorbed and fascinated by the patterns that emerged as they considered the interior and exterior angles of polygons. Pupils learn the value of presenting data in tabular form, developing the ability to convert these to bar or line graphs, and learning how to interpret these. They have good numerical skills, and are tested regularly in order to improve their mental ability. Pupils in a lower attaining group were able to multiply 9 by 5 by 3 using mental calculation. Pupils with average or higher attainment convert percentages to fractions and decimals and vice versa, showing they clearly understand the meaning of 0.8, 0.08, and 0.80. The use of algebra is less well developed. The mathematics of shape and space is taught effectively, and consequently pupils are able to calculate angles confidently, and show good understanding of the concepts of area and volume.

98. Teachers place stress on the key words used in each section of work, and these are also clearly displayed in some classrooms. Pupils' attitude to their work is very good and with this good emphasis on language their speaking and listening skills are good and enable them to discuss mathematical ideas using appropriate mathematical language.

99. Pupils are well equipped for lessons, and settle to work quickly. They are particularly patient when listening to their teachers, and to other pupils. For example, a group of pupils with additional educational needs were very supportive of a pupil who needed time to recalculate an inaccurate answer. Pupils with additional educational needs are fully integrated into the work of each class, and they make good progress; however, their education plans do not yet contain targets for numeracy or mathematics that would ensure appropriate challenge.

100. The behaviour of pupils is also very good, often exemplary; their level of concentration is very high and enables them to make good progress. There is an excellent relationship between teachers, support assistants and pupils; a mutual respect is evident. Pupils work well in groups when involved in problem solving. They are willing participants in each lesson, including question and answer sessions, and often ask questions to obtain clarification. They often leave lessons discussing their work. Their confidence and contribution to lessons increases as they move through the school.

101. Overall, the teaching in mathematics is good and no unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Two thirds of the lessons were judged to be good or better, and one in every ten was judged as very good. Lessons are well prepared, and start promptly. Teachers' have sound knowledge and understanding of what they have to teach. There is a sense of fun and enjoyment in many lessons. Teachers have a high expectation that pupils will concentrate on

the task in hand, and this is facilitated in the best lessons by splitting the time available into smaller sections of work.

102. The pace of work and learning is generally good, but is less stimulating in many lessons in Year 5. The work provided for each class is normally pitched at an appropriate level. However, there are occasions when teaching is so thorough that pupils are given too much help; the result is that pupils, and high attaining pupils in particular, are not challenged sufficiently to think for themselves. While additional work is normally available for those pupils who finish first, it is occasionally more of the same rather than a new challenge.

103. Teachers know each pupil well, including those with additional educational needs, and mostly use their knowledge well to provide the prompts that each individual needs to make progress. Targets are often based on overall expectations for the class and are not always appropriate for all pupils. In the majority of lessons, pupils are told at the outset what they are expected to know, understand and be able to do by the end. This is referred to in the lesson summary for consolidation, so that pupils are made aware of what they have learnt. The day-to-day marking of work is satisfactory in frequency, and contains helpful and encouraging comments. However, the grading of work is inconsistent across the department, so that pupils are not always aware of their standard, in comparison with other pupils in the class or with national standards. Homework tasks lack challenge and therefore interest.

104. There has been a review of what is taught since the last inspection, and there is now greater standardisation across classes in each year group. However, the scheme of work still requires further modification to ensure that all pupils receive the same opportunities, and that there is continuity from one class and one year group to another. This applies particularly to the use of information and communications technology. There is little evidence of the use of information and communications technology in mathematics lessons, and insufficient appreciation of the potential of information and communications technology links. Although there is expertise within the department, some teachers lack confidence with information and communications technology. As a result, pupils' progress in this important area varies from class to class and overall is unsatisfactory.

105. There are occasions, when pupils are totally absorbed and fascinated by the world of mathematics, particularly during investigations, but such opportunities for pupils' spiritual development are not planned for in the scheme of work. The department has responded positively to the national numeracy initiative, and appropriate time is devoted to the development of pupils' skills in manipulating number. There is, however, no whole school policy for numeracy and consequently no agreement about the methods used by different subjects for teaching graphs and various calculations. This creates unnecessary difficulties for pupils. Teachers make good use of merit marks to reward effort and to encourage pupils to work hard. There are no extra-curricular opportunities in mathematics for pupils, and no mathematics books in the school library.

106. The school and the department have collected a great deal of data about the attainment of individual pupils from Year 5 through to Year 8 in order to chart their progress in mathematics. While the information is used to place pupils in appropriate teaching groups, full use is not yet made of this data to produce an annual measure of the work of the department, or to compare the progress of boys and girls.

107. Since the last inspection, a new head of department has been appointed. He leads by example in his positive approach to the subject, to teaching, and to pupils. Overall, leadership and management are good. There is now more co-ordination across the school from Year 5 to Year 8, with a clear sense of teamwork in the department, including teachers and support staff. Support staff provide a valuable and effective contribution to pupils' education and progress. The department development plan reflects school priorities and the shared commitment in the department to improve attainment. Targets for this year's results in the national tests for pupils aged 11 are based on their most recent test scores and appear realistically challenging. Nevertheless, there is insufficient monitoring of the work of the department, particularly teaching, and there is no annual appraisal of each teacher's contribution to the work of the department.

108. Since the last inspection, there has been an increase in the extent to which pupils are placed in sets by prior attainment and, in the main, this is proving beneficial for the confidence of pupils at all levels of attainment. However, the progress of individual pupils' should be regularly monitored to ensure the work set is closely matched to their level of attainment and mathematical understanding.

