

INSPECTION REPORT

LATHOM HIGH SCHOOL

Skelmersdale

LEA area: Lancashire

Unique reference number: 119774

Headteacher: Mr D. Bruce

Reporting inspector: Mr R. Drew
7281

Dates of inspection: 10th – 13th September 2001

Inspection number: 220967

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

© Crown copyright 2001

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Glenburn Road Skelmersdale West Lancashire
Postcode:	WN8 6JN
Telephone number:	01695 725653
Fax number:	01695 725654
Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Tom Moorcroft
Date of previous inspection:	22 nd November 1999

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
7281	R. Drew	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and pupils' achievements How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9710	R. Burgess	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
18447	R. L. Cohen	Team inspector	History	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
11838	D. J. Cronin	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
14596	A. Fiddian-Green	Team inspector	Religious education Equality of opportunity Provision for pupils with special educational needs	
10209	V. J. Gormally	Team inspector	Art and design	
31100	G. Hunter	Team inspector	Mathematics	
31963	M. Padmore	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Design and technology	
19214	G. Price	Team inspector	English Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	
10564	J. Tomlinson	Team inspector	Geography	
21866	D. C. Tracey	Team inspector	Science	
7222	A. Watson	Team inspector	Music	
12972	T. K. Weaden	Team inspector	Physical education	

The inspection contractor was:

Power House Inspections

Grasshoppers
1 Anglesey Close
Chasetown
Burntwood
Staffordshire
WS7 8XA

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	12
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	16
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	18
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	21
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	22
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	23
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	27
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	28
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN	

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Lathom School is a smaller than average 11 to 16 secondary school with 646 pupils on roll. It is situated on the northern side of the town of Skelmersdale, serving much of the town and some outlying villages. The vast majority of pupils are of white UK heritage, with no pupils having English as an additional language. Pupils as a whole are significantly disadvantaged socially and economically and the proportion claiming free school meals is twice the national average. The prior attainment of pupils is well below average. About 5 per cent of pupils have statements of special educational needs - more than double the proportion found nationally- and a total of 124 pupils are on the special educational needs register.

Since the last inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed. Many other senior and middle management posts holders are also recent appointments. The school is participating in a range of national initiatives, especially Excellence in Cities.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The level of the school's overall effectiveness is now good. Although standards of attainment in work seen during the inspection are below average, pupils achieve satisfactorily. Teaching is consistently good and leadership and management is excellent. With spending per pupil high, value for money is satisfactory.

What the school does well

- Teaching and learning are good. In religious education, teaching is consistently very good.
- Leadership and management from the headteacher and key staff are excellent. The governing body fulfils its role well.
- There is a well-balanced curriculum, containing excellent personal health and social education provision.
- Care for pupils' welfare and their personal and academic progress is good.
- Relationships are good and oppressive behaviour minimised. Both factors have a positive effect on learning.

What could be improved

- Standards of attainment in tests and examinations are well below average.
- Attendance, especially in Year 11, is poor.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) provision does not fully meet requirements.
- There is too little scope for independent learning by pupils, both in lessons and in the library.
- There are unsatisfactory attitudes to school amongst a minority of pupils.

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 1999. It was judged to have serious weaknesses because several aspects of leadership, management, teaching and the curriculum were less than satisfactory. Very good overall improvement has been made since then in a relatively short time. The school's strengths now outweigh its limitations, and it is no longer judged to have 'serious weaknesses'.

In terms of action taken on the key issues of the previous inspection, leadership and management at every level have been transformed and the management of financial matters is now secure and well directed. Teaching has shown excellent improvement and learning is now good. All subjects now have satisfactory leadership and suitable schemes of work, though ICT does not yet have the resources or staff expertise to teach all aspects of the subject. Provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development have both improved very well, and assessment arrangements are also markedly better.

In addition, good progress has been made on other aspects of school life which were not key issues in 1999. For instance there has been good improvement in the Special Needs department since the last report, particularly in bringing special needs issues onto the agendas of departmental and management meetings. The capacity of the staff to sustain further improvement is excellent.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	1999	2000	
GCSE examinations	E	E	E	C	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

Pupils enter the school with standards of attainment which are, on balance, well below average.

At the end of Year 9 in tests in English, mathematics and science, the results in 2000 were well below average compared with those for all schools, though broadly average when compared with results in schools with similar intakes. However, work seen during the inspection was generally better than this. Overall, it was below rather than well below average. In some subjects, it matches national standards, notably in art and design, geography, physical education, religious education and modern languages.

On balance, this represents good achievement for pupils as a whole across Years 7 to 9. Pupils with special educational needs and those deemed gifted and talented also make good progress.

At the end of Year 11, results in GCSE examinations are well below the national average for all schools, while broadly matching results in schools with a similar intake. Results have improved marginally in the short period since the last inspection, especially in terms of lower grade (D to G) passes. The school consistently meets the targets set for it by the local education authority. In recent examination results, standards in art and design, music and religious education have been average, while those for French and statistics were above average. In English, mathematics, science, history and geography they were well below average.

In the work seen during the inspection, standards for Year 11 pupils were, on balance, below average rather than well below. Standards were above average in aspects of physical education and in GCSE language courses. Religious education, art and design, music, geography and physical education in general match national standards. In mathematics, standards are well below average.

Achievement across Years 10 and 11 for pupils in general is satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs and gifted and talented pupils also make satisfactory progress. Girls outperform boys at GCSE by a slightly wider margin than the national one.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Satisfactory. For the great majority of pupils, school is viewed very positively and they are keen to be involved in its activities and wear its uniform. A minority, declining since the last inspection, brings a negative, uncooperative manner into school. Pupils' attitudes and values have improved considerably since the last inspection and there is now a consensus amongst pupils that they are in school to work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Satisfactory overall. Behaviour has improved since the last inspection. Pupils behave well in the majority of lessons and are well behaved around school. Their conduct in assemblies was exemplary. Exclusions are higher than average, but used effectively to ensure improved behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are good. Teachers treat pupils with respect, which in turn earns them respect even from most of the pupils who occasionally have to be disciplined. Personal development is satisfactory. For pupils willing to take up all opportunities offered to them, it is good.
Attendance	Poor. The school has worked well to try and improve attendance levels, but they are still too low especially in Year 11. The issues of absences for holidays and unauthorised absences are significant: alongside poor attitudes amongst a minority, they hinder pupils' progress in Years 10 and 11.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11
Quality of teaching	Good	Good

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.

Teaching in the school as a whole is good. There was satisfactory or better teaching in virtually all the lessons seen, and a significant proportion was excellent or very good.

Teaching is good overall in English, mathematics and science. In religious education, teaching is very good. Mathematics teaching is very good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In all other subjects, teaching is good.

Pupils learn well in the school as a whole and especially well in religious education lessons.

Across the school, teachers are particularly good at planning well-structured lessons and, on balance, they manage pupils very well. Teachers' subject knowledge is also a great strength in enhancing learning, especially basic skills. Pupils' learning is effective in many respects: the pace at which they learn is consistently good and they are well aware of the standards they are reaching. While satisfactory at present, the ability to work independently is not as strong as other aspects of learning. In Years 10 and 11, the learning of a minority suffers through absences from school.

Pupils with special educational needs are taught well across the school and their learning is good. Teachers make satisfactory provision in their lessons for gifted and talented pupils, but, in line with existing plans, will soon give this greater focus.

Literacy skills are taught well; numeracy teaching is satisfactory, but the general skills of ICT are not incorporated satisfactorily into day-to-day teaching.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The full range of national curriculum subjects and religious education are in place; vocational courses and work-related learning enhance Years 10 and 11, as does excellent personal health and social education provision. ICT provision is not yet meeting statutory requirements.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. This aspect of the school's work is very well organised and pupils receive very good support from special educational needs staff. More support assistants are needed in lessons to maximise the help given to pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good, and much improved since the last inspection in terms of spiritual development. Moral development is very well promoted. Scope for social development is good. Cultural development is satisfactory.

cultural development	
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Day-to-day care and security of pupils are well managed. The monitoring of pupils' personal development is very good. Academic progress is well monitored.
How well does the school work in partnership with parents	Partnership with parents is satisfactory. Many parents are very supportive of all the school is doing, while a significant minority are not easily persuaded to be actively involved in their children's education.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The headteacher has had a profoundly beneficial impact on the school in a very short period of time. Vision is excellent and planning exemplary. Through wise appointments and positive encouragement all managers are performing well and there is a very impressive shared commitment to succeed. The calibre and deployment of teaching staff is good overall, but additional specialists are needed in art and design and music. Learning support staff are also good in quality, but too few in number. Accommodation is good overall, but the very well-maintained library is too small and its resources inadequate. ICT resources whilst improved since the last inspection are still inadequate.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Marked improvement has taken place since the last inspection. Governors are far more informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses, better organised, and well able to offer sound strategic advice to the school. Aspects of ICT and the governors' report to parents fail to meet statutory requirements.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The school is now very adept at analysing its performance and has shown itself to be capable of marked improvement on major issues over a brief two-year period.
The strategic use of resources	Financial matters have been set on a very firm footing and resources are now deployed very efficiently to support educational priorities. The school make effective comparisons between different suppliers of services.

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 make good progress. • The school is very approachable. • Expectations are high • Teaching is good. • Leadership is strong • The school helps their children to mature well. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of homework. • The information they receive about their children's progress. • Links between parents and school. • Behaviour of pupils.

Parents' responses are very positive, but only 10 per cent of parents returned their questionnaires and a very low number attended the parents' evening. Inspectors fully agree with the strengths identified by parents and found many additional areas in which the school is being successful. Generally homework is being used more effectively than average in this school; behaviour is satisfactory overall and good for many pupils, but a declining minority do still behave unacceptably at times. The situation is much better than during the previous inspection. Information to parents is satisfactory, as are links with parents in general. The school is seeking to improve liaison and is already considered to be very approachable by parents. Parents would like to improve links with the school and inspectors endorse this.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils enter the school with well below average attainment; they make good progress across years 7 to 9 and satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11.
2. At the end of Year 9, standards of work seen during inspection are below, but no longer well below, national averages for all schools. Published results for tests in English, mathematics and science were well below the average for all schools in 2000 and previous years, though the school's figures for 2001 indicate some improvement. Compared with schools with a similar intake, the 2000 results for these three subjects are broadly average.
3. In English, all but the highest-attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 have difficulty in writing fluently and accurately. In Year 9 lower-attaining pupils in one lesson had difficulty starting to write about their early childhood memories and needed the teacher's help. Higher-attaining pupils are able to produce fluent and engaging work when writing about literature or when asked to write as a character but many are uncertain about paragraphing.
4. In mathematics, the work of higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 showed that very few of them are capable of obtaining levels 7 or 8 in the National Curriculum tests. They handle geometric constructions well and can use tree diagrams to find probabilities, but their problem-solving skills are not yet well developed, nor are they strong at estimating answers. Middle-attaining pupils have difficulty remembering basic formulae, such as that for the circumference of a circle, and are not able to manipulate algebraic equations readily. Many can, however, find the radius and circumference of a circle if they are reminded of the formulae. Lower-attaining pupils produce work that is about three years below the average standard nationally. Basic numerical work is of a below-average standard overall, but is improving over time.
5. In science, pupils arrive with limited practical skills and their knowledge and understanding of biology, chemistry and physics is restricted. However, standards improve steadily across this age range in all the attainment targets, due to good teaching. Practical and investigative skills also improve, but pupils still lack some basic skills in this area. For example, some pupils in a higher-attaining Year 8 group did not know the correct technique for using measuring cylinders and this resulted in inaccuracies in their measurements. However, some groups do achieve higher standards in their work. For example, Year 9 pupils were able to test successfully factors that effect photosynthesis in plants.
6. All other subjects show improved standards in the work seen at the end of Year 9. In history, design and technology, music and ICT, standards are below average, having been well below at the start of Year 7. In art and design, physical

education, geography, modern languages and religious education, attainment matches national standards by the end of Year 9.

7. This represents good achievement across Years 7 to 9 for the majority of subjects and satisfactory achievement in English, mathematics, science, design and technology and ICT. The good and very good quality of so much teaching is a major reason for the gains being made by pupils; another is their generally positive approach to learning. While it is too early for some recent improvements to be properly reflected in published results for Year 9, the substantially better teaching and management of departments (especially their schemes of work and use of assessment) is already having a beneficial impact in the classroom.

8. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress across Years 7 to 9. The school is just beginning to implement a formal policy for gifted and talented pupils. Where they have been identified, their progress is good. In general terms, their needs are met well by good lesson planning, which includes extension work for very high attaining pupils. The strategies for encouraging even better progress amongst such pupils are due for implementation during the course of this year.

9. The school's newly introduced assessment and target-setting system is already helping pupils to achieve well. For even better progress to take place, the practice of some departments and of other schools of sharing targets early in Year 7 and across all subjects is essential.

10. Boys attain less well than girls at the end of Year 9, but the gap is no greater than that found nationally. Nevertheless, many teachers are incorporating strategies to involve boys more effectively in their lessons and a full policy on dealing with boys' under-achievement is about to be launched by the school.

11. At the end of Year 11, the standards of work seen during the inspection were below average. These pupils are generally making satisfactory progress. For much of this two-year period, achievement is good, but the declining commitment and attendance of a significant minority undermine their standards and the schools' overall performance in Year 11. Results at GCSE reflect this. They are well below average compared with all schools in 2000 and in the preceding two years. This is true in terms of points scores and the proportion gaining five or more A* to C passes (27 per cent in 2000). An upward trend is beginning amongst pupils scoring mostly D to G grade passes. Compared with schools of a similar intake, the 2000 results are at least average and for A* to G grades well above average. GCSE results over the last six years have fluctuated broadly in line with changes in the prior attainment of different year groups. However, since the last inspection, points scores have risen more rapidly than nationally and the school has met the targets set for it by the local education authority each year. The school remains committed to raising and exceeding them significantly as changes in teaching and learning, management and ethos become even more firmly established.

12. Some subjects are enabling pupils to attain particularly well. Results in modern languages, though for a limited number of pupils, are above the national average. In art and design, music and religious education, results broadly match

national standards. In the work seen by inspectors, aspects of physical education were above average and geography standards were average.

