

INSPECTION REPORT

HODGE HILL HGIRLS' SCHOOL

BIRMINGHAM

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number:103483

Headteacher: Ms C Gumbley

Reporting inspector: Mrs J Head
1604

Dates of inspection: 9-13 October 2000

Inspection number: 223768

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	Bromford Road Birmingham
Postcode:	B36 8EY
Telephone number:	0121 783 3094
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr K Siva Yogaiswaren
Date of previous inspection:	13 November 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Jean Head 1604	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it?
			The school's results and achievements
			How well are pupils taught?
			How well is the school led and managed?
			What should the school do to improve further?
Brigid Quest-Ritson 9724	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?
Roger Garrett 19913	Team inspector	English	
Roger Freeman 10244	Team inspector	Mathematics	
David Leonard 1779	Team inspector	Science	
Keith Hopkins 10385	Team inspector	Design and technology	
		Information technology	
Patricia Mitchell 12328	Team inspector	History	
Vernon Williams 20497	Team inspector	Geography	
Ian Waters 4829	Team inspector	Modern languages	
Janet Simms 10053	Team inspector	Art	
Jennifer Murray 1606	Team inspector	Physical education	
		Special educational needs	
		Equal opportunities	
Thelma McIntosh 11975	Team inspector	Music	
Peter Gilliat 4773	Team inspector	Religious education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Kiran Campbell-Platt 19352	Team inspector	English as an additional language	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Hodge Hill Girls' School is a comprehensive school for girls aged 11 to 16. With 669 pupils on roll, it is smaller than many other comprehensive schools nationally. The school is involved in the Excellence in Cities initiative, which aims to raise standards and aspirations in bigger cities. It is pleasantly situated in the Hodge Hill area of Birmingham, but *most* pupils come from the inner city areas of Saltley and Alum Rack, where unemployment is three times the national rate. Thus, although pupils are from mixed socio-economic backgrounds, many experience significant deprivation. About 50 per cent of girls are entitled to free school meals, which is well above the average for comprehensive schools nationally.

Taken as a whole, pupils' attainment on entry is well below average. Although pupils of all levels of prior attainment join the school, the proportion of lower attaining pupils is greater than that found in most schools nationally. The school has identified 40 per cent of its pupils as having special educational needs, which is considerably higher than average. Of these, 5 pupils have statements of special educational needs. Needs include moderate learning and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Almost 80 per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language, although none are at an early stage of language acquisition. Typically, around 75 per cent of 16 year olds move into further education.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

What the school does well

-

What could be improved

-

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
	all schools			Similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
GCSE examinations	C	E	D	A	

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	<i>Pupils have good attitudes to school and to their studies.</i>
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	<i>Behaviour, during the inspection week, was good in lessons and around the school. Pupils behave sensibly when moving around; they are polite and courteous to visitors.</i>
Personal development and relationships	<i>Good relationships are evident in classrooms. Pupils work together constructively; they enjoy and accept opportunities to take responsibility.</i>
Attendance	<i>Unsatisfactory overall, due largely to high levels of authorised absence in Year 11.</i>

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall			

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.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' social development is very good. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development is good. However, the school fails to provide a daily act of collective worship for all its pupils.
How well the school cares for its pupils	

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other	

key staff	
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	
The school's evaluation of its performance	
The strategic use of resources	

Information technology to support learning across the curriculum is underdeveloped. The school currently makes very prudent use of its financial resources; appropriate steps are taken to apply the principles of best value.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The school is approachable.</i> • <i>Their children are expected to work hard and to do well.</i> • <i>Their children like school.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Homework is inconsistent.</i> • <i>The information they receive about their children's progress is insufficient.</i> • <i>The school does not work closely enough with parents.</i>

Parents who returned the questionnaire and those at the parents' evening support the work of the school and are pleased with what it provides for their children. Inspectors agree that the school is approachable and that pupils are expected to work hard, and are encouraged to do well, in most subjects. They consider that the information which parents receive about their children's progress, through consultation evenings, interim and annual reports, is satisfactory overall, but agree that the setting of homework at Key Stage 3 is irregular and inconsistent. The school endeavours to forge effective links with parents, but its efforts meet with limited success.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

The school's results in public tests and examinations are below the national average for all schools at both ages 14 and 16. They are very low in both instances when compared to schools with similar intake. However, the latter comparison is based on the percentage of pupils who are entitled to free school meals. This figure does not give an accurate reflection of the social circumstances of pupils at this school or of their previously measured attainment. Hence, the comparison is invalid and is not included in this report. Pupils achieve broadly as might be expected by the time they leave school, given their attainment on entry.

In 1999, the school's overall points score in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 was below the national average for all schools. Results varied across the three core subjects, being well below average in English, below average in mathematics and in line with the national average in science. Results were lower than those for the previous two years, when the average points score was in line with national results. Thus, over the past four years, the trend in the school's results has been downward, compared with a rising trend nationally. English results have been consistently lower than those in mathematics and science. If results from 1996 to 1999 are taken together, boys and girls have achieved similarly in mathematics and in science, the difference in their performance being in line with national trends in these subjects. However, in English, girls' have achieved considerably better results than boys; the gap in performance has been wider than that found nationally.

A similar overall picture is given by the school's average points score at GCSE, which was below the average for all schools nationally in 1999, and in 1997 and 1998. However, in 1999, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades was in line with the national average for all schools and represented an impressive rise of 11 per cent on the school's 1998 results. In addition, the proportion of pupils gaining one or more A* to G grade was well above that attained by schools nationally. However, over the past six years, the school's average points score has shown a downward trend, as opposed to a rising trend nationally. Girls have attained better results than boys, the gap being broadly in line with national trends. Pupils performed relatively well in 1998 and in 1999 in English literature and in art; performance in mathematics was relatively weak.

Inspection evidence in the main substantiates and confirms the picture painted by the school's examination results. In Year 9, the overall standard of work seen in lessons was below that expected nationally for pupils' age. Standards are lower than usual in English, mathematics, design and technology, geography, history, and modern foreign languages; they are as expected for pupils' age in science, information technology, music, physical education and religious education, and above those usually attained by Year 9 pupils in art. In Year 11, the standard of work seen overall was broadly as expected nationally for pupils' age. Standards are as expected in English, science, geography, history, modern foreign languages, music, physical education, and religious education. Attainment is below that expected in mathematics and well below expectations in design and technology. In information technology, although standards are as expected in some aspects of the subject, many pupils do not have the opportunity to develop their skills in using information technology to measure and control events; hence, overall, standards are not as high as they should be. Standards are well above those expected for pupils' ages in art.

The school uses results from standardised tests taken on entry to predict likely performance at GCSE and to set targets. The attainment profile of the current Year 11 on entry was below average. Even so, the 38 per cent target for five or more A* to C grades at GCSE in 2000 is not particularly challenging. The strong academic monitoring that takes place at Key Stage 4 indicates that the school is on line to meet this target, but teachers will need to ensure that the 'as expected' standards of work observed in classrooms are translated into examination results that are in line with national averages.

Literacy

The quality of contributions made by other subjects to standards of literacy is satisfactory overall. Design and technology provides good opportunities for practising oral skills when design evaluations are presented to the whole class. Music requires the reading of song sheets and pupils encounter quite demanding vocabulary. They have to write in a variety of contexts. In geography pupils at Key Stage 3 analyse persuasive language in promotional literature and use role-play. Emphasis on key words and the use of appropriate language are features of teaching in maths and art. However, it is clear that in all subjects pupils' skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening are under-developed, and though there is improvement as pupils move through the key stages their weaknesses depress standards of attainment. The school's intervention programme and literacy strategy has gained further impetus from the appointment of a literacy co-ordinator and the establishment of a literacy task group. Their work is focused on departmental literacy work and maintaining and extending the strategies already in place. It will be evaluated as part of an "Action Research Project". The school

has the capacity to achieve consistency of approach across subject departments and thus raise standards of attainment further.

Numeracy

Standards of numeracy are weak. They are better at Key Stage 3 following the introduction of mental mathematics sessions at the beginning of each lesson. The standards are lower at Key Stage 4 due to the lack of continuity of teaching and learning in mathematics through prolonged absences of members of staff. Standards in geography are generally satisfactory as Key Stage 4 pupils make good sense of information presented in tables, charts, diagrams and graphs as a component of their coursework and individual projects. However, at Key Stage 3, there is insufficient coverage. In design and technology, teaching is effective meeting the pupils' specific needs but lacks a structured approach. Year 9 pupils show a good understanding of number in an information technology control lesson when calculating time differences and inputting the numerical data to control a fan and a light which are linked to sensors. Pupils' spatial weakness is improved through good teaching in art as pupils learn to realise a cube into a two-dimensional drawing.

The effectiveness of strategies for teaching numeracy skills are satisfactory. The mathematics department's new strategies mental mathematics for all pupils, developed in consultation with an adviser, are effective and beginning to improve pupils' facility for number. Some departments have started to incorporate numeracy into their Year 7 schemes of work in accordance with Curriculum 2000. However, opportunities are missed in most areas of the curriculum to build systematically upon pupils' knowledge and use of number. The school recognises the need for developing a whole school strategy. The recently appointed a co-ordinator held the first task force meeting recently to discuss issues to improve basic skills teaching across all curriculum areas.

Information technology Keith Hopkins

The school's results are to some extent a reflection of pupils' attainment on entry to the school. For many years, the attainment profile of the intake has been below average; pupils' literacy skills have been well below average. Actual results at GCSE are broadly in line with those predicted by scores from standardised tests taken on entry; the percentage of A* and A grades is higher than might be expected. Thus, assessment data indicates that pupils achieve broadly as they should during their time at the school; higher attaining pupils achieve well and make good progress in learning. An inspection analysis, comparing 1999 GCSE results with 1997 Key Stage 3 National Curriculum

results, indicates that pupils made expected progress overall during Key Stage 4; progress was good in English and science and was satisfactory in mathematics.

Inspection findings also confirm to a large extent the evidence provided by assessment information; namely, that pupils make satisfactory progress in learning in most subjects during their time at the school and, by age 16, achieve standards as might be expected given their low levels of literacy on entry. However, there is too much 'marking time' at Key Stage 3. Although pupils make satisfactory or better progress in most subjects during Years 7 to 9, they do not achieve as well as they should in the key areas of English and mathematics. In both subjects, progress is too slow, particularly in Year 7, due to an unacceptably high proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. Progress is also too slow in design and technology. Hence, overall, pupils' achievements at the end of Key Stage 3 are not as high as they should be. In addition, pupils with special educational needs are not able to achieve as well as they might in many subjects, because some teachers do not fully understand how to set short-term targets or how to address the difficulties that pupils have with learning.

At Key Stage 4, progress remains unsatisfactory in mathematics; standards are not high enough. Pupils' achievements are also too low in design and technology. In information technology, pupils' achievements are not as high as they could be in some aspects of the subject. Conversely, pupils make very good progress in art. They make good progress during Years 10 and 11 and achieve well in English, science, geography, modern foreign languages and physical education. Progress and achievement are satisfactory in all other subjects. This faster rate of progress at Key Stage 4 is facilitated by consistently good teaching, by a strong academic monitoring and mentoring system for all pupils and by pupils' own motivation to do well. Lower attaining pupils achieve well on a vocational New Start course; greater adaptation of work, as a result of setting arrangements, allows other pupils with special educational needs to achieve appropriately. Higher attaining pupils respond well to the demands of examination work and achieve above what might be expected of them. They do particularly well in art and modern foreign languages.

EAL: In the majority of lessons observed, the standards achieved by the majority of pupils identified by the school as having English as an Additional language are similar to standards achieved by all pupils, except for a minority of pupils who are at the early stages of language acquisition and a small group of pupils in Year 8, identified in Year 7 to be at risk of underachieving.

Pupils with English as an Additional Language make good progress in language acquisition in relation to their literacy skills at entry to the school. Pupils make appropriate progression in all the language skills, including reading at key Stage 3, showing good improvement since the previous

inspection. The majority of pupils make good gains in all the literacy skills and at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4, they have acquired the requisite linguistic ability to access the curriculum and to contribute actively in classroom discussions.

The progress made by pupils with EAL is monitored through very good arrangements for assessing pupils' levels of achievement in literacy at the start of secondary education and for tracking progress through the key stages. The process of individual target setting, which is reviewed annually, enables the school to identify underachieving pupils who are then targeted for additional support, for example, pupils at Years 7 who did not meet their targets for literacy, are receiving additional support from the EMAG funded teacher in Year 8. EAL pupils with special educational needs receive satisfactory support from the special needs provision. However the progress of more able pupils with EAL is limited in some subjects of the curriculum, for example, in geography and maths where teachers set insufficiently challenging tasks.