109. The department has made a positive response to the National Numeracy Strategy. As a result, the pace of learning is good in most classes, and attainment has improved. Overall, the department has made good progress. There are, however, areas that require further development in order to raise standards, namely the monitoring of teaching, consistency in the grading of work, the integration of information and communications technology, and providing appropriate opportunities to extend the knowledge and thinking of the most able pupils.

SCIENCE

110. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests, almost all Year 6 pupils gained the expected level (Level 4) and above and approaching half gained Level 5 and above; two pupils pupils achieved Level 6. This is well above the national average. These standards are also above average when compared with similar schools. Taking the four years 1996 to 1999 together, pupils' performance has continued to be well above average. Boys' results were only slightly higher than girls' in 1999 but, on average, they have been similar for the past four years. Results in science are better than those in English and mathematics. In each case, pupils' achievements by the end of Year 8 were well above the level expected for their age, illustrated through continuous assessment and end-of-module tests. Performance of boys and girls was broadly similar.

111. These achievements are reflected in lessons and work seen during the inspection. Current standards towards the end of Year 6 are well above average in all aspects of science. Towards the end of Year 8, pupils' attainments are high in relation to what is expected for their age.

112. In Year 5 lessons, standards are mainly in line with those expected for pupils of this age, although analysis of pupils' previous work illustrates certain higher achievements when learning about, for example, electrical circuitry. Pupils know that a bulb became dimmer, 'because less electricity was able to get through which means there was greater resistance'. Progress in learning was at a noticeably faster pace in Year 6 lessons than in Year 5, because the teacher's planning focused more effectively upon what pupils needed to learn than on the organisation of the activity. In Year 6, they learn that sound vibrations can travel through various materials. Their understanding develops well as they are moved into the higher levels of the subject. For example, the teacher's high expectations of their capabilities lead them to grapple with ideas about how pitch or loudness of sound can be changed.

113. Similarly, pupils in Year 7 are enthusiastically and competently led through a complex chemical equation that describes how plants manufacture glucose from water and carbon dioxide using light energy. They respond equally enthusiastically to the task with commitment because of their teacher's high, often ambitious, expectations and reassurances of what they are capable of understanding. At the same time, they are complimented about the level they are achieving; consequently, progress in learning is very good. Through the Cognitive Acceleration in Science Education project, Year 8 pupils deepen their understanding of problem solving and scientific methods as they deal with compound variables during an investigation.

114. Pupils develop very good use of number skills in calculations and the use of formulae. In Year 8, for example, they calculate the density of different materials from measuring mass and volume. Younger pupils in Year 5 increase the accuracy of their measurements as they become more familiar with new measuring apparatus and equipment. They learn how to calibrate their model forcemeter and know that force is measured in Newtons. Throughout the age-range, pupils are encouraged to choose a best way of recording their observations, either in the table they construct or an appropriate type of graph.

115. Speaking and listening skills are always encouraged during practical work and interesting demonstrations, as results are shared and discussed. For instance, Year 8 pupils were given an important chance to 'talk to a friend' about first impressions of unusual apparatus (Hoffman's Voltmeter) during their lesson about electrolysis of acidified water. Although there is good development of scientific vocabulary when teachers stress technical language in lessons and worksheets, there is insufficient use of technical words in pupils' explanations of their own conclusions of experiments.

116. The skill of drawing accurate two-dimensional science diagrams is developed well; although higher attaining pupils in particular are guided too much by teachers. Diagrams are suitably annotated to support learning. Standards of presentation and organisation of records are nearly always very good. Information communication technology is more widely used since the last inspection to support both the learning of science and the development of

computer skills, for instance in simulating electrical circuitry in Year 5 and in using sensors to explore light intensity in different habitats in Year 8. They scan and label leaves and present fieldwork results. Nevertheless, information and communications technology has yet to be fully integrated throughout all schemes of work.

117. By the time pupils are in their last year at school, a high proportion competently carry out investigations, with understanding of predictions based on scientific knowledge and fair tests. Higher attainers record investigations to a standard that is well above expectations for their ages. Low attaining pupils can isolate and select variables to be investigated with their teacher's support.

118. All pupils quickly learn to record their results in different ways. Pupils in a Year 5 class were encouraged to give reasons for their predictions about for instance, whether or not the height of a slope makes a difference to how far a car travels from its base. By competently carrying out the test they clearly extend their understanding of gravitational attraction and friction. Analysis of work shows, however, that while pupils in Year 6 are able to make predictions, they do not always sufficiently base their suggestions on ideas they have learnt in science lessons. Opportunities are also missed for the youngest pupils to plan experiments; too often, a method describes what has already been done. Much of the experimental work throughout the age-range has to be carefully structured by teachers; it is not balanced by enough independent investigative work because classrooms are too small for the numbers of pupils in classes to do so. This slows the rate at which sophisticated observations develop. Nevertheless, because of skilful management by their teachers, who are ably supported by extra adult help, pupils are able to organise and use a growing range of equipment safely during practical work.

119. The quality of teaching is predominately very good and is never less than satisfactory. Two thirds of the lessons were judged to be good or better and half were judged to be very good or excellent. Teachers adopt a range of strategies to support learning, and these are most effective in lessons where teaching is of the highest standards. Pupils' attention in a Year 6 lesson about sound was swiftly captured by a story about an alien visiting Earth, who had fifteen ears and wanted the level of noise reduced. This was judiciously peppered by effective questions that both confirmed and extended understanding about hearing, and encouraged the pupils to hypothesise and question further ideas about the transmission of vibrations. Eager to solve the alien's problem, the pupils made very good progress in their learning.