13. For several subjects, notably English, mathematics, science, history and geography, results in GCSE examinations were well below national average in 2000. The first three of these face a hard task in seeking to raise standards since all pupils, of every ability and attitude, are entered for these subjects. Poor attendances in Year 11 affect their results noticeably. However, management is now good or better in all three, and teaching good in English and science and satisfactory in mathematics. Overall these three subjects have seen significant improvement in provision since the previous inspection. Appropriate action is being taken to raise standards. History and geography both received serious criticism in the previous inspection report and in both subjects marked improvements have taken place. Standards in the work of current Year 11 are significantly higher than those in recent GCSE results.

14. For Years 10 and 11 as a whole, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. For several subjects, achievement or progress is good: this is true for religious education, physical education, science, music and geography. There is satisfactory achievement in all other subjects.

15. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and reach good standards relative to their previous attainment. They achieve well when their progress is measured against the specific targets set in their individual educational plans. The specialist lessons in the special needs rooms provide individual tuition in literacy and numeracy, which enable this good progress, and careful records are kept. There is a comprehensive testing programme on, for example, reading ages, which shows at a glance how much progress an individual pupil has made. Gifted and talented pupils make satisfactory progress.

16. Girls attain at a higher level than boys and generally make better progress. While the gap in attainment over the four years 1997 to 2000 is no greater than the national one, the school is already using a range of strategies to raise boys' achievement. These have not been in place long enough for their impact to be assessed.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

17. Pupils have positive attitudes to school and their standards of behaviour are satisfactory. Pupils' ability to show initiative and demonstrate personal responsibility is satisfactory and relationships in the school are good.

18. Pupils' attitudes to lessons are predominantly good throughout the school. Since the last inspection, pupils have shown a growing interest and involvement in their learning and in the extra-curricular activities that are offered. They respond well when the purpose of a lesson is clear and are interested and well motivated to succeed. This is the case in the great majority of lessons observed. However, there is a significant minority, especially amongst older pupils, who show little enthusiasm for school and fail to attend regularly. In some lessons, pupils are too passive and

contribute too little, whilst in a small minority of lessons in all years, the unsatisfactory or poor attitudes of a few pupils disrupt learning for all. In many lessons, pupils are keen to learn, and are motivated by their sense of achievement, although sometimes there is a tendency to give up too easily. Excellent attitudes were seen in a Year 9 art and design lesson, where pupils concentrated throughout the lesson, absorbed in a drawing lesson related to the work of Léger; in Year 8 mathematics, some excellent teaching engendered total concentration resulting in much well thought-out work during the lesson.

19. Behaviour in the school is satisfactory. Some exemplary behaviour was seen in a whole school assembly during the inspection. Behaviour around the school, arriving and leaving, and in the dining area, is orderly. In lessons it is usually good. However, some pupils, particularly, but not exclusively, lower-attaining boys, display challenging behaviour. For example, a Year 11 modern languages lesson was marred by the challenging behaviour of a few pupils who supplied facetious responses to the teacher. Pupils generally respond well to their teachers. In religious education, the enthusiasm and high expectations of the teacher resulted in a well-focused discussion on euthanasia in Year 11 and an excellent response by Year 7 pupils in an introduction to God in Christianity. Fixed-term exclusions over the past two years have risen as a direct result of the adoption of more stringent responses to aggressive or abusive behaviour.

20. The atmosphere of the school is largely free of oppressive behaviour, and sexism or racism are not evident. Although some bullying occurs, it is well handled and is not an issue for most pupils. Pupils understand the impact of their actions on others, and show suitable respect for other people's feelings, values and beliefs. They accept the sanctions imposed when they disregard the discipline code. In assemblies and conversation with adults, they are respectful and polite.

21. Pupils' ability to show initiative and personal responsibility is satisfactory. Those who are requested to act as prefects and monitors do so willingly and well, but do not volunteer for these positions. Pupils in all years are represented on the School Council. Year 7 pupils value the buddy system, which ensures that they have a senior pupil to whom they can turn when necessary. Relationships in the school are predominantly good. Pupils work well together in pairs and in groups. In science, some good working relationships between pupils and teachers were evident, which boosted pupils' confidence to succeed. Very good relationships between tutors and the pupils in their group were evident.

22. Overall, pupils with special educational needs form good relationships with specialist teachers, support staff and each other when they are in the special needs rooms. The challenges in work are usually very well matched to pupils' specific needs and they quickly make progress and feel a sense of success. Furthermore, this results in very good motivation and concentration. Personal development is good overall in this specialist department and is supported by good quality education plans for each pupil.

23. Attendance is poor and well below the national average. Unauthorised absences are above the national average. Only Year 7 (the current Year 8 pupils)

had an attendance rate above 90 per cent in the last academic year. Historically, attendance has been particularly poor amongst pupils in years 10 and 11, especially in year 11. Holidays taken in term time, fixed-period exclusions, and short periods of absence for illness or medical appointments are the reasons provided to explain most of the authorised absences. Some families do not accord education its proper value and condone absences that affect the education of a significant minority of pupils. Some pupils are beginning to respond to the rewards given for good attendance and in the last year, fourteen pupils achieved attendance records of 100 per cent.

24. Most pupils are punctual to lessons, which during the inspection started promptly. However a significant number of pupils arrive late in the morning, during the registration period, sometimes, but not always, due to irregularities in the bus services.

25. Since the last inspection, positive attitudes and satisfactory standards of behaviour have been maintained. A significant minority however, still display unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour in school, which hinders learning for all in some classes. Personal development of all pupils remains satisfactory and good relationships, both between pupils and teachers and between groups of pupils, have been sustained. Exclusions have risen since the last inspection due to a changed response to poor behaviour.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

26. The quality of teaching in the school as a whole is good. This represents very marked improvement since the previous inspection, especially across Years 7 to 9. Of the lessons seen, 99 per cent had teaching that was satisfactory or better. This included about 5 per cent with excellent teaching, 26 per cent in which it was very good and about 39 per cent with good teaching. The quality was satisfactory in 28 per cent and only in less than 2 per cent of lessons was it less than satisfactory.

27. For Years 7 to 9, the pattern is similar to that of the school as a whole, although the school's very small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching is concentrated here. In Years 10 and 11, all teaching was satisfactory or better. As a result of good teaching, pupils learn well. The quality of learning is good across the school as a whole. It is also good both for the Year 7 to 9 classes and those in Years 10 and 11.

28. While staff changes have taken place at the school since the last inspection, the good quality of teaching and learning owe more to changes of style. The school's recently introduced but effectively implemented teaching and learning policy provides crucial guidance on lesson structure, teaching strategies, use of rewards and sanctions, assessment and target-setting, use of homework and many other practical considerations. Staff use it consistently well. As a result, planning is a very good feature of teaching across the school, and it allows the equally impressive subject expertise of teachers to be fully exploited. Teachers manage their pupils very well, using maximum encouragement and very good use of praise. In nearly every instance of unsatisfactory response from pupils, the staff adhere fully to the agreed policy in dealing with problems which may arise.

29. Compared with schools nationally, teachers already show high expectations of pupils and use a good range of strategies in their lessons. In order to raise standards even further, there is scope for increasingly requiring pupils to work independently. Learning is already good overall, but is, in line with school policy, quite tightly structured and heavily directed by teachers. This policy has successfully reduced the unsatisfactory behaviour and poor learning typical of too many pupils at the time of the last inspection, but it limits the scope for many pupils to work in an investigative way for any length of time. Similarly, the small size and inadequate resources of the school library hinder the growth of pupils' research skills.

30. Most pupils have a good grasp of the standards they are reaching or could aspire to, and the pace of their learning is good, due to consistently strong pace in teaching. In Year 11 especially, a minority of pupils with poor attendance levels weaken their own learning quality. Their absence from lessons is an obvious factor, but the lack of underlying commitment to study revealed by absences is also a problem. The school has successfully reduced this factor since the previous inspection and created an atmosphere in which the vast majority of pupils are now keen to learn. This change needs to extend to the small minority awaiting transformation.

31. The improvement in teaching and learning since the last inspection has been particularly marked in some subjects. In 1999, teaching was unsatisfactory in some year groups or for the school as a whole in art and design, geography, history, drama and modern languages. It is now good in all of these. In addition, it remains strong in physical education, and good teaching has come to typify virtually all other subjects. The quality of religious education teaching across the school and of mathematics teaching in Years 7 to 9 is particularly strong. In Years 10 and 11, the teaching of mathematics is satisfactory, while in all other subjects it is at least good. Astute appointments have been made at head of department level in many of these subjects and this has done much to transform the quality of teaching. The initiative and effort of subject teachers has added to the benefits brought about through effective monitoring by senior managers.

32. In many lessons, the strengths of teaching and learning combine with great effect. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson with excellent teaching, lower-attaining pupils were helped to understand the themes of 'Romeo and Juliet' because of the teacher's skilful linking of the play to current events in Northern Ireland. Excellent planning ensured that all pupils could be active in the lessons and could move on to new tasks while their concentration was still high. They used the modern-day example to discover the emotionally loaded vocabulary and attitudes to make their acting powerful and to raise their understanding of the text.

33. In a Year 7 physical education lesson, teaching was very good overall for several reasons. There was a highly effective introduction and a clear structure to the next lesson, but more scope than usual was given to pupils to explore things individually and in pairs. As a result, a significant proportion produced imaginative gymnastic sequences of a very high order and the whole class reached above-average standards of attainment.

34. In an art and design lesson with Year 9, teaching reflected very good preparation. Clear slots of time were allocated to a brief introduction and a review of recent homework and projects. The latter were skilfully linked to the objectives of the lesson. Throughout the well-organised lesson, there were frequent changes of activity and regular encouragement given to pupils: this held their attention well and helped ensure very positive behaviour.

35. A mathematics lesson in Year 11 illustrated many strong features shared by other good lessons. In addition, the teacher revealed a very accurate awareness of pupils' prior attainment, and set very challenging work based on that knowledge. There was a rigorous adherence to key principles in the school teaching and learning policy, so that pupils were well versed in not answering out of turn, at reviewing previous work and at expecting homework well before the end of the lesson and writing it into their planners. Overall, teaching was excellent.

36. Very rarely, however, the quite challenging attitudes of some pupils prove too difficult for teachers to manage, especially if they are new to the school or the profession. Crucial aspects of agreed policy are not followed to the letter in these circumstances, notably the orderly entry to the room and establishing the initial

silent activity. Further support needs to be available to help staff make quick and correct decisions about the management of pupils under very difficult circumstances. A very positive feature of improvements since the previous inspection is the way some staff who formerly taught some unsatisfactory lessons have been enabled to teach securely and effectively through this inspection.

37. The quality of teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs is good, with some that is very good, and gives rise to good progress and standards relative to pupils' previous attainment. Teachers understand how to use their expertise and resources to make learning accessible and challenging. They have a very strong insight into the needs of the pupils, and as a result they often enrich the relationships already set up by enquiring after family or social events in pupils' lives. The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills is very strong and well linked to the use of the computers, with the specialist software that the school uses. Pupils are usually well motivated and they concentrate well, enjoying their successes. Teaching is very well planned so that pupils learn in small but challenging steps. Overall, these specialist teachers use very good methods and resources, which enable pupils with special needs to learn effectively. Learning support assistants give good support, which has a positive impact on pupils' attainment in mainstream classes. Teachers take account of the targets set out in individual education plans, and these contain clear targets and are sufficiently practical for subject teachers to implement when support staff are not present. The links with literacy and numeracy teaching strategies are good.

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

38. Overall, curricular provision is good.

39. The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is good. It has breadth and balance and it fulfils statutory requirements. Pupils are taught all subjects of the National Curriculum together with religious education and personal social and health education. Pupils have discrete lessons in drama, and there is broad coverage of work in art and design, where pupils have opportunities to work in two and three dimensions. In physical education, dance is well provided for boys. In music, there is a good range of quality keyboards in a discrete music technology suite. There are, however, some weaknesses in provision at this stage of pupils' learning. Several subjects, such as English, history, art and design and geography, do not offer sufficient opportunities for pupils to engage in ICT and the key skills provision associated with this subject are, despite recent advances, still unsatisfactory.

40. Provision for Years 10 and 11 is good in terms of both breadth and balance. In addition to studying the core subjects, pupils select from a wide range of National Curriculum options, which include humanities, arts and music. The school effectively meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. The school also provides an appropriate vocational education curriculum, which offers GNVQ in business studies, health and social care and leisure and tourism. This is augmented by a programme of work-based provision for the small number of pupils

who find this a more rewarding and fulfilling educational experience. There are, however, some limitations to the curricular provision in this stage of the pupils' learning. The National Curriculum requirements for ICT are not met because of the lack of the elements of control technology and database technology.

41. Curricular provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. There is good specialist provision and good provision for pupils' support in classes, where assistants work with individual pupils or with small groups. Individual targets are well thought out and are reviewed regularly and there is good commitment to equality of opportunity throughout the work of the special needs department. These targets include goals for literacy, numeracy and behaviour. Annual reviews provide a good focus for further improvement. Some pupils with special needs are withdrawn from mainstream lessons for additional support, given by the specialist staff. These lessons enable pupils with special needs to make good progress, and, thereby, gain greater access to the curriculum.

42. The school's provision offers equal opportunities for boys and girls to access the whole curriculum, and effective measures are taken to assure inclusion of all pupils in all activities. Provision for gifted and talented pupils is developing. Summer schools for gifted and talented pupils in Years 10 and 11 enabled them to support younger pupils in creating publicity materials, including a web page for the local Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust at Martin Mere. Numeracy provision is in its early stages of development and does not yet contribute as widely to curriculum enhancement as does literacy. This latter, which is taught well both during term time and in extended provision, such as that offered in the summer school, is having a good impact on raising standards.

43. Overall provision for personal, social and health education is very good. There are programmes of study for all pupils that include work on relationships, the environment and citizenship. Excellent provision is made for some elements of the programme, especially for careers education. The importance of the subject is fully recognised by all tutors and is valued by pupils. There is good provision for careers education and guidance in Year 11, which complements an effective work-experience programme for pupils, including a work placement at Cergy Pontoise in France, where pupils can extend their general education and enhance Key Skills.