EAL pupils' progress in developing language skills is supported by a wide range of whole school literacy strategies which enable the majority of pupils with English as an additional language to extend their language skills progressively so that they are able to access the curriculum effectively at both the key stages. Effective additional support for progress in language acquisition, especially for newly arrived at all key stages and underachieving pupils at Years 7 and 8, is provided on a one to one or small group basis by the specialist EAL teacher. However, specialist EAL support is not available for underachieving EAL pupils in Year 9 or at Key Stage 4 or for newly arrived pupils after the initial two week induction period although the EAL teacher liaises with subject teachers on the provision of curriculum provision and strategies relevant to the needs of pupils.

SEN: The attainment of pupils with special educational needs is well below national figures for all pupils. However, these pupils are fully integrated into all lessons and are able to make good progress because they receive good teaching. Their achievement is good throughout the school giving them better results at the end of each key stage than might be expected given their attainment on entry.

Gifted and talented pupils also benefit from good teaching and they too make good progress and achieve well at the end of both key stages. Their attainment is being enhanced effectively through the gifted and talented programme run by the school.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

Most pupils have good attitudes to their studies and are interested in their lessons. In a Year 7 science lesson pupils enjoyed learning about the classification of animals and were as eager to ask questions as to answer them. Pupils are usually attentive, as in a Year 10 French lesson when they took part in chorus work. Pupils also respond well when they are actively involved in lessons, as, for example, in a Year 11 English lesson when they were asked to comment on life in rural Mississippi in the 1930s from the viewpoint of the characters in the novel they were studying. Sometimes pupils will respond better to written, rather than spoken, tasks. There are occasions when some pupils' lack of concentration means they do not pay attention to what is being said, but are easily distracted and prefer to talk among themselves as happened in a Year 11 geography lesson.

Behaviour in lessons is predominantly good throughout the school. Problems of behaviour associated with a short attention span and lack of concentration do arise, but are normally handled well by teachers. Behaviour as pupils move around the school is also good. Corridors and stairs become very crowded at lesson changeovers, even with a one-way system. Pupils are sensible at such times and move around the school in an orderly manner. Cases of bullying or oppressive behaviour rarely occur. There are some incidents of bickering and friendship squabbles. Pupils themselves helped to draw up their code of conduct, which emphasises their responsibility towards others. This sense of responsibility is reflected in their general good behaviour, except for the amount of litter dropped in the hall after break and lunch. There have been no permanent exclusions in the past year. The figure for fixed term exclusions is slightly below average for a school of this size.

Relations in the school are good, both among pupils and between pupils and members of staff. In a Year 9 English lesson about relationships, pupils listened with attention and respect and readily applauded each other's work. The good relations the class had with their teacher contributed to pupils' enjoyment in a Year 11 mathematics lesson. Pupils respond well to the extensive provision the school makes for their personal development. Many are ready to accept posts of responsibility. The Support Our Students (SOS) group is a good example of pupils working responsibly together as a team to help others. The work of this peer support group was praised both by younger pupils who use it and the older girls who run it. However, some pupils are reluctant to show much initiative and independence in the way they work.

Attendance levels at the school are unsatisfactory, although there has been an improvement during the past year. The rate of attendance for 1998/99 was 88.3 per cent, which is below the national average of 91 per cent. This improved to 90.4 per cent in 1999/00. Authorised absence in 1998/99 was 10.5 per cent and improved to 8.1 per cent in 1999/00. The rate of unauthorised absence was 1.2 per cent in 1998/99 and 1.5 per cent in 1999/00, close to the national average of 1.1 per cent. Many

pupils have good levels of attendance. The unsatisfactory overall level is largely because a few pupils have very low rates of attendance. Those pupils' standards of attainment are adversely affected. Not all pupils arrive promptly in time for school.

These standards are similar to those noted in the last inspection report.

SEN: Pupils with learning difficulties are indistinguishable from their classmates and display good attitudes in lessons. Those pupils with statements of special educational need appreciate the support of classroom assistants and realise how they are helped to learn. Their work reflects their willingness to try hard and the positive attitudes they have to learning. One Year 7 mathematics lesson, supported by the special educational needs co-ordinator, demonstrated how enthusiastic these pupils can be by their participation in a brain awakening session.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

EAL: The school has made good progress since the previous inspection in the provision for developing bilingual learners across both key stages. Provision is now good overall and is due to the school's development of inclusive teaching by subject teachers as the principle approach for meeting the needs of the large number of EAL pupils. The provision for EAL pupils in Years 7 and 8 is very good and the range of teaching includes whole class, small group and one to one showing an improvement in the support of underachieving pupils as compared to the previous inspection.. The school has a specialist EAL teacher funded through EMAG who provides very good focused support for EAL pupils in Years 7 and 8 and satisfactory support in collaborative teaching and the development of differentiated resources for use by literacy and humanities subject teachers. The community outreach worker provides a valuable link between school and the parents of individual pupils identified for support, for example, working with a group of Year 11 pupils who are in the process of completing their coursework for GCSE and providing information for parents.

The school is in the process of developing a wide range of inclusive planning and teaching strategies for meeting the full range of needs of EAL pupils at both key stages: from those at the early stages of language acquisition to those who are linguistically fluent but who have further language needs for higher order learning. The latter is an area for development for the school, especially in the provision of consistently challenging tasks for more able EAL pupils across all subjects of the curriculum.

However, in the majority of lessons, learning is effective and work is appropriately matched to the range of language needs of EAL pupils.

Effective whole school literacy strategies which were observed to be consistently applied across curricular areas and which enable sound progression in learning for EAL pupils, include, for example, the use of key words and matching these to definitions, teaching the spelling of technical words and the use of writing frames. Teachers make appropriate efforts to explain instructions so that EAL pupils understand them, for example, in a Year 11 maths lesson, the teacher clarified key points and checked pupils understanding throughout the lesson. Bilingual subject teachers make effective and helpful use of EAL pupils' first languages to explain difficult subject concepts, for example, to a recently arrived pupil in Year 9. Teachers generally make good efforts to involve all pupils in classroom discussions thereby adding to the sound progress that is made by most pupils in their speaking and listening skills.

Pupils with EAL behave well and listen attentively to teachers in whole class and small group work. They apply appropriate effort in their work and take part in classroom discussions confidently and respond willingly to questions which teachers ask to check comprehension of the content of lessons and to clarify if instructions are understood.

SEN: Teachers work very well with their classes and ensure that work is suitable for pupils with learning difficulties. There are many instances in most subjects where teachers use a good range of strategies to ensure that pupils are fully involved. For example in French, teachers use different worksheets to suit the different learning needs of pupils. The display and use of key words across subjects builds up pupils' understanding of subject specific language well. The many strategies used by the school to develop literacy are particularly beneficial to pupils with learning difficulties. Although teachers cater well for all pupils in their classes, pupils with learning difficulties learn and make the most progress when they have additional support to help them. For example, in a Year 10 art lesson, two pupils with statements of special educational need benefited from the very good interaction with the learning support assistant. They were both able to achieve and to gain an understanding of the main ideas.

Gifted and talented pupils are challenged well in lessons. Teachers expect these pupils to achieve and set work that helps them to attain well. For example, in mathematics not only is teaching of the higher groups good but pupils are able to attend additional lunch-time sessions. **(Jean have you got a better example on an EF)**

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

The school provides a good curriculum for its pupils. It has a clear rationale and is well focused on providing effective learning opportunities for all pupils. Since the last inspection the school has reviewed and improved the curriculum, and continues to keep it under review to ensure that it matches the interests, aptitudes and special needs of pupils.

At Key Stage 3 the breadth and balance of the curriculum is satisfactory and pupils are given enhanced opportunities beyond the National Curriculum through the provision of drama, and personal, social and health education. The school offers a good curriculum at Key Stage 4 which is both relevant and flexible. All pupils follow courses in English, mathematics, science, a modern foreign language, design and technology, physical and religious education, and PSHE. In addition, pupils have a wide range of option choices, including extension courses such as business French, Express Urdu, Islamic studies and media studies. For some courses the Certificate of Achievement or a short GCSE are offered as alternatives to the full GCSE. Option choices also include a GNVQ programme in business studies and the Youth Award Scheme. All statutory requirements are fulfilled except some elements of the programmes of study in ICT and PE at Key Stage 4.

Opportunities for pupils to extend their learning and widen their horizons through extra-curricular activities are good. Provision such as the summer schools, the Easter revision school for Year 11 pupils, the homework club and the extended learning club provides pupils with extra support which help raise standards. A wide range of interest and curricular clubs are available to pupils at lunchtime. Most departments arrange relevant educational visits, such as theatre trips to Stratford and geography fieldwork in Birmingham City Centre. In addition the school provides a modest programme of extra-curricular sports activities.

Provision for PSHE is good, with one lesson a week in each year. The programme is taught by tutors at Key Stage 3 and by a team of experienced teachers at Key Stage 4. The scheme of work is well planned and monitored, and is responsive to pupils' needs. Pupils benefit from the overall programme that includes sex and relationship education, careers education and guidance, aspects of citizenship, health education and issues of drugs misuse. In one Year 10 lesson, for example, pupils were being very well prepared for work experience later on in the year with activities to develop confidence and expertise in using the telephone. The school regularly reviews its work in this field and is involved in local initiatives, such as those promoted by the Healthy Schools Project.

The school has extensive links with the community and these make a good contribution to pupils' learning. The Community Outreach worker and the two home/school workers help the school to establish contacts in the community which can be used for the benefit of pupils. Good relationships with local mosques, for example, enable meetings to be held which promote mutual understanding between the school and the wider community. Close links with business and industry are effective in promoting learning in curriculum areas such as business studies and careers education and guidance.

Relationships with partner institutions are good. Since the last inspection the school has been involved in a number of local projects which has helped to promote good links with partner primary schools. The head of Year 7 has recently been given specific responsibility to establish these links on a more permanent basis. However good systems are already in place to ensure that information about Year 6 pupils' attainments and aptitudes are known by the school before they start in Year 7. The summer schools attended by some Year 6 pupils provide a useful preparation for secondary school. Good relationships with further education and sixth form colleges ensure a smooth transition from school to college.

The level of improvement since the last inspection has been good. The school has worked hard to promote effective curriculum continuity across Key Stages 2 and 3 through closer liaison with its partner primary schools. It has also reviewed its overall curriculum organisation, improved the arrangements for the grouping of pupils and provided a better curriculum balance in its allocation of time to individual subjects.

EAL: EAL pupils have access to the full curriculum, however, in Year 9 and at Key Stage 4, EAL pupils do not have access to individual support from the EAL teacher for the development of specific language needs.

The school's provision for pupils' spiritual development is good. The high standard and variety of display work around the school provide the visitor with the values and beliefs that the school seeks to promote. Good contributions to spiritual development are made by religious education, English literature and art, with some contributions from French, Urdu, history, science and geography. Religious education provides pupils with good opportunities to consider and respond to questions of meaning and purpose, for instance belief in God, and to questions about the nature of values, such as Muslims' values on the role of women. In an English lesson, the teacher placed strong emphasis on understanding people's feelings in relation to the text studied. In a very good art lesson in Year 8, the teacher explored the emotive side of art: textures, feelings, reading and listening to sounds.

Assemblies take place on one day each week for each key stage. Although 70 per cent of the school population are Muslim, no pupils have been withdrawn by their parents from assembly. There are half-termly themes for assemblies as well as a Thought for the Week, which is used in tutorial time when no assembly is taking place. All assemblies have a period of reflection and usually a reading or poem, and there is effective evaluation of the content of assemblies. The themes for assemblies share values, sometimes of a Christian nature, and encourage respect for others. They provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on their own contribution to those around them. In this respect, the themes also contribute substantially to the provision for pupils' moral development. However, the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all its pupils.

The provision for pupils' moral development is good. The Code of Conduct is displayed in every classroom and pupils are well aware of what is expected of them. Good behaviour is promoted by teachers in lessons, where the red dot in the planner is used effectively. Teachers set very good examples for the pupils to follow, and there is mutual respect. Pupils examine moral issues and moral decisions, such as drug abuse, in the PSHE programme or the sex education programme. The virtue of hard work was extolled in the Thought for the Week during the inspection: Working will win, wishing won't. Issues of right and wrong are covered in history in dealing with the slave trade triangle. Resources and the conflict of land use in the National Parks are treated in geography.