120. Fascinated by a demonstration showing the effect that heat energy has upon various movements of ball bearings, Year 8 pupils keenly learned more about Kinetic Theory, and enthusiastically apply their knowledge as they experimented with liquids. Very good teaching is characterised by a lively approach, with well planned and briskly paced instruction. Superficial answers are not accepted if more is possible. Where teachers are secure in their subject knowledge, they teach with confidence and humour. Lessons where teaching was satisfactory shared many of the features of good lessons; activities were skilfully and safely managed and pupils encouraged to think about how to solve a problem themselves. However, a weaker element is when lesson planning is overly focused upon the organisation of activities rather than on learning. This results in the early pace not being kept up throughout lessons, leading to rather rushed conclusions at the end.

121. Teachers have good knowledge of pupils with additional educational needs and these

pupils make very good progress in their learning because of the wise use and skills of teaching support assistants who work closely with teachers. With the exception of the highest attainers who are not sufficiently and rigorously challenged, teachers have high expectations of effort, behaviour and attainment, so that most pupils are eager to learn about science.

122. The department is well organised, well managed and teachers work well as a team, which has ensured that the few issues raised in the last inspection have been either effectively dealt with or are being continually addressed. For example, non-specialist staff in Years 5 and 6 are being supported in their development of scientific knowledge and understanding. These teachers could gain extra help in planning successful lessons if the schemes of work were clarified further. The department is beginning to actively evaluate its own performance. To extend this work through the department, procedures need to include the tracking of individual pupils' performance through the different aspects of science. The department monitors learning by analysing test results, but regular classroom observations are needed to monitor teaching and share good practice.

ART

123. Pupils make good progress through the school, so that achievements in Year 8 are above those expected for their age. The department has continued to maintain the high standards noted at the last inspection. From the start in Year 5, there is a firm focus on the development of key artwork and visual skills and techniques. Pupils make positive use of their sketchbooks to develop images and ideas. Across all year groups, the teaching approach enables the secure development of pupils' creative imagination and their critical and analytical skills.

124. In lessons observed, for example, younger pupils make good use of their background knowledge of costume from history units when working in groups on large scale Tudor figures. They show good awareness of the range of fabrics available in Tudor times, and how decorative pattern effects can be recreated using a range of modern materials. By Year 6, pupils show good levels of freedom in artistic expression, as in their preparation work on fantasy figures arising out of a discussion about Tolkien's literary work. The resulting work also displays well developed sketchwork and mark-making skills. In Year 7, pupils demonstrate proper attention to health and safety matters when practising lino-cutting techniques, and the resulting work builds positively on earlier work on pattern for block printing. By Year 8, pupils can recall and discuss key facts about the life and work of major artists studied, such as Matisse. Their clay modelling work shows a good appreciation and feel for the medium and its possibilities. The painting work on display reflects well developed colour use skills and brushwork techniques, and significantly enhances the art-room environment.

125. The quality of teaching is consistently very good. There is a very positive link between the teaching, the quality of learning and the progress pupils consequently make. Learning is at least good and mainly very good across all year groups. The provision of a specialist art teacher for all year groups enables a consistency in approach to which pupils respond well. The teaching is very well focused on ensuring pupil understanding through targeted introductions to lessons, questioning of pupils, and helpful reviews of their work. The art teacher communicates clearly with all pupils on an appropriate level and is ably supported on occasions by a learning support assistant-technician.

126. There is effective monitoring and support for pupils in lessons. Consequently, pupils of all levels of attainment are suitably challenged by the work, including those with additional educational needs and those who are gifted and talented. Positive critical praise enables pupils to develop self-knowledge and understand how work in progress can be refined and improved. Demonstrations are of good quality and reflect the personal skills, knowledge and understanding of the teacher. Oral assessment of pupils' work in class is consequently effective, and they have a clear understanding of the standards being achieved. However, although work is regularly marked, there is a need to provide pupils with written reasons for grades given, for example in their sketchbooks. Teachers also need to use a more analytical approach in making their assessments at the end of Year 8.

127. Pupils' attitudes towards art and their behaviour in class are at least good and mainly very good across all year groups. They show a positive approach and a willingness to succeed which results from their teacher's expectations of high standards. Pupils' creativity and imagination is stimulated through both the teaching and their own interaction in groupwork. Pupils listen to and respect each other's contributions, and older pupils feel free to make relevant comments and observations as part of a very good teaching and learning partnership.

128. There is good, positive management and clear artistic direction for the development of the department. However, whilst relevant schemes of work are available and used, there is a need to audit the planning against the programmes of study of the National Curriculum. This is to ensure that the specific needs of each year group are met as they progress through the school.

129. Since the last inspection, there have been improved links with the feeder schools and some improvements to the art area by adding sinks, worktops and display cases. However, the art room is still basically a converted corridor and circulation area between other classrooms and, as such, it is unsatisfactory. Workspace is significantly limited for larger classes and older pupils. Whilst the quantity of consumable resources is satisfactory, the quality of, for example, paint, paper and brushes needs to be improved if standards are to be maintained. The department does not have the necessary computer hardware or software in order to make its expected contribution to information technology in Years 7 and 8.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

130. Throughout the school, pupils' overall progress in design and technology in relation to their age and ability is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Consequently, towards the end of Year 6, and by the time they leave in Year 8, they are achieving at a level above that expected for their age. This is being achieved at a time of significant re-organisation of the management of the department.

131. All pupils are currently competently engaged in project work based on newly planned activities that include resistant materials, simple electronics, food and textiles. The great majority of pupils demonstrate a simple understanding appropriate to their age of designing and making, and are able to carry out a variety of tasks with confidence. For example, in Year 5 designing and making a greetings card of good quality; in Year 7 designing and making a medieval souvenir using fabrics they had carefully identified for suitable characteristics. Although teachers initially identify areas of experience, opportunities are created in both project work and short focused tasks that enable pupils to develop research skills and extend their ideas, both individually and in groups. Pupils are able to gather information from a variety of sources and, with guidance, analyse the information and produce accurate and relevant specifications for their project studies. Regular homework contributes to pupils' understanding of their work.