44. Links with the community make a satisfactory contribution to pupils' education. Members of the local parish church send classroom helpers to religious education classes and local businessmen occasionally act as mentors for some pupils. Commercial organisations in the area enable all students in year eleven to undertake a two-week work placement. The school runs an Industry Week in which local businesses participate and there are yearly sponsorships of pupils by companies. For example, a local dairy sponsors twelve pupils on an Outward Bound course. External speakers and visitors, such as the Manchester Actors' Company, contribute and pupils are involved in Young Enterprise schemes. Transfer arrangements to ensure smooth transition from primary to secondary school are not yet firmly established in most subjects, other than in mathematics, where the school is one of a few participating successfully in a national scheme. Links to the local

colleges for post-sixteen education are stronger, with particularly good links to Skelmersdale College.

45. The school provides a range of extra-curricular activities in which a large number of pupils participate and which extend pupils' learning opportunities effectively. These include the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and a range of sporting activities, where a well-structured programme allows for development of both teams and clubs. However, the development is limited by staff availability

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

46. The school provides good provision for pupils' spiritual and social development and very good provision for pupils' social development. Provision for cultural development is satisfactory.

47. The provision for the spiritual development of pupils is good. This is a marked improvement since the last inspection. The policy lacks a clear definition of this area and has not taken a lead from recent publications, but it nevertheless provides clear guidance to teachers to support their planning. The aim to 'educate the present generation to look beyond the material dimension to the deeper issues of human existence' is worthwhile and challenging. The plans for collective worship are good and the school is committed to improving this aspect of its work. There is a clear daily pattern, with devotional readings on three days, a time for reflection on one day, and a year-group or whole-school act of worship on another day. These are well organised and good resources are provided for all staff. The whole-school assembly observed during the inspection was meticulously organised and sympathetically planned to include prayers, a time of reflection and an amusing but thought-provoking talk by the headteacher. Several form periods were observed where the spiritual dimension was excellent, involving pupils in a range of activities. In all departments, the spiritual dimension now features in curricular planning. In English, there is a good range of spiritual elements in much of the work on literature, especially evident in the work on poetry. In religious education, there is a very good analysis of spirituality and this is developed through work on feelings, creativity and choices. Developing positive attitudes of pupils towards themselves is a key feature in many physical education lessons. A Year 11 music lesson made opportunities for pupils to reflect on the terrorist attack in America and was a very good contribution to their spiritual development.

48. The provision for pupils' moral development is very good. Teachers provide excellent role models and their relationships with pupils are professional and of a high standard. Through the code of conduct, pupils are given clear guidance on what is acceptable behaviour. This is supported through good behaviour management schemes and the attitude of the majority of pupils towards school. Pupils know that any poor behaviour is dealt with quickly. They show respect towards others and the buildings and grounds are well maintained and graffiti free. Within many lessons there are opportunities to consider moral issues. In geography, for example, pupils discuss moral values and attitudes to birth control when studying population, and they look at the responses of individuals and society when studying

deforestation in the Amazon and the development of industry in less economically developed countries.

49. The school provides good opportunities for the social development of pupils. The policy claims, 'This school is a microcosm of both the nation and the global village, and is therefore a nursery for the development of social skills.' The School Council is a useful vehicle for pupils to learn social skills, although many pupils still need encouragement and support to participate. All pupils in Year 11 have some role to play in the organisation of the school, as prefects or monitors. In physical education lessons, pupils have a variety of opportunities to work co-operatively as well as competitively, and pupils are generally supportive of each other in team situations. Social responsibility and concern are promoted through a good programme of personal, social and health education. There is good work in drama to develop social skills of collaboration and expression. Religious education lessons make a strong contribution to this area by helping pupils to see the need to take a pride in school and through a consideration of values of tolerance and human rights. In English, there are some missed opportunities in imaginative and frequent work in speaking and listening in Years 7 to 9, but there is some excellent practice in Years 10 and 11. There are also good examples of collaborative work in modern languages, but no trips or exchanges take place.

50. The provision for cultural development was found to be unsatisfactory at the last inspection. The school has responded to the criticism and provision has improved and is now satisfactory. The religious education department make a good contribution through a study of history and traditions that includes art and design, literature and music in western and non-western cultures. English includes poems from other cultures in the GCSE work. The work of the history department is more limited, with few visits to museums or historical locations and few visitors to school to bring a multi-cultural dimension. Geography has good guidelines in the information to staff and includes many opportunities to study cultural differences to attitudes and values. Music makes a strong contribution to pupils' cultural development and a Year 8 lesson on how the Blues developed was a good example. Whilst this area has improved since the last inspection, it is not as strong as the spiritual, moral and social provision for pupils, and in view of the fact that the majority of pupils are from a white British background, the school could do more to extend their horizons and make them aware of the wide and exciting world beyond Skelmersdale.

51. Overall, the curriculum provides a good level of opportunities for attainment and enables pupils to achieve well.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

52. The school makes good provision for the care of its pupils. There are established procedures to identify and handle issues related to child protection; staff are informed of their responsibilities at regular intervals by the designated teacher and in the staff handbook. Satisfactory procedures are in place to protect the health and safety of pupils and staff. Written assessments of the risks associated with work in most departments have been made, but not of the common areas. During the inspection, a problem was identified in the art and design department, which was swiftly dealt with, although not fully resolved. Staff handle problems associated with the open nature of the site well, but this remains a concern for pupils' safety. Clear guidelines are established to deal with first aid and minor emergencies. The local education authority conducts routine checks at appropriate intervals to ensure the safe operation of electrical, fire prevention and other equipment.

53. The school's monitoring of academic performance and personal development is good, and the educational and personal support and guidance available to pupils are very good. Pastoral care is very good and well informed by careful record-keeping. Pupils remain in their tutor groups as they progress up the school, keeping the same form tutor and head of year whenever possible. There is a good team spirit amongst the pastoral staff, which engenders strong support for pupils' personal development; they are well informed about pupils' academic progress and personal development by a system of thorough monitoring procedures.

54. Procedures for monitoring attendance are good. Registration is efficiently conducted and data conscientiously collated. Pupils with good records of attendance are rewarded appropriately. Attendance records are closely monitored to establish patterns of absence and the services of the educational welfare officer are used well. Parents are contacted on the first day of absence for which no reason has been given, but absences are sometimes authorised too easily, especially for Year 11, and the number of holidays taken during term time are too high in all year groups.

55. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour and eliminating oppressive behaviour are very good. The introduction of a positive discipline policy is clearly understood and used consistently throughout the school. Pupils and parents recognise the fairness of the procedures adopted. Use of the Learning Support Centre is beginning to improve the behaviour and attendance of some pupils, but has yet to act effectively to reduce the level of fixed term exclusions. Very effective procedures have been adopted to eliminate bullying. There is no evidence of oppressive behaviour in the school and pupils of all ages report that when bullying occurs it is dealt with well. Nevertheless, pupils on the School Council are keen to undertake training as peer counsellors, to ensure that bullying does not interfere with any pupil's education.

56. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and academic progress, the use of assessment information to guide curricular planning, and the support given to pupils, are good. All subject departments have now established thorough

assessment procedures, although some, such as music, are new and have yet to prove their effectiveness in raising achievement. In most other subjects, teachers have well-established procedures that pick up any concerns over under-achievement. Work is marked consistently although better use could be made of diagnostic comments, especially in English. Targets for improvement are set and reviewed, with individual pupils regularly. Expected GCSE grades, based on prior performance, are shared with pupils. These are not always communicated to pupils early enough so that they have time to effect real improvement. A mentoring programme is in place for pupils whose predicted grades fall in the C/D band. In the lower part of the school, National Curriculum levels are not always used with pupils to help them know where they are and what they need to do to achieve the desired outcomes at the end of Year 9. Assessment data is generally used well throughout the school. Using nationally recognised tests, pupils are placed in appropriate ability sets or bands for different subjects.

57. The care and support of pupils with special educational needs are very good. Support assistants know the pupils they work with well, and the whole-school ethos is reflected well in the way that pupils with special educational needs have opportunities to take part in all school activities. Their contributions are valued, and their achievements are well recognised. This ensures that these pupils make good progress, and try hard at their work. There are good procedures for the identification of pupils with special educational needs. These needs are quickly identified either before or when they enter the school, and appropriate arrangements are made for the regular review of their progress. There is good liaison with outside agencies, which provide support. Very good records are kept of pupils' progress in relation to their targets. Members of the special needs team provide out-of-school clubs and give freely of their time in the interests of their pupils.

58. Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development are very good. In addition to data on academic performance, tutors and heads of year maintain comprehensive but concise records for each pupil, monitoring aspects of school life, including achievements, incidents, good news, and home contacts. Staff know the pupils well and provide very good support and guidance through regular contact, target reviews, and through the excellent provision of personal, social and health education.

59. Since the last inspection, the school has continued to improve the arrangements for establishing and using assessment data, particularly in Years 7, 8 and 9, and systems are now established in all departments. Individual target-setting is well established. Other arrangements to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils have been maintained and good pastoral care has been sustained.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

60. The parents' view is that this is a satisfactory school. The responses to the questionnaires and comments at the meeting were broadly positive about most aspects of school life. They indicated that most parents are particularly happy about the way they can contact the school with questions or problems. They feel that the

school expects their children to work hard to achieve their best, that the teaching is good and that as a result children make good progress. Some parents are less happy about the way they are kept informed about their child's progress and some feel that homework is not consistently set. Some uncertainty was expressed about the extent of activities provided outside lessons, but parents recognised that other issues had taken precedence over providing extra clubs and activities. At the meeting, parents expressed the view that the school had improved greatly since the last inspection, with a better physical working environment and much better guidelines for discipline in place. As pupils have been encouraged to take a more positive view of school and themselves, they feel that target-setting and other initiatives are leading to improved standards of work.

61. The inspectors agree with parents about the positive aspects of school life. They found the annual reports on progress to be satisfactory; although often there is insufficient detail about gains in skills, knowledge and understanding in many subjects. They found that the range of activities offered outside lessons is under-developed, but that the use of homework to support learning in lessons is good.

62. Overall, the school has satisfactory links with parents. Appropriate information is provided and parents feel able to approach the school if there are concerns or problems. Parents' involvement in the work of the school is satisfactory, but the contribution they make to their children's learning at school and at home is unsatisfactory.

63. The quality of information provided to parents is satisfactory. Information about the school is contained in the prospectus and regular newsletters but some details are missing from both the prospectus and the governors' annual report, particularly with regard to the presentation of Year 9 test and GCSE results. Whilst there is a clear timetable for interim and annual reporting to parents, with good opportunities for parents to consult form tutors and subject teachers, these opportunities are not used by all parents. The progress reports, although satisfactory, do not give sufficiently detailed comments on each subject, and the presentation of what each child knows and can do is not self-explanatory. Parents are routinely contacted if problems arise, and are welcomed into school should they have any concerns they wish to discuss. They are informed by postcard when their children achieve individual success, including when they make noteworthy progress in learning. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are involved well in the support that the school offers to pupils. They are kept well aware of the targets for pupils and are informed when the time comes for these special targets to be reviewed. Homework diaries are used appropriately to share pupils' individual targets and to monitor whether homework is done.

64. Parents' involvement in the work of the school is satisfactory. The governing body has its full allocation of parent governors, but there is no other formal structure, such as a parent-teacher association, for parents to become involved in the life of the school. A small number are actively involved in helping in school activities, such as running the Christmas Fair, helping in the library and supporting reading for those with special educational needs. Most parents visit the school when invited, and come to watch performances and attend the Awards Evening when their children are involved. Most, but not all, parents sign a home-school agreement each year. At the time of the inspection these had not been issued, and the first agreement is not made until after pupils have been in school for two or more weeks.

65. Since the last inspection, parents have maintained their positive views about the school, but the number who were prepared or sufficiently interested to contribute their views to the inspection were considerably lower this time than two years earlier. This reflects a wider lack of support with children's learning at school and at home from a significant number of parents.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

66. The headteacher and key staff give the school excellent leadership and management. This has radically changed the quality of many aspects of school life and ensured that improvement since the last inspection has been very good. As a result, the school is no longer considered to have 'serious weaknesses'.

67. Since his relatively recent appointment, soon after the previous inspection of 1999, the headteacher has rapidly established a remarkably clear sense of educational direction. Staff at every level have responded positively to new priorities and policies. This has ensured that the school's aims and values are very effectively reflected in its day-to-day work. Most significantly, the schools' new teaching and learning policy has been adopted and used by staff with unusual consistency and conviction. This reflects well both on the adaptability and commitment of the teaching force and on the successful management of devising, introducing and monitoring the policy.

68. Overall, leadership and management have also succeeded because the effectiveness of the senior management team has improved. New appointments have been made and the team enlarged, clear areas of responsibility have been defined, and the headteacher has successfully encouraged an atmosphere in which the management skills of colleagues are to be fostered and widely used. For example, this has allowed individual senior managers to promote and direct progress on a range of crucial policies including target-setting arrangements, monitoring of pupils' personal progress and staff induction.

69. Several departments were successfully led and managed at the time of the previous inspection, most notably physical education. Much delegation to newly appointed heads of department has taken place within the last two years, and several relatively inexperienced departmental managers are running their departments very effectively. Leadership is currently excellent in art and design and very good in mathematics, geography, design and technology, religious education, physical education, modern languages, PHSE and music. It is good in all other departments.

70. Year tutors manage the pastoral support of pupils well. They lead and support the work of form tutors most effectively, so that rewards and sanctions policies and the agreed procedures for monitoring pupils' personal development are consistently applied.

71. The special educational needs co-ordinator gives very good leadership and much time to this area of the school. All documentation is very full and easily accessible as a result of this commitment. The co-ordinator's knowledge and understanding of the aspect, and of the pupils on the register, are of high calibre. There are good developmental plans for provision in the future. Very good support is offered to the team of adults, teachers and assistants who staff the department, and this makes for a cohesive, happy atmosphere. Resources and accommodation for pupils with special educational needs are of a good standard overall.