Provision for pupils' social development is very good. The values set out in the themes for assemblies – the importance of one's actions, the impact on the community or the necessity to consider others – provide the basis for social behaviour. Group or pair work in many lessons, playing in the orchestra, residential courses, visits and trips help pupils to develop good relationships with each other. During this half-term 15 teams of four pupils from Year 9 are taking part in the Young People's Health Challenge, organised by Birmingham City Council. Pupils are given the opportunity to accept responsibility as members of the School Council and the Year 11 Committee. About ten Year 10 pupils undergo training for six months in order to help with the scheme Saving Our Students (SOS), designed to give support to Year 7 pupils. Weekly meetings provide different activities and, later in the year, drop-in clinics. Health education contributes to pupils' social development, and there is good social support for pupils through the new learning development team. The school is a very well integrated community.

Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. Visits in history to Ludlow and Goodrich castles help pupils to appreciate the local environment and its heritage. Art exploits pupils' own culture well. Some artists are brought in to provide extra-curricular activities, often from the ethnic community, and they focus on aspects of Asian culture, for example textiles. English texts show a

good awareness of the multi-cultural nature of the school. In French many pupils have contact with a native speaker. In design and technology, teachers provide opportunities and encourage pupils to talk about their own cultural traditions and to share their beliefs with others. The diversity and richness of other cultures is also promoted in textiles and food technology. The parent link and community outreach workers use their contacts outside school to enrich cultural development.

Since the last inspection, a Pastoral Manager has been appointed to improve the tutor programme and provide more focus on pupils' academic progress. There has been a better response from many subjects of the curriculum to the spiritual development. The daily act of collective worship still remains an issue.

SEN: Curricular provision is good at both key stages for pupils with special educational needs. Class groups and courses are well selected for these pupils so that they are placed in lessons where they are able to learn at their own pace. However, apart from pupils who have statements of special educational need, or those who have language development support, other classroom assistants are not available to assist pupils in lessons.

The opportunities for pupils to attend extra-curricular activities such as reading, super-learners and extended learning clubs at lunch times and after school are very good. During these sessions, pupils' learning is assessed and monitored so that additional on-going provision can be made where necessary.

Gifted and talented pupils are very well provided for through an extensive programme funded from the Excellence in Cities initiative. This has enabled the school to work in a cluster of schools providing enrichment activities such as the Macbeth workshop and sign language club. These activities are not only intended to improve attainment at the highest levels but also to develop pupils self esteem and confidence.

A strength of provision for pupils with learning difficulties is the communication made with outside agencies and the efforts to co-ordinate and support the systems available to pupils and their families.

EO: The school ethos, staff attitudes and the contribution of learning support teams create a climate for everybody in the school to feel valued and included. Pupils have full access to the curriculum and the very good range of additional extra-curricular classes, paired reading and general support for the most and least able ensures that pupils are not faced with barriers to their own improvement.

Equality of opportunity underpins the work of the school and has provided the rationale for the

establishment of the pastoral and learning development teams with pupils at the centre of planning. Pupils and staff are treated as individuals and every effort is made to encourage and develop a feeling of self worth and self esteem through activities such as the visit to Cambridge University. The school's equal opportunities policy statement is unequivocal that the environment should be free from any form of harassment including discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion or ability; this statement is supported fully through the many and varied displays and posters about the school.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

The school puts pupils at the epicentre of its policies for their welfare, support and guidance. There are very good procedures to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety. Health education plays an important part in this provision and features strongly in several subjects of the curriculum. There are very good procedures to ensure pupils' safety both in the school and on visits outside. The school records and monitors attendance meticulously. Good attendance is encouraged and rewarded. Tutor group bases show how the attendance rates of the various groups compare over the past month. With the help of the parent link workers, the learning development team and the Education Social Worker, Heads of Year investigate absence and persistent lateness and try to reduce them. Their efforts have improved the overall rate of attendance. The procedures the school has developed to promote discipline and good behaviour are also very good. Rules and the code of conduct – which pupils helped to compile – are clear and consistently followed by members of staff. Rewards and sanctions are equally well understood by pupils because these are included in the organisers which all pupils carry around with them. It is easy for pupils to know how well they are doing and for members of staff to see if there are any problems. The red dot – a sanction in a pupil's organiser - can be redeemed by over-stamping through negotiated good work or behaviour. This is a simple and very effective encouragement, especially for younger pupils. The school has just begun to complement these procedures by using the Framework for Intervention: this gives extra assistance to teachers in managing pupils and helping them learn. There are appropriate child protection procedures.

The school looks after the girls in its care very well. Detailed records are kept not just of academic progress, but also of personal progress and of any problems which could affect how pupils learn, such as behaviour or attendance. Members of staff know pupils well. All the many initiatives to develop a sense of personal responsibility and raise self-esteem have pupils' guidance as their prime focus. There are two 'achievement days' for all pupils who are helped to set targets for themselves on the first day and review them on the second, some months later. Y11 pupils have three additional individual interviews. Praise and recognition of effort play an important part in the way the school helps pupils. There are celebration award evenings for pupils at Key Stage 3 and academic awards

for pupils at Key Stage 4. The school takes full advantage of those local and national initiatives which will help pupils. 'Excellence in Cities', for example, provided funds to help establish the learning development team and its work with individual pupils.

The last inspection report considered that the school looked after pupils well, but that more effective monitoring of pupils' personal and academic progress was desirable. Much progress has been made since then. The pastoral and assessment systems have been extensively revised and are now very effective. The role of the form tutor in this process, coordinating the two systems as they affect individual pupils is under development.

Assessment

SEN: All pupils are carefully screened on entry to school so that early identification of those to be entered onto the special needs register can be made. At present, the register supplies a list of names and an overarching comment, such as literacy, but central records do not show the strategies or support that is given to pupils. Individual education plans are in place but they do not provide clear short term targets for each pupil. Teachers are not provided with a clear analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of pupils on the special needs register and the pupils' files do not provide the information that would help teachers to plan work for these pupils. All statutory requirements are met for pupils with statements of special educational need; reviews are held regularly and their needs are met.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

Parents think highly of what the school provides for their daughters. A large number, many more than average, returned the pre-inspection questionnaire. Their responses were overwhelmingly favourable. Parents think the school expects their daughters to work hard and do their best. They consider that their daughters like the school, make good progress and behave well. They also think the school is helping their daughters to become mature and responsible. The inspection team agrees with parents' favourable views. Parents concerns were few. A small number had reservations about the information they received about progress, whether the school worked closely with them and the range of extra-curricular activities. Inspectors agree that the amount of information about progress in reports varies, but they consider the school works very closely with parents and provides a good range of extra-curricular activities.

The way the school has worked hard and sensitively to establish a partnership with parents is excellent. The parent link workers and the Community Outreach worker play important and highly effective roles in this. The link workers act as intermediaries, helping the pastoral teams, individual pupils and parents. They help to develop trust between the school and parents who might otherwise have difficulty in contacting the school with problems or concerns. The school has also run courses for parents on such topics as Information Communications Technology and English as an Additional Language. Working jointly with the Community Outreach worker, the school has organised special meetings for parents which are held at mosques and Islamic centres. Topics at these have included attendance, careers and how parents can help with learning. These meetings have been well attended. The school provides a good range of information about itself through the prospectus, the governors' annual report, newsletters and curriculum information. The pupil organisers provide a valuable and regular link with parents. The information which parents receive about progress is more variable, but nonetheless satisfactory overall. All reports have factual details of the courses studied and tick boxes to indicate standards. Some of the accompanying comments give parents clear information about progress and tell them what their daughters can do and need to do in order to improve in that subject, but this good practice is not common to all. The school has worked to reach out to parents and make it easier for them to learn about the school and the work their daughters do. This has improved the parents' involvement and brought their contribution to a satisfactory level. More parents now come to parents' evenings and are happy to approach the school and cooperate with them when problems arise.

There has been continuous improvement since the last inspection.

SEN: The school makes every effort to work with parents in supporting pupils with special educational need but there is a limited response to requests for attendance at meetings.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Overall the school has a good match of teaching and non-teaching staff for the needs of its curriculum. In most subject areas the number of staff is appropriate, and they are suitably qualified, with fewer teachers teaching outside their specialist areas than before. Administration, clerical, technical and other non-teaching staff also match needs well. The school has successfully recruited staff from ethnic minorities lately, and has become a model of good practice locally. These, and all staff provide good role models for pupils. Exceptions to this good match lie in religious education,

music and mathematics. Adverse impacts on pupils' attainment and progress in mathematics are still evident. These result from recent, but now largely resolved staffing difficulties, which have disrupted continuity and progression in pupils' learning. In religious education, the absence of the recently appointed head of department is being well managed by the school, drawing on outside advice and help, but is still adversely affecting provision in this subject. The absence of the head of music means that the non-specialist music teachers and recently qualified supply staff lack specialist support. The school is very well aware of these difficulties, and governors and the senior management team are doing all they can to minimise the damage to pupils' learning.

The school has recently gained the Investors in People award which testifies to its sound systems of staff development. Although formal appraisal has been in abeyance, the head teacher has had interviews with staff which have been better focused than the more "comfortable" previous appraisals. These professional development interviews have identified needs for individual and whole-school training, which have linked in with the school's central development planning and departments' needs. Some staff have also become involved in longer term courses to advance their careers. The Governing Body and senior staff have made a good start on arrangements for Performance Management, and many staff have applied for the Threshold Assessment.

Unusually few newly qualified teachers have been appointed to the school in recent years. Induction systems are in place for all newcomers, and the systems of mentoring for newly qualified teachers are secure. Several staff are trained mentors. The school is aware of the shortcomings in induction packages for supply staff, and needs to get these secured urgently. Recent absences on the part of senior department staff have highlighted the need for support faced by supply staff filling in for these teachers. At the time of inspection several initial teacher training students were in the school, which is a committed provider of teaching practice in a number of subjects.

The school's response to the Key Issue relating to support staff for pupils with a need for English as an Additional Language has been largely resolved. The Local Education Authority's appointee identifies EAL needs, and pupils undergo intensive induction into the school on arrival. Three pupils were on this programme in the week of inspection. The significant response, though, has been on a whole-school basis. EAL pupils are seen as having specific needs across the whole range of the curriculum, and all staff have been trained to recognise and cater for these language needs. Further training for all staff on the needs of bilingual learners is required, but pupils' needs are now generally met, and this provision has effectively resolved the Key Issue. A greater need now, is for the school

to meet the needs of special educational needs pupils on the Code of Practice who are not stated. In some cases, these complex needs also involve EAL issues.

Accommodation overall is satisfactory. Since the previous inspection successful negotiations have been completed with the East Birmingham College resulting in the return for full use of three teaching rooms in the school. This has improved provision with the establishing of a vocational suite for business studies, a learning development base and a careers office. There has also been a significant improvement in physical education facilities with a good quality refurbishment the gymnasium and changing rooms. The school has re-organised space well to establish a new and larger open learning centre for pupils learning support, and built a new drama studio. Working conditions in design and technology have also been upgraded. However, the teaching and practice accommodation in music is inadequate in terms of space and acoustics and adversely affects the quality of teaching and learning. An additional permanent specialist classroom base is needed in history and religious education as present arrangements depress standards. There is still a general shortage of space with the library and hall being too small for the size of the school and some classrooms are small for some activities such as investigatory resource based learning in geography.

Movement around the school has improved with the implementing of a one way system of pupil movement but access to and around the school for disabled persons is inadequate. Most general rooms such as the library are welcoming and colourful and many very good quality displays exist in classrooms and adjacent corridors, which enhance learning. The largely open plan nature of the campus which is shared with other schools makes litter control difficult but within the school more preventative action is needed to reduce litter in the hall during break and the lunchtime.

Resources for learning are adequate in most subjects. There are particular strengths in mathematics where textbooks have a positive effect on learning because they are well matched to the requirements of the National Curriculum, and in design and technology where very good equipment and software enable control technology and electronics to be well taught. However, there are weaknesses in history and science because students are unable to keep books at home to help with homework, and in geography because there is insufficient overhead projection equipment and the television monitor is too small to allow all students to have a satisfactory view. Students are unable to carry out the full range of geography fieldwork because the departmental budget is insufficient.