132. Communication skills are developed through the subject, and pupils have opportunities for some extended writing and oral work that is generally well presented and accurate. Pupils make good use of technical terminology and create useful displays of information; key words within food and textiles lessons also help support this development.

133. Their progress in designing skills and graphical work is variable. Sketches and drawings have both annotation and colour and are informative, but they are lacking in organisation and structure. Pupils need to extend the range of ideas they produce within their development work and provide more detail regarding construction and methods of making. There is in some cases an over-reliance on teacher support in these areas.

134. The use of information and communications technology applications in the department is very weak and pupils' information and communications technology skills in technology are under-developed. However, the recent introduction of computer-controlled embroidery design and manufacture into textiles is providing a valuable experience for pupils.

135. Pupils use tools and equipment confidently and safely, and are able to explain their use and organise their working sensibly and productively. The basic skills involved in marking out, measuring and modelling are mostly well executed, and pupils are aware of the need for accuracy in their work.

136. Cutting, shaping and simple assembly work is generally successful, and by Year 8 pupils produce work with some high quality features. They show much enthusiasm in checking what they have made against their early intentions and are given much encouragement to assess and evaluate their work, making suggestions for development or improvement. However, they need to be guided into establishing more objective criteria for evaluation.

137. The standard and quality of teaching is good. There were no unsatisfactory lessons seen and all but one of the lessons was judged to be good. Current teaching activities for all year

groups are suitably planned and the teaching materials are well presented. Teachers have a detailed knowledge of their subject and the content of lessons is technically correct. The organisation of lesson objectives is clear and precise and the level of work is matched to pupils' ability. Teachers employ a variety of strategies for teaching, have helpful resources available, and make good reference to everyday situations to link up with the technological concepts being taught.

138. Pupils' work is regularly marked, with helpful comments about their achievements and how they can improve them. Relationships in classes are good; there is a firm but friendly and supportive attitude towards pupils. This results in good teacher-pupil co-operation and a positive atmosphere in the subject areas.

139. Well considered demands are made of pupils. They are given opportunities to investigate and experiment within their work and encouraged to persevere. Lessons have good pace and pupils stay on the set task through to completion. Pupils with additional educational needs are well integrated and participate in the full course of activities; work is generally well matched to their needs and they are given good in-class support. Overall, pupils are fully committed and have good opportunities to extend their thinking and to work hard. Consequently, throughout the school, the vast majority make at least sound progress and some make good progress in their learning.

140. The administration of the department has not been efficient, and this has had an adverse effect on pupils' achievement. The holistic nature of design and technology study is undeveloped, and the absence of a comprehensive scheme of work restricts the development of the subject. Project work has lacked an appropriate balance between designing and making in different contexts and materials, and there are insufficient overall assessment of pupils' achievements on which to gauge the extent and quality of their learning in order to plan appropriately.

141. The current re-organised administration of the department has gone some way to address the identified deficiencies. It is providing a more coherent and appropriate experience for pupils in design and technology through the organisation and introduction of new project work.

GEOGRAPHY

142. The inspection revealed that pupils' achievements by the end of Year 8 are above the level expected for their age, with a few pupils achieving well above. This confirms the upper school's Year 9 teacher assessments of pupils who left Fairlands last year. Higher attaining pupils can research and use data in a logically organised manner to produce good quality extended writing. They extract relevant information from a range of sources, such as video recordings and newspaper reports on the Turkish earthquake. Year 7 pupils have good information and communication technology skills. They are able to access scanned images

and write informative descriptions as part of their work on the tropical rainforest. All pupils in Years 7 and 8 know how to collect, analyse and present data. The small numbers of lower attaining pupils have difficulty with tasks requiring extended writing.

143. Almost all pupils in Years 5 and 6 make at least satisfactory progress in their learning, and two thirds make good progress. By the end of Year 6 pupils are achieving standards which are higher than those generally found for their age. By this age they can use an atlas competently, label continents and oceans on outline maps, and sometimes use 6-figure grid references. Pupils in Year 5 use 4 figure grid references and draw clearly labelled plans in their study of Cheddar. All pupils have a sense of place and an understanding of what it is like to live in an Indian village, for example. Higher attaining pupils use simple technical vocabulary to express themselves accurately. Lower attaining pupils describe a journey to India but have more difficulty using specialist words.

144. All the teaching seen was either good or very good. Over half the teaching was very good and this was in Years 7 and 8. This standard of teaching ensures that all learning is good and the progress of pupils very good in almost two thirds of lessons.

145. Teachers make clear what pupils are to know, understand and be able to do with at the start of the lesson, and finish with a short summation. This reviews and reinforces learning and is especially useful for the lower attaining pupils. In the best lessons, teachers' questioning probes and challenges the thinking skills of all pupils. Many different teaching strategies and resources are used. This enthuses and motivates pupils. An outside speaker from India introduces the lessons on village life, and a talk by an eco-tourist leads work on the tropical rainforest. Field visits are organised in each year, for example to Cheddar, Chepstow and Bristol. These provide pupils with appropriate first-hand experiences on which to base their investigations and data collection.

146. The units of work have been recently reviewed. They reflect current information and effectively support the teaching of the non-specialists in the department. The units ensure that pupils become increasingly independent in their geographical enquiries, and include many extended writing tasks that successfully extend the more able pupils. In the best lessons, pupils are able to organise and work at their own level on different tasks. In comparatively less successful lessons, teaching is too directed and leaves insufficient time for pupils' own or small group investigations.