72. Governors now contribute successfully to the work of the school. Since the previous inspection, they have reorganised aspects of their committee structures and meetings schedules, but more significantly have established an entirely different working relationship with the headteacher and other staff. Their knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses is good because key members of the governing body now have regular meetings with the headteacher and many other occasional meetings with senior and middle managers. Open dialogue characterises

the style of these events. Governors increasingly propose strategies and initiatives for senior managers to consider and they offer constructive criticism of the school's plans for improvement.

73. The governing body is now providing good strategic advice to the headteacher and other senior managers. It is able to draw on extensive information provided through reports and meetings and on the first-hand knowledge of school life, gained by frequent visits into school when it is in session. As school plans and policies are drawn up, governors are actively involved at an early stage and find their guidance welcomed.

74. The governing body fulfils its statutory duties well. It has acted swiftly and effectively to ensure that the headteacher's work is properly evaluated. With the headteacher, it has helped put 'Performance Management' arrangements in place for all other teachers. Curricular requirements are met well with the known exception of ICT, where shortcomings are being dealt with. Some technical requirements in the governors' report to parents need to be fully complied with: it currently lacks a formal agenda for its annual meeting with parents, dates for governors' terms of office and details about the way the school uses non-contact days for staff development.

75. The quality of planning in the school is excellent: this represents an outstanding improvement since the previous inspection, when planning was poor. The headteacher has initiated very successful changes, but has enlisted many others in the process and also fostered good planning skills amongst middle managers. As a result, staff collectively understand and support the whole-school focus on issues such as raising attainment, improving teaching, following clear schemes of work in every subject and using assessment data systematically. Heads of departments also plan effectively for their own subjects, with policies and activities that help to implement school objectives in the context of each department.

76. Planning is also of such good quality because the school's improvement plans have pursued the appropriate priorities and have used strategies that work. Recent and current plans all face the key issues of the previous inspection report head on and look for every possible way of meeting what is required. This has led to an immense amount of well-directed effort, by, for example, heads of department, in completing full schemes of work for every curricular subject. It has also involved very good monitoring and support arrangements. Over the last two years, all initiatives have been constructively monitored with considerable thoroughness by senior and middle managers. This has played a crucial role in helping staff to gain a shared understanding of new policies, offering them practical support and continually encouraging them to implement plans wholeheartedly.

77. Financial planning is now very good. The headteacher and governors have dealt effectively with the over-spend which developed soon after the previous inspection. In addition, they have achieved a very close match between spending and educational priorities patterns. Further funds have been acquired by successful bids into initiatives such as Excellence in Cities. The school has achieved a range of savings by comparing the costs of different suppliers of services, such as cleaning and catering.

78. The overall effectiveness of the school is good. Much of what is done and planned is very good, but it is too soon after the previous inspection for attainment

to have changed radically. Spending is above the national average and the school gives satisfactory value for money.

Staffing

79. The school has an adequate number of well-qualified teachers to deliver the curriculum. The provision of support staff has improved since the last inspection, but in the areas of art and design and design and technology, the provision is inadequate. Additional learning support staff across the curriculum would also enhance the teaching in a range of subjects. A very good induction programme for new staff, both experienced and newly qualified, ensures that they receive the necessary support to carry out their roles effectively. There is now very good monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching, with a well-structured programme of lesson observations in place. Arrangements for monitoring teachers' performance is supported by an effective system of professional development that is linked to the school improvement plan. A distinctive feature is the agreed target setting with individual teachers at all levels. The development culture that has been established in the school links well with the improved levels of teaching across many departments. The issues regarding staffing raised in the last inspection have been largely addressed, and senior management are endeavouring to solve the shortcomings in support staff.

Accommodation

80. The standard of accommodation is good. The buildings and grounds are very well maintained. The governors' environment committee is actively involved in exploring ways to improve the quality of facilities, which are well supervised by the finance and property manager and the caretaking staff. The provision of extra litter bins, inside and outside, has had a positive impact, though there is still litter after break and lunchtime. There is better access to toilets than was the case at the previous inspection, though the condition of toilets continues to cause concern. Similarly, there is ongoing concern over the regulation of the heating system, which is noisy in some areas and affects pupils' concentration. Funding has now been obtained to address the issues of heating, windows and toilets, and further funding is to be used to improve security. A programme of re-decoration and refurbishment is in place, but is limited by scant financial resources. There is a need to brighten up several teaching areas, notably in English, drama and science.

81. Work has now been completed on the conversion from open-plan teaching areas to provide discrete teaching rooms. Classrooms for each subject are closely grouped, assisting the co-ordination of the work of departments. Since the previous inspection, the unattractive breeze block walls have been covered by notice boards, which provide display boards in corridors, and this complements good display within many classrooms. Accommodation is good in modern languages and music and for pupils with special educational needs, who benefit from six stations for the computer programme 'Successmaker'. It is very good in art and design, and in physical education, where very good indoor and outdoor facilities enhance learning. The library is too small to provide effective support for individual study and research.

Resources

82. Resources for learning are satisfactory overall and good in religious education, special educational needs and physical education. The school has benefited recently from increased spending on learning resources targeted at areas of the curriculum such as modern languages where there was under-resourcing before. A new cross-curricular ICT suite has been established which is well used by the various departments. The library, although much improved since the previous inspection, is too small for the size of school and has poor ICT facilities.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

83. In order to build on the very impressive progress made since the previous inspection, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) Further raise standards of attainment by:
 - reducing absence levels amongst pupils;
(Paragraphs: 11, 13, 23, 30, 36)
 - improving the attitudes of a minority of pupils;
(Paragraphs: 11, 18, 19, 25)
 - widening the provision for gifted and talented pupils, as planned;
(Paragraphs: 8, 86, 105, 121)
 - enhancing the already good arrangements for target-setting in both key stages by sharing them earlier and more widely.
(Paragraphs: 9, 56)

- (2) Improve provision of ICT in the school, so that:
 - all pupils experience the full range of skills, knowledge and understanding in the programmes of study for ICT;
(Paragraphs: 39, 139, 140, 142)
 - systematic planning ensures ICT skills are promoted regularly across the whole curriculum.
(Paragraphs: 99, 108, 110, 129, 136, 157, 169)

- (3) Increase pupils' ability to concentrate and study independently by:
 - emphasising this factor consistently in lessons and creating more scope for it in lessons;
(Paragraphs: 29, 121, 149)
 - improving the range and quality of library facilities so that it becomes an effective centre for research for the whole school.
(Paragraphs: 29, 82)

In addition to the key issues above, the governors should consider including the following minor points for inclusion in its action plan:

- Develop more effective links with parents and the wider community to enlist their support for pupils' learning and to enhance aspects of curricular provision.
(Paragraphs: 62, 64, 65)
- Ensure the Governors' Annual Report to Parents contains sufficiently detailed information in all its sections.
(Paragraph: 63)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	141
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	73

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	7	37	56	39	1	1	0
Percentage	5	26	40	28	0.7	0.7	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	646
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	202

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	34
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	124

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	9.5
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	1.4
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 3 (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	82	62	144

National Curriculum Test/Task Results	English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	26	34	34
	Girls	31	27	21
	Total	57	61	55
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	40 (41)	43 (37)	38 (33)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	8 (6)	18 (16)	13 (13)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments	English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	28	35	31
	Girls	35	37	20
	Total	63	72	51
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	45 (47)	51 (53)	36 (37)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	7 (12)	19 (22)	6 (14)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	70	73	143

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	14	62	67
	Girls	24	70	72
	Total	38	132	139
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	27 (26)	92 (84)	97 (91)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	29
	National	38.4

Figures 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	5
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	1
White	640
Any other minority ethnic group	0

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	47	1
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: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	41.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.6

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	296

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.6
---	------

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	21.9
Key Stage 4	19.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	2 032 008
Total expenditure	2 108 675
Expenditure per pupil	3 250
Balance brought forward from previous year	24 638
Balance carried forward to next year	(52 029)

Figures in parentheses indicate negative values

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	13.4
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	7.2

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0.6
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	658
Number of questionnaires returned	58

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	28	59	9	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	43	52	2	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	17	59	10	2	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	12	62	14	7	2
The teaching is good.	31	57	3	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	53	14	7	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	40	3	5	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	48	45	5	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	19	62	9	5	3
The school is well led and managed.	29	53	3	0	12
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	26	57	7	3	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	21	52	7	3	16

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

ENGLISH

Overall, the quality of provision in English is good.

Strengths

- Teaching is good. Teachers plan lessons carefully and manage pupils very well. Their enthusiasm for English is often passed on to pupils.
- All pupils enjoy a full range of learning opportunities.
- The department is well managed and teachers work closely together.
- The strategies for teaching literacy to pupils in Years 7 to 9 are well under way.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils' levels of achievement by the end of Years 9 and 11 are not as high as they could be.
- Higher-attaining pupils are not always fully challenged and have few opportunities for independent study.
- Few pupils make wide use of ICT skills in their English work.

84. Attainment in English last year was well below national averages in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examination results. Test results at the end of Year 9 were also below those of schools with a similar background. They were in line with those achieved in mathematics and a little less good than those in science. Boys and girls did equally well against national figures. In 2001 the number of pupils achieving Level 5 or better showed a slight increase but over the last five years results have not quite kept pace with national improvement. In GCSE examination results the numbers of pupils achieving A*-C grades were well below national averages in both English and English literature but grades were in line with those achieved by similar schools. Results for 2001 show a slight decline.

85. Work seen during the inspection was consistently below average but not to the extent indicated by recent examination results, which suggests that standards are beginning to rise. The achievement of pupils in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory, taking into account their initial skill levels on entering the school or when beginning Year 10. The quality of teaching and learning is good and better than at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils who come to the school with well below average English skills, as a result of this good teaching, make rapid progress in developing their reading. Most pupils in Years 7 and 8 read regularly, as can be seen by their focus and concentration during private reading sessions at the start of lessons and in registration time. There are usually plenty of volunteers to read aloud in class. The departmental focus on reading, seen in such initiatives as form room book boxes and the reading award

scheme, has clearly had a positive impact on reading standards. However, writing is generally less well developed.

86. All but the highest-attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 have difficulty in writing fluently and accurately. In a Year 7 lesson pupils were asked to write a post card home and few were able to write more than the simplest of sentences and a small number could not get going without individual help. Even in Year 9 lower-attaining pupils in one lesson had difficulty starting to write about their early childhood memories and needed the teacher's help. Higher -attaining pupils are able to produce fluent and engaging work when writing about literature or when asked to write as a character but many are uncertain about paragraphing. Pupils generally use ICT skills, for example to word-process their work, significantly less often than in many other schools and the school resource centre offers very limited ICT facilities. Too many pupils in Year 8 last year produced untidy work in exercise books, although their own short stories were generally more confidently handled and recent work is better presented. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 write at length with greater confidence and from pupils of all abilities there are many examples of lively and sensitive writing, for example about work experience. Spelling, punctuation and grammar remain below average and pupils continue to struggle with paragraphing. Work on advertising, even from higher -attaining pupils, is rather superficial but literature essays on drama from Shakespeare to Willy Russell can at times be of the highest quality. Pupils with special educational needs respond well to challenging poetry, as seen in a Year 11 lesson where the excellent planning and presentation of the teacher, plus the valuable contribution of the learning support assistant, enabled pupils with very limited language skills to understand and enjoy the difficult GCSE poem, 'Blessing' by Imtiaz Dharker. Too little evidence was found to judge the progress of gifted and talented pupils.

87. Teaching and learning have benefited from recent improvements in standards of behaviour in the school and from more positive attitudes among pupils. There is no unsatisfactory teaching in the department In all lessons observed the class teacher was skilful in managing pupils so that they did not misbehave. In the best lessons teachers enthusiastically drive the lesson along at a brisk pace. In one such lesson lower-attaining Year 11 pupils were challenged to act out the fight from the opening scene of Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet', having understood the underlying tension through the teacher's reading of a newspaper article about feuding in Northern Ireland. They did so with sensitivity, using appropriate contemporary language, responding very well to the high expectations of the teacher. They listened attentively, volunteered ideas and worked together very well. By the end of the lesson they were all reading Shakespeare's text with real understanding and a good grasp of character and situation. Teachers have very good relationships with their pupils and as a result English lessons are usually enjoyable and productive. When learning objectives are not wholly clear to pupils, where tasks are too easy for higher attainers or where materials do not fully support lower attainers, pupils' progress in lessons is less impressive. Pupils are generally well motivated as can be seen by the good presentation of much of the work on display in teaching rooms and corridors. Teachers do not always capitalise fully on pupils' willingness to tackle challenging tasks, working independently in small groups. In all years the quality of pupils' oral work is well below average and at

present opportunities are being missed to extend the range and difficulty of speaking and listening activities in whole class and in group activities.

88. The department is well led and teachers work closely together so that pupils benefit from a consistent approach and clear procedures. The government initiative for introducing aspects of the National Literacy Strategy into secondary schools has received a good response and many English lessons in Years 7 to 9, for example, now begin with a short language based activity. Pupils observed in Year 7 and 8 lessons were well used to this practice, following on from their primary school experience of the literacy hour, and they clearly enjoyed these opportunities to extend their vocabulary and improve spelling. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously and follow agreed policies for assessing pupils' progress. Teachers are currently considering how best under-achieving pupils can be identified and supported so that all pupils fulfil their potential. Schemes of work for pupils in Years 7 to 9 have recently been revised to take account of current national literacy initiatives and changes to the National Curriculum; they offer a balanced and progressive programme for all three years. However, units of study do not include a sufficiently wide range of tasks and strategies to meet fully the differing needs of the highest and lowest-attaining pupils in each teaching group. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection having improved teaching and management but this has not yet led to higher standards of achievement.