The quantity and range of books in the library are good; books are well organised and attractively displayed. Students make good use of the library, both for reading and borrowing. Although the new open learning centre has eased some of the pressure for space, access to the library is restricted

because the room remains too small to accommodate all those students wishing to use it. The open learning centre is an increasingly well-used facility that is beginning to enhance learning across the curriculum; it also houses family literacy and careers libraries.

Although the open learning centre (a key issue at the last inspection) is now in use, some areas of the curriculum have insufficient resources. Overall, resources for learning are satisfactory.

EAL: There is very good management of the provision for EAL, for example, regular meetings for the EAL teacher with the deputy head with management responsibility for EAL. Sound strategies are established for monitoring the achievement of EAL pupils in Years 7 and 8 and planning support to meet their language needs. Although data collection on the progress of EAL pupils is school wide and very thorough not all pupils have access to specialist EAL support for the development of their specific language needs. Some teachers, for example, literacy and humanities teachers in Years 7 and 8 have had training in the development of differentiated materials and the use of teaching strategies for EAL pupils. However, training for all subject teachers on developing differentiated resources and teaching strategies not yet in place.

SEN: The newly appointed special educational needs co-ordinator has a clear overview of the improvements required for individual education plans and for record keeping. As she has been in post just four weeks it is too early for her plans to be implemented. The small team of learning assistants who provide support for pupils with statements of special educational need are valued highly and their contribution within lessons is significant in the gains in learning that these pupils make.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

(1)

(2)

(3)

Other less serious weaknesses, which should be considered for inclusion in the governors' action, are to be found in paragraphs.....

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

[]

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

[]

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	669	N/A
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	338	N/A

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	5	N/A
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	267	N/A

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	527

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	26
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	25

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	10.5
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.2
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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999			

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys			
	Girls			
	Total			
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School			
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School			
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys			
	Girls			
	Total			
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School			
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School			
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999			

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			
	Girls			
	Total			
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School			
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	[]
	National	[]

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	[]	[]	[]	[]

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	[]	[]	[] ([])	[]	[]	[] ([])
National	[]	[]	[] ([])	[]	[]	[] ([])

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	[]
	National	[]

International Baccalaureate	Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	[]
	National	[]

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	38
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	14
Pakistani	468
Bangladeshi	23
Chinese	0
White	89
Any other minority ethnic group	37

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	13	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	4	0
Other minority ethnic groups	3	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)	44.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	388

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	?
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.9
Key Stage 4	21.3

Financial information

Financial year	[]
----------------	-----

	£
Total income	[]
Total expenditure	[]
Expenditure per pupil	[]
Balance brought forward from previous year	[]
Balance carried forward to next year	[]

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	
Number of questionnaires returned	355

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	45	46	5	2	2
My child is making good progress in school.	40	48	3	1	8
Behaviour in the school is good.	49	37	8	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	42	43	9	4	3
The teaching is good.	44	40	8	2	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	37	13	4	8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	45	39	6	2	8
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	65	29	2	1	4
The school works closely with parents.	35	40	12	3	10
The school is well led and managed.	35	42	7	3	13
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	35	7	2	8
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	32	39	11	4	14

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

[text] [replaces the table when there are fewer than ten returns]

Other issues raised by parents

[text] [a short comment should be included if applicable]

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

ENGLISH

Standards of attainment in English are below those expected nationally by the end of both key stages. However, pupils achieve at least as well as they should in relation to their attainment on entry or prior attainment, and often better. This is because of the quality of teaching, which is good overall and at times very good or excellent. The planning of pupils' work, the variety of teaching methods used, and the management of pupils are particularly strong features. Teachers also enjoy working with their pupils and cultivate a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others both in classroom relationships and in the texts studied. Pupils therefore take pleasure in their learning and make good progress in developing skills, knowledge and understanding in both key stages. Good leadership of the department is responsible for this pleasant and productive working atmosphere, and ensures that the team combines careful assessment of pupils' needs with consistently high expectations for work and behaviour.

1999 Key Stage 3 test results were close to the national average for all pupils. Using average points scores for comparison with all schools, pupils' performance was below the national average. In comparison with similar schools, however, performance was well above average and higher than in maths and science. Although girls did substantially less well than girls nationally, these pupils achieved better results than would be expected given the level of attainment on entry to the school. The trend in average points scores for English over the last four years is rising broadly in line with the national trend. Provisional results for 2000 are lower than 1999 but, given prior attainment, suggest a performance in line with the trend.

1999 results for A*-C grades in GCSE English were below the national average for all pupils and significantly below the national average for girls. However, results were well above those for schools with a similar intake. Pupils achieved much better results than might be expected given their attainment on entry and at the end of Key Stage 3. All pupils achieved a grade in the range A*-G, better than the average performance nationally, and all 14 pupils entered for the Certificate of Achievement course passed. Provisional results for 2000 were slightly lower with 44 per cent of pupils achieving A*-C grades. While still below national averages, these results are also much better than might be expected in relation to prior attainment. Again, all pupils achieved a grade in the range A*-G, and Certificate of Achievement course pupils achieved 4 distinctions and 12 merits in their

100 per cent pass rate. Comparison of average point scores shows pupils performing better in English than they do in maths or science. Results for A*-C grades in GCSE English Literature have been below the national average, but provisional results for 2000 show an improvement over 1999 with 50 per cent achieving grades in this range. All pupils have achieved a grade in the range A*-G in the last two years.

The recent history of test and examination performance indicates that the department has succeeded in ensuring that pupils have done at least as well as they should in relation to their prior attainment, and many have done very well. Pupils at all ability levels have been able to realise their potential after making good or very good progress with the English department during their time in the school.

In work seen during the inspection, the standard of attainment at age 14 is below average standards nationally. This is a higher standard than expected given the pupils' well below average attainment on entry. The school also has a well above average proportion of pupils with special educational needs and most pupils have English as an additional language. The emphasis given to reading and support for special educational needs and literacy is already having a positive effect and enables a minority of pupils to improve reading and literacy levels and reach national average standards by the end of the key stage. A majority, though improving, does not reach a reading age that matches chronological age. Though there are examples of accurate reading and confident speaking, many pupils rush when reading aloud and do not articulate clearly and distinctly when speaking. Some are very quiet and lack confidence in oral work. Writing standards are depressed by weaknesses in presentation, spelling, sentence structure and vocabulary.

By the end of Key Stage 4 the standard of attainment is below the national average. It is a higher standard than expected given pupils' Key Stage 3 performance. A majority of pupils read with understanding, and greater confidence is apparent in pupils' speaking skills. Replies to questions are reasonably extended and fluent. Higher attainers can write at length, use information effectively, and adapt their language style appropriately to suit the context. There is a strong sense of empathy when writing about characters and relationships which shows good understanding. They still use relatively simple sentence structures, however, and have difficulty in reaching a sophisticated level of analytical skill. Lower attainers, many with special educational needs, are able to write at some length and structure their work appropriately provided they have a strong framework to work within. Many pupils, however, lack the richness of vocabulary that will enable them to express meaning with ease, and technical weaknesses continue to persist.

In English, pupils' attitudes to learning are good in both key stages. Standards of behaviour are very good. Pupils listen with interest, participate actively in group discussions and make use of opportunities their homework gives to carry out further research independently. They respond particularly well when teachers provide opportunities for all pupils to contribute to the lesson through a variety of activities and praise their efforts. This was the case, for example, in a Year 7 class when girls were able to read out their own work to the class, participate in group discussion, and make their own suggestions for what should be included in a letter to their primary school teacher. Pupils in a Year 10 class were actively involved by group and question and answer activities in identifying the persuasive qualities of Martin Luther King's speech "I Have A Dream" and as a result responded enthusiastically and appropriately when comparing it to a speech by William Hague.

Teaching is good overall in both key stages. The quality of learning matches the quality of teaching and is similarly good overall. Occasionally the timing of activities is faulty and produces a rushed or clumsy end to a lesson. Occasionally too much is attempted or a good resource is not used effectively. As a result, the pace of learning is slowed or disrupted, and pupils do not get an opportunity to review or evaluate their work. Such weaknesses are rare and usually arise from a desire to complete what has been planned. On the other hand, teaching strengths are much more frequently evident. Teachers encourage pupils to reflect on the feelings expressed by characters and through relationships in their set texts, and as a result pupils write about them with sympathy and understanding. This was apparent in a Year 11 lesson when pupils studying "Roll of Thunder" by Mildred Taylor were asked to think first about a significant journey they had undertaken before a "hot-seating" activity was used to establish the characters' feelings in the novel. Teachers demonstrate a high level of preparation based around a well-planned scheme of work and careful assessment of pupils' individual needs. Planning even extended on occasion to where pupils should sit in class to produce the best combination of individuals in a group. Teachers have a wide range of techniques at their disposal from question and answer sessions and group discussions to written models, frameworks for writing and brainstorming. These ensure that pupils can find a way to approach a task and complete it successfully. Teachers manage their classes particularly well. They work by providing a light touch or steer in the required direction, or by expressing surprise that a pupil is not meeting expected standards of work or behaviour, or by using humour to defuse situations and keep pupils on their side. Teachers create an enjoyable learning atmosphere and cultivate sensitivity to the feelings of others, so that good learning takes place throughout the key stages and pupils make good progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding.

Since the last inspection report in 1995, standards of attainment overall have remained below national expectations, but test and examination results indicate that pupils achieve very well given their

profile of attainment on entry and prior attainment. There have been improvements in the standard of reading, in the progress pupils make, and in the quality of teaching overall. Careful attention is now paid to the needs of individual pupils. Pupils' oral responses were referred to as "under-developed": they remain so in respect of pupils' diction, which is often indistinct and rushed when speaking or reading aloud. The addition of media studies at Key Stage 4 has enhanced the range of the department's work. The department is well led and managed and has a committed team of effective teachers. It has shown a good rate of improvement since the last inspection and its capacity for further improvement is good.

Drama

Drama is offered to pupils throughout Key Stage 3 as a separate subject and as an option at Key Stage 4. GCSE results in 1999 were slightly above national averages for A*-C grades and A*-G grades. Provisional results for 2000 were below average for A*-C grades, though all pupils entered achieved a grade in the range A*-G.

In the limited observation undertaken in this inspection, standards of attainment in drama are in line with national expectations by the end of both key stages. When pupils begin drama work they are quickly introduced to techniques like "still pictures", "freeze frames" and "thought tracking". They are taught how to control facial expression and body language in improvisation. They are encouraged to consider what a person might do when confronted with a difficult situation and convey feelings in improvisation and performance. By the end of Key Stage 3 most pupils are able to use these techniques effectively to take on a role and sustain it with reasonable commitment. At Key Stage 4 pupils are able to explore a characterisation in more depth and analyse and evaluate their own performance. Pupils in Year 11 are able to organise themselves quickly and collaborate effectively on a task. They take on a role and project themselves successfully in front of an audience. They are able to focus on a key moment in a situation and represent it by using movement, expression and gesture alongside a single word or phrase. In written coursework pupils empathise, evaluate and analyse in a mature and thoughtful way.

Attitudes to learning are very good: most pupils are involved and co-operative as a result of very good relationships with their teacher and enjoyment of their drama work. Their liveliness and enthusiasm is matched by quiet and attentive listening when required.

The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The teacher (often using humour) has established very good relationships with pupils, resulting in a relaxed working atmosphere that combines firm

control with lively activities. She manages learning skilfully, moving pupils on from discussion to practice to review and evaluation within clear time targets. The pace of learning is therefore sustained, and pupils work hard and make good progress. She particularly encourages thoughtful analysis of character, situation and pupils' own work by asking probing questions and using activities that extend the pupils' understanding. Pupils learn to be thoughtful and critical when analysing their own practical and written work as a result of this approach.

Drama was reported on with English in the last inspection report, and references are too few to make meaningful comparisons. Now drama clearly makes a positive contribution to pupils' developing confidence, speaking and listening skills and to the life of the school. The head of department's very good teaching is visibly raising standards of attainment throughout the age range.

MATHEMATICS

In 1999 Key Stage 3 national tests, the average points score for mathematics was well below the national average for all schools and below that for similar schools. The proportion of students attaining level 6 was very low in comparison with the national average and below that for similar schools. The improvement since the previous inspection is broadly in line with that seen nationally. During this period, the girls' performance has been below that of both English and science. The provisional figures for 2000 show a considerable improvement on previous years with almost three times as many pupils attaining level 6, bringing attainment closer to national averages.