147. The size and furnishings of one specialist room does not lend itself easily to group work. Pupils with additional educational needs make good progress in relation to their ability, especially when the support assistant attends. Their teachers know them well and recognise their needs. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are extremely positive in all lessons. The planned curriculum gives pupils many opportunities to develop their numeracy and information and communication technology skills. However, there are no computers in the specialist humanities rooms and classes are taken to the information technology base, which limits access to this aspect of the curriculum for larger classes.

148. Pupils' work is marked conscientiously and constructively, with helpful comments pointing out how they can improve. Nevertheless, more consistent use of the topic evaluation form would provide better information to pupils on their progress and targets.

149. The department is led by an enthusiastic specialist who has successfully addressed the items for development noted in the previous report. The attainment of pupils has improved and the more able are being given more challenging tasks. Units of work are relevant and the fieldwork programme is extensive and appropriate. There is need for the subject co-ordinator, who is also the head of humanities, to monitor, evaluate, and disseminate what is learned from the pool of expertise in the department.

HISTORY

150. History is taught as part of a humanities programme in which religious education, history and geography are taught in pairs. No history lessons were observed in Years 6 and 8 because the subject was not timetabled during the inspection week. Judgements are based on observation of lessons in Years 5 and 7. These lessons, together with a scrutiny of pupils' work, teachers' planning and discussion with teachers, indicate that achievement in history is good throughout the school. By the time they leave in Year 8, their attainment is above that expected for their age.

151. The management of learning is good. Pupils' progress through the school is secure, with the majority of pupils making good progress. The written work of pupils in all year groups shows that they develop a secure foundation of knowledge about life in the past. They understand the range of sources of evidence available and that some information about the past can be gained from a study of artefacts, written records or in portraits.

152. In Years 5 and 6, pupils are encouraged to acquire the essential skills of the historian, including the sequencing events to produce time lines and family trees. They can all compare aspects of life today with life in the past, and understand in particular the great difference between the lives led by rich and poor, for example in Tudor England. Pupils of all abilities are able to understand why Ancient Egypt was so dependent on the Nile, while pupils of the higher levels of attainment are able to use difficult sources of information. For example, contemporary paintings or evidence from the Mary Rose enable them to reach a high level of understanding of cause and consequence.

153. Pupils with additional educational needs make good progress because of the support from teachers. In all classes, they show a good understanding of why people chose to do things, for example to volunteer for the army in the Roman Empire. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 show a wide range of skills in writing about varied topics, including life in the Middle Ages and the experiences endured by slaves during the middle passage and at slave auctions.

154. The development of empathy with people in the past is a strong feature of class work, and all pupils learn to respect the people and technology of the past, for example in considering why Roman soldiers wore sandals. The essential skills of the historian are well established. However, other aspects of research, especially the comparison of different sources of evidence, require further development. Higher attaining pupils show knowledge of the history of their own area, and they all have the opportunity to visit important historical

sites, such as Isca Caerleon for their study of Britain as an outpost of the Roman Empire.

155. Links with other subjects are good. Pupils can describe figures in the history and mythology of Ancient Greece, and they know about the links between modern tourism and ancient sites. Artwork related to topics in history is very good, particularly in creative textile work on the Tudors and design work on Greek pottery. The majority of work is well presented and illustrated, indicating that pupils enjoy the subject and want to do well. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding, and a valuable contribution to the development of skills in literacy because of the range of tasks and the opportunity for extended writing in history. Computers and numerical information are used occasionally but, at present, there is insufficient development of information and communications technology and use of pupils' numeracy skills.

156. The teaching of history is good. More than half the lessons seen were good or better and there were no unsatisfactory lessons. One lesson was very good. Teachers are positive and enthusiastic about the subject and the range of topics covered is wide. Work is marked frequently, and effective assessment procedures have been developed. Long and medium term planning is good, and effective support is given to pupils with learning difficulties. The approach to the subject ensures that most pupils find the work interesting and challenging. However, there is not always suitable extension work for the gifted and talented pupils, and, in less successful lessons, all pupils use the same resources to attempt the same task. Good use is made of role play, drama and simulation games to extend pupils' learning. Pupils have the opportunity to add to their knowledge by their own research and from information collected on a variety of interesting visits for example to the Tutankhamen Exhibition in Dorchester. These visits supplement the available resources and help compensate for the limited accommodation available in school.

157. History is managed as part of a well run humanities department, which has ensured that there has been noticeable improvement in standards of work, assessment procedures and planning since the last inspection. There are particularly good links with other schools to ensure continuity and progression and to avoid duplication of topics covered. There is a clear focus on the development of all aspects of work in history, though as yet there is insufficient monitoring to ensure that all pupils have an equally rich experience of the subject, particularly as many classes are not taught by specialist historians. The management and teaching of history is successful in that pupils develop a good knowledge of life in the past and acquire the skills and interest to take their knowledge further.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

158. Pupils develop their capability in using information and communication technology mainly in lessons given specifically for this purpose. Pupils' progress in relation to their ages and abilities is never less than satisfactory and is mostly good. Towards the end of Year 6, pupils' attainment is mostly above that expected for their age.

159. Pupils show a good understanding of both the hardware and software they use, and almost all have confidence and show developing skills when using the keyboard for typing. They handle icons, menus and functions competently when loading required software from the network, and open and save files and retrieve information competently.

160. Pupils have learned to make good use of word processing, desktop publishing and spreadsheet packages. In particular, pupils in Years 6 and 8 have completed some valuable modelling tasks through spreadsheet activities. Useful work is undertaken in creating and using databases, with Year 5 pupils in particular demonstrating a good level of expertise in this area of work.