Literacy

89. Across the curriculum the teaching of literacy is good. A literacy coordinator, working with a small group of teachers, oversees a whole school policy. There is a general focus on reading activities during the annual school literacy week, when all departments deliver some aspect of literacy working on a common theme. Registration time is often devoted to reading or spelling activities. These strategies have made a contribution to recently improved standards of reading. All departments have considered the teaching of literacy in their schemes of work and several teachers have observed the literacy hour in primary schools. Key words and technical vocabulary are displayed in most subject areas, such as mathematics, science, geography, music, art and design and physical education. However, the provision of literacy teaching varies between subjects. Lessons in religious education have a strong emphasis on books and all pupils make a list of writing skills in exercise books. Awareness of literacy issues is high in physical education lessons where pupils discuss technical terms and descriptive words. Literacy displays in geography classrooms help pupils to realise the importance of literacy skills and teachers act as good role models, reading frequently to their classes from a range of sources such as the books of Jules Verne. Writing outlines are given to lower-attaining pupils in modern foreign languages and Year 7 pupils in history to help them to shape their written work. Good examples of extended writing by pupils are evident in geography, history and music. Poor oral work and weaker than average spelling were noted in design and technology, mathematics and ICT. Reading aloud in history is encouraged but standards are below average. Pupils in most subject areas make very limited use of the library resource centre for information gathering.

Drama

Overall, the quality of provision in drama is satisfactory.

Strengths

- Teaching is mainly very good. Pupils enjoy lively lessons that effectively build up their skills and knowledge.
- Revised schemes of work provide pupils with balanced and well-ordered programmes of study.
- Pupils' standards of achievement have improved significantly since the last inspection.

Areas for improvement

- The lack of a specialist teaching area prevents pupils from receiving the best possible drama experience.
- Continued improvement of GCSE examination results up to national average standards and beyond should be ensured.

90. Examination results for the last two years and standards of work seen in lessons indicate that pupils' levels of attainment are well below national averages. However, GCSE results for 2001 indicate a significant improvement on the previous year. In the majority of lessons observed teaching and learning in the stages from Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11 were very good. The department is well organised and there is a focused development plan with appropriate priorities. Lessons have clear objectives that are shared with pupils. Pupils quickly learn that drama work is important and challenging. When they join the school they often demonstrate very limited dramatic skills. They do not follow instructions very well and are undisciplined in their movements and talk. However, they quickly learn to work productively in groups, to evaluate their activities and to make progress in developing the skills of improvisation and performance. By Year 10, most pupils choosing to take GCSE drama are very well motivated. A group working on freeze frames representing key images for a dramatic moment entitled 'The Newcomer' did so with imagination, producing convincing characterisations with some evidence of subtlety. This work was well within average levels of attainment. At present, drama is mainly taught in a former art room. Although this is an adequate space, there are as yet almost no drama facilities. This is clearly unsatisfactory and holding back pupils' learning. The department has otherwise made good progress since the last inspection.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is good.

Strengths

- Overall, the quality of teaching is good.
- The mathematics department consists of fully qualified mathematics teachers who work very well together.

- The department is very well led.
- Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

Areas for improvement

- The standards of the pupils' work are still too far below national levels.
- Examples of excellent practice in the department should be shared so that all teachers provide more challenge for pupils in lessons and involve them more closely in their own learning.
- The opportunities for pupils to use ICT, whilst improving, are still insufficient.

91. Pupils' results in the National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds in the year 2000 were well below the national average, but broadly in line with those obtained by pupils from similar schools. Over the years between 1996 and 2000, results were below national averages and improved at a slower rate. In general, there is no significant difference between the attainment of boys compared with that of girls.

92. Up to the age of 14, pupils' mathematical skills show satisfactory improvement. Attainment is well below that achieved nationally when pupils join the school at the age of 11. Although it improves over the first three years, by the age of 14 it is still well below average. The work of higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 showed that very few of them are capable of obtaining grades 7 or 8 in the coming National Curriculum examinations. They handle geometric constructions well and can use tree diagrams to find probabilities, but their problem-solving skills are not yet well developed, nor are they strong at estimating answers. Middle-attaining pupils have difficulty remembering basic formulae, such as that for the circumference of a circle, and are not able to manipulate algebraic equations readily. Many can, however, find the radius and circumference of a circle if they are reminded of the formulae. Lower-attaining pupils produce work which is about three years below the average standard nationally. Basic numerical work is of a below-average standard overall, but is improving over time. A greater emphasis on numeracy work in Year 7 is beginning to raise standards in this area.

93. GCSE results in 2000 were well below national averages for pupils scoring grades A* to C, but showed an above-average improvement from results in national tests two years earlier. Results were also better than for other similar schools. The percentage of pupils gaining grades A* to G was broadly the same as nationally. Results have shown a rapidly rising trend, with improvement of 21 per cent for those achieving grades A* to C in 2001 over those of 1997. The percentage of pupils gaining a grade G or higher was below the national average figure. Mathematics results at GCSE are similar to those for other subject results in the school, although boys' compare less favourably than girls. The summer 2001 results are slightly lower than those for 2000. As yet, it is not possible to compare these with national figures.

94. The standard of work for pupils aged 16 as seen during the inspection is well below that attained nationally, although over three in every ten pupils show the capacity to obtain grade C or better at GCSE. Few high-attaining pupils are on

course for the highest grades A*, A or B at GCSE. These pupils show satisfactory algebraic skills including the ability to multiply brackets and factorise quadratic expressions. Skills of basic numeracy are also satisfactory, although not well enough developed to render them secure in handling fractions involving mixed numbers or denominators greater than single figures. Middle attainers can solve straightforward linear algebraic equations by inspection, but are not secure when trying to use a method of balancing. Mensuration is not strong. Although some can find the area of a triangle or a parallelogram even these sometimes confuse area with volume. Lower-attaining pupils can measure and draw angles correct to a degree and can draw a pie chart from a table of simple data, although they do not always label their work clearly.

95. Attainment on entry to the school is well below average. Pupils make satisfactory progress. Their achievement would be much improved if overall attendance were better and if the good behaviour and attitudes to their work of the majority were the norm for all. In the lessons observed in the lower school, an average of three pupils per class were absent, and in the upper school, the figure rose to almost four. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in line with their peers, and gifted and talented pupils make broadly satisfactory progress. Good support by assistants and teachers is a strong feature, contributing to the progress that is made. This is especially the case with the support assistance specifically dedicated to the mathematics department. No pupils with English as an additional language were seen during the inspection.

96. The teaching observed during the inspection was very good in Years 7, 8 and 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Overall, teaching is good. The hallmark of excellent lessons is the intensity of focus on skill improvement and understanding that keeps the pupils interested and totally involved. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen in lessons, but for almost half of teachers, whilst their lessons were satisfactory, improvement would occur if they expected more from the pupils and tried to involve them more in their own learning. In many lessons, pupils would benefit from a clearer understanding of what they need to do to improve. For the most part, teachers plan lessons very effectively and manage the pupils well so that no time is wasted. Every lesson begins with a short, related activity that enables the pupils to settle quickly into their work. Pace is maintained and the pupils are given a variety of activities so that their interest and work rate is maintained at a good level. Enabling all teachers to learn from and emulate the best is a priority for the department. Pupils' learning is good in Years 7 to 9: most pupils enter the school with relatively weak numeracy skills, but such drawbacks are largely overcome by the very good teaching they receive. Learning is satisfactory overall in Year 10 and 11. Most pupils learn well for much of the two year period, but a significant minority are then absent and learning suffers as a result.

97. Teachers mark the pupils' work carefully. There is some very good practice within the department in this respect. In addition to indicating whether the work is right or not, some teachers comment fully on how it might be improved, making good use of the school's reward system to motivate the pupils to do better.

98. Pupils' behaviour in lessons is satisfactory. Whilst in two thirds of the lessons seen the pupil's attitudes to their work and their behaviour were good, very good, or excellent, there was an undercurrent of unwillingness in almost a quarter. This occurred more amongst older pupils than younger, but was also related to how interesting and challenging the lessons were. In most lessons, pupils concentrated hard while listening, and at written and graphical work. This good behaviour stemmed from pupils' responding well to good teaching. Where teaching was less good, behaviour was less good too. Relationships in the classroom are good and the quality of these relationships does much to contribute to the pupils' progress.

99. Departmental leadership is very good. The head of department is a very talented teacher, extremely well thought of by colleagues and pupils. Departmental meetings are closely focused on improving teaching and learning. There are effective arrangements for improving teaching performance, based on regular performance review. Very good clear departmental documentation clarifies what is required of teachers and provides useful guidance. The need for enhanced ICT equipment within the department is acute and there is no direct access to the Internet from the mathematics classrooms.

100. Although it is too soon to see an impact on standards, improvement since the last inspection in the mathematics department has been very good. All areas of concern have been addressed and improvements made. Teaching has improved, and teachers have a better grasp of the use of ICT as a teaching tool, with good use of the overhead projector a strong feature in lessons. The quest to address how pupils of varying ability are helped is reflected in the reworking of most of the departmental schemes of work, a greater emphasis on the learning of basic numerical skills (particularly in the lower school) and by the introduction of statistics as a separate curricular element, in addition to mathematics, for all pupils in Years 10 and 11. The introduction of a Summer School for Numeracy and of a bridging unit linking mathematics work in the primary school with what is done in the secondary school is also helping the pupils to understand and come to terms with their work.

Numeracy

101. Although numerical skills are well below national averages, pupils demonstrate satisfactory use of these skills in their work across the curriculum to enable them to progress. In design and technology, measuring and weighing skills are adequate and pupils show that they can apply spatial ideas through drawing in two and three dimensions. In science, pupils show reasonable graphical skills and use protractors to measure angles of refraction and incidence, although they need help from the teacher to do so. There is, therefore, no evidence to suggest that any pupil is denied access to any element of curriculum in spite of numerical skills that are overall well below average.

102. The teaching of numeracy in subjects other than mathematics is satisfactory. There are examples of good work in science investigative work and in class when analysing data to find averages of sets of results and draw lines of best fit. A lesson on Ohms law saw the teacher giving a good demonstration of how to manipulate formulae using the triangle method. In Spanish lessons, the pupils were taught to use the four rules of arithmetic in the target language. In a lunch time computer club, pupils were learning to use co-ordinates. Most departments have policies in place for the teaching of numeracy.

SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is good.

Strengths

- Good teaching
- Very good emphasis on teaching and learning has led to improved teaching in the department.
- Pupils achieve well and their attitude to learning has improved.
- The department is well led and the delivery of the science curriculum is improving.
 - ASSESSMENT OF PUPILS' CAPABILITIES IS GOOD.

Areas for improvement

- Marking of pupils' day-to-day work does not generally highlight their strengths and weaknesses or show them how to improve.
- The provision of ICT in science lessons is inadequate.

103. Results in tests for pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2000 were well below the national average for all schools. They were average compared with schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds. Girls performed relatively better than boys in these tests. Pupils' performance in the science tests was better than in similar English and mathematics tests. Results in 2001 improved. All pupils in Year 11 take double award modular GCSE science. Results in 2000 were well below the national average. Over the last four years, the trend of results has been broadly upwards, although the proportion of pupils gaining A* to C passes in 2001 fell slightly. Importantly, pupils taking GCSE science perform relatively better than in most of their other subjects, including English and mathematics.

104. Standards of work for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 observed during the inspection and seen in work scrutinised were below average for their age. Pupils enter the department with attainment that is well below average for their age. They have limited practical skills and their knowledge and understanding of biology, chemistry and physics is restricted. However, standards improve steadily across this age range in all the attainment targets, due to good teaching. Practical and investigative skills also improve, but pupils still lack some basic skills in this area. For example, some pupils in a higher-attaining Year 8 group did not know the correct technique for using measuring cylinders and this resulted in inaccuracies in their measurements. However, some groups do achieve higher standards in their work. For example, Year 9 pupils were able to test successfully factors that effect photosynthesis in plants. They made good progress in this lesson due to good teaching. Taking into account pupils' prior attainment, pupils' achievement overtime is satisfactory. They acquire knowledge and understanding of science at a satisfactory rate compared with their starting point.

105. Standards of work for pupils in Years 10 and 11 are also below average for their age. Their knowledge and understanding of science is lower than would be expected. For example, a middle-attaining Year 10 group's knowledge of the laws of reflection was limited. Their weak numeracy skills hindered their progress in this lesson. Many pupils did not know the correct way to measure angles using a protractor and this led to inaccuracies in their results. Higher-attaining Year 10 group were able to investigate Ohms Law experimentally, using a variety of techniques, including computer modelling, which ensured that they made very good progress in their learning. Taking account of their standard at the end of Year 9, pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. They make more rapid progress in their studies as a result of improving attitudes to work, coupled with good and effective teaching. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets set for them, due to good support in their lessons from teachers and support assistants. There is insufficient evidence to judge the progress of gifted and talented pupils.

106. Teaching overall is good. Teaching is good and better in about three-quarters of lessons observed. One lesson was very good. There is a very good focus by the whole department on teaching and learning which has led to a common approach to the structure of lessons. This has helped to improve pupils' behaviour and is improving attainment. Lessons are well planned, with clear learning objectives that are shared with the pupils. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of the subjects that they teach, and scientific concepts such as photosynthesis and reactivity are clearly explained. Teachers have high expectations of pupils in terms of achievement and behaviour. They are hard working and committed to the education of their pupils. They have good relationships with pupils, which supports the pupils' learning. In the relatively less successful lessons, pupils need more opportunities to contribute to their own learning. For example, lower-attaining Year 10 pupils investigated food tests by means of a practical demonstration, where they would have made better progress if they had individually performed the experiments. There is a somewhat limited variety of teaching styles, with many lessons being didactic. The day-to-day assessment of pupil's work does not generally highlight their strengths and weaknesses or show them how to improve. However, teaching is competent and well directed to the needs of the pupils.

107. All pupils learn well in their lessons. They have a positive attitude towards their work and are interested in what they are doing. Year 7 pupils enjoy learning about how to use the Bunsen burner and other scientific apparatus. Pupils collaborate well in group-work when doing practical activities. Their levels of concentration are good. Some individual pupils present challenging behaviour, but staff use the disciplinary policy effectively. Some pupils lack confidence in their abilities in science and so are often reluctant to contribute answers in class.

108. The department makes a satisfactory contribution to the pupils' basic skills. Key words are used so that access to the science curriculum is easier. Numeracy is developed where appropriate. For example, pupils were taught how to manipulate physical formulae so that their attainment in physics would improve. The department

tries to use ICT where appropriate to enhance the science curriculum, although resources in this area are limited.