At GCSE in 1999, standards were well below the national average for grades A*-C, and in line with those schools with a similar intake. Pupils achieved satisfactory standards given attainment on entry and at the end of Key Stage 3. However, the girls' performance in mathematics is much lower than their attainment in all other subjects. The proportion gaining A*-G grades in 1999 was below the national average but much improved on the previous year. The provisional results for 2000 year are also an improvement on 1998 reflecting an upward trend since the previous inspection.

Students' attainment at Key Stage 3 is usually below national standards. However, by the end of the key stage, higher attaining Year 9 pupils are attaining levels above national standards. They describe, in words and algebra, rules for finding numbers in quadratic sequences. These girls make good progress during the key stage given their low attainment on entry which is well below the national average. Lower attaining Year 9 pupils find difficulty in calculating fractions of whole numbers and need help in understanding the printed word when attempting work on averages. They understand tabulated data and are successful when doing simple calculations. Students with special educational

needs in Year 7 make good progress resulting from the team teaching approach. This strengthens basic numeracy and literacy skills. It also makes a strong contribution towards gains in pupil confidence and personal development through opportunities to talk about mathematical findings, typifying the improvement in this key stage.

At Key Stage 4, attainment overall is well below national expectations with one class being in line. A strong contributory factor to lower than anticipated levels of attainment is the succession of different teachers who have taught these pupils for varying lengths of time. This is due to permanent teachers having prolonged periods of absence. The school has made considerable efforts to arrange for supply cover and for work to be prepared for these classes. The situation is improving and permanent teachers are endeavouring to rebuild pupils' confidence in themselves and raise attainment to a more appropriate standard. High attaining pupils in Year 11 are improving their numerical algebraic skills when evaluating formulae to calculate compound interest gained on sums of money. Lower attaining pupils are succeeding slowly to measure angles accurately with protractors. Some lower attaining Year 10 pupils are still experiencing difficulty with basic number work. They do not receive the benefit of additional support from classroom assistants. Their progress is unsatisfactory.

Teaching by specialist teachers is good; with some instances of very good and excellent teaching. Teaching is stronger at Key Stage 3. Here, the teachers' commitment and enthusiasm to share their knowledge are supported by a new strong scheme of work. This has high expectations for pupils of all abilities and presents opportunities for use of ICT to enhance teaching. This is evident with high attaining Year 8 pupils where the emphasis is in developing girls' thinking skills when problem solving. Teaching at Key Stage 4 is, by necessity, focused on building relationships and a sense of purpose with classes, in addition to ensuring that pupils acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for examination work. Lesson planning is a real strength as lessons are constructed well giving pupils a variety of activities in lessons. Teaching of basic skills is good. Pupils benefit from the objectives and key words for each lesson being presented to them. All lessons begin with mental mathematics or brain-awakening sessions which involve all students. This is a new activity, however not all sessions are conducted at a stimulating pace and opportunities are missed for pupils to share their methods with peers. Teachers are good at developing pupils' understanding of technical words and very aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Teachers make good use of questions and answers to establish students' levels of understanding and then build upon their knowledge. Discipline is good and at best a good working atmosphere is achieved almost effortlessly. Teachers with classes new to them also show a determination to establish high standards of behaviour.

Pupils throughout both key stages take a pride in the presentation of work. Behaviour is good. They listen well to the teacher and each other. When opportunities arise, pupils work co-operatively in groups. Most are able to sustain their concentration throughout the lesson although some of the lower attaining pupils find this difficult. Key Stage 3 pupils show a real enthusiasm for learning and often ask questions to gain further understanding.

The department is led very well by a quietly determined leader. He is successfully building a new team of teachers who have the same determination and very strong commitment to raising standards. Their willingness to hold additional classes for pupils of all abilities during lunch-times, involvement in the successful summer school and by volunteering to take on extra administrative duties are all improving collaboration and the sharing of good practice.

Displays enhance the working environment. Pupils celebrate success by displaying work on corridor notice boards and use commercial posters in classrooms as additional learning resources. The lack of a central office or a networked computer restricts teachers' opportunities to enter data and prepare materials at school.

The head of department is new since the previous inspection. He has bid successfully for various sources of money which are enhancing teaching and learning opportunities through new textbooks, graphical calculators, and numeracy booklets for homework exercises. New timetable arrangements have now improved the teaching and learning for all Key Stage 3 pupils. Assessment procedures have been developed and are good. Marking is regular and consistent. Pupils understand the grades and key letters enabling them to improve. Pupils benefit from 'steps to success leaflets', which give improvement guidance. Purposeful half-termly testing now informs them of progress being made in terms of National Curriculum levels. Good record keeping by individual teachers and central departmental records identifies strengths and weaknesses of both pupils and teaching modules. Monitoring of teaching by the head of department through classroom observation has been severely restricted due to staffing problems.

SCIENCE

In 1999 the results of National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were well below the national average and below average in comparison with similar schools. They were higher than in mathematics but lower than in English. The results in 2000 were significantly better. Bearing in mind that students' attainment is well below average when they enter the school, they make sound progress between Years 7 and 9.

At the end of Year 11 the proportion of students gaining the higher (A*-C) grades in GCSE examinations in 1999 was well below the national average, but almost all students in the year group gained a grade in the A* to G range for double award science. Students make good progress through Years 10 and 11 and the results were above average relative to similar schools. They were higher than in mathematics but lower than in English. In 2000 the results were a little lower than in 1999.

When students enter the school in Year 7 their attainment is well below that expected for their age. For example, they observe and record changes seen when objects are heated but very few explain their observations. In their lessons they make good progress through Year 7 and sound progress through Years 8 and 9. At the end of Year 9 standards remain well below average, reflecting the results of National Curriculum tests. Students' attainment is held back, particularly in materials and their properties, by limited understanding of key words and insecure earlier learning. They know that indicators are used to distinguish between acids and alkalis, but few can use their knowledge to explain how an acid or alkali could be neutralised. In part, their attainment in this area of science has been adversely affected by staff changes in the past.

Students make good progress through Years 10 and 11. At the end of Year 11 standards in lessons and written work are below average but higher than those suggested by GCSE results. By this stage students have better understanding of meanings of key words, but their recall of earlier learning remains weak. Almost all can make a prediction about the outcome of an investigation into how animals keep warm and draw a simple conclusion from their results. On the other hand few recognise anomalous results or make realistic suggestions about improving their experimental technique.

Students with special educational needs and those learning to speak English make good progress in Years 10 and 11. In earlier years they make good progress when an additional teacher supports their learning, but their progress is less good when support is not present. In Year 7 the class and support teachers worked very effectively as a team in helping lower attaining students learn how to classify animals according to their characteristics; they frequently emphasised the spelling and meaning of key words such as 'vertebrate' and 'reptile'.

Students demonstrate satisfactory skills in handling laboratory equipment carefully and safely. By Year 11 they plan and carry out their own investigations; a more systematic approach to developing students' investigative skills is being implemented in Years 7 to 9, regularly challenging them to plan their own experiments, carry them out, and explain the results. Some teachers place strong emphasis on the development of literacy skills but this is inconsistent across the department. Students cope

adequately with the numerical demands of the subject, for example using graphs in Year 11 to help them understand the relationship between distance and time when calculating speed. A systematic approach to developing students' numerical skills is being implemented. The use of information technology is increasing, but the number of computers located in the department is insufficient for students to use them fully in investigative work.

Teaching and learning are good. In about one third of lessons they are very good, and occasionally excellent. Teaching and learning are generally less good in Years 8 and 9 than in other years, particularly in lessons on materials and their properties. There are also occasional unsatisfactory lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use it well to engage and hold interest, often using personal anecdotes or relating work to students' own experience. In Year 7 the teacher emphasised the importance of phases of the moon in the Muslim calendar; learning was very good because students were interested and needed to think for themselves when challenged to work out the sequence of phases. Students make good progress, particularly in Years 7, 10 and 11, because they behave well and concentrate on their work. Novel approaches are often used, as in Year 11 when the teacher compared the speed of an Olympic runner with that of a ball thrown at the blackboard; students enjoy science in these lessons. In Year 7 students gained a real sense of wonder in science when they used microscopes to examine a sample of cloth and discovered how much more detail they could see than with the naked eye. Teachers' planning is usually good, but students sometimes leave work unfinished and underlying scientific principles are not drawn out. In Year 8 they described what they saw when mixing chalk with water, but did not explain the difference between mixing and dissolving in terms of particles. Learning is less good in other lessons because students either repeat earlier work without carrying it further forward or their existing knowledge is insufficient for them to build on it. In Year 9 they repeated an experiment to find out whether common substances were acidic or alkaline without comparing the strengths of the acids and alkalis they tested, while in Year 10 students struggled to use the reactivity series in predicting reactions between metals and acids because they had not fully understood earlier work. Marking of students' written work is up to date but the quality of teachers' comments is inconsistent. They are usually sufficiently detailed to show them how to improve, but sometimes students' work is acknowledged only with a tick. Critical comments are infrequently followed up so that students' learning from them is limited.

The department is soundly led, but improvements to the curriculum have only recently been introduced and have yet to have an effect on students' attainment, particularly in Years 8 and 9. Although the quality of teaching is monitored, the features of good and very good teaching in the department are inconsistently applied, so that students' learning is better in some areas of the curriculum than others. Teachers firmly believe that all students are capable of gaining a GCSE pass

in double award science; commendably, all are entered and virtually all gain a pass. The technicians provide a good service in helping the department to work efficiently. There are insufficient textbooks to allow students in Years 9 and 11 to keep a book at home to help them prepare for National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations.

Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Although results in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations have declined, improvements to the curriculum have been put in place and are beginning to raise standards, particularly in Year 7.

ART

On entry to Year 7, pupils' art skills are weak. Their degree of spatial awareness is significantly lower than average for girls. This remains a weakness, despite an appropriately planned curriculum which concentrates on redressing the deficiencies in drawing and painting which arise from this. Pupils make good progress through the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3, experiencing a satisfactory range of two and three dimensional media. By the end of Year 9, attainment across the range of media they use, matches the national expectation for boys and girls overall. Judged against the expectation for girls, which is higher, standards are somewhat below average because of residual difficulties in pupils' use of mathematical features such as the representation of shape and form. By Year 9, many pupils still need help with basic shape; for example, most in a lower set doing silhouettes of the head, needed pre-formed templates to achieve good proportions. Pupils' achievements in art are often good or very good for their abilities. Only a very small proportion of pupils continued to GCSE in 1999. Results at A*-C, at 55 per cent, were below the overall average of 61 per cent, and well below the average of 72 per cent for girls in schools of this type. A higher percentage took GCSE in 2000, when results were similar, 57 per cent, with some A*s. Attainment in current Key Stage 4 classes indicates a stronger Year 10 than Year 11, where current performance shows lower attainment than last year. Weaknesses in GCSE work mostly relate to pupils' underlying low literacy and mathematical skills. Most pupils at Key Stage 4 have too little direct observational drawing and painting work in their portfolios. It is also at too low a standard to support higher quality work in other media. Their critical studies often include interesting research, frequently about a wide variety of other cultures' art. The quality of recording these investigations is compromised by poor handwriting and spelling, and a lack of evaluative application of what they find out to their own assignments.

Pupils generally enjoy their art lessons, the more so as their skills improve. In many instances, pupils find an avenue for self-expression and success through art. They learn well, and persevere with

concepts which are difficult for them, such as tonal drawing to achieve three dimensional effects, as seen in a Year 8 lesson practising this skill. Most pupils have a very good understanding of the necessary processes, and can often follow instructions to produce the required result without fully understanding underlying concepts. Whilst some younger girls are uncertain, undervaluing their work and dependent on teachers for support and help, most older pupils have gained enough confidence to discuss their work openly, and show pride and pleasure in their achievements. They respond well to teachers, and benefit greatly from the high level of 1-1 communication they experience in class. These sessions form the key method of transmitting to, and drawing from pupils what they need to do to improve. They also bolster pupils' self-esteem through encouragement and praise. Art contributes significantly to the spiritual and cultural dimensions of pupils' lives, as seen, for example, in a Year 8 lesson where pupils were feeling textures of stones and rocks and listening to sounds of the sea whilst visually interpreting a text about a Japanese picture. The valuable Year 10 Enrichment option enables far more pupils to continue with their art curriculum, and an additional opportunity to take a GCSE examination at the end.