161. Work in files and on display shows a growing and clear strength in pupils' attainment in communicating information through word-processed text. Examples often include graphical images imported from a range of sources. Written work is of a good standard, and verbal reporting is clear and precise, with able to explain their approach to their project studies in an informed way.

162. Pupils also experience a basic introduction to using simple instructions to control events. This provision is of value but its content is not challenging enough and it does not give enough opportunities for applications in a variety of contexts. Nevertheless, overall pupils are involved in a demanding range of activities; they enjoy their information and communications technology courses and produce work of a good standard.

163. There is opportunity for pupils to develop information and communications technology skills through relevant activities in a range of contexts through other subjects, and some subject areas are able to take full advantage of this. They are well organised and effective. However, constraints relating to the availability and booking of the information and communications technology teaching area, and the limited equipment available in teaching areas, leads to inconsistent provision across the curriculum as a whole.

164. The standard of teaching in all years is good. All but one of the lessons seen was either good or very good and no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. About one in three of the lessons was judged to be very good. Staff have detailed knowledge of the work they are teaching, which means that they are able to deal competently with any difficulties that may arise with software and hardware, as well as pupils' enquiries. Teaching content is well prepared with clear objectives that have been well structured. The presentation of information is clear, uses relevant terminology and is appropriate to pupils' ages and ability. Prepared worksheets provide clear guidelines that support pupils' independent working. These attributes make a positive contribution to pupils' learning and the standards they achieve.

165. Staff provide very positive individual support for pupils, and teaching style is a good balance between clear and helpful instruction and hands-on experience. Relationships with pupils are interactive and productive. Pupils make enthusiastic and regular use of the ample extra-curricular provision.

166. The department is well managed on a day-to-day basis, with good co-ordination of the team implementing information and communications technology studies. There is a clear and detailed scheme of work reflective of requirements, which is taught well by staff. However, there is a need to improve the monitoring and assessment of pupils' progress in the subject, to

ensure that provision for foundation skills and experiences in other subjects make an effective and consistent contribution to pupils' development. There is a further need to review access to facilities in all subjects to ensure that effective use is made of all available equipment.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

167. Although there is no requirement for them to do so until Year 7, pupils study French in Year 6, and both French and German in Years 7 and 8. Their achievements by the end of Year 6 stand them in good stead for the work they do in Year 7. For example, in an imaginary shopping situation they can ask the price of various items and give appropriate responses; they know about French currency and its relationship to English currency. By Year 8, pupils' attainment in foreign languages is broadly in line with the levels found nationally for pupils in the equivalent age groups. Teacher assessments from the Upper School show that pupils who transfer from Fairlands continue to attain at levels which are in line with the national average. There is no significant difference between oral and written skills, or between attainment in French and German. Girls attain higher levels than boys, but the variation is no greater than that found nationally. Given that by the time they leave pupils have studied French for three years, the reason their attainments are broadly average, rather than higher, is that they study two languages from Year 7 with consequent reduced time and focus for both. Pupils do well to achieve at this level in two languages and the overall picture of their foreign language development is very healthy.

168. Indeed, pupils' progress in languages is, overall, good. In lessons it is at least satisfactory, and often good or very good. In Year 6, they quickly learn the basic vocabulary and grammatical structures of French, and begin to use the foreign language in speech and writing. In Years 7 and 8, many pupils develop greater accuracy and fluency in their oral work, and learn to communicate effectively in pairs with each other. In a small minority of cases, pupils do not progress consistently beyond the stage of repeating single words and phrases, with hesitant and unclear pronunciation.

169. Written work is mostly well presented, and by Year 8 reaches a satisfactory level of accuracy. There is, however, heavy reliance on copying and other prompts, and there are relatively few instances of extended writing that is creative or imaginative. Pupils with additional educational needs make good progress in the oral work and written aspects of the foreign language, despite the fact that teaching groups are large and there is no classroom support; this is because both the teaching and the match of tasks to the pupils' prior knowledge are good. Progress in German is equivalent to that in French, despite the lower allocation of time. This is because of the high quality of the teaching in German.

170. The quality of teaching is at least satisfactory and mostly good in all three year-groups; it is a strength of the department. Of the eight lessons seen, two were very good and five were good. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. The teachers have good subject knowledge, with a suitable command of the spoken language. They plan their lessons carefully, make clear to the pupils exactly what they are to know, understand and be able to do. They use a range of classroom strategies to sustain interest and reinforce learning and their management of the pupils is excellent. Pupils of all abilities are given opportunities to progress. Teaching is conducted predominantly in the foreign language and, in the majority of cases, this secures good oral responses from pupils, who become aware of their ability to

communicate in French or German. Occasionally in some lessons there is too much teacher direction, which limits the opportunities for pupils to make real linguistic progress. In some cases, the work is insufficiently challenging for the most able pupils. Information technology has yet to make a major impact on teaching and learning, though a start has been made. There is, overall, a marked enthusiasm for the subject, which teachers share with their pupils. Homework is set and marked regularly, with helpful and informative comment to the pupils.

171. The department is efficiently managed. The overall time allocation for the subject is satisfactory, but several classes have over 30 pupils, which makes it difficult for the teachers to give the level of individual attention that some pupils require. Accommodation and learning resources are good, apart from information technology, and a positive learning environment has been created.

172. There is a successful programme of visits to France, which reinforces the work done in school. Effective assessment procedures are being developed to enable the progress of each pupil to be closely monitored. Since the last inspection, there have been significant improvements in curriculum provision, in teaching and learning strategies, and in attainment, particularly in German. There are many strengths in the department, and a clear potential to raise the attainment of pupils further in both French and German.