109. The department is well led and managed and teaching has improved. Effective learning strategies have improved pupils' attitudes towards their work. There is good teamwork in the department. Assessment of pupils' capabilities is good and the monitoring of academic performance works well to ensure that under-achieving pupils are identified and offered mentoring. The technician works hard and effectively to ensure that the department functions well on a day-to-day basis. Health and safety requirements are met and teachers ensure that pupils carry out practical work in safety.

ART AND DESIGN

Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is very good.

Strengths

- Results in GCSE this summer showed a marked improvement over the previous year.
- The teaching in art and design is consistently good.
- The management of the subject areas is excellent.
- Display is used very effectively to assist learning and to enrich the school environment.

Areas for improvement

- The use of computers in art has improved since the last inspection but is still inadequate.
- Art and design lacks sufficient teaching staff: support is needed to share the responsibilities shouldered single-handedly by the head of department.
- Health and safety practice in the pottery area is unsatisfactory.

110. At the end of Year 11, in 2000 pupils gained results in GCSE examinations that, although still below the national average, were significantly higher than those of the previous year. There was little difference between the success rates of girls and boys, but girls gained more very high grades. These results compare favourably with those of other subjects in the school. In work seen, attainment at Year 11 was at around the average level. Pupils show strengths in design and composition and are able to use colour imaginatively, particularly in large-scale work. Work in three dimensions is a further strength, for instance the construction of colourfully decorated large-scale forms in card. Ceramic work is strong and well finished. A comparative weakness is the sparse use of ICT in the development of ideas. Basic skills in literacy and numeracy are addressed in the analysis of subject terms specific to art and design and in measuring as a factor in design and the judging of proportion.

111. Achievement and progress from Year 9 to Year 11 are sound. Pupils work purposefully and the skills in drawing and observing developed in earlier stages are built upon methodically. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, due to the inclusive nature of the subject and to appropriate target-setting, which also helps talented pupils to fulfil their promise.

112. At the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment is at an average level. Work seen displays strengths in drawing from observation, and good design work derived from the study of major artists, for example, Fernand Léger. Art history is interwoven very effectively into pupils' creative work in both two- and three-dimensional studies. Some instances of three-dimensional work based upon the study of natural forms, for example, seashells, are of a well above average level for this stage. Basic skills are promoted through the study of subject-specific terminology, and studies in the history of art give rise to extended writing. Pupils extend their numeracy skills in

design, which involves measuring and scaling. There is little evidence of work with computers beyond the use of word-processing and the collection of information for use in on-going projects.

113. From a below average level of general attainment on entry, pupils make good progress in achieving average levels of attainment in art and design at the age of 14. Their progress is aided by an interest and enthusiasm for the subject, together with the stimulating environment provided and good-quality teaching, which create a productive working atmosphere.

114. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Projects are designed to allow for a wide range of achievement and there is a great deal of sensitivity to individual needs in teaching. This is allowing both pupils with special needs and those with special talent to make good progress.

115. The teaching in the department is of high quality at all levels. Work is well planned and lessons are carefully prepared, with clear objectives that are fully understood by pupils. From Year 7 to Year 9, pupils are helped to develop basic art and design skills involving keen observation and drawing, together with an understanding of colour and its function. The use of workbooks and work folders is carefully supervised and provides the material for evaluating progress. Sensitive individual tuition at this stage develops pupils' confidence and interest. This confidence, in turn, helps them to make personal decisions about the direction of their work for GCSE examinations in Year 11.

116. Assessment is thorough and related to school policy and the assessment objectives of the GCSE course. In the stage from Year 7 to Year 9, an assessment pattern has been devised to reflect the National Curriculum requirements. This is not externally moderated and is in need of refinement to reflect fully the quality of work of pupils at this stage.

117. The leadership of the department, which is vested in the sole specialist teacher, is excellent. Schemes of work are detailed and cover a wide range of creative activities. The curriculum is broad and varied and provides creative activities in two and three dimensions in the stage from Year 7 to Year 9. From Year 10 to Year 11 the general art and design syllabus for GCSE enables pupils to make continuous progress from the earlier stage. The good quality of teaching and the highly committed quality of management represent a major improvement since the last inspection. The staffing situation, with all teaching and management roles currently carried out by one teacher, places a heavy burden of responsibility on that individual.

118. The accommodation provided is spacious and well lit and resources are adequate for present courses. There is a need, however, to isolate the pottery kilns in order to conform to recommended health and safety practice.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is good.

Strengths

- There is an improving trend in GCSE results.
- The department has fully and effectively addressed all the issues raised in the last inspection report.
- Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned in all materials areas.
- The subject is very well led and the head of department effectively monitors attainment, progress and teaching in the department.
- Assessment procedures are good.

Areas for improvement

- The department's sequence of booklets, which guide and support pupils through the design process and which provide evidence of their progress, is not yet complete.
- Teachers' use of question and answer techniques whilst improving, does not yet ensure that pupils have maximum opportunity to contribute to their learning.
- The department should continue to develop the use of ICT in design and technology.

119. In the 2000 teacher assessments, Year 9 pupils were awarded levels that were below national averages. Standards of attainment in the classroom as seen during the inspection were below national expectations. This was also the case during the last inspection, though since that time progress has improved and is now satisfactory. Pupils respond best when they are given focused practical tasks. In one such task, they constructed models of chairs using card-backed foam. They worked with suitable precision and the results helped them to understand the function of modelling in the design process. Though design skills are generally weak, in textiles they produce a good range of practical outcomes when pupils make wall hangings using a variety of fabric assembled with a range of stitching. In food technology, they acquire knowledge and understanding of risk assessment and ways in which quality in making can be controlled. However, pupils are weak in design skills, particularly in research and in the evaluation of their work as it progresses and after it is finished.

120. The 2000 GCSE results in the three examinations that are presently offered by the department show an upward trend. Around a third of pupils entered attained A* to C grades, largely due to a big increase in the number of food technology candidates awarded high grades. Boys perform less well than girls, as is the case nationally. The last report pointed to some unsatisfactory progress in the resistant materials GCSE course. The progress made in this area is now satisfactory. Standards in all areas in the workshop and workroom are below national expectations. As in Years 7 to 9, pupils are stronger in making than in designing. In resistant materials, pupils successfully use templates when they explore the making of flat-pack furniture. They demonstrate care and precision when they construct boxes using traditional joints. Their knowledge of ergonomics is basic and they do not confidently sketch to design. In food technology, higher-attaining pupils produce good research into the dietary needs of diabetics. They use drawing skills well to present their work in their folders. There is scope to make more use of ICT to aid in the preparation and presentation of their work. Lower-attaining pupils in food technology lack some confidence in their practical ability when making pastry. Pupils in graphic products make good use of ICT, but they find difficulty in analysing existing products and do not make best use of the information they gain in their research to help the formulation of their designs. In all areas there is more scope to learn about industrial practice.

121. Teaching and learning are good in all years. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are mainly working within their own specialist areas, which leads to better informed teaching and schemes of work that guide pupils effectively through their courses. The more experienced teachers in the department control pupils well and all maintain safe working environments. Lesson planning is invariably good and leads to coherent and structured learning experiences. Clear instructions as to the content of lessons is given at the start of lessons and pupils are reminded of the progress they have made over the lesson at its end, which helps them to gain a clearer perspective on their own learning. Teachers use display well to raise the profile of the subject, making it more interesting for current pupils while also offering examples of past pupils' work to show what can be achieved. Teachers work hard to develop productive relationships with their pupils and over time they are repaid with respect. Lessons generally proceed at a good pace and this helps to sustain

interest. The general aim is to achieve a balance between practical and theoretical work and this is generally well judged. Teachers could improve their practice by developing their question and answer techniques, which do not always encourage pupils to offer extended responses. Teachers are well aware of pupils with special educational needs in their classes and their planning for lessons includes their responses to these needs. Too little evidence is available to judge the progress of gifted and talented pupils.

122. Pupils' attitudes are overall good. Though they can challenge less experienced teachers, they generally respect the need for classroom rules. In most lessons, they listen attentively to instruction and get on with work with little fuss. They enjoy the practical aspects of the subject and want to produce quality work.

123. The leadership of the department is very good. There is very good teamwork, demonstrated in the support given to colleagues. The head of department and deputy have fully and most effectively addressed all the issues raised in the last inspection. An area for development already identified by the department is the production of design booklets to guide and support and extend pupils as they tackle their design tasks.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is satisfactory.

Strengths

- The quality of the management of the department has transformed the teaching and curricular provision.
- The behaviour of pupils is good as a result of effective class management.
- The learning of pupils is good because of well-planned and carefully structured lessons.

Areas for improvement

- The results at the end of Years 9 and 11 are too low.
- Although well behaved, too many pupils are passive in lessons and need to be encouraged to take a more active role in their learning through the extension of thinking activities.
- There are insufficient opportunities for all pupils to develop their enquiry skills through fieldwork and the collection of first-hand data.
- There are too few opportunities for all pupils to use ICT to enhance their learning.

124. Results in geography are well below national averages. In 2000, GCSE results at grades A* to C were well below average. This was also true for the results in 2001. However, all pupils succeeded in achieving a grade in 2001. The girls achieved better results than the boys, but they were still well below the national average for girls. In recent years there have been no high grades, but in 2000, 6 per cent of pupils achieved grades A* or A. Since the last inspection, the results in

GCSE have gone down. At the end of Year 9, the results of teacher assessments show that pupils are below the national average and there is little difference between boys and girls.

125. The standards of work seen during the inspection are in line with national averages, although there is still a high proportion of pupils whose work is below average. Generally, the learning of pupils is good. They arrive in Year 7 with mixed experiences of geography. Through good teaching they make good progress through Years 7 to 9. They develop skills of enquiry and learn to ask geographical questions. The higher-attaining pupils show their creativity through good pieces of extended writing. One good example was the imaginary journey to the centre of the earth, and one pupil had written an evocative piece of work on migration in Kenya from the point of view of a Kenyan farmer. Throughout most lessons, pupils concentrate well and are kept busy by the well-planned teaching. In some lower-attaining sets, pupils find it difficult to concentrate and the teacher has to provide extra encouragement. This limited concentration has an impact on the pace of learning and some lessons do not reach a satisfactory conclusion. In many lessons, the pupils are too dependent on the teachers for the pace and direction of learning. They are reluctant to take sufficient responsibility for their own learning and as a result the long-term retention of skills and knowledge is not good. Oral skills are not well developed and there are too few opportunities for pupils to talk together about their work. Teachers are very supportive and sympathetic, but do not ensure that pupils ask questions, explain themselves in detail, sustain an argument or present a point of view.

126. Teachers produce very good topic and lesson plans. They are effective teachers because of their good knowledge of the subject and their very good management of pupils. This results in well-organised lessons with a quiet businesslike atmosphere, where pupils are not distracted. Year 7 pupils obtain information from pictures and can use simple classifications. Higher-attaining Year 9 pupils have a good understanding of the reasons for the migration of people and are aware of the problems this can create in areas like the Mexican-American border. Most pupils extend their knowledge of processes of landscape formation but they do not have a sound knowledge of world locations. Their basic map reading skills are weak.

127. In Years 10 and 11, the standard of work seen in class is average. The groups contain a wide range of ability and rarely have in-class support, which makes great demands on the class teacher, who prepares well and supports all pupils to ensure they receive sufficient attention. Pupils continue to make good progress as they move through the examination topics and their books are well organised, thus helping their learning. They continue to learn technical vocabulary and most can use it appropriately. The coursework for GCSE examinations, which develops the skills of pupils through a study of Southport, is very mixed. The higher-attaining pupils show clear understanding and can collect data, analyse it using appropriate graphical techniques and reach simple conclusions, but the work of the lower attainers is often not complete and any conclusions are shallow. Many pupils are still content to describe aspects of geography but reluctant to provide clear and detailed explanations. The good teaching is extending these skills through close

attention to examination techniques and clearly planned lessons. This is helping pupils to make good progress.

128. In each year, pupils with special educational needs make good progress because of the careful planning of lessons. The division of pupils into ability groups is useful and helps all pupils to progress. However, many groups still contain a wide range of abilities and there is too little in-class support. Teachers plan their lessons with suitable material to extend the higher attainers. The adaptation of material to support pupils with special educational needs is good. Such pupils are dealt with in a quiet and sympathetic way that encourages them without drawing undue attention to their problems.

129. The work seen in class is better than the recent examination results would suggest. This is because since the last inspection there have been many changes in the department. The new head of department has only been in post for one year and has already made enormous changes, with a complete re-write of all schemes of work and lesson plans that are having an impact on the quality of teaching. The organisation of the department is very good and there is very good leadership and educational direction. Well-qualified teachers, who teach geography alongside their other subjects, lend support. The marking of work and the assessment of pupils are good: there is a consistent and professional approach that is resulting in good learning, though it is too early for it to have had any impact on external examinations. The main areas for improvement are to ensure that all pupils, especially in Years 7 to 9, have adequate fieldwork experiences and to ensure the greater use of ICT to enable pupils to research using the Internet, collect data using data-logging methods in their weather studies and use software packages to produce graphs.

HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is good.

Strengths

- Good achievement in Years 7 to 9 from a low attainment on entry.
- Good teaching that results in good learning. Lessons are well planned and well delivered.
- Good effective and efficient management and leadership of the department.
- Good comprehensive policies and assessment procedures.
- The department has dealt very effectively with the concerns outlined in the last report and is now poised for further success.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough emphasis on the skills that encourage independent learning for all pupils.
- Target more rigorously the gifted and talented pupils.
- There is less use of artefacts and visits to local places of historical interest than is commonly found further.
- ICT is insufficiently used to support learning in this subject.

130. By the end of Year 9, pupils attain standards that are below national norms. Results in teacher assessments are below national expectations, and a scrutiny of pupils' work indicates similar standards. However, in many classes observed during the inspection, pupils' attainment is in line with national expectations. In these lessons, pupils handle historical facts to good effect and they increase their knowledge of types of historical evidence, which they interpret well. For example, Year 9 pupils, in their comparative study of the population of the UK in 1750, 1900 and 2000, can effectively use statistical data and evidence, not only to show the rate of growth of population, but also to explain the prevailing conditions which enabled such growth to take place. Pupils effectively judge the reliability and validity of such evidence. Nevertheless, pupils' overall attainment across time is affected by their poor levels of literacy and their lack of retention techniques and therefore they attain below national expectations.