Art teaching is almost always good, with much very good teaching, particularly at Key Stage 4. Teachers' relationships with pupils create a working atmosphere where they can learn effectively, and enjoy their learning. Much good humour is evident in classes with older pupils, and teachers are skilled at encouraging independence and self-reliance, which compels pupils to make individual decisions about their work, even when this is difficult for many. Teachers' assessment of pupils work is good, with marking an important way of transmitting both encouragement and critique. As a result of good teaching, pupils learn better than might be expected given their low underlying attainment, and progress in art is good. Teachers' class management and teaching methods match pupils' needs well. They are firm and fair, so all pupils can work in a purposeful atmosphere and get help where needed. Pupils who have learning support in lessons also benefit from very good liaison between their teachers and support staff. The latter are fully briefed on lesson objectives, and are very helpful in generating the good progress their charges make. Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection.

The presence of five post-graduate students in this small department at the time of inspection indicates the good external links the department maintains. Visiting artists make valuable contributions to extra-curricular work, and the link between art and technology is strong, particularly in textiles leading to good achievement in this area. The department has made good improvement since the last inspection. Good, creative use is now made of information and communications technology adding a further, useful dimension to pupils' studies.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Over the past three years the overall proportion of pupils achieving an A*-C grade at GCSE in design and technology is below the national average when compared with results for all maintained schools. Results in resistant materials were significantly below the national averages in 1998 as were those in graphics in 1999. The results overall for textiles and for electronics were broadly inline with the national average. In 1998 and 1999 the proportion of pupils' attaining an A*-C grade in child development was well above the national average. This year a substantial proportion of the pupils' studying textiles achieved significantly above the A*-C average expectation. Throughout this period the proportion of pupils achieving an A*-G grade has been above the national average. Pupils achieve as well in design and technology as they do in their other most successful subjects.

By the end of Year 9 the great majority of the pupils attain below the national average expectation. A small minority attain above the expectation and a very small minority attain well below the expectation. Most pupils' show satisfactory levels of creativity in their design work particularly in textiles. The excellent range of exemplar material that is displayed within the textile room provides a very effective visual stimulus for pupils' helping to support and extend their creative thoughts and ideas. Across the disciplines sketches drawn by pupils to explain their design ideas vary in quality. Whilst most pupils' outline their design ideas using good sketches that are well annotated, a small proportion of work is spoilt by indiscriminate use of felt tip colour pens that does not enhance the work. Pupils' make good progress in developing their understanding of the principles and processes of designing in a broad range of materials which often-incorporate moving and electronic components e.g. the pneumatic toy project in Year 8. Higher attaining pupils' have satisfactory and developing levels of fluency in the use of technical terms but lower attaining pupils are often hesitant and unsure of the correct terminology. The development of pupils' literacy skills and their technical vocabulary is well supported by the effective use of technical keywords displayed on workshop walls. The computer control module and the electronic circuit simulator used in Year 9 effectively enable pupils to develop and apply both information technology and numerical skills. Pupils' achieve satisfactory standards in both these areas.

From a well below average attainment on entry into Year 7, nearly a half of the pupils attain standards that are broadly inline with the national average expectation by the end of Year 11. A small minority attain significantly above the expectations in textiles. Work seen in all material areas match the most recent examination results and reflects a rising trend in attainment overall. At Key Stage 4, in the best design folios the standard of presentation of design ideas is good with pupils' utilising a broad range of graphical techniques including computer-generated graphics and text well. In Year 11

textiles, a bedroom design depicted in a mood-board produced by one pupil is of exceptional standard. In a small minority of other folios the graphical communication skills are traditional and the range of techniques narrow. In food technology pupils are able to recall and apply knowledge and understanding of nutrition and food preparation. They confidently discuss ways of adapting methods of cooking and the choice of foods to provide a healthy diet. In practical sessions pupils are busy and productive and interact and communicate in an open friendly way. They organise their work well, follow the recipes and work plans they have designed and produce well finished appetising dishes. In textiles in Year 11, skills in using the computerised sewing machine to produce a logo are good. Extended use of computer aided design software or computer aided manufacturing equipment is underdeveloped being limited by a sufficient range of high-tech equipment. Pupils including those with special educational needs show considerable interest in the tasks set and make good progress for their capabilities particularly when supported by specialist staff.

Overall the quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory and is good or better in the great majority of lessons at both key stages. Consequently the quality of learning is good and pupils make good progress in their studies throughout all areas of design and technology. The teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects. They plan work very well, and very effectively manage pupils learning opportunities with good use of time and resources. Teachers set high expectations for learning to which their pupils readily respond, for example in a Year 11 class where the teacher's high expectations and excellent support has enabled the pupils to successfully tackle a wide range of ambitious projects for GCSE assessment in textiles. Procedures for assessing pupils' work are very good. Their attainment is carefully monitored and recorded as they progress from year to year. There are standard assessment sheets that teachers use in all aspects of the subject. This ensures consistency and helps pupils to fully understand how they are being assessed. The regular recording of assessment enables pupils to be appropriately challenged according to previous levels of attainment. Work is consistently marked to a good standard and constructive comments are sufficiently detailed to help pupils to learn from their mistakes and make progress. Homework is set regularly and the assignments are often discussed with the class in advance. The teachers know their pupils very well and they work well as a team to ensure continuity in teaching and learning across all areas of the subject. They support and encourage pupils of all abilities enabling them to experience success. Teachers use a range of very good exemplar design material, which is either displayed on workshop walls or in display folders, which guides and supports pupils design, work very effectively.

The excellent leadership and management of design and technology enabled the department to make good progress in resolving all the issues identified in the last report. The accommodation for the subject is now very good and with the exception of computer aided designing and manufacturing

equipment, enables the National Curriculum to be fully and effectively delivered. The direct result of all of the above factors is that standards have improved and continue to do so.

GEOGRAPHY

Recent GCSE A*-C grades results have fluctuated below the national average. However, the Year 2000 result at 60 per cent showed a significant improvement and was broadly in line national average for all pupils. Very few pupils attain the higher grades. When compared with other GCSE subjects within the school geography results have usually been above the average. Recent A*-G results have been broadly in line with the national position or better.

Most pupils attain levels that are below the national average at the end of Key Stage 3 and 4 but standards are close to the national average in Year 10. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils have a satisfactory grounding in geographical skills and knowledge but key words are not sufficiently emphasised. Most can use and interpret maps but need more practice in the construction and analyses of graphical representation of statistical data. Pupils' knowledge of location and spatial issues is good. Progress overall at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. However, in some classes high attainers are not stretched with higher level work. Pupils with special needs, despite good class teacher support, are not provided with enough learning support in class for them to make maximum progress.

By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils generally can explain physical and human processes studied reasonably competently e.g. river management and demographic transition models well. The best independent study project work for GCSE based on local urban fieldwork in Birmingham is of very high quality. Progress at Key Stage 4 is generally good although for many Year 11 pupils progress is only satisfactory due to lack of motivation.

Teaching overall and at both key stages is satisfactory. There was some good teaching observed at both key stages and very good teaching in Year 7 based on pupil's recent fieldwork experience in Central Birmingham. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. The best teaching is characterised by very secure knowledge of the subject with lessons well planned and presented in a structured and focused way which promotes learning as it help pupils understanding. Visual aids are well used including video extracts, photographs, and Ordnance Survey maps as, for example, in Year 10 a map of Derby used in explaining the location factors which attracted the Toyota motor industry there and in Year 7 a map of Central Birmingham in 1889 for comparison with fieldwork maps to show the changes of land use and function that has taken place over time. These practical lessons clarify aims and have a significant positive impact on the quality of students learning. Teachers are very

supportive of pupils and provide very considerable extra-curriculum sessions to ensure coursework is understood and that GCSE project work is completed to a high standard. However, teachers often have considerable difficulty in managing and controlling some pupils and this reduces the pace of the lesson with higher attainers particularly disadvantaged.

However, learning would be further enhanced by greater consolidation and re-enforcement of the main teaching points visually on the board; the regular use of a standing display map to develop pupils' understanding of geographical patterns and place; a stronger emphasis on pupils' learning needs in selecting materials and activities for lessons, particularly for high attainers; and the use of more investigatory resource based learning at both key stages to develop pupils' independent learning. There is some good teaching of literacy skills as for example in Year 7 when one class were assessing a brochure promoting Brindley Place in Central Birmingham for persuasive language which they then practice in written accounts of their fieldwork activity. Numeracy skills are satisfactory. Marking of pupils' work is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 but is more detailed, and helpful at key Stage 4 and has a clear impact on the progress made by girls. However, pupils are not involved in evaluating their own work and setting targets with their teachers. Fieldwork undertaken is enriching and very effective in raising pupils' motivation in the subject and the standard of their work. However, there is insufficient at Key Stage 3 where there is no study of physical landscapes or an area outside their immediate locality. There is a very good coherent programme of information technology skills suitably linked to curriculum themes that ensure progression over both key stages. This is a strength of the course.

Pupils' attitude to learning is satisfactory and many display a real interest in their work as in a Year 10 group assessing statistical data using ICT skills to establish Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient who did not want to leave the activity on which they were conscientiously working. However, in some lessons some girls are disruptive have negative attitudes and are very uncooperative resulting in wasted time, a low work rate leading to underachievement. Behaviour with the exception of these occasions is satisfactory but the concern identified needs urgent attention. Pupils generally relate well to each other. Pupils' individual responses to questions are varied but are rarely well developed. In all lessons a greater class response needs nurturing.

The department is well managed and led by a quiet conscientious head of department. Subject documentation is generally good with a clear action plan especially well focussed on improvements. A detailed evaluation of the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and standard of performance at external examinations informs future curriculum planning. There is currently no monitoring and evaluation of the impact of other work of the department to assess how standards can be further

improved. Accommodation is in specialist rooms but not all provide sufficient space for investigatory resource based learning. Wall displays in subject classrooms and adjacent corridors are of very good quality providing an attractive learning environment. Resources are satisfactory overall but there are some serious shortfalls such as the need for a permanent display world map, an overhead projector and a video monitor in each specialist room, the repair of the automatic school weather station and a fieldwork budget.

The school has successfully worked on improving standards of attainment in examinations by developing study and examination skills since the previous inspection. Concerns raised then have been partly addressed but there is still need to extend more able pupils by providing more suitable tasks for them. Further efforts are needed to address the difficulty of some pupils to recall previous knowledge adequately.

HISTORY

Standards seen during the inspection were below the standards expected nationally at ages 14 and 16 but they indicated satisfactory progress from the time of entry to the school. Some pupils in each year group achieve good standards. In 1999 half the candidates entered for the GCSE achieved A*-C grades, close to the national average and an improvement on the previous year. Pupils achieving A*-G grades were above the national average. In 2000 there was a very small entry, a third of whom gained A*-C grades. GCSE results did not compare well overall with other school subjects. Results of pupils entered for the Certificate of Achievement in the last two years were good. Numbers of GCSE candidates are well up for the next two years. Teacher assessments at age 14 were very near national expectations and seem optimistic compared with standards seen in Year 9.

At age 14, pupils show their knowledge and understanding through using various kinds of diagrams and extended writing. They show ability to acquire and consolidate historical information, fitting new knowledge into an historical context. The recall of earlier work is often good. Pupils remembered well the reasons why each of the four contenders claimed the throne in 1066. Pupils' oral work frequently shows that their history is at a higher standard than their ability to write. At age 16, pupils' notes are often clear and well presented. Bullet points are well used. Pupils show good understanding of the clash of culture of the white men with the Sioux tribes on the American plains. Weak literacy skills too often lower the standards of pupils' history. The best of the course work for the GCSE examination is very good.

All lessons observed were at least satisfactory, nearly half were good and one was very good. The three teachers are all competent historians whose knowledge and understanding are strengths. They believe in the value of their subject for the young. They prepare lessons thoroughly and present work to their classes in a pleasing variety of ways. They make good use of written and pictorial primary source material from Year 7, training pupils well to research from books. Many source and work sheets are of high quality. They are carefully graded in difficulty so that the work is accessible to both higher and lower attainers. Individual help for pupils is always available in and out of lessons. Good opportunities for empathy are given, for example at the court of Louis XVI. Role play and artefacts stimulate interest and enhance learning. Many pupils' general vocabulary is very limited. Good attention in class is paid to the development of historical and general vocabulary particularly in oral work. Skilful questioning helps pupils to work out links between causes and consequences. The art of story telling is not forgotten. Opportunities to link the past with present day national and international affairs should be more readily taken. Direct attention to accuracy in writing needs to be given in class to raise attainment. Over the age range pupils with special educational needs are well integrated. They receive much help from teachers during individual work and make satisfactory progress. In several classes observed, there was a need for in-class support to help these pupils cope with the work.