MUSIC

173. In Years 5 and 6, pupils' work has many strengths and they make sound progress. Consequently, by the time they reach the end of Year 6 they are achieving at the level expected for their age. In music lessons, pupils sing songs with confidence, accuracy and a good tone. They play percussion instruments and keyboards with high levels of control. They are able to describe the music they hear, showing a growing musical understanding and vocabulary. For example, in a Year 5 lesson, pupils listened to television theme tunes and identified rhythm patterns, the instruments being used and the musical style. They went on to perform a short tune, adding instruments and changing the style to create a given mood. Most pupils are able to read from staff music notation with good accuracy.

174. During Years 7 and 8 pupils make good progress so that by the end of Year 8, pupils' attainment is above the level expected for their age. Pupils show a good ability to sing in parts, such as when performing a round. Many are able to play a range of tuned and untuned percussion instruments with sensitivity and a good understanding of musical style. More able pupils demonstrate higher levels of skill, for instance, playing a challenging independent musical part during a class performance of an Irish jig. Most pupils are able to maintain their own musical line while performing with a large group. Pupils with additional educational needs often achieve good results, such as making perceptive comments when listening to and comparing different pieces of music. Most pupils operate the electronic keyboards with great confidence, but overall information and communications technology skills are not fully developed through music.

175. Since the last inspection, the high attainment in music has been maintained. There have been significant improvements in some areas including improved long term planning and the development of a clear and useful assessment system.

176. Pupils throughout the school have good attitudes towards music. They behave well in lessons and are trustworthy, for instance when working in groups in practice rooms without the direct supervision of the teacher. Pupils show enjoyment in music lessons and are eager to engage in practical aspects of music making. Most pupils speak confidently when analysing musical examples or evaluating compositions and some ask as well as answer questions.

177. Of the seven lessons seen, four were good and three were very good. In the very good lessons, teaching shows clear planning and a progression of carefully chosen activities that engage pupils' interests, help them to sustain concentration, and give a sense of excitement about learning; consequently the pupils learn very well. They have a good range and variety of musical activities which usually involve pupils in playing instruments, singing and listening and responding to recorded music or their own compositions and performances. The well defined lesson structure and good use of time helps pupils to maintain a good pace of working. Lessons are well organised and managed, and there are good strategies for maintaining high standards of behaviour and reasonable noise levels. Suitable lesson objectives are noted in written planning, but are not always made clear to pupils. Most lessons have good opportunities for more able pupils to take on more challenging work and include good individual support to help less able pupils to make good progress. Skilful questioning helps to develop and assess pupils' knowledge and understanding.

178. The music curriculum is carefully planned through a range of units covering a wide range of musical techniques, styles and cultures. For example, pupils are given opportunities to compose using musical techniques, such as 'Theme and variation', and to identify and compose using elements of 'Ragtime' style, and learn about music from India.

179. The school offers an appropriate range of extra-curricular musical ensembles and other activities including choir, brass group and woodwind group. Musical productions form an important part of the work of the department. A wide range of instrumental lessons is available, and the proportion of pupils who take up these lessons is about twice the national average.

180. The quality and range of music resources is satisfactory, and many new instruments have been purchased since the last inspection. Although good use is made of the limited accommodation, it remains unsatisfactory because it restricts pupils' achievement. This is because the music room is too small for current class sizes and storage of larger instruments presents a problem. In addition, there are too few spaces available for pupils to work in small groups, and pupils have to carry large instruments outside and up and down stairs to access the few available spaces. The situation is particularly difficult when visiting instrumental teachers are in school. The use of information and communication technology to support learning in music is underdeveloped, due to the lack of computer facilities in the department and the limited facilities available on many keyboards.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

181. Pupils make sound progress through the school and their attainment by the end of Year 8 is broadly in line with that expected for their age. Boys in Years 7 and 8 have good ball control, can perform different types of passes in football, and understand the importance of creating space. Nevertheless, they lack consistency performing these skills accurately in the

game. Girls attain well above standards expected nationally in hockey, and have very good knowledge of positional play for their age. Boys and girls have above average levels of fitness and can prepare for exercise independently. Pupils support one another well in the small group tasks set in the fitness circuit.

182. By the time the pupils are aged 11 years their attainment is average for their age. They understand how to warm up and stretch their bodies ready for activity. In dance, girls and boys are able to move in space with an awareness of others. They respond well to creative and co-operative tasks but their movements lack quality and body tension. In netball, girls are able to throw over short distances accurately. However, their footwork is insecure when in competitive situations.

183. The attainment of some individual pupils and teams is very good. They play football, hockey, netball, rugby, cricket and athletics at district and county levels, and two girls represent national teams.

184. The quality of teaching is mostly sound, with one third of lessons being good or very good. Only one lesson observed during the inspection was unsatisfactory and this was largely because the lesson was not structured to ensure pupils made sufficient progress. Learning is sound overall, and in one third of lessons pupils make good or very good progress.

185. Teachers' recapitulation of recent work at the beginning of lessons assists pupils to both recall and consolidate earlier learning and to make sound progress. When the range of ability demands more flexibility than whole class teaching, the class is divided into smaller ability groups, for example in boys' football. This allows pupils of all abilities to make the same amount of progress, helping the less able and extending the more gifted pupils. Pupils with additional educational needs make good progress when the learning assistant attends the lesson.

186. Relationships with pupils are mostly very good. Pupils are prepared to listen and try hard to achieve new targets set by their teachers. All lessons provide opportunities for pupils to learn about health and fitness in the form of warm-up and cool-down periods, and to show independence in their participation in this element. Teaching does not always address all areas of the National Curriculum, thereby denying pupils the chance to progress in their planning, performing and evaluative skills. There needs to be an appropriate balance in each lesson. For example, a few dance lessons only address the planning element and miss opportunities for pupils to look at and evaluate their own and the work of others. The use of additional sources of reference, perhaps in the form of activity sheets or work cards, would promote learning more fully.