131. By the end of Year 11, the standards attained by pupils are below national expectations. Results in GCSE, at 40.6 per cent A* to C grades, are well below the national levels. However, a pleasing feature is that standards of pupils' work in several lessons seen during inspection are equal to the standards achieved in similar schools nationally. In such lessons, pupils are skilful at linking several facts together to make a comprehensive and cohesive historical picture. For example, Year 11 pupils, in their studies of the factory system in the nineteenth century, can explain both how and why the lives of the pauper factory apprentices were allowed to be so harsh. Yet pupils lack confidence when dealing with the complexities of analysis and evaluation when confronting them in tests and examinations and this leads to attainment falling below national norms.

132. Pupils' achievement in each year from Year 7 to Year 9 is good. This is good since many pupils enter the school with a very low baseline of skills and knowledge. By the end of this stage of their learning, pupils have a good knowledge of the periods they are studying and they are effectively able to relate causation to effect. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 build on the progress made in the first three years. However, their overall achievement by the end of Year 11 is only satisfactory since it is affected adversely by some pupils' poor attendance and negative attitudes, especially, but not exclusively, in Year 11. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. However, the achievement of gifted and talented pupils could be not yet maximised because of the lack of a more rigorously focused and targeted provision.

133. Teaching is good overall throughout Years 7 to 11, and pupils learn well as a result. No lesson observed during the inspection was less than satisfactory, and some lessons were very good. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject. Lessons are well planned and well prepared and lead to pupils' learning. A characteristic of history teaching is that the teachers' belief in the value of the subject is reflected in their enthusiasm for it. This has a strong impact on pupils' learning. Teachers are particularly good at establishing good relationships. In some lessons, they tend to be overly didactic and pupils are not sufficiently encouraged to become independent learners. In the best lessons, however, teachers are particularly adept at drawing out significant points from material which is both challenging and exciting and they successfully exhort pupils to become more active participants in their own learning. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on the use of evidence in history, the teacher was able to take what appeared at first to be a simple picture of a dead body and, by getting pupils to analyse it in depth as if engaged as detectives in a murder enquiry, he was able to get them to extrapolate a host of pertinent facts. The quality of his teaching led to good pupils' learning since pupils were stimulated by the challenge and applied their best intellectual and creative efforts to fulfil the tasks he set.

134. The response of pupils is good. With the exception of a small but significant group of pupils, mostly of very low ability, pupils generally show good application to their work. They respond diligently, settle quickly to task and sustain concentration. Their positive behaviour and response, which is often a direct result of good teaching and good classroom management, is an important factor in their increased learning.

135. The management and leadership of the department are good. The department is led effectively and efficiently by the head of department, supported by the other member of staff, who is an excellent role model for a team committed to raising standards and to the encouragement of pupils to high achievement. Under this leadership, the department has produced informed and informative policies, together with good operational documents, such as schemes of work, which are being implemented with success and which have an effect upon pupils' learning. Successful monitoring has been established to guarantee the maintenance of standards. There is a comprehensive assessment policy, based on sound principles and achievable outcomes. Targets are predicted for pupils against National Curriculum criteria and these make effective and positive impact on the guidance of

pupils' learning and attainment. Pupils are involved in their own self-reviewing of their work. A common marking scheme is fully in place. However, the National Curriculum levels are not posted in pupils' notebooks or on walls of the rooms. The teaching rooms have displays of pupils' work which act as an incentive and which create an atmosphere conducive to learning. These walls and the walls of the corridor of the history suite, are not sufficiently utilised to improve pupils' literacy by the addition of key words

136. There are now clear policies for the use of ICT in the increasing school provision, but as yet, there is insufficient access to, use of and training in the use of ICT to support the subject. There is insufficient use of visits to nearby places of historical interest, which would add immeasurably to the pupils' experience of history.

137. The department has spent money prudently and effectively on a range of new text-books, including differentiated text-books for Years 7 to 9, which contribute significantly to the achievement which pupils make by the time they reach the end of Year 9. However, there is a significant dearth of artefacts in the department and this has an adverse effect on the work of the department.

138. Since the last report, the department has made considerable improvements in several important areas. Progress in Years 7 to 9 is now good. Teaching in the department is benefiting from the application of the new school teaching and learning policy and is now good overall. All classes have clear learning objectives that are shared with the pupils. A particular strength is the short-term planning, which was a concern of the last report. This is now a good department with the capacity and potential for increasing success.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in the courses which are dedicated to the teaching of ICT is satisfactory. The quality of provision in ICT across the rest of the curriculum is unsatisfactory in most subjects.

Strengths

Teaching in dedicated lessons is good. Lessons are well planned and managed.

- There is a sound basic skills course for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9.
- Teaching is well supported by a highly competent ICT systems manager.

Areas for improvement

- The school lacks a fully comprehensive scheme of work to direct teaching and learning in ICT across the curriculum.
- The basic skills course for younger pupils lacks regular end-of-module tests to track attainment in ICT.

139. In the 2000 teacher assessments for 14 year olds, the ICT department awarded levels that were below national averages. These judgements were reflected in the standards of work observed during the inspection, which were below average. Pupils at this age use a range of applications with varying degrees of success. They use word processing competently in a number of subjects, though their use and application of desktop publishing software is not well advanced and few consider in any depth the audience their work is created for. In their ICT lessons, they learn to write satisfactory procedures that control events on a screen. The school has only recently been connected to the Internet and there has been no use by pupils of the information sources it provides. In some subjects, pupils use the school's internal Internet and sometimes they access CD-ROMs to gain information. However, only in ICT lessons have they studied databases in any depth and so have been unable to develop beyond basic concepts. Pupils model information when they produce a profit and loss account, but are not able to develop the modelling information further. This is because of the lack of opportunity to use ICT in other subjects in the curriculum. Pupils achieve well in ICT but they make too little progress on ICT skills in the rest of the curriculum. Overall progress for pupils with

special educational needs is satisfactory while too little evidence exists to judge the progress of gifted and talented pupils.

140. The ICT department provides a good basic skills course for pupils in Year 7,8 and 9. Though pupils attain below-average standards, they are given the opportunity to develop skills in all the areas required by the National Curriculum. This basic grounding in ICT is rarely developed further in the other subjects and this has an adverse effect on the progress made by pupils. Only a few teachers in the school outside of the ICT department regularly use the computers as a tool to enhance learning.

141. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, over half the pupils entered attained A* to C passes. This was just below national averages. Half the pupils entered in 2001 attained A* to C grades. Pupils successfully use word processing, desktop publishing and other industry-standard software packages to create a range of business documents. They cover the areas of knowledge and understanding required by the examination syllabus and learn about typical commercial ICT systems and the ways in which these are used by business. Keyboard skills are often weak and this hinders progress. Standards of work observed during the inspection in the ICT course were below national averages.

142. Less than half of Year 11 pupils take the GCSE ICT course. The others do not experience a planned programme, their experiences of ICT are not tracked and the school has no systematic procedures to assess their attainment. They do not further develop expertise in control technology or in the creation of databases and consequently the standards they attain are well below average.

143. The teaching of ICT is good in the dedicated course. It is good too in a few subjects where it is taught by individual teachers with expertise, notably in design and technology and English. In the remainder of the curriculum ICT teaching is improving but not yet satisfactory: staff expertise is inadequate and the habit of integrating ICT activities into everyday teaching has still to be established. This largely reflects problems of acquiring adequate resources to allow all staff suitable access to computers. Teachers of the dedicated courses have good subject knowledge that they impart effectively in introductions and in the support and guidance to individuals that are an effective feature of the ICT teaching. They produce good support materials, which are under a process of continuous development, and end-of-module tests are planned. The materials give effective guidance to pupils and allow them to be more independent in their learning, as they have a clear idea of what they are expected to do and can proceed on their own. In these courses, learning is good and pupils demonstrate good concentration and application. Teachers have high expectations and so lessons proceed at pace, with a good level of challenge. Good use is made of new technology. For example, they use a data projector to good effect to demonstrate important teaching points to the entire class. The control and management of pupils is good because the work they are given interests and extends them and thereby promotes good learning.

144. The management of ICT is good and the technician provides valuable support. There has been a substantial improvement since the last inspection in the

resources made available to pupils and in the standards they attain. There is still some way to go to improve standards for all pupils, especially those in Years 10 and 11 who do not follow a course in the subject. The school needs to provide a whole-school scheme of work for ICT, backed up by systematic monitoring and recording of pupils' progress in the subject.

MODERN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is good.

Strengths

- Progress in learning and standards of attainment have improved in Years 7 to 9.
- Teaching is good. It has improved considerably since the previous inspection.
- The work of the subject is very well led and managed.
- Assessment procedures, marking, and target setting improve motivation.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning a foreign language have improved.
- The subject is now well staffed and benefits from good accommodation.

Areas for improvement

- Overall standards of attainment in Years 10 and 11.
- The use of the full range of resources, to extend pupils' learning experiences.
- Pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to communicate with native speakers.

145. Attainment at the end of Year 9, as shown by teacher assessments, is in line with the national expectation, for both boys and girls. Girls do better than boys, but by no more than is the case nationally. A small number of gifted pupils reach high levels. At the end of Year 11, results at grades A* to C in 2001 in French were above the national average. They were much better than at the previous inspection in 1999, but considerably lower than in 2000. Results fluctuate considerably. Boys now do as well as girls, and their results

in 2001 were above the national average for boys in 2000, whereas girls' results were in line with the national average for girls. Two pupils gained grade A. Results in Spanish were well below the national average, although candidates had only two years to prepare. The results of pupils doing French compared well to performance in most of their other subjects. However, the number of candidates entered for GCSE in modern languages in each of the last three years constituted only a small percentage of the year group. The vast majority of pupils left without any accreditation in the subject.

146. Given their overall level of attainment on entry to the school, pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9. They hear a good deal of French in lessons from the start of Year 7, and this is sustained, in both French and Spanish lessons, in Years 8 and 9. They gradually increase their knowledge of vocabulary and structure, so that standards in reading and listening are generally satisfactory. By the end of Year 9, higher-attaining pupils write in a range of tenses and, in the best work, experiment with language and begin to write creatively in open-ended tasks. The work of lower-attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, is less accurate, but benefits from the use of writing frames, so that they communicate at a basic level. Speaking skills are less well developed. Pupils enjoy choral repetition and working with a partner, but the vast majority, including the more able, are diffident about

making individual contributions. Without support, their pronunciation is often weak. However, they show more enthusiasm in lessons where merits are awarded for good oral work. By the end of Year 9, most pupils are able to provide a reasonable amount of information, in speaking and writing, about themselves, their home and family, and more demanding topics such as recent holidays.

147. Progress in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall, but there is considerable variation. Inspection evidence shows that some pupils in small GCSE option groups in

Year 11 make good progress. Others within the same groups make satisfactory progress. The majority of pupils follow a course leading to a Certificate of Achievement in Spanish, after studying French in Years 7 to 9. Many of these pupils are working at lower levels than they achieved by the end of Year 9. For them, progress is unsatisfactory, but they are likely to leave with some accreditation. All pupils in Year 10 are now following a GCSE course in French, and a small number also take Spanish. It is too early in the course to assess their progress. The small number of pupils in GCSE groups means that they have more regular opportunities to participate in oral work, so that this skill improves considerably in Years 10 and 11. Pupils use support materials well to improve their written and comprehension work. The best written work is accurate, lengthy and imaginative. Pupils are able to produce interesting accounts and descriptions in a range of tenses, and most can include opinions. Standards in other groups are well below national expectations, but pupils convey information at a basic level, and understand key details in what they read and hear.

148. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Teaching is good or very good in more than half of lessons. It is unsatisfactory in one out of thirteen lessons, which represents a major improvement compared to the previous inspection. Subject knowledge is good. Teachers use the foreign language well to conduct lessons from the start of Year 7, thus providing a good model and raising expectations of pupils, whose learning is improved as a result. They support the school's policies on teaching basic skills by including some emphasis on mathematical and literacy skills, such as use of glossaries and dictionaries; and encourage word processing and research skills, for instance by using the Internet to find out about French speaking countries in Year 8. Planning for individual lessons is invariably very good, and shows a uniform approach to implementing schemes of work. Planning includes the provision of work for pupils of different levels of ability within groups. As a result there is a good level of inclusion and all pupils make progress in their learning. Expectations of pupils are appropriately high, not just of standards in work but also of behaviour. Teachers provide good models in the way they conduct themselves, so that progress in learning is enhanced by good relationships in the classroom. Teaching methods are largely effective. In the best lessons, teachers provide a range of varied activities, covering different skills and conducted at a good pace. In these lessons, pupils consolidate previous learning and acquire new knowledge in an enjoyable atmosphere. For example, in a Year 8 French lesson on the home, pupils enjoyed a lively oral revision session, learned and applied new vocabulary, learned about adjectival endings, and received some cultural input on francophone countries. In a Year 11 Spanish lesson, pupils revised numbers through arithmetical

operations, learned how to express opinions about films, and played board games to practise this language.

149. There is a tendency to rely on a limited range of resources. Long-term planning recognises the need to expand the range of pupils' learning experiences by including more frequent use of computers, readers and video. A more imaginative use of overhead projectors could also enhance teaching and learning. Pupils' attitudes towards learning a foreign language have improved considerably over the last year, and pupils in Years 8 and 9 are pleased to have the opportunity to study an extra language. This improvement is due to good teaching. Where pupils' interest is fully engaged, there are no problems with behaviour. In most lessons, there is a degree of unacceptable behaviour, or passivity. Teachers deal well with this, so that progress in learning is not affected. However, the failure to contain poor behaviour sufficiently early can lead to learning being subverted, and this is where unsatisfactory teaching occurs. Although pupils collaborate well in paired oral work, teachers could profitably extend the use of pair and group work to promote more independence in pupils' classwork and improve confidence in speaking tasks, since too much work is teacher-focused in many lessons. The quality of marking is very good. Teachers routinely add helpful comments and suggest targets for improvement. This has a positive impact on learning. Most homework complements work done in class, and open-ended tasks enable gifted pupils to produce creative work beyond the minimum requirement. However, some tasks are undemanding, so that homework does not always have the impact it should have.