Most classes observed were well behaved and settled quickly to work. Pupils are engaged by some topics such as why Elizabeth I resisted all attempts to persuade her to marry, or the dramatic stories of the French Revolution. Many pupils are keen to answer questions though some pupils in each year group are too passive in class. In one or two classes, some pupils exhibited short spans of concentration and were easily distracted from their work. There were some good signs of inquiry by individuals and teachers always had time to listen.

Management in the department is unsatisfactory at present because the handbook is out of date and therefore gives insufficient guidance to staff; because information technology is only developed as a tool for history in one year group so far; because there is a specific history expedition for only one year group and because a better lead is needed on specific class room strategies to raise literacy standards. The department is aware of priorities and has set good targets. A new scheme of evaluation and moderation of National Curriculum work is starting this year. The work on computers for Year 8 is successful in developing both history and technology skills. Plans for other years, especially Year 9 are being made. The expedition to Goodrich Castle is of great value. Individual staff do mark work well for history and for literate expression but a departmental policy for the classroom is needed to make a greater impact.

The optional choices in the National Curriculum are well chosen to illustrate patterns of continuity and contrasting breaks in those patterns. The GCSE syllabus offers great variety including local history and wide themes such as a study of medicine through time and the relevant Irish Question. Contributions to pupils' moral development are made in the study of right and wrong in human actions such as in the slave trade triangle. Pupils' social and cultural development is assisted by the study of past societies very different from their own such as pre-Revolutionary France or the Islamic Civilisation of Sulieman the Magnificent.

Accommodation for history is unsatisfactory as there is only one specialist room and many lessons are taught in rooms where there is no historical ambiance. Television equipment is not in place in the history room so the ideal frequent use of brief video clips from the excellent stock of videos is impracticable, as is the use of overhead projectors by staff without a teaching base.

Since the last inspection good progress has been made on providing work suitable for pupils of different attainment. Marking is helpful and now informs future learning.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

In 1999, the first year pupils were entered for a GCSE in information technology, the proportion of pupils' achieving an A*-C grade was well above the national average expectation. All pupils gained an A*-G, which was also above the national average for these grades. Last year the proportion achieving an A*-C grade dropped to well below the national average although the proportion of pupils achieving within the range A*-G remained above the national average. Pupils' attain as well in information technology as they do in their other more successful subjects.

A small majority of pupils attain broadly inline with the national average expectation in information and communications technology (ICT) by the end of Year 9. They progressively develop good skills, knowledge, and understanding in all the separate strands of the subject through the timetabled ICT lessons in Year 7 and subsequently in timetabled control technology lessons in Year 9. In Year 8 and for most of Year 9 there are variable opportunities for pupils to use and extend their ICT skills across the curriculum. Good opportunities are provided in geography, design and technology, art and history but there is little opportunity provided in other subjects. Pupils use spreadsheets well to record data and produce a graph on land usage in geography in Year 7. In Year 8 pupils produced a newspaper about the civil war and a study about the plague at Eyam in 1665 using CD ROM and Internet resources. In Year 9 design and technology, pupils show satisfactory skills in recording and modelling data using a heat-sensing thermometer linked to control software. They also show good

skills in setting up an electronic circuit using circuit-simulating software. The great majority of the higher attainers have satisfactory keyboarding skills whilst lower attainers show hesitancy in using the keyboard and are slow at inputting data. Most pupils use the mouse well to negotiate icons, menus and functions when loading the required software from the network. All pupils show a positive attitude to learning and good behaviour in lessons.

In the Year 10 GCSE course approaching a half of the pupils attain inline with the national average expectation with a small minority attaining above it. A GCSE course is not available for the current Year 11 pupils. Across the curriculum at Key Stage 4 there is a lack of opportunity, for whatever reason, to enable all pupils to develop skills in information and communications technology through a planned, systematic or sustained way. Several subjects have yet to fully identify how they intend for the national curriculum requirements for information technology to be delivered in their schemes of work. Some subjects, e.g. art, geography, design and technology make good provision and pupils' use information technology well in support of their learning. Assessment within the Year 10 specialist information technology course is satisfactory and pupils are well aware of how they are progressing. However, as a result of the unevenness in provision across the curriculum assessment is unsatisfactory overall at Key Stage 4.

Teaching is never less than satisfactory and is predominantly good or better in all timetabled IT lessons. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subject and are able to effectively stimulate pupils' interest and motivation. During the inspection week word-processing and desktop publishing exercises were very effectively taught to Year 7 groups. The demonstration of the processes involved was greatly enhanced by the use of large screen presentations enabling all pupils to see clearly the processes involved. Similarly using the large screen, control work in Year 9, and the GCSE coursework in Year 10, was very effectively communicated to pupils. Teachers provide challenging and interesting ICT tasks that are well matched to pupils interest and ability. The problems posed build effectively on pupils' prior knowledge and understanding of information technology. Teachers provide high levels of individual support and guidance working with pupils at their computers. The teaching styles and strategies adopted impact positively on pupils learning. As a result, most pupils show good interest levels, sustain their concentration for lengthy spans of time and make good progress in developing their skills in lessons. Teachers are good at testing pupils understanding of the required task. The assessment procedure in specialist information technology lessons in Year 7 is good. However, the end of Year 9 assessment is carried out in the control module delivered through design and technology. This is unsatisfactory because it does not adequately measure standards achieved against all national curriculum strands and it also tests pupils at different times in the year. For example, the group of pupils assessed early in Year 9 are disadvantaged when compared to the

group assessed at the end of Year 9 when they are more mature and will have experienced greater use of information technology and have become more confident and competent as a result. Worksheets, produced within the department, successfully identify learning objectives. However, some tasks and written instructions within the worksheets are insufficiently modified to suit the needs of all attainment levels. The quality of teaching successfully generates a good attitude to learning with good and often very good behaviour observed in all lessons. Pupils including those with special educational needs show considerable interest in the tasks set and make good progress for their capabilities particularly when supported by specialist staff. Since the last inspection a technician has been appointed and provides a valuable contribution to pupils learning.

The school approached the findings of the previous inspection in a very positive manner and most of the issues identified have been remedied. A major investment has been made in improving the resources for information technology and new resources are currently in the process of being installed. The subject satisfactorily reflects the requirement of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3 but is unsatisfactory overall at Key Stage 4.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C in French in the GCSE examinations in 1999 was well above the national average for all pupils and above the national average for girls. The number of pupils gaining A* and A grades was also above the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to G was well above the national average. The results for grades A* to C in the year 2000 examinations rose by 4 per cent. Three-quarters of the pupils entered in each year for the certificate of achievement gained distinction grades. In school, pupils perform better in French than in many other subjects.

Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 9 is well in line with national expectations. Pupils' understanding of the foreign language is good. Oracy skills are being very well developed in every lesson. Pupils are confident speakers. They speak in complete sentences and mainly from memory. Higher attaining pupils in a Year 8 class could say which sport they liked or disliked and give a reason. Written work is well used for a purpose. Pupils write about their likes and dislikes, their families. The top set in Year 8 had produced some very good descriptions of members of their families with photos, showing the different cultural background from which they come. Two

statemented pupils from the same year had produced work of a very similar standard with the aid of writing frames.

Pupils' attainment by the end of Year 11 is above average. As at Key Stage 3, French is the accepted language of the classroom, and pupils' understanding is good. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their oracy in every lesson. Year 10 pupils in Business French began the lesson practising numbers, and by the end of the lesson took part in pairs in a telephone role play. Higher attaining pupils in Year 11 developed the future tense well in their very first encounter with it.

Written work is used well for a purpose; sometimes it is used to support oral questions. Pupils show a good knowledge of topic vocabulary, for example a wide range of adjectives – masculine and feminine forms - to describe themselves and others. One pupil in Year 10 last year had produced a very interesting account of a holiday visit to Bangladesh, showing a good knowledge of vocabulary and of different tenses.

Teaching is a major strength of the department. In just under three-quarters of the lessons observed, teaching was good or very good. Learning is good. Progress is good at Key Stage 3, and very good at Key Stage 4. Progress made by most pupils with special needs is very similar: learning is good in lessons where pupils are supported by assistants. Teaching styles are very consistent, with all lessons beginning with a challenge, usually orally, to past work. This enables pupils to consolidate their knowledge and to think hard. Pair work occurs in nearly every lesson, when pupils work well with each other. Teachers have high expectations and provide good challenge to higher attainers; equally, they give good support to lower attainers and pupils with special needs. Classwork, homework and end of year examinations at Key Stage 3 are adapted to meet the needs of all pupils. Good use is made of resources, particularly of flash cards and the overhead projector, to introduce new material and to help pupils to memorise it. Planning is good. Each lesson has a variety of tasks and skills. This helps pupils to maintain their concentration and their interest. Relationships are good. Homework is set regularly and is well marked.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good or very good. They are good listeners, work very well together in pairs and help each other. Relationships are very good.

Leadership and management of the department are excellent. Monitoring is effective. Examination results are well analysed. The foreign language assistante is used well in class. There is a shared commitment within the department to the school's aims and to high achievement.

Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Teaching has improved considerably. Oral skills have a high priority, and pupils now speak in complete sentences and from memory. A reading programme has been introduced for all pupils at Key Stage 3. The department is aware of the need to develop further the use of ICT.

MUSIC

Standards of attainment in music by girls at the age of 14 are below nationally expected levels. This reflects the school's own assessment of attainment at this stage. For girls at the age of sixteen standards of attainment as shown by the pattern of GCSE results over recent years are very good. Almost consistently 100 per cent of those entered gain A*-C grades, of which around 50 per cent are A* or A grades.

Standards of attainment by Year 7 pupils are close to nationally expected levels. At this stage girls can use simple notation, understand how the lay-out of the keyboard, can find notes for melodies they know and are beginning to develop useful fingering technique. One class quickly learned to play "Swing low, sweet chariot" because the teacher had, by an imaginative and humorous approach, ensured that they could apply a finger numbering system so that their playing became smooth and rhythmic. They understand and recognise elements of music such as pitch and dynamic and they sing enthusiastically and are eager to attempt simple part-singing although the quality of their performing is not refined beyond accurate notes and words. Across Years 8 And 9 these earlier skills are not well developed. Pupils do not become more fluent keyboard players, and their musical knowledge and understanding remains basic. Progress in a Year 8 lesson on "Blues" was hindered because girls were unable to create a basic chord and found using the left hand very difficult. Several did not follow or read instructions carefully enough to make satisfactory progress in the lesson. Few use an appropriate subject vocabulary or readily interpret simple staff notation. Singing is poorly projected, although girls of higher ability in Year 9 successfully mastered the vocal agility necessary to perform a rap. Around thirty pupils learn to play orchestral instruments; they are well taught and make good progress.

Attainment of pupils in Years 10 and 11 does not reflect the examination grades gained in previous years. However, girls make very good progress in performing. Instrumental playing quickly improves from a low base of experience, girls develop good ensemble skills as they work together in small groups, and many sing with good communication and sense of style. They write words and compose attractive and at times memorable melodies for songs similar to those they sing, usually in a popular ballad style. However they are not able independently to add harmony or accompaniment styles,

although they make suitable selections from a suggested range. Their knowledge of technical and historical terms is not secure. Girls in Year 11 were unable to distinguish between “rhythm” and “backing” and in Year 10 they were unable to follow an explanation on chord sequence because they did not remember what “chord” meant.

Pupils’ attitudes to the subject are variable. Pupils in Year 7 settle promptly and listen well. Most pupils have a positive approach, but because they do not concentrate well and are given to chatter and at times over-excited responses they do not take in essential information. When given the opportunity and a clearly defined task they work well together in small groups. Girls in Year 11 listened intently to extracts played, and particularly enjoyed the effects created by choral music by of the Renaissance.

As a result of the extended absence of the head of department much of the teaching in the department was covered by two supply teachers, both of whom are subject specialists. Additionally music is taught by two members of staff who have no qualification in the subject. The quality of teaching varies from good to poor but most teaching is satisfactory. All lessons are carefully planned and relationships between staff and pupils are good. Teaching was most successful when the content closely matched to pupils’ previous abilities, which under the circumstances during the inspection was not always possible. Pupils in Year 7 learned well because procedures were carefully and systematically explained and pupils understood what was expected of them. In one lesson they were able immediately to apply the new concept of numbering fingers by playing melodies on keyboards and so began to develop a secure technique, readily sharing the teacher’s enthusiasm for the idea. In Year 11 pupils were encouraged to use subject language to help them identify particular features of different styles of music. Where teaching depended on explaining the content of work-sheets without musical examples being played, or where language such as “tonic” and “dominant” was unfamiliar pupils did not know what was expected and became discouraged. The level of challenge and expectations of pupils’ abilities are not high enough, and pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to consolidate and further develop new skills and so make more consistent progress. For instance pupils in Year 8 who successfully learned to play a short melody did not know how to develop the idea, and pupils in Year 7 were not shown how to improve the quality of their singing. Ensemble skills are poorly developed, largely because there are no suitable spaces for group work.