187. Teachers have less subject expertise in dance than in games. Most lessons in dance are satisfactory, but in the less successful lessons, the allocation of time to different sections of the lesson is unbalanced, for instance with the teacher talking too much and leaving insufficient time for pupils' own movement.

188. Pupils' attitudes to physical education are very good. They look smart and are well prepared to concentrate and work in their lessons. The large numbers who attend the many extra-curricular activities provided by the department demonstrate their enthusiasm for the subject.

189. The curriculum includes gymnastics, dance, games and athletics for all year groups. There is satisfactory provision for Years 7 and 8, but this relies on the feeder schools to teach swimming in Years 3 and 4. This is closely monitored to ensure statutory requirements are met. The very good provision of team games and outdoor activities as part of the extra-curricular programme is appreciated and well attended by the pupils. The small hall is the only indoor facility. It is used for drama, assemblies, examinations, dining and all dance, gymnastics, and wet weather lessons. This restricts curriculum planning, limits the variety of teaching strategies used with large groups, and prohibits specific indoor games. It is difficult for teaching to have sufficient pace and rigour to ensure the good progress of all pupils when facilities are so limiting.

190. The subject co-ordinator sets clear routines and procedures, and has successfully addressed the issues from the previous inspection. However, the indoor accommodation is inadequate. It prevents the implementation of a broad and balanced curriculum and limits the progress of pupils in their planned activity when the weather is inclement. Assessment is now well established and linked to the programmes of study. These would support the teaching more if they were further developed to include the use of clear intentions for learning, variety of teaching methods and risk assessment criteria.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

191. At the start of the current academic year, the school introduced the new locally agreed syllabus for religious education. Planning is now ready to ensure its implementation across all year groups and the school meets statutory requirements. The subject is taught in rotation with history and geography within the humanities department. At the time of the inspection, no religious education modules were being taught in Years 6 or 7. Judgements on the standards reached by those pupils are made based on discussions with staff, an extended scrutiny of pupils' work and interviews with groups of pupils in Years 6 and 7.

192. The attainment of pupils in Year 6 is in line with the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. However, whilst younger pupils can, for example, consider what is 'special' to them about chosen or sacred objects and express their own personal thoughts and feelings satisfactorily, they are generally more secure on factual than interpretative work. They also show a better knowledge and understanding about Christianity than other world religions. Pupils do well when they talk about, for example, the story of Noah, and explain the symbolism of the rainbow or the dove in more spiritual, New Testament terms. However, although they understand the symbolism of the cross to Christians, they can only provide descriptive facts about similar symbolic artefacts from other faiths rather than their value or meaning to a believer. Attainment overall in Years 5 and 6 is also affected by a shortage of curriculum time for the subject. This is some 15 per cent less over a year than that recommended by the agreed syllabus. There is insufficient consistency in approach and coverage of religious education in relation to pupils' other humanities work. For example, pupils' work in exercise books sometimes lacks cohesion, and it is difficult to identify the real focus and intention of the units studied.

193. However, pupils' achievements in their final year at the school are above the expectations of the agreed syllabus. Work in lessons based on the agreed syllabus unit, 'The

Life of Christ through Art,' was especially impressive. Pupils made good use of their critical and analytical skills to identify the portrayal of greed and avarice in a painting of two tax collectors. They reflected well on the significance of the work, let their thoughts flow, and used experimental language effectively for descriptive purposes to write a short piece on 'A Journey through a Tax Collector's Soul.' The resulting work was shared enthusiastically by the class as a whole. Good evidence for consideration of the thoughts and feelings of others was also seen in the sample of pupils' work, for example, consideration of the thoughts of the Virgin Mary on the birth of Jesus arising out of Boticelli's 'Mystic Nativity'.

194. At interview, Year 7 pupils showed a much broader understanding of other religions than was evident in Year 6 pupils. For example, they know about the panch kakkar and what these five 'K's' mean to the initiated Sikh, and can explain the meaning of the Hindu festival of Diwali. They can make parallels between the approach of Guru Nanak to the 'untouchables' with Jesus' approach to lepers. They consider matters of good and evil and interpretations of God as a single or multi-faceted entity.

195. Teaching in Year 5 is, overall, satisfactory. One lesson was good and the remainder were satisfactory. Teaching in Year 8 is good; one lesson seen was very good and the other was good. As a result, pupils' learning in Year 8 is good. Overall, pupils with additional educational needs make good progress. However, more able pupils in Years 5 and 6 have insufficient opportunities to extend their thinking and skills.

196. There are no subject specialist teachers with religious education qualifications, although in-service training has enabled teachers to start teaching the new agreed syllabus with confidence. The teaching in Year 8 was particularly enhanced by subject specialist knowledge of fine art, which significantly improved the teaching of the art-focused unit of the agreed syllabus. In the best teaching in both years, teachers questioned pupils skilfully to focus their minds and enable them to think about and consider religious, moral and ethical issues. Pupils' learning was enhanced though the use of CD-ROM research material on Christianity and Sikhism.

197. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons and interviews in Years 5 and 6 are satisfactory. In Years 7 and 8, they are mainly good and sometimes very good. Pupils in all year groups are attentive, listen politely to each other's contributions in discussion and are keen to become involved in open debate.

198. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, standards in the subject are more secure and pupils are more active in lessons. Whilst day-to-day assessment of pupils' work in class is satisfactory, actual marking in books is not as helpful as it could be, for example by making clear how work could be improved or explaining why a particular grade has been given. Pupils are not made aware of their achievements in relation to the expected levels set out in the Agreed Syllabus, and nor are their parents.