150. The school has addressed the serious weaknesses reported at the previous inspection. Curricular provision in Year 10 is now fully inclusive, and pupils in Years 8 and 9 can learn two languages. Gifted pupils in Year 10 are provided with the opportunity to study German at lunchtime. The department is now fully staffed, and benefits from good accommodation and an increased level of resourcing. A new head of department, in post for just one year, has transformed its working practices, as a result of which there has been very good improvement since the last inspection. This is shown in the improved standards in attainment and progress in Years 7 to 9; in the quality of key documents such as the departmental development plan and new schemes of work; in good assessment procedures; and in the monitoring of the work in the subject. Minutes of meetings show how well the department functions as a unit. The head of department gives a strong example and provides very good leadership and is aware of where further improvements need to be made, especially in improving overall attainment in Years 10 and 11, and broadening pupils' learning experience, notably by the use of new technology, which will facilitate real communication with native speakers.

MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision in music is good.

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Accommodation and resources are good.

- The department is very well managed.

Areas for improvement

- Establish full and effective use of the newly introduced assessment procedures as soon as possible.
- The new scheme of work should be implemented and be rooted in the National Curriculum orders and greater use made of ICT.
- Opportunities for singing in assemblies and music lessons are too limited.

151. In 2001, all thirteen candidates gained a pass grade and three gained the higher A* to C grades in the GCSE examinations. This continues the 100 per cent pass rate in 2000, when there were also ten 10 pupils in the Y10 GCSE group and 17 pupils in the Year 11 GCSE group. Standards of work seen are broadly in line with the national average.

152. In the work seen in Years 7 to 9, attainment is below the nationally expected level and progress is good. The pupils in Year 7 are familiar with the elements of music and can perform a simple melody on the keyboard using one or more of these elements. Year 8 pupils make good progress in their understanding of the twelve-bar blues and are familiar with a technical vocabulary which includes, 'ostinato', 'polyrhythms', 'blue notes' and 'fills'. The pupils in Year 9 make good progress in understanding the idea of theme and variations. They listen attentively to Mahler's theme and variations on 'Frere Jacques' and compose and perform their own arrangements on keyboard. Higher-attaining pupils confidently improvise and play solo on keyboard. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are unsure about the elements of music and are less confident when composing and playing keyboard. More opportunities should be given for pupils to sing. Basic literacy skills are being developed when Year 8 pupils, for example, write extensively about Tchaikowsky and the Nutcracker Suite. Overall achievement from Year 7 is good

153. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are broadly in line with those expected nationally and pupils achievement is good. Year 10 pupils make good progress in their understanding of chord sequences and are able to differentiate between primary and secondary chords. They effectively appraise their own 16-bar keyboard compositions in AABA form. They are also effectively being introduced to music technology. The pupils in Year 11 develop a good understanding of such effects as 'clusters', 'sustained notes' and 'micro-tones', when listening to Penderecki's, 'Threnody of the Victims of Hiroshima'. This had a significant spiritual dimension as pupils reflected on the sufferings in Hiroshima comparing them with the images they were seeing following the terrorist attack in America. The great majority of the pupils including those with special educational needs, make good progress building on their previous learning.

154. The pupils have a good attitude to music and enjoy lessons and extra-curricular music activities. The substantial majority are well behaved and older pupils are committed to obtaining good examination results. The pupils work well together, particularly in composition and performance work. Music activities are all inclusive, involving boys and girls of all abilities. Relationships between pupils and

with teachers are mature and productive. The pupils are courteous and trustworthy and handle with care the expensive instruments and resources they use. They show respect for their own and each other's contributions and performances.

155. The quality of teaching and learning, including instrumental tuition, is good and sometimes very good. The music teacher and visiting staff are accomplished musicians with a secure knowledge of their subject. They successfully impart much of their enthusiasm to the pupils, who learn well because of their strong interest and concentration. Lessons are well planned with teaching objectives and expected learning outcomes being clearly identified. This results in lessons having good pace and enables the pupils to learn very effectively: they approach their work with confidence and in turn make good progress. Care is taken to match the levels of work to the needs and abilities of individuals or groups, particularly in Years 7 to 9. As lessons proceed, work is effectively assessed according to the department's assessment policy, although there is room for improvement in the marking of pupils' work to include individual targets. Pupils with special educational needs and those judge gifted and talented make good progress. The quality of teaching makes an important contribution to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, the pupils in Year 11 were quiet and reflective when listening to Penderecki's Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima. In addition, pupils have a good understanding of African and Latin American music. Teaching and learning are most effective when lesson targets are explained at the start and when time limits are set for activities. Teaching is less effective when lesson outcomes are not made clear to the pupils and learning reflects this.

156. Twenty-seven boys and eighteen girls benefit from free instrumental tuition. Up to fifty pupils benefit from extra-curricular guitar, keyboard and music clubs. School productions, such as Guys and Dolls, Christmas music in the Concourse shopping centre and Christmas assembly involving large numbers of pupils, effectively contribute to the broadening of the pupils' musical experience and complement class lessons.

157. The department is very well managed and enthusiastically led. The new scheme of work should be implemented as soon as possible and fully reflect all aspects of the National Curriculum. The time allocated to music is slightly below the national figure. Accommodation is spacious, bright and welcoming and has a positive effect on pupils' responses. Resources in general are good, but ICT is still under-used in the department. There are relatively few opportunities for pupils to sing either in lessons or assemblies.

158. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards have improved largely as a result of good quality teaching. There should be less dependence upon commercially produced schemes and some resource books are old and in need of replacement. Marking should be improved and the potential benefits of the new assessment procedures should be exploited to the full.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is very good.

Strengths

- Achievement across Years 7 to 11 is good, with the majority of pupils developing a range of skills in games and gymnastics; some pupils achieving high levels of performance.
- Much of the teaching is very good with high but realistic expectations evident, supported by an appropriate emphasis on 'quality' of performance.
- Physical education makes a distinctive contribution to the social and moral development of pupils and provides a rich context for the development of language skills.
- The department is well led and managed.

Areas for Improvement

- Pupils' understanding of principles of play across a range of games is insufficiently developed.
- The department should continue to explore strategies to improve GCSE results.
- Too few strategies are used to involve non-participants in lessons.

159. Standards in the work of 14 year olds observed during the inspection are in line with expectations for their age in games and gymnastics. Pupils exhibit a range of skills in football and netball, often accompanied with technical accuracy while some lack controlled execution. In gymnastics, girls show a range of ideas and while many perform with poise and control others are less assured. Achievement across Years 7 to 9 for pupils as a whole is good, given that many pupils started in Year 7 with a limited experience of physical education. Boys' performances in badminton reflect the lack of previous experience and the need to refine throwing and striking skills.

160. By the age of 16, the number of pupils gaining A* to C grades has decreased over recent years, but is in line with the academic predictions for the last two

cohorts. There is no marked difference in the overall results for girls and boys, but girls' attention to detail and presentation in theory work is much better. Strategies to improve this through the use of specific exercise books are being implemented. The number of girls taking GCSE physical education is low and efforts to improve this figure should continue.

161. Standards in the work of 16 year olds observed in practical sessions are in line with national expectations for their age. In netball and badminton, girls have sound catching, throwing and hitting skills. Knowledge of rules is fairly secure, but tactical appreciation and understanding of some key principles of play is less secure. A significant number, mainly in the GCSE group, exceed expectations for their age and demonstrate a high level of skill. Several boys exhibit a high level of technical skill in passing, receiving and striking 'dead' ball situations in football, but tactical awareness and the ability to officiate in basketball are less well developed. Pupils recognise how to prepare for activity and are aware of the safety issues with different teaching environments and with transporting equipment to fields. The safe movement of apparatus in the gymnasium is particularly efficient and pupils have been well trained.

162. It is rare that pupils with special educational needs can be distinguished from the rest and many make good progress in practical work as a result of a variety of tasks appropriate to their ability and a good range of equipment. Some pupils develop and refine their skills in the structured extra-curricular programme. The department has targeted this area and numbers attending the activities are increasing.

163. Teaching and learning are good, with much being very good. Across Years 7 to 9, teaching is very good where there is a prompt, active start to lessons and teachers provide inspiring demonstration, combining a depth of subject knowledge with a very good knowledge of their pupils. This enables them to provide appropriate targets for the individual as in the teaching of gymnastics. In these lessons, learning is consistently very good for pupils of all abilities. In one lesson observed, some pupils were challenged to create sequences using advanced gymnastic technique while others solved the task with a range of movements, but the emphasis on 'quality' of movement was evident for all pupils. In Year 10, teaching is very good when realistic tasks are set for the different abilities within the group, as in a football lesson where pupils rose to the challenge of bending the ball or hitting difficult targets. Across Years 7 to 11, learning of practical skills is good, but there are missed opportunities to involve the small number of non-participants. Further consideration is needed of helping pupils to observe performances accurately and explain how to improve, thus extending knowledge and understanding. A distinctive feature of the teaching is the reinforcement of acceptable behaviour and appropriate attitudes toward competitive or co-operative situations. The underpinning of literacy work through the regular attention to key words and technical vocabulary is also noteworthy. This is apparent in the GCSE theory lessons and in work in the gymnasium, where good use is made of the whiteboard and displays to extend vocabulary and clarify terms.

164. The department makes the best use of the well-maintained indoor and outdoor accommodation. The addition of a dedicated base for theory lessons has been a worthwhile improvement since the last inspection. Excellent leadership and management are major factors in the success of the department. The head of department has a clear vision for the department that in turn has been translated into realistic aims and objectives. There is an achievable development plan tinged with realism that serves the department well. There is evidence of a reflective culture and a team ethos is well developed within the department. An effective assessment system ensures that learning outcomes are accurately monitored and in turn informs the well-structured curriculum units of work.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is very good.

Strengths.

- Results from the first group to take the GCSE short course examination exceeded the targets, and over a quarter of the pupils entered gained A* to C grades. Well over three-quarters gained A* to G grades.
- Pupils are learning skills, such as analysis, evaluation, and empathy, well.
- Teaching is consistently very good or excellent. It is very well planned with very good use of resources and some excellent videotapes.
- The subject is very well led with a very brisk, committed style that is raising the profile of religious education across the school very well.
- There is an intellectual, theological, and ethical challenge that captures pupils' interest and enables very good learning.

Areas for improvement.

- Library books are insufficient to support GCSE research and reference, although some such resources are provided on the school's Intranet.
- ICT is used, but not fully developed.

165. The results from the first group of Year 11 pupils to take the examination for the GCSE short course were good, and exceeded the targets set. A* to G grades were achieved by 88 per cent of those entered, and 28 per cent gained A* to C.

166. Attainment by the end of Year 9 is broadly in line with the standards expected by the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. However, there are indications that attainment is above average in some work as a result of the very good or excellent teaching and departmental planning. All pupils, including those who have special educational needs make good progress. The department makes very good use of individual education plans for pupils who have special needs. All pupils are taught investigational skills, which lead to better understanding and interpretation of some of the facts they learn. For example, in Year 7, pupils were discovering how to apply their knowledge of the universe to further considerations of its immense size. Excellent teaching and challenge provided many new facts and opportunities to relate various planets, stars and distances within the scheme of the universe. Pupils learn about the Trinity and some of the attributes of God. They are given plenty of opportunities to relate religious beliefs to the example of some famous people, such as Gaby Roslin or Mel Brooks. They understand about some of the sacred books of Hinduism, and learn about the five Pillars of Islam. Year 9 pupils have learnt about modern day 'icons', such as Madonna or Princess Diana. They learn how to think things through in such social topics as drug or alcohol dependence and learn about modern saints such as Maximillian Kolbe or Oscar Romero.

167. By the end of Year 11, pupils' attainment is in line with the expectations both of the locally agreed syllabus and those of the examination board. Some of the

pupils' work is above average. Pupils make good progress, including those who have special educational needs. They learn about social dilemmas such as euthanasia or abortion, and build on work done in earlier years by examining the Big Bang theory of creation. They are extending their understanding of the various views of creation with consideration of the biblical stories in Genesis, Darwin's theories, and looking at the design and purpose of creation. In the ethical part of their work, they consider human problems such as poverty or suffering, and they learn to evaluate the material they discover and form opinions of their own. They have discussed and written about conversion, vision, and presence when considering people's experiences of God.

168. Teaching and learning are very good, with some that is excellent. Teachers plan very well and set high levels of challenge, which motivate pupils very well and enable them to learn effectively. There is imaginative use of resources such as excellent videotapes on space and the universe. Teachers are skilled at using methods that ensure pupils understand the topic. For example, in a Year 10 lesson about the universe, the teacher asked a pupil to hold an apple and an orange to represent the earth and the sun, while a second pupil, at a distance, held a plum to represent Pluto. 'If you use the same scale,' said the teacher, 'and go to the big roundabout at the end of the road, you would represent the edge of our galaxy.' In this very telling way, pupils immediately understood the vastness of the universe, and it increased learning and interest very well. The pace of lessons is very brisk, with time, however, for pupils to read sections of information and then join in a lively discussion. Humour is often used and this too keeps pupils' interest focused on their work and establishes very good relationships with the teacher. Up-to-date information is provided for pupils, which enables very good learning. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, a newspaper cutting from earlier this month on the petition in court of a terminally ill woman to end her life was produced when they were discussing assisted euthanasia. In another class on the same topic, pupils were preparing a mind map to fix the subject in their memories for examination purposes. Relationships are consistently very good and this is one of the keys to the success of teaching and learning in religious education. The subject makes an excellent contribution to spiritual, moral social and cultural education within the school.

169. The department is very well led with an enthusiastic, knowledgeable and committed head of department. Schemes of work have been meticulously planned and all teachers follow them very well. The team of teachers presents a cohesive and committed response to the challenges of teaching religious education and standards are rising well. Resources are good, but there are insufficient books in the school library to support research by pupils for their examination work. More use could be made of ICT, although the department has already recognised this, and some information is scanned into the Intranet for pupils' use.

170. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. In particular, the improvement in standards of teaching, which were satisfactory at the time of the last report, are now very good overall.

171. This is a very successful subject, which is raising its profile in the school and improving standards through the very good teaching, and leadership.