Teaching staff put much effort into the work of the department but overall management has several unsatisfactory features. Although the department documentation is extensive, and all school policies are represented, there are few clear working systems in place. Because of its over-dependence on the use of keyboards the scheme of work for pupils in Years 7-9 does not give girls opportunities to

explore a range of sound or different styles of composing and performing. Although there is an emphasis on developing pupils' natural abilities, particularly singing, there is not enough progressive development of other musical skills. There is no scheme of work for music in Years 10 and 11, and girls' musical development suffers because there is no planned anticipation of their abilities or needs to be able to meet the demands of the course. As a result pupils in the GCSE course remain dependent on the expertise and support of the teacher for decisions about suitable harmony or accompaniment styles in order to be able to complete their work satisfactorily. An assessment system which relates pupils' achievements to nationally agreed levels is under development but methods by which girls' progress and strengths and weaknesses are identified are unclear. Non-specialist teaching within the department needs regular, systematic in-service support to ensure teachers understand and are able to use a contemporary approach to the subject. The provision of pitched instruments other than keyboards is insufficient to deliver the National Curriculum, and provision for Information Technology needs up-dating so that this can be a more effective tool for composition in all years. Accommodation, which was unsatisfactory at the last inspection, has not been improved. Communication in class teaching is hindered in the main teaching room by fixed units which prevent pupils from seeing and concentrating on the teacher while explanations and demonstrations are given and hinders the development of group work for composing and performing which requires a range of resources; this has a direct effect on the standards of attainment of younger pupils. Practice rooms are too small for groups of instrumentalists to work together. The mobile classroom is small, badly heated and has no suitable spaces for pupils to work in groups.

The situation with regard to music has deteriorated since the last inspection. However the department is well placed to improve because there is a great deal of goodwill and professional expertise both within the department and through support from the senior management. The school and the head of department are aware of the difficulties and are working together to improve the situation.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

At the end of Key Stage 3, teachers' assessments in 2000 showed that pupils' attainment was below national expectations. Inspection evidence confirms that very few pupils attain beyond what might be expected of pupils of this age and a substantial number achieve below national expectations. GCSE results in 2000 were below the national average for grades A* to C but were broadly in line with the overall school results. Pupils have not been entered for GCSE examinations in the years before 2000.

At Key Stage 3, in work seen during the inspection, pupils make good progress and they improve in all aspects of their work. When they enter the school, they are well below national expectations with low skill levels and limited experience of physical activities. By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment is still below national expectations but nearer to what might be expected of pupils of this age. Their skill levels show good improvement but it is particularly in the area of body awareness that the greatest progress can be seen. Pupils have far more confidence, for example when vaulting in gymnastics, and they control their movements and apply their skills in games such as netball. However, their knowledge of the need to prepare for exercise and their understanding of concepts such as the difference between twisting and turning remains weak.

At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is well below national expectations. Pupils take part in a number of new activities and there is insufficient time for them to develop their skills and knowledge to the level that can be expected of 16 year old pupils. In some activities such as trampolining, their progress is good and is attributable to the good foundations laid by the work in gymnastics at Key Stage 3; in this activity, pupils' attainment is similar to national expectations.

The quality of teaching is sound overall; it is better at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4. In the majority of lessons teaching is satisfactory but it ranges from being very good to unsatisfactory. Teachers consistently use good classroom management skills to establish routines and their procedures for organising pupils are good. Teachers' relationships with pupils are good and they ensure that there is a high level of participation by pupils in all lessons. All teachers begin their lessons by telling pupils what they are going to learn; this sets clear expectations for learning to which pupils respond very well. Lessons are well structured and provide good opportunities for pupils to plan their work, practice and to some extent, reflect on how successful they have been.

Teachers encourage and praise pupils but at times their expectations of what pupils can achieve are too low. For example, in a Year 8 gymnastics lesson the pupils' work was accepted as good although the majority had not performed at the level they were capable of. Too frequently, teachers provide too long for pupils to practice without redirecting work or teaching new information. When this happens, pupils continue working but their concentration slackens and insufficient effort is made by them. In the very best lessons, teachers use their subject knowledge and their knowledge of pupils well to move learning on. For example, in a Year 9 netball lesson, the teacher moved from group to group questioning and re-focusing what was taking place. In two lessons, teaching was unsatisfactory because the activities were not selected well, the pace was slow and pupils learned too little. The activities did not match the pupils' understanding or their stage of learning.

Pupils' attitudes to the subject are generally good. They behave well and take part in lessons without fuss. There is noticeable progress in learning at Key Stage 3 as pupils enter with such low levels of skill, particularly in swimming and knowledge of games. Throughout the school, few pupils display good levels of fitness, strength or stamina and very rarely do they push themselves to achieve better results. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into lessons and are able to use a range of modified equipment to assist their learning; gifted and talented pupils are not so well challenged in lessons but their progress and learning is still good. Teachers display key words used in physical education and make constant reference to these but less attention is given to developing numeracy skills. Lack of equipment prevents teachers contributing to developing pupils' information technology skills.

Leadership and management of the department are good. Appropriate priorities are identified and written into a clear plan for future developments. The work of the department is monitored, although a programme for classroom observation is not yet in place. Good evaluation takes place of how much progress is made towards meeting pupils needs. Assessment procedures are good and are linked into the well written progressive schemes of work. Pupils benefit from the very good practice of having what they are going to learn in physical education entered into their personal planners. The curriculum is broad and balanced at Key Stage 3 but at Key Stage 4 it does not fully meet the requirements of the National Curriculum as pupils do not have the opportunity to follow two activities in sufficient depth to ensure that programmes of study are covered.

The department offers a good number of extra-curricular activities at lunchtimes and after school but the participation rate of pupils is low. There is a commitment by staff to providing opportunities for pupils to participate in sport and they organise school teams for netball, rounders and athletics as well internal form competitions.

Overall, good improvement has been made since the last inspection. All issues raised have been carefully addressed and although attainment is still below national expectations pupils make good progress.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

In the last three years GCSE results at grades A* to C from small groups of pupils taking the examination have varied. In 1998 results were above national averages for all maintained schools and in 1999 they were below but most pupils make good progress through the course and achieve well.

The attainment of pupils aged 14 is slightly below the level expected by the Birmingham Agreed Syllabus. Most pupils are developing a generally sound knowledge and understanding of Christianity, Islam and Sikhism. Year 8 pupils, for example, know about the main features of a mosque and how it is used for prayer. However, they have more difficulty in understanding general religious concepts, such as the way in which symbols are used in religion. Pupils in Year 9 are beginning to reflect on a range of personal, social and world issues and to understand how these might affect their own and other people's beliefs and values. Attitudes to the subject are positive and behaviour is good. Overall pupils achieve well and make good progress.

The attainment of pupils aged 16 is below national averages for GCSE courses. Most pupils have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of Muslim beliefs and values, often drawing successfully on their own community backgrounds; for example, they have a keen appreciation of some of the issues relating to the role of women within Islam. Pupils have more difficulty in thinking through the Christian perspectives on some of the moral and social issues they are studying in the GCSE courses. Oral work is better than the written. Many pupils are articulate and persuasive in class discussion, but are less successful in composing clear, well-structured answers to written questions. Attitudes to RE in the classroom are good and at the moment pupils are making sound progress in the subject.

The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and very often good; it is better at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4. During the inspection much of the teaching seen was undertaken by a temporary teacher due to the absence of the head of department. Clearly stated learning objectives at the beginning of lessons help pupils make good progress. Work is carefully planned at Key Stage 3 and good provision is made to meet the wide range of attainment within classes. In a Year 7 class, for example, structured work at three different levels was provided for pupils working on the background of the different religious communities in to-day's Britain. At Key Stage 4 planning is less detailed and sometimes leads to work that is insufficiently challenging for some pupils. Teachers use a reasonable range of teaching methods, such as groupwork and whole class questioning, and this helps pupils extend and consolidate their learning. On the whole pupils are effectively managed so that they respond well to questioning and work hard at written tasks. All written work is acknowledged, and good marking at Key Stage 3 gives pupils helpful advice on ways to improve their work. However, the absence of explicit criteria for assessment means that pupils do not really know how well they are doing in the subject and how they can make progress.

The overall level of improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The deployment of staff has improved and most of the teaching is now in the hands of two teachers, although there are still six other staff who are deployed in teaching small amounts of RE. The provision for RE is now

good at Key Stage 4 and fully meets statutory requirements, with all pupils having a choice of three different GCSE courses. However, accommodation is unsatisfactory as the subject has one only dedicated room and over the half the lessons take place in rooms all over the school; this restricts the range of methods available to teachers. At present the management of RE is also unsatisfactory because schemes of work and assessment procedures are under-developed which means that there is insufficient guidance for staff teaching the subject. This is holding back the process of raising attainment levels in the subject and, at Key Stage 4 particularly, is slowing down the rate of pupils' progress. RE is a popular subject and the school is working hard to overcome the current difficulties faced by the department.

CAREERS

Careers education is excellent and has gained a number of awards in recognition of its quality. It ensures the school's declared aim 'preparing today's women for tomorrow's world' is a reality. Close effective liaison with the careers service establishes the framework in Year 7 by raising equal opportunities and stereotyping issues. The full forward-looking programme begins in Year 9 and is carefully structured throughout Years 10 and 11. A strong ICT input in Year 9 enables pupils to use effectively, in their decision making, a wide variety of careers-based software and the internet to broaden their further education and career opportunities. This is complemented by wide-ranging up-to-date materials within the careers libraries and knowledgeable advice from trained careers librarians. The preparation for teachers and pupils for two weeks' work experience in Year 10 is very thorough. The strong and enthusiastic two-way links with local industry through the education and business partnership ensure that all health and safety issues are covered, pupils benefit from their work placements and annual careers conventions are supported very well. Talented and gifted pupils' aspirations are raised through the visits and links with Cambridge University. Visits for all girls to Birmingham University are about to be re-established. Pupils' evaluation of their course is used effectively to continually update and improve the careers provision.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Vocational education is in its early stages of development. The quality of the current provision of GNVQ business studies and French for Business is very good. Business studies pupils, who have a wide range of ability, benefit from a course which has a good structure enabling them to study the theory, to visit shopping centres, interview sole traders and, through a grant, set up their own businesses. This work links well with the PSMHE course.

URDU

Standards achieved by pupils are in line with national expectation and are a reflection of the very good progress that pupils make in building on their prior knowledge and understanding of the language and in developing their reading and writing skills in Urdu script during the two year course. In 2000, 66 per cent of pupils achieved grades A-C with the results for recent years showing very small variations from national expectations. Pupils who take the subject in Year 10 however, achieve well above the national average. Most of these pupils have previously studied the subject in community language schools and have a strong commitment to the subject. They respond well to the teacher's high expectations of their ability and are focused and attentive in the classroom. Currently, 23 pupils in Year 11 are studying for accreditation in the A/S level in the subject.

Standards of work seen in lessons are good overall , ranging from satisfactory for pupils with SEN to very good for many pupils who take pride in producing very neat written work which shows a sound grasp of the grammatical conventions in familiar language. Less able pupils, however, are chatty and make limited progress in developing sentence level work independently. Overall, however, pupils respond well to the wide range of teaching strategies and the creatively differentiated resources of a high quality developed by the teacher. Relationships in the classroom are positive and pupils demonstrate the ability to work constructively in pairs, small group and in whole class activities. The very good development of speaking and responding skills is supported by very good classroom management and the consistent use of the target language by the teacher.

The subject scheme of work is appropriate and relevant and includes a range of topics which make a strong contribution to pupils moral, social and cultural development. The teacher's planning is informed by regular and thoroughly collected assessment data on individual pupils and supports the good development of language skills made by the majority of pupils. Pupils in some year groups have access to ICT which pupils use to word process their individual written work, however this remains an area for development for the subject. The subject now has an identifiable classroom base which marks an improvement on the previous inspection.